



# Emma Lazarus

## HIDDEN HERO OF HISTORY

**Listen to the story:** <https://jonincharacter.com/emma-lazarus/>

**Emma Lazarus was a writer, poet, and an activist who wrote “The New Colossus,” for the Statue of Liberty symbolizing America’s promise of freedom for all.**

Emma Lazarus was born in 1847 and grew up in New York City. She came from a Sephardic Jewish family and, long before she was born, her ancestors fled the country of Brazil. They left because Jewish people were being treated unfairly just for being Jewish.

In the 1880s, many Jewish people were fleeing Russia for the same reason and arrived in the United States as immigrants. An immigrant is someone who comes to a new country to live permanently. Because of Ms. Lazarus’ family background, she felt a connection with the new people coming to her country. She stood up for the rights of Jewish immigrants who came to the United States to feel safe and get a fresh new start on their lives.

A mitzvah is the word Jewish people use to describe a good deed. In her lifetime, Ms. Lazarus did a lot of mitzvahs including starting the Hebrew Technical School. Because the Jewish people were being treated so poorly in Russia, they didn’t have the training to find employment. Schools like the Hebrew Technical School taught them different skills so they could get a job and pay for things like food and a place to live. Ms. Lazarus also volunteered to help Jewish immigrants find shelter in New York when they first arrived.

**Emma Lazarus’ support for Jewish immigrants in America showed up in her writing and poetry.**

Ms. Lazarus’ love of writing started when she was very young. When she turned 17, her father, who was a wealthy merchant, paid to have her first book of poetry printed. She went on to write about many different topics as plays, essays, books, drama, poetry and a novel.

As an activist for Jewish immigrants, she wrote about their struggles and experiences when they first arrived in their new country. She wrote a book of poems called *Songs of a Semite* where she talked about how wrong it was to treat Jewish people unkindly just for being Jewish.

Her most important poem is one that many Americans know, but many don’t know she wrote it. It’s called *The New Colossus*:



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  
Glow's 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-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"



Emma Lazarus wrote the poem for the Statue of Liberty. Known as "Lady Liberty," the statue stands in the Upper New York Bay in New York City. It was often the first site immigrants saw when they entered the United States by Ship. The Statue of Liberty was a symbol of hope for a new and better life for so many of them.

Ms. Lazarus' poem raised money for the statue so it could be built. The poem sits at the base of the statue to this day, sending the message that all are welcome in the United States of America, no matter religion, background, or race.

Emma Lazarus left behind a legacy on the value of kindness and compassion for others.

## Give it Some Thought

How do you think Emma Lazarus felt when she saw the struggles of Jewish immigrants arriving in America?

How do you think immigrants felt to leave their homes and families behind to start new lives in a foreign country?

Emma Lazarus believed in welcoming immigrants and offering them support as they started their new lives in America. How can we create a welcoming and inclusive community for people who are new to our school or neighborhood?

Emma Lazarus spent her adult life helping others who were less fortunate. Can you think of ways that you can use your own talents and abilities to make a positive difference in the world?

## Glossary

**Family Tree:** A diagram or chart that shows the relationships between different members of a family, usually going back several generations.

**Ancestor:** A person from whom one is descended, such as a grandparent, great-grandparent, or earlier relative.

**Immigrate/Immigration:** To come to a new country to live permanently.

**Activist:** Someone who works to make the world a better place by speaking up and taking action for things they believe are important.

**Sephardic:** The descendants of Jews who lived in Spain and Portugal before being expelled in the late 15th century.

**Vocational Education:** Education and training that focuses on specific skills and trades, preparing students for careers in various industries.

**Inclusive:** Including or accommodating people from all backgrounds, identities, or abilities.

**Symbol:** A thing that represents or stands for something else, often conveying a deeper meaning or message.

**Advocate:** Someone who publicly supports or recommends a particular cause or policy.

**Plaque:** A flat, thin piece of metal, wood, or stone with writing or an image on it, often used as a memorial or commemoration.

**Pedestal:** A base or support on which a statue or monument is mounted.

**Legacy:** Something handed down or inherited from a predecessor, often in the form of traditions, values, or achievements.

## Use Your Imagination

Here are some activities you can do that are inspired by the story of Emma Lazarus:

### Create a Family Tree

After listening to this episode, look at the family tree Mr. Redge created on the next page of this activity guide. Using his drawing as an example, work on making your own family tree. With a grownup's help, you can find and use a family tree template: <https://freefamilytreetemplates.com/>

### Write a Poem

Inspired by Emma Lazarus's love of poetry, write your own poem about any topic that is important to you or is about something (or someone) you want to stand up for.

### Listen and Draw

Create a picture of something from Emma Lazarus' story that you enjoyed. Is that the Statue of Liberty? Is it a scene of Ms. Lazarus helping others? How about a scene of Jonathan telling Redge about Emma Lazarus? Use your imagination and have fun with it.

### All Are Welcome!

Imagine that you have been asked to make a sign that will be the first thing immigrants see when they arrive in their new country. Make a poster with a message that shows the same welcoming spirit and compassion Emma Lazarus had for Jewish immigrants who arrived in America in the late 1800s.



# My Family Tree

## By Mr. Reginald T. Hedgehog

