The Immigrant Experience

What can we learn about the values and beliefs of society from the ways in which artists document, depict, or comment on the immigrant experience?

How do the narratives of images made by immigrants compare to documentation by others?

Documentary illustrations and photography often aim to capture moments that reveal an individual or group of people and their place in the larger society. This Permanent Collection Portfolio Guide features a sampling of works from the Addison’s collection offering varied perspectives and discussion points for exploring the ways in which immigrant experiences and voices have been documented over time.

Educators are encouraged to use this Guide and the expanded Portfolio Image List as a starting point, a place from which to dig deeper, ask questions, and make new connections for class plans and projects.

For online use, click the images in this guide to access digital images in the Addison’s online database.

Images highlighted in grey are ideas for materials from outside the Addison’s collection of American art that can enhance the potential for both personal and global connections.

For more information about resources from the Phillips Academy Archives and Special Collections, contact Director Paige Roberts at proberts@andover.edu.

Selected Thematic Approaches

Social Documentation — How does social documentary photography tell stories about immigration and immigrant experiences?

Collaboration and Immigrant Voices — How can images and writing function in context to share a more complete, inclusive story?
Social Documentation

What can we learn about the values and beliefs of society from the decisions made by artists documenting, depicting, or commenting on the immigrant experience?

How does social documentary photography tell stories about immigration and immigrant experiences?

In an 1871 political cartoon printed in Harper’s Weekly, Thomas Nast criticizes bills proposed to limit immigration from China. In his illustration, Columbia, the feminine symbol of the United States, shields a Chinese man and reminds a gang of thugs that “America means fair play for all men.” Similar empathy can be seen in the work of Danish immigrant and social reformer Jacob Riis, whose use of explosive magnesium flash powder to light his photographs made visible to the middle class the lives of the many immigrants living in tenement housing in New York City. Later, in photographer Berenice Abbott’s 1930s extended study Changing New York, storefronts represent the influences of immigration and cultural exchange on the city’s evolving identity and landscape.

Images of immigrants at Ellis Island attempt to give voice to the experiences of the anonymous. Lewis Hine’s photographs at the turn of the century record pride and dignity. In his 1907 photograph The Steerage, Alfred Stieglitz focuses on the separation between voyagers paying the highest and lowest fares aboard a ship departing Ellis Island, returning to Europe.
Collaboration and Immigrant Voices

How do the narratives of images made by immigrants compare to documentation by others?

How can images and writing function in context to share a more complete, inclusive story?

Just as Swiss immigrant Robert Frank documents a 1950s America in his series *The Americans*, Colombian-born contemporary photographer Oscar Palacio brings an outsider perspective to a keenly observed landscape. Born in what is now Ukraine, Arthur Fellig, known as *Weegee*, photographs both the seedy and the innocent in New York, including children sleeping on a fire escape in 1943.

Photographer Wendy Ewald works collaboratively with her subjects to voice their experiences through the inclusion of their writing directly on the photographs. The image titles in Bill Owens’s 1970s series *Suburbia* often quote the subjects depicted, such as the image *Because we live in the suburbs we don’t eat too much Chinese food. It’s not available in the supermarkets so on Saturday we eat hot dogs.*

On display at the *Phillips Academy Archives* is both writing by and photography of Joseph Neesima, Phillips Academy class of 1868, who fled from Japan as a stowaway on an American ship, and who later founded Doshisha University, now the largest private educational institution in Japan. Also available for exploration at the Archives is the scrapbook of Chentung Liang Cheng, Phillips Academy class of 1882, who came to Phillips as part of the Chinese Educational Mission (CEM), which sent Chinese students to America.
Curriculum Connections and Resources

**SUGGESTED CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS**

**History/Social Studies**
- the history of immigration
- the economics of immigration
- immigration and settlement patterns (maps)
- tenement housing
- The Industrial Revolution
- The Progressive Era
- Ellis Island
- books by Julia Alvarez
- books by Edwidge Danticat
- Farewell to Manzanar
- The House on Mango Street
- The Joy Luck Club
- What is the What
- A Tree Grows in Brooklyn

**English**
- immigrant narratives
- life in tenement housing
- books by Junot Diaz
- books by Julia Alvarez
- books by Edwidge Danticat
- Farewell to Manzanar
- The House on Mango Street
- The Joy Luck Club
- What is the What
- A Tree Grows in Brooklyn
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- The Joy Luck Club
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**Art**
- representation
- portraits and types
- portraits and self-portraits
- visual narratives
- visual biographies
- images and text
- works in series
- photography
- social documentation

**Science**
- biology and race

**Math**
- immigration data and statistics
- the economics of immigration

**CONNECTIONS TO ADDITIONAL THEMATIC PORTFOLIOS**

**American Identity**
**Race/Otherness**
**Types/Stereotypes**
**Portraits/Self-portraits**
**The Power of Photography**
**Images and the Media**

**TEACHER AND STUDENT RESOURCES**


Local historical organizations:
- The Andover Center for History and Culture. [http://andoverhistorical.org/](http://andoverhistorical.org/)
- Phillips Academy Archives and Special Collections. [http://www.noblenet.org/paarchives/](http://www.noblenet.org/paarchives/)