Beyond the red brick of Ellis Island
where the two Slovak children
who became my grandparents
waited the long days of quarantine,¹
after leaving the sickness,
the old Empires of Europe,
a Circle Line ship slips easily
on its way to the island
of the tall woman, green
as dreams of forests and meadows
waiting for those who’d worked
a thousand years
yet never owned their own.

Like millions of others,
I too come to this island,
nine decades the answerer
of dreams.

Yet only part of my blood loves that memory.
Another voice speaks
of native lands
within this nation.
Lands invaded
when the earth became owned.
Lands of those who followed
the changing Moon,
knowledge of the seasons
in their veins.

¹ Quarantine (noun): a state of enforced isolation to ensure that no contagious diseases are spread
Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement identifies the main theme of the poem?
   A. The descendants of the immigrants who came to America often don't understand the sacrifices their ancestors made.
   B. America no longer offers immigrants the freedom that it once promised people long ago.
   C. America has a complicated history of offering a new way of life to some while taking it away from others.
   D. Immigrants did not find the success they expected in America when they passed through Ellis Island.

2. PART B: Which TWO details from the text best support the answer to Part A?
   A. “waited the long days of quarantine, / after leaving the sickness” (Lines 4-5)
   B. “on its way to the island / of the tall woman” (Lines 8-9)
   C. “waiting for those who’d worked / a thousand years / yet never owned their own. (Lines 11-13)
   D. “Like millions of others, / I too come to this island” (Lines 14-15)
   E. “Lands invaded / when the earth became owned.” (Lines 22-23)
   F. “the changing Moon, / knowledge of the seasons / in their veins.” (Lines 25-27)

3. The speaker says, “Yet only part of my blood loves that memory” (Line 18). What does that quotation reveal about the speaker’s attitude towards America?
   A. The speaker feels conflicted about America’s history.
   B. The speaker doesn’t like the memory of their grandparents.
   C. The speaker feels as if they don’t belong in America.
   D. The speaker doesn’t consider America a land of opportunity.

4. How do the words used to describe the Statue of Liberty contribute to the tone of the poem?

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   2
Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. How does the poem explore America’s unique history of offering hope and opportunity to some people, while subjugating others? Do you think that you can focus on the positive elements of America’s history without acknowledging the negative? Why or why not?

2. The speaker of this poem references one component of American history that is complicated. Can you think of others? Why is it important to think about all the ways your examples can be considered?

3. In the poem, the speaker feels a sense of connection to his ancestors who immigrated to America and to the Native Americans who lived on the land before them. What might cause the speaker to feel connected to both groups of people? How can both parts of the history the speaker describes be part of their identity?