

Designing Effective Projects: Characteristics of Projects Inside Projects: Grades 6-8

Destination America: Our Hope, Our Future, A 6-8, Social Studies Project

Students travel back in time to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as they experience life through the eyes of a European immigrant who first steps foot on U.S. soil. You may want to print this page as you view the entire [Destination America Unit Plan](#)

Student Centered

This project is made relevant to students' lives by asking the Essential Question: *Why do people move from one country to another?* Students create a profile of an immigrant for themselves and participate in a simulation of historical events. Students make several choices and complete many authentic tasks, including a portfolio of their experiences and a personal letter home to their family in another country.

Alignment with Standards

Project work is central to the curriculum. Immigration is often part of the 6-8 Social Studies curriculum and addresses state and district standards. It involves key historical concepts of immigration, social patterns, and diversity.

Important Questions

The Essential Question, *Why do people move from one country to another?*, prompts interesting discussions that have relevance beyond the classroom. Content questions such as, *Why did immigrants leave their home countries to come to the United States?*, prompt students to think about relevant facts and information that lead to the higher level questions. Students revisit the Essential Question throughout the unit, and have many opportunities to discuss the question and reflect individually, in pairs, and with the larger group. This not only gives the students opportunities to think about the content at higher levels but gives the teacher information on the students' understanding.

Multiple and Ongoing Assessments

Project expectations are reviewed throughout the unit beginning with discussion of a rubric at the beginning to the assessment of final work at the end. Discussions, homework assignments, and journal writings are opportunities to check for understanding and to keep informed about the progress of students.

Demonstrations of Learning

Students demonstrate what they learned from the research and their simulated Ellis Island experience through their portfolio. Their multimedia presentations show an understanding of immigration at that time, specifically the influences and effects of immigration from a very personal, distinguished viewpoint.

Authentic Work

The students make real-world connections through the Essential Question, which asks them to reflect upon their own family origins and the experiences of their ancestors. Students create profiles for themselves and are placed in a simulated event that recreates history. These tasks provide the students with an authentic experience and a personal connection to the content.

Technology-Enhanced Learning

Students use technology to create a multimedia presentation to share their simulated experience with other audiences. They use Internet research to investigate their selected national origins and gather information for their profile.

Higher-Order Thinking Skills

Students use knowledge and take what they have learned from their research and apply it to creating a personal profile for themselves. Students use higher level thinking to explore the essential and Unit Questions in their final products.

Varied Instructional Strategies

- **Prior Knowledge:** Students draw upon their prior knowledge by creating a definition of “Who is an American” at the beginning of the unit. The class also creates a list of countries that represent the students’ ethnicities. This initial knowledge is built upon in their investigation of the Essential Question.
- **Graphic Organizers:** The unit begins with class-created lists to accompany the brainstorming process. Students create individual and group charts throughout the unit.
- **Cooperative Grouping:** Students work in teams to investigate Web sites on the Internet.
- **Peer and Teacher Feedback:** Students receive feedback when they share homework assignments and multimedia presentations. Rubrics communicate progress when final products are assessed.
- **Recognition:** Students receive recognition when they share their multimedia presentations and homework with the class.
- **Questioning:** The discussion of the essential, unit, and content questions provide questioning throughout the unit. Students ask and answer questions to complete research, interview family and friends, and write in their journals, further probing them to think at higher levels.
- **Modeling:** The teacher models the research steps. There are models for exemplary work, a student sample multimedia presentation and story examples on the Ellis Island Web site.
- **Classroom Management:** Students work in small groups to investigate Web sites on the Internet. The final portfolio is completed in steps, and students use the rubric throughout the project to check on project expectations.