

Strategies for Activating Background Knowledge
in a 4th-8th Grade Social Studies Unit on Immigrants to the U.S.



1. The teacher will **present a connection between a term or concept and something that most students are familiar with already** and then lead a discussion before presenting new material. For instance, he or she may remind the students of the Pilgrims' journey from England on the Mayflower, and state that they were moving, or immigrating to the Colonies to start a new life.

2. **Preview the text materials.** Lead students through an examination of headings, subheadings, captions, and italicized and bold-faced words. Are any terms familiar? What do they already know? What are they curious about? A K-W-L chart can be used as a graphic organizer with this activity.



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3. Have students **share their experiences** or prior knowledge of the topic with a partner before reading the text. Follow up with whole-class sharing.

4. **Read through assessment questions** and discuss them before reading the text. Not only will this activate prior knowledge, but it will also make students alert to key terms as they read.



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5. Use a **5 Senses Chart** to awaken sensory memories and creative thought in regard to a situation or experience being covered in the lesson. For example, students could list what they might see, hear, smell, touch, and taste on an immigrant ship.

Strategies for Teaching Vocabulary Knowledge in a 4th-8th Grade Social Studies Unit on Immigrants to the U.S.

Sample Terms: Immigrant, Emigrant, Persecution, Famine, Voyage, Contagious

<p>1. Teach students an explicit definition of the vocabulary word. Make sure that the definition is student-friendly. In other words, create a definition that uses language at the level of the students rather than relying on the dictionary definition. Discuss how we use the vocabulary word to help students contextualize its meaning.</p>	
	<p>2. The Possible Sentences strategy has proven to be effective after students have had exposure to content-area vocabulary. The teacher gives the students a prepared list of familiar and unfamiliar terms that are from the same content-area topic. The group prepares student-friendly definitions, and then working in pairs, students write 2-4 sentences that contain each contain two of the words on the list. The class will share their sentences.</p>
<p>3. Have students use graphic organizers to guide examination of the word and its relationship to other terms. The Frayer Model is a research-based graphic organizer that should be completed as a teacher-led group. This graphic organizer has students write the definition, examples and non-examples, and characteristics that help them identify the word.</p>	
 <p>This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under</p>	<p>4. Encourage students to examine the parts of the term, or morphemes, such as prefixes, suffixes, and the root word. For instance, the term "emigrant" contains the prefix em-, which means "to go onto or into". If students can remember that "embark" means to set out on a voyage or adventure, this may help them remember that an emigrant is a person who leaves their home country to live somewhere else.</p>
<p>5. Several strategies help both ELL and dyslexic students. Using hand gestures and pictures to accompany words provides illustration to students so that they can create a visual link between the word and an object or action. Students can listen to an audiobook while reading the text on the page as a multisensory activity to connect sound and sight. And placing a word wall in the classroom provides a reference area for review of vocabulary that students have learned.</p>	