

Lucia's New School

A Reading A-Z Level R Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,098

Connections

Writing and Art

Research to learn more about Ellis Island. Create a poster to show the history of the immigration station. Share your work with your class.

Social Studies

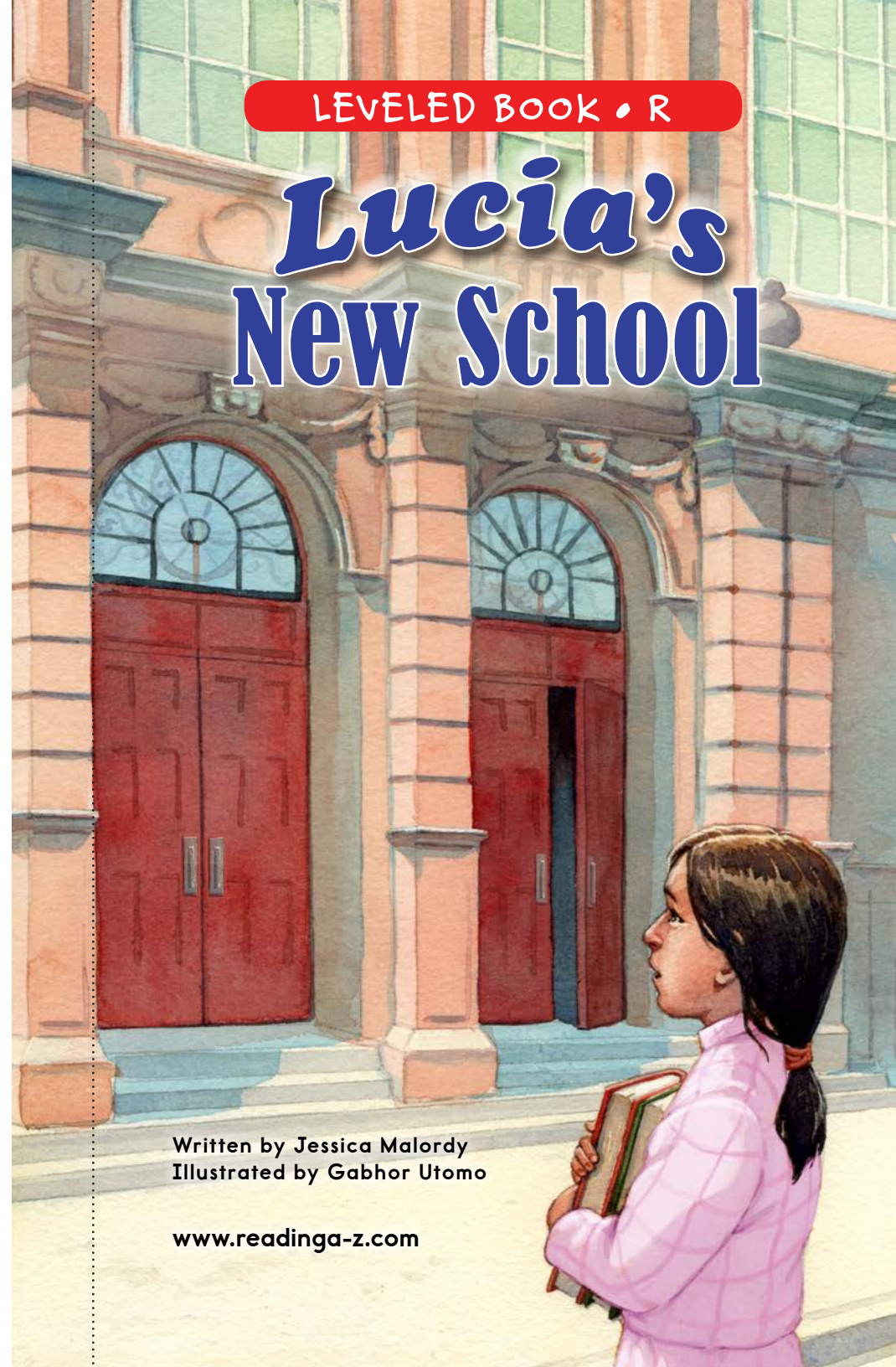
Lucia is from Italy. Locate Italy and where you live on a map. How could you travel to Italy from where you live? Explain to a partner why you chose to travel the way you did.

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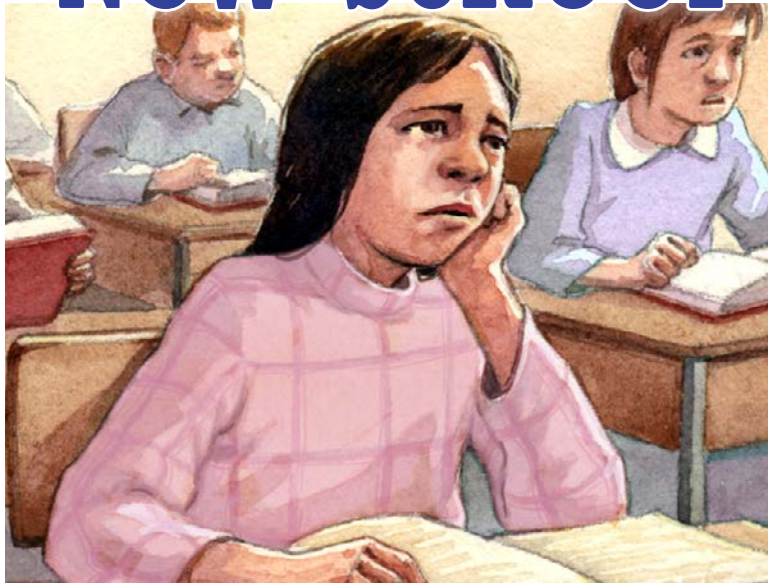
Lucia's New School



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Focus Question

How do Lucia's feelings about her new school change during the story, and how does meeting Teresa help her?

Words to Know

apologized
confusion
immigrant
impatiently
orchard

poverty
tenements
tongue
vendors

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Correlation

LEVEL R

Fountas & Pinnell	N
Reading Recovery	30
DRA	30



The new school sat on Orchard Street, but there wasn't an **orchard** in sight. Instead, the street looked like the rest of the Lower East Side, an **immigrant** neighborhood in New York City. It was 1909. There were run-down **tenements**, grimy gutters, strange smells, and more people than Lucia (loo-CHEE-ah) could count. Pushcart **vendors** made their way through the crowds, hawking their goods.

"Bratwurst! Sweet and spicy bratwurst!" a big man bellowed.

"Pickles! Two cents each!" shrieked a skinny lady with a kerchief.

"Fresh-roasted corn coming right up!" a boy shouted.



Not that Lucia could understand a word—the pushcart vendors spoke in a **tongue** she didn't understand. Maybe it was English, maybe German or Yiddish, maybe all three. In any case, Lucia only spoke Italian. She had just arrived in America a few weeks ago. In her first home, a little village in southern Italy, the roads had been plain dirt, surrounded by quiet fields and fruit trees. On windy days, the air smelled of lemons and oranges and the sea. But one day, her parents had decided to sell their goats, bundle up their belongings, and board a ship to America.

“We are leaving for a better life,” Lucia’s mother had told her. “In America, you will be able to go to school. In Italy, for farmers like us, there is only **poverty**.”

Lucia was thankful for the opportunity to go to school for the first time. Back home, the only school had been many miles away. Still, as she walked up the stone steps of Public School 42, she could not help but feel afraid.



The school’s long hallways and tile floors reminded her of Ellis Island, where she and her family had been inspected before being allowed into America. The school nurse checked Lucia’s hair for lice, though nurses at Ellis Island already had.

The principal scribbled Lucia’s name and classroom number on a slip of paper. He handed it to her, then pointed sharply toward the stairs. When Lucia found her new classroom, she took a deep breath before knocking on the door.

The teacher answered the door. “Class, it seems we have a new student. What is your name?” she asked Lucia.

Lucia did not understand and shook her head.

The teacher sighed **impatiently**. “What is your name?” she asked again.

Lucia bit her lip. She didn’t understand the question any better than before.

There were forty students in the class, all of them watching with wide eyes. When the teacher grabbed the slip of paper out of Lucia’s shaking hand, they giggled.



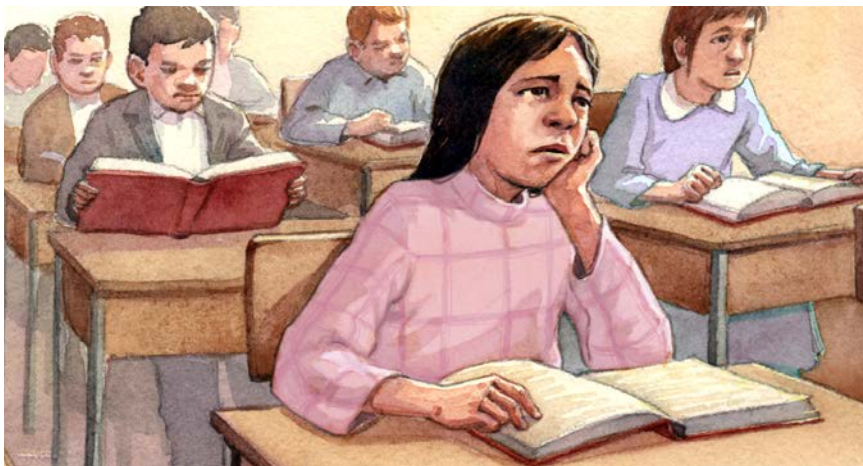
Students play chess during an after-school program at P.S. 42 in New York City.

The Lower East Side of Manhattan has housed huge numbers of immigrants for nearly two centuries. The Benjamin Altman School (aka Public School 42) has always been a great sample of the neighborhood’s population. When the school opened in 1898, the students were mostly Jewish immigrants from eastern Europe. Today, the students are 94 percent Asian.

One thing hasn’t changed, though. Kids in New York City refer to their public school by its number, not its name. So they don’t call it the Benjamin Altman School. They call it P.S. 42.

“Her name is Lucia Giordano,” the teacher announced as she walked Lucia to a desk at the back of the room. Lucia heard her name and felt her cheeks turn hot with shame as she passed her new classmates. She should have realized what the teacher was asking, but how could she have been sure? It all sounded like nonsense to Lucia’s ears.

The rest of the day passed in a blur. Everything was in English: the textbook, the writing on the blackboard, the teacher’s instructions. English was awful, Lucia decided, with its clunky consonants and ugly-sounding vowels. All day long, the strange sounds surrounded her like a dark fog Lucia feared she would never escape.



“I hate school!” she told her parents that night. “I don’t know anybody, and nobody will talk to me. I can’t even see the blackboard from where I sit . . . not that it matters. I don’t have any idea what’s going on, because it’s all in English.”



"It's the same for me at the brickyard," Lucia's father said. "The boss speaks English, so I must learn to speak English."

"This is a new country, Lucia, and we are all going to have to learn its language," her mother said.

"What for?" Lucia asked. "Why did we have to leave everything we know for this crowded country and its horrible language?"

"We did this for you," Lucia's father said in a firm voice. "In America, you have the chance for a better life. Now finish your dinner—school starts early tomorrow."



All week, Lucia did her best to follow along at school, but her **confusion** continued. She tried asking a classmate for help, but the girl shook her head and looked away. When Friday finally arrived, Lucia raced out of the building, eager to escape. She ran so fast, however, that she slipped down the stone steps and banged into another girl.



"*Mi scusi!*" Lucia **apologized** in Italian before she could stop herself. The words just slipped out.

To her surprise, the girl she had bumped into grinned. "*Tranquilla,*" she replied.

"You speak Italian?" Lucia cried.

"Of course," the girl replied. "My name is Teresa. We moved last summer from Naples. We live on Mulberry Street now."

They were still speaking in Italian as they walked together down the street.

“Are there mulberries on your street?” Lucia asked. “We live on Elizabeth Street, but nobody seems to know who she was.”

Teresa laughed. “Not a mulberry tree in sight! But sometimes I like to sit on the fire escape and pretend I’m at the top of a very tall tree.”

“What a wonderful idea! I’ll have to try that, too,” Lucia said. “I’m so glad to meet a friend. None of my classmates like me. I tried to ask someone for help today, and she wouldn’t even look at me! I’ve never met such unfriendly people before.”



“They’re not unfriendly,” Teresa explained. “I’m sure they’d like you if they understood you! Look around—all the kids here are immigrants like you and me. Nobody speaks English, not yet anyway.”

“Really?” It had not occurred to Lucia that others were struggling, too.

“Really! And from all over,” Teresa continued. “Hungary, Poland, Russia . . . it’s tough to find someone you can talk to. Lucky you bumped into me!”

Lucia looked around. It was the same busy street as before, but suddenly the bustling Lower East Side looked different. Maybe it was just that Teresa’s words had changed the way Lucia saw it. Suddenly the many languages, and the different types of dress, and the strange foods, and the crowded buildings didn’t seem so scary or overwhelming.

“Everyone came here for a better life, just like we did,” Lucia said. “Everybody probably feels just as alone and afraid as I do.”

“But you’re not alone,” Teresa said. “We can learn English together.” Then she grabbed Lucia’s hand and said the word again, but in English. “Say it with me.”

Lucia grinned. “To-ge-ther,” she said.



Glossary

apologized (<i>v.</i>)	showed that one is sorry for saying or doing something wrong (p. 12)
confusion (<i>n.</i>)	a state in which one is unclear or uncertain about something (p. 11)
immigrant (<i>adj.</i>)	of or relating to a person who comes to live in a new country, especially for the purpose of settling there (p. 3)
impatiently (<i>adv.</i>)	in an annoyed manner, usually because of having to wait for something (p. 7)
orchard (<i>n.</i>)	an area of land that is planted with fruit trees or nut trees (p. 3)
poverty (<i>n.</i>)	the state of being poor (p. 5)
tenements (<i>n.</i>)	houses or other buildings divided into apartments, especially ones that are overcrowded or in disrepair (p. 3)
tongue (<i>n.</i>)	the language a person speaks (p. 4)
vendors (<i>n.</i>)	people who sell things (p. 3)