



# CURRICULUM GUIDE

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## *Minsha's Night on Ellis Island*

BY Pam Berkman  
AND Dorothy Hearst  
ILLUSTRATED BY Claire Powell

*Follow Minsha, a determined terrier, as she travels to Ellis Island in this third book in the At the Heels of History series.*

*For many immigrants,* coming to America in 1921 means a stop on Ellis Island—even for a four-legged stowaway!

Minsha loves her human family, especially nine-year-old Leila. But Leila's family has decided to leave their home in Beirut for a new life in America—and they can't take Minsha with them. Minsha is devastated, but she's also a dog of action, so she sneaks aboard a second ship bound for New York. She knows she should stay hidden, but can't help but make friends with a boy named Yusef and his family.

When their ship arrives at Ellis Island, Yusef is suspected of being sick and is separated from his family. Even though Minsha is eager to find Leila, she can't leave Yusef alone, either. As Minsha sniffs out a solution, she'll have to contend with a territorial gang of cats, some helpful sparrows, and a surprisingly friendly rat. But will her new friends be enough to help her reunite Yusef with his family? And will it be too late for Minsha to reunite with hers?

[PamBerkman.com](http://PamBerkman.com)

[AtTheHeelsOfHistory.com](http://AtTheHeelsOfHistory.com)



[DorothyHearst.com](http://DorothyHearst.com)

The Common Core State Standards addressed by the discussion questions, activities, and worksheets in this guide are noted throughout. For more information on the Common Core, visit [corestandards.org](http://corestandards.org).

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Unless otherwise noted, all discussion questions meet the following Common Core State Standards:

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1**

-  The story opens at the Port of Beirut in Greater Syria in 1921 with Leila and her family boarding a steamship for America. What are the reasons behind Leila and her family's departure?
-  Leila is saddened to learn that her beloved dog, Minsha, cannot join her on the steamship. What words does she say to try and convince her family to let her bring Minsha on the journey? What argument would you have made? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2**
-  Greater Syria was a dangerous place in 1921. What are the difficulties and challenges of lengthy steamship travel? Why would the decision to leave home or stay be a difficult one for Leila's family to make?
-  Minsha is heartbroken to be separated from Leila and faces challenges and dangers as she tries to follow her. Describe how Minsha receives support from the big dog on the docks and later from Yusef and his family once on board the steamship. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3**
-  On the ship, Minsha and Yusef's family meet Mr. Khoury. Mr. Khoury shares that, "A journey like this makes everyone who takes it family." Cite examples from the text that support Mr. Khoury's statement about people who share a difficult journey becoming a family. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2**
-  How could Yusef's cough effect what happens once they land on Ellis Island? Why is Teta's handkerchief important?
-  Minsha's primary motivation for boarding a steamship to America is to be reunited with Leila. How does Minsha's plan change when she and Yusef's family arrive at Ellis Island?
-  In this story, Ellis Island is home to many interesting animals, including a rat named Esmeralda Delilah the Third. Esmeralda tells Minsha that "family is everywhere." Describe Esmeralda and the relationship she shares with Minsha on Ellis Island. How do the two animals become a kind of family? What does family mean to you? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3**
-  Not all animals on Ellis Island behave as a family. Which animal is determined to make life hard for Minsha? Why do you think the animal acts this way? Describe the difficulties Minsha suffers from this less-than-friendly animal. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3**

-  Minsha witnesses how newcomers to America are processed in the Registry Room on Ellis Island. Compare Yusef’s family’s experience to Mr. Khoury’s experience with the inspectors in the Registry Room. How do Mr. Khoury’s difficulties lead to problems for Yusef and his family?
-  Minsha desperately wants to be reunited with Leila. What is Minsha’s dilemma when thinking about leaving the island? What does Minsha’s response to the dilemma reveal about her character? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3**
-  Even though Minsha and Yusef do not speak the same language, they find a way to communicate with one another. How is this special form of communication useful when the two try to get off Ellis Island? What role does Henrietta the cat play in Minsha’s and Yusef’s escape?
-  What alarming discovery does Minsha make when she bumps into Tom’s coat as he captures her? What impact does this have on her situation?
-  How do Leila’s words about family and not leaving anyone behind, and Esmeralda’s phrase, “family is everywhere,” affect Minsha’s actions in the room where Yusef is captured with the inspectors and Dr. Rose? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2**
-  How do Minsha’s feelings change toward Dr. Rose? What is revealed about Dr. Rose’s past that may have helped change Minsha’s feelings about her? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3**
-  When the inspectors have Minsha locked inside a cabinet, how do you think Minsha feels when Yusef describes her as *his* dog? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3**
-  What is the “kissing post” at Ellis Island? Who do Yusef and Minsha see near the kissing post the morning after the incident with the inspectors and Dr. Rose? Describe how the characters are feeling at this point in the story. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3**
-  What dilemma does Minsha face once she and Yusef’s family are settled into their new life in Little Syria in New York City? How is the solution to this problem in keeping with the theme of family in the story? **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2**



The discussion questions, activities, and worksheets in this guide were created by Leigh Courtney, Ph.D. She teaches in the Global Education program at a public elementary school in San Diego, California. She holds both master’s and doctoral degrees in education, with an emphasis on curriculum and instruction.

# ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

## Family First

Family is an important theme in *Minsha's Night on Ellis Island*. Read the character quotes below that relate to family. Choose one that speaks to a time or situation in your life and write a personal narrative about how your experience reflects the meaning of the quote. Keep in mind that “family” means anyone in your life who is important to you.

- Mr. Khoury: “A journey like this makes everyone who takes it family. We stick together.”
- Leila: “We’re family! We stick together and help each other! We don’t leave anyone behind.”
- Esmeralda: “They’re all family to me. You know how it is—family is everywhere.”

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.1.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.2.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3**

## Inspiring Women

A suspicious cough could keep an Ellis Island immigrant from staying in America. Those who did not pass a health inspection were marked with chalk on their clothing and separated from the other immigrants. Thankfully, there was a modern hospital and many caring doctors on Ellis Island. The character of Dr. Rose in *Minsha's Night on Ellis Island* was inspired by two real-life female doctors who worked at Ellis Island: Dr. Rose Bebb and Dr. Rose Faughnan. Choose one of these two remarkable women to research. How did she come to work at Ellis Island? What diseases did she treat? Compile your research into a short informational report. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.1.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.2.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.2**

## Readers' Theater

As a small group, select a chapter from *Minsha's Night on Ellis Island* to retell in the form of a readers' theater. Work together to identify the main ideas and events in your selected chapter. Incorporate these key points as you create your script. Will you have a narrator to tell parts of the story? Which characters will have lines to speak? Write your script in play form. Make copies of the script for all group members, assign parts, and practice saying the lines. Finally, perform your readers' theater script for the rest of your class. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3.A; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3.B; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3.A; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3.B**

## Lady Liberty

Yusef and his family were excited to see the Statue of Liberty as their steamship entered New York harbor. “The New Colossus,” a poem written by American Emma Lazarus, appears on a plaque at the base of the giant statue. Two lines in the last portion of Lazarus’ poem hold great significance for many immigrants:

*Give me your tired, your poor,*

*Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free*

Work as a class to create a mural featuring these two lines of Lazarus’ poem and the experiences of immigrants coming to America. Find scenes in *Minsha's Night on Ellis Island* that symbolize these stirring words. Draw, color, and paint the selected scenes to illustrate the promise of a new life in America for many immigrants. Display your mural in your classroom. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.7; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.7; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.7; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.7**

Names: \_\_\_\_\_

# WHAT TO PACK?



When they traveled to America, Teta brought a sample of her exquisite embroidery and Mr. Khoury brought a beautiful necklace of silver coins. If you were an immigrant moving to America in 1921, what would you bring and why? Meet in a small group to brainstorm what your group might pack into a single suitcase. Record a list of items and reasons why your group selected them. Share and compare your lists with another group.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.1.8; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.2.8; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.8; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.8

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# ENTRANCE INTERVIEW



Each immigrant who passed through Ellis Island had to answer a set of 29 questions before they could be approved to live in America. Pretend that you are a character from the story. Imagine how this character might answer eight of these required questions. Use information from the story to help you write answers based on your character. Why might some of these questions be difficult to answer? How would you feel being interviewed at Ellis Island?

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1

1. What is your name?

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2. What country are you from?

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3. Have you been to America before? If so, when, where, and for how long?

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4. Are you meeting a relative here in America?

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5. What is the condition of your health?

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6. What color are your eyes and hair?

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7. Are you able to read and write?

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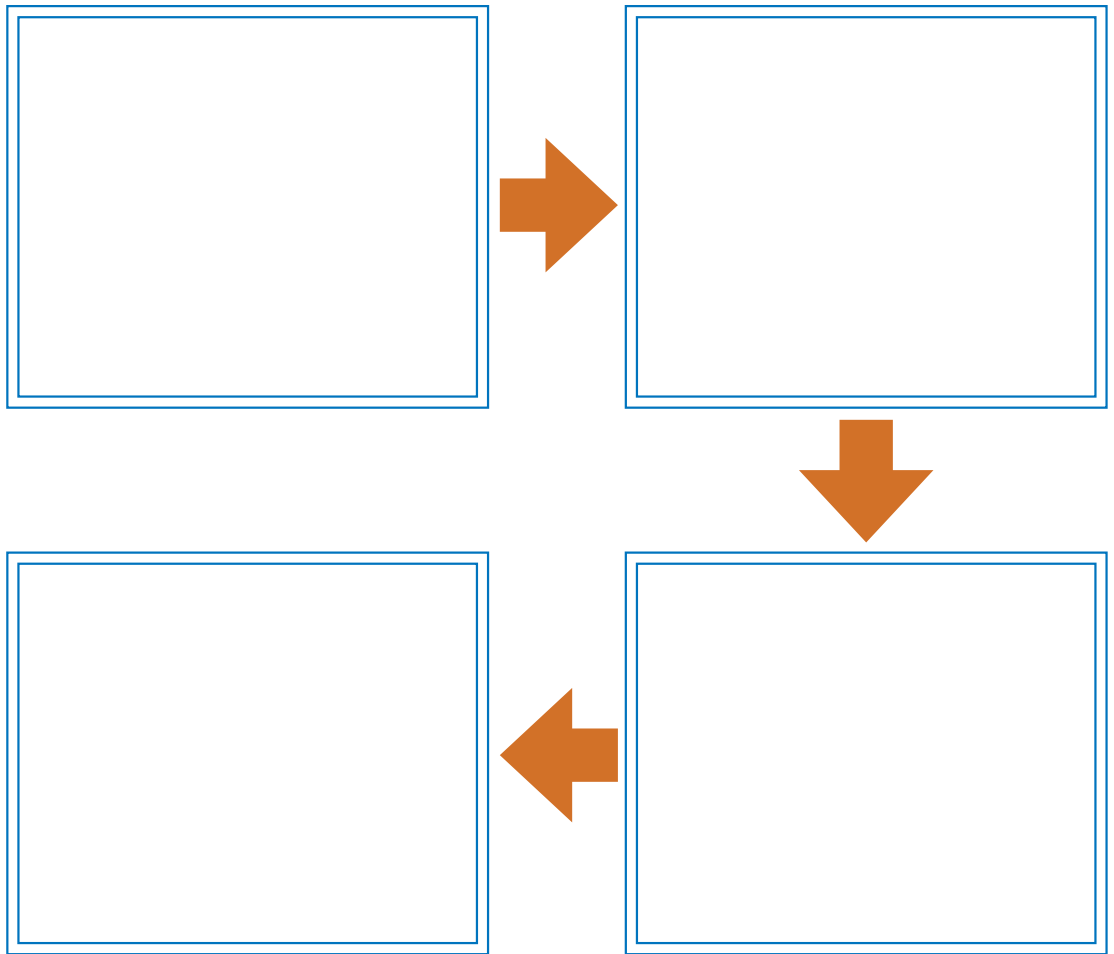
8. What is your final destination in America?

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# STEPS TO PASS THROUGH ELLIS ISLAND

While the sea voyage to America could be lengthy and challenging, the immigrants' difficulties did not end once they reached Ellis Island. Every immigrant had to go through a process to determine if she or he could stay in America. Look at the facts below that outline the steps Ellis Island immigrants had to take to gain entry to the United States. Cut out each fact and determine the correct order of the steps before gluing the boxes in the graphic organizer.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1**



Next, immigrants had a 2-3 minute interview with an inspector.

First, immigrants coming through Ellis Island were given a brief exam by a doctor.

With a landing card, immigrants could board ferries to New York or New Jersey.

If immigrants passed the doctor's exam and the interview, they got a landing card.

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

# CHARACTER SCRAMBLE

Unscramble the letters to reveal characters from *Minsha's Night on Ellis Island*.

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Take the letters within the circles and unscramble them to reveal a primary theme in *Minsha's Night on Ellis Island*.

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