

# HENRY STONEMASON TO SCULPTOR DISPIRITO

Lesson for Educators on Immigration



EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

## LESSON

GRADES 8–11

This curriculum is aligned  
with the New York State  
P–12 Learning Standards



New York State  
Museum

The New York State Museum is a program of  
The University of the State of New York  
The State Education Department  
Office of Cultural Education



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#### ABOUT THIS LESSON

This lesson draws from the Henry DiSpirito collection at the New York State Museum, a gift of the artist's daughters, which includes examples of his direct-carving sculptures, paintings, and a selection of his carving tools. This lesson will specifically look at DiSpirito's work that explores the experience of refugees and immigrants. The lesson will aid educators in teaching students about responding to art and making connections to DiSpirito's immigration experience, using excerpts from his memoir, *Le Mie Memorie*. DiSpirito's recollections were originally spoken and written in his native Italian and were transcribed and translated by his daughter Dolores DiSpirito and provided for use here by the Fenimore Art Museum in Cooperstown, New York.

The New York State Learning Standards met in this lesson are included at the end of this guide. For more information on the standards, visit [www.nysed.gov/next-generation-learning-standards](http://www.nysed.gov/next-generation-learning-standards).

#### ABOUT THE HENRY DISPIRITO COLLECTION

In keeping with Henry DiSpirito's generous spirit, the DiSpirito family donated a collection of his works to the New York State Museum. In late 2019 the temporary exhibition, *Henry DiSpirito: Stonemason to Sculptor*, opened, featuring nine sculptures and a group of paintings from this collection, with an additional sculpture on loan from Utica College. Historical images and tools from DiSpirito's studio illuminate his creative process.



EDUCATOR'S GUIDE  
GRADES 1–6

# AN IMMIGRATION STORY

# LESSON



EDUCATOR'S GUIDE  
GRADES 8–11

## INTRODUCTION

Using the memoir and artwork of Henry DiSpirito, this lesson explores the larger experience of immigrants and refugees. In this lesson, students will be introduced to new concepts surrounding immigration. Students will compare the experiences of immigrants, analyze historical waves of immigration, and look critically at current immigration policies.

## OBJECTIVES

This lesson encourages students to assess and respond to DiSpirito's artwork and make connections to historical and contemporary waves of immigration and refugee crises. Students will use observation skills to evaluate the artwork and discuss its connections to larger themes of immigration.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Henry DiSpirito (1898–1995) was born in Castelforte, Italy. From an early age he had a love of art, but for much of his life the desire to create would come second to his duties to family and country. At the age of 11, he left school to apprentice as a stonemason under his father's tutelage. The money he made working helped his parents support the family. With the help of a patron, DiSpirito was then able to secure an apprenticeship with a painter and moved to study art in Sessa Arunuca, just south of his hometown. At the age of 19, Henry entered military service in the middle of World War I.

After witnessing the horrors of the First World War in Italy, and the rise of fascism, DiSpirito immigrated to the United States aboard the *Duca d'Aosta* in 1921. He moved to Utica, New York, where he had family, and soon found work as a stonemason and attended night school, where he learned English and U.S. history. DiSpirito became an American citizen in 1930. When the Depression hit, he was able to turn his attention back to art through President Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration federal art project, creating dioramas depicting events in American history.

DiSpirito went on to study art at Utica's Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute from 1941 to 1943. In 1963 he was named the first artist-in-residence at Utica College, a position he held until his death. While most of DiSpirito's artwork focused on the animals, plants, and people of Utica, he also created images of his home in Italy, of refugees and immigrants like himself, and the anguish of war. From halfway across the world, he saw news of the devastation that impacted his home country during World War II. In the early 1940s, DiSpirito was active in U.S. relief efforts to aid children in Italy during and after World War II.



**The Refugees**, n.d.  
Oil and pastel on paper  
10" x 14"



**Refugees (Mother and Child)**, c. 1953  
Plaster  
14.5" x 13" x 6.5"



**Refugee**, c. 1941  
Plaster  
11" x 3" x 7", Loan from Utica College



**Pain of War**, c. 1941  
Clay  
7" x 5" x 3.5", Loan from Utica College

## FEATURED WORKS

Henry DiSpirito created these featured artworks during World War II and the post-war refugee crisis that followed. He recalled his experience during the First World War as one of the most tragic periods of his life—he hated war, and we see him using those experiences along with his immigration experience to inform his artwork. The piece titled *Pain of War*, which depicts the face of a woman, is based on a real experience from DiSpirito's time serving in the Italian military during World War I.

## VOCABULARY

- **immigrant** – A person who moves to a country from somewhere else.
- **refugee** – A person who flees for safety, especially to a foreign country, during times of political trouble, war, persecution, or other danger. Refugees cannot safely return home.
- **migrant** – A person who chooses to move to improve their life by finding work, education, or other opportunities. If a migrant returns to their home country they will receive protection from their government.
- **asylum seeker** – Individuals who have sought international protection and whose claims for refugee status have not yet been determined.
- **stateless person** – Persons who are not considered citizens by any state; they do not possess a nationality of any state.
- **internally displaced persons** – People or groups who have been forced to leave their homes to avoid the effects of conflict, disasters, or human rights violations and have not crossed an international boundary.
- **push factor** – Something that makes people want to leave a place or escape from a situation. A flaw or distress.
- **pull factor** – Something that attracts people to a place. A benefit or opportunity.
- **fascism** – A political philosophy that promotes centralized autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader having complete power and forcible suppression of opposition.
- **dictator** – A ruler with total power over a country.
- **nativism** – The policy of protecting the interests of native-born or established inhabitants against those of immigrants.
- **assimilation** – The process of adapting to the culture of a group or nation.

## WARM-UP

Assess students' pre-conceived understandings and prior knowledge by asking the following questions:

- What is immigration?
- Who is an immigrant?
- Why would someone leave their home country?
- What are the different reasons immigrants come to the United States?
- Who is a refugee?
- How is a refugee different from an immigrant?
- Why does the distinction between refugee and migrant matter?
- How does immigration impact U.S. society?

Create a classroom chart with the student responses to reference later. Students can also do the warm-up activity independently using the attached worksheet and share responses in class discussion.

## GUIDED PRACTICE: VISUAL THINKING STRATEGIES

To support class discussion while observing the featured artworks, have students use visual thinking strategies:

- What is going on in this artwork?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can you find?

Continued Discussion

- What are your feelings about the artwork? Do you have an emotional response?
- What can we tell about the people included? (age, attire, cultural connection, wealth, mood, expression)
- What does their body language convey?
- What are the relationships between the figures?
- What props and important details are included?
- Does the title impact your interpretation of the artwork?

## INDEPENDENT STUDY

See the attached worksheet for *Le Mie Memorie* close reading and questions. Give students time to read through excerpts from the memoir, and ask students to discuss DiSpirito's immigration story. What were the factors that caused him to leave Italy? What challenges did he face? How does his experience connect to the broader experience of immigrants throughout time? How did it impact his artwork?

## EXPANDED DISCUSSION

Discuss the history associated with World War II immigration. Questions:

- What countries and regions were most involved in the war?
- Where did most of the war's destruction take place?
- How did World War II impact America?
- How did World War II transform Europe?

Globally, World War II caused the greatest displacement of people from their homes in the twentieth century. In DiSpirito's native Europe alone, apart from the many millions of people who were killed leading up to and during

the war, millions more were forced to flee persecution, forced labor, death camps, and oppressive governments. Europe saw the destruction of entire cities, the deaths of millions of citizens and soldiers, and the erosion of empires.

During World War II the United States maintained restrictive immigration quotas and policies. In the aftermath of the war, the U.S. enacted milestone legislation regarding refugees with the 1948 Displaced Persons Act, which was designed to help resettle Europeans who had been displaced from their homes during the war. Under this law, refugees became a major factor in U.S. immigration. The Truman administration expanded the number of European refugees above the existing quotas.

Discuss current conflicts causing today's refugee crisis:

- When you think about the refugee crisis what image comes to mind?
- Should the needs of migrants and refugees be treated equally?
- Are there benefits to taking in refugees?
- Do new populations make a country more vulnerable?

According to the UN Refugee Agency there are currently over 70 million forcibly displaced people around the world, more than at any other time since World War II. The number of people fleeing their homes and crossing international borders has ignited a global debate on how countries serve refugees. The United States is no exception in polarizing views on current immigration policies.

### **RESEARCH ACTIVITY OPTIONS**

Students will pick one of the following topics to create a presentation either in small groups or individually. Students will critically analyze their sources using the attached website-evaluation worksheet.

#### **1. Research waves of immigration in U.S. history.**

- First Wave, late 1600s–c. 1820
  - ▶ Primary immigrant origin: The Netherlands and British Isles
- Second Wave, mid 1800s
  - ▶ Primary immigrant origin: Ireland, Germany, Central and Northern Europe
- Third Wave, 1880s–1920s
  - ▶ Primary immigrant origin: Austria-Hungary, Italy, Russia, Southern and Eastern Europe
- Internal immigration (The Great Migration), c. 1910–c. 1970
  - ▶ Primary migrant origin: American South
- Fourth Wave, 1960s–present
  - ▶ Primary immigrant origin: Latin America, Asia, and Middle East

#### **2. Research contemporary U.S. immigration crisis.**

- What makes the situation a crisis?
- Example topics: Central America, Syria, South Sudan, Iraq, Yemen, Venezuela, Rohingya peoples

#### **3. Research your family history and personal connection to immigration.**

- How does the immigrant experience relate to your identity?
- Why did your family decide to move to the U.S.?
- How do you think your family's experience compares to other immigrants?

#### 4. Research immigration stories and trends within your own community.

- How has immigration shaped your community?
- How have refugees and immigrants benefitted your community?

#### 5. Research media portrayal of immigration.

- What role does the media play in impacting public opinion?
- What different biases about immigration have you found?

#### 6. Research immigration policies.

- What are the arguments for and against an immigration policy or law?
- How do immigration policies affect the day-to-day lives of immigrants?
- Topics may include: Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Immigration Act of 1891, Immigration Act of 1924, Displaced Persons Act of 1948, Immigration Act of 1965, Immigration Act of 1986, DREAM Act

### WRAP-UP

Students will present and discuss their research.

### Optional Cross-Curricular Extensions

**Social Studies Extension:** Have students examine roles New York played in World War II. (NYS SS 8.6B).

Option 1: Industry (Brooklyn Naval Yard or General Electric)

Option 2: Refugees (Fort Ontario Refugee Center)

### ELA Writing Extension

Option 1: Have students write a journal entry from an immigrant's point of view.

Option 2: Have students write an essay for or against a historic immigration policy using research evidence.

**Advanced Art Extension:** Have students respond to other artwork and examples of photojournalism that cover the topic of immigration and refugees. How do images influence our views of the world?

**World Languages Extension:** DiSpirito's original memoir was transcribed from Italian to English. Write a fictional journal entry about a person who has just moved to your community from another country. Write it in the world language you are studying.

# LESSON LEARNING STANDARDS

## NEW YORK STATE SOCIAL STUDIES FRAMEWORK LEARNING STANDARDS

### 8TH GRADE

**8.2: CHANGING SOCIETY:** Industrialization and immigration contributed to the urbanization of America. Problems resulting from these changes sparked the Progressive movement and increased calls for reform. (Standards: 1, 2, 4; Themes: MOV, SOC, TECH, EXCH)

**8.2a:** Technological developments changed the modes of production, and access to natural resources facilitated increased industrialization. The demand for labor in urban industrial areas resulted in increased migration from rural areas and a rapid increase in immigration to the United States. New York City became the nation's largest city, and other cities in New York State also experienced growth at this time.

- Students will identify groups of people who moved into urban areas and examine where they came from and the reasons for their migration into cities.
- Students will explore the immigrant experience at Ellis Island.
- Students will compare and contrast immigrant experiences in locations such as ethnic neighborhoods in cities, rural settlements in the Midwest, Chinese communities in the Far West, and Mexican communities in the Southwest.

**8.2c:** Increased urbanization and industrialization contributed to increasing conflicts over immigration, influenced changes in labor conditions, and led to political corruption.

- Students will examine nativism and anti-immigration policies, including the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907, and immigration legislation of the 1920s.

**8.8: DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE:** After World War II, the population of the United States rose sharply as a result of both natural increases and immigration. Population movements have resulted in changes to the American landscape and shifting political power.

**8.8b:** The postwar United States experienced increasing immigration, debates over immigration policy, and an increase in cultural diversity. Students will examine migration and immigration trends in New York State.

- Students will examine the effects of immigration legislation and policy, including recent debates over immigration policy.

### 11TH GRADE

**11.7: PROSPERITY AND DEPRESSION (1920–1939):** The 1920s and 1930s were a time of cultural and economic changes in the United States. During this period, the nation faced significant domestic challenges, including the Great Depression. (Standards: 1, 4; Themes: ID, TCC, SOC, CIV)

- Students will examine change in immigration policy as reflected by the passage of the Quota Acts of the 1920s.

**11.10: SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE/DOMESTIC ISSUES (1945–present):** Racial, gender, and socioeconomic inequalities were addressed by individuals, groups, and organizations. Varying political philosophies prompted debates over the role of the federal government in regulating the economy and providing a social safety net. (Standards: 1, 4, 5; Themes: ID, TCC, SOC, GOV, CIV, ECO)

**11.10b:** Individuals, diverse groups, and organizations have sought to bring about change in American society through a variety of methods.

- Students will trace the following efforts in terms of issues/goals, key individuals and groups, and successes/limitations: Immigration (e.g., Immigration Act of 1965, Immigration Act of 1986, continuing debates over immigration)

The New York State Museum  
Cultural Education Center  
222 Madison Avenue  
Albany, New York 12230

Fall 2020

**Museum Director**  
Mark A. Schaming

**Senior Historian/Curator, Social History**  
Ashley Hopkins-Benton

**Exhibition Planner**  
Jill Cozy

**Museum Educator**  
Kat Morehouse

**Museum Editor**  
Jessica Fisher Neidl

Cover Photo: *Toiler's Hand*, Henry DiSpirito, c. 1947



# AN IMMIGRATION STORY

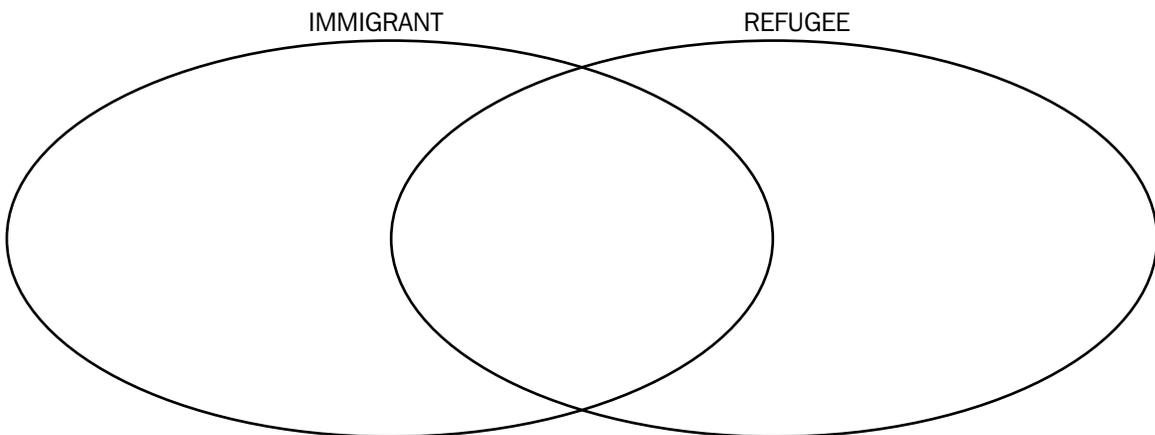
NAME \_\_\_\_\_

**1. What is immigration?**

**2. Why might someone choose to leave their home country to move to a foreign country? Think about the *Push Factors* and *Pull Factors* that might motivate them (see vocabulary list).**

PUSH FACTORS	PULL FACTORS

**3. What are the similarities and differences between *immigrants* and *refugees*?**



# HENRY DISPIRITO

## STONEMASON TO SCULPTOR

### *Le Mie Memorie* Worksheet

The following are excerpts from Henry DiSpirito's memoir, *Le Mie Memorie (My Memories)*. As DiSpirito began writing and recording his memoir in his native Italian, he thought of his birthplace and home in Castelforte, Italy. He remembered the mountains, the sea, and the small town left in ruins by the battles of World War II.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Students will read the excerpts and answer the questions at the end.

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NAME

#### **Apprenticeship as a Stonemason**

"But, when I would absent myself from work I thought of the harm I was doing to my parents. They had so much need for my help financially. Until I was a young man I was tormented by two thoughts: one was the love for my family, and the other was my love for art."

#### **My Meeting with Professor Bartolomeo Aloia**

"... I came from the Military District in Gaeta where I was entered into service. I would shortly be wearing a military uniform. The teacher felt proud that another of his students was going to defend their country. I was not, in fact, enthusiastic to leave my art for the war."

#### **The Immigrant**

"In October of 1920 I was discharged from the army with the grade of Sergeant, a grade that was given to me, not for heroism, but for office work that I performed (writing reports) with the 5th Corp. of Arms, residing at Levico-of [*sic*] Trento. Returning home, there was little, primarily bread. The populace lived in the most squalid poverty. In Northern Italy there were violent strikes. The workers occupied the factories that could not sustain them because of the lack of prime materials. Italy, after the war, lived in a state of violence. Mussolini seemed to be going toward a dictatorship and it was then that I thought to emigrate.

"I had an uncle and cousin in Utica whom I went to for help. I explained to them my position and my desire to emigrate to America. In a short period of time I provided the necessary papers and all was in place for me to leave. How many thoughts passed my mind! The land rich in everything, with its skyscrapers, with its industries, and commerce. In a short time I will go to live in the Land of Promise!"

#### **My Departure from Italy**

"On the evening of March 12, 1921, aware of my impending departure, a group of my friends gathered in the small Piazza of San Carlo to wish me good fortune and happiness in the New Land. We stayed until very late, reminiscing of the past, when we were very young, until the moment arrived to shake hands and to say 'good night'...

"On the night of March 18, 1921, I was already on-board ship, the *Duca D'Aosta*. When it was dark, I heard three loud roars that resembled those of an injured lion. It was the sign that I was leaving my homeland—to never return again."

#### **Arrival in New York**

"The evening of April 1, 1921, I arrived on the *Duca D'Aosta* in New York. A few hours later we disembarked and boarded a train. Every one of us immigrants had a card attached to us that guided us to our destination. During the trip, when the train would stop, I was curious to look out and see the houses, listen to the talking (a language very different from mine). When I heard the arrival call for "Utica, Utica," I cannot describe the emotions I felt at that moment. I thought I

was dreaming; instead, it was real. In a hurry, I left the train and found myself in a subterranean [sic] that led me to the station. It was well lit and had columns of marble. I had found the Marble of Carrara in this New Land! I almost had the desire to embrace it, but I restrained myself so as not to create a spectacle. But, when I went out of the station I saw that the streets were of mud, the sidewalks of wood, the houses showed me nothing of beauty to my eyes. So, this was the beginning of my disillusionment. The taxi took me to the house of my uncle on Ontario Street. I arrived tired from my trip. My aunt made up a bed, and said, “good night, we will see you tomorrow.”

**My Arrival in Utica**

“...I said nothing. I was hurt. I took a book, I remember it was Victor Hugo’s “Les Miserables,” and in my misery I went to Proctor Park. I found a secluded place, since I did not want to be seen, so that I could think of my small hometown, and I began to cry.”

**Evening School**

“As in all of the cities of America, there is night school for the immigrants, and I enrolled quickly after my arrival. The school was a short distance from where I lived, full of air and light and with all conveniences possible, large rooms, libraries and especially desks, that were new and clean.

“The teachers were mostly young and pleasant. They were interested not only in the English language, but also in the history of the young nation. It was in the evening classes that I learned to know and love America and her history. When I set foot in Utica I hoped to see palaces of marble, gardens opulent with flowers, and Genesee Street rich in statues and fountains like Treve, museums and theaters. I had forgotten that America was a young nation of only three hundred years and could not be compared to the Old Country. So, I started to seriously study English and the history of this great nation, the men of letters and of the arts, and I had to admit I made a grave error trying to compare the Old World with the New: one of millennia of history and the other simply of a few hundred.”

**Using the excerpts from *Le Mie Memorie*, answer the following questions:**

**1. Using the section titled “The Immigrant,” identify the push factors and pull factors that caused DiSpirito to emigrate.**

PUSH FACTORS	PULL FACTORS

**2. Write a brief summary of Henry DiSpirito's arrival in the United States. What were some challenges he faced as a newly arrived immigrant?**

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**3. How does DiSpirito's personal experience connect to his artwork?**

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# WEBSITE-EVALUATION WORKSHEET

## SITE INFORMATION

Website Name: \_\_\_\_\_

URL: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Accessed: \_\_\_\_\_

Domain of Website:  .com  .org  .net  .edu  .gov  other

Is the name of the author or publisher provided?  Yes  No

## POINT OF VIEW

This site is:  Fact  Opinion

Is the purpose of the site stated?  Yes  No

If Yes, the purpose is to  Inform  Entertain  Persuade

Does the tone of the language seem unbiased?  Yes  No

Does the bias affect credibility? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Are sources cited?  Yes  No

Does this site link to/from reliable sources?  Yes  No

## CURRENCY OF SITE

When was the site last updated? \_\_\_\_\_

Is there an original posting date? \_\_\_\_\_

To be reliable, should the type of information on this site be current?  Yes  No

Why or why not?: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Does this site provide useful information for your research?  Yes  No

Will you use this source? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_