



**IMMIGRATION**

**HOUSES OF WELCOME: The Settlement House Movement  
1890-1925**



**OVERVIEW**

By analyzing historic images, students will learn about the living conditions of the Lower East Side beginning in the late-19th century and the impact of the settlement house movement.

**STUDENT GOALS**

- Students will analyze Jacob Riis’s iconic photographs of the Lower East Side.
- Students will be able to articulate the significance of the Visiting Nurse Service of New York.
- Students will explore public health in the late-19th century and create campaigns that raise awareness for contemporary public health concerns.

**COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS**

**1<sup>st</sup> Grade:**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.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.

**5<sup>th</sup> Grade:**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7

Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

**11<sup>th</sup> Grade:**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

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

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**KEY TERMS/VOCABULARY**

- Density
- Immigration
- Photojournalism
- Public Health
- Reformer
- Settlement
- Tenement

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**ACTIVISTS**

- Eleanor Roosevelt
- Harry Hopkins
- Herbert Lehman
- Jacob Riis
- Lillian D. Wald
- Mary Brewster
- Stanton Coit

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**ORGANIZATIONS**

- Harry Street Settlement
- National Child Labor Committee
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
- The Visiting Nurse Service of New York
- United Neighborhood Houses of New York



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**INTRODUCING RESOURCES 1 & 2:** *Jacob A. Riis, Lodgers in a Crowded Baynard Street Tenement – ‘Five Cents a Spot,’ ca. 1890. Museum of the City of New York.*

In the late-19th century, New York experienced a massive wave of immigration. Between 1870 and 1900, nearly 12 million people immigrated to the United States, with the majority entering through New York and settling there. Due almost entirely to immigration, the city’s population more than tripled between 1870 and 1900. This growth put pressure on neighborhoods like the Lower East Side. Large families crowded into small apartments in tenement buildings that were close together and, in many cases, lacked indoor plumbing or running water. By the turn of the century, the Lower East Side was the most densely populated place in the world, and this density took a toll on the health of its residents. Lack of running water or fresh air led to the spread of diseases like typhoid and tuberculosis. Because many people lived in a single apartment, and each apartment was so close to neighboring apartments, these diseases spread rapidly throughout the Lower East Side. The neighborhood had a higher mortality rate than the rest of the city, with children especially at risk.

Explore the following photographs by photojournalist Jacob Riis to discover the living conditions in Lower East Side tenement houses.



Jacob A. Riis, *Lodgers in a Crowded Baynard Street Tenement – ‘Five Cents a Spot,’ ca. 1890. Museum of the City of New York, 2008.2.8.*



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**DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS**

- Based on this photograph, how would you describe the housing in the Lower East Side where many new immigrants were settling in New York in the late 1800s and early 1900s?
- How many people do you see sharing this room?
- What argument is the photographer Jacob Riis making about the housing, and what changes do you imagine he'd want to see made?



*A Visiting Nurse from Henry Street Settlement Treats an Infant in a Tenement Apartment. 1907. Courtesy Columbia University Medical Center, Health Services Library, Visiting Nurse Service of New York Collection.*

*In 1886, New Yorker Stanton Coit founded the nation's first "settlement house," the New York Neighborhood Guild (today the University Settlement) on Forsyth Street on the Lower East Side. Inspired by the example of reformers in London's Toynbee Hall, Coit and his fellow volunteers moved to the city's poorest neighborhoods to reach out to immigrants living in crowded, unhealthy tenement apartments. They lived as members of the community and helped local families receive health care, enroll in educational programs, join recreational clubs, and enjoy a range of social services.*

*In addition to living as part of the neighborhoods they served, settlement workers—many of them young, college-education women—increasingly came to believe that urban problems like poverty, unsanitary housing, and poor medical care required public solutions, and they became advocates for expanding government's role in fighting social ills.*



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*In 1893, two young nurses, Lillian D. Wald and Mary Brewster, moved into a Lower East Side apartment to offer medical services to poor immigrants living in tenements nearby. Out of their initial effort grew two institutions, the Henry Street Settlement and its public nursing service, which later became the Visiting Nurse Service of New York. When Wald moved into 265 Henry Street in 1895, the city had a handful of settlement houses; by 1911, it would have at least 70. Wald became one of the nation's most recognized social activists. Her urban nursing service helped create the field of public health nursing; Henry Street became a nerve center for causes ranging from labor arbitration and the abolition of child labor to racial integration and world disarmament.*

*By the 1920s, as it became clear that settlement houses could neither abolish urban poverty nor heal class divisions, activists readjusted their expectations. Settlement houses continued to provide a wide range of services to entire neighborhoods. Two new professions, social work and public health nursing, emerged from their efforts. Today, 37 neighborhood settlement houses, many of them rooted in decades of activism, continue to offer New Yorkers an array of programs, including medical care, preschools, arts programs, job training, and shelters for the homeless and survivors of domestic violence. Agencies such as the Visiting Nurse Service of New York, also stemming from the settlement house movement, today serve clients throughout the city.*

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## DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS

- What is the difference between a tenement house and a settlement house?
- Who is the activist in this photograph? What do you think her job was? Where is she working?
- Considering the living conditions displayed in Lodgers in a Crowded Baynard Street Tenement – ‘Five Cents a Spot,’ why was the foundation of the Visiting Nurse Service of New York so significant?
- Why do you think visiting nurses wore uniforms?
- See the lesson plan on Woman Suffrage. How does the Visiting Nurse Service of New York contribute to the changing role for women at this time?



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**INTRODUCING RESOURCES 3 & 4 :** *Resource 3: Jacob A. Riis, Children Boarded Over the Hatchway of the Fire Escape to Make a Playhouse, 1903. New York City Tenement House Department, New York Public Library.*

*Resource 4: Jacob Riis, Roof Playground (boys)—Public School, ca. 1897. Chicago Albumen Works. Museum of the City of New York.*

Many reformers attempted to counteract the high rate of illness and death on the Lower East Side. One important strategy focused on providing the city's children with more places to exercise and access fresh air. Writers like Jacob Riis used photography to provide powerful visual evidence of the need for open recreational spaces for New Yorkers, especially children. In dense cities where space was scarce, playgrounds on rooftops specially adapted to the environment proliferated.



Thomas Nast, *The American River Ganges*, *Harper's Weekly*, September 1871.



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**DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS**

- Describe what the children are doing in this photograph.
- What do you see around them? What could be unpleasant or dangerous about playing this way?
- Why might the children have chosen this location? What can we infer about their daily lives from viewing this image?
- Based on the caption of this image, what do you think Jacob Riis wanted people to feel when they viewed this picture? What kind of change do you think he was advocating for?



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**DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS**

- Where are these children playing?
- Why do you think activists like Jacob Riis advocated for the development of playgrounds for children?
- How does this space compare to the one in the previous picture entitled Children Boarded Over the Hatchway of the Fire Escape to Make a Playhouse? How is this scenario trying to improve on where children play?
- What additions would you make to this space to improve it?

**IMMIGRATION****HOUSES OF WELCOME:** The Settlement House Movement 1890-1925**ACTIVITY 1**

Identify with your class public health concerns that New Yorkers face today. Examples could include asthma and obesity. List on the board factors that might be contributing to these crises, such as access to health care, cigarette smoking, or fast food consumption. Create a campaign that raises awareness about the causes of these public health concerns and promotes positive change. Challenge your students to integrate strategies displayed in the settlement house movement – such as taking photographs or advocating for recreational spaces – in their activism.



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## ADDITIONAL READING

### THE NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLES

“Board of Health: Their Annual Report Defective Sewerage Tenement-Houses Vital Statistics Interesting Mortality Tables,” April 19, 1873, reports on the public health crises in tenement houses. (<http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1873/04/19/82405740.html?pageNumber=11>)

“King’s Daughters Need Money” by Jacob A. Riis, November 16, 1896, asks for donations to fund a thanksgiving meal in a tenement house. (<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9E07E6D61E3CE73AA15755C2A9679D94679ED7CF>)

“The Visiting Nurse,” May 22, 1922, describes the work of the Visiting Nurse Service of New York. (<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9B0DE5D61531EF33A25751C2A9639C946395D6CF>)

“A Police Reporter who Forced Reforms” by Edward Frank Allen, April 17, 1938, explains why Theodore Roosevelt calls Jacob Riis “New York’s most useful citizen.” (<http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1938/04/17/96816238.html?pageNumber=85>)

## CONTEMPORARY CONNECTIONS

“In Obesity Epidemic, Poverty Is an Ignored Contagion” by Ginia Bellafante, March 16, 2013, examines the relationship between economic status and public health, drawing upon the history of the typhoid epidemic in tenement houses. ([http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/17/nyregion/in-obesity-fight-poverty-is-patient-zero.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/17/nyregion/in-obesity-fight-poverty-is-patient-zero.html?_r=0))



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**SOURCES**

Davis, Allen F. *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements & The Progressive Movement, 1890 to 1914*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1984.

Huysen, David. *Progressive Inequality: Rich and Poor in New York, 1890-1920*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014.

Riis, Jacob A., *Children Boarded Over the Hatchway of the Fire Escape to Make a Playhouse, 1903*. New York City Tenement House Department, New York Public Library.

Riis, Jacob A., *Roof Playground (boys)—Public School, ca. 1897*. Chicago Albumen Works. Museum of the City of New York.

Riis, Jacob A., *Lodgers in a Crowded Baynard Street Tenement – ‘Five Cents a Spot,’ ca. 1890*. Museum of the City of New York.

*A Visiting Nurse from Henry Street Settlement Treats an Infant in a Tenement Apartment, 1907*. Courtesy Columbia University Medical Center, Health Services Library, Visiting Nurse Service of New York Collection.