

# Is America the “Promised Land” for the world’s immigrants?



Source: Wikimedia Commons

## Supporting Questions

1. What factors brought early immigrants to the U.S.?
2. What factors are bringing immigrants to the U.S. today?
3. What factors are deterring immigrants from the U.S. today?

7th Grade Geography Inquiry

Is America the Promised Land for the world’s immigrants?

<b>Arkansas Standards for Social Studies</b>	<b>WST.3.7.2</b> - Analyze perceptions people have of places and regions around the world based on direct experiences and indirect experiences
<b>Staging the Question</b>	List of challenges and opportunities for immigrants as represented in media and discuss whether today’s immigrant is faced with the same issues.

**Supporting Question 1**

What factors brought early immigrants to the U.S.?

**Formative Performance Task**

Create a graphic organizer listing the major push/pull factors for immigrant group to coming to United States.

**Featured Sources**

**Source A:** [Liberty Ellis Foundation: Oral History Project](#)

**Source B:** [Newsela article: The Irish Immigrant Experience](#)

**Source C:** [Newsela article: The History of European Immigration in the United States](#)

**Supporting Question 2**

What factors are bringing immigrants to the U.S. today?

**Formative Performance Task**

Annotate interviews and articles about immigration today by highlighting underlining, or rewriting ideas that are similar to the factors from early immigrant groups.

**Featured Sources**

**Source A:** [Library of Congress: Interviews with Today’s Immigrants](#)

**Source B:** [Newsela article: Family adjusting to new life in Fresno after escaping Syria](#)

**Source C:** [Newsela article: Latino immigration to the United States: Economic Factors](#)

**Supporting Question 3**

What factors are deterring immigrants from the U.S. today?

**Formative Performance Task**

Rank deterrents facing immigrants today from least to greatest, justifying one’s ranking using evidence from the text.

**Featured Sources**

**Source A:** [Global Citizen: The 7 biggest challenges facing refugees and immigrants in the U.S.](#)

**Source B:** [Whitehouse.gov: Executive Order 13780](#)

**Source C:** [Department of Justice: Attorney General Sessions memorandum](#)

<b>Summative Performance Task</b>	<b>ARGUMENT:</b> Is America the “Promised Land” for the world’s immigrants? Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, essay) that discusses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from sources while acknowledging competing views.
	<b>EXTENSION:</b> Contrast President Trump’s immigration policy with President Obama’s immigration policy and discuss the key similarities and differences between the two positions.
<b>Taking Informed Action</b>	<p><b>UNDERSTAND:</b> Create a set of questions to understand people’s perception of immigration.</p> <p><b>ASSESS:</b> Interview community or family members about their perception of immigration in the U.S. Alternatively, interview immigrants about their experience coming to the U.S. and adjusting to life here.</p> <p><b>ACT:</b> Share results of interview with class and make suggestions on ways to help immigrants adjust to life here in the U.S.</p>

## Overview

### Inquiry Description

This inquiry leads students through an investigation of immigration experiences in the United States. By investigating the compelling question—“Is America the ‘Promised Land’ for the world’s immigrants?”—students evaluate the motivating factors and deterrents for immigration to the United States both in the past and present. The formative performance tasks help students build on knowledge and skills through the course of the inquiry and allow students to recognize the push/pull factors for immigrants throughout our history. Students create an evidence-based argument about whether America remains the prime destination spot for many of the world’s immigrants today.

In addition to the Key Idea listed previously, this inquiry highlights the following Conceptual Understanding:

**WST.3.7.2** - Analyze perceptions people have of places and regions around the world based on direct experiences and indirect experiences.

It is important to note that this inquiry requires prerequisite knowledge of geographical concepts and ideas. Thus, students should have already studied the concept of culture and migration from region to region.

Note: This inquiry is expected to take five or six 40-minute class periods. The inquiry time frame could expand if teachers think their students need additional instructional experiences (i.e., supporting questions, formative performance tasks, and featured sources). Teachers are encouraged to adapt the inquiries in order to meet the needs and interests of their particular students. Resources can also be modified as necessary to meet individualized education programs (IEPs) or Section 504 Plans for students with disabilities.

### Structure of the Inquiry

In addressing the compelling question “Is America the ‘Promised Land’ for the world’s immigrants?” students work through a series of supporting questions, formative performance tasks, and featured sources in order to construct an argument supported by evidence while acknowledging competing perspectives.

## Staging the Compelling Question

In staging the compelling question, “Is America the ‘Promised Land’ for the world’s immigrants?” teachers may prompt students with a political cartoon to promote questioning and discussion about its primary message. Students examine [“The Immigrant” cartoon](#) and decide its main message, then make a list of challenges and opportunities for the immigrant shown in the cartoon and discuss whether today’s immigrant is faced with the same issues.

## Supporting Question 1

The first supporting question—“What factors brought early immigrants to the U.S.?”—has students defining push/pull factors before jigsawing the various immigrants throughout American history. The formative performance task asks students to analyze the primary factors for early immigrants’ migration from their native homeland to the U.S. The featured sources for this question include the Liberty Ellis Foundation Oral History project as well as two Newsela articles. Featured Source A requires teachers (or students) to set up a free account so that users can access the immigrant interviews. Teachers can narrow the search field by selecting interviews of immigrants from certain countries. The source provides some interviews in both audio and transcript format. Since several of the interviews are lengthy, the teacher should consider requiring students to listen/read only small parts of the interview to gather required information. Alternatively, the teacher may pre-select interviews and narrow down the content him/herself for students. Featured Source B is a Newsela article that delves into some of the push/pull factors that brought Irish immigrants to the nation. Similarly, Featured Source C is a Newsela article that explores the push/pull factors for European immigrants in general. *Although Source B and Source C also require teachers to set up an account, setting one up is **free** and gives teachers the opportunity to refine the article based on student Lexile level for differentiation purposes.*

## Supporting Question 2

For the second supporting question—“What factors are bringing immigrants to the U.S. today?”—students annotated interview transcripts and articles highlighting the major push/pull factors influencing immigrants today and compare/contrast them to the factors that brought early immigrants to the U.S. Along with the resources from the previous supporting question, the featured sources provide students with additional materials that allow them to understand the experiences of today’s immigrants to the United States. Featured Source A is a compilation of interviews of immigrants to the U.S. present day. Featured Sources B and C are both Newsela articles that take a closer look at individual immigrant families’ experiences in the U.S. and explore the factors that brought them.

## Supporting Question 3

The third supporting question—“What factors are deterring immigrants today?”—asks students to rank the major deterrents facing immigrants today from least to greatest using the sources provided. Students should justify their ranking using evidence from the sources. In addition to the previous featured sources, the sources for this task summarize several of the major factors preventing would-be immigrants from entering the United States. Featured Source A compiles seven major deterrents for immigrants, while Featured Sources B and C contain actual policy directives from the Trump administration that may, in many students’ minds, act as a deterrent for would-be immigrants. Sources B and C, while lengthy, may need to be scaffolded and/or shortened by the teacher, as much of the verbiage within the sources can be difficult for some students to comprehend.

## Summative Performance Task

At this point in the inquiry, students have examined the major push/pull factors for past and present-day immigrants to the U.S., as well as some of the deterrents preventing immigrants from coming.

Students should be expected to demonstrate the breadth of their understandings and their abilities to use evidence from multiple sources to support their claims. In this task, students construct an evidence-based argument using multiple sources to answer the compelling question “Is America the ‘Promised Land’ for the world’s immigrants?” It is important to note that students’ arguments could take a variety of forms, including a detailed outline, poster, or essay.

Students’ arguments will likely vary, but could include any of the following:

- The U.S. is a “promised land” for the world’s immigrants because the reasons for coming to the U.S. are stronger than the deterrents.
- The U.S. is not a “promised land” for the world’s immigrants because the deterrents from coming to the U.S. outweigh the benefits.
- The U.S. is partially a “promised land” for the world’s immigrants, but current policies and practices are making it more difficult to come to the U.S.

To extend their arguments, teachers may have students contrast current immigration policies under the Trump administration to the policies under the Obama administration and draw conclusions showing how the benefits and deterrents may have changed within a short amount of time.

Students have the opportunity to Take Informed Action by drawing on their understandings of push/pull factors for immigrants. Since many students do not have the opportunity to talk to present-day immigrants to our nation, this inquiry presents two options for the Taking Informed Action component. To *understand*, students can create a set of questions to ask their family or community members’ perceptions of immigration. Alternatively, they may want to create a set of questions to ask current-day immigrants about their reasons for coming to the U.S. To *assess* the issue, students should interview these community/family members or immigrants that they know and record their responses. To *act*, students share their results with the class and make suggestions on ways to help immigrants adjust to life and culture in the United States.