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Promises and Compromises: A Historical Inquiry for Middle School Students on Swedish Immigration

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Promises and Compromises: What was it like to be a Swedish immigrant in the Midwest in the late 1800s and early 1900s?



Source: Beijmom, Ulf (2003). Images of Swedish-America. Emigrant Institute Friendship Society, No. 10., p. 88.

Supporting Questions

1. Why did people leave Sweden and settle in the Midwest?
2. How did they make a living once they arrived?
3. What challenges did they face? What opportunities did they encounter?

Inquiry Design Model (IDM) Blueprint™

Compelling Question	Promises and Compromises: What was it like to be a Swedish immigrant in the Midwest in the late 1800s and early 1900s?		
Standards and Practices	<p>SS.6-8.IS.5.MC. Develop claims and counterclaims using evidence from credible sources while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both.</p> <p>SS.6-8.IS.6.LC. Construct arguments using claims and evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging the arguments' strengths and limitations.</p> <p>SS.6-8.H.2.MdC. Analyze and compare multiple factors that influenced the perspectives of multiple groups of people during different historical eras relevant to the cultural groups.</p>		
Staging the Question	Introduce the inquiry with this quote from James J. Hill, "Give me Swedes, snuff and whiskey, and I'll build a railroad to Hell!" and the picture from the first page of this inquiry. Discuss: What do these two sources tell us about Swedish immigration to the United States? What clues point to when Swedish immigrants came and why? And, what was their experience like?		
Supporting Question 1	Supporting Question 2	Supporting Question 3	
Why did people leave Sweden and settle in the Midwest?	How did they make a living once they arrived?	What challenges did they face? What opportunities did they encounter?	
Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	
An annotated "push/pull" chart	A primary source gallery walk activity	Promises/compromises t-chart	
Featured Sources	Featured Sources	Featured Sources	
<p>Source A: A letter from a Swedish immigrant to Iowa</p> <p>Source B: A poem depicting life in the United States</p> <p>Source C: The Homestead Act of 1862</p> <p>Source D: Advertisement posted in Swedish newspapers by an emigration company</p>	Source A: Eight images depicting various jobs held by Swedish immigrants	Source A: Letters reflecting on memories of growing up as a Swedish immigrant	

Summative Performance Task	Argument	Drawing from a variety of historical sources, explain how America was the Promised Land, a land of compromise, or both, for Swedish immigrants.
	Extension	While engaged in this inquiry, students will be encouraged to develop a question of interest for their own inquiry project that they could pursue using the archival materials at the Swenson Swedish Immigration Center, those available at the school library or other local library, or those available online, such as digitized newspapers.
Taking Informed Action	Have the students share the results of their own inquiries with the Swenson Swedish Immigration Center.	

Overview

Inquiry Description

This inquiry explores the experiences of Swedish immigrants in the United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s. During this time approximately 1.3 million Swedes left their homeland to settle in the United States. Many ended up in the Upper Midwestern states of Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota. According to the 1910 Census, approximately 12% of the population of Minnesota were Swedish American and Chicago had the second largest Swedish population of any city in the world, including Sweden. By analyzing a variety of primary sources this inquiry provides different perspectives on why they immigrated and what it was like to be a Swedish immigrant. The title of the inquiry alludes to the well-known idea that America was and continues to be the “Promised Land” for immigrants seeking to make new lives in a new country, but, immigration also involves giving things up and adjusting to new conditions, in other words, compromises.

The staging question for the inquiry is designed to get students thinking about the importance of immigration for meeting the demands of labor in the United States by presenting them with a provocative quote by the great railroad baron James J. Hill and as well as an image of Swedish immigrants working on the railroad. The first lesson relies on a combination of different sources to help students identify and evaluate the various factors that led to Swedish immigration, including a letter written by a Swedish immigrant, an advertisement from a Swedish newspaper, the Homestead Act of 1862, and a poem about life in the United States. Using these sources, students identify the factors that led Swedes to immigrate to the United States and then evaluate which source they think would be the most influential.

The second lesson is a gallery walk designed to highlight the wide variety of jobs filled by Swedish immigrants once they arrived. Each stop in the gallery walk will include an image and a short excerpt from a letter, diary, or memoir highlighting a different job. A photo analysis worksheet adapted from the Smithsonian will be used to assist students in their analysis.

The final lesson is focused on the promises and compromises faced by Swedes as they immigrated and experienced life in the United States. By examining a variety of letters from the time period students will appreciate the complexity of the Swedish immigrant experience and in

doing so make connections to the experiences of immigrants and refugees today. A t-chart categorizing the promises/compromises will be created by the students. They will also be led in a discussion of the strengths and limitations of sources that were written at different times.

The summative performance assessment for this inquiry asks students to reflect on the lessons and the sources used in order to make an argument summarizing the Swedish immigrant experience. Ideally, students will recognize the complexity of the experience and be able to appreciate the value of using a variety of different historical sources to understand and to make an informed, well-supported historical argument. It is hoped that students will also develop their own questions as they engage with the questions and sources during this inquiry and that they will conduct their own research using local research centers such as the Swenson Swedish Immigration Center.

Lesson 1 Sources and Materials

Source A: Letters from early settlers were often printed in newspapers in Sweden and likely influenced the decision to emigrate. This letter, written by Peter Cassel in 1846, is a good example. Cassel and a group of twenty one relatives and neighbors established a settlement in southeastern Iowa near Burlington.

Post Office, Jefferson County, Iowa Territory,
United States of America, February 9, 1846

Friends and Countrymen:

In accordance with our promise on our departure from Sweden we are sending you a few lines to tell you how and where we are situated at present. After a fortunate voyage of eight weeks between Gothenburg and New York we arrived at this place the 16th of last August. We are under heavy obligations to Captain Nissen for the promptitude with which he satisfied our desires and the attentiveness with which he always ministered to our welfare and needs. We also had the pleasure of hearing him expound the Word of God in rich measure, not only at the regular morning worship every Sunday but also with a reverent prayer every morning.

From a complete map showing all the land that was offered for sale, which we obtained in New York, we learned that the best land in Wisconsin had already been taken, and accordingly we decided to settle in Iowa. This territory borders on Missouri to the south and on Illinois

to the east and is reputed to be the best of the hitherto unsold lands. It has an abundance of water power, contains metals, marble, and several other natural resources, and only a very small part of this extensive territory is settled.

After a sojourn of eight days in New York we embarked on our journey with Burlington, the capital of Iowa, located about thirty-three Swedish miles⁵ from St. Louis on the Mississippi River, our first destination. At New York we met many Swedes who reside there; and these countrymen showed us many favors and much kindness. The long journey from New York to Burlington, which is made by steam power over land as well as by water, cost us twelve dollars per person. It should be noted that children under three ride free. In each case provisions are not included. Among the larger cities we passed were Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and St. Louis. The first named is the most beautiful city in America and probably one of the most beautiful in the whole world. On the journey we could eat as much fruit as we desired, including grapes, which grow wild in great abundance.

We had made a sort of agreement with a Mr. B. of Stockholm, who was in our company on the journey to Iowa and was in better financial circumstances than we, that he was to purchase land for all of us. We promised to reimburse him as soon as we were able. Accordingly he bought four hundred *tunnland* situated about six and one-half Swedish miles from Burlington from a man in this city for two dollars per *tunnland*⁶ on credit and with interest. We immediately went to view the land. After a short time, when it became evident that we could not possibly make a deal with Mr. B., we decided to leave him. We had no difficulty in securing employment and lodging in the neighborhood.

For the present we are in Iowa Territory, Jefferson County, near Skunk River, a Swedish mile and a half from Mount Pleasant, about 42° north latitude. We have everything we need and feel secure for the future. Our plan is to found a Swedish colony about twenty-three and a half Swedish miles west of here, where the government has recently acquired land from the Indians. Each family can take a claim of three hundred and twenty *tunnland*, and when the time for payment comes, which is usually four years later, as much thereof as desired can be purchased at \$1.25 per *tunnland*, the remainder reverting to the government. Two educated countrymen from Västergötland, whose longer residence in the country has made them thoroughly familiar with con-

ditions and in whom we have the highest confidence, have associated themselves with us and we have taken a common claim to one thousand *tunnland* of the aforementioned land, whose fertility and excellent location on the navigable Des Moines River is not excelled by any tract in the entire state of Iowa. Next month some of us will go there, the others remaining here another year, since we are getting along reasonably well and have most excellent neighbors.⁷

The ease of making a living here and the increasing prosperity of the farmers, year by year and day by day, exceeds anything we anticipated. If only half of the work expended on the soil in the fatherland were utilized here, the yield would reach the wildest imagination; but the American farmer, content with enough to give him a living and comfort, confines himself to plowing, planting, and harvesting. Timbered land is broken with a yoke of oxen, the expense being \$1.50 per *tunnland*. The hard prairie requires four yoke of oxen at \$3.50 per *tunnland*. There is not a single stone on the surface but small hills almost in every case contain at a depth of four or five feet limestone and sandstone, so there is never a lack of stone for building purposes. Coal is found nearly everywhere along rivers and creeks. A yoke of oxen is worth from twenty-five to thirty-five dollars and a cow ten to twelve dollars.

Barns and cattle sheds are seldom, if ever, seen in this vicinity; livestock is allowed to roam the year around, and since pasturage is common property, extending from one end of the land to the other, a person can own as much livestock as he desires or can take care of, without the least trouble or expense. Every morning or evening the cattle are fed corn or oats, in order that they may become attached to the place. Hogs thrive and increase very fast. One of our neighbors, who has farmed only four years, has one hundred head of hogs, raised on his farm. Their food consists largely of acorns, a product that is so abundant that as late as February the ground is covered in places. This winter pork is worth four *rdr banko* per *lispund*.⁸ All crops thrive and grow to an astonishing degree. Cornfields are more like woods than grain fields. Ordinarily corn grows to a height of from ten to twelve feet, and a special kind of ax is used to cut it. A bushel of seed corn yields as high as seven hundred bushels, and the ears are so large that a single one makes about a *kvarter*.⁹ We have counted from one thousand to fourteen hundred grains in an ear. Since corn must be planted

thin, various things are planted between the hills—cucumbers, beans, melons, and pumpkins. The last named grow so large that a single one makes a meal. There are several varieties and they are quite good. From them can be made ale, syrup, and several other products. I have seen hemp, but I do not know what it is used for, because it is so coarse. I measured a hemp fiber which was thirteen and a half inches long and at the root two inches in diameter.

Game of many kinds—geese, turkeys, pheasants, etc., etc.—is abundant. All domestic animals in Sweden are in use here, and in general they are large, especially sheep. Cows yield milk generously and on the average milk from a single cow makes at least five *skålpund*¹⁰ of butter per week. A day's wages is equivalent to two bushels of cornmeal (about one Swedish *halftunna*).¹¹ Last October for fourteen days' work I received twenty-two Swedish *lispund* of finely ground wheat flour. We have raised and threshed buckwheat on half shares, including food. It is to be noted that nobody furnishes his own food when he works for others. The Americans have unusually good food. Skilled laborers are well paid. A tanner gets half of the leather he prepares. In this vicinity a tanner ought to do well, but I do not think leather is tanned by the method used in Sweden. A carpenter is paid eight dollars for making a bed—four days' work. A farm wagon costs from one hundred to one hundred and thirty dollars. This is a heavy wagon with large wheels. The necessary iron costs only sixteen dollars, so you can judge how good wages are. I do not think it would be profitable for an artisan who confines himself to carpentry to come here, because the Americans probably excel all other people at this trade, and there is an abundance of carpenters in all parts of the country.¹²

Emigrants ought not to bring implements with them, because this country has perhaps the best implements in the world. They are made of cast steel and are not very expensive, but of excellent quality. Moreover, it does not pay to transport from New York to the remote western states more effects than is absolutely necessary. Each passenger on a steamboat is allowed five *lispund* of baggage free of charge, but on canal boats and on railways only two and a half *lispund*. Excess charges are so high that they eat up the value of the article.

If any of you decide to join us, we will be at your service, as far as we are able, until you reach your destination. We will plant our own little Sweden. If you will notify us in advance with reference to your

departure from Sweden and the approximate time of your arrival at New York, one of us will meet you in that city and guide you the entire way out here. A *bonde* with a wife and two children ought not to emigrate unless he has at least one thousand *riksdaler riksgälds*,¹³ because after paying all the expenses of the journey he will have scarcely enough money left to purchase necessary livestock and a few household necessities; but with this sum and good ability to work he can undertake the journey with confidence and with the assurance that a hopeful future awaits him and his children.

Freedom and equality are the fundamental principles of the Constitution of the United States. There is no such thing as class distinction here, no counts, barons, lords, or lordly estates. The one is as good as another, and everyone lives in the unrestricted enjoyment of personal liberty. A Swedish *bonde*, raised under oppression and accustomed to poverty and want, here finds himself elevated to a new world, as it were, where all his former hazy ideas of a society conforming more closely to nature's laws are suddenly made real and he enjoys a satisfaction in life that he has never before experienced. There are no beggars here and there never can be so long as the people are ruled by the spirit that prevails now. I have yet to see a lock on a door in this neighborhood. When people leave their houses everything is left unlocked, even though they expect to be away several days, yes, even months. Their houses can be entered by anybody, but I have never heard of theft.

As regards the language, we are getting along quite well. Our children attend school. The population of Iowa is composed for the most part of Americans and some Germans. The Americans are extremely good and friendly, but the Germans are more industrious. The Americans compete with one another in helping the needy. If a person does not make his wants known, they come of their own accord to those they think are in need of assistance and inquire if they can be of service; but everybody in good health who is able and willing to work gets along by his own efforts.

At this time of the year the sap of the sugar maple is running and we have made much sugar and syrup; we are still engaged in this. Here grain is stored in a building roofed and lined with straw to prevent the grain from leaking through. In December we had fairly cold weather; I guessed the temperature was from twelve to sixteen degrees.¹⁴ From

Christmas on, however, the weather has been pleasant, and now in February everybody has the doors open all day.

Space forbids me to write any more, although I have much more to tell you. We hope we will soon receive a few lines in reply to this long letter. May God be with you and may He grant you good fortune and success in all honorable and useful undertakings is the wish of your honorable and upright friends across the ocean.

Peter Cassel

Citation: George M. Stephenson, trans. and ed., "Documents Relating to Peter Cassel and the Settlement at New Sweden," Swedish American Historical Bulletin 2, no. 1 (1929): 55-62. (Accessed in Barton, H. Arnold. (1975). Letters from the Promised Land: Swedes in America, 1840-1914. University of Minnesota Press, p. 28-33.)

Source B: Poems or "American ballads," such as this one recalled by a sailor in 1900 also helped reinforce the idea of America as a land of opportunity.

Brothers, we have far to go,
Across the salty water,
And then there is America,
Upon the other shore.
Surely it's not possible?
Oh yes, it's so delightful!
Pity that America,
Pity that America
Must lie so far away.

The trees that grow there in the land,
Sweet they are, as sugar,
The country there is filled with girls,
Lovely little dolls.

And if you would like one of them,
You right away have four or five,
Out there in the fields
There grows English money.

Ducks and chickens come raining down,
Roasted geese, and others yet
Fly onto the table,
With knife and fork stuck in 'em.

The sun, it never does go down,
Or go out for each of us,
Here is gaiety and song,
Cellars filled with fine champagne.
Surely it's not possible?
Oh yes, it's so delightful!
Pity that America,
Pity that America
Must lie so far away.

Citation: [August Bondesson], August Bondessons visbok, 2 vols. (Stockholm, 1903), 2:231-32. (Accessed in Barton, H. Arnold. (1975). Letters from the Promised Land: Swedes in America, 1840-1914. University of Minnesota Press, p. 34.)

Source C: News of the opening of land in the western United States to settlement as a result of the Homestead Act of 1862 also spurred "land fever" in places like Sweden. It stated that any adult citizen, who had never taken up arms against the U.S. government could lay claim to 160 acres of government land, provided that they "improved" their plot by settling on it and farming.

The actual text of the Homestead Act of 1862 along with a transcript can be found here: [Homestead Act of 1862](#) and transcript of the document can be found here: [Homestead Act of 1862 transcript](#).

Citation: Act of May 20, 1862 (Homestead Act), Public Law 37-64 (12 STAT 392); 5/20/1862; Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, 1789 - 2011; General Records of the United States Government, Record Group 11; National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

Source D: To facilitate and encourage the immigration process businesses posted advertisements in newspapers in Sweden, such as this one. (Note: Google Translate is a good tool to convert the document into English).

Hurrah för Kansas!

Fri Resa!

till

KANSAS

Vid Synodalmötets Slut

För hvar och en som köper en
"quart" land i det nya svenska
settlementet i

MEADE COUNTY, KANSAS,
och "half-fare" för hvar och en
som följer med, antingen han
köper land eller ej.

Meade County har de berömda Artesiska
brunnarne på från 50 till 150 fots djup.

Meade County uppför nu en af de största
sockerfabrikerna i hela Kansas. Flera
skola följa nästa år.

Endast 160 mil från de blomstrande kolo-
nierna i McPherson County (Lindsborg,
New Gottland).

Landet billigt, vilkoren goda. Passen
nu på!

J. E. GUSTUS,
J. A. WESTERLUND,
Agenter.

Citation: Pamphlet "Förslag till Reglemente för upprättandet af en Coloni i Staten Californien och de Förenade Nord-Amerikanska Staterna [Suggestions for regulations for the establishment of a colony in the State of California and the Northern States of the United States], L. Marcus, 1849. With advertisement "Hurrah för Kansas! Fri Resa till Kansas! [Hooray for Kansas, free travel to Kansas for those who purchased land, Meade County, Augustana Synod]

Source Analysis Worksheet

Review the four documents and identify the factors that led to people leaving Swede and how believable you think they would be if you were considering emigrating from Sweden.

Document	Reasons to migrate (use quotes from the source)	Is the source believable? If you were considering emigrating, would you be influenced by it? Why or why not.
Letter		
Poem		
Homestead Act		
Newspaper Advertisement		

Rank the sources from the most believable or influential to the least. Explain your reasons.

Lesson 2 Sources and Materials

Source A: Images depicting various jobs held by Swedi



sh immigrants. (Note: do not include the citations when the students are analyzing the images. Let them make their own inferences).

1.

This photograph captures life on a farm in Jupiter Township, Kittson County, Minnesota in the fall of 1901. A steam engine used for threshing is seen in the foreground. (Accessed in: Beijmom, Ulf (2003). Images of Swedish-America. Emigrant Institute Friendship Society, No. 10., p. 19.)

2.



The interior of one of the many Swedish-owned grocery stores in Minneapolis, MN from around 1900. (Accessed in: Beijmom, Ulf (2003). Images of Swedish-America. Emigrant Institute Friendship Society, No. 10., p. 54.)

3.



Anders Gustaf Malmberg's shoe shop in Austin, Texas. Malmberg immigrated to Texas in 1894 from Hakarp in Jönköping County, Sweden with his wife and six children. One of his sons, Eric, is on the right. (Accessed in: Beijmom, Ulf (2003). Images of Swedish-America. Emigrant Institute Friendship Society, No. 10., p. 65.)

4.



“Lumbering in Minnesota about 1895.” In the old growth forests of Minnesota there were trees that could be dated all the way back to Columbus. (Accessed in: Beijmom, Ulf (2003). Images of Swedish-America. Emigrant Institute Friendship Society, No. 10., p. 72.)

5.



Hilma Gustavson immigrated to Chicago from Växjö, Sweden. Like many young Swedish women settling in cities, she became a maid. Swedish maids were much in demand, particularly in the homes of wealthy families. This picture is likely from around 1924. (Accessed in: Beijmom, Ulf (2003). Images of Swedish-America. Emigrant Institute Friendship Society, No. 10., p. 74.)

6.



A lumberyard in the Rocky Mountains, circa 1910. (Accessed in: Beijmom, Ulf (2003). Images of Swedish-America. Emigrant Institute Friendship Society, No. 10., p. 90.)

7.



A Swedish woman mining for gold in Nome, Alaska. The Klondike gold rush attracted over 100,000 people to western Canada and Alaska starting in the fall of 1897. Most of the gold miners were men, but, as you can see from this photograph, women also joined in the search. (Accessed in: Beijmom, Ulf (2003). Images of Swedish-America. Emigrant Institute Friendship Society, No. 10., p. 115.)

8.



Many immigrants found work in factories. This image is of the Dunlop Tire Factory from 1908. (Accessed in: Beijmom, Ulf (2003). Images of Swedish-America. Emigrant Institute Friendship Society, No. 10., p. 76.)

Photograph Analysis Questions (Adapted from “Engaging Students with Primary Sources,” Smithsonian, National Museum of American History)

First Impressions

What are your first impressions?

Take a closer look . . . make sure to examine the whole photograph.

Make a list of any people in the photograph.

Make a list of any activities you see going on in the photograph.

Make a list of any objects in the photograph.

Looking More Closely

What year do you think the picture was taken? Are there any clues?

What kind of clothing is being worn?

Is there any lettering on signs or buildings?

What time of year is pictured? Time of day? Cite your evidence.

Where was the photograph taken? Cite your evidence.

Thinking Further

If people are in the photograph, what do you think is their relationship to one another?

Can you speculate on the relationship of the people pictured and someone who is not in the picture?

What do you think happened just before the picture was taken?

What do you think happened just after the photograph was taken?

Who do you think took the photograph? Why?

What does this photograph suggest to you? Describe your reaction in a statement.

What questions do you have about the photograph? How could you try to answer them?

What is the one thing that you would remember most about this photograph? Why?

What questions do you have about the photograph that you cannot answer through analyzing it? Where could you go next to answer these questions?

Lesson 3 Sources and Materials

Swedish immigrants faced many challenges as they left what was familiar to them for a new life in the United States. The following letters depict both the hardships and opportunities faced by Swedish immigrants.

Letter written by Carl Johan and Fredrik Bergman, New York, 1879. Citation: Otto Robert Landelius, ed., *Amerikabreven* (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1957), 33-34. (Accessed in Barton, H. Arnold. (1975). *Letters from the Promised Land: Swedes in America, 1840-1914*. University of Minnesota Press, p. 179-180.)

Dear Sisters,

A third letter to you and still no answer to any of them, but it is possible they did not reach you. I don't have anything to write about except what I wrote about in the other letters. Whether you have gotten them I don't know. We have our health and are feeling quite well, but earnings are quite small the first year. We can hardly earn enough for food, so our pocketbooks are not bursting you may be sure. I put my pocketbook under my pillow every night, for if thieves come then I don't have to be afraid; there are a lot of thieves. Here they murder people almost in broad daylight. There have been two murders since we came here, one on the same street where we live, and here they hang people who have done something wrong. Here there is also a fire every day so it is nothing unusual. The other day some Swedes came here where we are living in the boardinghouse. They had come on a boat that belonged to the North German Line. The boat began to burn when they came out to the middle of the ocean it was terrible, cries of distress were heard from all sides. It began burning at eight in the evening, at four in the morning the fire was put out. The captain on the vessel passed out; the fire had been started by an infernal machine someone had packed among silk goods to get high insurance. How little a human life is valued here. It is dreadful; in good old Sweden you know of nothing but good. Here you cannot enjoy life, people don't know what that means here, to earn money is their pleasure. It is still so very warm here. It is not as warm in Sweden at Midsummer when there is a warm year, but you have to get used to everything. In this country the womenfolk are masters over the men. You don't even dare look at a women for fear of being reported to the police. But here live

very fine folk. Here you can see big houses that are ten stories high. The railway goes above the city so there is so much noise. Now I want to ask how you have it there at home in Sweden. Is Algot Cederholm's store still open? Write soon, it is so sad to wait a long time for letters. Once a month we will write to each other. It is such fun to be able to write to you, but the worst thing is postage money, but I can surely borrow it. . . .

Karl and Fredrik

Letter written by Emma Blom, Minnesota, 1915. Citation: Widén, Amerikaemigrationen i dokument, 56. (Accessed in Barton, H. Arnold. (1975). Letters from the Promised Land: Swedes in America, 1840-1914. University of Minnesota Press, p. 300-301.)

18 May 1915

It has been a hard winter for me as long as the children were going to school. I had five children to have ready, off to school, and two at home, all of them so young and difficult, all under nine years old. But I am glad that they have gotten a good start with reading, although it cannot be so much in one winter. The children began school on 8 September and they went every day until 30 April and will begin again in September. Three of our children will go then, this winter only Mikael and Jenny went, but we had three for other people. You want to know if they are reading English. Yes, I must say in all truth that English is just as usual for us as Swedish is in Frostviken. It comes just as easily for our children to read English as it does for Agda to read Swedish. But we are thinking of teaching them Swedish ourselves. Mikael can read a little Swedish. We are near to the school, only five minutes' walk, it is right beyond our pasture. Here in this country the children never receive any Christian instruction in the public schools. The Bible is strictly forbidden in school, because there are so many kinds of people and so many doctrines. The parents must take care of that themselves. Around here they are mostly Catholics. Our children

have gone to Sunday school every Sunday for a long time now, to a pastor, and we are teaching them to read the Bible ourselves. We have books and newspapers of all kinds in both languages and when they have learned everything they are to learn in English, we are thinking of sending them to a Swedish-speaking Lutheran pastor for a winter for confirmation instruction. There are many people in this country who never let their children go to communion school but all our children will go. . . .

Letter from Mary Stephenson, Mt. Pleasant Iowa, 1868. Citation: Stephenson, "Typical America Letters," 91-93. (Accessed in Barton, H. Arnold. (1975). Letters from the Promised Land: Swedes in America, 1840-1914. University of Minnesota Press, p. 136-138.)

Mount Pleasant, Iowa, June or July 1868

Dear parents, brothers, and sisters:

The peace of God be with you!

We send greetings to you all. Oliver has just finished writing his letter, and since he did not have space to write everything he intended, I will add this supplement.

Dear Brother-in-law Carl and Sister Johanna, you ask how you can put your money to the best advantage. You cannot buy a farm, because land is too high priced, but you can get a start by renting a farm. Renters get ahead much faster here than in Sweden. Those who want to own land go farther west, where the land is free. If you settle in this community, however, you can soon get started by buying colts and calves and harvesting fodder. Livestock develops rapidly, and it will not be long before you can realize on them. Oliver says he will help you all he can. You will not regret coming here if you do not encounter misfortunes—and misfortunes are met with in every country.

Day laborers are able to save money here—an impossibility in Sweden. I know of many who own farms who didn't even have gruel in Sweden. I am reminded of Jonas Peter, whose possessions on his arrival consisted only of his clothing. Now if his property were converted into money he could buy a good estate in Sweden, and this in spite of the fact that he married a poor girl, suffered misfortunes, and had no one to help him. But he is industrious and has a good wife. There are many similar cases. A housekeeper has few worries, because food is so plentiful. There is no necessity for begging.

A few weeks ago seventeen emigrants from Nydala parish arrived and made their headquarters with us. We housed and fed them, as they had no relatives or acquaintances. One family is still with us. The husband has been engaged to work two months for an American for twenty dollars per month, his wife and two children staying with us. She assists me in various ways. People are arriving from Sweden and from other countries and sections in large numbers; but do not worry over the danger of overpopulation, as Iowa is as large as Sweden and only half settled.¹⁵ Then think of the other states! People come and go constantly.

I want to warn you that the voyage is trying, and some become seasick. I escaped that. Now, however, the voyage is so brief that it is a pleasure trip compared to what it was in former days. The sooner you come the better.

Addressing Sven and Christine, let me say that, accustomed as you are to the ways of Sweden, I doubt that you would be satisfied here, unable to understand the language of the country. But you would do well by your children, and Christine would no doubt have things better.

Now a few words with my parents. We are glad to know America is in your thoughts, but I am sorry that Mother is so reluctant. One of you will have to yield, and that of course will be difficult. But whatever you do, don't separate; if Father came without Mother, he would be so lonesome that he would see the dark side of everything and finally return. An old man who left his wife in Sweden came with Peter Gustaf. In this community there is a lonesome and dissatisfied man, making his home with his son, who left his wife, who in spite of the most urgent letters refuses to join him. He cannot return to her because they lived unhappily and had little in common. I advise you to come together, and I believe you will spend a happy old age here.

It may be that you are afraid we will expect some recompense from you, but that has never entered our minds. Don't let that worry you. If in the providence of God sickness should come upon you, we will perform our duty as your children and care for you. It is doubtful if Sven and Christine will stay at Bredagård until your days are ended. If you think it desirable, you might rent your farm and order the money sent to America in case you need it. But you know what is best, and it is hardly necessary to lay plans a hundred years ahead. I am sure that you will get along better here; you will not have to grind and cook and bake. Weigh the matter carefully. I am sorry for Mother if she is persuaded to go against her will. If Johanna is in the party, she can be of assistance in case of need. I hope what I have written will be taken in the right spirit. I do not want to take the responsibility of causing you to undertake something for which you will be sorry.

Our son thanks his grandfather for the present . . . and I thank you for the yarn. Our little daughter is the best baby I have ever seen. She is growing fast and, although only five months old, sits alone. I have a great deal of work, but my health remains good. We get ten gallons of

milk from four cows. We sold a cow two weeks ago. I got over thirty pounds of wool this year.

I close with greetings to all. Write soon, and we will reply immediately.

Mary Helena Stephenson

Letter from a pioneer pastor in Minnesota, 1861. Citation: Albin Widén, *Vår sista folkvandring* (Stockholm, 1962), p. 54. (Accessed in Barton, H. Arnold. (1975). *Letters from the Promised Land: Swedes in America, 1840-1914*. University of Minnesota Press, p. 92-93.)

. . . There are many wrong ideas among you there at home. Some believe that if they could only come to America they would live like lords and in a few years become well-off, even rich; but they deceive themselves for one has to work hard and sweat for what he gets here. Others, meanwhile, find too much fault with this country, and since they have heard that it has gone badly for some one or another who has come here, they believe that want and misery must be everyone's lot. That is also wrong. Say what you will about America, one thing is certain, and that is that those who wish to and can work can escape from want; for work and earnings for both men and women are not lacking here. The Swedes in this area are not prosperous; but this is not to be wondered at; for when they came a few years ago, there was complete wilderness here and you surely know that new land cannot be broken, fenced, and made into fertile fields quickly, nor buildings put up for themselves and their livestock; and therefore it is not surprising that we still have very poor houses and that things are far from what we

would wish; but they get better each year, so that some already have quite comfortable homes. . . .

Letter Jigsaw Activity

Students will be divided into small groups and assigned one of the letters. They will read their assigned letter and complete a t-chart identifying the promises or opportunities they encountered and the challenges or compromises encountered. For their letter each group will also evaluate the credibility of the source. One member from each of the original groups will then form a new group to share the results of their document analysis.