

# The New Americans

*What are some concerns Americans have about immigration?*

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

---

---

---

---

---

---