

LESSON PLAN



Speaking Lady Liberty

Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free...

By Erika Luckert

These famous lines by Emma Lazarus have stood as a welcome to immigrants alongside the Statue of Liberty for over a century. In fact, the poem was written as part of a fundraising effort to build the pedestal on which Lady Liberty still stands.

In 2017, The Guardian commissioned 21 poets to write [updated versions](#) of the famous poem for today's America. They even invited readers to join in and pen [their own replies](#) to Lazarus, and to this country. Earlier this year, I invited my students at IS 392 to join the poetic conversation, writing poems in the voice of Lady Liberty. Now, as immigrant children are being separated from their parents at the border, their words feel more urgent than ever.

LESSON

Grade: 6th

Genre: Poetry

Common Core State Standards: ([Refer to the ELA Standards > Writing > Grade 6](#))

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3.B
Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3.D
Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to convey experiences and events.

Lesson Objectives:

In this workshop students will:

- Imagine what it is like to immigrate to the United States.
- Explore the history of the Statue of Liberty.
- Write a poem inspired by Emma Lazarus' poem.

Warm-Up

Imagine you're speaking to somebody who just arrived in this country. Make them a list of

- 1) Things to look forward to
- 2) Things to be prepared for

Main Activity

Explain to students that when early immigrants arrived in the United States, one of the first things they saw was the Statue of Liberty. Ask students what they already know about Lady Liberty.

Offer some additional background information and introduce the context for the Emma Lazarus poem:

The Statue of Liberty (also known as Lady Liberty) was erected in 1886 in the New York Harbor and was a gift from France to the United States. It is a symbol of Freedom or Liberty.

One of the bottom of the monument, there is a plaque with a poem by a poet named Emma Lazarus. This poem was mounted on the statue in 1903 -- that's 115 years ago!

Many people believe this poem is what transformed the Statue of Liberty into an icon for welcoming immigrants. Through these words, Lady Liberty came to be seen as the official greeter to immigrants -- welcoming them to build a life in the United States.

Invite students to read the excerpt from "The New Colossus":

...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!"
- Emma Lazarus

Explain that recently, some poets decided to update this poem. Invite students to read Bob Hicok's version:

Who We Are

Give me your burning, yearning masses churning
to be free, I love all lovers of decency, the poor, the rich,
the nuclear physicist and cab driver alike, when I hear a knock,
I'm flattered, and honor guests as my mother raised me to--
I say "Welcome," and throw wide my golden door

Ask students to discuss how Bob Hicok updated the Emma Lazarus original, paying close attention to both similarities and differences.

Next, introduce Lynn Melnick's adaptation:

Refuse

Huddled in our heyday, we swallow
anything is possible. The golden door? I'm tired.
This feels exactly how I feared it would:
wretched hands around my throat, gasping
on what good fortune you insist I've been given.

Again, discuss how Lynn Melnick updated the Lazarus poem. Students may also want to compare Melnick's version to Hicok's as they work through the poem.

Writing Task

Ask students to write their own updated poem in the voice of Lady Liberty. They may want to draw on ideas from the list they made at the start of class, or from any of the mentor texts.

Closing

Allow students time to share their poems.

Extension

Dahn Vo's *We The People* is a full size replica of the Statue of Liberty, divided into over 200 separate pieces. It was displayed in Brooklyn Bridge Park in 2014, and at the Guggenheim museum in 2018. Show students [images of the artwork](#), and invite them to reflect on this alternate "update" of Lady Liberty. How does Dahn Vo's work change your perspective of Lady Liberty? What does it make you think about? Can you relate his sculpture to any of these Lady Liberty poems?

Welcome to the Golden Door

Give me your tired
Your poor
You walk
Through the hall to
Find the golden door
You lift the lamp
You open
The door
Will you
Find your
Reward or would you
Honor guests
As mother raised
You
To say
You're welcome
To the golden door.

Diego C., 6th Grade

I'm Lady Liberty

I'm Lady Liberty

I represent your state

I am a pleasant statue

That you cannot forsake

I'm Lady Liberty

I stand strong & bold

With my rod in my hand

And green & scent of mold

I'm Lady Liberty

I represent your state

Cause I'm tall & worthy

But not a mistake!

I am Lady Liberty

I represent your state

I'm welcoming the city

Until we see fate

Sanaa H., 6th Grade



Not Safe

Give me your heart. I welcome
you to the USA. I hope you will
be safe because now at this time
it's not the same as it was in the past.
Right now it's more dangerous than you
think. The golden door is not golden
anymore. It doesn't shine like it used to do.
It's now a rusty old hate
kind of door. It's not the best door
to go in, and now people rather

go to another door.
Please give us the golden door back.
We don't want hate, killing,
We want the golden door back
Not a rusty hating door.

Miguel R., 6th Grade

Lady Liberty

This world has changed
for many years now that
Donald Trump's here we
all have fear, but I am
still standing here for almost
more than 100 years.

Still waiting for all
the rats, school shootings
and Donald Trump's new
laws to disappear.

I have been waiting
here for women's
equality and homeless
people to get their rights.
I have been waiting here
for many years for all the
problems to disappear. But
after all I am just waiting
here to see how our world
works.

Camille W., 6th Grade

Lady Liberty

This once was a place all people were welcome,
Donald Trump moved in with his whiney little tantrum,
The golden door is being shut but the white house is open,
The people who flee from danger are being kicked out,

When we need the help we are gonna get shut out,
Cause the people who need us now due to their struggles,
War, crimes, gangs, etc. that's why they flee their homes,
I thought we offered opportunities, not take them away,
We're being selfish turning our cheek to the needy,
My condolence to these families that are getting kicked out very sickly

Cayden W., 7th Grade

Lady Liberty

Arrive here on a boat
Your heart feels like it floats.
Some legal, some not,
It doesn't matter, you're all one flock.
People scream and fight,
Kick and shove, call you names.
But it doesn't matter because we're all the same.
You finally arrive after your long trip.
I welcome you with my golden gates,
This is your new home to stay.

Annalise G., 7th Grade