



THE NEW JERSEY ITALIAN HERITAGE COMMISSION



Darwinism and Anti-Italian Sentiment

Grade Level: 9-12

Can be adjusted to accommodate Grades 6-8

Subjects: Science / United States History / Language Arts / World Languages

Categories: Immigration and Prejudice / History and Society / Arts and Sciences

Standards:

Please see New Jersey Student Learning Standards on page 5 of the lesson plan for complete standards alignment.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

1. describe how people once used Darwinian evolution to advance the notion of racial and ethnic superiority.
2. identify how the racist propaganda of these authors and others contributed to the Immigration Acts of 1917, 1921, 1924 and 1929 and resulted in discrimination against Italian Americans and other ethnic groups.
3. research and convey cogent examples in American history where Italian Americans made meritorious contributions to American society.

Abstract:

Students explore how false science can result from prejudice and stereotyping. They examine historical and contemporary examples how groups of people may be perceived and labeled in society through manipulation of the media.

Background:

During the turn of the 20th century, many Americans used Charles Darwin's theory of evolution to justify their belief in the "racial superiority" of white Americans, especially those Americans of Anglo-Saxon stock. Darwin taught about "the survival of the fittest" in nature. Nature chose only the fittest animals to reproduce; thus, superior genes would pass on. Inferior genes would die out.

Certain scientists and scholars taught that there were superior races like there were superior breeds of dogs and horses. Of course, they usually noted that their own race was superior. They promoted the idea that Anglo-Saxons in Britain and the even "more advanced" Anglo-Saxon Americans would and should rule the world because they were of premium stock. They pointed to the large, wealthy British Empire as their proof, and politically free and wealthy child of Britain, the United States as further evidence. These racial Darwinists not only believed that the white or Caucasian race was genetically

superior to nonwhite races, they taught that some branches of the white race were superior and other branches were inferior, especially those of darker complexion. Scientists even outlined hierarchies of levels of superiority for high school and college textbooks, with the Anglo-Saxons and Nordics on the top.

Below are three examples of this type of belief. These men were frightened that a multitude of Italians, particularly swarthy southern Italians, would come to the United States and dilute the "superior" Anglo-American gene pool. Some also worried that Italians would mix with African Americans and create a "fiery" generation who would not stand for a second-class status in America

Procedures: (2 activities)

- I. Have students read the three excerpts on the worksheet.
- II. Have students point out where the authors' presented misinterpretations and erroneous explanations of Darwin's theory of evolution.
 - A. Have students list reasons why this theory is so wrongfully applied to races.
 - B. Have students list modern and historical examples that will easily refute these arguments.
 1. *Students could point out that both an Italian American and an African American sit on the United States Supreme Court.*
 - C. Instruct students to write a persuasive paragraph using their research to refute the use of Darwin's Theory of Evolution to support racial supremacy.

Or

- I. Ask students why writings and beliefs espoused in these excerpts helped cause the Immigration Acts of 1917, 1921, 1924, and 1929 to be enacted?
 - A. Have students create a graphic organizer chart.
 - B. They will list reasons the authors used to argue against immigration.
- II. Have students research 5 Italian Americans who made great contributions to American society.
 - A. Ask students to refute each point in their graphic chart, by using examples of praiseworthy Italian American accomplishments.
 - B. Ask students to write an open letter from the future to these authors.
 1. Instruct students to not be uncivil in their responses.
 2. Tell them to use reasoned arguments and give factual evidence in their letters to refute the authors' arguments.

Assessment:

For the first activity-- Assess the paragraph by using the *New Jersey Registered Holistic Writing Rubric* for scoring.

For the second activity-- Teachers will read the students' lists, and/or letters to evaluate

their comprehension of the objectives. Teachers should make a checklist to evaluate the students' graphs and letters. Teachers should also use the New Jersey Reading Rubric to assess students' comprehension of the excerpts.

Resource:

Bruno Leone, editor. *Immigration: Opposing Views*. San Diego: Green Haven Press, 1992.

Supplemental Information

Darwinism and Anti-Italian Sentiment

Excerpt One

In a 1912 article in the *North American Review*, Prescott F. Hall of the Immigration Restriction League wrote that immigrants brought with them “. . . political and social institutions very different from ours [Americans]. The Southern Italian, which constitutes the largest element in our present immigration, is one of the most mixed races in Europe and is partly African, owing to the Negroid migration from Carthage [who were really Semitic Phoenicians] to Italy. . . . The Negro strain in the South Italians has already been mentioned . . . What would happen if a large Mediterranean [Italian] population should be colonized in our Southern States and should inbreed with the Negro population it finds there? This is not an imaginary possibility, for the dark-skinned races are more likely to settle in the southern part of the country. . . . Let us suppose that some inbreeding with the Negro takes place. Will the descendents of the emotional, fiery Italians submit to the social judgment that a man with a sixteenth or a thirty-second part of Negro blood is a colored man who must occupy a position socially, if not politically inferior.

Excerpt Two

In 1916 Madison Grant, author of *The Passing of a Great Race* told his readers the highly evolved American people would become a diluted race, once new immigrants came into the United States and started to intermarry with Americans. He claimed that European leaders had taken the “. . . opportunity to unload upon careless, wealthy, and hospitable America the sweepings of their jails and asylums. The result was that the new immigration . . . contained a large and increasing number of the weak, the broken and the mentally crippled of all races drawn from the lowest stratum of the Mediterranean [southern Italy and Sicily] basin. . . . These immigrants adopt the language of the native [born] American, they wear his clothes, they steal his name and they are beginning to take his woman, but they seldom adopt his religion [Protestant Christianity] or understand his ideals.”

Excerpt Three

In a 1920 book, “*The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy*, Lothrop Stoddard warned against allowing immigrants into the country. He divided the White Race into three branches, the Nordic (blonde, blue-eyed English and Northern Germanics) the Alpines (stocky, brown-haired Austrian Germans, Swiss, etc,) and the Mediterranean (Southern Italians and Sicilians). He ranked the Mediterraneans as the most inferior branch of the White Race and warned against allowing them and immigrants of color into the United States. He worried that Mediterraneans would mix with Americans and, “Hence, when a highly specialized stock (superior white branches) interbreeds with a different stock (lower white branches or with people of color), the newer less stable, specialized characters are bred out, the variation, no matter how great its potential value to human evolution, being *irretrievably lost* [author’s emphasis].

New Jersey Student Learning Standards Social Studies

6.1.12.D.3.b Explain how immigration intensified ethnic and cultural conflicts and complicated the forging of a national identity.

6.1.12.A.8.c Relate social intolerance, xenophobia, and fear of anarchists to government policies restricting immigration, advocacy, and labor organizations.

English Language Arts

RI.9-10.1 Accurately cite strong and thorough textual evidence, (e.g., via discussion, written response, etc.) and make relevant connections, to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferentially, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RI.9-10.2 Determine a central idea of a text and analyze how it is developed and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

RI.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language of a court opinion differs from that of a newspaper).

RI.9-10.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetorical devices to advance that point of view or purpose

RI.9-10.7 Analyze various perspectives as presented in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

RI.9-10.8 Describe and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and reasoning.

RI.11-12.1 Accurately cite strong and thorough textual evidence, (e.g., via discussion, written response, etc.), to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferentially, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RI.11-12.2 Determine two or more central ideas of a text, and analyze their development and how they interact to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

RI.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10).

RI.11-12.6 Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.

RI.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

RI.11-12.8 Describe and evaluate the reasoning in seminal U.S. and global texts, including the application of constitutional principles and use of legal reasoning (e.g., in U.S. Supreme Court majority opinions and dissents) and the premises [...]

W.9-10.1 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

W.9-10.1.a. Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

W.9-10.1.b. Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience’s knowledge of the topic.

W.9-10.1.c. Use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.

W.9-10.1.d. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic.

W.9-10.1.e. Establish and maintain a style and tone appropriate to the audience and purpose (e.g. formal and objective for academic writing) while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.

W.9-10.1.f. Provide a concluding paragraph or section that supports the argument presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).

W.9-10.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and wellstructured event sequences.

W.9-10.3.a. Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

W.9-10.3.e. Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

W.9-10.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)

W.9-10.5 Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, trying a new approach, or consulting a style manual (such as MLA or APA Style), focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1–3 up to and including grades 9–10).

W.9-10.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

W.9-10.8 Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation (MLA or APA Style Manuals).

W.9-10.9 . Draw evidence from literary or nonfiction informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research..

W.9-10.9a Apply grades 9–10 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work [e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare]”).

W.9-10.9b Apply grades 9–10 Reading standards to literary nonfiction (e.g., “Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning”).

W.11-12.1 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

W.11-12.1.a. Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes it to create a unified whole; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

W.11-12.1.b. Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience’s knowledge of the topic.

W.11-12.1.c. Use appropriate and varied transitions and syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.

W.11-12.1.d. Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic.

W.11-12.1.e. Establish and maintain a style and tone appropriate to the audience and purpose (e.g. formal and objective for academic writing) while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.

W.11-12.1.f. Provide a concluding paragraph or section that supports the argument presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).

W.11-12.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

W.11-12.3a Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

W.11-12.3e Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

W.11-12.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)

W.11-12.5 Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, trying a new approach, or consulting a style manual (such as MLA or APA Style), focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1–3 up to and including grades 11-12.)

W.11-12.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

W.11-12.8 Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation (MLA or APA Style Manuals).

W.11-12.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

W.11-12.9.a. Apply grades 11–12 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century foundational works, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics”).

W.11-12.9.b. Apply grades 11–12 Reading standards to literary nonfiction (e.g., “Delineate and evaluate the reasoning in seminal texts, including the application of constitutional principles and use of legal reasoning [e.g., in U.S. Supreme Court Case majority opinions and dissents] and the premises, purposes, and arguments in works of public advocacy [e.g., The Federalist, presidential addresses]”)

RH.9-10.1 Accurately cite strong and thorough textual evidence, to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information

RH.9-10.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

RH.9-10.3 Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

RH.9-10.6 . Compare the point of view of two or more authors in regards to how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

RH.9-10.8 Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic, or of various perspectives, in several primary and secondary sources; analyze how they relate in terms of themes and significant historical concepts.

RH.9-10.9 Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

RH.11-12.1 Accurately cite strong and thorough textual evidence, (e.g., via discussion, written response, etc.), to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to develop an understanding of the text as a whole

RH.11-12.2 Determine the theme, central ideas, information and/or perspective(s) presented in a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events, ideas and/or author’s perspective(s) develop over the course of the text

RH.11-12.3 Evaluate various perspectives for actions or events; determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RH.11-12.6 Evaluate authors' differing perspectives on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence

RH.11-12.8 Evaluate an author's claims, reasoning, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other sources

RH.11-12.9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.