

Guiding Question: How did immigrant women experience and shape life in the United States at the outset of the 20th century?

Document-based Writing Activity

The Role of Women in the Progressive Era

How did young immigrant women like Lena participate in social change in the Progressive Era? Drawing from the documents below, describe two ways that immigrant women participated in American society at the start of the 20th century—as workers, labor organizers, and/or social reformers.

First, use the note-taking tool below to take notes on the four documents.

Then *write two paragraphs* explaining two ways women participated in changing American society at this time. In each paragraph, be sure to *cite details from the documents* to support your statements.

Document Note-Taking Tool: Women’s Roles in the Progressive Era

Name of Document:

Activities women are doing:	Why they are doing the activity:	Social changes they are part of:
		<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial work/labor organizing <input type="checkbox"/> Social reform How women are contributing to change:

Document 1



Inside a Garment Factory, 1910

After 1900, immigrant women played an ever-larger role in the garment industry. In this image, hand sewing is being done by men and women facing a narrow bench, whereas men operate sewing machines at a long row of paired workstations. Male managers (standing) keep watch over the workers.

Photographer: Lewis Hine, ca. 1910. Source: *The 1911 Triangle Factory Fire*, Kheel Center, Cornell University, <https://trianglefire.ilr.cornell.edu/slides/231.html>

Time: At least 60 minutes

Goal/Intent: Building on their game knowledge, students develop their document-reading and writing skills as they answer the question: *How did young immigrant women like Lena contribute to social change in the Progressive Era?*

Instructions

Document Analysis (30 min)

Give students at least 30 minutes to read and summarize the first four documents using the Note-Taking Tool.

Essay Writing (30 min)

Have students use their notes to write two paragraphs explaining two roles women played in the Progressive Era.

Teaching Suggestions

- Use class time to begin the document analysis; have students work in small groups to “jigsaw” the documents.
- Have students complete the analysis and write the paragraphs for homework.
- Make sure students have at least four copies of the Note-Taking Tool for their analysis.

Additional Scaffolding

If your students need support in completing this activity, consider the following suggestions for scaffolding the task:

- Read and complete the Note-taking Tool for one or more documents together as a class. You can model the process by inserting your own “think alouds” into the class discussion of each document.

Document 2

“30,000 Waist Makers Declare Big Strike” (Article Excerpt)

This 1909 newspaper article describes a gathering of thousands of female shirtwaist makers. During the meeting, the workers made the decision to go on strike from their jobs to demand better working conditions. The article quotes strike supporters Samuel Gompers, the head of the American Federation of Labor Union, and Clara Lemlich, a young female worker.

Thirty thousand ladies waist makers, driven to desperation by the intolerable conditions prevailing in their trade, voted to go on a general strike last night at four enormous mass meetings.

The decision to strike was first reached at the Cooper Union meeting, where Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor Union, said: "I have never declared a strike in all my life, but there comes a time when not to strike is but to rivet (fasten) the chains of slavery upon our wrists. When you can't get the manufacturers to give you what you want, then strike. And when you strike, let the manufacturers know you are on strike!"

This was greeted with a storm of applause.

Clara Lemlich, who was badly beaten up by thugs during the strike in the shop of Louis Leiserson, said: "I wanted to say a few words." Cries came from all parts of the hall, "Get up on the platform!"

Willing hands lifted the frail little girl with flashing black eyes to the stage. She said simply: "I have listened to all the speakers. I would not have further patience for talk, as I am one of those who feels and suffers from the things pictured. I move that we go on a general strike!"

Source: Polacheck, Hilda Satt. 1989. *I Came a Stranger: The Story of a Hull House Girl* (pp. 63–64). University of Illinois Press. [Text adapted for readability]

Word Bank

reception room (*n.*) – room where visitors are greeted
forget cuffs and monotony – forget about the boredom and difficulty of making shirtwaists all day
daily monotony (*n.*) – tiresome repetition

- Choose fewer documents for students to analyze. Pairing one text with one image can be an effective way to reduce the reading volume for students while preserving the sophistication of analysis and ideas.
- Require a shorter written response. You may decide to reduce the volume of writing you ask your students to complete to one paragraph or two sentences.
- Provide students with sentence starters or model paragraphs. Consider adapting the following series of sentence starters that make up a paragraph:

One change in American society in the 1900s that immigrant women helped bring about was _____. Immigrant women contributed to this change by _____. For example, in the document _____, we can see _____. This shows that _____.

Document 3

Jane Addams and Hull House: Aid for Immigrant Workers

Jane Addams was a reformer and social activist who created one of the first settlement houses for immigrants—Hull House in Chicago. In this document, a young Polish immigrant and garment worker describes what it was like to enter a settlement house for the first time and to meet Jane Addams.

One evening in 1900, after a particularly boring day at the factory, I decided to walk over to Hull House three blocks from where I lived. This event marked the beginning of a new life for me. I was lucky. Jane Addams happened to be in the reception room when I came in.

Miss Addams came up to me and asked whether I would like to join a club or a class or perhaps the gymnasium. For a moment I just stood there looking at her. Her face made me forget cuffs and monotony.

"I really don't know what I want," I said. "You come with me," she said, taking my hand. "I think you will like to do this." She took me up a flight of stairs and then down a flight and we came to the Labor Museum. The museum was a very special addition to the work at Hull House and very dear to her heart. I believe that I was the first student to work in the museum.

I soon branched out into other activities. I joined a reading class. The daily monotony of making cuffs was eased by thinking of these books and looking forward to evenings at Hull House.

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Document 4

Sophie Irene Loeb, Social Welfare Pioneer

Sophie Irene Loeb was born in Russia and immigrated to the United States in 1872. In the 1910s and 1920s, she was a journalist, a politician, and an

advocate for the health and welfare of mothers and children. Her obituary in the *Jewish Daily Bulletin* after her death in 1929 describes her impact on various causes.

Miss Loeb had been a factor in the social reform programs of New York State since she first entered politics in 1913 as champion of widowed mothers and fatherless children. Since then she led and supported many other reform projects... In 1910 she became a member of the staff of "The Evening World" [a newspaper] and began the series of articles describing the problems of the poor on the lower East Side which gave the impetus to many reform measures in New York State. For years she gave publicity to the causes for which she was campaigning and they were almost invariably successful. It was said of her that she was directly responsible for more reform measures than any other one woman in the country.

Miss Loeb was known in Europe as well as this country for her indefatigable endeavors in behalf of dependent widows and children and for the betterment of working conditions. She was born in Russia and brought to the United States at age 6. She turned early to writing and to the work of uplifting humanity. She never received pay for her welfare work and she declined to run for public office, although often urged to do so.

Word Bank

reform (*adj.*) – for the improvement of society
impetus (*n.*) – inspiration
measures (*n.*) – laws

indefatigable (*adj.*) – never-tiring
dependent (*n.*) – requiring financial