



# THE NEW JERSEY ITALIAN HERITAGE COMMISSION



## Italian Immigration to Swedesboro, NJ

**Grade Level:** Fourth and Fifth Grades

**Subjects:** Social Studies / Character Educations

**Categories:** History and Society / Immigration and Prejudice

**Standards:**

Please see page 4 of the lesson plan for complete New Jersey Student Learning Standards alignment.

**Objectives:**

Students will be able to:

1. read a story about Italian immigration to Swedesboro.
2. determine how the immigrants were able to improve their lots in life.
3. explain what character traits are needed to create opportunities.

**Abstract:**

Students will be introduced to the concept of immigration. They will explore how Italian immigrants traveled across the Delaware River from Philadelphia to become migrant workers in Gloucester County. Many of these same migrant workers eventually owned most of the prosperous farms in South Jersey. Students will investigate the opportunities available to immigrants in the USA and the prosperity that met those who worked hard, worked ethically, and worked intelligently. They will see how the American dream came true to many of the Italian immigrants who settled in the farmlands of southern New Jersey.

### **Background:**

At one time in New Jersey's history, Italians made up the largest single ethnic group in the state. Earlier, after Italian unification in 1861, Italians began to arrive in large numbers. Approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  of these immigrants came from the Mezzogiorno (a region of Italy stretching down the Italian peninsula south of an imaginary line that starts between Rome and Naples to Ancona on the Adriatic Sea) and from Sicily. The majority of the people emigrating from Italy were impoverished peasants, living in a near subsistence economy that was moving towards a cash market economy. The search for cash in the new economy led many Italians into the cities or to foreign lands. They came to America in search to work in the burgeoning factories of the American Industrial Revolution. These factories included silk, cotton, and porcelain mills. Some Italians were skilled masons, stonecutters and sculptors, and found work building many of the churches in New Jersey; women were seamstresses in the garment factories. Many settled in large urban centers such as Trenton, Newark, Paterson, and Jersey City. By the 1930s, Italian agrarian colonies were present in Vineland, Hammonton and southwestern Gloucester County where Italians worked on farms as seasonal workers. In each area where Italians were present, smaller regional communities existed, with "paesani" from one area or village would settle together for social or economic security.

### **Procedure:**

- I. Give students some of the above background in terms that they can understand.
- II. Ask them:
  - a. Why would people move to a strange, new land?
  - b. How bad must have things been in the old country for entire families to move to a new land in search of opportunities?
  - c. What type of fears would you have if your parents moved to a foreign land, where they did not speak English?
  - d. How must have young Italian boys and girls felt when they moved to New Jersey from Italy.
- III. Have students read the article "Immigration".
- IV. Once they read the article, have the students answer the questions on "Immigration".
- V. Ask students to create a flyer to a foreign country inviting people to come to America to work.
  - a. Have them focus on the opportunities available in America.
  - b. Have them point out to successful precedents like the Italians of Swedesboro and Woolwich Township, New Jersey.

### **Assessment:**

The teacher will evaluate the students' answers from the initial discussion and the question from the essay to check for understanding.

The teachers will evaluate the students' flyer to determine their level of comprehension.

### **Extension:**

Have students pretend they are the immigrants who ended up buying the farms around Swedesboro. Tell them to write a short paragraph giving advice to their grandchildren and great-grandchildren about how to overcome adversity and create a successful career in the United States.

**Teacher Resources:**

American Passage: The History of Ellis Island, Harper Collins Publishers, 2010, Vincent J. Cannato.

Teaching Italian American Literature, Film, and Popular Culture, The Modern Language Association of America, New York, 2012, Edited by Edvige Giunta and Kathleen Zamboni McCormick.

# **New Jersey Student Learning Standards**

## **Social Studies**

- 6.1.4.B.7 Explain why some locations in New Jersey and the United States are more suited for settlement than others.
- 6.1.4.D.2 Summarize reasons why various groups, voluntarily and involuntarily, immigrated to New Jersey and America, and describe the challenges they encountered.

## **English Language Arts**

### RI.4.1

Refer to details and examples in a text and make relevant connections when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

### RI.4.3

Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.

### RI.4.5

Describe the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in a text or part of a text.

### RI.5.1

Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text and make relevant connections when drawing inferences from the text.

### RI.5.3

Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.

### RI.5.5

Compare and contrast the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in two or more texts.

### W.4.2a

Introduce a topic clearly and group related information in paragraphs and sections; include formatting (e.g., headings), illustrations, and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

### W.5.2a

Introduce a topic clearly to provide a focus and group related information logically; include text features such as headings.

## Flyer Rubric

<b>Requirements</b>	<b>Scoring</b>
<b>The Flyer tells people where to come to</b>	<b>Correctly meets all five requirements 5 points</b>
<b>The Flyer tells people why they should come</b>	<b>Correctly meets four of the five requirements 4 points</b>
<b>The Flyer tells people what opportunities are in store for them</b>	<b>Correctly meets three of the five requirements 3 points</b>
<b>The Flyer gives an example of a previous success</b>	<b>Correctly meets two of the five requirements 2 points</b>
<b>The Flyer is neat</b>	<b>Correctly meets one of the requirements 1 points</b>
	<b>Meets none of the requirements 0 points</b>

# Supplemental Information

## Italian Immigration to Swedesboro, NJ

During the first couple of decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many Italians moved from Italy to seek better opportunities in the United States. They would often work for enough cash to return to Italy, so they could buy land and farms for themselves. Others used their money to bring family members over to the New World. Many of these immigrants had worked the land in Italy as agricultural laborers. Once they came to American cities, many began to work in factories. Others, however, found opportunities to again work the land in states such as, California, Florida, Louisiana, and New Jersey.

A large number of Italians had immigrated to Philadelphia and had settled in the South Philadelphia section of the city. Some quickly took advantage of opportunities they heard of across the Delaware River in Gloucester County, New Jersey. New Jersey farmers needed strong men to work their bountiful fields, starting with plowing and planting in the Spring and ending with harvesting each Fall. Italian men would seasonally leave their families in South Philadelphia and live together in barracks that were set up on farms around Swedesboro, in Woolwich, Township.

Over the years, Italian families worked hard in the hot summer sun, helping to supply the nation with much needed crops. Many would save their meager wages until they had enough money to actually buy the farms they had worked so hard on. Soon, most of the farms around Swedesboro were owned by the former migrant workers from Italy. They continued their industrious traditions and developed many prosperous farms throughout Gloucester County.

Most of the Italian farmers around Swedesboro attended St. Joseph's Catholic Church in town and brought with them their ancient traditions from the island of Sicily in Italy. Annually, the new Americans would celebrate their heritage with a Mass and an Italian festival honoring three Sicilian brothers, St. Alphius, St. Philadeiphus, and St. Cyrinus. The brothers had been martyred for their faith, by the ancient Romans in 251 AD. The brothers were from the same region of Sicily as were most of the Italian farmers who now lived around Swedesboro. A small taste of Sicilian tradition reminded the farming families of their proud Italian heritage. The tradition brought to New Jersey from Sicily is still celebrated by Italian Americans and other Americans in Swedesboro today.

The children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of the original Italian settlers continue to live in the Swedesboro area; many still operating prosperous family farms. Others have moved on to different occupations and have sold their farms to developers for millions of dollars.

The story of Italian immigration to Gloucester County is a story of sacrifice, hard work, dedication to family, and eventual success and prosperity. The story of Italian immigration is an American story-- the story of why America is such a great country today.

# Immigration to Swedesboro, NJ

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:**

Answer the following based on your reading of the “Italian Immigration to Swedesboro, NJ”

1. Why would so many Italians emigrate from Italy to the United States during the early years of the twentieth century?

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2. Why would many Italians who came to America want to return to Italy?

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3. Even though many Italians worked in factories in Philadelphia, why was it natural for many Italians to want to work in the fields in South Jersey?

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4. Why did many Italians buy farms in Gloucester County?

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5. Why do Swedesboro Italians still celebrate the lives of ancient Roman citizens?

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6. What does the story of the Swedesboro Italians tell you about the men and families who settled there?

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# Answer Key

1. Why would some many Italians emigrate from Italy to the United States during the early years of the twentieth century?

*Students will have a number of answers. Make sure they realize that most Italians left Italy for economic reasons and believed there were great opportunities in America. Let students know that many Italians also immigrated to nations such as Argentina and Canada.*

2. Why would many Italians who came to America want to return to Italy?

*Students will have a number of answers. Point out that most people would want to live in their homeland, if they could survive or prosper. Many Italians were able to earn enough cash abroad to return home and buy their own land.*

3. Even though many Italians worked in factories in Philadelphia, why was it natural for many Italians to want to work in the fields in South Jersey?

*Many of the Italians were experienced working the fields in Italy. They knew how to work on farms; thus, they knew how to take advantage of the abundant opportunities that were available in Gloucester County.*

4. Why did many Italians buy farms in Gloucester County?

*Most Italians initially came to America in hopes of earning enough cash to buy land in Italy. When Italian workers had accumulated enough money and farms were available in the United States, it made practical sense to buy land here and settle their families in New Jersey.*

5. Why do Swedesboro Italians still celebrate the lives of ancient Roman citizens?

*The Italians who settled in the Swedesboro area came from the same region of Sicily as the martyrs. The Italian immigrants and the modern Italian Americans want to honor their old world traditions, their faith, and their Italian heritage, as part of their American identity..*

6. What does the story of the Swedesboro Italians tell you about the men and families who settled there?

*Answers will vary, but students should be aware that these people were very brave to move to America from their homeland. They worked in the hot sun, but not only did they work hard, they worked smart. They worked smart enough to take advantage of opportunities in the United States. They ended up buying many of the farms that they had worked and operated successful farms for years to come.*