

FINAL TASK

Museum Exhibition: "American Identity: A Nation of Immigrants"

The Mission

You are curators working for the **Smithsonian Museum** in Washington D.C. The museum director has asked your team to create a new exhibition exploring American identity through the lens of immigration.

Your exhibition will be displayed in the museum's main hall and must educate visitors about the complex, evolving story of who is "American."

Working Groups & Format

- Groups of 3-4 students
- Create ONE exhibition panel (poster format: A3 or larger)
- Choose ONE theme from the list below

Exhibition Themes

Choose ONE theme for your panel:

1. **"Give Me Your Tired, Your Poor": Arrival in America** – Focus on why immigrants came and what they hoped to find
2. **"Natives vs. Newcomers": Conflict and Tension** – Focus on how immigrants were (or weren't) welcomed
3. **"We Get the Job Done": Immigrant Contributions** – Focus on what immigrants brought to America
4. **"Home and Away": The Immigrant Experience** – Focus on the emotional journey: leaving home, nostalgia, adaptation
5. **"Rewriting the Story": Whose Thanksgiving?** – Focus on how American myths/traditions evolved and whose voices were heard (or silenced)

What Your Exhibition Panel Must Include

1. Title Section (10%)

- A creative title for your panel that reflects your theme
- Subtitle indicating the time period(s) covered

2. Primary Sources (30%)

At least 3 quotes from different texts/sources we studied:

- *The New Colossus* poem
- Thanksgiving article (Michael Baron)
- Native American magazine article (your own work!)
- *Gangs of New York* extracts
- *Brooklyn* film
- "Immigrants (We Get the Job Done)" - Hamilton Mixtape
- Frank McCourt's *'Tis*

Each quote must be properly cited (author/source)

3. Visual Elements (20%)

- **At least 2 images:** historical photos, illustrations, or student-created artwork
- Visuals must be relevant and captioned
- Could include: Ellis Island photos, Statue of Liberty, maps, immigrant portraits, etc.

4. Curator's Note (30%)

150-200 words explaining:

- Why this theme is important to understanding American identity
- What your chosen sources reveal about the immigrant experience
- Connections between different time periods (Pilgrims → Irish → modern immigrants)
- What visitors should learn from this panel

5. Modern Connection (10%)

50-75 words connecting your historical theme to immigration today

- This could be a separate text box labeled "Why This Matters Now"

Format & Presentation Guidelines

Visual Design

- Clear layout - easy to read from 2 meters away
- Use headings, subheadings, and text boxes to organize information
- Color scheme appropriate for a museum (professional but engaging)
- Mix of text and images (not too text-heavy!)

Language Requirements

- Write in formal but accessible English (educate the public!)
- No grammar/spelling errors
- Vary sentence structures

- Use historical vocabulary accurately

Collaboration

- Each group member must contribute
- You may divide tasks (research, writing, design) but everyone is responsible for the final product

Assessment Criteria (20 points total)

| Criterion | Points |
|---|--------|
| Content & Sources: Relevant quotes from at least 3 different sources, properly integrated | 6 pts |
| Curator's Note: Clear explanation of theme's significance, makes meaningful connections between sources/time periods | 6 pts |
| Visual Design: Professional appearance, effective use of images, readable layout | 4 pts |
| Modern Connection: Thoughtful link to contemporary immigration issues | 2 pts |
| Language Quality: Accurate English, varied vocabulary, minimal errors | 2 pts |

Timeline & Steps to Success

Day 1: Planning (in class)

1. Form groups and choose your theme
2. Review all sources from the unit
3. Brainstorm: Which sources best illustrate your theme?
4. Create an outline of your panel layout

Day 2-3: Creation (homework + class time)

5. Select and copy your quotes
6. Write your Curator's Note draft
7. Find/create appropriate images
8. Begin designing your poster

Day 4: Finalization (in class)

9. Peer review with another group
10. Make final revisions
11. Complete and submit

Day 5: Exhibition Opening! (in class)

12. Display all panels in the school library

13. Gallery walk: students visit each panel and take notes
14. Brief presentations (2 min per group): explain your curatorial choices

Tips for Success

- **Don't just summarize!** Analyze why your sources matter for understanding American identity
- **Make connections!** Show how the Pilgrims' experience relates to Irish immigrants relates to modern immigration
- **Think like a curator!** You're telling a story and making an argument about American identity
- **Be creative with visuals!** You could create illustrated timelines, comparison charts, maps showing migration routes, etc.
- **Use the Native American perspective!** Your magazine article assignment gives you a unique source to include

Example: Curator's Note

Theme: "Home and Away"

This panel explores the emotional paradox at the heart of immigration: the tension between escape and nostalgia. Frank McCourt's memoir *'Tis* captures this perfectly when he sits aboard a ship bound for New York, crying for the "gray miseries" of Limerick he desperately wanted to leave. Similarly, the Pilgrims who would create the Thanksgiving feast were refugees "fleeing their home country's hostile political environment." What both stories reveal is that immigration is never just about arrival—it's about loss, memory, and the complicated relationship with home. The Wampanoag who welcomed the Pilgrims understood what it meant to belong to a place; the immigrants learned what it meant to lose that belonging. As we see in *Brooklyn* and *Gangs of New York*, this homesickness doesn't disappear in the second generation. Understanding American identity means understanding that Americans are people who carry multiple homes in their hearts.