Lesson 7

Our Family Ancestors: Immigrants to the New World

Resources
• Globe
• Photo album
• Photograph representing ancestors
• Graphic depicting ancestry
• Word cards: ancestors, immigrant, generation, family customs
• Question cards: Why did people immigrate to America? How were their lives different from ours? Why did people from the same country tend to settle close together? What did you learn about your teacher’s ancestors?
• Time line
• Our Family Ancestors: Parent Interview Information Sheet
(Figure 12)

Children’s Literature

General Purposes and Goals
To help students: (1) understand and appreciate the contributions of their ancestors; (2) realize that some of their customs and traditions probably originated with their ancestors; (3) realize that their ancestors immigrated to America from other parts of the world; and (4) understand and appreciate how life for their ancestors was very different from that of their immediate family.

Main Ideas to Develop
• Ancestors are all the people in your family, starting with your parents, who were born before you. These relationships are often shown on a graphic known as a family tree.
• All families have ancestors represented around the globe.
• Immigrants are people who come to a new land to make their home.
• Life for our ancestors was very different from ours.
• Often our family customs and traditions originated with our ancestors who immigrated to America from other parts of the world.
Teaching Tips from Barbara

I sent the home assignment to the students’ families several days before this unit so that I was sure to have the information to use with the lesson. Then I started the lesson by pointing out and marking on a world map where my ancestors were from. At the end of the lesson, I added stickers to the map that showed where my students’ ancestors were from.

Starting the Lesson

Share the results of the home assignment. Begin the lesson by sharing old photos of one or more of your ancestors. Ask the students what questions come to mind when looking at the photos. Responses might include Who is it? When did this person live? Where did this person live? Why is this photo in our album? Introduce the word ancestor and explain that it means a family member who lived in the past.

Introduce the graphic (family tree) depicting your family, illustrating how you are related to your ancestors. Have students locate the individual whose photograph you have shown (e.g., great-grandfather). For the purpose of this lesson, focus on one or two individuals and briefly explain your relationship to the others.

Great-grandmother
Great-grandfather

Grandfather
Grandmother

You, the child

Mother

Grandfather
Grandmother

Father

Identify the ancestor and indicate where she or he lived by locating it on the globe. Explain how most ancestors who immigrated long ago came to the United States by boat, crossing the ocean and arriving after many weeks—possibly months—to begin a new life in a new land (Note: This took place long ago—after the Pilgrims arrived. Point out the period on the time line.) Explain that most of the recent ancestors of American children were born here, but some came by ship or plane from across the oceans or by car or on foot from Canada or Mexico.

Suggested Lesson Discussion

America is a nation of immigrants—people who come to a new land to make their home. All Americans are related to immigrants or are immigrants themselves. [Introduce the book Coming to America, the Story of Im-
migrants and the challenges they experienced. Following are key points from the book to emphasize.]

Long, long ago, there were no inhabitants in the Americas. During the Ice Age, people crossed the land bridge from Asia to Alaska in search of food. As the years passed, descendants of these early hunters spread out all over North and South America. While some continued to roam the open lands, others settled in small villages and later built cities. These were the people who were here when Columbus arrived. He called them Native Americans because he thought he had sailed to India. Today they are called Native Americans or American Native Americans. After Christopher Columbus crossed the Atlantic Ocean, other explorers came in search of land and riches for their countries, and in time settlers followed the explorers’ routes and came to make new homes in America. They hoped for freedom and for opportunities to enjoy better lives. Besides these immigrants who chose to come to America, many other people were brought here against their will and forced into slavery.

By about 1700, thousands of people had arrived. People who came from the same country usually stayed together because they spoke the same language and tended to share the same values. Many gained freedom and a better life, but many others, including the Native Americans and millions of Africans, lost both.

With the influx of newcomers to America, the United States government in 1892 opened an immigration center on Ellis Island, near New York City. The purpose was to control the number of newcomers to America and make sure they were in good health, would work hard, and would stay out of trouble—that is, be good citizens in their new homeland.

[Return to your explanation of where your ancestor settled. Use a U.S. map to point out the location. Describe what he or she did for work, and what his or her spouse did. Explain family life: transportation, communication, recreation, and so on. Describe one or more family traditions that have been passed on from one generation to another. Use the graphic to review terms such as ancestor and generation, and show the “connections” to your immediate family. If the custom or tradition has been modified with each new generation, use the graphic, pictures, and/or dramatic explanation to point out the changes that have occurred over time.]

[Pique the students’ interests by posing these questions: I wonder how many countries are represented in the classroom? Where do you suppose your ancestors are from? What did they do for work when they came to America? How were their lives different from ours? What customs or traditions do you enjoy based on your ancestry? Tell the students that they will have the opportunity to get answers to these questions through their home assignment.]
Activity
To summarize the lesson, have the class create two group journal entries: “Coming to America” and “Our Teacher’s Ancestors,” using an open-ended sentence format.

COMING TO AMERICA
During the Ice Age people crossed the land bridge to America in search of food.
As years went by descendants of the early hunters spread out across America.
After Christopher Columbus crossed the Atlantic Ocean, other explorers came in search of land and riches.
Many people from many countries came in search of freedom.
Many people, however, didn’t come to America by choice. In fact, there were people from Africa who were forced into slavery.
People continued to come to America and finally in 1892 the United States government opened Ellis Island as a center for immigration

OUR TEACHER’S ANCESTORS
Our teacher’s ancestors settled in ______________. They came from ______________. They did ______________ for work. One of the special family traditions that they shared with their relatives and continue to practice is ____________________________________________.

Summarize
• All of us have ancestors who immigrated to America from other places.
• Immigrants are people who came to a new land to make their home.
• Life for our ancestors was very different from ours today.
• Often our family customs and traditions originated with our ancestors.

Assessment
Ask each student to select a partner. Hold up word cards and have pairs talk about the concept or question. Include for the pair assessment the following concepts and questions: ancestor; immigrant; generation; family customs; Why did people immigrate to America?; How were their lives different from ours?; Why did people from the same country tend to settle close together?; and What did you learn about your teacher’s ancestors? Randomly select students to share their responses.
Home Assignment

Have students interview family members to learn about their ancestry after they have read the group journal entries “Coming to America” and “Our Teacher’s Ancestors.” Send home copies of Figure 12 to help students conduct their interviews.

Dear Parents,

We have been learning about family ancestors and the influence they often have on our lives. I have asked your child to read our class journal entry that describes my ancestors.

Please allow your child to interview you about your family ancestors. A Parent Interview Information Sheet is enclosed. We will use the responses during our next class discussion. We would also like to encourage you and your child to make a family tree—at least a partial one representing one parent’s ancestors. Talk about the special things your child has learned from individuals represented on the family tree. Describe a family custom or tradition that has been passed down from one generation to another that you enjoy either regularly or on special occasions. Prepare your child to share it with his or her peers during social studies class. Thank you!

Sincerely,

FIGURE 11 Model Letter to Parents
Questions to Parents

1. What country (countries) represent your ancestry? ________________

___________________________________________________________________

2. Identify at least one immigrant ancestor (e.g., father’s grandfather).
   _________________ What do you know about his or her past (e.g.,
   Where did he or she grow up?)? _________________

___________________________________________________________________

3. What did he or she do when he or she came to America? ________________

___________________________________________________________________

4. Where did he or she settle? ________________

5. Why did he or she settle there? ________________

___________________________________________________________________

6. What did he or she do for work? ________________

7. What did the family do for recreation? ________________

8. How was his or her family life different from yours? ________________

___________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________

FIGURE 12 Our Family Ancestors: Parent Interview Information Sheet
Thank you for sampling this resource.

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