

It's a Long Way from Home

Lesson 2: Migration Stories

Focus Questions

What was the Great Migration? How did the Great Migration change Chicago? What happened during the 1919 Race Riot? What can oral history teach us about the past? Why do so many people continue to migrate to Chicago today?

Core Understandings

Students will understand why over 500,000 African Americans left the rural South to move to Chicago during the Great Migration. They will understand that migrants found both opportunities and challenges here. They will understand that “witnesses to history” can help all people discover the past through the stories they tell and the artifacts they collect.

Knowledge

Students will know how the Great Migration transformed Chicago between 1916 and 1970. They will know how and why racial tension erupted in the 1919 Race Riot. They will know how to conduct an oral-history interview and why the information they collect is important, both personally and to future generations of Chicagoans.

Skills

Students will use their language arts skills to analyze and discuss secondary source materials. They will use their independent research skills to create primary historical documents. They will listen and speak effectively and express their findings in writing.

Common Core ELA Standards

CCSSR1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSSW7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.SL.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

ISBE Social Science Standards

Goal 15: Understand economic systems, with an emphasis on the US.

Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the US, and other nations.

Goal 17: Understand world geography and the effects of geography on society, with an emphasis on the US.

Goal 18: Understand social systems, with an emphasis on the US.

In This Lesson

Students will learn about the Great Migration and make connections to their own family's migration experiences through an oral-history project. The story elements of character, setting, and conflicts/problems are addressed. This lesson was researched and written by Diane Shalda.



Activity

As a bell-ringer activity, project the photograph *Migrant Family from the South, c. 1920* from the *It's a Long Way from Home* interactive history map. <http://www.chicagohistory.org/greatchicagostories/site/storymap/index.html?story=6>

Ask students to describe the family. Brainstorm prior knowledge of the Great Migration.

Next, distribute printouts of the Great Migration entry from *The Electronic Encyclopedia of Chicago*. <http://encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/545.html> Also distribute the 1919 Race Riot handout (at the end of this lesson). Have students read the materials aloud and discuss them as a group, being sure to touch upon how the two events were interrelated. Ask students whether they think Louis would have had reason to fear for his safety when he moved to Chicago in the 1920s. What opportunities drew Louis to Chicago despite the dangers he might encounter? What opportunities and challenges might migrants encounter in Chicago today?

Next tell students they are going to explore their own migration stories. Distribute copies of the Oral-History Interview worksheet (at the end of this lesson). Lead a discussion of the meaning and importance of oral history. Be sure to touch upon the following:

- 1) What is oral history?
- 2) What can oral history teach us about our own families?
- 3) Why is it important for ordinary people to record their experiences?

Using a volunteer to pose as Louis, model an oral-history interview for students. Play the role of the interviewer and ask the questions on the worksheet. Tell students that many oral histories are also recorded using audio or video equipment for accuracy. Get students thinking about how questions are worded, steering them away from those with yes or no answers. Stress the importance of listening carefully and recording answers faithfully.

Lesson 2 Home Connection

Have students conduct an oral-history interview of a family member. They should bring in their interviews to share with the class.

Materials & Resources

- **Printouts of the Great Migration entry in *The Electronic Encyclopedia of Chicago*:**
<http://encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/545.html>
- **Printouts of the 1919 Race Riot handout**
- **Printouts of the Oral-History Interview worksheet**

Instructional Notes

Encourage student to interview their oldest family member if possible. Ask them to bring in copies of old photographs or other family artifacts to share.

If you do not have a projector in the classroom, you can distribute printouts of *Migrant Family from the South, c. 1920* from the artifact image set PDF for *It's a Long Way from Home*.

http://www.chicagohistory.org/greatchicagostories/pdf/artifacts/artifacts_its_a_long_way_home.pdf

Extension Activities

Write the following sentence on the board: “My (grandma, grandpa, mom, dad, other person) (name of person) came to Chicago from (place) in the year (0000).” Have students fill in the information in the parentheses and then continue to write an essay about the migration experience of their relative using the answers they collected in their interviews.

Have students write an essay about why diversity is important to Chicago and America.

Take a field trip to the Chicago History Museum to view the “Sweet Home Chicago” section of the *Chicago: Crossroads of America* exhibition to teach students about the city’s diverse neighborhoods. There is also a photography exhibit on Chicago immigrants on the museum’s first floor.

Two episodes of the WTTW series *Chicago Stories*, “Race Riot of 1919” and “Pullman Porters,” offer excellent in-depth information about the era.

Handout: The 1919 Race Riot

By Olivia Mahoney

Source: *Chicago: Crossroads of America*, ©2006 by the Chicago Historical Society.

The 1919 Race Riot illustrates how conflicting forces converging at the crossroads create tensions that explode into crisis. Its roots lay in the complex swirl of events and social upheaval associated with World War I. At the time, a booming economy and tight labor market caused by the draft created new opportunities for African Americans living in the South, where Jim Crow practices severely restricted their freedom. Drawn by employment opportunities and hoping for a better life, scores of blacks journeyed to northern cities such as Chicago in a mass movement known as the Great Migration.

One of the turning points in American history, the Great Migration had a profound impact on the North. In Chicago alone, more than fifty thousand African Americans arrived between 1916 and 1920, more than doubling the size of the city's black population. They came to work in various industries, primarily meatpacking and steel plants. For the most part, they settled on the South Side below Twelfth Street in an area known as the Black Belt, where a small community of African Americans had been living amidst a larger white community since the 1890s. Not surprisingly, the large and rapid influx of blacks created racial and social tensions in a city long dominated by whites, most of whom had never lived near blacks before. Similar tensions had erupted in Illinois race riots in Springfield (1908) and East St. Louis (1917), creating racial tension throughout the state. In addition, when the war ended in November 1918, thousands of white soldiers returned, expecting to find jobs; instead, they found blacks had taken their place, a situation that greatly exacerbated tensions that soon exploded in violence and mayhem.

On July 27, 1919, Eugene Williams and four other black teenagers from the South Side decided to go swimming. Like other blacks excluded from "white" beaches in the city, they patronized the Twenty-fifth Street Beach. Inexperienced swimmers, they used a large, homemade fourteen-foot log raft as a safety platform for swimming and diving, propelling it forward by kicking their legs. That day, they aimed for a post near the Twenty-ninth Street Beach, an area controlled by whites where a nasty fight between blacks and whites had just erupted. As Williams and his friends floated by the breakwater at Twenty-sixth Street, they noticed a white man throwing rocks at them. A

Handout: The 1919 Race Riot (continued)

projectile struck Williams in the forehead, knocking him back into the water. His panic-stricken friends tried to help, but to no avail. One of them, John Harris, swam to shore and notified a lifeguard at the Twenty-fifth Street Beach who called for a rescue boat, but by the time it arrived, Williams had drowned.

A black policeman went with Williams's friends to the Twenty-ninth Street Beach, where they identified the rock-thrower standing in the crowd. The white officer on duty, Daniel Callahan, refused to arrest the man, or to allow the black policeman to arrest him. At that point, Harris and his friends ran back to the Twenty-fifth Street Beach, where they told the crowd what was happening a few blocks away. A crowd of African Americans ran to the scene, and soon, hundreds of blacks and whites gathered at the beach. After Officer Callahan arrested a black man, the crowd began to throw rocks and bricks at each other. A black man, James Crawford, fired a gun at several white policemen, injuring one of them. In return, a black policeman fired at Crawford, fatally injuring him. Many others in the crowd were also armed and they began shooting, starting a full-blown race riot that lasted the better part of five days.

Worksheet: Oral-History Interview

Name: _____

Questions

Directions: Choose a family member to interview. If possible, choose the oldest member of your family. You may also videotape or make an audio recording of the interview.

1) Where did our family originally come from?

2) When did our family come to Chicago?

3) How did our family get here?

4) Why did our family come to Chicago?

Worksheet: Oral-History Interview (continued)

Name: _____

5) Are there any memorable stories about our family coming to Chicago (perhaps something funny, sad, happy or scary)?

Worksheet: Oral-History Interview (continued)

Name: _____

6) Does our family have any special artifacts? If we were going to donate something to the Chicago History Museum, what would it be?

7) What advice would you give someone just moving to Chicago?
