

# Creating an Immigration Law Timeline

A 1-day unit on Immigration Trends and Directions

This activity allows students to discover that immigration law has become more restrictive over the years. It introduces students to some names of some immigration acts and spotlights some trends regarding which groups were more welcome than which other groups. It requires students to analyze information and use problem-solving and decision-making skills to eliminate information that is not needed, and to organize information onto a timeline.

**PREPARATION:** Students will work in pairs. Print one handout for every two students.

## CONTENT

(What the teacher says is written in italic bold. Directions and correct student responses are written in regular type.)

*The United States was a place for all Europeans seeking freedom. It was a big country. Settlers and laborers were needed to develop the new nation, so only European immigration and slavery were encouraged. From 1790 to 1875, almost a hundred years, there were no immigration laws about who could live in this country and become a citizen.*

*The Native Americans lived all over the continent, but, as people arrived from various European and African countries, regardless of where they settled, they killed or pushed out the Native Americans, even though this was the Indians' homeland.*

## SKILL: Creating a Timeline

*Today we are going to create a timeline, which is a kind of chart. To get some ideas about charts, open your textbooks and find some examples of charts. Raise your hand when you find an example, and we'll all turn to that page to study it.*

Discuss the way the chart is organized.

*What categories of information are on the chart?*

*What is the title of the chart?*

*Does the title summarize the chart?*

Discuss two or three examples in the same way, until someone locates a timeline, or locate one yourself. Discuss it last, then proceed.

*Now we are going to learn more about immigration to this country.*

Have the students work together in pairs. Give each pair a sheet of white paper and a copy of the handout Who Shall Be American? (More information about our immigration laws is available at the following Web site: [uscis.gov/graphics/index.htm](http://uscis.gov/graphics/index.htm).)

*The Who Shall Be American? handout is loaded with information, but it is all mixed up. Read the handout.*

*What types of information are in this handout?*

[Immigration laws and numbers of people coming to this country]

**What are the numbers of the statements for the immigration and citizenship laws? Circle them.**

[1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20]

**What are the numbers for items on numbers of people coming to this country? Place a checkmark beside them. Some items may have both a circle and a check mark.**

[2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 19]

**What are the groups/categories of information?**

[Year, title of the law, information about the law]

**Would it make sense to you if the laws were in chronological order? What kind of chart would best present this information?**

[A timeline]

**Yes. So let's create a timeline on the board.**

Have one student draw the line and add dates as you call on students to identify the laws in time order. Student writes date and name of law only, not description.

**What was the earliest law passed?**

**Which was next?**

**Now continue making a timeline with your partner.**

### **SKILL: Analyzing the Timeline**

After the students have worked for a few minutes, stop and verify that they are getting their timelines organized.

**What categories of information did you include in your timeline?**

[The names of laws and the year they were made]

**What should be the title for this timeline?**

[Immigration Laws, History of Immigration Laws, Immigration Law Timeline...]

### **SKILL: Analyzing Information**

When most of the students have completed adding most of the laws, begin analyzing their timelines.

**How did the laws change as the U.S. got older?**

[Congress kept creating more and more restrictions that excluded more and more people.]

**Why did Congress not want the Chinese here in 1882?**

[That information is not here.]

***Let's try to guess or make inferences based on what we know as to why Congress might exclude them.***

[They were different. They were not white Europeans. They had different habits and customs and had a different color of skin.]

***Xenophobia is a fear of strangers or foreigners. Many congressmen were xenophobic when making our immigration laws.***

**SKILL: Summarizing**

***At the bottom of your timeline, write two sentences which summarize the information which you presented.***

***What is the timeline about?***

[The immigration laws of this country]

***What does this information tell us?***

[The restrictions which were imposed on immigration]

***What is the BIG idea?***

[Over the years Congress passed many laws defining who could be admitted to this country. Preferences, quotas, and literacy tests were established which excluded certain groups of people. Over the years immigration laws have become more restrictive.]

***Put both partners' names on your timeline and pass it to the front.***

(Or record participation credit in some other way.)