



Yale-New Haven  
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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1983 Volume VI: Cross-Cultural Variation in Children and Families

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## **Italian-American Legacy**

Curriculum Unit 83.06.03  
by Ralph Lambert

### **Introduction:**

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The following unit was constructed for the purpose of educating the 8th grade middle school student on the struggles and contributions of the Italian-Americans of New Haven. The unit will also help to illuminate some of the discriminatory practices against other ethnic groups and their similarities.

The Italians came to America to work for a better life for themselves and their children. They came to work on the farm and in the city. The family members each had their role, each was dependent on one another to succeed. When success was imminent they would send for more family living in Italy to come to America and enjoy life, or at least contribute to a better life. Education, business religion and economic conditions in general would eventually determine how or where they would live.

New Haven attracted a large portion of the Italian immigrants because of its oyster industry and proximity to the Long Island sound. Not only did they work immediately after their arrival in the late 1800's but they continued to contribute in other areas of production. Industry played a vital part in the work life of the Italian-American as well as farming on America's rich soil.

Have they succeeded in establishing themselves as a proud culture? Time has past and the future is coming. The feeling is that America sure has done well to welcome the Italians. Time will tell.

This unit is intended to explore the contributions and struggles made and to arouse the students curiosity about his or her own culture and to research any similarities. The students work load will include discussions about Italian-American life, as well as independent work and role playing of various Italian struggles and achievements.

## ***A . Behavioral Objectives***

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The unit may be completed in the time frame of four weeks, each student will participate in (1) two class presentations on Italian-Americans and similarities related to their own culture (2) each student will be responsible for a role playing project and a brief report on what role-play achieved (3) students will interview and or survey on an Italian-American student or adult.

Many other classroom activities will be introduced for students to participate in:

- a. newspaper and magazine research
- b. media reporting
- c. interviews

## ***B . Learning Objectives***

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The students will be able to achieve the following by the end of the course.

First— *to help instill a cultural pride in each student and good feeling about one's self.*

*Many students are unaware of the various cultural contributions. It is hoped that by examining the Italians, other cultures will be illuminated.*

Second— *to illustrate what contributions were accomplished by the Italian-Americans.*

The Italians were instrumental in creating a positive attitude for New Haven. Other cultures have followed the same path as the Italian-Americans.

Third— *to record feedback from each student in class based on a questionnaire to determine what contributions of Italian culture or their own culture they are aware of.*

*Various questions on accomplishments will be asked and answered.*

Fourth— *to determine how the past will influence the future.*

Students will discuss possibilities for cultural changes.

### ***Strategies***

To present this unit, it is advised that the following be introduced in its assigned order.

A. *The City*

A brief description of New Haven. Discussion on the past, present and future considerations.

B. *People*

Why the Italians migrated to this region and the effects of the migration.

C. *Influence*

What accomplishments were attributed to the Italian Americans and how did these contributions influence others?

D. *Cultural Preference*

The Italians lived and worked in their own clusters. A discussion on the effects of this phenomenon.

E. *Values*

What is a value? A discussion on how values are perceived. The Italian-American values, how the environment or region may effect values.

F. *Organization and Organizations*

How each culture, in particular the Italians found strength to survive through various networks.

G. *Legacy*

What can we expect from our own heritage? Have we learned what the Italians achieved?

## ***Unit Summary***

### *Week One: Background of the Italians in Italy*

Students will learn about the role of the Italian government in the migration, also their role in farm life and poverty. The family unit will be discussed; how the Italians supported their families, why they exited to other countries.

Questions to be considered include: What are the responsibilities of the family members? Who is the dominant decision maker? Why? Was the decision to leave Italy beneficial to the family?

During this week of discussion many ideas and facts should surface. Various projects will be assigned to reinforce discussions. Students will research their own family tree to determine what their heritage is and if it may include any Italian ancestry. Family tradition will also be explored as it existed in Italy.

### *Background brief*

The Italians arrived in New Haven around 1872. They came here to escape the poverty of Italy. The Italian government wanted to industrialize Italy at the expense of its people. There was little reward for the unskilled laborer and the peasant farmers of Italy. Over eighty percent of the people depended on agriculture for a living but the Italian soil wasn't always ready for crops when it was most needed, nor were the means and equipment updated for efficiency. Many Italian farmers and laborers lived in villages perched in the hills to avoid the lowlands which offered the constant threat of Malaria. The rain washed topsoil of the mountains which caused Malaria swamps. It wasn't unusual for a farmer to walk miles to reach their land and once there, they had only archaic tools to use for their work. The rain fall complicated farming to the point that it wasn't profitable. The rain fell in the autumn and winter in heavy amounts which proved devastating for the farmer's ability to successfully farm. Wages were low for skilled and unskilled worker. The worker averaged between sixteen and thirty cents per day.

## *Week Two: The Migration into the American Cities*

During the second week the students will be exposed to the effects of the great migration on Americans and Italian-Americans. A discussion on “Just how hard life was”, the rewards and benefits of life in America, the cluster or village phenomenon that each city became a part of, and the repercussions to this style of living. Job opportunities will be discussed along with climate and farming differences that made America ideal for migration.

The students will learn about:

1. Values and traditions that were taught to children and passed to other children
2. Education
3. Contribution of the Italian-American
4. Responsibilities of members of the family
5. Religion
6. Recreational including good things to eat

Students will participate in class discussions and be assigned tasks to explore some of these questions.

### *Background brief*

America was offering two to three times more money and better working conditions. Land was plenty. Soil was abundant. Taxes were negligible and compulsory, military service was non-existent. These attractions and more made North America ideal for the two-thirds of all Southern Italians that migrated. Many others traveled to South America, Brazil and Argentina.

The principal cities in America around the turn of the century were New York—145,433, Philadelphia—17,830, Chicago—16,008, Boston—13,738. Other cities included Newark, New Orleans, Providence, Pittsburgh, Buffalo and New Haven, Connecticut. New Haven’s total population was 50,000 in 1890. Of that total 2,990 were Italian, by 1900 4.9% lived in New Haven.

The Italians encountered many problems after arriving in New York’s docks. The immigrants were sickly and many died from Cholera and other contagious diseases.

The Italians followed the Irish into various arrival neighborhoods, such as Oak Street, The Hill and Wooster Square. However the Italian immigrants of the 1880’s—1900’s felt the anti-Italian discrimination practices that followed them into American Cities. The Italians were easy prey for “Americans” because of their inability to speak English soon after their arrival. This created small communities of Italians throughout the city. These villages were staked out by entire provinces of Italian families that left Italy for New Haven. These American branches were welcomed relief for the Italian families that knew no one. The tendency to segregate themselves from other Italians was a natural process for many immigrants because they felt little or no affinity to their compatriots from other areas of Italy. Most spoke dialects which other Italians couldn’t understand, therefore they felt more comfortable among themselves. The family within this structure was usually father dominated and mother centered and tended to be both strongly centralized and supportive.

### *Week Three: Victory Over Hunger*

This week will be devoted to the universal appeal of food.

Class participation and discussion on a variety of foods and their significance— *victory over hunger* , the origin of macaroni, how to prepare a number of dishes, how to make a cannoli, the unity of a family dining together, preparing the meal together, the garden and fruits and vegetables.

Students will discuss how to begin a garden, what to grow and if weather or season permits, a small one will be started with the types of Ethnic foods available and how they differ from the Italian-Americans.

#### *Background brief*

The preparation, cooking and eating of Italian foods in the warm company of relatives and friends takes on an almost ritualistic significance among Italian-Americans.

It may very well symbolize the family's victory over hunger. The love affair with food began almost immediately when they arrived in New Haven. Fresh fruits, tomatoes and vegetables were the favorites to grow. The family would gather and prepare all the garden grown crops and homemade pasta, the "meal" served as a time to relax and talk about the day's events. As time went on, the Italian influence in New Haven was and still is prevalent. Many Italian bakeries and restaurants flourished. Fresh vegetables and fruit stands could be approached almost anywhere in New Haven. Fish carts with a variety of delectable fish, oysters, clams and lobsters from New Haven waters could be sampled. The Italians of Wooster Street specialized in the best pizza and Pepe's, Sally's and The Spot are known around the country.

### *Week Four: Entrepreneur*

We will discuss the business abilities of the Italians and the many organizations. Students will learn about how businesses were started, where money came from to start businesses, managing ability; home buying will also be included with notes on mortgage money.

During the week, class discussions will center around success and failures of known businesses in New Haven. Newspapers will be used to chart a few stock market developments. Specific stocks will also be explored. Magazine articles will be used to substantiate discussions, how loyalty became a part of business in the Italian communities, who worked in the businesses? Was it always family? What businesses were the Italians mostly involved in and why?

#### *Background brief*

Italians were great organizers (*campanilismo*), loyalty is credited with the start of many business ideas. Organizations were places to gather and to seek help. In 1930, eighty (80) clubs, 10,000 member organizations and Italian owned banks, lent money for home buying Italians. Money came from accumulated resources. Slide show presentations will follow. Students' folders will be discussed and shared.

### **Conclusions**

This unit has been designed to help students begin to think about the influence of the Italian immigrants in America and specifically New Haven. It is meant to stir curiosity about the student's own heritage and to enlighten their knowledge of themselves. The students will have the opportunities during this unit to explore

and digest information that would never have been available with the loyalties and sacrifices that were made. Pioneers, adventurers who came here with little knowledge and understanding of the new world. All the ethnic groups started a new life in America in a most difficult fashion, many similarities existed. The Italian-American story may just mirror the plights of all others that have surfaced. Perhaps by researching our past, the present will be easier to understand, the future easier to attain.

*Contributions :*

*Amadeo P. Giannini— Founder of Bank of America*

*In 1904 Giannini opened his first banking office, which in those days he called “The bank of Italy”.*

*Salvatore Giordano— President of Fedders Corporation*

*Manufacturer of air-conditioning equipment*

*Jeno Paulucc— President of the Chunking Corporation*

*The leading processor of Chinese food*

*Fiorello LaGuardia— Mayor of New York City*

*Former Mayor and the first Italian-American of national prominence.*

*Arturo Toscanini— Music Conductor*

*Enrico Caruso— Opera Tenor*

*GianCarlo Menotti— Composer*

*Attilio Piccirilli— Italian-American Sculptor*

*Harry Bertoia— Contemporary Sculptor*

*Enrico Fermi— Physicist and Nobel Prize Winner*

*John Cairdi— Poet*

*Frank Sinatra— Singer*

*Perry Como— Singer*

*Dean Martin— Singer*

*Benjamin F. Biaggini— Chairman of Southern Pacific*

*Edward J. Debartolo Sr.— Ohio shopping-center and sports magnate*

*Jeno F. Paulucci— Minnesota frozen-food processor*

*Frank D. Stella—Detroit businessman and civic leader*

Michael Bennett— *Broadway choreographer ( “ Dreamgirls ” )*

Francis Ford Coppola— *Moviemaker ( “ Apocalypse Now ” )*

Gay Talese— *Author ( “ Thy Neighbor’s Wife ” )*

Jack Valenti— *Motion Picture Association of America*

Robert Venturi— *Architect, “father of postmodernism. ”*

Buzzie Bavasi— *Executive V.P. California Angels*

Tommy Lasorda— *Manager, Los Angeles Dodgers*

Billy Martin— *Manager, New York Yankees*

Joe Paterno— *Penn State football coach*

William V. D’Antonio— *American Sociological Association*

John Lo Schiavo— *President of University of San Francisco*

Edmund D. Pellegrino— *Professor of Medicine, Georgetown University*

**Questions:**

To be asked of Italian-Americans

1. Do you instinctively think of yourself as Italian, American or Italian-American?
2. Have you ever felt conflict between the Italian part of you and the American demand on your nature?
3. What particular insights or advantages do you have from your Italian background?
4. If there is one thing that you think as an Italian American you do not share with others? What is it?
5. Name some Italian-Americans of whom you privately most proud.

To be asked of all others

1. Have we benefited from the Italians migrating to America? Have we benefited from other cultures?
2. What contributions have been made?
3. Should we attempt to stop any future migrations to America . . . or control?
4. Has the Italian-American migration influenced our future?

## **LESSON PLAN #1**

**OBJECTIVE**—Students will visit two restaurants to compare styles and discuss the experiences.

**MATERIALS**— Transportation, if required, pencil and notebooks, money.

**PROCEDURE**— Students will visit two different ethnic restaurants and taste the food, compare the differences and talk to the managers.

**CHOICES:**

Restaurant #1—Italian food

Any number of Italian restaurants available, most students prefer pizza, notes taken on cost, ingredients, owner dialect.

Restaurant #2—Jewish food

Students prefer the Deli, Westville location idea for sandwich testing. Notes taken on cost, ingredients, owner dialect.

Restaurant #3—Mystery restaurant

Students choose a restaurant at random, walk in and try to determine ethnic culture by reading menu, ingredients, dialect.

## **LESSON PLAN #2**

**OBJECTIVE**— Food lesson to prepare a “cannoli.” This lesson will teach the student a variety of educational lessons.

**MATERIALS**— 1 1/2 c. sifted all-purpose flour

2 T sugar

1/4 c. shortening

1 egg yolk

1/2 c. dry white wine

vegetable oil

(cheese filling)

2 lbs. Ricotta cheese

1 c. sugar

1 t. vanilla

3 oz. sweet chocolate broken into small pieces



1/4 c. chopped pistachio nuts

confectioners sugar

*PROCEDURE*— Sift together flour and sugar. Cut in shortening. Stir egg yolk into wine. Add to flour mixture. Mix dough until stiff. Divide dough in half, roll out as thin as paper. Cut into 3 1/2 inch squares. Place cannoli forms diagonally on pastry squares from point to point. Draw remaining 2 corners loosely over Cannoli form. Moisten underside of overlapping corner with wine. Press corners together. Heat oil to 375—. Fry 2 to 3 minutes or until golden brown turning occasionally. Drain. Cool. Use pastry tube or teaspoon to fill shells with cheese filling. Sprinkle nuts on filling on each end. Dust center with confectioners sugar. Makes about 25 shells . . . can be frozen.

*EVALUATION*— Informal evaluation by the teacher.

### **LESSON PLAN #3**

*OBJECTIVE*— To determine what difficulties students would encounter if they found themselves in a new situation that perpetuated discrimination.

*MATERIALS*—Classroom pads, pencils.

*PROCEDURE*— Teacher will set up role playing situation similar to Italian-American plight i.e. student will act out problems possible in applying for a job. One student will approach another in search of a job. Students in class will take notes on adlib adventure.

*EVALUATION*— Students and teachers will evaluate play.

### **LESSON PLAN # 4**

*OBJECTIVE*— To help reduce discrimination against stigmatized cultural groups and to provide them equal educational opportunities.

*MATERIALS*— Classroom discussion format

*LESSON*—Role Play: 5 students will sit on panel and discuss the discriminatory practices that are directed at any 5 ethnic groups. e.g. Italians, Puerto Ricans, Irish, Blacks and Jews.

Name any alternatives to discrimination.

*STRATEGIES*— To create a school atmosphere which has positive institutional norms toward victimized cultural groups in the United States.

### **LESSON PLAN # 5**

*OBJECTIVE*— To discuss the school's role during and after the migration millions of immigrants into the United States.

*MATERIALS*— Classroom discussion format

*QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION*— 1907. Peak year of mass migration to the United States, a movement which brought 46 million immigrants between 1820-1974.

“The Common School changed the immigrant, but the immigrant altered the school, says Historian D.B. Tyack”.

Discuss Tyack’s statement and list on board all the changes that were made for the school and immigrants.

*EVALUATION*— Students will be asked to evaluate their input. Teacher will record input and feedback.

### **1901 Poem by Yale Student**

Sydney Deane

Lamenting The Passing of a Once-Aristocratic Neighborhood

The old white church in Wooster Square

Where Godly people met and prayed.

Dear Soul! they worship many there

Italian mothers, man and maid.

In gaudy Southern scarves arrayed

The horrid candles smolder where

The Godly people met and prayed

alas the fall of Wooster Square.

## **TEACHERS’ ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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Barzini, Luigi. *From Caesar to the Mafia*. New York: The Library Press, 1971.

Barzini’s second book on the Italians discusses everything Italian from people, places to problems.

Briggs, John W. *An Italian Passage : Immigrants to Three American Cities, 1890-1930*, New Haven 1978.

Three American Cities are discussed in depth on the Italian-American contribution.

Carpenter, Niles. *Immigrants and Their Children*. Washington, 1927.

Good readings about the Italian Immigrant and the next generation Italians.

Luciano, Iorizzo J. and Mondello, Salvatore. *The Italian American’s*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980.

A complete historical overview of the Italians before, during and after their migration to America.

Sowell, Thomas. *Ethnic America* . New York: Basic Books, Inc. Publishers, 1981.

Excellent reading on various cultures from around the world.

Tomasi, Lydio F. *The Italians in America: The Progressive view, 1891-1914*, New York: The Center For Migration Studies of New York, 1972.

Fast pace articles on the Italian immigrants and his problems during the crucial years, 1891-1914.

Townshend, Doris B. *Fair Haven: A Journey Through Time*. New Haven Colony Historical Society, 1976.

History of Fair Haven (New Haven), Connecticut.

## **STUDENTS' ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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Dobrin, Arnold. *Italy Modern Renaissance*. New Jersey: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1968.

Geared for older student. Has a good section on "Highlights in Italian History".

Egan, E.W. *Italy in Pictures* . New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 1973.

Good pictures on land, history, government, economy, people and arts.

Epstein, Sam and Beryl. *The First Book of Italy* . New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1972.

An introduction to Italy's geography, industries, cities and people and their way of life.

Leech, Michael. *Italy, The land and its people*. Silver Burdett Company: Morristown, New Jersey, 1976.

Excellent book for children. Many fast leading articles and colored photographs.

McClellan, Grant S. *American Youth in a Changing Culture*. New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1972.

Contains reprints of articles, excerpts from books on current issues and social trends in the United States and other countries.

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