

Pilsen is an old community in Chicago with a long history. This part of Chicago started small and got bigger, as most neighborhoods in the city did. Its cultural history is about moving, changing, and connecting. Many people have moved there over the decades. This movement started when immigrants chose to settle in this part of the city when Chicago was growing rapidly. An immigrant is a person who moves from one country to another. Pilsen's first people spoke German. They had moved from Germany. If you go to Pilsen today you will see some of the places they built. But when they first moved there, it had just a few homes. Then immigrants continued to migrate there; newcomers moved to Pilsen so they could be near people who came from the same country.

Many immigrants found homes and jobs in Pilsen, and it was a time of challenge and change for them. They had to figure out how to live in the new country. They had to find a place to live, and they needed employment for income. They worked on railroads and on docks along the Chicago River, loading and unloading lumber, and in factories, too. They had a lot to do to make a home in their new country, and it was not easy to accomplish the changes. Cooperation and collaboration were important for the progress of each family and the whole community.

The newcomers built churches, created gardens, opened stores, and set up newspapers. The newspapers were published in their own language, and they were a way to educate the newcomers about their own community and the city through articles and editorials. Many entrepreneurs opened businesses, and soon the community was bustling. Some social workers supported this progress, they guided the immigrants who kept coming to the community. They set up settlement houses, where people could learn English and get help finding work and housing. But then there was movement out of the community, it was a local migration to suburbs and other parts of the city. People were looking for more opportunities. As the population declined, businesses closed.

Then there was another movement into Pilsen, which you'll see a symbol of if you go to 1831 South Racine today. There you will find Casa Aztlán, which is a Mexican-American center. About 50 years ago, many Mexican-Americans moved to Pilsen from another part of Chicago—so the community was renewed. They liked the buildings, they wanted to create a Mexican-American community. They joined the churches of Pilsen. To avoid conflict, leaders of the Mexican Americans and European Americans talked about ways to collaborate to continue Pilsen's progress. One way the two groups worked together was to create murals, which are enormous paintings on walls. Pilsen has many beautiful murals created during that period. When you see those murals you will notice that there are symbols of Germany and other European countries as well as representations of Mexican history. They are inter-cultural art that represents the connections that were made through that collaboration.

Pilsen used to be called the "Heart of Chicago" when people first settled there, then there was an exodus. But through the second migration, it became the "Heart of Chicago" again, this time for families from Mexico. People opened businesses, and Mexican American community groups supported the community's families. Now as in the past there still are organizations that help people who move to this part of Chicago.

A heritage is a legacy; it comes from the past and influences the present. The Mexican Americans have a rich heritage from their own country and from their experience in Pilsen. Each August, the community has a special day. It is the Fiesta Del Sol, a gathering that includes the Mexican Americans and people from all over the metropolitan area. People who used to live in Pilsen return come and see the changes. They see their own heritage, as well, in the murals.

## Infer and Support the Main Idea - Nonfiction

Questions developed by Center for Urban Education for use by Chicago Public Schools 2008-2009.

*Choose the best answer for each question.*

1. What is the main idea of the first paragraph?

- a. Many people moved to Pilsen.
- b. Pilsen is a community of immigrants.
- c. Pilsen is old.
- d. Pilsen is in Chicago.

2. What is the main idea of the second paragraph?

- a. Immigrants liked Pilsen
- b. Immigrants built new lives in Pilsen.
- c. Immigrants moved out of Pilsen.
- d. Immigrants found jobs in Pilsen.

3. What is the main idea of the whole passage?

- a. Pilsen has a great history.
- b. Many people live in Pilsen.
- c. Immigrants have moved to Chicago.
- d. Mexican Americans live in Pilsen today.

4. What is another good title for the passage?

- a. Living in Chicago: Then and Now
- b. Moving to Pilsen
- c. Work and Homes in Chicago
- d. A Community of Murals

5. *Write your own answer to this question. How do you figure out the main idea of a nonfiction passage?*

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### **TEACHER NOTES: Develop Students' Skills: Exercise Thinking**

These questions have not been validated, so decisions about student's achievement should not be made based on their responses. They are intended to exercise skills. Recommended activities include: students work in pairs to choose the best response; give students the questions without the responses so they generate their own answers; students make up additional questions; students make up questions like these for another passage.

**Answers:** *You can remove this answer key and then give it to students and ask them to figure out the basis for the correct response.*

Item	1	2	3	4
Answer	b	b	a	a

Question 5 is open-ended. Here is a suggested response.  
Answers should include: look at the title; look at the kind of information.