

Social Studies in Fourth Grade

Both classes have been working very hard in Social Studies this winter to better understand the experience of immigrants who lived on the Lower East Side of New York City at the beginning of the 20th century. We integrated our unit into every subject area- Math, Reading, Writing, Art, and Music. We also have participated in several different simulations to help us realize what it **really** felt like to be an immigrant. Lastly, we took two trips to the Tenement Museum on Orchard Street, focusing on different essential questions with each trip.

Tenement Models

Beginning by looking at the actual dimensions of a typical tenement house and finding the area and perimeter using our math skills, we thought carefully about our budget and space restraints. After deciding what we could or could not afford as a family, students used various resources to construct a model for a tenement house. We tried to include as many realistic details as we could, including peeling wallpaper, few beds and sewing machines for home-based sweatshops.

School Simulation

After researching immigrant children's experience at schools, we turned one of our fourth grade classrooms into a classroom from 1900. The teachers made students sit straight up in three straight rows and recite poems by heart, copy down lines endlessly, say the pledge of allegiance, checked hands and fingernails for cleanliness and threatened students with rulers if they did not behave! There was even a visit from Principal Cohen.



Sweatshop Simulation

We did research on what it felt like to work in a sweatshop. There were several stations and tasks to perform, but workers only got to do one thing for the whole day, which could get very boring. Workers had to trace and cut patterns, sew buttons on collars and sew collar pieces together. There were a few underage kids who had to hide when the inspector came, or they would get caught and sent home.

Historical Fiction Writing

We built on our knowledge of the genre from our book groups in December, and used our background knowledge and imaginations to create vivid, historically accurate stories that took place during the immigrant's experience at home, on the boat over, at Ellis Island and on the Lower East Side. We focused on one main setting and one main problem, as well as experimenting with different "hooks" in the first lines to entice our readers. We also focused on developing character through the use of dialogue and action. Both classes presented their stories to families at Publishing Parties.

LES Tenement Museum Field Trips

During the first trip to the Tenement Museum, we met and spoke with an "immigrant," Victoria

Confino, who showed us what her apartment looked like. We noticed how small the rooms were for so many people! We also noticed the dark, cramped conditions of the hallways, and imagined what Orchard Street must have looked like one hundred years ago.



On our second trip, we imagined that we were tenement inspectors, looking to make sure that the living conditions were acceptable. We interviewed both a tenement landlord and a tenant to hear different perspectives. This helped us debate about the positives and negatives of the Tenement Reform act of 1901.

4th Grade Musical

We wrote scenes that reflect parts of the immigrant experience coming to America. With Ledell, we are going to write music and eventually rehearse and perform a musical in the spring!