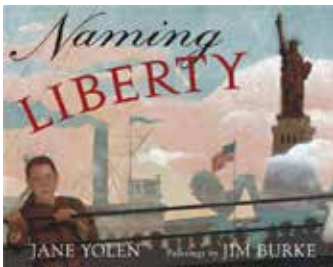


# The Statue of Liberty: Double Stories Provide Historical Perspective

Judy Britt

Standing tall in New York Harbor, the Statue of Liberty is an enduring symbol of America. Layers of historical content and symbolism are uncovered in books that tell various parts of her story. By reading one or more of these books, students can begin to see that the experience of immigration is complex—it’s not one narrative, but many that are woven together.

## Naming Liberty



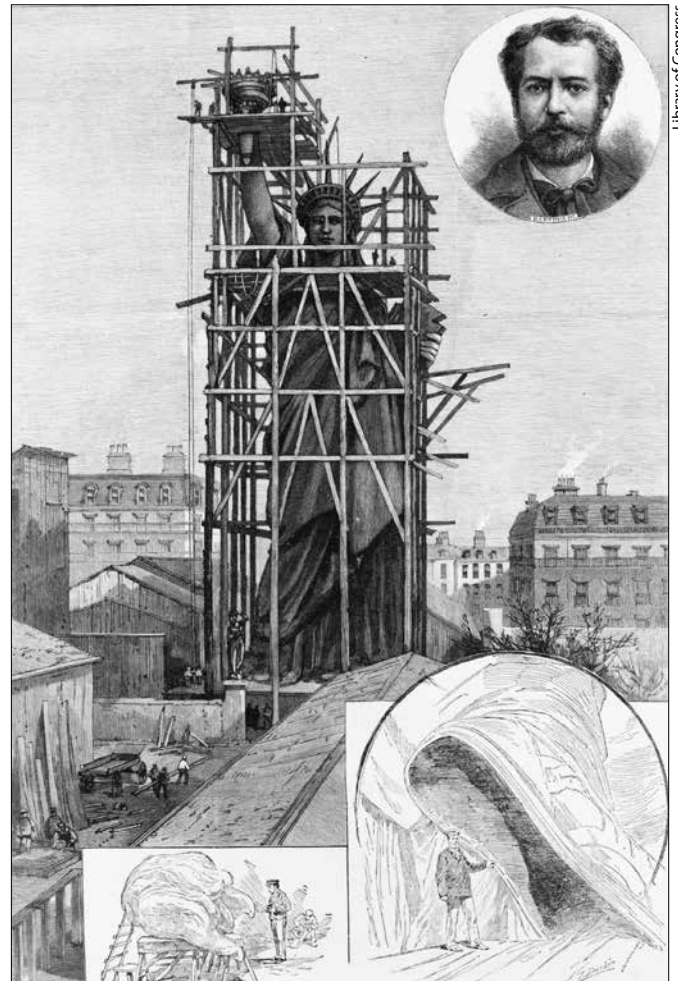
*Naming Liberty* by Jane Yolen is a “double story” that presents two narratives: a Russian Jewish family makes the journey across the Atlantic to find freedom in America, and a huge Statue of Liberty is conceived and constructed in

France, then transported to the United States—a gift from one nation to another.<sup>1</sup> As the reader turns the pages of this book, the tandem stories unfold. On the left-hand page is a work of historical fiction, the story of Gitl, a Jewish girl from Yekaterinoslaf, a city in southern Russia. On the right-hand page, the reader follows a timeline about the creation and construction of the Statue of Liberty. The statue’s creator, the French artist Frederic Auguste Bartholdi, strove for two decades to bring the dream into reality.

Author Yolen’s unique approach to historical fiction provides good opportunities for using literacy strategies and learning content in social studies. In the beginning of the book, Gitl’s papa has an announcement at the dinner table: he’s planning for the family to immigrate to America. On the opposite page, M. Edouard de Laboulaye (a French citizen, abolitionist, and supporter of U.S. President Lincoln) announces his idea for a monument to be given to “France’s great friend, America” at a dinner party at his country house. The year was 1865, shortly after the Union victory in the U.S. Civil War, which had been closely followed by the French public. This monument would not be an ordinary bronze statue, but a colossus (it’s 151 feet high from torch to tip of skirt) with a staircase inside.

By placing the year at the top of each page of the statue’s story, Yolen leads the reader through the chronological sequence of

the statue’s construction, which also anchors Gitl’s narrative. Common themes connect the two stories. For example, the



Construction of the Statue of Liberty, showing scaffolding and portrait of Frederic Bartholdi. Published in 1884.

Library of Congress

themes of struggle and sacrifice for achieving dreams are fundamental to both. Gitl's family has endured persecution, but now they're ready to search for liberty in a new place. Layoulaye's big idea initiates years of work as he and Bartholdi struggle to realize a monument to celebrate the friendship between France and America. Time is short, because America's 1876 centennial is drawing near, and both Frenchmen wish to have the monument fully constructed by that time.

The process of implementing big ideas, however, takes time. For Gitl's family, the process begins when Papa sends her brother Shmuel ahead to find the family a place to reside in America. For Layoulaye, the keys to success include securing funding, and finding the right artist to realize the image of "Liberty Enlightening the World." The artist is his friend Frederic Auguste Bartholdi, who was a sculptor, but also loved architecture. Bartholdi followed an arduous path of raising funds (the French people would finance the statue; the American people would be expected to pay for the pedestal), traveling, and designing and constructing the monument. Yolen's account of Bartholdi's struggle to construct the huge monument and transport it to America is mirrored by the family's struggle to follow their dreams across the Atlantic Ocean and start a new life in America.

Shmuel's acculturation to American life is signaled when he takes an American name, "Sammy." Gitl also wishes for a new name in her new country. Meanwhile, the many parts of the statue are completed in France, packed into 214 crates, and sent to America. Gitl's family and Lady Liberty make separate journeys, but both travel by train and ship. Gitl's new life in America is signaled by the selection of her new name: "Liberty," or "Libby" for short. The French name for the Statue of Liberty was "Liberty Enlightening the World." But like the girl, the bronze statue acquires a shorter, American name: "Lady Liberty" or the "Statue of Liberty." As Libby arrives at Ellis Island, she is welcomed to America by the sight of Lady Liberty. Symbols of America are often introduced in early childhood classrooms. Reading this book aloud is a great way to introduce the Statue of Liberty to younger students. *Naming Liberty* is suggested reading for students ages 6-9. Older students can read this text independently, but with guidance to help them examine the social studies concepts that are embedded within the text.

Since *Naming Liberty* has two stories, developing readers may want to read one story at a time, possibly with assistance. Although students who are between six and nine years old can read *Naming Liberty*, some of the social studies content is more closely aligned to the social studies curriculum for perhaps fourth or fifth grade. For example, when I listened to seven-year-old Sydney read Gitl's story aloud, it was clear that she could read most of the story independently. She knew most of the vocabulary, but we paused occasionally to discuss the meanings of unfamiliar words and to provide contextual information for the story. Words that proved difficult to pronounce also represented more challenging social studies



Torch of the Statue of Liberty as envisioned in 1885.

concepts, such as "immigrants," "Yiddish," and the name of Gitl's home city, "Yekaterinoslaf." The word "pogromists" was rather difficult to explain and clearly above the social studies concepts for second grade learners.

Writers of historical fiction routinely incorporate information from a variety of sources in the fictional narratives that they write to portray real events. The last page of book, which has the heading, "What is true about this book?," cites numerous sources as well as personal history that Yolen used to create her double stories. The book leaves the reader wanting to know more about the people during this time period. For example, the story ends before we learn about an immigrant's life after he or she arrives in America in the late 1800s. Many immigrants endured the trip to America only to struggle in poverty. There are other good books that pick up where this one leaves off.

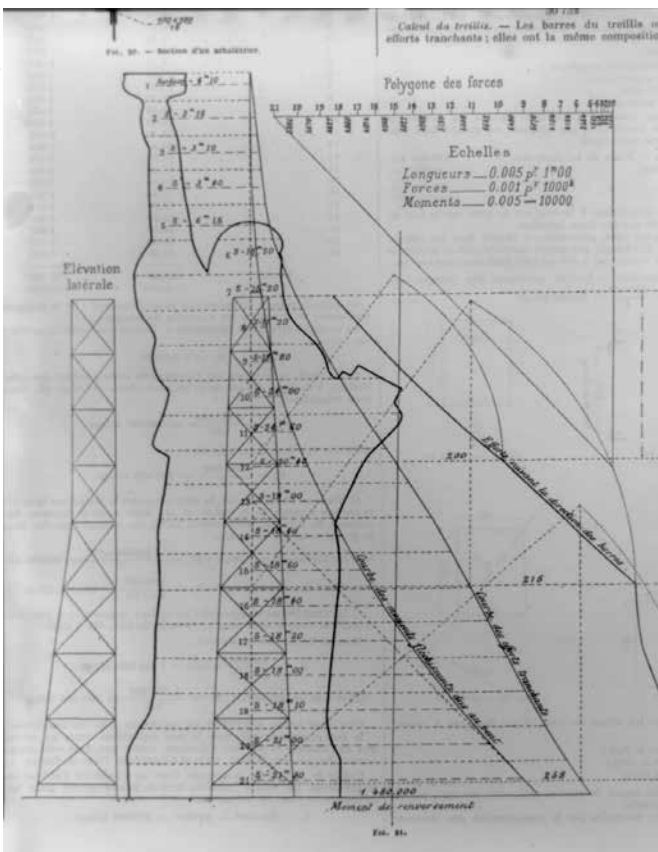
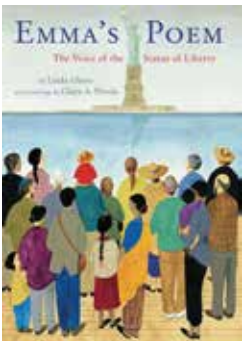


Diagram of the dimensions of the Statue of Liberty.

### Emma's Poem



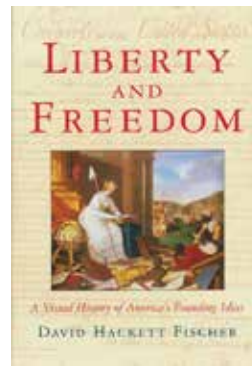
*Emma's Poem: The Voice of the Statue of Liberty* by Linda Glaser makes a useful companion to *Naming Liberty*. This book relates the real story of Emma Lazarus, author of “The New Colossus,” which is the poem inscribed on the base of the Statue of Liberty. Born in New York City in 1849, Lazarus was a tireless advocate for improving the plight of the immigrants she saw at Ward’s Island. Glaser

contrasts the lives of the immigrants at that time with those of the wealthy citizens of the city, illustrating the stark differences of the two economic classes. Lazarus, who was a writer, humanitarian, Jew, and member of the educated elite, demonstrated her compassion for an immigrant population striving for a new life. Her words, “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free” expressed a tribute to millions of immigrants who sailed by Lady Liberty on their way to Ellis Island.

Both author Linda Glaser and illustrator Claire Nivola were inspired by their own immigrant ancestry. Glaser’s grandparents emigrated from Eastern Europe seeking refuge from anti-Semitism. Nivola’s grandparents, who came to America in 1939, are pictured on the book’s cover. The family photographs included in *Emma’s Poem* highlight the importance of using primary sources to connect the lives of real people to

historical narratives. It’s a “double story” in that Lazarus witnessed the suffering of many new immigrants, yet she maintained an attitude of hope.

### Liberty and Freedom



In elementary social studies, teachers engage students in the work of historians—to interpret the stories of people in historical contexts to develop perspective and chronological understanding. *Liberty and Freedom*, a reference book for adult readers by David Hackett Fischer,<sup>2</sup> offers background knowledge for teachers involved in engaging students in what Levstik and Barton refer to as “talking historically.”<sup>3</sup> In

*Liberty and Freedom*, Fischer probes the fundamental American values of liberty and freedom as he relates how the stories and customs of ordinary people influenced the larger story of America. The images of liberty (a term based on the idea of *separation* from bondage) and freedom (a term based on voluntary *connection* to a society of freemen) are compared and contrasted in the stories. Fischer weaves a large garment of stories from two centuries of American history

*Liberty and Freedom* can also be used in the classroom—when a teacher reads specific passages to provide background for *Naming Liberty* and *Emma’s Poem*. In a review of research-based practices for using informational trade books, Nell Duke suggests that one way to introduce informational text to students is to read it to them.<sup>4</sup> With informational texts, we often read only the part that we need for the topic at hand. Students can witness the teacher doing this, and start making connections on their own between various historical accounts, commentary, and historical fiction.

### Multiple Sources

Multiple sources of reading on the same topic help students to develop deeper understandings of historical concepts. Along with the double stories in *Naming Liberty*, students can read other historical fiction, such as *Emma’s Poem*, and informational text found in *Liberty and Freedom* to develop a deeper understanding of the related stories of people who were part of the story of the Statue of Liberty as a symbol of freedom and democracy in America. By exposing students to various stories and information on the same topic, teachers add depth and perspective to social studies understanding.

Historical understanding is developed when books with related themes are used to engage elementary students with informational and narrative text. James Damico explained that multiple texts on the same topic deepen understanding of content knowledge.<sup>5</sup> The juxtaposition of reading texts with the same theme builds social studies understanding and develops skills in content area reading. Common Core State Standards



(CCSS) assert that students learn from text by making connections among ideas and between varied texts.<sup>6</sup>

Teachers planning interdisciplinary units in elementary social studies routinely incorporate combinations of narrative and informational texts to guide students in combining and connecting information. One approach to developing a deeper historical understanding as well as engaging students in the text complexity recommended by CCSS is to provide a variety of texts on the same subject. Taking a thematic approach to social studies reading also offers an opportunity to examine strategies that incorporate social studies literature to address CCSS.<sup>7</sup>

A position statement prepared for NCSS by Task Force for Early Childhood and Elementary Education states, “Social studies must be a vital part of the elementary curriculum in order to prepare children to understand and participate effectively in an increasingly complex world.”<sup>8</sup> Michelle Herczog reviewed CCSS and the NCSS Standards and found that they each share a common goal of providing a framework for developing citizens that can succeed in a global society. Herczog defined social studies as an “inclusive discipline” that promotes civic competence within the context of integrated learning.<sup>9</sup> When used together for instructional planning, CCSS and the NCSS Curriculum Standards offer powerful contexts for contemporary classrooms. Standards provide guidance for a range of meaningful strategies to extend learning. Meaningful social studies activities that engage students in learning about the Statue of Liberty are described below.

## CLASSROOM USES FOR THESE BOOKS

### Read Aloud Examples

A dinner party was the setting where Laboulaye first proclaimed his big idea for France’s gift of friendship to the United States. This information is found in both *Naming Liberty* by Yolen and *Liberty and Freedom* by Fisher (p. 368). Fischer describes the dinner party in 1865 and provides additional contextual information. For example, students may find it interesting that fundraisers were held inside the enormous knee and the foot of the statue (p. 373). This detail shows that it takes money to build a big monument, but more generally, we often need the participation and support of many other people in order to bring our own big ideas to life.

### Technology Integration: Google Earth

Bartholdi selected a site for the Statue of Liberty on his first



Learners can use a world map to trace the routes of immigrant populations as well as the trip that the Statue of Liberty made from France to the New York Harbor.

trip to America. After sailing into New York Harbor, he chose Bedloe’s Island to be an immigrant’s first view of the statue. Learning about the Statue of Liberty begins with learning about the location of Lady Liberty. Using the “fly to” feature with Google Earth, teachers can show students where the Statue of Liberty is located. Click on picture icons to see additional photographs of the Statue of

Liberty at the Google Earth site.

### Map It Out

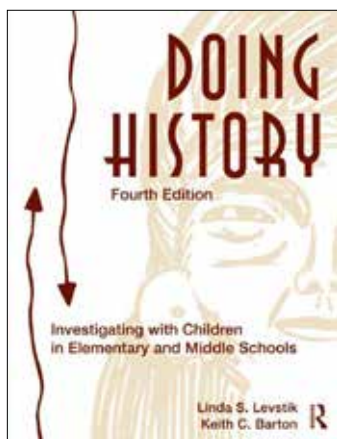
Yolen’s text offers numerous opportunities for mapping activities. From tracing Gitl’s journey from Yekaterinoslaf to America and Bartholdi’s trips from France, students can learn how to use maps to make connections in stories. Learners can use a world map to trace the routes of immigrant populations as well as the trip that the Statue of Liberty made from France to the New York Harbor.

### R.A.F.T. Writing

Writing assignments enrich content knowledge and promote

writing across the curriculum in elementary classrooms to provide a real world connection to social studies learning. Students take on a role to think and write from another person's perspective for a specified time or place to focus on an audience for writing. The form offers a real world application for written products such as newspapers, poetry, essays and letters to provide context for the assigned topic. Pretending that they are a newspaper reporter in the 19th century, the students could write a newspaper article about the Statue of Liberty arriving in boxes on a ship in New York Harbor. A R.A.F.T. could also be developed for the students to write a simulated journal from the immigrant's perspective to share what they know about an immigrant's journey to America.

### Thinking Like a Historian



In each edition of their book, *Doing History: Investigating with Children in Elementary and Middle Schools*, Linda Levstik and Keith Barton encourage us to imagine a classroom where students regularly use primary sources to organize and interpret historical information. The social studies standards theme of

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**CHANGE**, provide guidance for planning instruction to teach students about symbols of America. Using primary sources in social studies lessons engages students in thinking like historians. Primary source documents such as original letters, photographs, and newspaper articles provide contextual information for learning about the Statue of Liberty.

The Library of Congress<sup>10</sup> and the National Archives and Records Administration<sup>11</sup> are powerful resources for teaching students about using primary resources. At both websites, there is a section for teachers with links to educational resources and a search box that simplifies the process of locating primary sources.

Suggested primary sources that make real world connections to the Statue of Liberty include photographs, newspapers, prints and maps of the immigrant experience as they made the journey to America. Numerous photographs show the Statue of Liberty as it has stood in the New York Harbor since 1886.

Listed below are basic questions that can be used to examine a primary source photograph.

- After examining the primary source artifact,
- What does the photograph show?
- What is a good title for this photo?
- Write a caption for the photograph.
- How do people immigrate to the United States today?

### Develop Timelines

Timelines can be used to visually display important events in history. Yolen's story about Bartholdi provides a useful opportunity to construct a timeline of the Statue of Liberty. Students can create timelines to illustrate the two decades that it took to construct the Statue of Liberty in France, pack it in boxes and send it to America.

### Get A News Update

In October 28, 1886 the Statue of Liberty was completed in Ellis Island in the New York Harbor. Over the course of 126 years, the Statue of Liberty has been closed for renovation several times to keep it safe and accessible to visitors. Starting in 2011, the Statue of Liberty was closed for improvements and was set to reopen on October 28, 2012. Hurricane Sandy, one of the most disastrous storms in history hit the east coast on Oct. 29th. The resulting damage from the storm has led to a park alert by the National Park Service announcing that due to conditions created by Hurricane Sandy, the Statue of Liberty National Monument and Ellis Island would be closed until further notice. Link to the National Park Service [www.nps.gov/stli/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/stli/index.htm) for the latest information.<sup>12</sup>

### Notes

1. Jane Yolen, *Naming Liberty* (New York: Philomel Books, 2008). Visit Jane Yolen [janeyolen.com](http://janeyolen.com). 1999 Linda Glaser, *Emma's Poem: The Voice of the Statue of Liberty* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010).
2. David Hackett Fischer, *Liberty and Freedom: A Visual History of America's Founding Ideas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
3. Linda Levstik and Keith Barton, *Doing History: Investigating with Children in Elementary and Middle Schools*. 4th ed. (Danvers, MA: Routledge, 2010), 27.
4. Nell K. Duke, "The Case for Informational Text," *Educational Leadership* 61 no. 6 (2004): 40-44.
5. James S. Damico, "Multiple Dimensions of Literacy and Conceptions of Readers: Toward a More Expansive View of Accountability," *Reading Teacher* 58, no. 7 (2005): 644-652.
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9. Michelle Herzog, "Using the NCSS *National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: A Framework for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment* to Meet State Social Studies Standards," *Social Education* 74, no. 4 (2010): 217-222; quote 217.
10. Library of Congress, (Washington, DC: Library of Congress), [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov).
11. National Archives and Records Administration (Washington, DC NARA), [www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov).
12. National Park Service, "Statue of Liberty," [www.nps.gov/stli/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/stli/index.htm).

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