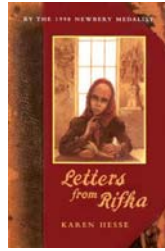


Letters from Rifka: A 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Literacy Focus Unit  
By  
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FEATURED SELECTION:

*Letters from Rifka* by Karen Hesse. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1992. (4<sup>TH</sup>-6<sup>TH</sup>)

Rifka and her family flee Russia in 1919. Rifka is left in Belgium to recover from a disease she encounters. She writes letters to her cousin, Tovah, who was left behind in Russia. Rifka finally arrives in America but has to stay at Ellis Island for a time. We learn all about Rifka's travels through the letters.

RELATED MATERIALS:

*Leaving for America* by Roslyn Bresnick-Perry. San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 1992. (1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup>)

This book provides another look at a Russian little girl leaving with her mother for America. This picture book will give the students a look at life in Russia.

*Streets of Gold* by Rosemary Wells. New York: Dial Books, 1999. (5<sup>TH</sup>)

Masha is a young Russia girl who is being prosecuted for being Jewish in Russia. Masha is in a very similar situation as Rifka.

*Ellis Island: New Hope in a New Land* by William Jacobs. New York: Macmillan, 1990. (4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>)

This book walks through the process of being at Ellis Island and how immigrants came to America. Rifka and her family went through this process.

*If Your Name was Changed at Ellis Island* by Ellen Levine. New York: Scholastic, 1993. (3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>)

Written in question and answer format, this book answers common questions asked by students who are curious about Ellis Island. This book is written in simple terms that students are able to understand the concepts of the book.

*Immigrant Kids* by Russell Freedman. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1980. (4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>)

This book provides students a look at immigrants in America. It is a good book to introduce immigration to students.

#### GOALS:

- Students will have an understanding of immigration to the United States.
- Students will gain an understanding of Ellis Island.
- Students will learn about the reasons surrounding why Rifka had to leave Russia.
- Students will learn about life in Russia during the 1910s.

#### SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS:

6.1.16 Trace the individuals, beliefs and events that represent various political ideologies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. (Individuals, Society and Culture)

6.3.1 Identify and locate on maps the countries and capitals of Europe and the Americas such as Great Britain, Russia, Mexico, Canada and Brazil.

6.1.24 Identify issues related to an historical event in Europe or the Americas and give basic arguments for and against that issue utilizing the perspectives, interests and values of those involved.

#### SPECIFIC SKILLS LEARNED:

- Students will learn how to map a journey from Europe to the United States.
- Students will learn how to visualize the text as they read through the text.

#### UNIT PLAN:

##### **PRE-READING**

ACTIVITY: Students will research and do a presentation on immigration to the United States. They must include Ellis Island and the conditions the immigrants encountered on their journey. Students will do a 2-3 minute presentation on the research they conducted. The teacher should spend time in the computer lab with the students and conference with the students on their progress.

GROUPING: Individual

##### **READING**

ACTIVITY: Teacher will read the first chapter aloud. Students will alternate between buddy reading and individual reading.

GROUPING: Individual, paired reading.

##### **RESPONDING**

**ACTIVITY:** Students will keep a daily reading log in which they summarize each letter in 2-3 sentences. The teacher will collect the reading logs every 3 days and check to see if the student is reading and understanding the book. Students will also draw 2 images a week in which they pick their favorite scene from the book and draw it.

**GROUPING:** Individual

### **EXPLORING**

**ACTIVITY:** 1) Students will map Rifka's journey to the United States. Rifka lists many of the cities that they went through on their way to the coast. Provide students with a detailed map of cities and countries. Let the students choose how they want to map out the cities. As the teacher, make a list of the cities that Rifka traveled through. Make sure the students have each of these cities on their maps. 2) Have students write a response from Tovah to Rifka, after Rifka sends Tovah her Pushkin back. Make sure students hit the high points of the story in their response.

**GROUPING:** Small group, Individual

### **APPLYING**

**ACTIVITY:** 1) Students will hold an interview with a family member/other person about their trip to America. OR Do research about another immigrant family. The students will write 2 interesting stories about that person/families trip to America. 2) Students will do research on either typhus or ringworm. Students will then give a 2-4 minute presentation to the class.

**GROUPING:** Individual, group

TIME SCHEDULE:

(Book in letters, the dates are the chapters)

Day 1 Sept 2, 1919 Immigration reports before reading	Day 2 Sept 3, 1919 Oct 5, 1919	Day 3 Nov 3, 1919 Collect reading logs	Day 4 Nov 27, 1919 Nov 30, 1919	Day 5 Dec 1, 1919 Feb 25, 1920 Hold a class discussion about book so far
Day 6 Mar 17, 1920 July 29 1920 Sept 14,1920 Collect reading logs	Day 7 Sept 14, 1920 Sept 16, 1920	Day 6 Sept 21, 1920	Day 9 Oct 1, 1920 Oct 2,1920 Collect reading log	Day 10 Oct 7,1920 Oct 9, 1920 Hold a class discussion about book so far
Day 11 Oct 11, 1920	Day 12 Oct 14, 1920 Oct 21, 1920	Day 13 Oct 22, 1920 Collect reading log Introduce exploring/applying projects to class Class discussion	Day 15 Work on projects	Day 16 Work on projects due next day

ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST:

\_\_\_\_\_Reading log entries

\_\_\_\_\_3 Class discussions

\_\_\_\_\_Immigration Reports

\_\_\_\_\_2 images per week

\_\_\_\_\_One of 4 projects completed

IDEAS FROM FOCUS UNIT TAKEN FROM:

<http://teams.lacoe.edu/documentation/classrooms/language/rifka/rifka.html>