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# Firsthand Accounts from Ellis Island

## Objective

- √ Students will practice reading aloud portions of text as a divided reading in preparation for public performances.

## Preparation

- Copy of *Life as an Immigrant* (page 115) for the teacher.
- Copy *Life as an Immigrant—Divided Reading* (pages 116–117) for each student.

## Fluency Suggestions and Activities

You may want to complete the history and vocabulary activities on the following page before starting this fluency activity. An understanding of the historical context and vocabulary will help students analyze and read the piece fluently.

1. Begin by having students think about what it must have been like to arrive at Ellis Island as an immigrant in the early 1900s. Have them write their ideas on the board. Then, tell them you have some firsthand accounts of this experience that they will be reading.
2. Read *Life as an Immigrant* (page 115) aloud for your students modeling a fluent reading.
3. Distribute copies of *Life as an Immigrant—Divided Reading* (pages 116–117) to each student. Tell students that they will be performing these readings on the school's loudspeaker. There are enough sections to allow for six days of performances.
4. Divide students into six groups. Each group will be responsible for reading a section on the loudspeaker. Each group should read its selection as a choral reading.
5. Give groups time to practice their readings. Remind them to pause, use expression, and read slowly enough so that others can understand the words.
6. Tell students that they will be working in their groups to write one- or two-sentence introductions for their sections. Each introduction will be read by one student right before each performance. For example, students can introduce the first selection by saying, "The following is an account from an immigrant as he arrived at Ellis Island in 1907." Have a different group present over the loudspeaker each day.

# ***Firsthand Accounts from Ellis Island*** (cont.)

## **History Connection**

Millions of people came to America during the 1800s and the early 1900s. They were in search of better lives. Their first stop was Ellis Island, where they had to answer questions and be checked for diseases. They had to prove they could work and would not be begging on the streets. Women had to have a man claim them before being allowed to leave the island. Sometimes the wait at Ellis Island was short, and other times it could take months to get through. For most people, it was not a pleasant experience. Some immigrants were rejected because they could not work or were found to be sick. Tuberculosis was a common sickness. If this happened, they had to board a ship and travel back to their homelands.

## **Vocabulary Connection**

Discuss unfamiliar vocabulary encountered in the text. Some possible words are listed below. After identifying any other difficult words, discuss them within the context of the text.

- **etched**—imprinted or impressed
- **foredeck**—the front of the deck of a ship
- **awe**—amazement

## **Extension Idea**

- After reading these accounts, have students imagine their lives as immigrants. Let them write brief accounts as if they were coming to America as immigrants. Then, let them practice these readings and perform them for the class.

# Life as an Immigrant

My first impression of the new world will always remain etched in my memory, particularly that hazy October morning when I first saw Ellis Island. . . My mother, my stepfather, my brother. . .and my two sisters. . .all of us together clustered on the foredeck for fear of separation and looked with wonder on this miraculous land of our dreams. . .Mothers and fathers lifted up the babies so that they too could see, off to the left, the Statue of Liberty. . . This symbol of America. . . inspired awe in the hopeful immigrants.

—*Edward Corsi, Italian immigrant arrived in 1907. In the Shadow of Liberty, 1935*

There was absolutely no chance for the common man (in Europe) to get ahead. You just lived and you finally died, and probably the county had to bury you. We'd have meat about once a year. . . Once in a while, Mother would buy one of those short bolognas, cut it up, put it in the soup, and everybody would get a little piece. I used to think, "If only I could get enough of that to fill my stomach!"

—*Charles Bartunek, Czech immigrant settled in New York in 1914*

We have gained more since our arrival here than I did during all the time I lived in Norway and I have every prospect of earning a living here for myself and my family—even if my family becomes larger—so long as God gives me good health.

—*Gjert Hovland, Norwegian immigrant arrived in 1830s*

The doctor would have them put their hands down on the desk and if their nails showed pink, he passed them as not suffering from a heart condition. But when the nails were very blue he put them aside as a heart case. The people with tuberculosis all had a little curvature of the spine. They showed the tuberculosis that way, and were not admitted either.

—*Helen Barth, volunteer at Ellis Island*

If I served spaghetti, the detained Italians sent me thanks and everybody else objected. If I put pierogi and mazovian noodles on the table, the Poles were happy and the rest unhappy. Irish stew was no good for the English and English marmalade was gunpowder to the Irish.

—*Henry Curran, commissioner of Ellis Island from 1923 to 1926*

At the docks were 2,000 men, women, and children who were "excess quota." Here, by our country's permission, the 2,000 would now be turned back. . . I could only watch them go. Day by day, the barges took them from Ellis Island back to the ships again, back to the ocean, back to what? As they trooped aboard the big barges under my window, carrying their heavy bundles, they twisted something in my heart that hurts to this day.

—*Henry Curran, commissioner of Ellis Island from 1923 to 1926*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## ***Life as an Immigrant— Divided Reading***

### ***Group 1***

I will always remember my first impression of the new world, especially that hazy October morning when I first saw Ellis Island. My mother, stepfather, brother and two sisters clustered on the foredeck because we were afraid of being separated. I looked with wonder on this miraculous land of our dreams. Mothers and fathers lifted up the babies so that they, too, could see the Statue of Liberty. This symbol of America inspired awe in the hopeful immigrants.

### ***Group 2***

There was absolutely no chance for the common man in Europe to get ahead. You just lived and you finally died, and probably the county had to bury you. We would have meat about once a year. Once in a while, Mother would buy one of those short bolognas, cut it up, put it in the soup, and everybody would get a little piece. I used to think, “If only I could get enough of that to fill my stomach!”

### ***Group 3***

We have gained more since our arrival here than I did during all the time I lived in Norway. I have every prospect of earning a living here for myself and my family—even if my family becomes larger—so long as God gives me good health.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## ***Life as an Immigrant— Divided Reading*** (cont.)

### ***Group 4***

The doctor would have them place their hands down on the desk. If their nails showed pink, he passed them as not suffering from a heart condition. But when the nails were very blue, he put them aside as a heart case. All the people with tuberculosis had a little curvature of the spine. They showed the tuberculosis that way, and they were not allowed to stay.

### ***Group 5***

There was no way I could please everyone. If I served spaghetti, the detained Italians sent me thanks and everybody else objected. If I put pierogi and mazovian noodles on the table, the Poles were happy and the rest unhappy. Irish stew was no good for the English. English marmalade was gunpowder to the Irish.

### ***Group 6***

At the docks were 2,000 men, women, and children who were “excess quota.” Here, by our country’s permission, the 2,000 people would now be turned back. I could only watch them go. Day by day, the barges took them from Ellis Island back to the ships again and back to the ocean. I wondered, what did they go back to? As they trooped aboard the big barges under my window, carrying their heavy bundles, they twisted something in my heart that hurts to this day.

# Singing About Show Business

## Objective

- √ Students will read “*There’s No Business Like Show Business*” using the call-and-response method.

## Preparation

- Find an audio recording of “*There’s No Business Like Show Business.*”
- Make an overhead transparency of the song “*There’s No Business Like Show Business*” (page 120).
- Copy “*There’s No Business Like Show Business*”—*Call and Response* (page 121) for each student.
- Find a copy of an Irving Berlin musical for the Extension Idea.

## Fluency Suggestions and Activities

You may want to complete the history and vocabulary activities on the following page before starting this fluency activity. An understanding of the historical context and vocabulary will help students analyze and read the piece fluently.

1. Start this lesson by humming or singing the line, “There’s no business like show business like no business I know.” Or, if you are able to obtain a copy of the song, let your students listen to it. Then hum or sing “God bless America, land that I love” and “I’m dreaming of a White Christmas.” Have students raise their hands if they have heard these songs before. Tell them that these songs were all written by a famous immigrant, Irving Berlin.
2. Place a transparency of the song “*There’s No Business Like Show Business*” (page 120) on the overhead and read it aloud, modeling fluent reading for the students.
3. Give each student a copy of “*There’s No Business Like Show Business*”—*Call and Response* (page 121) and read it aloud together in a choral reading several times. Show students how to obtain different effects by changing how you read the piece, focusing on pitch, tone, and timing. Although this is a song, students will be reading it as a poem. If students desire to sing it, let the class sing the song together a few times.
4. Tell students that they will all get the chance to read this song during lunch for other classes.
5. Place students into groups of six to read the song together using the “*There’s No Business Like Show Business*”—*Call and Response*. Allow time for students to practice the song several times.
6. When all the groups feel prepared, arrange for them to perform for groups of students in the lunchroom at different times of the day or on different days.



# ***Singing About Show Business*** (cont.)

## **History Connection**

Irving Berlin made his way to America when he was very young. His family was of Jewish heritage. When government troops began persecuting Jewish people, his family left and found refuge in New York City. At the age of 13, Berlin left home to make his own living. He began singing and soon found his way to the vaudeville stage. Instead of learning to read music, he played piano by ear. In his early 20s, he wrote “Alexander’s Ragtime Band,” which made him famous. He continued writing, and many of his songs are still famous today.

## **Vocabulary Connection**

Discuss unfamiliar vocabulary encountered in the text. Some possible words are listed below. After identifying any other difficult words, discuss them within the context of the text.

- **appealing**—likeable or charming
- **dreary**—dull, gloomy
- **angels**—investors in Broadway musicals
- **jack**—money or investments

## **Extension Ideas**

- Have students take another one of Irving Berlin’s songs and create their own call-and-response readings. They can work in small groups and then perform them for the class.
- If possible, let your students watch an old musical with songs from Irving Berlin like *White Christmas*, *Easter Parade*, or *Annie Get Your Gun*.

# **“There’s No Business Like Show Business”**

By Irving Berlin

There’s no business like show business like no business I know.  
Everything about it is appealing, everything that traffic will allow. Nowhere could you get that happy feeling when you are stealing that extra bow.

There’s no people like show people, they smile when they are low. Even with a turkey that you know will fold, you may be stranded out in the cold. Still you wouldn’t change it for a sack of gold, let’s go on with the show.

The butcher, the baker, the grocer, the clerk are secretly unhappy men because the butcher, the baker, the grocer, the clerk get paid for what they do but no applause. They’d gladly bid their dreary jobs goodbye for anything theatrical and why?

There’s no business like show business and I tell you it’s so. Traveling through the country is so thrilling, standing out in front on opening nights. Smiling as you watch the theater filling, and there’s your billing out there in lights.

There’s no people like show people, they smile when they are low. Angels come from everywhere with lots of jack, and when you lose it, there’s no attack. Where could you get money that you don’t give back? Let’s go on with the show.

There’s no business like show business like no business I know. You get word before the show has started that your favorite uncle died at dawn. Top of that, your pa and ma have parted, you’re broken-hearted, but you go on.

There’s no people like show people, they smile when they are low. Yesterday they told you you would not go far, that night you open and there you are. Next day on your dressing room they’ve hung a star, let’s go on with the show!!

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## **“There’s No Business Like Show Business”—Call and Response**

**All: There’s no business like show business like no business I know**

**R1:** Everything about it is appealing, everything that traffic will allow. Nowhere could you get that happy feeling when you are stealing that extra bow.

**All: There’s no people like show people, they smile when they are low.**

**R2:** Even with a turkey that you know will fold, you may be stranded out in the cold. Still, you wouldn’t change it for a sack of gold, let’s go on with the show.

**All: The butcher, the baker, the grocer, the clerk are secretly unhappy men because the butcher, the baker, the grocer, the clerk get paid for what they do but no applause. They’d gladly bid their dreary jobs goodbye for anything theatrical and why? There’s no business like show business and I tell you it’s so.**

**R3:** Traveling through the country is so thrilling, standing out in front on opening nights. Smiling as you watch the theater filling, and there’s your billing out there in lights.

**All: There’s no people like show people, they smile when they are low.**

**R4:** Angels come from everywhere with lots of jack, and when you lose it, there’s no attack. Where could you get money that you don’t give back? Let’s go on with the show.

**All: There’s no business like show business like no business I know.**

**R5:** You get word before the show has started that your favorite uncle died at dawn. Top of that, your pa and ma have parted, you’re broken-hearted, but you go on.

**All: There’s no people like show people, they smile when they are low.**

**R6:** Yesterday they told you you would not go far, that night you open and there you are. Next day on your dressing room they’ve hung a star, let’s go on with the show!!

**All: There’s no business like show business like no business I know.**