The Immigrant Journey through the Ports of Philadelphia

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Overview

The immigrant journey to Philadelphia will provide insight into the challenges faced by newly arriving immigrants to Philadelphia. There will be particular focus on the travel and entry processes for these ethnic groups new to Philadelphia. How did they get to Philadelphia? What were the experiences once a passenger had first arrived in the city? Would there be trouble and oppression for those who had gone through great financial sacrifice and risk to get here? Were there immigration restrictions that jeopardized the future of these travelers? How are these travelers similar to today’s citizens of Philadelphia?

My 5th grade students in West Philadelphia are often resigned to the opinion that their lives will be filled with struggle. Many students have voiced concern that they will not be afforded the same chance for success as others in Philadelphia.

I hope that through the answering of the questions posed in this unit, students will be able to identify with the struggles of immigrants searching for their own brand of success. My goal is for students to gain an awareness of the significant hardships immediately faced by different ethnic groups coming to Philadelphia and understand that they can create tangible goals that will allow them to take the same risks and make the same sacrifices as those before them. Ultimately, it is my hope that my students will find the same success that comes in the face of doubt and uncertainty faced by these immigrant travelers.

This unit also fulfills the requirement of the School District of Philadelphia 5th grade core curriculum. Pennsylvania Standards require that students understand the concepts of immigration as well as government restriction and regulations on immigration. This unit for 5th grade students will be taught in accordance to the core curriculum timeline, which corresponds with the aforementioned state standards.

Rationale

Standard instruction for young students in Philadelphia still includes the notion that America served as a “mother” waiting with open arms for tired and oppressed children
yearning for freedom. That reality is somewhat skewed. My students will understand that America was in most cases a land of opportunity, but in the sense that it was a quick way to earn money and a possible trip back home.

Regardless of perception, the process of reaching ports in Philadelphia often involved great financial sacrifice and risk. There were a great number of different ethnic groups representing a variety of countries that came to Philadelphia. The trip across the Atlantic proved difficult for all of them, with “stops” along the way that served as deterrents for those trying to enter Philadelphia under less than ideal circumstances. Once here in Philadelphia, some immigrants found they were duped into lives of servitude. Most, however, helped lay the foundations for Philadelphia, as we know it today.

Historical Background

Between 1815 and 1985, 1.3 million immigrants entered Philadelphia’s ports. Most immigrants, disembarked at Ellis Island in New York, overlooking Philadelphia. Even though Philadelphia’s ports of entry were not as popular, it did not stop it from becoming one of the largest immigrant cities even before the American Revolution. Ships arrived en masse with people from Germany and Northern Ireland. Between 1717 and 1754 over 70,000 Germans arrived and over 150,000 Scotch-Irish made their way to Philadelphia with the promise of fertile farmland.

With the establishment of Philadelphia sailing lines by businessmen such as John Cope, Philadelphia saw a steady number of immigrants arrive throughout the early-to-mid part of the 19th century. Most of the migration took place after 1815, with the majority of ships coming from famine stricken Ireland, England, and Germany. In the years 1847 to 1854, an increase in Cope’s shipping fleet as well as new sailing competition from McCorbell and Co. from Londonderry, UK, allowed 120,000 immigrants to make it from European cities to ports in Philadelphia. The total number of passengers from 1853 alone surpassed the number of immigrants who came throughout the 1820’s.

Due to an economic downturn as well as the disinterest of John Cope’s offspring to carry on the Atlantic crossing tradition, Philadelphia reached a low point in travelers reaching its shores. Over 400,000 immigrants arrived to the United States in 1872. Only 154 could claim to have arrived on the ports of the Delaware River. Ironically, it was during this period that Philadelphia made a name for itself as one of the “great immigrant cities of the U.S.” Over 1 million immigrants arrived to Philadelphia from other ports of entry.

The introduction of the steamship to Philadelphia did not leave the city without a steady flow of immigration for long. The American Line serviced newly arriving immigrants from eastern and southern Europe through Great Britain. Another steamship competitor called the Red Star Line brought travelers from Belgium and Antwerp. The Hamburg-American line catered almost exclusively to Jewish and Polish migrants from Russia and Austria-Hungary. The arrival of these immigrants made Philadelphia a relevant place in the story of immigration, reclaiming its spot as the 4th largest immigrant port city by 1880.

Philadelphia maintained a steady stream of arriving immigrants through the 1870’s and 80’s. Fredric M. Miller tells us in his essay, “Immigration through
Philadelphia,” that more than 90 percent of Philadelphia’s foreign-born population was from Germany and the British Isles. But as previously mentioned, Eastern and Southern Europeans began making their way to Philadelphia. By 1914, most of Philadelphia’s foreign passengers were from Russia and Italy. Only 5,000 of the 68,000 newly arriving immigrants were from German or British descent. This shift in immigrant background lasted through the final waves of immigration before quota restrictions were implemented in 1924.

Philadelphia’s arriving immigrant population quickly declined near the end of the 1920’s at a faster rate than the rest of the United States. Philadelphia kept that pace as an immigrant port city with only around 30,000 immigrants arriving to Philadelphia between 1925 and 1975.

All told, about half of Philadelphia’s population in the mid 1920’s was either immigrants or children of immigrants. Philadelphia comprised about 5 percent of the total arriving immigrants to the United States. These immigrants settled in different areas of Philadelphia. Neighborhoods like Northern Liberties (German), Southwark (Irish), Manayunk (Polish), and other parts north and west of the city soon swelled with these new Philadelphians. Their arrival here as skilled workers allowed Philadelphia to become a major producer of machines, tools, textile, garments, refined sugar, petroleum, pharmaceuticals and chemicals.

The passage to Philadelphia was never an easy one. Those who wished to travel to the United States often paid high prices to get there. Cramped and unsanitary conditions on board the ships often greeted the passengers. The multiple quarantine ports on the way to Philadelphia provided tense situations for those who were not in ideal traveling condition.

For most travelers, a ticket across the Atlantic proved to be a large financial sacrifice. At the height of Philadelphia’s first immigration boom, a transatlantic ticket cost between five and seven British pounds. A good workingman’s wage at that time period was around one pound a week. Anyone intent on making money in the United States first had to save money for months or even years before they were able to secure a ticket for a transatlantic voyage. But even expensive ticket pricing didn’t guarantee that passengers would travel in comfort and style.

Travelers often endured cramped and crowded conditions on board ships to Philadelphia. The trip took ages by today’s standards. Most men and women who embarked on the journey for America could expect to spend around one month at sea. There were often up to 400 passengers on each voyage. Most were forced to share a six-foot by six-foot section of space. Single men and women were grouped into fours and shared this small space for the duration of the voyage. Married couples were grouped into twos and shared the same room. There were no special comforts for those who rode in the steerage class. After the passengers disembarked, their same travel areas were used to transport corn back to Europe.

The major disadvantage for these immigrants traveling to Philadelphia was the greater distance that needed to be traveled after literally catching a glimpse of the more convenient Ellis Island. Not only would passengers endure a longer trip, but they would also combat the obstacles that they found along the 110-mile journey up the Delaware River. The Delaware proved to be difficult for many reasons. Boats struggled to move through its shallow and winding waters. The Delaware River often froze leaving
passengers and crews to contend with large ice chunks floating on the river. Passengers’ morale must have been at an extreme low while traveling the Delaware. They were able to see land on all sides of their ship, yet had to wait until reaching the Philadelphia in order to begin their new lives. Unfortunately travelers still had the ominous task of visiting the quarantine station at Philadelphia.

The Philadelphia Lazaretto was built eight miles south of Philadelphia in the town of Essington. It was built in 1742 as a response to German Philadelphians’ complaints of lack of proper care for their arriving countrymen. It seems that many immigrants were arriving to Philadelphia’s ports in ill health and were unable to receive any immediate service. Under the direction of Governor George Thomas, the Lazaretto was immediately built to alleviate similar circumstances. After a yellow fever outbreak in 1793, Philadelphia officials moved the Lazaretto to its current site, which at the time was considered a great location with a sparse population. At its height in the late 19th century, the Lazaretto saw over 4,000 patients a year, many who never left the site.

The Lazaretto served as Philadelphia’s quarantine station during the time immigrants and other travelers were most at risk of obtaining disease. This period from June 1st to October 1st of every year was aptly named “Quarantine season”. The workers at Lazaretto, which included a resident physician, quarantine master, steward, and matron used a simple and efficient system for greeting each ship. When a ship was spotted, a lookout would simply ring a bell to alert the resident physician and quarantine master. They in turn would meet the arriving ship in the Delaware River with a list of rules and regulations provided to the ship’s captain concerning the governing of the Lazaretto.

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The rules and regulations set by Philadelphia’s board of health were extensive and allowed for the Physician and Quarantine master to obtain sworn statements from both the passengers and crew about their personal health status. Questions asked often included whether or not one was “wearing apparel or bedding belonging to a deceased person.” Almost all travelers were asked about the vessels and possible ports encountered while on the voyage. Some were asked to produce clean bills of health from their originating cities or ports and all were asked if they were currently in good health. The inspection of ships at the Lazaretto did not end there.

The Physician and Quarantine master were also responsible for the physical examination of the ship and its inhabitants. “If everyone on the ship was healthy, the quarantine process took about a day.” A ship that was found unsanitary had to be “whitewashed” and fumigated, which often included a large kettle filled with burning sulfur and alcohol that was lowered into the ship’s hold. Any diseased or dead were taken off the ship and brought to the station house where they would wait to get better or die. The contents of the ship including luggage and cargo would then be decontaminated at a temperature of up to 220 degrees. A ship that was contaminated could be at Lazaretto anywhere from a week to one month.

For the sick passengers taken off of contaminated ships, the Lazaretto station provided few options. There were other employees designed to make life at the Lazaretto comfortable for the sick immigrants. In the height of the 19th century, the Lazaretto employed laborers, carpenters, servants, nurses, and gardeners. While there were many hands, patients often had only two choices: live or die. Once a patient was deemed healthy they were sent up the river to Philadelphia, ready to begin their new lives.
Unfortunately most ill immigrants did not go beyond the borders of the Lazaretto and remain buried there still today.

Philadelphia area residents also came to the Lazaretto. Citizens of the Chester County area brought their sick in for medical attention. One story tells of a man sent by market wagon to the Lazaretto with smallpox. He died shortly after arriving.20 Records show others who had their deceased family members buried at the Lazaretto along with the other bodies. In other cases, Lazaretto employees would be cared for after they became sick while on the job.

The Lazaretto would begin to meet its demise during a second yellow fever outbreak. This outbreak occurred in 1870 and was subsequently blamed on the sick at Lazaretto (there was no knowledge at the time that yellow fever was actually caused by mosquito bites). This prompted the first visit to the Lazaretto by a Governor of Pennsylvania who started the legislative process of moving the Lazaretto further away from Philadelphia.21 Even with increased visits to the Lazaretto by the now faster steamships, the Lazaretto was forced to vacate its premises and was replaced by a federal quarantine station at the mouth of the Delaware Bay. 22

Prospective Philadelphians had very little to worry about, however. Aside from the annoyance of being checked twice over for infectious diseases, very few people were detained or sent home. In fact, in the year 1901-02, of the 17,175 immigrants to the quarantine stations only twenty-six were kept there for infectious disease.23

The Lazaretto served as a seaplane base during World War I and a banquet hall among other things. In 2006, after a lengthy court battle, it was decided that the Lazaretto would be preserved as a historical landsite.24 The federal quarantine station at Reedy Island continued to serve those arriving to Philadelphia ports but would not see the same volume of people or share in the same rich history of the Lazaretto.

After the Government’s federal law barring criminal convicts or paupers from making the journey, the federal inspection center at Reedy Island also served as a background and criminal check for the new passengers. In similar fashion to those kept with infectious diseases, most immigrants checked were not detained for being paupers or criminal convicts. 25 A very small percentage of people were detained at the correctional facility at 2nd and Christian Streets. They were ultimately deported back to their countries of origin. Those who finally arrived at the ports of Philadelphia were free to begin their new lives. Others however still had last trials to attend to.

The ports at Washington Avenue, Vine Street, and Reed streets were busy centers filled with large receiving areas, factories and Pennsylvania railroad stations. It was at these ports that newly arrived immigrants faced a new series of problems. Early on, German and Irish immigrants were duped into indenture servitude. Upon their arrival in Philadelphia, these immigrants were required to stay and serve families in the city in order to pay off their transatlantic fare.

In some situations, single women were not allowed into Philadelphia. This created impromptu celebrations throughout these terminals as hasty unions were made between single passengers.26 While these celebrations took place, many a merchant waited outside ready to con the next foreigner looking for help.

These bustling ports however, would soon find themselves increasingly sparse, as the United States government would soon begin a crackdown on immigrants arriving on its shores. The influx of newly arriving immigrants to Philadelphia would soon slow to a
halt. The Johnson-Reed act of 1924 radically limited the number of immigrants who were allowed to enter the United States.

As an initial response to the perceived inability of Eastern and Southern European immigrants to assimilate to the nativist culture, the United States government created a 3 percent quota act, which limited the immigration of Southern and Eastern Europeans by 20 percent. This 1921 act, based off the 1910 census, would also reduce the number of “old stock” immigrants from Northern and Western European countries who were still considered undesirable.27 According to the members of the United States government, there were still too many immigrants arriving who had no interest in assimilating to the American way of life, as they knew it.

Members of congress remedied this so called problem through the use of the more disproportionate census of 1890. This census reflected the United States’ population before the influx of the Eastern and Southern European immigrants, who did not wish to be naturalized. This act of 1924, dubbed the Johnson-Reed act, limited the number of Northern and Western European immigrants by 29 percent. This was but a small consequence, as the Johnson-Reed act accomplished its goal of alienating Eastern and Southern European immigrants at a reduction of 87 percent. The number of Italians alone allowed to enter the United States went from over 42,000 people before the Johnson-Reed act to just over 3,800 after the act’s approval.28 Furthermore, any person wishing to immigrate to the United States had to obtain a visa from a U. S. consul.

The national origins act of 1929 further alienated incoming immigrants whose skin tone was different from their white skinned Northern and Western European counterparts. The United States government went to great lengths to accomplish this task as government officials first took the time to categorize those who were unworthy of resident status. These affected people groups included “Black Africans, mulattos, Chinese, Japanese, and Indians”.29 This particularly affected Asian immigrants, who were often seen by the United States as a sub-human species. Every ethnic group from Afghanistan to the Pacific were seen as unable to assimilate and therefore not welcomed to immigrate to America. Japan saw these inequalities set by the United States as an affront to their people. They retaliated by imposing a 100 percent tariff on any American goods that came into their country, effectively ruining American businesses and trade in Japan.30

One group not immediately affected by the new quota laws was native Mexicans. The United States had no interest in discriminating against its neighbors to the south. In fact, the U.S. saw the Mexican people as a temporary fix for labor shortages in both world wars.31 These “South Indians” were considered white according to the immigration laws and mixed in with the “native stock” peoples accordingly. Mexican settlers in places like California, interacted, worked for, and in some cases, married their Anglo neighbors.32

The native Mexican population in the United States was soon not without opposition. Like other ethnic groups before them, Mexicans were charged with being social degenerates, who were “ignorant” and “filthy” among others. The government put certain restrictions on Mexican laborers, which in turn limited the number of Mexican immigrants entering the United States. By the year 1930, there was a decrease in Mexican immigrants by over 76 percent from five years earlier.33
The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 effectively ended the United States’ “Golden Door” of immigration. By the 1930’s, there were more people leaving the United States than coming through its ports. It was not until 1952 that the United States discontinued its immigrant restrictions based on race and ethnicity. In many ways it was too late. The creation of an elite people in the United States through ethnic restrictions ultimately brought about a flawed social structure with far reaching tensions and consequences still seen today. The battle over those allowed to enter the United States’ borders still rages on.

Throughout the history of Philadelphia we see a variety of people who took the opportunity to come to this country in order to find success. All faced the rigors of the trip across the Atlantic as well as the many obstacles brought on by the geographic and societal miscues of Philadelphia and its people. Regardless of these trials faced, the many immigrants who passed through the ports of Philadelphia left an undeniable mark on the city that continues to shape Philadelphia today.

State standards ask that students understand the experience faced by immigrants coming to cities such as Philadelphia. Through this unit, I hope they are able to go beyond just understanding facts. I hope my 5th grade students see the hardships brought on by taking risks for better lives. The benefit that will come from this instruction will help them to understand that through risk taking and difficult journeys, come rewarding experiences.

Objectives

This unit will enlighten students to the profound events and conditions that faced immigrants as they traveled from their homelands to Philadelphia. Students will focus specifically on the time periods from 1815-1925 when transatlantic travel by sailboat and steamship were at its peak. Students will understand the fact that immigrants did travel to Philadelphia for a variety of reasons. Through the study of primary documents, students will begin to understand the hardships faced on the journey to Philadelphia. Finally, the class will identify with the many obstacles immigrants faced while near or at the ports of Philadelphia.

Main objectives will include:

- Analyzing maps and other geographical resources to understand the places of origin of Philadelphia immigrants
- Identifying the types of hardships faced on transatlantic liners to Philadelphia
- Analyzing the effect the government regulations and restrictions had on immigrants arriving to Philadelphia
- Understanding the concepts of prejudices in immigration with regards to single women, the poor and indentured servants.
- Be able to identify the similarities and differences between immigrants who arrived to Philadelphia in the 19th and early 20th centuries and those immigrants who arrive today.
- Students will understand and know the definition and concepts of immigration.
Strategies

The 5th grade Philadelphia core curriculum asks that students attain proficiency through the use of a variety of manipulatives and resources. These will include the use of geographical resources in finding countries of origin and historical fiction selections about children leaving their homeland of Ireland. Students will also look at primary documents including passenger lists to help identify the people leaving their home countries. Through the use of role-play students will mimic the hardships faced during travels on ships across the Atlantic. Through this particular strategy, students will also compare and contrast the roles of immigrants and immigration and quarantine officers. Students will also gain knowledge in this unit through types of writing, which include diary and letter writing. Students will use Venn diagrams to compare and contrast immigration laws and restrictions as well as immigrant experiences. Students will use outside resources by visiting the Philadelphia Independence Seaport Museum.

Classroom Activities/Lessons

Lesson 1- An Introduction to Immigration

Objectives: Students will know and understand the definition and concepts of immigration as well as the geographic origins of those who arrived in Philadelphia.

Procedure:

- Students will work in groups to create a KWL chart. They will describe what they know about immigration and write down the concepts they would like to learn more about.
- I will read an excerpt from the book “Journey to the New World,” which will help students understand the process of immigrating to the U.S.
- Students will complete a short, shared reading in their Harcourt Horizons Social Studies books, which further explain the definitions and concepts of immigration. This will include immigrants who arrived in Philadelphia.
- Students will use their atlases and work in teams to identify immigrant countries of origin and their distance from Philadelphia. This concept will be taught through a “great map race”.
- Students will work in groups to finish their KWL charts. They will write down the definitions and concepts they learned.

Lesson 2- The Difficult Journey to Philadelphia
Objectives: Through the use of role-play, students will identify with the difficult journey to Philadelphia. Students will look at passenger lists. Using a name off the passenger list, students will write a “letter” to their family describing the difficult journey.

Procedure:
• I will put students into groups of four. Each group will then be placed on a section of six foot by six-foot carpet.
• Students will be asked to perform a variety of tasks while grouped together on the carpet including eating, completing an assignment, and finding a way to sleep.
• Students will listen to a short excerpt from “Journey to the New World”. I will also describe specific details of the immigrants’ journey to Philadelphia.
• Students will be told the space they’ve inhabited throughout the lesson is similar to the space that travelers had on their journeys.
• Students will have a whole class debate on whether or not they would leave for a better life if it involved the learned about conditions.
• Students will look at passenger lists and see actual names of people who decided to make the trip to Philadelphia.
• Students will pick one name off the list and write a letter to their “family” back home telling them of the journey to Philadelphia.

Lesson 3—the Arrival to Philadelphia

Objectives: Students will know the trials faced by immigrants as they passed through the Lazaretto Quarantine station and entered the ports of Philadelphia.

Procedure:
• Each individual student will be handed an index card. Each card will tell students if they are married or single, rich or poor, sick with disease or healthy, and a criminal or good citizen.
• Students will do a shared reading on the history of the Lazaretto Quarantine station in Philadelphia. I will teach students the specific issues dealt by immigrants arriving at the Lazaretto.
• Students will then role-play an arriving ship to the Lazaretto. Students will hand Quarantine officers their index cards. Officers will make the decision whether a passenger can leave for Philadelphia Ports, stay at Lazaretto, or be detained for deportation at the Moyamensing correctional facility.
• Some students will be “left behind” at Lazaretto while other students will complete the same process at the Washington Street Ports. (All will take place in the classroom).
• Students will write a diary chronicling their stop at Lazaretto and first seeing Philadelphia at the Washington Street port.

Lesson 4—Compare and Contrast Immigration Today with Immigration from 1815-1925.
Objectives: Students will meet and interview a recent immigrant to the U. S. Students will create a Venn diagram to compare and contrast immigration today with immigration from 1815-1925.

Procedure:
- Base on previous lessons, students will work together to make interview questions for their guest. (Interview questions will be guided to reflect previously taught material)
- Students will listen to their guest’s story about how he or she arrived in Philadelphia.
- Students will ask their questions for the guest to answer.
- Students will work in partners to create a Venn diagram, which will compare and contrast the immigrant journey to Philadelphia in the 19th and early 20th centuries and the journey of a recent arrival to Philadelphia.

Lesson 5-A Debate on Immigration Law

Objectives: Students will learn about the immigration laws of the early 1900’s including the Johnson-Reed act and the National Origins Act. Students will debate the merits of these laws. Students will also compare the laws of the 1900’s with the immigration laws of today.

Procedure:
- Whole class lesson on Johnson-Reed Act and National Origins act. Students will be expected to take notes.
- Students will be given different scenarios of immigrants trying to enter America. Students will decide if these immigrants should be allowed into the United States based on these laws.
- Students will be split into two groups, where they will gather information to debate the merits of these laws. Students will also be asked to debate whether any kind of similar prejudices exist today.
- Students will then be put into groups to create their own alternative acts for immigration in the 1900’s as well as for the immigration issues of today.

Lesson 6- A Trip to the Philadelphia Independence Seaport Museum

Objectives: Students will visit the Philly Seaport Museum. Students will tour the “Bound for America” and “Immigration” exhibits.

Procedure:
- Students will listen to an excerpt of “Immigrant Kids” by Russell Freedman.
- Students will visit the Independence Seaport Museum
- Students will listen to the stories of actual passengers and sit in the steerage bunks from actual ocean liners at the Immigration Exhibit.
- Students will see how difficult it was for ships to navigate through Philadelphia at the “Bound for America” exhibit.
Students will complete a reaction essay to their field trip experience detailing the new ideas and concepts learned from the museum.

Annotated Bibliography


Internet sources:


3) [www.phillyseaport.org](http://www.phillyseaport.org), 17, March 2008.


Children’s Annotated Bibliography:
1) Brocker, Susan, Journey to the New World, Shortland Publications, 1999
   This is a fictional diary detailing the life of a young Irish peasant and her journey across
   the ocean to America.
2) Bunting, Eve. Dreaming of America: An Ellis Island Story, Scholastic Inc., 2004
   This story tells of the Journey Annie Moore took with her family from Ireland to
   America.
   This group speaks of the lives of immigrant children in the late 19th and early 20th
   centuries.

Appendices and Standards

Pennsylvania Academic Standards for United States History

   Students will understand the political and cultural contributions of individuals and
   groups. Students will describe the characteristics of places and regions by their
   population characteristics. Students will identify the factors that affect the growth and
   decline of a population. Students will read and identify primary documents, material
   artifacts, and historical places.
   - 8.3 United States History (A)
   - 8.3 United States History (B5)
   - 7.3 Geography(C)

Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Literacy

   Students will use and understand a variety of media and evaluate the quality of
   material produced. Students will read and understand essential content of informational
   texts and documents in all academic areas. Students will demonstrate after reading,
   understanding and interpretation of both fiction and non-fiction text. Students will
   produce work in at least one literary genre that follows the conventions of the genre.
   Students will compare the use of literacy elements within and among texts including
   characters, setting, plot, theme, and point of view.
   - 1.1 Literacy (G)
   - 1.2 Literacy (A)
   - 1.2 Literacy (B)
   - 1.2 Literacy (C)
   - 1.3 Literacy (B)

Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Writing
Students will write multi-paragraph informational pieces including letters, essays, reports, and instructions. Students will write with a sharp, distinct focus identifying topic, task, and audience.

- 1.4 Literacy (B)
- 1.5 Literacy (B)

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4 Stolarik, 42
5 Stolarik, 45
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7 Stolarik, 49, 50
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