

## Final Project Lesson Plan

Summer Teaching American History Institute: Immigration, Aug. 2010

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**AIM:** How can we learn about the immigrant experience through Primary Sources?

### **Possible Do-Nows:**

- 1) What is a Primary Source? List a few examples
- 2) What are some Primary Sources we have from immigrants
- 3) How do Primary Sources influence our understanding of a historical event?

### **Lesson:**

- Begin with short discussion/recap of previous Immigration lessons.
- Make a list of sources that we have that discuss the immigrant experience
  
- Introduce the Polish Peasant Letters: Short background, explaining the situation regarding Brokowski and his wife (information located on p. 156-160 of packet)
- Distribute the selected letters (below)
  
- Groups students so that when they work on the questions, they can Think, Pair, Group-Share
  
- Depending on reading level of students, either read the quoted pieces aloud to students or, if students are high-level readers, have students read aloud. If grouping has been done previously and set groups are made, high level reader in each group can read aloud to group.
- Regardless of reading level, read first letter aloud as a class

### **Letters to Brokowski from his Wife in Poland:**

- 1) Letter dated July 21, 1893: Read entire letter aloud as a class. Establishes the setting and relationship between the husband and wife.
  
- 2) Letter dated April 12, 1894: First two-thirds of the letter, ending with the line "Now they show themselves, as they are." This letter details how the Wife's position has changed significantly. She no longer has people asking her for money but instead is shunned. Furthermore, we learn the Husband has indicated he will no longer return to Poland to collect his wife.
  
- 3) Letter dated August 8, 1895: FINAL PARAGRAPH. Here we see that the Wife has been trying to find her Husband's exact location, but cannot afford this affair. She tells us that she is also willing to send him a photograph he has asked for (indicating that he still cares) but only if he can send her some more money. She says, " I beg you, send me yours [photograph] as soon as possible," indicating she is still longing for him, despite previous rebuttals.
  
- 4) Letter dated October 2, 1895: More dramatic tone in the letter. More money is asked for. A new and constant theme.

- 5) Letter dated January 28, 1896: Beginning from the lines “And I have a corner where I must sit upon my bed...” This portion of the letter indicates the Wife’s plight is increasing. But it could be a ploy for more money, not an actual act of desperation. A good letter for students to analyze and discuss the problem of bias.
- 6) Letter dated December 2, 1896: Beginning in the second paragraph “My Wlazdio, don’t be angry that I send registered letters...” to the end. Indicates the Husband’s tolerance is waning, that his letter writing is becoming more and more infrequent. Clearly his interest is becoming more and more obligatory and less actual interest in her well being. The Wife is taking a dire begging tone here.
- 7) Letter dated August 8, 1904: Over a decade in, he has basically stopped writing to her and she is beginning to get the picture that he is “tired already with writing always and sending money.” He has made his intentions clear and she is a bit delusional about his affection for her, saying, “Although you do not let me feel [worry], because you are good, yet I feel it myself, and whenever I receive money from you I weep, for I am a burden to you...” Delusional about his caring, but slightly realistic about her being a burden.
- 8) Letter dated August 6, 1910: “...I beg you for God’s sake, have pity and send me a little money, for I can find no way out. I tried to get from the Philanthropic Association at least a few tickets for a few pounds of bread and a few pints of gruel monthly, but they refused me, for they learned that I have a husband. They say that it is for them all the same whether this husband is in Warsaw or America, but I have a husband. So I don’t know what to do with myself. I have no work...”
- 9) Letter dated July 12, 1912: Final letter, a real desperate plea for help as all she possesses has been take. She is literally begging for money and seemingly is near death. A stark change from the first letter.

**Questions students should answer in a group:**

- 1) What is the status of the Wife in the first letter? Is she well off? Provide evidence for your answer
- 2) How does the Wife’s status change over the course of the letters? Provide a quotation or other evidence.
- 3) Does the tone of the letters change? If so, how? Why do you think this is the case?
- 4) In the letter of January 28, 1896, do you believe the Wife is as desperate as she claims? Why or why not? Also, is she a biased writer? How does bias in Primary Sources effect our understanding of history?
- 5) How does the relationship between the Wife and Husband change over the course of the letters? Why do you think the Husband stops promising to bring her to America? Do you think this happened often in situations where one member of the family immigrated and others did not? Why or why not?
- 6) Do you get the sense that it is the Wife or the Husband who is more invested in the marriage? Provide evidence to support your answer

**Homework:**

Students should write a 2-3 paragraph response to the Wife as her Husband, Mr. Brokowski. The letter should describe his experiences as an Immigrant in America at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of

the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Students can answer specific complaints or questions that the Wife has stated in her letters the students have read.

Another option would be to have the students write a letter from the perspective of Mr. Brokowski to his Wife. In this letter, the Husband would be writing a letter that the wife would answer. For example, students would write a letter that would be the precursor to the August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1910 letter. Their letter could discuss how Mr. Brokowski has nothing to send his wife and is tired of hearing her complain. The students are in effect writing letters which answer and prompt the letters from the book.

**Project:**

Students can now create a companion project to the Polish Peasant letters. Ask students to write letters, either to relatives in other countries, in other states, or if they have none, to fictitious people in another country describing the trials and tribulations of life in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America. Students should not only focus on the positive aspects of life in New York City (if they think there are some) but should point out the harsh realities and maybe dreams that are not quite true in real life. This activity can be conducted either with pen and paper, on a computer, via Facebook messaging, etc. Many students will have relatives in other countries or states that have Internet access; using this ability to access multimedia sources, students may also want to include photographic evidence in their letters. These letters can then be peer edited or group edited before being produced in a final copy.