

Mirette and Bellini Cross Niagara Falls

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Social Studies

Geography

Mirette and Bellini travelled from Paris to Niagara Falls. Trace their journey on a map. It can be assumed that airplanes were not a common form of travel at this time. How did they get there?

Jakob is traveling from Poland. Trace his journey on a map also.

Mirette, Bellini, and Jakob are travelling from Europe to North America. Find a globe and show your student the seven continents. Use the continent cards & discs and a map or globe to reinforce the seven continents this week.

Travel on a Ship

It would take many weeks to travel the Atlantic Ocean by boat. Discuss some of the downsides of being on a ship for so long. Does your child get seasick? Do they know what that is? Discuss the ramifications of illness on a ship. What if someone had a contagious disease? It would travel faster in smaller quarters.

Steerage

Mirette sees passengers from the steerage section. When people traveled to America, they were divided up by wealth. The poorest people stayed in steerage, which was a big open area in the bottom section of the boat. These people had the cheapest tickets on the boat, and the worst conditions. They were traveling to America to move there permanently. It was frightening to leave everything behind and move to a new place. Why did people do it? Does your student think that Mirette and Bellini were able to brighten the spirits of the people on the boat during their journey?

Immigration

Most of the immigrants that passed through Ellis Island as Jakob did were from southern and eastern Europe. They began their journey by traveling across Europe to get to a seaport. Not all of Europe is easily accessible to the Atlantic Ocean, and if people wanted to travel to America, they had to first travel to a location where they could take a boat. These people often traveled by foot, train, or horse.

Ellis Island

When people arrived at Ellis Island, they were given numbered identity tags. They were forced to leave their baggage on the ground floor (all of their possessions!), and continue upstairs to the registry room. There they were inspected to see if they could enter the country right away, or if they had to undergo further review. The main concern was that they did not bring diseases from their country into America. If the doctors thought that an individual might be carrying a disease, their clothes were marked with chalk, and they were pulled out of line for further inspection. If they seemed healthy, they could continue on. After the registry room, people proceeded on to the legal inspection. The manifest (the list of people on the boat) was given to Ellis Island, and officials there asked the people questions to confirm their identity. They were asked questions about their age, marital status, destination, etc. If their answers did not match what was written on the manifest, they would be kept for further inspection. After that, the immigrants who were given permission to enter the country were able to buy train tickets, exchange their money, and meet their loved ones.

Go-along book: *If Your Name Was Changed at Ellis Island*

Niagara Falls

Locate Niagara Falls on a Map.

Niagara Falls is the collective name for the Horseshoe Falls, the American Falls, and the Bridal Veil Falls. These are a series of waterfalls that lie on the American/Canadian border in upstate New York. Combined, they have the highest flow rate of any waterfall in the world. They were formed when the glaciers receded at the end of the last ice age. The Horseshoe Falls drop about 173 feet and are 2,600 feet wide, while the American Falls drop between 70-100 feet and are 1,060 feet wide. How much water flows over the falls is directly related to the elevation of Lake Erie, and reaches its peak in late spring or early summer. At its peak, the volume of water is as much as 202,000 cubic feet per second. The color of the water going over the falls is green, because of dissolved salts and rock, which is caused by the swiftness and power of the Niagara river. The falls are regarded both for their beauty and as a useful source of hydroelectric power.

Do research about Niagara Falls and help your student complete the Five Fast Facts page.

Kindness

Mirette brings Jakob food. This was very kind of her, because the passengers in steerage would not have received good food. She was a good friend to Jakob from the very start.

It shows us Mirette is more than a good tightrope walker; she is kind.

Bellini also shows us something about himself. He insists on staying with Jakob, and vouches for him so that he can remain in America. He did not have to do this, but he did it anyway.

Discuss Matthew 26:34-40, James 1:27, and Matthew 22:34-40 with your student.

The Land of Dreams

Jakob says that, "In America, it is possible." Many people felt this way about America, that it was a land of possibility, and that by moving their lives across the Atlantic, they would have opportunities that they would not have in Europe.

One of our founding documents, the Declaration of Independence guarantees us to the right of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (note: it doesn't say happiness, but it says pursuit of). What is so important about these three rights? Is this why America was considered the land of dreams?

Statue of Liberty

The statue of Liberty is the first thing many immigrants saw when coming to the United States. It was a symbol of freedom to them. The Statue of Liberty was a gift of friendship to the United States from France in 1886.

Discuss this excerpt of the inscription on the statue:

*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!*

How does this description match that of the people on the boat?

Complete the Statue of Liberty mini book for your notebook.

Learn more about this famous landmark with our [Lady Liberty lessons and printables](#).

Deception

Patch is cheating in the contest. Discuss this with your child. Why is deception wrong? How does your child feel about what Patch does? Compared to the other stories that we have read about Mirette and Bellini in this book in their dealings with Jakob, what does this tell us about Patch?

Tourism

You can see a boat down below in the water in one of the illustrations with the tightrope. It is a sightseeing boat for the falls. A similar experience still exists, called “Maid of the Mist” where a boat takes you to see the falls, and gets very close up! The other main attraction at Niagara Falls is a walking tour called “Cave of the Winds” where you get to walk behind a waterfall.

Real Tightrope Walkers

While Mirette and Bellini are fictional characters, there have been real people who have braved the tightrope across the Niagara.

[Watch this video](#) about Charles Blondin. How does Blondin remind your student of Bellini?

Maria Spelterini (b. July 7, 1853, d. October 19, 1912) was an Italian tightrope walker who crossed the Niagara gorge on tightrope on July 8, 1876. She was 19. She crossed just north of the lower suspension bridge. She did it again on July 12, wearing peach baskets strapped to her feet. She did it a third time on July 19th, blindfolded, and with her ankles and wrists manacled on July 22nd. She also toured Europe, and performed at Moscow and St. Petersburg. It seems like she was a real life Mirette!

Language Arts

Third Person & Letter Writing

This story is told in the third person. How different it might be if it was told from another perspective! Have your student write letters from Jakob to his Uncle, telling his side of the story in first person (I, me, my).

Use the printable page to review the four parts of a letter. Your student can type his letter directly on the page.

Newspaper Article

An article is written for the newspapers about Jakob. Have your child write what he thinks the article might say. Be sure to include the main points: who, what, where, when,

and how.

Your student can type directly on the printable page to write his article.

Ship Names

The name of ship in print is italicized. Your child may have seen this in other books. Point it out to him! What does your child think about the idea of a ship having a name? What would your student name a ship if he had one?

Complete the Italics mini book.

Names

In this story the little boy's name is Jakob. Does your child know anyone else with this name? Do they spell it this way? The Hebrew spelling of Jacob is more common. Jakob is from Poland. There are many common names (often from the bible) that have different spellings depending on where the name is from. A good example of this is the name John. Variations on the name John (Hebrew) are: Ian (Scottish), Ivan (Russian), Jan (Dutch), Giovanni (Italian), Johan (German), and Evan (Welsh). Your child may wish to look up their own name, and variations of it. If you discussed Ellis Island with your child, you may wish to mention that names (first and last) were frequently misspelled or changed when someone passed through Ellis Island, mostly due to language barriers and the level of noise in the building.

Big Words

Look for BIG WORDS throughout the story. ("EXTRA! EXTRA! PATCH SAYS HE WILL SURPASS BELLINI.") Discuss these with your student. Why did the author choose to put the words in ALL CAPS? How should we read these big words?

Art

Details

In the picture on the boat where Mirette first sees Jakob, have your student look closely at the picture. Many of the other people in the picture have muffled illustrations where their features are not clear, but Jakob's features are as clear as Mirette's features. Does your child know why this is? It draws your eye to him, and lets you know that he is important, while the other people in the illustration are not.

Inset Pictures

On a few pages, there are inset pictures of something that is happening at the same time as something else. This adds to the action. Why are there only inset pictures on a few

pages? Why are they not on every page? Has your child ever read another book where this style of illustration as storytelling has been used? (Jan Brett books often do this in the margins.)

Realism

The illustrator for this book must have studied either pictures of Niagara Falls, or gone there in person! The pictures are very true to what the falls look like in real life. In the picture where Mirette is walking the tightrope, it seems like the American Falls are behind her, with what is now the Rainbow Bridge in the background. If your child is interested, look at photographs of this area! You should also be able to Google “Niagara web cam” and watch it live.

Math

The story says that the cable that Mirette and Bellini walk is 2000 feet long. Guy wires were attached at twenty foot intervals. How many sets of guy wires were there? How many spikes were there to attach the wires to the ground (each wire touches the ground in two locations)?

How many horses were needed to pull both Mirette and Bellini's wire and Patches wire tight? (The story says that teams of horses pulled the wire, and the illustration shows two horses pulling one side of the wire).

Science

Oxidation

While still on the boat, they see the Statue of Liberty, and know that they have reached America. It is green! Does your student know why? The statue was originally a dull copper color, but due to oxidation of the copper, it turned green. By 1906 it had covered the entire statue.

Look through your piggy banks and try to find pennies that have oxidized.

Waterfalls

Falling water is loud! They cannot hear Jakob because of the water. Has your child ever been near a waterfall? If not, go in your bathroom and whisper to each other. Then turn on both the bathtub and the faucet, and whisper. Can you hear each other? Imagine the sound from of all that water coming over the falls!

Balance-Inner Ear

Balance is important to a tightrope walker! Balance depends on three things: visual feedback from your eyes, feedback from your muscles, and feedback from your inner ear. What does your inner ear have to do with balance? Inside your ear is something called a semicircular canal. It is filled with fluid, and parts of it have small hair cells. When your head moves, the fluid moves the hair cells, and sends feedback to your nerves and brain. This allows your body to keep balance, even when doing something like walking on a wire! To demonstrate this, do the following “inner ear” experiment with your child.

“Inner Ear” Experiment

When you spin in circles, you get dizzy. This is because the movement of your spinning makes the fluid in your semicircular canal move, and activates the hair cells. When you stop moving, the fluid continues to move for a period of time, so your brain thinks that you are still moving, even though your body has stopped.

Take a jar, and fill it with water. Securely put the cap back on. Spin the water in the jar by making circular motions with the jar. When you stop spinning the jar, observe the water. Does it stop spinning? What happens in the jar is very similar to what happens inside your inner ear when you spin!

Balance-Center of Gravity

Your center of gravity is an imaginary point where all of your weight is distributed evenly. To show your child the idea of even distribution of weight, you may wish to let your child play with a balance, or balance something (it could be as simple as a pencil) on their hand. When you are standing normally, this point is midway between your front and your back, a few inches lower than your belly button. A lower center of gravity means that you are more stable. Have your child experiment with this. Take turns trying to (gently) push each other down. Do this when standing up, and then do it crouching down (spread your feet). You should be harder to topple when you are lower.

When our center of gravity is directly over our supports (your feet, when standing), we are balanced. Every time we move from that position, our center of gravity moves, and our body must compensate for this, or we could fall. We generally do this instinctively, moving our head and arms to adjust ourselves. Sometimes we are not able to compensate, and we tumble. Your child can experiment with this by standing on the edge of a stair, or a curb, with his heels hanging over the edge. It seems like a small thing, but it makes it difficult to balance. Let him experiment with ways of compensating

by shifting his body or holding objects.

Your student may be interested in knowing that engineers use this principle when designing cars and buildings. The lower the center of gravity is, the safer.

Tightrope walkers use this same principle. It is more difficult in this situation, because their center of gravity must be kept directly over the rope. It is made even more difficult because the tightrope walker's support is generally only one foot at a time (a small, narrow support) on a wire that is constantly moving.

Also because of this, when a tightrope walker carries a pole, it isn't a rigid pole, but a flexible one (you can see this in the illustrations). The flexible pole helps to lower their center of gravity. This is especially true if the pole is weighted at the ends.

Walk on a balance beam or tape a masking tape line to the floor. Try to balance on the beam or line. Try again using a broom. Does it help you balance?

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Mirette and Bellini travel from Paris to Niagara Falls



Jakob travels from Poland to Niagara.



AUSTRALIA

NORTH
AMERICA

SOUTH
AMERICA

ASIA

EUROPE

AFRICA

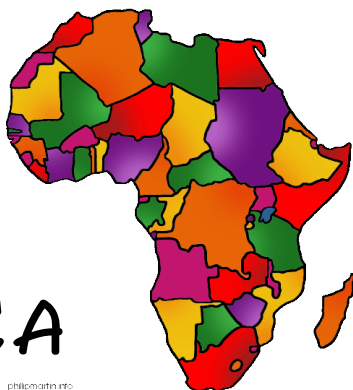
ANTARCTICA

Label a map with these discs as you learn the continents of the world.

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PACIFIC
OCEAN

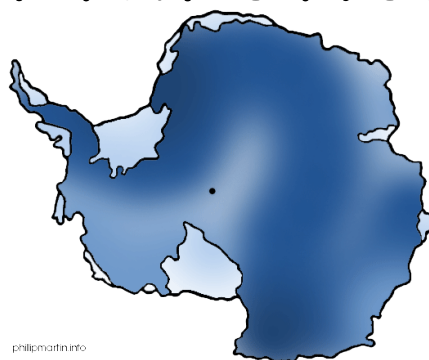
AFRICA



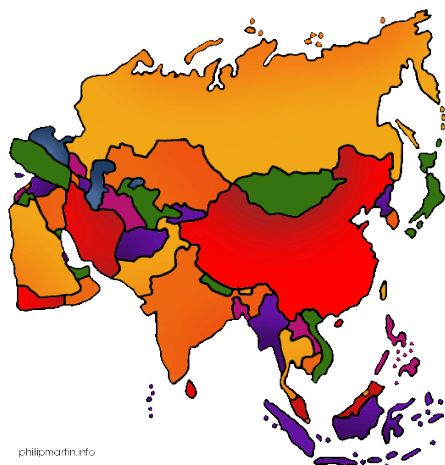
AUSTRALIA



ANTARCTICA



ASIA



NORTH
AMERICA



EUROPE



SOUTH
AMERICA

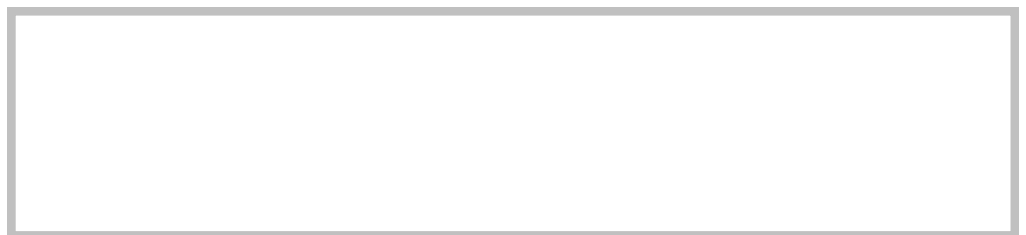


CONTINENT
CARDS

Directions: Cut book out as one piece. Paste words on next page into the book.



Statue of Liberty
symbol of



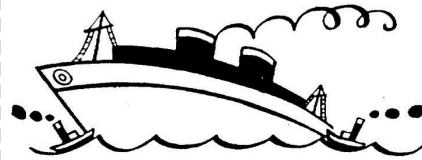
**Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free;
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless,
Tempest-tossed to me
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!**

Explain that we italicize (typed words that slant to the right) the names of ships, books, artworks, plays, etc. in order to distinguish them from other words in the text. We can also underline them to distinguish them.

Cut on the solid lines. Fold top flap down. Fold book in half. Cut out additional pieces. The first one ("the name of a ship") should be pasted on the left side of the open book. When your student lifts the flap ("or you can") he should write "underline it" and show an example of Magnifique underlined. If your student is not writing yet, he could cut and paste the prepared words ("underline it.").

or
you can

Italics



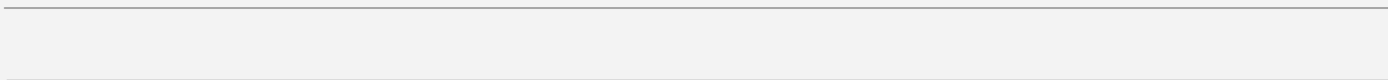
The name of
a ship must
be in italics

Magnifique

underline it

Magnifique







Five Fast Facts Niagara Falls

fact

one

fact

two

fact

three

fact

four

fact

five