

Two Poets Describe Immigration to the United States

These poets have very different ideas about immigration. Read the two poems and answer the questions.

Unguarded Gates (1895)

By Thomas Aldrich

Wide open and unguarded stand our gates,
And through them presses a wild motley throng--
Men from the Volga and the Tartar steppes,
Featureless figures of the Hoang-Ho,
Malayan, Scythian, Teuton, Kelt, and Slav,
Flying the Old World's poverty and scorn;
These bringing with them unknown gods and rites,
Those, tiger passions, here to stretch their claws.
In street and alley what strange tongues are loud,
Accents of menace alien to our air,
Voices that once the Tower of Babel knew!
O Liberty, white Goddess! Is it well
To leave the gates unguarded?

The New Colossus (1883)

By Emma Lazarus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glowed world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame,
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

1. Why do you think Thomas Aldrich titled his poem "Unguarded Gates"?
2. Aldrich describes immigrants as a "wild motley throng." What do you think he means?
3. In your opinion, why does Aldrich call Liberty the "white Goddess"?
4. Why do you think Emma Lazarus titled her poem "The New Colossus"?
5. According to Lazarus, the "Colossus" greets the "wretched refuse of your teeming shore." What do you think she means?
6. In your opinion, what does Lazarus mean when she says, "I lift my lamp beside the golden door"?
7. Extra-credit: The new Colossus stands in "the air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame." Where does it stand? What are the twin cities?