

RWR Sample Task

Diary of An Immigrant

You will be asked to write a diary entry in the persona of an immigrant coming to the United States. It will describe your arrival to America. Requirements and helpful questions for this entry are covered below. Remember that this is a challenging assignment. You are being asked to take new information and use it in a creative way that shows your understanding of the issues of immigration.

The purpose of this entry is to describe what happened to you and your family when you landed at Ellis Island or Angel Island (Chinese and Japanese immigrants). The following are requirements and helpful questions:

1. Describe your first sight of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, or Angel Island. What do you feel? How do the other members of your family feel? What is happening around you on the deck of the ship?
2. Are there rumors or worries about what will happen to you when you land? Do you hear that some people are sent back or taken away? Are people offering advice on what to do or say when you meet immigration officials?
3. What are your dreams and hopes for your new life in America? What are your fears and worries about a new life in America?
4. Describe getting off the ship, landing and the process the immigration officials put you through. Do you feel welcome, afraid, confused? Do you see someone else being ejected by the immigration officials? Was your family separated for some reason? Those who land at Angel Island should include a reaction to some of the poems carved into the walls of the barracks. How do those poems make you feel?
5. What are your feelings after you have been allowed into America? Did everyone in your family get in? Are you being met by a relative, a friend or an employer? Where do you plan to settle?
6. Make a prediction for your future in America. Will your dreams come true?

Diary of An Immigrant

Suggested Grade Span

Grade Level 5–8

Context

This task falls during the eighth and ninth week of a twelve-week unit on immigration that our eighth grade class does during the first half of the school year. At the beginning of the unit, students are put into “family groups” and asked to create a character profile of who they are. Each member of the group is asked to take on the persona of a member of a family planning on immigrating to America. The families are each assigned an originating country. Prior to this assignment, students had done individual and group research on their country of origin as well as a character sketch. They had done several other social studies and language arts assignments related to immigration and had had some direct instruction laying the groundwork in social issues. Students had also been studying immigration in general for the previous eight weeks. As a part of their research, students were given primary source diary entries to read and comment on.

Alternative Versions of the Task

This task asks students to bring together a number of different skills. They need to be able to read and understand primary source documents. They also need to be able to use the writing process and write in a specific genre. Students are asked to self and peer-edit their work, revise and rewrite.

Related Standards

From *Standards for the English Language Arts*

Standard 1

Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among the texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

Standard 4

Students adjust their use of spoken, written and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

From *National Standards for United States History*

Standard 2

Students should understand massive immigration after 1870 and how new social patterns, conflicts and ideas of national unity developed amid growing cultural diversity. Students should be able to demonstrate understanding of the sources and experiences of the new immigrants by: a) tracing the patterns of immigrant settlements in different regions of the country; and b) analyzing the obstacles, opportunities and contributions of different immigrant groups.

Standard 2D in *Historical Thinking Skills*

Students should be able to evidence historical perspectives — the ability: a) to describe the past on its own terms, through the eyes and experiences of those who were there, as revealed through their literature, diaries, letters, debates, arts, artifacts and the like; and b) to avoid “present-mindedness”, judging the past solely in terms of present-day norms and values.

What the Student Will Do

Students should work individually on writing the diary entries. They have done their research on immigration in general and their specific countries while in family groups. Some groups may choose to do their research together while others may choose to do research individually and then share with the group. They should have researched primary diary sources, so that they are familiar with the style and genre. Also, family groups need to have chosen specific events that everyone in the family experiences. These common threads should be seen in the diary entries. They should begin by outlining or mapping their entry as a way of organizing their thoughts. Students should then write a rough draft. Once this is done, they can self-edit their work and make changes. Students should also peer-edit with at least one other student. Finally, the student should have a teacher or adult conference. After their drafts are rewritten, students will submit the final draft of their diary entry.

Teaching Tips

Students should be well immersed in learning about immigration and their family groups before they start to write their own diary entries.

When choosing family groups, make sure that you assign realistic countries for the students to study. Assign countries on which students will be able to find information. Many times students will want to be from a country that is a part of their own cultural background. Instead, assigning children to countries with which they have had no experience leads to greater historical and cultural understanding.

Also, many students have had little or no experience with primary source documents and may not be familiar with how to read historical sources. Be sure that students have had ample practice reading and understanding primary source documents, so that they have models for their diary writing.

It is often helpful to share the assessment rubric with the students before they begin the assignment. This way, students are clear on what the expectations are for the assignment. Once your students are familiar with the concept of rubrics, you can ask them to create their own rubrics for assignments.

Familiarize your students with the writing process that you want them to use. Make sure they know how many drafts and conferences you expect, so there are no misunderstandings.

Before you begin this task, contact your library research person to find out what information and types of resources are available for the children to use in their research. Find out if there are any inter-library loan services or college libraries that you can use.

Selected Bibliography

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Harper Perennial Library, 1991.

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Lawlor, Veronica, ed. I Was Dreaming to Come to America: Memories from the Ellis Island Oral History Project. Viking Children's Book, 1995.

Levine, Ellen. If Your Name Was Changed at Ellis Island. Scholastic, 1993.

Riis, Jacob. How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York. Dover Publications, 1971.

Wilson, Wendy S. and Jack Papadonis. Ellis Island and Beyond. J. Weston Walch Pub., 1996.

CD-ROM, "Journey to America"

Ellis Island Web site, www.ellisland.org

Extensions

To make this task more manageable for fifth graders or for students needing extra assistance, we suggest giving them more structure. Provide research sheets for them to fill out. Have students do research in groups. Guide students in how to write their diaries with specific details they need to use in each paragraph.

To increase the difficulty for students, we suggest asking them to do additional research. Several of our students did independent research at a local college library and shared the information with the class. Others read additional books to add to their own understanding.

Interdisciplinary Links

Math

Ask students to research the number of people in the immigration wave. Were there significant differences throughout the years? Were immigrants from certain countries more prominent? How many immigrants eventually returned to their homeland? Ask students to chart and graph this information.

How long would certain journeys take? Ask students to find out how long a journey would be from their “family’s” homeland. Factor in trains, boats and weather. What would the journey cost from Western Europe? Eastern Europe? Japan? China?

Science

Find out about wind and weather patterns. How may this have affected the immigration patterns? How did agriculture and geography affect immigration? How did disease affect immigrants? How does disease spread?

Geography

Ask students to find their country of origin on the map. Have students fill in maps of Europe, Asia and North America so they are familiar with the geographical location of homelands. Compare what a map of the world looked like in 1900 to what a map looks like today. What are some of the changes that have taken place? Where have the most changes occurred?

Social Studies

What were the political climates in the countries of origin? What were the social climates? How may these have affected immigration? Find out where your family came from originally. Interview parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles. Make a family tree.

Art/Music

Research the different cultures from the originating countries. Are there specific art forms that are prevalent? How does the art reflect the cultural or political atmosphere? What types of music or dance are popular? Make up a song or dance in the style of your “family’s” country.

Technology

Have your students conduct on-line research about immigration. Ask students to use Web resources to construct a “genealogy” for their family groups. Locate Web sites relating to Ellis and Angel Islands.

Novice

Diary -
When I first saw
the statue my eyes lit up
like Christmas lights. I was in
America. When I got to Ellis
Island I didn't care for it
because it was such a long
wait. I had just a little
of 30 dollars so I could get
in. A lot of people are saying
they don't have money so
they won't get in and the
are scared.

Factual information
is out of context and is
not explained.

When I was walking
around I would hear people
talking about it. May get into
America people would take
what money you had and
all your belongs. It is true
that some people get sent
back because you have something
wrong with you or you have
a disease. A lot of people are
saying be very nice with the
officials and don't be lippy with
them because they could send
you back.

There is no logical
progression in the
paragraph structure.

I hope to find my friend
who left because I haven't
seen him in a while. I also
dream of starting my own

Novice (cont.)

construction business
and make a lot of money
of it. I am worried about
not finding a job and can't
support my self so I
won't have a place to live.
I am also worried my
family and I getting to bed
then we will have nothing.
Ship~~pe~~ landed my stomach
was empty because I was
so scared of not getting
into America. When I entered
the big building a tall guy
made us wait in a big
room with about 20 bunkbeds
in it. After about 2 days an
offical called out 0malley's
so we went and had to
take all these weird test.
The people checked out
eyes and other stuff. After
that they told us to go
eat lunch then come back
and we will tell you if
you got in or not.
We went and
ate lunch for about 1/2 an
hour and came back and
they said we are free
to go. I said what

There is a simple
use of vocabulary, and
the writer uses spoken
language throughout
the writing.

Novice (cont.)

ally
You are free to go!
I was so relieved and
happy. When I reach my
destination I hope I will
be successful and I hope
my family will be to.

There is no evidence of an individual tone or style.

There is no evidence that this student edited or revised the work.

Apprentice

Dear Diary,

I can see Ellis Island just up ahead, the statue of Liberty is amazing, it is huge, the biggest statue I have ever seen. There are people everywhere! The building are big too, Peter is excited to see everything, Christina is a little scared. Finally we have arrived, the trip was long and we are tired and hungry, I have heard so many different stories about this place, it will finally be happening to us. We will follow our new friend Hans, off the boat he has a friend on the shore that will meet us.

Right off they assign us each a number, we go to our bunk and get our things together and try to wait for our turn to get off the boat. I have no idea how long it will be, my children are both scared and excited. I feel a hand touch my knee, my daughter and son are both crying. I ask them what is the matter. "mamma is not with us to begin our new life here," says Christina. Peter says nothing but he is crying quietly, I feel myself start to tear up, I must be strong for my children, I am all they have now. I can not show fear so I tell them that Mama would be happy and excited and proud that we are all here in America safe and sound.

After two days of waiting our numbers are called, when they start to ask me questions I am so nervous I forget my english. The man smiles so I start again. I explain that my whole like we have lived in Germany. I am a weaver, my son and daughter are here with me, we want to start a new life here in America. I explain that my friend Hans who I met on the ship is going to help us, he is waiting for us to get through immigration and then he will take us to people who can help us find a place to live. The man listens and he is quiet, I wait, I am scared he will reject us and send us back to the boat. After a while he reads something to us I do not understand but he waves his hand! We are through immigration. Finally we can begin to find a new life. Hans said he will wait at the bottom of the statue until he sees us, we hurry to get there. There are people everywhere, I don't think we will ever find him. I am beginning to realize how big America is. I can smell food, the children are hungry and thirsty. I feel someone touch my shoulder, and then Hans is standing next to me smiling. Come with me he says I have some bread and cheese we will celebrate your new life before we leave for a place called Pennsylvania. It is not far from here a few days of travel by train and then we will be home. I think that sounds so good, so do Peter and Christina. We walk over to the Statue and sit down to eat.

America is going to be a good place I can feel it. We have made the right decision to come here. We will be safe not, I can raise my children in this country, without war and fighting. We are happy and tired but ready to make the trip to our new home, Hans says there are many German people where we are going, I will like that!

The student uses appropriate historical facts.

The student is beginning to use the conventions of written language and is starting to develop an individual voice and tone.

There is an improper use of dialogue, but the organizational pattern is clear.

The student uses run-on sentences and inconsistent tenses.

Practitioner

From the diary of Tovah Nachtmann, age 13

The student incorporates historical facts into his/her writing.

Dear Diary,

Today I saw the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. It was even prettier than the ocean. It was the Statue of Liberty. It was huge and had a greenish tint to it. The lady just kept getting bigger and bigger the closer we got. I thought it would fill the sky. But lucky for us it did not.

After the long trip we were finally there at the gates of America. I had dreamed about this day for ever. I had pictured it a little different. I had pictured it with Father, Esther, Isaac, Sarah, Rolf and me all together on the boat for America.

Everyone on the boat was on the deck looking at America. All the talk was so loud I could not hear my own voice as I talked to Esther and Esther.

I was a little worried about Ellis Island because I had been told that if you or someone in your family is sick, then they send you back. I could not stand the journey home without my family. I also could not stand to go into America without a member of my family.

I hope that in America people do not hate Jews and that we can start our own farm and become rich. I also worry that we will be poor and Father will not be able to join us.

As we get off the ship we were hurried into the big building of Ellis Island. In the hurry off the boat, I lost my friend Esther. I could not see her or hear her. There were people everywhere, they were all talking in new different languages. All the people and voices made me feel afraid, lost and confused. Esther held me close as a man asked Esther a lot of questions about where we were going and if any of us had been sick. Then we were hurried down many halls and into a little room. In the room a man shined a little light into our eyes, ears, and mouths. He told Esther that we were all okay. Then he sent us through another set of doors into America.

I felt the same as I did on the other side of the doors. I was so happy that finally everyone but Father in our family was in America. Esther stopped by the mailroom to pick up a letter from our Aunt.

Esther bought us a loaf of bread to eat while Isaac bought train tickets to Nebraska. Esther opened the letter and her eyes filled with tears. Then she fell to the ground. She said in a shaky voice, "Fathers dead." "No, No!" I screamed. Then I too fell crying to the ground. Miriam sat on a bench crying too. When Isaac came back, he sat on the bench with Miriam trying not to cry.

America had been so mean to us. Now all my hopes and dreams are gone, gone like Father, like Mother, like my whole life up until now.

There is appropriate use of style and tone.

The entry is well-written, organized and clear.

Expert

NOTE: The character writing this is Lee Wong Chang, 39, of China, who traveled to America with his 15-year-old daughter Mei Lee, and his brother, Wu Tang, a stonecutter.

Diary Entry #3

Angel Island
June, 1898

The student has a strong opening paragraph.

I am writing this today out of grief and sorrow. I have been turned away from the country of my dreams. The doctors said I had some sickness called Tuberculosis. I can not believe that I have been rejected. I am so sad I don't think that I can ever recover from this.

When our ship came into the harbor of San Francisco, even though I could not see it, I sensed it in the air. There was a certain tenseness. I ran up onto the deck and joined the others in looking at all the wonders of the Golden Mountain. The ship pulled into the dock, and we were among the first ones off. As we stepped off, we were overcome by all of the new sights and sounds. We had to force ourselves to put away all of those thoughts and run to the doors of America.

Inside, it was very crowded and I could not see a thing. I took out one of my shoelaces, and we each tied a piece of it around our wrists to keep us together. All of that day we stayed in that very packed room. At night we took turns sleeping so that we were sure not to get passed by if our turn came. But in the morning, our turn had still not come. We waited for most of that day, until the afternoon when everything started to move. We made our way rather quickly to the examination room where everyone but I was passed through. As we were about to be passed through, they put a small chalk mark on the breast of my best coat.

At first I was angry because they had intentionally made it dirty, but then, as I was taken away, I realized that the mark set me apart from everybody else. They then forced me to let go of Mei Lee's hand, and they sat me down on a bench on the side of the room. They took Mei Lee and Wu Tang away. They brought in an interpreter who said that I was to stay here until I got better.

The student develops an original position.

Expert (cont.)

I said, "Get better? I am not sick!" He said that I was, and that I had to stay here. Then he took me into a room where I was left alone for quite a while.

It was in that time that I realized that my dream of living in the Golden Mountain was not going to come true. I had made it this far, only to be turned away at the door of this so-called "Angel Island." All over the walls were the poems of immigrants like me who had been turned away. They told of the ultimate sadness, an insult so painful that they gave up everything they had ever hoped or dreamed of having here in America. Now I had joined the ranks of the rejected, the unwanted, the unneeded. I realized that I would also have to give up all hopes except that of staying alive. I turned my reflections to Mei Lee and Wu Tang. They are such good people. I forced myself to put all thought of them out of my mind. It was then that I decided I would carve my own story into the wall here. It will be engraved in people's minds forever.

Lee Wong Chang
Age 39
A barber, of Shanghai, China

A strong individual voice and tone are developed throughout the piece.

The student writes with striking language and vocabulary.