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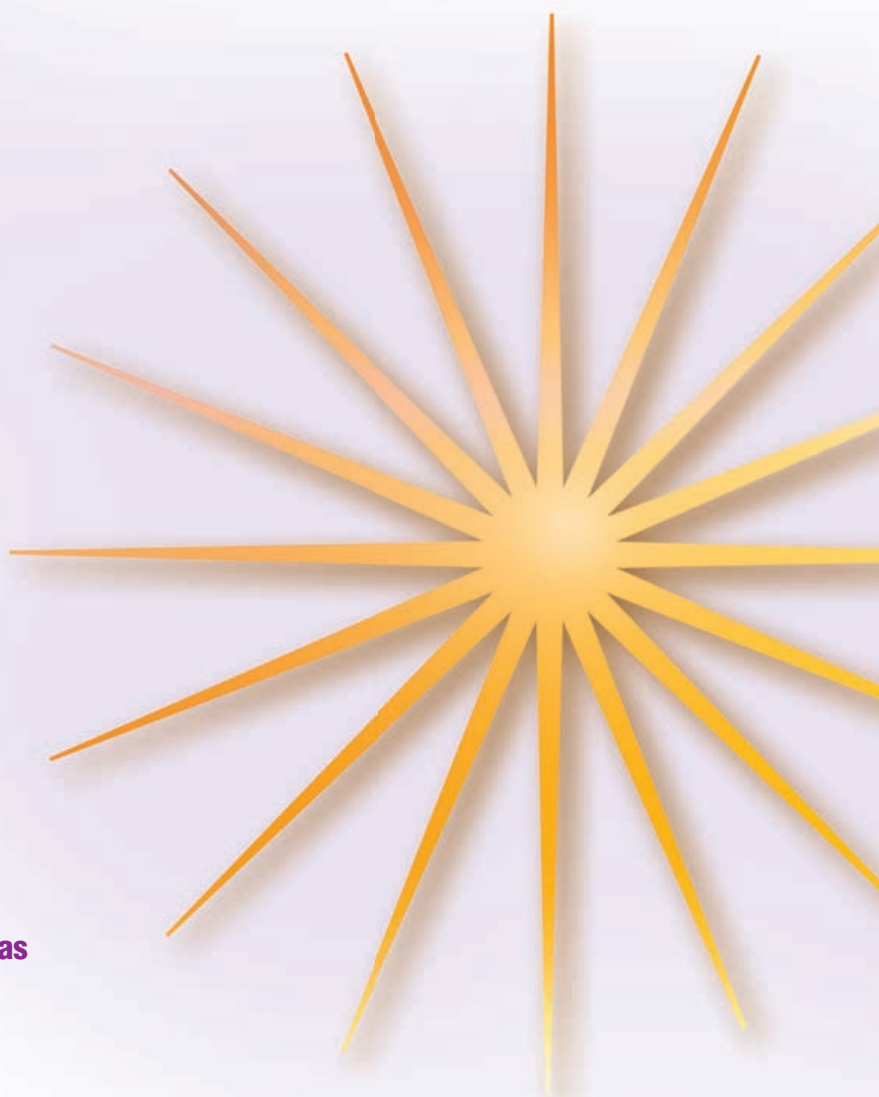
Reading

GRADE
8



Focused Practice for Reading Comprehension

- Fiction and non-fiction passages
- Story structure
- Integration of knowledge and ideas
- Key ideas and details
- Answer key



The New Americans

What are some concerns Americans have about immigration?

¹ The poem “The New Colossus” is engraved on a bronze plaque at the base of the Statue of Liberty. It contains the famous lines “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore.” Many people entering the United States for the first time over a century ago were greeted with these words.

² Over the past 400 years, our nation has seen millions of immigrants. Most began to arrive from Europe and from Africa. Some were adventurers and wealthy landowners. Others came as slaves or servants. Some were high officials. As more immigrants settled here, the country came to be organized as the United States. As recently as 50 years ago, most of our immigrant population came from Europe. Today, immigrants come from almost every country in the world.

³ How do immigrants become citizens of the U.S.? Becoming a citizen takes a lot of patience. It also requires a good deal of studying and persistence. Family based immigration allows immediate relatives of U.S. citizens to get visas. Employment based visas are options for some, but visa numbers are limited by the skill set of the worker.

⁴ People fleeing persecution may seek asylum as refugees. This means that America is willing to offer a safe haven for a certain number of immigrants who are in danger. This number is limited to 70,000 people per year, but the number of people hoping to become American citizens is staggering. In 2011, 15.5 million immigrants were naturalized citizens. More than 13 million were legal permanent residents, and 11.1 million were unauthorized migrants.

⁵ Those who have held legal residence for at least five years can qualify for full citizenship. They must be at least eighteen years old. They have to show continuous residency and “good moral character,” as well as pass English language, civics, and history exams.

⁶ Immigrants come bringing their religious and cultural traditions with them. Some new arrivals adjust quickly, while others maintain the customs of their homelands. Immigrants can be welcomed as ready sources of labor. They can also be seen as competition for scarce jobs and the cause of lowered wages and benefits for American workers.

⁷ One source of controversy is the millions of migrant workers who do not have legal residency. Some Americans see offering these migrant workers a path to citizenship as a fair first move in reforming immigration laws. Others believe that when there are so many people who have waited years for a legal path to citizenship, it is not right to award those who have not followed the laws.

⁸ Another issue is how to handle immigrants who illegally cross the nation’s border. Should we open a path of citizenship to them? While plenty of people believe that we should give amnesty to these immigrants, there are just as many who believe we should not. Others think that we should make sure our border patrol is strong while still providing assistance to those who wish to become residents of the United States.

⁹ Since its birth more than 200 years ago, people have wanted to become citizens of a country that will offer them a better life. They come from all over the world and arrive by boat, by plane, or on foot. However immigration controversies are resolved, we can all benefit from the many different cultures immigrants bring to America to enrich our own perspectives.



1. Reread the lines in paragraph 1 from “The New Colossus” that appear on the Statue of Liberty. If you were a new immigrant to this country, would this poem make you feel welcomed? Explain.

2. How are the backgrounds of immigrants today different than they were 50 years ago?

3. What does the word *controversy* mean in paragraph 7?

4. Why would someone seek asylum in the U.S. as a refugee?

5. Do you think the author does a good job of showing both sides of the controversy surrounding immigration? Use examples from the text to support your answer.

6. Do you know the immigration history of your family? Tell what you do know, including where your family came from and when they arrived in this country. If you do not know anything about your family’s immigration history, explain how you could find out.

Starting Over

Will Chantale's brother be able to emigrate from Haiti and join his family in America?

¹ Chantale sighed and squirmed slightly on the gray metal folding chair. No matter how she sat, there was no way to get comfortable. Her legs were practically numb from sitting for nearly two hours in the uncomfortable seats.

² Both Chantale and Mrs. Jean-Louis had been dreading this visit. Chantale disliked having to translate for her mother, who was uncomfortable in her English-speaking abilities in public. Something about the powerlessness her mother felt because she couldn't speak for herself made Chantale extremely uncomfortable. Mrs. Jean-Louis had dreaded the trip because she was anxious. There was nothing more important to her than reuniting her family, yet she had little confidence that the mounds of paperwork would ever result in her son being granted permission to move to the United States.

³ Chantale slouched again, trying to get comfortable. Just then, the heavy door at the corner of the waiting room opened and a woman with a tired face called "Jean-Louis? Violine Jean-Louis?" She mispronounced the last name, but Chantale hurriedly stood up and nudged her mother.

⁴ Sitting inside the small, cramped office, Chantale and Mrs. Jean-Louis waited patiently for Ms. Washington to sort through some paperwork on her desk and type for a moment at her computer. Finally, she faced them. "Tell me what I can do for you today," she said, smiling unexpectedly. "You want to bring your son . . . Edgard, I believe . . . to the United States from Haiti. Is that correct?" she asked.

⁵ Mrs. Jean Louis looked at Chantale and nodded. She understood English and actually could speak it fairly well, too, but her confidence, especially in official circumstances, was lacking. She turned to Chantale and spoke in rapid French, her hand resting on her daughter's arm.

⁶ "My mom wants me to tell you that Edgard is all alone. He was married but lost his wife and son in the earthquake in 2010. He has never recovered from his losses and needs to be with his family. He needs a fresh start, a new beginning. She says that Edgard is a quick

learner and a hard worker, that he will be an asset to America."

⁷ "I'm so sorry for your losses," said Ms. Washington. "I remember hearing about the horrors that accompanied that earthquake." She turned to her computer screen. "Mrs. Jean-Louis, is it correct that you immigrated to the United States in 2008, along with your husband, Georges and daughter, Chantale?" Chantale's mother nodded, and Ms. Washington continued. "And all three of you have green cards?" she asked. Mrs. Jean-Louis nodded again, reaching for her purse.

⁸ Ms. Washington put up a hand. "I don't need to see it right now," she said kindly, "I'm just checking to see that the information I have is correct. As a green card holder, you may petition to have an unmarried son or daughter of any age immigrate to the United States and become a permanent resident. We'll need to start by having you fill out Form I-130, Petition for an Alien Relative. We'll need proof of your status as a permanent resident, as well as evidence of your relationship with Edgard Jean-Louis."

⁹ Ms. Washington continued to go over the requirements and necessary documents needed for Edgard's immigration. Chantale translated when necessary, but she was distracted by the look on her mother's face. It was hope, and it was something Chantale had stopped associating with her mom years ago. When Chantale and Mrs. Jean-Louis stepped out into the sunshine half an hour later, the same look of peace was still on her face.

¹⁰ "You have your phone?" asked Mrs. Jean-Louis, hugging her daughter with one arm. Chantale nodded and handed her phone to her mom. A moment later, her mother smiled. "Edgard?" she began.



1. How are Chantale's and Mrs. Jean-Louis's feelings at the beginning of the story different?

2. How does Mrs. Jean-Louis change during the course of the story?

3. If the story continued, what do you think would happen next?

4. Which of these best describes the main idea of the story?

- _____ A Haitian-American girl named Chantale is bothered by having to translate for her mother.
- _____ A young Haitian man loses his wife and son in an earthquake.
- _____ A Haitian woman and her daughter visit the Office of Immigration to find out how to help the woman's adult son immigrate to the United States.

5. This story is told from the narrator's point of view. How do you think it would be different if it were told from Mrs. Washington's point of view?

6. Do you think that immigrants should be allowed to petition for family members to come to the United States as permanent residents? Why or why not?

New Neighbor, Nuevo Amigo

Will Alexander and Leonardo find a way to communicate?

¹ “Alexander, did you finish your homework?”

² “No worries, Mom, it’s all done,” said Alexander as he sprinted out the kitchen door with a soccer ball in his hands.

³ If his parents let him, he would have gladly skipped dinner to keep on practicing as the sky turned dusky and the sun started to set. Usually, he would practice his drills by himself, since his little sister showed no interest at all in the game he loved. But today was different; something happened that changed his routine. Today Alexander met Leonardo.

⁴ Alexander’s mom said that the house next door had finally sold, and a couple and their son from Villavicencio, Columbia, were moving in. She told Alexander that the son was about his age. It had been a week, but Alexander had yet to see Leonardo.

⁵ Alexander was known among his classmates for being outgoing. “Alexander could strike up a conversation with a goalpost,” his coach was fond of saying.

⁶ Alexander crossed the yard and rapped confidently at the cheery red door, and almost immediately Leonardo appeared. “Hi, my name is Alexander,” Alexander said, as he extended his hand to Leonardo.

⁷ Leonardo smiled shyly and shook Alexander’s hand. “Leonardo . . . my name is Leonardo,” said the dark haired boy quietly.

⁸ “I haven’t seen you around school yet, have you started? Do you play any sports? How do you like the neighborhood?” Alexander started spewing questions to a wide-eyed Leonardo.

⁹ Leonardo just shook his head and looked uncomfortable. *Uh oh*, thought Alexander, *I don’t think he understands me*. He held up his soccer ball to Leonardo and said, “Do you want to play?” hoping Leonardo would understand the gesture, if not the words. The grin on Leonardo’s face was the answer.

¹⁰ “I play in Villavicencio,” said Leonardo.

¹¹ “Great!” responded Alexander “Let’s go!”

¹² Alexander and Leonardo started passing the soccer ball back and forth between their two yards. Alexander could tell right away that Leonardo was a talented player, better than he was himself. The hour sped by, and Alexander’s mom called out that dinner was ready. Alexander stopped playing and pantomimed putting a fork to his mouth and chewing. “It’s time for dinner,” he said regretfully.

¹³ Leonardo understood and repeated the sentence, “It’s time for dinner.”

¹⁴ “Exactly,” said Alexander, “It’s time for dinner. Can we play again tomorrow after school?” Alexander asked, hoping Leonardo would understand.

¹⁵ Alexander could tell Leonardo wasn’t sure when he shrugged his shoulders. Then, Alexander got a great idea, “Come with me!” Alexander excitedly grabbed onto Leonardo’s t-shirt and pulled him toward his house.

¹⁶ Alexander took Leonardo to his room and started rummaging through his bookshelf. “I have a Spanish dictionary here somewhere,” he muttered to himself. A moment later, he found the small orange book and looked up the words for *tomorrow*, *after*, and *school*.

¹⁷ Alexander looked directly at Leonardo, held up the soccer ball, and said *mañana*, *después de*, and *la escuela*. He had no idea if what he said really translated into what he intended, and he was relieved when Leonardo smiled and eagerly nodded his head.

¹⁸ “*Mañana!*” Alexander repeated.

¹⁹ “*Mañana!*” agreed Leonardo.



1. Name one way in which Alexander and Leonardo are different and one way in which they are similar.

2. Give two examples of ways that the boys found to communicate with one another.

3. In paragraph 5, it says that "Alexander could strike up a conversation with a goalpost." What does this mean? What does it tell you about Alexander's personality?

4. How do you think Leonardo feels when he first meets Alexander? Use examples from the story to support your answer.

5. On the lines below, write a brief summary of paragraph 3.

6. In paragraph 12, what does *pantomimed* mean?

7. Tell about a time when you used something other than spoken language to communicate with someone.

Island of Hope

What role did Ellis Island play in America's history?

¹ Ellis Island sits quietly in New York Harbor. For many years, it was a beacon of hope for new immigrants. People came to America from around the world, searching for a better life. Some were fleeing poverty; others were seeking freedom from religious persecution. Reaching Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty were a sign to immigrants that they had arrived in America and could begin their new lives. For some of the 12 million people who passed through Ellis Island between 1892 and 1954, this was true. They were processed and admitted in just a few hours. Others had a much different experience.

² The trip across the Atlantic Ocean was difficult, especially for passengers in third class, or steerage. People were often tired and sick when they arrived. They had spent several weeks aboard a large, crowded ship. First- and second-class passengers had an easier time. If they passed a health check onboard the ship, they would be quickly processed and released. The third-class passengers had to wait much longer—sometimes, even days. When they did finally leave the ship, they were given identity tags and told to head for the main building on Ellis Island.

³ This was often a time of great confusion. Following directions in a language you don't understand is difficult! The passengers carried their most important belongings—the items they had chosen to make the long trip across the ocean with them. They were tired, they were anxious, and there were often young children or elderly parents to keep track of.

⁴ On the way to the Great Hall (officially known as the Registry Room), doctors watched the immigrants as they waited in line. They looked for people who were having any sort of difficulty that could indicate they were ill. In the large, noisy room, the immigrants had to pass a health inspection. One of the worst parts was having your eyelid lifted by a tool called a buttonhook so that doctors could check for a contagious eye disease.

⁵ Immigrants who needed further inspection had a letter marked with chalk on their clothing. The letter indicated what sort of problem they were suspected of having. Immigrants who

passed the health inspection were sent on to have their legal inspection. The big worry, of course, was separation. What if you passed the health inspection but your child or spouse did not?

⁶ At the next stop, immigrants were asked a series of questions, such as where they were born, were they married, what sort of work did they do, how much money did they have, and so on. Their answers needed to match the answers on the list, or manifest, from the ship. Many people were admitted to the United States after passing the necessary requirements, but many were also detained. Some were immediately sent back to their home countries, while others spent days, or even months, in the infirmary. Their cases would eventually be reviewed again and a decision would be made as to whether or not they could stay in America. About three thousand immigrants died on Ellis Island, and about two percent were denied entry to the U.S.

⁷ For the fortunate immigrants who were given permission to stay, social workers were on hand to offer help as people made their way in a new and foreign country. They often met relatives at the Kissing Post, a column outside the Great Hall, where the new immigrants were reunited with friends and family.

⁸ The last immigrant passed through Ellis Island in 1954. Today, you can visit the museum and learn about the history of a place that played a role in the lives of so many American immigrants. In fact, about 40 percent of Americans today can trace at least one ancestor to Ellis Island. Are you one of them?



1. In paragraph 1, what does the author mean by saying that Ellis Island was “a beacon of hope”?

2. How was the experience of third-class passengers different from first- and second-class passengers?

3. Do you feel that it was fair or just for officials to detain passengers who were thought to be weak or ill? Why or why not?

4. What were Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty a sign of for immigrants?

5. *Even if a passenger did not pass the health inspection, he or she would not be sent home.* Is this statement true or false?

6. What was the author’s purpose in writing this article?

7. What are four adjectives you could use to describe how immigrants may have felt as they passed through Ellis Island?

Chickens in the Neighborhood

Will Isabella and Noah get the backyard chickens they want?

¹ Noah got up from the couch, dusted the cracker crumbs off his shirt, and headed for the door. He opened it to find his sister standing there grinning at him.

² "What's going on?" he asked, raising his eyebrows at her. "Did you forget your key or something?"

³ "I couldn't open the door," explained Isabella, holding up her hands to show her brother that they were occupied. In one hand, she carried a canvas bag bursting with books. In the other was a plain brown paper bag with the top folded over.

⁴ "What's in the bag?" asked Noah, taking it from his sister. He peeked inside and was surprised to find more than a dozen eggs nestled into several handfuls of wood shavings. About half of them were light brown, some with speckles, and half were a pale greenish blue. "Where'd you get these?" he exclaimed. "I've never seen blue eggs before."

⁵ "I went to Claudia's house after school to see her chickens," said Isabella. "Her family has seven chickens, and each one lays an egg a day, so they have entirely too many eggs most of the time."

⁶ "And you should have seen Hazel and Annabelle run," she added. "It was truly one of the funniest things ever to see them hustling across the yard with their backsides bobbing along."

⁷ "You want chickens now, don't you?" asked Noah. "I'm actually pretty sure that Mom and Dad will think it's a good idea, in terms of being a learning experience and getting back to the earth and everything, but I think we're going to have a problem with the neighborhood association."

⁸ In her excitement, she had forgotten about the governing body of the dozen or so streets that formed the Sardis Creek subdivision. There were restrictions on what color you could paint your front door, what you could plant in your yard, and what color the curtains facing the street could be. Isabella suddenly felt quite

certain that there was no way that she and Noah were going to have any chickens of their own anytime soon.

⁹ That evening at dinner, Isabella and Noah told their parents about Isabella's afternoon experience with Claudia's chickens and their worries about the neighborhood association. "I even stopped at the library on my way home," lamented Isabella, halfheartedly scooping up a bite of mashed potatoes. "I have a whole bagful of books on raising backyard chickens and building a coop," she added, slumping in her chair.

¹⁰ "Okay, okay, don't give up yet," commented Mrs. Burlingham. As Noah had predicted to his sister, their parents immediately jumped onboard with the idea of raising chickens. "I think that you should at least give your idea a chance," she added. "How could you present this to the association so they'd say yes?"

¹¹ The kitchen was quiet for a moment, except for the squeak of the dog toy that Hoolihan, the family dog, was busily gnawing on.

¹² "Well," began Isabella thoughtfully, "at school when we wanted to change the rule about cell phones in the cafeteria, we created a petition and collected signatures . . . and the rule was changed!"

¹³ "That's just what I mean!" said Mrs. Burlingham. "I think that collecting signatures of residents of the neighborhood is a great place to start."

¹⁴ "We could compost the old chicken litter and use it for the gardens in the common areas," added Isabella, scooting her chair back. "Can I be excused? I have a lot of work to do!"



1. What problem do Isabella and Noah have in the story?

2. What ideas do they have for a possible solution?

3. Why do Isabella and Noah think that the neighborhood association will not allow them to have chickens?

4. In paragraph 8, what does *restrictions* mean?

5. Check the character traits that best describe Isabella.

_____ enthusiastic _____ competitive _____ immature _____ reckless
_____ determined _____ cautious _____ energetic

6. From whose point of view is the story told?

7. Reread the first sentence in paragraph 10. What does it tell you about Mrs. Burlingham?

8. Describe what you think will happen next in the story.
