European immigration to the USA (19th and early 20th C.)

Introduction:

http://histoireetcivilisation.com/2013/02/17/men-at-lunch/

Charles C. Ebbets, Lunchtime atop a Skyscraper, 1932

Word box:
- Girder: poutre métallique.
- Pulley: poulie
- Frame: structure
- To be on lunch break
- To stand out: ressortir

1. Make a presentation of the document
- It's a black and white photograph taken by Charles C. Ebbets
- The document is entitled Lunchtime atop a Skyscraper
- The date is not given, it looks pretty old
- The photo illustrates men probably workers having lunch and chatting while sitting on the beam of a skyscraper under construction

2. Describe the meaningful elements in this picture? What are these people doing?
- In the bottom-right corner there is a cable and a pulley
- In the foreground we can see a vast city, densely populated, and in the back we may notice a park
- In the middle ground we can observe workers sitting on a girder. The men stand out against the misty background. They seem to be floating in the air.

According to the title, the men on the girder are having lunch at the top of a skyscraper under construction.

3. Who might they be?
- The fact they are having lunch in such hazardous conditions, hundreds of feet above the street (!), reveals they are most likely workers involved in the construction of a skyscraper, of which only a girder reveals the existence. They may be ironworkers erecting steel and assembling the building's frame.

4. When was this picture taken? Where? Justify.
Vast urban area + skyscraper under construction + old photograph + steel frame = it probably concerns a period connected with the industrial revolution (development of new techniques of construction (steel, glass, reinforced concrete) allowing the construction of tall buildings, initiated in the USA). We can guess that the picture is from the beginning of the 20th century.

The background gives us information: it’s a vast metropolis with tall buildings as we can have in North America, the large park can be Central Park in New York.

5. Why is this picture an important document for American history?
It’s the birth of American skyscrapers, birth of a legend. US skyscrapers are the symbol of wealth, success, an expression of the American Dream for the Americans and all the asylum seekers. It's a connection between the USA and Europe: Europeans that colonized North America, fleeing Europe looking for a new life, and contributed to the construction of modern American cities as workers or as owners after becoming rich (rags-to-riches story).

Use expressions below:
The document represents/focuses on/illustrates/emphasizes...
It shows that, It reveals that
We may notice/observe that/
In the background/in the foreground...

Charles C. Ebbets, Lunchtime atop a Skyscraper, 1932
1. Case study: Men at lunch

- Seán Ó Cualáin, Men at Lunch, documentary, 75 mn, Sónta Film, September 2012

Video timing: 01'46 – 04'43

Questions:

- Séquence 1: 01'46 – 04'43
  1. Pick out elements concerning their origin, location, job ....

| Who? | - 11 ironworkers
| - bunch of regular guys
| - descendants of immigrants |
| Where? | - Iconic image of New York
| - Central park
| - 50th street |
| When? (date of the picture and economic context) | - At the height of the Great Depression
| - 1932 |
| What? (Name of the building under construction) | - “20 century’s most grandiose and unlikely building projects, the Rockefeller Centre, 14 art deco skyscrapers of which this, the RCA building, would be the tallest.” |

2. Explain the expressions « Now they are quintessential New Yorkers » and “heroic pride”

The workers are European immigrants and they are risking their lives for a day’s pay. But with their humbleness and simplicity they are building one of the US legends, the skyscrapers that are a strong part of the US identity. By this act of generosity, they are making their contribution to the creation of the US identity and in this way they are part of the US history. Thus they reached their integration in their host country. They are not just immigrants anymore they have become Americans.

- Séquence 2: 27'50 – 30'56
  3. How can Americans today relate to their story?

“(...) this picture embodies the great American immigration story. I don't think it is so much about who these men are as individuals, I think it is more who they are as a group.”

European immigrants shaped the USA’s identity and history.

4. When and why did most of the Irish leave their country?

“We think of New York as an immigrant city, that's the world image but it doesn’t become an immigrant city until the 1840s when you get this tremendous wave of immigrants coming out of Ellis Island”

“The Irish of the 1840s, the Famine Irish make this an immigrant city and they begin to pave the road, finding their way into America, working their way into America. That's gonna eventually lead to those guys on the beam, those 11 guys are the descendants spiritually and I think physically of the famine immigrants.”

5. What is Ellis Island?

It’s an island in Upper New York Bay that was formerly the principal immigration station for the United States from 1892 until 1954. Mandatory examination gateway for poor asylum seekers.

“The period is 1883 to 1925, it is one of the most breathtaking periods of immigration in the history of humankind. And 24 million people came to America in a thirty-year period, 16 to 17 million of them came through Ellis Island alone, the peak was 1907, a million and a half more, a million point seven came to New York city”: all passed through Ellis Island.

6. Are these people the expression of the “American Dream”?

“And that's why I love this photograph it's because in 70 years, this is where they've gone, from the gutters of South Street to the towers of Manhattan”: they were part of the American dream.

“They begin to pave the road, finding their way into America”: they found a place in a new society, contributed to building a symbol of the American Dream.”

- Séquence 3: 37'48 – 39'00 + 40'47 – 44'14
  7. Why is it so important to find the identity of “these guys” 80 years after?

“Replies started flooding into the post after the article was published. You know, people saying “that's my brother, that's my uncle, that's my father” and they very well could have been. So pretty soon these 11 men became 45.'

“What's remarkable to me is this deep desire to want to be part of history and as Americans we have such a short history. People wanted to lay some kind of claim to be part of what this photograph represented.”

A large number of Americans have European roots, this picture represents a part of their individual history.

8. What is the village connected with 2 of the men? Where is it?

“The trail, it seemed had gone cold, and then in 2007 a fresh lead emerged in the most unlikely of places: the West of Ireland, village of Shanaglish in county Galway.”

9. Who are Pat Glynn and Patrick O'Shaughnessy? How are they connected with two of the men?

Two of the ironworkers sitting on both ends of the beam have been identified, they were cousins

Sonny Glynn : Pat Glynn’s father
Matty O’Shaughnessy: Patrick O’Shaughnessy’s father

10. What is the evidence found on one of them?

“Your father is very easily identified by the nose, he certainly has the Shaughnessy nose.”

11. When and why did they leave Ireland?

“Family records show that Sonny Glynn & Matty O’Shaughnessy emigrated to America in the early 1920s. The Ireland they left behind was a country in turmoil still reeling from its bitter struggle for independence from Britain & 2 years of brutal civil war. For Matty, one memory of that time would never fade.”
12 - Why is this photo a major legacy for the Americans and the Irish?

Skyscrapers have always been storytellers.

“A number of groups that were dependable sources for ironworkers in New York, of course you have the Mohawk Indians, the famous Mohawk Indians who got into the work in the middle of the twentieth century and are still in it today and then there were immigrant groups primarily you had Germans, Scandinavians and of course the Irish. The Irish were always the dominant force in ironworking in New York and we don’t know a great deal about these men but we know they were Irish because when you look at the employment rolls you can see the Irish names and that was true a hundred years ago, that was true fifty years ago and it is largely true today.”

Example of Dan Barry, columnist New York Times: “It just so happens that my mother is from Shanaglish Parish. My grandfather is buried there, my grandmother is buried there.”

13 - How does this photo relate to the American dream? In your opinion did the men achieve it?

“There are certain photographs that are distinctly New York. (…) and there is this photograph and it speaks to the immigrant experience”

“Imagine being out of work just coming from a breadline and stopping on the street corner and looking up and seeing these average Joes doing those extraordinary things and these men became almost like movie stars to New Yorkers on the street”

“The ironworkers were living with two realities: one was the daily danger of his work and the other was the fact that he was a kind of a common man. Superhero.”

2. Irish immigration to the USA

● Evolution of Irish immigration

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Period 1: Between 1810 and 1860 the curve reveals a rapid/sharp growth ………., the number of Irish immigrants skyrocketed… it peaked in 1860

Period 3: After 1890 the curves shows a steady decrease

3. Reasons of European immigration to the USA during the 19th Century

The reasons why people migrate are often described as push and pull factors.

Push factors: reasons that can force people to leave their native area

Pull factors: reasons that can attract people to a new area.

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4. Conclusion - test

Use the answers and what you learnt from the documentary and write two paragraphs:

I - Irish immigration through a picture (When, why?)

II - How and why did they become part of the US contemporary history?

Two quotations that might help you:

“An American is somebody who came from somewhere else to become someone else” (Newspaper reporter, 1920)

“America is like a huge melting pot. It is here we will mix the races together to create a new person – an American” (President of the USA, Woodrow Wilson, 1915)