

Identity: Who am I? How do I define myself? How do others define me?

In this lesson, students will reflect on the important role immigration has played in US history, the “Zero-Tolerance” practice of separating children from their parents at the United States border in 2018, and students’ personal reflections on identity, which may or may not involve immigration narratives.

1. Ask your students to examine the following resource:

May, Kate Torgovnick. “Why the Stories of Ellis Island Matter Today”

<https://ideas.ted.com/gallery-why-the-stories-of-ellis-island-matter-today/>

2. Discuss with your students how national identity and citizenship are defined in the United States. Read the follow excerpt to get a sense of how people define citizenship:

In “Literature is Language: An Interview with Amara Lakhous,” Italian writer Lakhous considers how Italian identity is defined:

Someone who has an Italian passport? In Brazil and Argentina there are people who have an Italian passport and who don’t speak Italian and who have perhaps never lived in Italy. Are they Italian? When people say Italians are those who speak Italian . . . this discourse of identity being tied to some sort of grid, of linguistic entrapment, of nationalism, is troubling.” (426)

3. Ask your students to examine the “Zero-Tolerance” practice of separating children from their parents at the United States border in May and June of 2018:

Lind, Dara. “The Trump Administration’s Separation of Families at the Border, Explained”

<https://www.vox.com/2018/6/11/17443198/children-immigrant-families-separated-parents>

- a. How does this experience differ from prior immigration experiences?
- b. How does it differ from the experiences of those coming through Ellis Island in particular?
- c. How does this practice challenge the famous poem on the Statue of Liberty?

“The New Colossus” by Emma Lazarus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she

With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Assignment: Write a response to the question "who am I?"

1. Write a 1-2-page typed response answering the following two questions:
 - a. Establish the criteria upon which you build your identity: is it religion, nationality, interests, gender, or class? Or something else?
 - b. Have you ever had your identity defined by someone else? If so, how? And how does that make you feel?
2. Students will also create a visual representation of their answer, creating either a paper-based or computer-based presentation to be shared with the class.