NCSS Notable Trade Book Lesson Plan

Maggie’s Door by Patricia Reilly Giff

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This lesson plan can be used with upper-level elementary students to discuss the Irish potato famine and immigration to America by displaced peoples. It uses a trade book entitled Maggie’s Door to foster students’ consideration of people, places, and environments as well as individual development and identity through a cultural lens.

**Book Title**

**Book Summary**
*Maggie’s Door* is a story of emigration from Ireland to America during the Irish potato famine. Friends Nory and Sean unknowingly board the same ship to New York — Nory as a passenger in steerage with her brother Patch and Granda and Sean as a cook’s helper in the galley — yet they do not discover that they are on the same ship until late in the journey. Alternating chapters relate the journey to Nory’s sister Maggie’s home in Brooklyn from Nory’s perspective and then from Sean’s perspective. Grades 4-8.

**NCSS Standards**

- Culture
- Time, Continuity, and Change
- People, Places, and Environments

As part of their study of U.S. history, 5th grade students learn about mid-19th century Irish immigration to the U.S. during the Irish potato famine and consider multiple perspectives concerning immigration.
Materials  Along with classroom copies of *Maggie’s Door*, you will need a –

1. video
2. world map
3. chart paper
4. computer and printer
5. drama props
6. selected resource books on immigration

Objectives  Students in Grade 5 will

- locate Ireland and the U.S. on a world map and estimate distance between the countries.
- identify two reasons the Irish emigrated to the U.S. during the 19th century.
- consider multiple perspectives of the immigration experience and distinguish between these perspectives.
- research and report on issues related to early U.S. immigration waves.

Procedures  Introduction

Introduce *Maggie’s Door* by stating/asking as follows:

*We’re going to read a book about Nory and Sean, who immigrated to New York from Ireland more than 150 years ago. Let’s find Ireland on the map (use large world map). Ireland is part of the European continent. Now let’s find New York. New York a state in the U.S., which is part of the North American continent.*

1. How might Nory and Sean have traveled to the U.S. in the 1800s? Let's find out how far it is between Ireland and the east coast of the United States (measure approximate distance on map).

2. How long did it take them to travel that distance? Anyone who has lived through that type of journey surely has some interesting stories to tell. Let's find out.
I. Pre-assess students’ understanding about immigrants and immigration by discussing and asking the following --

_Nory and Sean were Irish immigrants._

1. What do we mean by the word "immigrant"?
2. What is immigration?
3. Why do immigrants come to the U.S.?
4. Do you know an immigrant?
5. What country did they emigrate from? (Allow time for discussion and sharing.)

II. Share these concepts with students using charts, photographs, archival newspaper articles, immigrants' own stories, web sites, and resource books:

- The U.S. is considered a nation of immigrants.
- Many immigrants came to the U.S. from European countries between 1820 and 1920.

III. If time permits, show the video “The Immigrant Experience” and discuss reasons Europeans came to the U.S. during the 19th and 20th centuries.

IV. Read and discuss _Maggie's Door_, emphasizing the multiple perspectives represented. Individually or in small groups, students will research and teach classmates about the following:

- The Irish potato famine
- Issues identified through historical (19th century) photographs of or about Irish immigrants in the U.S.
- U.S. immigration trends, 1800-1950
- Ellis Island immigration procedures 1800-1900
- Interview an immigrant about his/her experiences coming to the U.S.
- The process for becoming a U.S. citizen
Expansion

I. Ask the following --

What motivates someone to make the momentous decision to leave his or her country permanently and come to the United States?

II. Provide students with resources such as Bound for America (Meltzer), Immigrants (Sandler), or web sites listed below. Give them time to look over their materials. Lead students toward the following:

Visualize living in another country. Think about what your life is like. What might motivate you to immigrate to the U.S.? (Responses may include jobs, political rule, religious reasons, education, or others.)

III. Students will work in pairs while conducting further research about the lives of actual immigrants. Use props (and perhaps a script) to dramatize the information you learn.

Assessment

Did each student perform the following?

- Locate Ireland and the U.S. on a world map and estimate distance between the countries?
- Identify two reasons the Irish emigrated to the U.S. during the 19th century?
- Depict multiple perspectives of the immigration experience and distinguish between these perspectives?
- Conduct individual or small group research on issues related to early U.S. immigration and report the findings to the class?

*** Teacher observation and student work samples serve as documentation of individual and small group performance. Some teachers may wish to develop grading rubrics for written and/or oral reports.
**Suggested Extension Activities**

**Science/Health Extension**

The ship carrying Nory and other Irish immigrants is filthy, and many die of disease. The immigrants are instructed to wash themselves because a doctor will come aboard to examine them before they are allowed to leave the ship. Ask students to research the health regulations for immigrants in the 19th century at the time when Nory enters the United States. Find out health regulations for immigrants today and create a short pamphlet that details these health regulations. Include a paragraph at the beginning of the pamphlet that explains the importance of such regulations. [source: Books@Random]

**Local History Extension**

Students research their own town's or city's immigrant history.

- Which ethnic group(s) were the early settlers?
- Which group(s) came later—when and why?
- Who is most closely associated with the founding of the town/city, and what was that person’s ethnic or cultural background?
- What events or circumstances motivated people to come to the town/city?

Assemble findings and create a visual or computer-generated display of key elements in the town/city’s past.

**Family History Extension**

Students interview parents, grandparents, or other relatives to trace their family's history.

- Which ethnic and/or cultural group(s) is(are) represented in the family's background?
- Were any family members immigrants? If so, from what country?
- When did they arrive in the U.S.?
- Why did they choose to come to the U.S.?

Collect photographs, letters or postcards, documents, and other memorabilia representing the family history. Assemble findings and create a museum display or computer program to share the family's history.
Books


Through period photographs and text, along with excerpts from immigrants’ own memories, Freedman tells the story of immigrant children of the late 1800s and early 1900s growing up in New York City and chronicles their lives at home, school, and play. Grades 3-6.


Prequel to *Maggie's Door*, this book tells the story of Nory's family in 19th-century Ireland, their struggle to survive during the potato famine, and her sister Maggie's emigration to America. Grades 4-7.


This story is told in letters written by a young Jewish girl trying to immigrate to America from Russia. Grades 4-7.


This book includes black and white photographs and tells of emigration from Europe during the 1820s to 1920s discussing reasons people left and telling of the hardships encountered traveling to and settling in America. Grades 4-10.

Written in the style of a young girl’s diary, this book provides insight into how it feels to be an immigrant. Ten-year-old Hannah, the only daughter of a large Jewish family from Lithuania in the early 1900s, must journey to America with her cousin hoping to make a better life for herself and her family. Hannah describes the horrible conditions aboard the ship and the fear of not being allowed to stay once arriving in America. Grades 3-5.


Using photographs, letters, diaries, and biographical accounts, the Hooblers describe the settlement of America. The focus is on immigration from the 18th into the 20th century with accounts of the successes and hardships that the immigrants encountered as they fulfilled their dreams for a better life. Grades 5-9.

*I was dreaming to come to America: Memories from the Ellis Island oral history project*. Selected and illustrated by Veronica Lawlor. New York: Viking, 1995.

Lawlor provides selections focusing on child immigrants interviewed for the Ellis Island Oral History Project and accompanies these with illustrations in collage using hand-painted paper. Grades 4-6.


A nonfiction resource depicting first- and second-wave U.S. immigration, Sandler’s book includes more than 100 vintage primary sources from The Library of Congress. Grades 4-8.


Through historical photographs and descriptive text, the author focuses on the experience of late 19th and early 20th century immigrants especially highlighting the experiences of children as they journeyed and began life in their new country. Suggestions for further study and ideas for students to research immigration in their own family are included. Grades 3-5.


A fictional story of a young Chinese boy who joins his father in America and helps his father realize his dream of building an airplane. The story recounts the hardships of life as an immigrant in San Francisco’s Chinatown in the early 1900s.
Video

*The Immigrant Experience.* Learning Company of America.

This is the story of an immigrant family's journey *to* and settlement *in* the U.S.

Primary Source Kit


A “museum in a box” with 23 replicas of genuine Ellis Island artifacts from the years 1892-1924, such as a passenger list, immigrant’s passport and birth certificate, an Ellis Island lunch menu, a literacy test, and period photographs.

Web Links

Irish Immigrants
Available at [http://www.kinsella.org/history/histira.htm](http://www.kinsella.org/history/histira.htm)

Offers Americans' perspectives on the influx of Irish immigrants in the 19th century.

In Our Own Voices, Stories of Immigration
Available at [http://library.thinkquest.org/CR0212700/final_website/sitemap.html?tqskip1=1](http://library.thinkquest.org/CR0212700/final_website/sitemap.html?tqskip1=1)

The Immigrant Experience

Ancestors in the Americas
Available at [http://www.byubroadcasting.org/ancestors/](http://www.byubroadcasting.org/ancestors/)

The New Americans
Available at [http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans/](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans/)

American Immigration Center
Available at [http://www.us-immigration.com/](http://www.us-immigration.com/)

Center for Immigration Studies
Available at [http://www.cis.org](http://www.cis.org)
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