



**Created by:** Darlene McClurg, L.T. Ball Intermediate

**Grade level:** 5

**Primary Source Citation:** *Immigrant Kids* by Russell Freedman, Scholastic Inc., New York, 1980, pp 21-22, 31-32, 43-44, 46-47.

Allow students, in groups or individually, to examine the passages located below while answering the questions below in order. The questions are designed to guide students into a deeper analysis of the source and sharpen associated cognitive skills.

**Level I: Description**

1. What is the date of the writing and who is the author?
2. How do you know this passage is a primary source?
3. What specific words or phrases help you to picture clearly the living and working conditions of the immigrants?

**Level II: Interpretation**

1. Why do you think this passage was written?
2. Who is the intended audience?

**Level III: Analysis**

1. What does the passage tell you about the time period?
2. What conclusions can you draw about the daily living and working conditions for the new immigrants?
3. What questions would you ask this writer if you could interview him?
4. Judging from this immigrant's point of view of living and working in America, would he encourage others to come?

Leonard Covello has described his family's first American home and his mother's reaction to running water in the hallway:

Our first home in America was a tenement flat near the East River at 112th Street. . . . The sunlight and fresh air of our mountain home in Lucania [southern Italy] were replaced by four walls and people over and under and on all sides of us, until it seemed that humanity from all corners of the world had congregated in this section of New York City. . . .

The cobbled streets. The endless, monotonous rows of tenement buildings that shut out the sky. . . . The clanging of bells and the screeching of sirens as a fire broke out somewhere in the neighborhood. Dank hallways. Long flights of wooden stairs and the toilet in the hall. And the water, which to my mother was one of the great wonders of America—water with just the twist of a handle, and only a few paces from the kitchen. It took her a long time to get used to this luxury. . . .

It was Carmelo Accurso who made ready the tenement flat and arranged the welcoming party with relatives and friends to greet us upon our arrival. During this celebration my mother sat dazed, unable to realize that at last the torment of the trip



was over and that here was America. It was Mrs. Accurso who put her arm comfortingly about my mother's shoulder and led her away from the party and into the hall and showed her the water faucet. "Courage! You will get used to it here. See! Isn't it wonderful how the water comes out?"

Through her tears my mother managed a smile.

*Combined bath and laundry in tenement sinks  
(photo by Lewis Hine)*

Sophie Ruskay has recalled the grammar school she attended on the Lower East Side:

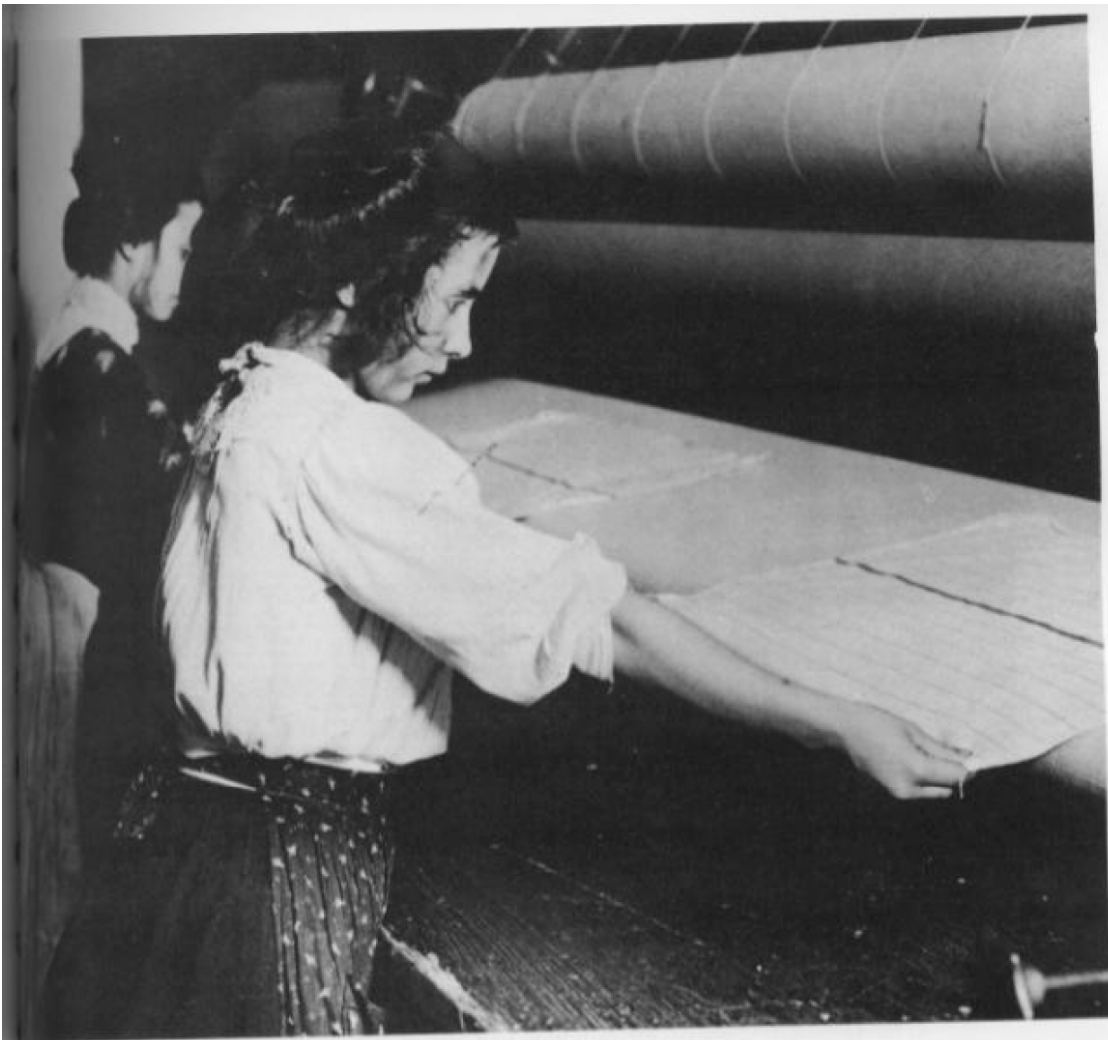
When teacher called out in her sharp, penetrating voice, "Class!" everyone sat up straight as a ramrod, eyes front, hands clasped rigidly behind one's back. We strived painfully to please her. With a thin smile of approval on her face, her eyes roved over the stiff, rigid figures in front of her.

Beautiful script letters across the huge blackboard and a chart of the alphabet were the sole adornments of the classroom. Every day the current lesson from our speller was meticulously written out on the blackboard by the teacher who, whatever else she lacked, wrote a lovely, regular hand. We spent hours over our copybooks, all conveniently lined, as we laboriously sought to imitate this perfection.

We had to learn our lessons by heart, and we repeated them out loud until we memorized them. Playgrounds were nonexistent, toilets were in the yard, and gymnasiums were an unheard-of luxury.



Some schools had rooftop playgrounds. But usually, there were no sports or play facilities at all. Students stood at their desks as they performed physical fitness exercises every morning. At the command "Class stand!" the room was filled with the shuffling of feet and the banging of desk seats being raised. Monitors used long poles to open the windows. The teacher stood on a little platform beside her desk. She called out, "Breathe in! Breathe out!" as the class made loud hissing sounds. These breathing exercises were followed by simple gymnastics: "Hands on shoulders! Arms up! Arms out! Shoulders back!"



Pauline Newman was an immigrant child who worked in a New York City clothing factory:

It was child's work, since we were all children. We had a corner in the factory which was like a kindergarten. The work wasn't difficult. The shirt-waist finished by the [sewing machine] operator

*Laundry worker (photo by Lewis Hine)*



would come to us, so we could cut off the thread left by the needle of the machine. You had little scissors because you were children.

Somehow the employer knew when the inspector was coming. Materials came in high wooden cases, and when the inspector came we were put into them and covered with shirtwaists. By the time he arrived, there were no children.

In the busy season, we worked seven days a week. That's why the sign went up on the freight elevator: If You Don't Come In On Sunday, Don't Come In On Monday.

The journalist Jacob A. Riis described a sweatshop district on the Lower East Side:

Men stagger along the sidewalk groaning under heavy burdens of unsewn garments, or enormous black bags stuffed full of finished coats and trousers. Let us follow one to his home and see how Sunday passes in a Ludlow Street tenement.

Up two flights of dark stairs, three, four, with new smells of cabbage, of onions, of frying fish, on every landing...to the door that opens to admit the bundle and the man. A sweatshop, this, in a small way. Five men and a woman, two young girls, not fifteen, and a boy who says unasked that he is fifteen, and lies in saying it, are at the machines sewing knickerbockers....The floor is littered ankle-deep with half-sewn garments. In the alcove, on a couch of many dozens of "pants" ready for the finisher, a bare-legged baby with a pinched face is asleep. A fence of piled-up clothing keeps him from rolling off on the floor.





The faces, hands, and arms to the elbows of everyone in the room are black with the color of the cloth on which they are working. The boy and the woman alone look up at our entrance. The girls shoot glances, but at a warning look from the man with the bundle, they tread their machines more energetically than ever.

Enterprising children often went into business for themselves. Kids peddled matches, shoelaces, and ribbons from boxes set up on street corners. Young bootblacks, carrying

*Bootblacks (photo by Alice Austen)*