The New Colossus
By Emma Lazarus
1883

Emma Lazarus (1849-1887) was a Jewish American poet, best known for her sonnet “The New Colossus.” This poem is currently engraved on a bronze plaque and displayed on the Statue of Liberty’s pedestal. The statue stands across from the historic Ellis Island, through which millions of immigrants came into the U.S. in the late 1800s and early 1900s. As you read, take notes on how the poem describes and portrays the Statue of Liberty.

1. Not like the brazen\(^1\) giant of Greek fame,\(^2\)
   With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
   Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
   A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame

2. Is the imprisoned lightning,\(^3\) and her name
   Mother of Exiles.\(^4\) From her beacon-hand
   Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes
   command
   The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
   “Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!”\(^5\) cries she

3. With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,
   Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
   The wretched refuse\(^6\) of your teeming shore.
   Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost\(^7\) to me,
   I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

[1] Brazen (adjective): bold; without shame or humility
[2] This is a reference to the Colossus of Rhodes: a statue of the Greek god Helios, god of the sun. This statue was built in Rhodes, Greece, in 280 BCE to celebrate victory in war. It was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.
[3] a reference to electricity
[4] Exile (noun): the state of being forced to leave one’s native country; someone who leaves their native country
[5] splendid display; an old term for great pride
[6] Refuse (noun): something thrown away or rejected as worthless; trash
Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following best describes a theme of the poem?
   A. Immigrants flock to America mainly for safety concerns.
   B. America values welcoming immigrants with open arms.
   C. Immigrants forget their old customs when they come to America.
   D. People who immigrate to new countries must work hard and have strong resilience.

2. PART B: Which of the following lines best supports the answer to Part A?
   A. “Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame, / With conquering limbs astride” (Lines 1-2)
   B. “Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand / A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame / Is the imprisoned lightning” (Lines 3-5)
   C. “her mild eyes command / The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame” (Lines 7-8)
   D. “Give me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, / The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.” (Lines 10-12)

3. PART A: What is the effect of calling the Statue of Liberty the “Mother of Exiles” in line 6?
   A. It emphasizes how fearsome the statue stands in the harbor, guarding America and its citizens from outside threats as a mother would protect a child.
   B. It portrays the statue as both maternal and protective of immigrants, welcoming them into the U.S. and promising to provide for them.
   C. It highlights how the majority of Americans came to the U.S. because they were exiled, or thrown out, of their previous countries.
   D. It emphasizes the statue’s meek appearance, unlike the appearances of other mightier statues.

4. PART B: Which quote from the poem best supports the answer to Part A?
   A. “Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame, / With conquering limbs astride” (Lines 1-2)
   B. “Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand / A mighty woman with a torch” (Lines 3-4)
   C. “From her beacon-hand / Glows world-wide welcome” (Lines 6-7)
   D. “her mild eyes command / The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.” (Lines 7-8)
5. Compare the lines “Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” (Line 9) with “Give me your tired, your poor” (Line 11). How do these lines contribute to readers’ understanding of the Statue of Liberty’s character?

A. She wants to keep all wealthy immigrants from the “ancient lands” out of the U.S. because they will not work as hard as the poorer immigrants.

B. She is uninterested in receiving the old grandeur and riches of the “ancient lands” the immigrants come from and prefers to welcome those in need.

C. She does not want the new immigrants coming to the U.S. to bring their old customs with them from the “ancient lands,” as she prefers that they adapt to American culture.

D. She believes that America has enough wealth to offer immigrants, and that they do not need to bring more wealth over with them.

6. Consider the title of the poem. How do the differences between the Statue of Liberty and the Colossus “of Greek fame” (mentioned in line 1) develop the overall meaning of the poem? Cite evidence from the poem in your answer.
Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. In your opinion, why did so many people immigrate to the United States?

2. Do you think that our country is as welcoming to immigrants as this poem implies? Explain your answer.

3. In the context of this poem, what makes America unique? Use evidence from this text, your own experience, and other art, literature or history in your answer.