The Peopling of Philadelphia: 19th Century Immigration

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Abstract:

This curriculum unit will examine nineteenth century immigration in the city of Philadelphia. Many immigrants came to Philadelphia through others ports, but the unit will focus on Philadelphia’s port and the arrival of ships from various European cities. In fact, Philadelphia was the fourth largest port in America during the 1800s. It was an industrial city in need of skilled workers. Simultaneously, in Europe, there were numerous groups of people seeking a better life for themselves and their families. Students will examine the reasons people left their homes and traveled thousands of miles without any guarantees of a job, a home or a better life. In the end, however, Philadelphia did attract a widely diverse group of immigrants throughout the 19th century.

The lessons in the unit use many primary documents. Students will explore photographs, ships’ manifests, political cartoons and advertisements related to immigration. They will use graphs and charts to compare Philadelphia trends with national trends in immigration. There is the examination of political cartoons from the 19th century in order to explore and analyze stereotyping of various ethnic groups. Finally, Philadelphia had its own Ellis Island for almost 100 years, from 1799-1893. It was called the Lazaretto Quarantine Station. This was a most interesting part of Philadelphia’s history. Students will learn how it came into being, where it was located, why it was created, and who passed through this extraordinary facility.