



# Emma Lazarus: Poet Activist

A three day lesson about Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus,” and the Statue of Liberty

*Time requirement:*

*Session One: 55-60 minutes*

*Session Two: 70 minutes (or two 35-minute lessons)*

*Session Three: 40 minutes*

## Lesson One: Poet As Sculptor

In 1883, poet and literary critic Emma Lazarus wrote a poem that has become an unofficial motto of the United States. When she first wrote the poem it was read publicly at an auction to raise money for the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. After the fundraiser, it was almost lost to history. Emma died four years after writing the poem a generation later it was affixed to the Statue itself. Since that time the poem and the Statue have become an inseparable declaration, offering a vision of the Statue of Liberty as a “mother of exiles,” welcoming newcomers from around the world. In this lesson, students will learn how Emma Lazarus’ “The New Colossus” influenced the world’s perspective of the Statue of Liberty. They’ll learn how the two pieces work in tandem to make a statement about America, a nation of immigrants.

## Essential Question:

- How does historical context shape the art created in a particular era?
- How can art help express and define a nation’s identity?

## Materials:

- Powerpoint presentation, “Poem as Sculptor” (This presentation contains images of the Statue of Liberty and a timeline about its history, the text of “The New Colossus,” hyperlink to the Emma Lazarus video, and further prompts to use throughout the lesson.)
- The Statue of Liberty observation sheet (1 copy per student - OPTIONAL)
- “The New Colossus” (1 copy per student)
- Emma Lazarus identity chart (1 copy per student)
- FOR OPTIONAL HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT: Writing the *new New Colossus worksheet* (1 for each student)

## Notes for the teacher:

*Throughout this lesson plan, you’ll find prompts to display certain slides from the presentation during particular lesson steps. You’ll also find suggested times for each lesson step.*

*You may find it helpful to watch the Emma Lazarus video before teaching the lesson to gain background information about the Statue of Liberty, Emma Lazarus and “The New Colossus.” However, we recommend that you allow students to construct their knowledge about these topics throughout the lesson.*

# Lesson Steps

## 1. Activate student thinking (5 minutes):

- a. Distribute the Statue of Liberty observation sheet & Display Slide 2.
- b. Allow students 5 minutes to complete the “Do Now” activity.

*Study the image of the Statue of Liberty. On your observation sheet, record at least 5 details you notice about the statue. Then write 1 - 3 sentences answering the question “What do you think is the message the statue sends to people arriving, and the world, about the United States of America?”*

## 2. Students share responses to the “Do Now” activity (3 - 5 minutes).

Either have students share their observations and responses with the whole class or with a partner.

## 3. Teach the historical context of the Statue of Liberty (5 minutes).

- a. Display Slide 3: A Timeline of the Statue of Liberty.
- b. Have students read each point on the timeline.
- c. Ask: “Do any of the facts about the statue’s history change your opinion about the statue’s message? Why or why not?”

## 4. Define Important Terms in “The New Colossus” (5 minutes)

- a. Display Slide 4: “The New Colossus” Basic Historical Context.
- b. Read through the historical context or have students take turns reading the facts displayed on slide 4.
- c. Display Slide 5: “The New Colossus” Important Terms.
- d. Option A: Display one important term at a time using slide 5 of the presentation. Allow students to define the terms for their peers or simply read the definitions of the terms from the slide.

Option B: Distribute copies of “A New Colossus.” Read through the important definitions provided on the right side of the poem.

## 5. Read “The New Colossus” (5 minutes).

- a. Display Slide 6: “The New Colossus”.
- b. Option A: Invite students to read the poem silently as you read it aloud to the class. Option B: Invite students to read the poem silently while you play the video of Laurie Anderson reciting “The New Colossus,” which is hyperlinked to slide 6.
- c. Allow students time to read the poem a second time to themselves. Instruct students to annotate the poem by underlining words or phrases that stand out to them or that raise questions for them. Students should jot down reactions and/or questions in the margin of the poem.

## 6. Examine “The New Colossus” (5-7 minutes) :

Option A: Display slide 6. Identify Lazarus’ use of the following poetic devices:

- Allusion -- Lazarus makes reference to the ancient Greek Colossus of Rhodes, a 30 meter high statue of Helios that celebrated Rhodians’ defense of their city against Cyprus. It was built between 292 and 280 BCE.
- Personification -- The statue “cries.”
- Metaphor -- The “huddled masses” are equated with “wretched refuse.”

Option B: Allow students to explore the interactive annotated “The New Colossus” at <https://nextbookpress.com/new-colossus/> .

# Lesson Steps

## 7. Discuss “The New Colossus” (10 minutes)

- a. Ask: What words, phrases or images from the poem stood out to you? Why?
- b. Ask: How does the poem make you feel?
- c. What is the message of this poem?

## 6. Summary/ Final Analysis (10 minutes).

a. Explain to students that they’ve learned that Emma Lazarus wrote her poem about The Statue of Liberty. What they might not know is that interpretations of the statue have changed and evolved over time.

### Optional example

- a. Display Slide 7: The Black Statue of Liberty Rumor
- b. According to a report from the National Park Service, “**The Black Statue of Liberty Rumor: An Inquiry into the History and Meaning of Bartholdi’s *Liberté éclairant le Monde*”** *FINAL REPORT* by Rebecca M. Joseph, Ph.D. with Brooke Rosenblatt and Carolyn Kinebrew from September 2000:

*“The conventional interpretation of the statue as a monument to American immigrants is a twentieth-century phenomenon. In its early years (1871-1886), that view was only rarely and vaguely expressed, while references to the Civil War and abolition of slavery occur repeatedly from its first introduction to the United States in 1871 up to and including the dedication celebrations in 1886. Immigrants did not actually see the Statue of Liberty in large numbers until after its unveiling. In the early twentieth century, the statue became a popular symbol for nativists and white supremacists. Official use of the statue’s image to appeal to immigrants only began in earnest with public efforts to Americanize immigrant children and the government’s advertising campaign for World War I bonds. The “immigrant” interpretation gained momentum in the 1930s as Americans prepared for war with Hitler and by the 1950s, it had become the predominant understanding of the statue’s original purpose and meaning.”]* “The New Colossus” plaque was added to the Statue of Liberty in 1903.

- b. Display Slide 8 and ask students to respond (either in writing or in discussion) to the following question: How does “The New Colossus” influence the way you view the Statue of Liberty? What message about the United States of America do the two pieces of artwork together send to the world?
- c. Allow students to share their responses with a partner, small group or the whole class.



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## Lesson Two: Researching Emma Lazarus

In the last lesson, students explored how two pieces of art, the Statue of Liberty and “The New Colossus,” work together to make a statement about America’s identity. Students learned basic facts about the historical context of each piece of art. Both works responded to the political climate in which they were created and shaped America’s identity moving forward. To better understand how historical climate affects an artist, in this lesson, students will conduct research using both secondary and primary sources from the American Jewish Historical Society archives to better understand Emma Lazarus’ life and times. In doing so, students will strive to answer the question, “How did Emma Lazarus’ world and personal experiences lead her to write ‘The New Colossus.’” This lesson will lay the groundwork for students to consider how their own experiences and historical context will influence them as poets.

## Essential Questions:

- How does historical context influence artists and shape the art created in a particular era?

## Materials:

- Emma Lazarus Powerpoint presentation, slides 9 -
- “Emma Lazarus Research” worksheet (1 copy per student)
- Emma Lazarus archival materials (Note: These materials are available online and are available to download. Students can view them on the AJHS website or you can provide hard copies to each group of students):

*Chapter 1:* “What Was it Like to Grow Up As Emma Lazarus?” (4 artifacts)

*Chapter 2:* “What were some of the conversations and issues involving immigration during Emma’s lifetime?”

*Chapter 3:* “What were some of the conversations and issues happening around Emma in her community?” (4 artifacts)

*Chapter 4:* “What did being Jewish mean to Emma?” (6 artifacts)

*Chapter 5:* “How did Emma act in the world, and how did she express herself and shine light on issues important to her?” (4 artifacts)

*Chapter 6:* “How did Emma come to write ‘The New Colossus’ How did ‘The New Colossus’ become connected to the Statue of Liberty” (5 artifacts)

# Lesson Steps

## 1. Activate prior knowledge. (5 minutes)

- a. Display Slide 10.
- b. Ask students to respond in writing to the “Do Now” prompt: “Do Now: In our last lesson, you learned that Emma Lazarus wrote her poem, “The New Colossus”, in 1883. What do you know about the world in 1883 that may have influenced Emma Lazarus as she wrote her poem?”

## 2. Share “Do Now” responses. (3 - 5 minutes)

- a. Create a classwide K-W-L (Know - Want to Know - Learn) chart. If students are not familiar with this type of chart, explain that it is a graphic organizer that can be used to track one’s learning. First you record what you already know about a subject. Then you record questions that articulate what you want to know about a topic. Lastly, after conducting research, you record what you have learned about a topic.
- b. Allow 5 - 10 students to share ideas from their “Do Now” response. Record their responses in the “K” column of your K-W-L chart.

## 3. Explain the task: become historical researchers. (5 minutes)

- a. Explain to students that yesterday, they examined the way “The New Colossus” influences the way people interpret or view the Statue of Liberty. Today, students are going to become historical researchers to better understand what led Emma Lazarus to write her poem.
- b. Display Slides 11 & 12 and explain each of the following research terms:
  - Archive
  - Archivist
  - Primary Source: A document or artifact created by an eye witness to an event the artifact depicts or describes.
  - Secondary Source: An expert resource that contains facts and interpretation based on research with primary sources.
  - Research Question: An overarching question that anchors and guides an investigation.
  - Focus Question: A narrow question that helps to answer one part of the research question.

## 4. Generating questions. (5 minutes)

- a. Display slide 13: “Research Question.” Explain that the class will work together to answer the overarching research question, “How did Emma Lazarus’s experiences lead her to write ‘The New Colossus’?”
- b. Display slide 14: “Generating focus questions”
- c. Instruct students to spend a few minutes generating focus questions, narrower questions categorizing Emma’s experiences in the world. Provide the example, “In what type of family was Emma raised?” OPTIONAL: Have students share questions with a partner and choose 1 - 2 focus questions to share with the class.
- d. Have students share questions with the class. Record the questions as students share.
- e. Display Slide 15: “Emma Lazarus Research” and distribute the “Emma Lazarus Research” sheet which already contains the overarching research question. Explain how students will use the sheet to record focus questions, sources and notefacts. Note that students may answer more than one focus question using the same source, in which case they should record the facts in more than one row on the sheet.

# Lesson Steps

## 5. Watch the Emma Lazarus video (15 minutes).

- a. Explain to students that it is usually best to start exploring a topic using secondary sources because expert historians have gather, analyze and then explain the topic for your.
- b. Display slide 16 Show students the AJHS Emma Lazarus video. Use the hyperlink on the slide to play the Emma Lazarus video for students.
- c. Instruct students to take notes on the research sheet that help to answer their focus questions. OPTIONAL: Pause the video after each section to allow students time to record the information they learned.
- d. Have students share note facts they recorded on their research sheet. Be sure students mention to which focus question each note fact corresponds.

**Note: This may be a good stopping point if you need to divide this session into two class periods.**

## 6. Archival Research. (15 minutes).

- a. Divide students into 5 groups. Explain that each group will conduct further research to answer one of the 5 focus questions. To do this, students will use primary sources from the AJHS archives. They should continue to record the sources, questions and notefacts on the research sheet.
- b. Display Slide 17: "AJHS Source". Use this slide to orientate students to the way the primary sources are presented. In addition to the source, AJHS archivists have provided necessary context for the source and definitions for difficult terms found within the source. This additional information is all factual. An archivists job is not to analyze or interpret, but to gather and explain primary sources.
- c. Direct students to work with the other members of their group to use the resources that correspond with one focus question to help answer that focus question.

## 7. Sharing research. (10 minutes)

- a. Have a spokesperson from each group provide a brief summary of the research the group conducted and explain how the sources provide an answer to one of the focus questions.

## 8. Summary / Revisiting the research question. (10 minutes)

- a. Display Slide 18: Ask students to respond to the research question either in writing or in discussion: "How did Emma Lazarus's experiences lead her to write 'The New Colossus'?"



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## Lesson Three: Writing “A New Colossus”

In the last lesson, students learned about how Emma Lazarus’s historical context and personal experiences influenced her writing “The New Colossus.” In this lesson, students will be asked to consider their own context and experiences when articulating what they believe should be America’s message to newly arriving immigrants and to the world regarding America’s attitude toward immigrants.

### Essential Questions:

- How does historical context shape the art created in a particular era?
- How can art help express and define a nation’s identity?

### Materials:

- Writer’s Identity Chart/Historical Context worksheet (1 per student).
- Writing the *New New Colossus* worksheet (1 per student)

# Lesson Steps

## 1. Activate prior knowledge (5 minutes).

- a. Display Slide 20: “Do Now”.
- b. Have students respond to the “Do Now” activity: Based on our last lesson, name 3 - 5 factors that influenced Emma Lazarus leading her to write “The New Colossus.”

## 2. Share “Do Now” responses (3 minutes).

- a. Have students share their responses either with a partner or with the whole class.
- b. Explain to students that aspects of Lazarus’s identity (female, Jewish, upper class but compassionate toward poor immigrants, New Yorker, well educated, etc) led her to write “The New Colossus.” Additionally, aspects of the times in which she lived, or her historical context (influx of immigrants, building of the Statue of Liberty, post-Reconstruction Era) positioned her to write the poem, too.

## 3. Creating an identity chart (10 minutes).

- a. Display Slide 21 and distribute the “Writer’s Identity Chart/Historical Context.”
- b. Explain to students that today they will have the opportunity to write their own version of the New Colossus. However, before they begin that process, they will begin by describing aspects of their own identity and context that impacts their perspective, their opinions and their means of expression.
- c. Instruct students to begin by placing their own names in the center of the web. Then they should list *at least 7 aspects of their own identity that shapes who they are and how they view the world.*
- d. Next, they should list at least 4 aspects of their historical context that might influence the message in their poem. If necessary, provide an example of something from the current political climate, economic climate or social climate that is related to American identity or American attitudes toward newly arriving immigrants.
- e. Have students share their work with a partner or with the whole class.

## 4. Writing the New New Colossus (15 minutes).

- a. Display Slide 22: “Your task” and distribute the “Writing the *New New Colossus*” sheet.
- b. Explain the task to students: *You are being asked to write a new “New Colossus.” Your poem will take the place of Emma Lazarus’ poem on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. Your poem should, together with the Statue of Liberty, send a message to the world about America, a nation of immigrants. Your poem should be between 14 - 20 lines long and should include the use of at least 2 poetic devices.*
- c. Remind students about the poetic devices Lazarus employed in her poem (allusion to the Colossus of Rhodes, personification of Lady Liberty, imagery of huddled masses learning to breathe free).
- d. Allow students time to draft their poems. Note: Finishing the poems can be a homework assignment.

## 5. Share (7 minutes).

- a. If a few students are ready to share before the end of the lesson, allow them to share.

## OPTIONS:

- Before students write their own poems, allow them to watch poems from the 92nd Street Y poetry contest.
- Print out a selection of poems from the 92nd Street Y contest. Allow students to annotate the poems by underlining words and phrases that they feel are evocative or effective, and by crossing out words or phrases that are not. They can then replace the less effective language with words and phrases of their own.