Introduction:
As a part of your participation in the Jewish Museum of Maryland’s Immigrant’s Trunk program, an actor playing the role of Ida Rehr, a Jewish immigrant from Ukraine, will deliver a dramatic performance for your students. During this performance, students will have the opportunity to interact with “Mrs. Rehr” and to learn about her life as a Jewish immigrant.

Classroom Set Up:
Your classroom will be transported back in time to 1941 for this performance. Ida Rehr has been invited to speak to your students in honor of Citizenship Week. The actor portraying the role of Ida Rehr will bring a trunk with her filled with objects, immigration documents, and photographs that will help her tell the story of her life. If possible, she will need to have access to the classroom 30-minutes in advance of the performance to set up the trunk. Please have four empty folding chairs at the front of the classroom available for her use during the performance. She will need a small table near the chairs that she can use during the performance. In addition she needs access to a private room where she can change into her costume.

Please note that this performance is intended to take place in a classroom, not a school auditorium. If you have scheduled it to take place in a different space, please contact Elena Rosemond-Hoerr at the Museum (erosemondhoerr@jewishmuseummd.org / 410-732-6400 ext. 229), so that she can make the actor aware of the change of venue.

Student Preparation
One of your teachers will need to introduce the performance. Please use the attached introduction. Also, please make sure that your office staff is aware of the program and that someone is available to direct the actor to the classroom upon arrival.

It is important that students are prepared in advance of his visit and that they understand that they are going back in time to the year 1941. In the course of the performance, Ida talks about what is going on in the world in 1941, specifically about the persecution of the Jews living in countries occupied by Germany. You might want to prepare your students about World War II in advance of the program. By 1941, much of Europe is under German control (including Poland, the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Norway, and Denmark). Upon the bombing of its naval fleet in Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the US, under the leadership of President Franklin Roosevelt, decides to enter the war.

Please remind students that the program is intended to be interactive. Ask them to brainstorm possible questions that they would like to ask a Jewish immigrant to America in the early 20th century. They will have the opportunity to ask some of their questions at the end of the performance.
Attached you will find additional background information that might be useful in preparing your students in advance of this program. Materials include a brief history of Eastern Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a bibliography for preparing additional lesson plans, and a biography of Ida Rehr. Please do not share Ida’s biography with the students before the program.

Biography of Ida Rehr

Ida Rehr was born Chaye Bezoomna on August 12, 1896 in Besnovez, a small Jewish town, with a population of 225 people, in the Ukraine. Her family was Hasidic, and Ida’s father, Shulem, was the Rabbi of the town. Ida had one older sister, Minnie, and four other siblings: Mayer, Zlottamy (Zlotti), Herschel, and Devorah. Ida’s uncle, Louis, had immigrated to Baltimore in the early 1900’s to avoid conscription into the Russian army. It was at this point that Ida’s uncle changed his last name to Rosen. Ida’s sister Minnie soon followed, and on September 5, 1913, Ida arrived at Locust Point in Baltimore aboard a ship called the Frankfurt. Ida was seventeen years old. The ship manifest indicates that Minnie paid for Ida’s passage to the United States; Ida arrived with five dollars in her pocket. Her father and the rest of her family remained behind in the Ukraine.

Ida first settled in East Baltimore at 116 S. Bond Street, where she lived with her uncle and sister. East Baltimore was home to a large Jewish immigrant community. She found work at Sonneborn’s Clothing Factory at Pratt and Paca Streets (see 1863 Map of Baltimore)—a company that employed a large number of immigrants. Ida attended night school to learn English language, American history, and other topics necessary for the citizenship exam. During this period, Ida maintained close contact with her family in the Ukraine.

In 1923 Ida met Daniel Rehr, an Austrian Jewish immigrant, and they were married on June 24, 1923. Although her family could not attend the wedding, Ida’s father Shulem sent her a handcrafted wedding blessing. Ida and Daniel had three children: Aaron Jerome, Dorothy, and Elaine. By 1926, two years after Aaron was born, the couple had
moved to 623 Light Street, where the Maryland Science Center resides today. They owned a confectionary shop at that address and lived above it. Later that year, Daniel received his citizenship; Ida’s naturalization came a year later in 1927. The rest of Ida’s family remained in the Ukraine. Her entire family, with the exception of her youngest sister, was killed during the Holocaust. Ida died in Baltimore on August 26, 1988, at the age of ninety-two.

Historical Background:

The Lives Left Behind

Beginning in 1880 and lasting until 1924, approximately four million immigrants, many of them Jewish, left their homes in Eastern Europe and journeyed to the United States. The reason for this large-scale migration was the anti semitic policies towards Jews in this region, and a perception of the United States as a glorious land of limitless opportunity. During the reign of Alexander II in Russia, many liberal reforms were implemented, including the abolishment of the serf system and the introduction of capitalism. After his assassination in 1889, anti-Semitic riots erupted and Russia’s new rulers introduced discriminatory legislation. The resulting Temporary Laws placed severe economic restrictions on Jews, and, in turn, led to increased violence against them. The Russian leaders supported this violence as a means of diverting attention from a growing revolutionary anti-Czar movement. The Black Hundred, an anti semitic movement supported by the Czar, instigated pogroms against Jews in Russia and neighboring countries. Thus, the Jews in Russia and other countries in Eastern Europe, who had once experienced a degree of economic and intellectual freedom, were confronted by increasingly oppressive and discriminatory conditions. Many opted to leave and to immigrate to the United States, where they envisioned a golden land free from religious oppression.

The Immigrant’s Journey

The immigrant’s journey from Eastern Europe to the United States was not an easy one. After acquiring the necessary papers for departure and boarding the ships, immigrants were often confined to the steerage section of ships which could hold up to two thousand people. In the steerage section, immigrants were housed in metal berths three bunks high, where they remained during their two-week journey, amidst unsanitary conditions that included spoiled food and unwashed bodies which often caused sea-sickness. Meals were served in dining rooms with long tables. On older ships, however, passengers often ate from tin mess kits in their steerage quarters.

Upon arrival at Ellis Island, immigrants did not immediately disembark but were often forced to wait in steerage for days at a time before boarding a ferry to the immigration station. The harbor was usually crowded with steam ships, and as many as 20,000 immigrants waited for processing. The conditions on the ferries themselves were stifling. Many people died from contagious diseases waiting to make the trip across the harbor.
Once the immigrants finally landed in Ellis Island they were each given a numbered tag that corresponded to the page and line number in the ship manifest where their names appeared. They then formed a line, extending all the way from the dock baggage room up to the second floor where the immigrants were met by a team of doctors and inspectors. The inspection process was very thorough, and doctors searched immigrants for signs of disease, and mental deficiencies. They were especially on the lookout for trachoma, a highly contagious eye disease, as well as cholera, favus (a nail and skull fungus), and insanity.

After the medical inspection, immigrants were required to illustrate that they were competent through a variety of tests proving they were capable of providing for themselves in the US. Often single women and children were required to show proof that they knew someone in the US who would support them before they were allowed to leave Ellis Island. Those without such documents and those who failed to pass the medical inspection were forbidden to leave Ellis Island until they either received the necessary documents, or recovered from illness. Two percent of all immigrants were deported back to their countries of origin because they suffered from an incurable disease, or failed to meet inspection requirements.

**Becoming a Citizen**

In order to become an American citizen, immigrants were first required to file a declaration of intent. This document recorded the applicant’s pledge to become a United States citizen, to uphold permanent residence within the country, and to renounce allegiance to other nations. After filing the declaration of intent, the applicant then had to wait for a period of two to seven years. When this waiting period was over, the applicant then petitioned the court for citizenship and was required to produce affidavits signed by two witnesses attesting to the applicant’s moral character and to the fact that the applicant had resided within the United States for a minimum of five years. The petition was then subject to an investigation and a hearing before a judge. This hearing was the last step in the procedure, and if the judge ascertained that all criteria for citizenship had been met, the applicant would take an oath of allegiance to the US constitution, renouncing all foreign allegiances. The immigrant was then granted a certificate of citizenship.

Naturalization, the process of becoming a full-fledged American citizen, has changed throughout the course of American history. By the early 1920s, as the flow of immigrants to the United States increased, immigration and naturalization laws became more and more restrictive. The restrictive nature of these laws resulted from a growing anti-immigrant or nativist sentiment. This was due to the fear that the large numbers of immigrants living in the US would result in a weakening of American society and in a reduction in the numbers of available low wage jobs. This fear resulted in a change in immigration policy. What had formerly been an open door policy ended. Immigration quotas were established in 1924 which, effectively, closed America’s doors to immigrants.
Immigration History Resources

Books for Teachers:
- Robert A. Rockaway, Words of the Uprooted: Jewish Immigrants in Early 20th Century America.

Books for Students:

Web Sites:
- www.ellisisland.org – Ellis Island’s web site, virtual tours of exhibitions, on-line passenger search
- www.dreamsoffreedom.org – virtual tours of immigration museum in Boston, sample lesson plans
• http://library.thinkquest.org/~26786/en/introduction – “From One Life to Another” – articles about different ethnic group immigration stories
• www.jewishgen.org – connects researchers of Jewish genealogy worldwide
The Leo V. Berger Immigrant’s Trunk
Project Team

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Living History Project:
"Saul Bernstein" script by Sharie Valerio with additional research and writing assistance from Tim King and Harriet Lynn
Performed by Tim King
Produced and directed by Harriet Lynn, Heritage Theater Artists’ Consortium
Costumes, Kostumes by Kathryn

"Ida Rehr" script by Sharie Valerio with additional research and writing assistance from Tamara Johnson and Harriet Lynn
Performed by Katherine Lyons
Produced and directed by Harriet Lynn, Heritage Theater Artists’ Consortium
Costumes, Kostumes by Kathryn

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The Jewish Museum of Maryland is an agency of THE ASSOCIATED: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore.

To reach the Education Department of the Jewish Museum of Maryland, please email eroosemondhoerr@jewishmuseummd.org or call (410) 732-6400 ext. 236 or 229.
The Leo V. Berger Immigrant’s Trunk
Ida Rehr Living History Performance

Evaluation

Your name: _________________________________________

School : ________________________________

Grade (s): _____________  # of Students: ________________

How did you learn about this program? ___________________________

Please rate the following aspects of the program:

Quality of program as a teaching tool   excellent   good   fair   poor

Content of script    excellent   good   fair   poor

Ability of actor to interact with students excellent   good   fair   poor

Relevance of program to curriculum   excellent   good   fair   poor

Age-appropriateness for your group    excellent   good   fair   poor

Student response    excellent   good   fair   poor

Were your expectations met? _____________

Did this program enrich your curriculum? _______________ 

How can we improve upon this program for future performances? __________________ 

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

Are you interested in scheduling this program again for next year? ________________

Please use the back of this sheet for additional comments. We are especially interested in hearing about specific student comments.

Thank you!