

Book Review

*Ellis Island*¹

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E. Landau, *Ellis Island*. New York, NY: Children's Press, 2008.

According to the publisher, this book was written for young second and foreign language learners with mid-level proficiency. K12 students at these levels should be able to work with *Ellis Island* in class or independently. With this text, they can develop their language skills because the narrative and illustrations help open their minds so that they can picture the controversial, yet interesting events that occurred on Ellis Island.

In her five chapters Elaine Landau showcases factual, historical, and descriptive information about Ellis Island in the United States of America. At the end of the 19th century, more than 12 million immigrants passed through Ellis Island in New York Harbor. They immigrated, not only because they were poor or because their lives had not been stable in their home countries, but because they were looking for a place to practice their beliefs and freedom of speech without fear. They were searching for a better life, not only to find peace for themselves, but also to let the following generations survive obstacle-free. As an example of the immigrants' reception on arriving at Ellis Island, Kennedy (2018) commented they often encountered harsh times while they were passing through the Ellis Island facilities. The hopelessness of arrivals is expressed ironically as Ellis Island was called the "*Island of Opportunity*" rather than the "*Island of Tears*". Although official documents were not required to enter the U.S. at that time, large numbers of families were formed into lines--men and boys to one side and women and children to the other, on beginning the entry process. The first story on the cover page of the book exemplifies the experience with the first Irish immigrant, Annie Moore (depicted in detail on p. 35), a fifteen-year-old, who landed on Ellis Island, with her brothers. Another image portrays the expectant people from different nationalities standing in front of the main building in 1926. They carried their own luggage without knowing how and where to settle down in the U.S. (p. 36).

In Chapter 1, "The Immigrants", Landau briefly mentions the reasons behind the immigrants' desire to start over. Men, women, and children fled Europe, Africa, South America and Asia because of war, danger and poverty. In Chapter 2, "A Difficult Trip", she illustrates how the cost of the ticket was more expensive than the amount for buying food for a couple of days at that time. Their months-long journeys were not only undertaken by ship or small steamboat, but also augmented by days on trains, on horseback or in wagons. Landau added at the end of the Chapter significant facts about the steerage class with regards to the narrow extent of space and the dirtiness of their accommodations.

In Chapter 3, "Why Ellis Island", the author expands on the characteristics of the Ellis Island for the arrivals. As one of the main ports of entry to the U.S., large numbers of immigrants landed on the island during the first five years (1892-1897) before the buildings were destroyed in a fire in 1897, from which only 200 immigrants and workers who were in the facilities at that time survived. Three years later, the Island resumed its operations in a new building constructed for making profit from new arrivals. In Chapter 4, "On American Soil, at Last", Landau describes the long process that the first-class and the second-class passengers from steerage faced. The passengers were obliged to following a specific procedure in order to enter Ellis Island. First, on arrival, most poor immigrants underwent a physical examination to prove they weren't infected with serious diseases. For example, they had to have a complete medical examination because of a fear they would spread a serious eye infection, trachoma, from Europe. After that, the arrivals had to be questioned for hours by legal inspectors in the registry room about their ages, occupations, social, moral, and legal status, in addition to their ability to read and write in the English language. Then, immigrant

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families often had to wait for long periods in the dormitories or hospitals in case they didn't get entry permits or while waiting for relatives so they could enter as family groups.

In Chapter Five, "After Ellis Island," Landau gives an explanation of the later radical changes in immigration laws after an increase in the number of arrivals from Poland and other countries to work in the *Land of Opportunity*. Few immigrants were accepted to enter the United States because most arrivals of diverse nationalities, especially the Asians from China, seized on the opportunity of working more than one job for the sake of earning extra money. With the Immigration Act of 1924 the government legislated to restrict another massive entrance of immigrants. However, the author concluded that most immigrants' dreams came true after all the years of struggle when they finally achieved their American citizenship.

This text attempts to guide the students to understand more about the history of the United States, as well as to develop new vocabulary (i.e., *immigrants, emigrants, steamships, visa, port, trachoma, interpreters, morals, literacy*). Through its simple writing style, the book helps second and foreign language learners to explore various methods for developing their learning skills, letting educators embrace diverse cultural perspectives in the class curriculum. Additionally, teachers can take advantage to apply different teaching strategies to create an effective learning style as a mean of assessing the level of expertise of novice students formally and informally with regards to listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

Ellis Island is rich with its colorful design and well-organized sequentially-ordered content, including statistic and factual information along with realistic and powerful images. These images are taken from the Ellis Island Immigration Museum and are arranged in a chronological timeline. Some examples from the textbook include a desperate mother with her three children waiting for her husband to arrive to pay the passages so they could travel together as a family (p. 9) or a Polish family who is happily showing their entry permits to enter the U. S. A. (p. 33).

Educators can use the book as they do other picture books to discuss insights of world cultures. Furthermore, the speaking and writing practices at the end of each section promote the learning of diverse cultural views through pair and group activities, class assignments, matching, true-false quiz games, or multiple-choice questions, taking into consideration the competencies that are addressed. Teachers lead students to answer the questions through writing, to do role-play with a classmate for oral conversation, or to carry out discussions to facilitate classroom interaction. All this will consequently increase the learner's engagement with the course content by engaging them with valuable information about the world, while developing their language skills.

Reference

Kennedy, J. (2018). Most immigrants arriving at the Ellis Island in 1907 were processed in few hours. Retrieved from <https://www.history.com/news/immigrants-ellis-island-short-processing-time>