



Pushcart Players

Study Guide to Production & Activities



ELLIS ISLAND:

GATEWAY TO AMERICA



A celebration of the dream, hope and promise of freedom and democracy in America

SUMMARY

As we settle into the 21st Century, Pushcart Players offers a spirited salute to America in song, dance and story. *"Ellis Island: Gateway To America,"* is an uplifting musical, designed to illustrate the struggles and achievements of past generations in preserving the freedoms we enjoy in the United States today. It takes a loving look at a small group of immigrants who came to this country in 1903 seeking freedom, opportunity and a better life for themselves, their children and their children's children. The immigrants in our play provide a symbolic representation of the many émigrés from a multitude of nations that have reached our shores over the years. Prevailing themes throughout the presentation are the immigrant experience, ethnic diversity, and the precious legacy of freedom and democracy in America.

"Ellis Island..." begins at the turn of the 20th century with the arrival of Emma, Rosa, Tony and other hopeful émigrés at Ellis Island. Colorful scenes and musical numbers take these refugees through early experiences in their new homeland and then on a journey through the decades designed to illustrate key events in our nation's history. From the personal perspective of these main characters, young audiences will learn about industrialization, unionization, the prosperity of the 1920's and economic depression of the 1930's, FDR and the New Deal, eras of war and peace, -- and the recurring struggle for human rights and civil liberties.

Music for *"Ellis Island..."* is drawn from a rich reservoir of American folk music and original songs that reflect the spirit and mood of our country from 1900 to the 1960's. Innovative costumes, settings and staging provide a delightful visual treat and an inspiring theatre experience for young and family audiences.

This study guide offers a brief synopsis of each of the components in the play followed by suggestions for projects and discussion. Our hope is that you will build upon our suggestions, including many ethnic groups that have enriched our nation, and tailor the material to the age and level of your students. Our outreach department is available at any time to assist you in planning and implementing workshops and projects in conjunction with the presentation of *"Ellis Island: Gateway To America."*



ARRIVAL OF IMMIGRANTS (Early 1900's)

The play opens at the turn of the century as Emma, Rosa and Tony arrive in New York Harbor. They are finally in the land of their dreams after a long, difficult journey from Europe. The sight of the Statue of Liberty is touching and awesome.

The lyrics in the opening song, written by Emma Lazarus, (set to music by Irving Berlin) are engraved on the base of the Statue of Liberty. They are:

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless tempest tossed to me.
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.

- What do you envision when you hear or read this poetry?
- Write a poem or message that you would like to have engraved on the Statue of Liberty?
- Ask someone you know who came to this country how he or she felt when first seeing the Statue of Liberty. If you don't know someone like that, try to create those feelings by looking at a picture and imagining that you are coming to America after hoping to do so for many years.

When the boat docked at Ellis Island, Emma, Rosa and Tony had to go through immigrant processing where they were questioned and examined. This process filled all immigrants with anxiety because if they didn't pass all the exams they could be detained or worse yet, sent back.

- If you know someone who came through immigration at Ellis Island, ask him or her about that part of the journey. Perhaps you could arrange for that person to come to your class and talk about his or her experiences.
- *Note to Teacher:* This episode lends itself well to a role-playing exercise. Have students work in pairs, with one being the newly arrived immigrant and the other the immigration officer. Have them switch roles. Conduct an open discussion following the exercise about the feelings of each of the roles and why students acted or reacted as they did.
- Write a letter to a friend or relative telling what happened and how you felt while being questioned by the immigration officer.
- Read about Ellis Island on the Ellisland.com website.
- Ask your teacher or librarian for a book or magazine article about Ellis Island.
- Take a field trip to Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty.



EARLY EXPERIENCE OF IMMIGRANTS

Immigrants came (and continue to come) to America for many reasons. Many came from impoverished towns and villages in southern and Eastern Europe. Others came in search of religious freedom.

- Can you imagine what it might be like to live in a place where you are not free to practice your religion or to say what is on your mind? Discuss how that might feel. What do you think you might do if you lived in a country like that?
- Imagine living in a country where no matter how hard you or members of your family work, there still is not enough money to feed or clothe the family. Draw a picture or write a short story about that.
- Draw a picture or write a short story or play entitled "My Journey For Freedom"

Some immigrants encountered intolerance (bias and prejudice) when they first arrived because they were "foreigners." In our play, Pat sings "No Irish Need Apply" – a humorous song about overcoming the difficulties of rejection as a foreigner. In the song, Pat intimidates the employer who won't consider hiring an Irishman.

- Can you think of other ways Pat may have dealt with discrimination?
- Why do you think the employer and people like him cared about ethnic origins?
- Discuss some of the differences and similarities of the immigrant experience in the early part of the 20th century and the early part of the 21st century.
- *Note to teacher:* Have students form small groups to discuss the above questions. Then ask a representative from each group to share the discussion points with the class.

Emma is amazed that education in America is available to everyone, not just the wealthy citizens. She and others take advantage of the opportunity to learn English and the history of the United States by attending night school.

- Write a poem or story that has one of the following titles:

"Living In A Country Without Speaking Or Understanding The Language."

"Learning A New Language"

"Learning About a New Culture"

- *Note to teacher:* Clearly there are many elements for consideration on this topic. Feel free to create other titles and have students explore the many aspects of balancing heritage, education and assimilation.

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WORKING TO SUCCEED IN A NEW COUNTRY

In this segment of the play, the immigrants learn about the Industrial Revolution. They sing a song, "Hard Travelin'," (by Woody Guthrie) which highlights the contributions of the labor force to progress in the U.S. Many people in that group were immigrants.

- Try adding some verses to the song, celebrating people in other occupations that have contributed to the growth of our country.
- Draw a picture of yourself in one of these hardworking jobs.
- Classroom Project: Create a mural or collage with each student illustrating a component of the labor force in the early part of the century.

The new immigrants in "Ellis Island . . ." sing about the poorly ventilated, poorly lit factory in which they work long hard hours for pitiful pay.

- Find pictures in books that show factory conditions in the early part of the century. Write a newspaper article or a short story about the people you see in those pictures.
- Do a creative drama exercise set in a factory that is hot and poorly lit. Now make it cold and drafty. Add the pressure of a company boss hovering, seeing to it that there is no talking and no slowing down.

UNIONIZATION

As more people entered the work force in the early 20th century, workers began to demand improvements in their factories, mines, mills, etc. Unions were formed and grew stronger. In the song, "Solidarity Forever," the characters sing, "Yet what force on earth is weaker than the feeble strength of one."

- Talk about the difference between one person making a demand and many people coming together to insist that their needs be met.
- Ask your librarian for a book suitable to your age about the labor movement in this country in the early 1900's.
- Create a flier to advertise a union that is looking for new members.
- *Note to teacher:* Here is another good role-playing exercise. Create and describe a labor issue. Divide the class into union, management and mediators for a negotiation session.



CITIZENSHIP

Emma, Rosa and Tony attend a ceremony in which they will become citizens of the United States. While nervous and excited, they are filled with awe and wonder at becoming citizens of this “miraculous land of their dreams.”

- Why do you think that Rosa, Emma and Tony think of this day as “the beginning of a new life?”
- Why do you think that becoming a U.S. citizen is a precious goal for many people throughout the world?
- How did you feel when the immigrants in the play became American citizens? Create a drawing or a collage to express your feelings.
- *Note To Teachers:* An *excellent* resource for exploring this subject is the book, “*I Was Dreaming to Come To America*” - Memories from the Ellis Island Oral History Project. It is illustrated by Veronica Lawlor with a foreword by Rudolph Giuliani



WORLD WAR I

Rosa reads a letter from a soldier in World War I, in which he quotes President Wilson saying, “...the war to end all wars” is over. When Rosa’s soldier comes home, the other characters sing “When Johnny Comes Marching Home.” The song begins and ends welcoming and celebrating the young people who served their country in the military, while the center of the song talks about how war affects the people who are sent to fight.

- Why do you think that people at that time believed WWI would be a war that would end all wars?
- Discuss the characters' mixed feelings as the soldiers returned home after helping to win the war.
- Can people have opposing feelings about the same event? ...The same person? Discuss these ideas.

THE ROARING TWENTIES

In the 1920's technology brought economic well being and made many new "gadgets" available to the American public. In this scene we see Emma, Rosa, Tony and Pat doing the dance of the 1920's - the "Charleston," while using newly invented gadgets like telephones, vacuum cleaners, radios, phonographs and the automobile.



- Can you picture what life was like without the conveniences provided by these "gadgets?"
- In what ways do you think these inventions changed people's lives?
- Imagine that the year is 1921 and you are hearing a record played on a phonograph for the first time; listening to a radio; talking on a telephone or using a vacuum cleaner; riding in an automobile. Write a newspaper report about these new experiences.
- What are some of the new "gadgets" and technology that we now enjoy in the beginning of the 21st century? How do they affect our lives?
- Discuss the new gadgets that you imagine technology will make available in the next 50 years.

THE DEPRESSION, FDR AND THE NEW DEAL

In 1929 America experienced an economic set back that was called the "Depression." Many people lost their jobs, businesses and savings. Some people couldn't pay their rent or buy groceries. The characters in our play sing a song, "Things Will Be Comin' My Way." The song has "a characteristically American note of optimism at the time of deepest despair."



- Discuss differences and similarities between life in the U.S. in 1929 and today.
- Bring a recent newspaper article to class that may have similar concerns about the economy today that existed in the late 1920's.
- What do you think is meant by "American optimism"?

When Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected President in 1932 he began the New Deal, which consisted of programs that put people back to work and improved the economy.

- Design a poster showing how people felt when times were tough.
- Create another poster illustrating how people felt when times began to improve.
- Imagine that you are living in the United States in the 1930's. Write a letter to a friend in another country describing the changes in the United States because of programs instituted by President Roosevelt.



WORLD WAR II AND POST-WAR PROBLEMS

During the 1930's Americans heard about Nazi Germany, Japan and Italy invading other countries. When the Japanese Empire attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, America became involved in what was called World War II. The characters in "Ellis Island..." wanted to do their share to help fight against the aggressor nations.

- Why do you believe they felt that way? In what way(s) is it similar to our reaction in the U.S. when terrorists attacked our nation on 9/11?

Note To Teachers: This may be a good segue into discussion about 9/11, our current "War on Terrorism" and all the complex issues we are now facing, once again, as our democratic values are being challenged and attacked.

- Draw a picture or write a poem or story about where you were, what you were doing and how you felt when you heard about the planes flying into the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon.
- If you know someone who remembers Pearl Harbor, (a neighbor or relative) ask him or her what it was like in the United States before and during World War II. Perhaps that person would share his feelings and reaction to 9/11 with you and discuss the similarities and differences of those attacks. Perhaps you could take notes and report to the class or invite that person to come to your class to speak.

When the war was over Americans found that there were people at home, like the character Bilbo in our play, who were preaching hatred and offering easy answers to complicated economic problems. Bilbo said, "America is for Americans. Send the rest back to where they came from."

- What, in your opinion, is an American?
- What would happen if only people who were born here could stay and everyone else had to go back to their native country?
- If people from other countries had not been allowed to come here in the 1800's and early 1900's, what do you think America would be like today? Do you think you would be here?
- If you were born in America, ask your parents or grand parents where they were born. ...great grandparents, etc.

While America offered great promise for freedom and opportunity, the immigrants who came gave many things, in return, to America.

- Can you think of contributions to America that were made by people from other countries? In the arts? In industry? In science? In politics?
- Think of some of your favorite foods. How many of them originated in another country. An interesting class project might be to bring in a favorite recipe or sample of food from another country. Compile an international/American cookbook.
- Imagine what this country would be like without the music, books, movies, plays, food, language, humor, buildings, roads, railroads, etc. that were created or worked on by immigrants. Write a letter or draw a picture for a friend illustrating this country without the work of people from other lands.
- Create an international classroom (or school wide) quilt with each student designing a square that represents his or her family's ethnic roots. The quilt can be made of fabric or paper squares and displayed in the classroom or hallway.



ROCK & ROLL – THE 50'S

The actors sing a medley of songs that were popular in the 1950's. The '50's are thought of as a time when young people did not involve themselves in what was going on in the country or the world.

- Do you think it is important for young people to know what is happening in the world around them? Why?

- Compare the lyrics in a popular song from the 50's with a popular song from the 60's. ...a popular song from today. What are the differences? Similarities?
- What do you think lyrics will be about ten years from today?
- Try writing a popular song that speaks to the concerns of our world today.

CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

On August 28, 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., led a March on Washington to demonstrate for civil rights and racial equality. One of the characters in the show states, "Blacks are peacefully protesting against segregation."

- Discuss what is meant by "segregation" and how it affects people.
- Why do you think the people in our play were inspired to join the March on Washington?
- You might want to read *Martin Luther King: The Peaceful Warrior*, by Ed Clayton, which explains Dr. King's vision and his dedication to achieving racial equality.

FINALE

ELLIS ISLAND: GATEWAY TO AMERICA

Emma writes in her journal that "Martin Luther King had a dream.... and it is up to all of us now to keep that dream, that hope, that promise alive."

- Discuss some of the things that we can do to make Martin Luther King's dream of freedom and equality come true. As individuals. As a group.
- Write a poem or story that begins with the words, "I have a dream..."
- Write an essay that begins with the phrase, "America is special to me because . . ."
- Draw a picture of what freedom in America means to you.
- *Note to teachers:* Perhaps different students could select one of the above activities. Other students could become editors and publishers, compiling the written and drawn material into a booklet or magazine for parents and other students.

As Emma writes in her journal, she recalls her ancestors who came to America's shores in 1903. They remind her that they also followed and realized a dream. They sing a final chorus of "Three Cheers For America."

- What do you believe are the similarities between Martin Luther King's dream and the aspirations of the early immigrants? Differences?
- Draw a picture of the immigrants as you last remember them, including one or more of your ancestors.
- Write a short play (or story) about freedom and democracy in the 21st century.



THE LIVE THEATRE EVENT

Knowing something about the process of preparing and presenting a performance will not only help to develop an appreciation of theatre as an art form but will also enhance the role of the student as an audience member. Following are some of the steps the Pushcart creative staff observed in preparing "*Ellis Island: Gateway To America*." Perhaps this information will also inspire your students to develop a class play.

Ideas/Research/Script: After sharing ideas, the two playwrights decided on the subject they wanted to write about, read history books about the time periods covered and wrote and rewrote a script until they felt it was ready to be cast and rehearsed.

Songs: At the same time the script was being written, the songwriter, or composer/lyricist, was also writing songs and/or finding songs that she believed would help to clarify or move the show along in a more interesting way than would dialogue (the spoken word). The musical director then arranged the songs, assigning each actor their musical part – either melody or harmony.

Sets/Costumes: The set and costume designer read the script and created costumes for the actors to wear in each scene to help further define their character and the era. She also designed the set pieces to suggest the location of the scenes. The props, that is, the items that the actors carry or handle also add color and information to each scene.

Rehearsals: First the actors learned their lines, or dialogue, and the songs, which were taught to them by a rehearsal pianist. The director helped the actors interpret their roles and gave them their “blocking” – that is – where and when they move on stage. A choreographer developed and taught dances to the actors. A stage manager made notes on everything that was decided upon in rehearsals.

Music: After the play had been rehearsed for a few weeks, the musical director came back and timed the scene changes so as to arrange the scene-change music. He orchestrated all of the music, assigning each instrument its part, hired musicians and recorded all of the music and some sound effects in a sound studio. The engineers in the studio put together a Compact Disc recording for Pushcart to bring to each performance.

The Performance: After a total of four weeks of rehearsal, wherein all of the above ingredients were slowly added, came the most important element of all, **THE AUDIENCE**. Live theatre is very special because it is *interactive* and the reaction of an audience is very important to the actors as well as the playwright, director and musicians.

Because "*Ellis Island: Gateway To America*" may be a first adventure in viewing live theatre for some students, a discussion of theatre and theatre terms – what students may expect to see, hear and even “feel” – as well as things to look for or think about – will also enhance the theatre experience.

- Begin with a discussion of differences between TV, movies/videos and live theatre. Point out that the performance scheduled for your school or theatre will be recreated *just for you!*
- Inform students that there will be, if time permits, a question/answer/assessment session with the cast immediately following the performance. Students are invited to ask questions and offer comments regarding the production at that time.



ELLIS ISLAND

Here are some facts that you might like to know about Ellis Island:

Earliest records of the Island date back to the early 1600's when it was under the claim of Native Americans. It later passed under the control of Dutch settlers, English colonists and numerous private owners. The last known private owner was Samuel Ellis (a New Jersey farm owner) who willed it to his descendants in 1794. It was acquired by the State of New York for \$10,000 in 1807 and ceded to the federal government for \$10,183 in 1808.

The island had many names and uses over the years, though no one actually lived there for lack of fresh water and vegetation. It was best known as Little Oyster Island for the abundance of oysters in its surrounding shoals. Its uses ranged from fishing to picnicking and even to pirating.

A small fortress (named Fort Gibson) was built on the island as tensions with England mounted in 1808. The barracks housed British prisoners and American soldiers. It was later used as a munitions supply depot during the Civil War.

Large waves of immigration took place after the Civil War due to westward expansion and a burgeoning economy. Corruption and exploitation of newly arrived immigrants caused a board of commissioners to create a system to count, inspect and protect immigrants. Castle Garden, originally a fort and then an opera house located at the tip of the Battery, became one of the first immigrant receiving stations.

A new immigration center was constructed on Ellis Island, and completed in 1892 by the federal government when Castle Garden could no longer handle inflated numbers arriving in the latter part of the century. The construction consisted of doubling the island's 3 acre size with landfill, converting five existing buildings and erecting seven new ones including the main building, a hospital, powerhouse, surgeon's quarters, bathhouse and detention building.

Ellis Island opened as a National Park on September 10, 1990, rebuilt by contributions from citizens across the country.



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SONGS

"Give Me Your Tired, Your Poor" -- Lyrics: Emma Lazarus, Music: Irving Berlin

Irving Berlin put Emma Lazarus's poetry, which is engraved on the base of the Statue of Liberty, to music for a Broadway musical show, "Miss Liberty," in 1949.

"No Irish Need Apply" -- Traditional

This folk song humorously tells the tale of a young Irishman encountering difficulties in seeking employment. It illustrates the problems immigrants had in finding work, for though the characters might have been different -- sometimes Irish, sometimes Swedish, German, Italian, Jewish, Black, Puerto Rican -- the plot was often much the same.

"Three Cheers For America" -- Carole Wechter

Written specifically for this show, the song illustrates the pride that immigrants had in becoming Americans, and their overwhelming desire to learn all they could about their new country.

"Hard Travelin'" -- Woody Guthrie

Woody Guthrie said: "This is a song about the hard traveling of the working people, not the moonstruck traveling of the professional vacationers."

"Stitch And Sew" -- Carole Wechter

Written for "Ellis Island..." this number presents the conditions and complaints of the factory workers.

"Solidarity" -- Lyrics: Ralph Chaplin, Music: Traditional

This song was originally sung as "John Brown's Body" and was also borrowed by Julia Ward Howe for her "Battle Hymn of the Republic." It was adopted by the union movement with Mr. Chaplin's lyrics to demonstrate the strength of a group with a common purpose.

"When Johnny Comes March Home" -- Patrick S. Gilmore

Patrick S. Gilmore was bandmaster of the United States Army and his song was one of the most popular of the Civil War. It became popular again during World War I. The melody was borrowed by the Irish and, with altered lyrics, became an anti-war song.

"Gadgets" -- Carole Wechter

Composed for "Ellis Island..." this tune uses the feel of the Charleston, a dance that was popular in the 1920's.

"Things Will Be Comin' My way" -- Traditional

This blues number grew out of the Depression of the 1930's with that characteristically American note of optimism at the time of deepest despair.

"Over There" -- George M. Cohan

George M. Cohan, an American songwriter/performer, wanted to enlist in the army to fight during World War I, but was told that he was too old. He decided to put a show together and bring it to the armed forces; "Over There" was written for that show and was revived during World War II.

50's Medley,

This is a sampling of rock and roll songs that became popular during the 1950's. It represents the music that engaged young people at that time.

"We Shall Not Be Moved" -- Lyrics: Anonymous, Music: Spiritual

This melody came out of the South and spread throughout the country. It was picked up and adapted by the Union Movement in the late 19th century and then the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950's and '60's, citizens across the country



For Information on other Pushcart productions contact:

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Pushcart programs are generously funded by ADP Foundation, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, Frenkel & Company, E.J. Grassmann Trust, Healthcare Foundation of NJ, The Hyde & Watson Foundation, NJ State Council on the Arts/Department of state, PNC Bank, Lillian Schenck Foundation, The Turrell Fund, Wallerstein Foundation for Geriatric Life Improvement, Josh & Judy Weston Foundation, The Whitehill Foundation, The Puffin Foundation, A.I.G. and many individual contributors

Pushcart is a member of Actor's Equity Association, ArtPride, Arts Council of the Morris Ar, Coalition for Arts & Humanities, Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation, New Jersey Theatre Alliance, and Producers' League of Theatre for Young Audiences.

