

City of Immigrants Glossary

As students play MISSION 4: “City of Immigrants,” they will encounter many of the terms below. Some of the terms, listed in this document in purple, are included as “smartwords” in the game. See the MISSION 4 “At A Glance” document in the Overview section of the Teacher Materials for information on when the smartwords are included in gameplay. Additional terms are included for teacher and student reference.

English Terms

adamant—inflexible; refusing to bend or change one’s mind.

almshouse—a place for poor or sick people to stay, funded by private charity.

assault—a threat or attempt to physically attack another person.

battery—a group of large military guns or cannons. May also refer to places where the large guns once were located.

beau—a woman's sweetheart.

boarders—persons who pay for a place to sleep and meals.

bodice—the part of a dress (excluding sleeves) that is above the waist.

bourgeois—belonging to the middle class and concerned about material wealth.

cantor—an official who sings religious music and leads the prayers in a synagogue.

capitalists—wealthy persons who use money to invest in trade and industry for profit.

coincidence—two things that happen at the same time.

congregation—the people who regularly attend religious services at a place of worship.

consent—to agree to something or to give permission for something to happen.

corruption—dishonest or illegal activity by people in power.

customs—relates to governments controlling items that can be moved between countries. Some items may be banned or have limits placed on the quantity that can be brought in or taken out of a country.

delegation—a group of people who represent a larger group and either vote or act for them.

City of Immigrants Glossary

dignified—behaving in a serious or formal manner.

discourage—to prevent something by showing disapproval or creating difficulties.

drafted—selected to serve in the military.

elevated tracks—a type of transportation in which rails are built above street level on overhead structures.

escort—a person that goes with another person to give protection.

excessive—more than is necessary or desired.

exploitation—to use someone or something unfairly for your own benefit.

exposé—news reporting that reveals scandal or corruption especially in government or business.

firebrand—a person who passionately and aggressively promotes a cause and tries to lead others to action.

forelady—a female worker who supervises other workers.

gentiles—persons who are not Jewish.

ghetto—a part of a city in which members of a minority group are forced to live; it originally described an area where Jews were required to live in Venice (Italy) in the 1500s.

gogol mogol—a Russian Jewish home remedy made with egg yolks, warm milk, cinnamon and sometimes brandy.

greenhorn—a newly arrived immigrant who is still unfamiliar with city life and American ways.

grievances—reasons for complaint or protest, especially unfair treatment.

herring sandwich—a sandwich made from herring, a type of fish.

housewares—items for the home such as pots or cooking supplies.

ILGWU—the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union; an organization that represented workers in the women's clothing industry in New York City in discussions with their employers.

City of Immigrants Glossary

inconsolable—very upset; incapable of being comforted.

injustice—a situation in which the rights of a person or group of people are not recognized.

inquisition—harsh and intensive questioning or investigation, references tactics used by the Spanish church against Jews in the 15th century.

knish—an Eastern European food made of a filling such as baked potato or spinach covered with baked or fried dough.

kosher—food that adheres to Jewish religious dietary rules.

ledger—a book in which financial accounts are recorded.

loitering—to wait or stay in a public place without a purpose.

magistrate—a judge who may conduct trials and impose penalties for minor criminal offenses.

Minsk—formerly a major trading city in Russia and the Soviet Union, Minsk is now the capital of Belarus in Eastern Europe.

muckrakers—American journalists at the turn of the Twentieth Century who searched for and exposed problems or other unpleasant facts in order to make them public.

nauseous—feeling sick, like you may vomit.

negotiate—to try to reach an agreement or compromise through discussion with others.

nudnik—an irritating or boring person.

operator—a sewing machine worker.

pay envelope—an envelope containing an employee's weekly wages on which employers record the work completed and amount earned by the employee that week.

peddler—a person who sells goods on the street or door to door.

picketing—standing outside a location (e.g., a factory) and attempting to persuade others not to enter the location for a specific reason, such as a strike.

pushcart—a cart that can be pushed around the street and from which food or goods can be sold.

City of Immigrants Glossary

rabbi—Jewish religious leader or teacher.

Sabbath—a day of rest and religious observance; called “Shabbos” in Yiddish. For Jews, the day starts at sundown on Friday evening and continues until sundown on Saturday.

scabs—a disparaging (negative) word for workers who refuse to strike or who help company management during a strike. Also referred to as “strike breakers.”

seam—a line where two pieces of fabric are sewn together.

serfs—in a feudal system, landless peasants who are forced to work for the landowners.

settlement house—places in low-income neighborhoods where the poor could receive services such as daycare, education, and healthcare. Middle class volunteers worked, and often lived, in settlement houses. Settlement houses began to appear in the 1880s and peaked in popularity in the 1920s.

shirtwaist—a women’s blouse or shirt that could easily be worn with any skirt and was popular with American working women in the early twentieth century.

socialism—a political or economic theory that promotes a more equal society and the elimination of extreme wealth or poverty through collective ownership of industries or distribution of goods.

socialist—a person who advocates socialism (a theory of creating a more equal society and the elimination of extreme wealth).

socialites—persons in upper-class society who are well-known for hosting or participating in social events such as parties and fundraisers.

starvation wages—wages that are too low to pay for necessities such as food and shelter.

streetcar—a vehicle that runs on rails along city streets.

strike—a form of protest in which a group of employees refuses to work as part of an attempt to get their employer to agree to make certain changes.

strikebreakers—a person who continues to work during a strike or is hired to take the place of an employee on strike. A more negative term is “scab.”

suffrage—the right to vote in political elections.

City of Immigrants Glossary

sweatshop—a clothing workshop at the turn of the twentieth century in which workers work long hours in poor conditions for little pay.

synagogue—a Jewish house of worship and place for religious instruction.

Talmud—the collected writings of Jewish law and tradition, a central religious text in Judaism.

tenement—a small low-cost apartment built for working-class families. Also refers to the multi-storied building in which the apartment is located.

toughs—groups of men hired by company management to assist scabs and physically intimidate or restrain picketers. Also referred to as “thugs” or “scab chaperones.”

Tsar—the emperor of Russia prior to the 1917 revolution.

Tsar's Army—the Imperial Russian Army, active from 1721-1917. Many of the members were enrolled by force, not by choice.

underestimate—to think that something is smaller or less important than it actually is.

uprising—an effort by many people to change the leadership.

vigilant—keeping careful watch for possible danger or difficulties.

workhouse—a house of correction where people found guilty of minor crimes would be required to work as part of their sentence.

Yiddish—a language, based on German, that is written with Hebrew characters and was originally used by Jews in central and eastern Europe.

City of Immigrants Glossary

Yiddish Terms

balabusta—the woman of the house or a good homemaker.

bubaleh—term of endearment, similar to "sweetie."

chutzpah—bravery or self-confidence that borders on rudeness.

gonif—term for a thief or rascal.

goy—a person who is not Jewish.

kvetch—to complain.

maidel—girl.

mitzveh—a good deed.

nudge—a person who bothers or annoys others.

oy vey iz mear—phrase meaning "woe is me."

schlep—to carry something heavy or to walk a long distance.

schmoozing—idle chatting or gossiping.

Shabbos—a day of rest and religious observance. For Jews, the day starts at sundown on Friday evening and continues until sundown on Saturday. Called "Sabbath" in English.

shalom alchiem—greeting meaning "Peace be upon you." Response "alchein shalom" means "Upon you be peace."

shtetl—a town; usually referred to small towns in Eastern Europe with large Jewish populations.

treyf—food that does not meet the requirements of Jewish religious dietary rules; not kosher.

yente—a person who likes to gossip or interfere.