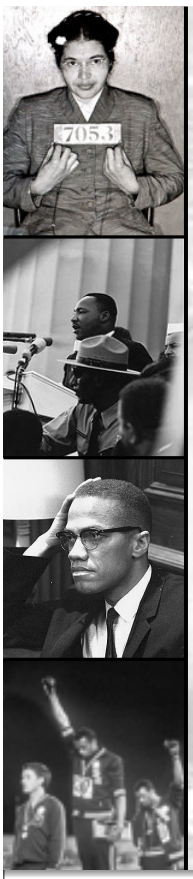

Activity: Read letters from African Americans heading North, then write your own!

- **Directions:** Read the following letters, written by African American migrants heading North.
  Part I. Answer the following questions:
  - 1) What "push factors" are causing African Americans to move out of the South? Use specific detail and examples from the letters.
  - 2) What "pull factors" are pulling African Americans to the North? Use specific detail and examples from the letters.
  - 3) What emotions do these migrants display? How do you feel about their situation and why?
- **Part II.** Now, imagine that it's 1919. You are a black migrant moving North. You have a large family. In a 200-word letter, explain the "push/pull" factors involved in your decision to migrate. What economic and social struggles will you face along the journey? What do you hope to find in the North? Will life improve for your family? Explain.

Letter to the Chicago Defender

County: ANDERSON
State: TX
Town: Palestine
Date: January 2, 1917

Dear Sir:

I hereby enclose you a few lines to find out some few things if you will be so kind to word them to me. I am a southerner lad and has never ben in the north no further than Texas and I has heard so much talk about the north and how much better the colard people are treated up there than they are down here and I has ben striveing so hard in my coming up and now I see tha tI cannot get up there without the ade of some one and I wants to ask you Dear Sir to please direct me in your best manner the step that I shall take to get there and if there are any way that you can help me to get there I am kindly asking you for your ade. And if you will ade me please notify me by return mail because I am sure ancious to make it in the north because these southern white people ar so mean and they seems to be getting worse and I wants to get away and they wont pay me in getting up there please give me enough to get away and live to. If you will not ade me in getting up there please give me some information how I can get there I would like to get there in the early spring, if I can get there if possible. Our Southern white people are so cruel we collard people are almost afraid to walke the streets after night. So please let me hear from you by return mail. I will not say very much in this letter I will tell you more about it when I hear form you please ans. soon to

Yours truly.

Source: http://www.people.memphis.edu/~kenichls/WA4Letters.htm

Letter to the Chicago Defender

County: HALE
State: AL
Town: Newbern
Date: April 7, 1917

Dear Sir:

I am in receipt of a letter from ____ of ____, ____, in regards to placing two young women of our community in positions in the North or West; as he was unable to give the above assistance he enclosed your address. We desire to know if you are in a position to put us in touch with any reliable form or private family that desire to employ two young women; one is a teacher in the public school of this county, and has been for the past six years; having duties of a mother and sister to care for she is forced to seek employment else where as labor is very cheap here. The other is a high school pupil, is capable of doing the pwork of a private family with much credit.

Doubtless you have learned of the great exodus of our poeple to the north and west from this and other southern states. I wish to say that we are forced to go when one thinks of a grown man wages is only fifty to seventy five cents per day for allg rades of work. He is compelled to go where there is better wages ans sociable conditions, believe me. When I say that many places here in this state the only think that the black man gets is a peck of meal and from three to four lbs. Of bacon per week, and he is treated as a slave. As leaders we are powerless for we dare not resent such or to show even the slightest disapproval. Only a few days ago more than 1,000 people left here for the North and West. They cannot stay here. The white man is saynig that you must not go, but they are not doing anything by way of assisting the black man to stay. As a minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church (north) I am on the verge of starvation simply because of the above conditins. I shall be glad to know if there is any possible way which I could be of real service to you as director of your society. Thanking you in advance for an early reply, and for any suggestions that you may be able to offer.

With best wishes for your success, I remain, very sincerely yours.

Source: http://www.people.memphis.edu/~kenichls/WA4Letters.htm

Letter to the Chicago Defender

County: ORLEANS
State: LA
Town: New Orleans
Date: June 10, 1917

Kind Sir: I read and hear daly of the great chance that a colored parson has in Chicago of making a living with all the priveleg that the whites have and it mak me the most ankious to want to go where I may be able to make a liveing for my self. When you read this you will think it bery strange that being only my self to support that it is so hard, but it is so. everything is gone up but the poor colerd peple wages. I have made sevle afford to leave and come to Chicago where I hear that times is good for us but owing to femail wekness has made it a perfect failure. I am a widow for 9 years. I have very pore learning altho it would not make much diffrent if I would be throughly edacated for I could not get any better work to do, such as house work, washing and ironing and all such work that are injering to a woman with femail wekness and they pay so little for so hard work that it is just enough to pay room rent and a little some thing to eat. I have found a very good remady that I really feeling to belive would cure me if I only could make enough money to keep up my madison and I dont think that I will ever be able to do that down hear for the time is getting worse evry day. I am going to ask if you peple hear could aid me in geting over her in Chicago and seeking out a position of some kind. I can also do plain sewing. Please good peple dont refuse to help me out in my trouble for I am in gret need of help God will bless you. I am going to do my very best after I get over here if God spair me to get work I will pay the expance back. Do try to do the best you can for me, with many thanks for so doing I will remain as ever,
Yours truly.

Source:
http://occawlonline.pearsoned.com/bookbind/pubbooks/divine5e/chapter24/medialib/primarysources2_24_1.html

County: ADAMS
State: MS
Town: Natchez
Date: September 22, 1917

MR. R. S. ABBOTT, Editor.

Dear Sir: I thought that you might help me in Some way either personally or through your influence, is why I am worrying you for which I beg pardon.

I am a married man having wife and mother to support, (I mention this in order to properly convey my plight) conditions here are not altogether good and living expenses growing while wages are small. My greatest desire is to leave for a better place but am unable to raise the money.

I can write short stories all of which portray negro characters but no burlesque can also write poems, have a gift for cartooning but have never learned the technicalities of comic drawing. these things will never profit me anything here in Natchez. Would like to know if you could use one or two of my short stories in serial form in your great paper they are very interesting and would furnish good reading matter. By this means I could probably leave here in short and thus come in possession of better employment enabling me to take up my drawing which I like best.

Kindly let me hear from you and if you cannot favor me could you refer me to any Negro publication buying fiction from their race.

Source: http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5332/

County: ANDERSON
State: TX
Town: Palestine
Date: January 2, 1917

Dear Sir:

I hereby enclose you a few lines to find out some few things if you will be so kind to word them to me. I am a southerner lad and has never ben in the north no further than Texas and I has heard so much talk about the north and how much better the colard people are treated up there than they are down here and I has ben striveing so hard in my coming up and now I see tha tI cannot get up there without the ade of some one and I wants to ask you Dear Sir to please direct me in your best manner the step that I shall take to get there and if there are any way that you can help me to get there I am kindly asking you for your ade. And if you will ade me please notify me by return mail because I am sure ancious to make it in the north because these southern white people ar so mean and they seems to be getting worse and I wants to get away and they wont pay me in getting up there please give me enough to get away and live to. If you will not ade me in getting up there please give me some information how I can get there I would like to get there in the early spring, if I can get there if possible. Our Southern white people are so cruel we collard people are almost afraid to walke the streets after night. So please let me hear from you by return mail. I will not say very much in this letter I will tell you more about it when I hear form you please ans. soon to

Yours truly.

Source: http://www.people.memphis.edu/~kenichls/WA4Letters.htm

County: COOK
State: IL
Town: Chicago
Date: November 13, 1917

Mr. H————-
Hattiesburg, Miss.

Dear M————: Yours received sometime ago and found all well and doing well. hope you and family are well.

I got my things alright the other day and they were in good condition. I am all fixed now and living well. I certainly appreciate what you done for us and I will remember you in the near future.

M————, old boy, I was promoted on the first of the month I was made first assistant to the head carpenter when he is out of the place I take everything in charge and was raised to $95. a month. You know I know my stuff.

Whats the news generally around H'burg? I should have been here 20 years ago. I just begin to feel like a man. It's a great deal of pleasure in knowing that you have got some privilege. My children are going to the same school with the whites and I dont have to umble to no one. I have registered—Will vote the next election and there isnt any 'yes sir' and 'no sir'—its all yes and no and Sam and Bill.

Florine says hello and would like very much to see you.

All joins me in sending love to you and family. How is times there now? Answer soon, from your friend and bro.

Source: http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5339/

Letter to the Chicago Defender

County: ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST
State: LA
Town: Lutcher
Date: May 13, 1917

Dear Sir: I have been reading the Chicago defender and seeing so many advertisements about the work in the north I thought to write you concerning my condition. I am working hard in the south and can hardly earn a living. I have a wife and one child and can hardly feed them. I thought to write and ask you for some information concerning how to get a pass for myself and family. I dont want to leave my family behind as I cant hardly make a living for them right here with them and I know they would fare hard if I would leave them. If there are any agents in the south there havent been any of them to Lutcher if they would come here they would get at least fifty men. Please sir let me hear from you as quick as possible. Now this is all. Please dont publish my letter, I was out in town today talking to some of the men and they say if they could get passes that 30 or 40 of them would come. But they havent got the money and they dont know how to come. But they are good strong and able working men. If you will instruct me I will instruct the other men how to come as they all want to work. Please dont publish this because we have to whisper this around among our selves because the white folks are angry now because the negroes are going north.

Source: http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5332/