

Designing Effective Projects: Projects in Action Anatomy of a Project Plan: Grades 6-8

Destination America: Our Hope, Our Future: A 6-8, Social Studies Project

Students travel back in time to the late nineteenth-and early twentieth-centuries as they experience life through the eyes of a European immigrant who first steps foot on United States soil. You may want to print this page as you view the entire [Destination America Unit Plan](#).

Essential Question: *Why do people move from one country to another?*

Before a Project Approach

Initially, this unit was a research project. Ms. March's students chose an immigrant group, did research on the Internet, and pretended to be an immigrant representing that group. Students wrote letters home about their experience as a new immigrant to the United States. The Curriculum-Framing Questions for this project centered on the question of democracy and the American dream, however these were not addressed in the unit or the students' products.

After a Project Approach

Ms. March decided to improve upon this project by making it more focused specifically on the immigration experience and not on the American dream. She wanted her students to experience what life would have been like for newly arrived immigrants to the Ellis Island detention center. To that end, she decided to have students create the persona of a European immigrant (based on research using primary and secondary source documents), develop documents for that immigrant, engage in a simulation of Ellis Island, and create a digital portfolio of documents, letters, and pictures that chronicled their experience to share with others.

Challenges

In shifting to a project-based unit, Ms. March faced three challenges. First, because much of the students' work would be independent and self-paced, she wasn't sure how to gauge the project time. She was also concerned about giving students so much choice: immigrant group, choice of persona, and choice of documents to create. She wasn't sure how she would monitor students' progress and maintain quality with so many different topics and choices. Lastly, with so much going on in the project, she was unsure how to organize the classroom space. Currently, her students sat in rows and a couple of computers lined the back wall.

Overcoming Challenges

1. **Time.** Ms. March knew her students needed to learn to prioritize tasks and manage their time efficiently, so she incorporated the use of checklists and timelines. These tools would allow the students the opportunity to take responsibility for their own work. With the timeline, Ms. March established deadlines and allowed the students to work at home and school.
2. **Choice.** Periodic individual check-ins and mini-conferences with each student were inserted into the timeline. This way she could gauge their progress and discuss their choices periodically, without taking away their ownership of the project.
3. **Classroom Organization.** Ms. March was sure to gather as many resources as possible ahead of time, and compiled a computer time sign-up sheet to manage the use of the computers more efficiently. She also arranged the desks into groups by countries, so the students could share materials. This helped students assemble with ease and set a precedent for collaboration.