



## Immigration: For a Better Life

### Characters

Aaron  
Sarah  
Joshua

Carmella  
Angela  
Mario

### Setting

After an overview section, this reader's theater begins in the steerage class of a ship. It is crowded and dark, and many people are ill or seasick. When the ship reaches Ellis Island, the immigrants are greeted by the Statue of Liberty. People bustle about to go through inspection. After a brief hospital scene, the setting changes to the tenement apartment buildings. The script ends with a patriotic outdoor celebration.



## Act I

Aaron:

What does it mean to be an American? Who belongs here? Who does not? America is a country of immigrants. People have left their countries of birth to come here. People come here for many different reasons. They come to get rich and move back to their birth countries. Or they come to become citizens and start new lives.

Sarah:

Some people come for freedom, and some for better jobs. Some think the streets here are "paved with gold." Many people want a chance for their children to go to school. Some people leave their countries because of widespread disease or famine. Others leave because they are persecuted.

Joshua:

People come from all over the world. They may not look the same or wear the same kinds of clothes. They may have different beliefs. They may speak different languages. They may have different customs and ideas. But they have one thing in common. They all seek a better life.



**Carmella:**

Life may not be easy for immigrants. Many people think that America has too many immigrants already. Some say that immigrants take away jobs from people who are already here. Some say that they are dirty and that they spread diseases. Other people say that the immigrants cling to their old customs and don't want to become "real" Americans.

**Angela:**

But, the story of the immigrants is the story of America. People come from different places. They stay and become part of the American way of life. In turn, they leave their mark on this country. They change our view of what it means to be an American.

**Mario:**

This is our story. It is the story of two families. My family is Catholic, and we are from Palermo, Italy. The Rubins are Russian Jews. We both came to America by ship in 1914 and met on Ellis Island. Neither of our families had much money. But, we all had big dreams. I remember that day as if it were yesterday. Our lives came together, and we were never quite the same.

## Act 2

**Joshua:**

I remember saying goodbye to my friends and family when I left Russia. I was only five years old at the time. We traveled by ship to America. It took weeks to get there, and I got very sick. By the time we docked, my mother was extremely worried about me. Let's go back in time so you can hear the story.

**Sarah:**

What's wrong, Joshua? Your forehead seems too hot, and your coughing just doesn't stop. We will be arriving soon, son. Aaron, I'm really worried about Joshua. I'm afraid that this trip has taken an enormous toll on him.

**Aaron:**

It has taken a great toll on all of us, Sarah. Riding in the steerage class has made everyone ill. It's so cramped with 150 people in this small sleeping compartment. I went out on the deck this afternoon to get a bit of fresh air. I met some people who told me they've been seasick for the entire two-week journey across the Atlantic.