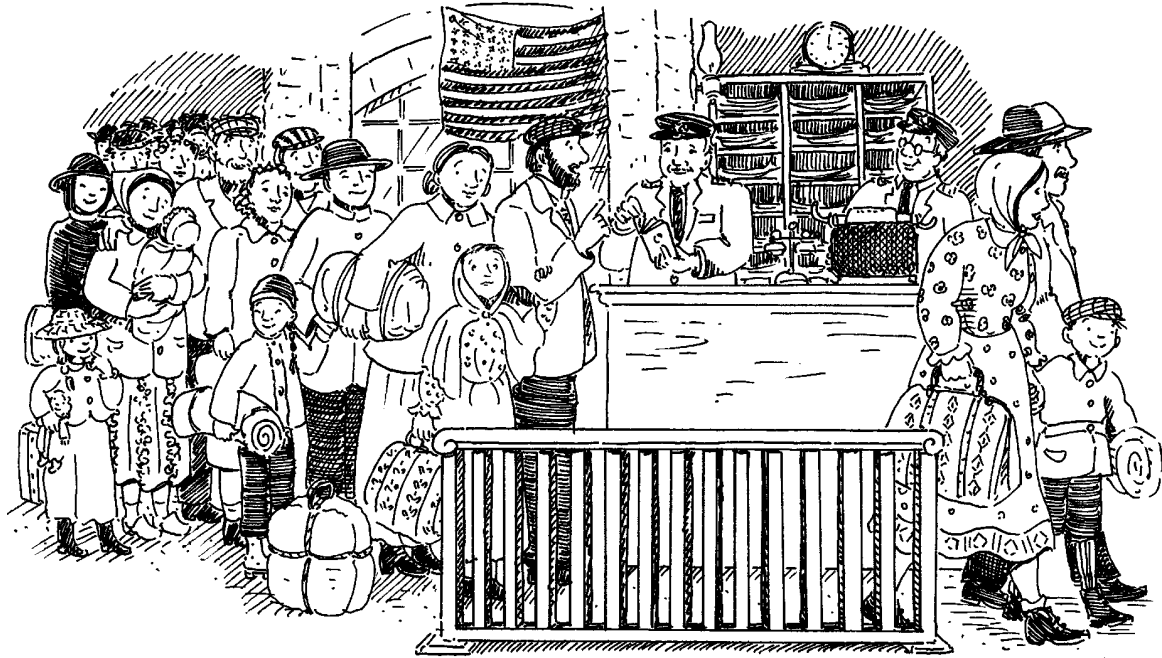


ELLIS ISLAND AND ANGEL ISLAND

Immigration (1892-1910)



Cast of Characters (in order of appearance) at Ellis Island

Sasha Bernstein: *Twelve-year-old Russian Jewish girl*

Marty Bernstein: *Sasha's younger brother*

Solomon Bernstein: *Sasha and Marty's father*

Irina Bernstein: *Sasha and Marty's mother*

Ruth Kokernot: *Russian Jewish woman*

Mr. Hopson: *Ellis Island inspector*

at Angel Island

Mr. Wayne: *Inspector*

Paul Gee: *Fourteen-year-old Chinese boy*

Tet Kwan: *Chinese man*

Richard Sing: *Chinese man*

▲ ACT 1 • Ellis Island, New York (1892) ▲

SASHA BERNSTEIN: Look at all the people! I've never seen so many people in one place before!

MARTY BERNSTEIN: I can't understand what anybody but us is saying. Everybody's speaking different languages. Where do we go? What do we do?

SOLOMON BERNSTEIN: Follow them. They look like they know what they're doing.

IRINA BERNSTEIN (*raising her voice*): Is anybody from Russia? Does anybody speak Yiddish?

RUTH KOKERNOT: I do. And you shouldn't follow those people. The doctor has already looked at them. See the letters in chalk on their sleeves? *E* means eye disease. *H* means heart problems. They may get sent back to where they came from.

SASHA BERNSTEIN: We won't get sent back. We're healthy.

SOLOMON BERNSTEIN: We were healthy when we left Russia—in the middle of the night, with the clothes on our backs and a little food. Then we walked for a week into Germany to catch the steamship. Then we finally got on a ship—

RUTH KOKERNOT: Don't tell me. I know. There was no room. The food was terrible, and there wasn't much of it. The water was bad, and there wasn't much of it, either.

IRINA BERNSTEIN: We *were* healthy when we left Russia.

SOLOMON BERNSTEIN: We're lucky we are even *alive*. The czar's soldiers came riding into our village. We were lucky to escape.

RUTH KOKERNOT: I know. I saw terrible things, terrible things—so many of us hurt and killed, because we're Jewish.

SASHA BERNSTEIN: Which line do we get in? We want to get out of here and go into New York City.

RUTH KOKERNOT: First the doctor has to look at you. You stand in that line. Then, if you don't get anything marked in chalk on your sleeve, you get in that line over there. How much money do you have?

SOLOMON BERNSTEIN: What?

RUTH KOKERNOT: You have to have at least twenty-five dollars or they won't let you in. You have to have a place to stay. You have to have a job.

IRINA BERNSTEIN: We have to have twenty-five dollars? Nobody told us that. The boat tickets took almost all the money we had.

MARTY BERNSTEIN: We have a place to stay! My uncle Theo found an apartment for us. Papa and I are going to work in the garment factory where he works.

SASHA BERNSTEIN: Mama and I are going to work at home, sewing clothes.

SOLOMON BERNSTEIN: We don't have twenty-five dollars.

RUTH KOKERNOT: How much do you have?

SOLOMON BERNSTEIN: It looks like . . . almost twenty dollars.

RUTH KOKERNOT: That's not enough.

IRINA BERNSTEIN: But it's almost enough.

RUTH KOKERNOT: Here—here's five dollars.

SOLOMON BERNSTEIN: We can't take your money.

RUTH KOKERNOT: Look, do you want to get sent back to Russia? You've got jobs. You can pay me back.

MR. HOPSON: Keep it moving, keep it moving. We don't have all day. *(to Solomon)*
What's your name?

SOLOMON BERNSTEIN: What?

RUTH KOKERNOT: He wants to know what your name is.

SOLOMON BERNSTEIN: Oh. Solomon Bernstein, and this is my wife Irina—

MR. HOPSON: Sal Burns and Irene Burns. Welcome to America. Get in that line over there.

SOLOMON BERNSTEIN: No, no, my name is Solomon Bernstein—

RUTH KOKERNOT: That's not your name anymore, Sal. Welcome to America.

▲ ACT 2 • Angel Island, California (1910) ▲

SCENE 1: AN OFFICE AT ANGEL ISLAND

MR. WAYNE: Okay, Paul Gee. Sit down. Take it easy. Just answer my questions, and you'll get out of here.

PAUL GEE: Thank you.

MR. WAYNE: First question—are you here all by yourself?

PAUL GEE: My father is waiting for me in San Francisco.

MR. WAYNE: You'll live with your father?

PAUL GEE: Yes, sir.

MR. WAYNE: You're not a paper son, are you?

PAUL GEE: Excuse me?

MR. WAYNE: You're not pretending to be someone's son—someone who just happens to be an American citizen already? You're not paying someone to say that you're his son?

PAUL GEE: No, sir! He really is my father. We look just like each other, too. If you saw him, you would know that he's my father.

MR. WAYNE: I'm sure. Let's talk a little bit about China. How many brothers and sisters do you have?

PAUL GEE: I have two sisters and two brothers.

MR. WAYNE: Okay. How many windows are there in your house?

PAUL GEE: There are six windows in my house.

MR. WAYNE: I'm sure. Where is your house located in the village?

PAUL GEE: My house . . . in the village . . . it's . . . one, two, three, four—fourth house in the second row.

MR. WAYNE: Is that your final answer?

PAUL GEE: Yes, sir. My house is the fourth house in the second row.

MR. WAYNE: Who lives in the second house in the fourth row?

PAUL GEE: The second house in the fourth row? Hmmm . . . Gong Zhou lives there.

MR. WAYNE: All by himself?

PAUL GEE: No, sir—all by herself. Her husband died last winter. They had no children.

MR. WAYNE: What did her husband die from?

PAUL GEE: He was very sick. He coughed a lot. Excuse me, sir?

MR. WAYNE: What?

PAUL GEE: Why are you asking me so many questions? Why does it matter how many windows my house in China has?

MR. WAYNE: I have to make sure you are who you say you are. You could be making all this up just to get in to the United States. You could be thinking that you'll get rich quick here by taking jobs from real Americans. Then you'll take all your money back to China.

PAUL GEE: Oh, no, sir. I mean, I will work hard here. I want to become an American citizen.

MR. WAYNE: I'll tell you this—you'll either get to go to San Francisco in about a month, or you'll get sent back to China.

PAUL GEE: Why would you send me back?

MR. WAYNE: If we find out that you lied to us, we'll send you back. Your house better be the second house in the fourth row.

PAUL GEE: Excuse me, sir. It's the fourth house in the second row.

MR. WAYNE: We'll see about that.

SCENE 2: A FEW WEEKS LATER

TET KWAN: Don't worry, Paul. You haven't even been here for a month.

RICHARD SING: He's right. I've been here for almost two months.

PAUL GEE: But my father said they would keep me here at Angel Island for a week or two.

TET KWAN: Don't worry. You'll be out of here before you know it.

RICHARD SING: He's right. Why don't you go play some volleyball? It'll make the time go by faster.

PAUL GEE: I guess you're right.

(Paul leaves.)

TET KWAN: I hope he gave the right answers to all the questions. I hope they let him go to San Francisco.

RICHARD SING: I hope they let us *all* go to San Francisco.

(Mr. Wayne walks in. Paul follows him.)

MR. WAYNE: I've got some good news and some bad news. Listen up. Richard Sing—San Francisco! Ho Chin—back to Hong Kong! Paul Gee—San Francisco!

PAUL GEE: I made it! I made it!

TET KWAN: See, everything turned out all right.

PAUL GEE: But what about you? He didn't call your name.

TET KWAN: At least I'm not being sent back to China. I'm still in America. Richard, take care of Paul. Make sure he finds his father.

RICHARD SING: We'll see you when you get to San Francisco, Tet. It won't be long, maybe tomorrow even.

(They all shake hands. Paul and Richard leave.)

TET KWAN: Maybe tomorrow, maybe never.

TEACHING GUIDE

Background

Between 1892 and 1920, over 23 million immigrants to the United States were processed at Ellis Island. Its opening coincided with the second great wave of immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe that began in the 1880s. The immigrants were first examined by doctors. If they were deemed unhealthy, they could be sent back to their originating countries; families were often separated in this way. About 2 percent of the immigrants who had contagious diseases or couldn't take care of themselves were sent back. Healthy immigrants were then questioned by inspectors. At this stage, names were often changed—shortened or misspelled by the inspectors. Immigrants also had to have at least twenty-five dollars, the promise of jobs, and places to stay. After leaving Ellis Island, immigrants either remained in New York City or traveled by train to other destinations—Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and the Midwest. In 1921, after Congress passed restrictive quotas on European immigration, Ellis Island was used for the purposes of detaining and deporting aliens. It was closed in 1954.

Angel Island was expected to become the “Ellis Island of the West” after the Panama Canal was opened. World War I interfered, however, and the majority of immigrants passing through its doors were from Asia. The first Chinese immigrants to the United States arrived in 1848, and more followed, primarily to work the California gold fields. Severe unemployment in the 1870s led to discrimination against the Chinese and led to restrictions against Asian immigration. Only those who had been born in the United States, or had husbands or fathers who were citizens, could enter the country. The San Francisco earthquake destroyed records, so citizenship was often difficult to prove. Thousands of “paper sons” and “paper daughters” claiming to be the real sons and daughters of Chinese-American citizens entered the country. Immigrants were held at Angel Island anywhere from two weeks to two years. Inspectors asked detailed questions about the Chinese immigrants' home villages. Those who didn't pass the questioning were sent back to China. Many of the detainees wrote poetry on the wooden walls while they waited to hear their fate. Angel Island closed on November 5, 1940.

Both Ellis Island and Angel Island, once abandoned, are now museums.

Vocabulary Some readers may not be familiar with the following words:

citizen: person who is born in a country, or who becomes a member of that country by law

czar: ruler (king) in Russia before 1917

garment: piece of clothing

immigration: the act of coming to a new country to live

inspector: person who looks at someone or something

Yiddish: language spoken by many European Jews

Books to Build Interest

The Chinese-American Experience (Coming to America) by Dana Ying-Hui Wu (Millbrook, 1993)

I Was Dreaming to Come to America: Memories from the Ellis Island Oral History Project (Puffin, 1997)

If Your Name Was Changed at Ellis Island by Ellen Levine (Scholastic, 1994)

Web Sites

<http://angel-island.com> (Oral histories and photographs of Angel Island)

<http://angelisland.org> (Angel Island Association)

<http://ellisland.com> (Ellis Island Immigration Museum)

ACTIVITIES

Family Tree

Besides Ellis Island and Angel Island, immigrants entered the United States through other port cities such as Boston, New Orleans, and Galveston, Texas. Many stayed in those cities, but others traveled inland. How did your students get where they are today? Have them interview family members so they can use oral histories to make their own family trees. A useful book to help students get started is Lila Perl's *The Great Ancestor Hunt* (Houghton Mifflin, 1991).

From ?? to the United States

Immigrants usually come to the United States for economic, political, or social reasons. Often, the events in their home countries—drought, political upheaval, religious persecution—forced people to leave and seek better lives elsewhere. Have students choose one country and explore its pattern of immigration to the United States. They may present a straightforward report with graphs and charts, or a fictionalized account of one person's story in the form of a diary or a play. Encourage them to create a map that shows the route that an immigrant from that country might take.

Angel Island Poetry

An Asian immigrant could be detained at Angel Island anywhere from two weeks to two years. Often, detainees wrote or carved poems into the walls at Angel Island, some of which can still be seen today. These poems can be found in the book *Island: Poetry and History of Asian Immigration on Angel Island 1910–1940* by Him Mark Lai, Judy Yung, and Genny Lim (University of Washington Press, 1997). Share the book with students, and encourage them to write their own poems on topics such as moving to a new place, immigration to America, or what living in the United States means to them.

History of Ellis Island and Angel Island

After being closed to immigration, both Ellis Island and Angel Island fell into disrepair and were almost forgotten. Now visitors can take a ferry to Ellis Island and stand in the Great Hall where immigrants were processed. They can also go to Angel Island and see the poetry carved into the walls. Ask students to research the history of Ellis Island or Angel Island—before, during, and after they served as immigration stations.

Communicating Without Words

Immigrants from many different countries poured into Ellis Island. An inspector or doctor couldn't hope to communicate with each immigrant in his or her language; immigrants from different countries, or even different regions of the same country, couldn't speak to each other. Challenge students to think about how they would communicate with someone who spoke a different and unfamiliar language. Then set aside a portion of time for them, and you, to communicate without using words. After the experiment, talk about the experience. Which forms of communication—pantomime, drawing, for instance—worked the best? What did students find rewarding and frustrating about the experiment?

Immigration to Your Community

What is the story of immigration to your community? When was it founded, and by whom? How has the population changed over the years? If possible, enlist the aid of the local historical society or school or public librarian to help students find out more about immigration to their community. Consider having them collaborate on a play or series of skits about the changes in their community.