



FAMILY ARTICLE

TEACHER GUIDE

THE CONFINOS

WHO THEY ARE

Many members of the Confino family lived at 97 Orchard Street in the 1910s. Originally from Kastoria, a town in modern-day Greece, the family began immigrating to the United States in 1913 as war began to break out in the Ottoman Empire. Soldiers began to quarter in the Confino home and to steal goods from their store. The eldest Confino son, Joseph, was old enough to be drafted into the army, and the family was worried for his safety and his ability to practice his Jewish religion if he became a soldier. The Confinos decided to leave their hometown to ensure their children were safe and that the family could remain together.

PRIMARY SOURCES

1 Kastoria Postcard c. 1900

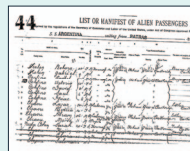


This is a postcard of what the Confino Family's hometown may have looked like as they were packing their belongings to begin their journey to the United States. The postcard shows large houses with courtyards, a beautiful blue lake, majestic mountains, and a clear sky.

Questions for Student Exploration

- *What are some words you would use to describe Kastoria, based on what you see in this image?*
- *In what ways is Kastoria different than New York City?*
- *Have you ever left a home behind and adjusted to life in a new place?*

2 1913 SS Argentina Ship Manifest



Some members of the Confino family are listed on the passenger list of the SS *Argentina*. Rachel, Victoria, David, Saul, and Isaac are all traveling to the United States from modern-day Greece to reunite with other family members. Their "Race or People" is listed as Hebrew, referring to their Jewish religion.

Questions for Student Exploration

- *How old were the Confino children when they travelled on the SS Argentina?*
- *Can you figure out what religion the Confino family practiced by looking at this document?*
- *What do all of the individuals on the passenger list have in common?*



PRIMARY SOURCES

3 Confino Family Photograph, 1913



This family portrait was taken shortly after Rachel and her children arrived in New York City after their journey on the SS *Argentina*. Pictured here are (top row) Abraham, Rachel, David, Victoria, (bottom row), Jacob, and Saul. This portrait does not include everyone from the Confino family that lived at 97 Orchard Street.

Questions for Student Exploration

- Who do you think is in this picture?
- Is this taken in New York or Kastoria? How do you know?
- How do you think Victoria feels while posing for this photograph in a new city? How do you feel when you have to take a group picture?

READING ACTIVITIES

Comprehension Questions

- What country and what town was Victoria from?
- Where were Victoria's ancestors from? What language did she speak? What was her religion?
- How old was Victoria when her family decided to come to the United States?
- What was happening in Victoria's region in 1913 that influenced the Confino family's decision to leave Kastoria?
- What part of the ship (the SS *Argentina*) did Victoria's family travel in to the United States. What was it like there?
- Where was the first place Victoria's family went once their ship reached the United States? Describe something Victoria experienced there.
- Where did Victoria's family decide to live in New York City?
- When did Victoria stop going to school? What did she do?

Your Turn / Thinking Questions

ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCE

- What are the reasons Victoria and her family left Kastoria for New York?
- How is Victoria's life in New York different than in Kastoria? How is her life the same?

ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE

- How does Victoria's life in 1913 seem different from your life today? How does it seem similar?
- What do you think would be the most difficult part of Ellis Island?



WRITING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Pretend you are 14-year old Victoria Confino and write a biography poem. You can use the template and your imagination, but make sure to include information you've learned from the primary sources and article to fill in the details.

Victoria Confino

Wishes to _____

Dreams of _____

Wants to _____

Wonders about _____

Fears _____

Likes _____

Believes in _____

Loves _____

Plans to _____

Wonders about _____

- 2 Did push factors or pull factors play a bigger role in the Confino family's decision to immigrate to the United States? Please use two pieces of evidence from the text or primary sources to explain why.

GLOSSARY

ANCESTORS

(n.) family members that lived a long time ago.

LADINO

(n.) a language spoken by Sephardic Jewish people. Some words might sound like Spanish, French, Hebrew, or Arabic.

JEWISH SABBATH

(n.) the Jewish day of rest, starting Friday night and lasting until Saturday night every week.

KOSHER

(adj.) a way of preparing food in order for Jewish families to practice their religion and dietary restrictions.

REGION

(n.) an area of land that may include many different towns, cities, or even countries.

QUARTERED

(v.) when soldiers or other government forces take over civilian homes to live and rest.

STEERAGE

(n.) the most affordable level of a steamship where many immigrant families stayed as they traveled across the ocean. This level was below sea level and very crowded.

BERTH

(n.) a small, uncomfortable bunk bed, usually found on a ship.

FERRY

(n.) a small boat that travels small distances, usually as a form of quick transportation.

MANIFEST

(n.) a document that lists the names and information of all passengers from the arriving steamship.

SHABBAT

(n.) see Jewish Sabbath.

DESCENDANTS

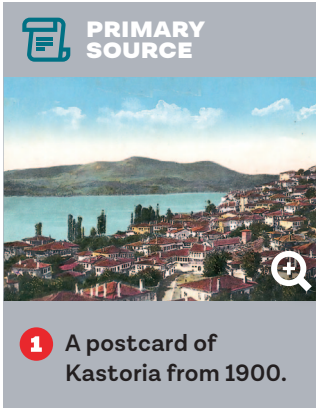
(n.) an individual's children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, and future family members.



FAMILY ARTICLE

THE STORY

THE CONFINOS



Victoria Confino's Childhood in Kastoria

As a young girl, Victoria Confino had little reason to want to leave her home in Kastoria, a beautiful town in the country of Greece surrounded by mountains, forests, and a large lake.

Victoria's Papa was a businessman and had a store in one of the rooms of the house, which was three stories tall and had marble floors. Gardens and fruit trees surrounded her home. Victoria had a sister and four brothers by 1913, and she also shared her home with her mama, Rachel, her papa, Abraham, and with uncles, aunts, cousins, and maids who helped with the housework.

One thing Victoria learned as a young girl was about her Sephardic Jewish heritage — her **ancestors** were from Spain. Although they left Spain hundreds of years earlier, they kept their language (called **Ladino** or *Spangol Muestru*, “Our Spanish”), songs, and pride in their names and community.

Victoria did not go to school, but there were many, many things to learn from her mother and aunts: how to sew, run a household, and keep her family's traditions. Mothers performed the candle-lighting ceremony on the **Jewish Sabbath**, prepared **kosher** foods, and expected that their daughters would learn these rituals too. For fun, Victoria might have enjoyed swimming in the lake, singing, and visiting friends and neighbors.

YOUR TURN How does Victoria's life in 1913 seem different from your life today?
How does it seem similar?

Leaving Kastoria

Victoria turned eleven in 1913, and that summer she left Kastoria forever and made the journey to New York City.

Why did Victoria, her parents, and her brothers leave their home? There were many reasons why they crossed the ocean to start a new life.

By 1913, their **region** was at war. The family feared that her oldest brother Joseph, 15 years old, would be forced to fight in the war. In addition to the dangers faced by soldiers, in the army he would not be able to practice his Jewish religion, such as observing the Sabbath and eating kosher foods.



In addition, because the family had a big house, there were soldiers **quartered** in their home, and they knew that at any time the war itself might be fought in their town.

Many people in Victoria's community had already immigrated to the United States. Especially with the war, there weren't many ways for Sephardic Jewish people to make money or find a good education.

Victoria's older sister, Allegra, had immigrated to New York City earlier in 1913, with her new husband Sam Russo, who was already well-established in New York. Perhaps one thing that eased the pain of leaving home was that maybe Victoria was excited about being reunited with her only sister.

The decision was finally made when a mysterious fire burned down the Confino's beautiful home in Kastoria. Now homeless, the family gathered what was left of their belongings and prepared to start over in America.

YOUR TURN What are the reasons Victoria and her family left Kastoria for New York?

The Journey

Victoria's father Abraham left for New York first, taking his son Joseph, and two nephews.

In August 1913, Victoria, her mother, and other siblings started the trip to join her father.

They first travelled to Patras, Greece. In Patras, they boarded a steamship, the SS *Argentina*, crossing the Atlantic Ocean to New York City.

The SS *Argentina* was a big ship. Victoria and her family traveled in **steerage**, located at the bottom of the boat, with up to 1,230 other third-class passengers. A ticket in steerage was the least expensive, and steerage was the most crowded part of the boat.

Imagine you are with Victoria in steerage. It's crowded, damp, and chilly and there are no windows. She sleeps on a **berth** with a thin mattress, blanket, and a life preserver used as a pillow. It is never quiet in steerage. Victoria can hear the ship's machinery, the waves, and the sounds of people getting seasick, coughing, talking and praying in many different languages, and babies crying. There's not much to do and her brothers are bored and cranky.

For many immigrants, their first memory of America was seeing the "lady with the torch" — the Statue of Liberty — in New York harbor. First- and second-class passengers were free to leave the ship once it docked at the





pier, as long as they were not seriously ill. The Confinos, along with other steerage-class passengers, had to wait on board the ship, often overnight, until they boarded a **ferry** that would take them to Ellis Island.

Ellis Island

Over twelve million newcomers were inspected at the immigration station at Ellis Island between 1892 and 1954.



How did Victoria feel at Ellis Island? For many, Ellis Island was a frightening place. A nickname for Ellis Island among Sephardic Jewish immigrants like Victoria was *la izla de sufriensas* (the island of suffering).

Imagine Victoria making her way through Ellis Island. She is directed to walk single file up a huge staircase to the second floor. At the top of the stairs are Public Health Service doctors. The doctors look to see if anyone wheezes, coughs, shuffles, or limps as they climb. Victoria's mama, who suffers from a painful leg, may be nervous as she tries to hide her limp. Once they pass through the medical inspection, Victoria and her family wait to be questioned in the Great Hall. They sit on hard benches. If the wait is especially long, they might receive a free meal. This could be sandwiches, bananas, ice cream, or Jell-O, foods Victoria had probably never seen before. After the wait, they are questioned by an inspector who has a **manifest** with all their names, countries, and personal information.

Unless a person was detained for health or legal reasons, it took an average of five hours to pass through the entire inspection process at Ellis Island. About 2% (2 out of every 100 people) didn't make it through and were sent back to their home country. Victoria and her family all made it through the inspection process.

YOUR TURN What do you think would be the most difficult part of Ellis Island?

When Victoria's mama arrived at Ellis Island, she knew her husband Abraham was waiting for her somewhere on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, but she didn't know where. She gave the address "Joseph Cohen, 101 Allen Street" to the immigration officers. Joseph Cohen was known as "Tio Yosef" (Uncle Joseph). He was a fellow Sephardic Jew from Kastoria who helped many people in his community by meeting them at Ellis Island. He helped them locate friends or relatives, and sometimes gave them temporary housing.



Making a New Home in New York City

The Confino family started their American life on the Lower East Side. The streets were crowded with pushcarts and people moving in every direction. There were not many trees or open spaces. The city was an overwhelming jumble of tall buildings, elevated trains, and different languages. There were many Jewish people in the Lower East Side, but not many other Sephardic Jewish people.

The family moved into an apartment at 97 Orchard Street. In 1914, there were ten people living in the apartment's three rooms: Victoria, her parents, her five brothers, and two cousins.

In America, Victoria quickly learned how to hang the wash from the fire escape and to chase rats out of the apartment with a broom. Her Mama had a limp and was often pregnant, so Victoria was responsible for most of the laundry and scrubbing. She especially disliked scrubbing the floor. In New York, her Papa changed his job, and now owned a factory where people sewed aprons. Victoria stopped going to school after second grade to help sew aprons and take care of the family's cooking and cleaning chores.

At night, Victoria made a bed on the kitchen floor, on her manta, a rug made from goat's hair. This is one of the few things the family was able to bring with them from home.

On Friday evenings, Victoria's mama still lit two candles to mark the beginning of **Shabbat**, the Jewish day of rest on Saturday. In America at this time, most people worked on Saturdays, but although life was changing quickly for the Confinos, keeping Shabbat was a very important tradition to them. They would eat special foods, always with lots of spices, rice, and beans. Their meals were very different than the food their Jewish neighbors from other parts of the world ate.

YOUR TURN *How is Victoria's life in New York different than in Kastoria?
How is her life the same?*

We can learn many things from a document like a ship's manifest, but it can't tell us about people's personalities or feelings. Luckily, Victoria's **descendants** were able to share their memories of her, and that is how we know what she was like. Victoria loved to sing, dance, imitate people, and tell stories and jokes. But her granddaughter also described her as having a sadness underneath her sense of humor. One reason for this sadness is that Victoria never stopped missing her hometown. Along with her stories, she also shared recipes and other traditions with her kids and grandkids.



This is a postcard of what the Confino family's hometown may have looked like as they were packing their belongings to begin their journey to the United States. The postcard shows large houses with courtyards, a beautiful blue lake, majestic mountains, and a clear sky.



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LIST OR MANIFEST OF ALIEN PASSENGERS

Required by the regulations of the Secretary of Commerce and Labor of the United States, under Act of Congress approved F

S. S. ARGENTINA

sailing from PATRAS

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No. on List.	NAME IN FULL.	Age.	Sex.	Married or Single.	Calling or Occupation.	Alio to—	Nationality.	Race or People.	* Last Permanent Residence.
	Family Name.	Given Name.	Yrs. Mos.			Read. Write.	(Country of which citizen or subject.)		Country. City or Town.
1	Bohora	Bohora	40	M	Housewife	No	Greece	Hebrew	Greece Castoria
2	Bohora	Gabriel	9	M	S.	No	Greece	Hebrew	Greece Castoria
3	Confino	Rachel	40	F	Housewife	No	Greece	Hebrew	Greece Castoria
4	Confino	Victoria	10	F	S.	No	Greece	Hebrew	Greece Castoria
5	Confino	David	8	M	S.	No	Greece	Hebrew	Greece Castoria
6	Confino	Saul	6	M	S.	No	Greece	Hebrew	Greece Castoria
7	Confino	Isaac	11	M	S.	No	Greece	Hebrew	Greece Castoria
8	Eliador	Lazar	50	M	Labourer	Yes	Greece	Hebrew	Greece Castoria
9	Eliador	Rebecca	14	F	S.	Yes	Greece	Hebrew	Greece Castoria
10	Eliador	Abram	46	M	Labourer	Yes	Greece	Hebrew	Greece Castoria
11	Eliador	Moise	11	M	Pupil	Yes	Greece	Hebrew	Greece Castoria
12	Juda Cohen	Sarah	20	F	Housewife	Yes	Greece	Hebrew	Greece Castoria
13	Eliador	Isaac	50	M	Labourer	Yes	Greece	Hebrew	Greece Castoria
14	Eliador	Isaac	50	M	Labourer	Yes	Greece	Hebrew	Greece Castoria
15	Eliador	Salomon	16	M	S.	Yes	Greece	Hebrew	Greece Castoria

Some members of the Confino family are listed on the passenger list of the SS Argentina. Rachel, Victoria, David, Saul, and Isaac are all traveling to the United States from modern-day Greece to reunite with other family members. Their "Race or People" is listed as Hebrew, referring to their Jewish religion.



List or Manifest of Alien Passengers

1	2	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
No. on List	Family Name	Given Name	Age	Sex	Married or Single	Calling or Occupation	Able to Read, Write	Nationality (country of which citizen or subject)	Race or People	Last Permanent Residence	
										Country	Town
1	ACohen	Bohora	40	F	M	Housewife	No	Greece Turkey	Hebrew	Greece Turkey	Castoria
2	ACohen	Gabriel	9	M	S		No	Greece Turkey	Hebrew	Greece Turkey	Castoria
3	Confino	Rachel	40	F	M	Housewife	No	Greece Turkey	Hebrew	Greece Turkey	Castoria
4	Confino	Victoria	10	F	S		No	Greece Turkey	Hebrew	Greece Turkey	Castoria
5	Confino	David	8	M	S		No	Greece Turkey	Hebrew	Greece Turkey	Castoria
6	Confino	Saul	6	M	S		No	Greece Turkey	Hebrew	Greece Turkey	Castoria
7	Confino	Isaac	11 mo.	M	S		No	Greece Turkey	Hebrew	Greece Turkey	Castoria
8	Eliaou	Lazar	50	M	M	Labourer	Yes	Greece Turkey	Hebrew	Greece Turkey	Castoria
9	Eliaou	Rebecca	14	F	S		Yes	Greece Turkey	Hebrew	Greece Turkey	Castoria
10	Eliaou	Abram	46	M	M	Labourer	Yes	Greece Turkey	Hebrew	Greece Turkey	Castoria
11	Eliaou	Moise	11	M	S	Pupil	Yes	Greece Turkey	Hebrew	Greece Turkey	Castoria
12	Juda Cohen	Sarah	20	F	S	Housewife	Yes	Greece Turkey	Hebrew	Greece Turkey	Castoria
13	Eliaou	Haim	52	M	M	Labourer	Yes	Greece Turkey	Hebrew	Greece Turkey	Castoria
14	Eliaou	Clara (?)	?	F	?		Yes	Greece Turkey	Hebrew	Greece Turkey	Castoria



This family portrait was taken shortly after Rachel and her children arrived in New York City after their journey on the SS Argentina. Pictured here are (top row) Abraham, Rachel, David, Victoria, (bottom row), Jacob, and Saul. This portrait does not include everyone from the Confino family that lived at 97 Orchard Street.



The Confino's parlor, or living room. Victoria's brothers slept in this room.



The Confino's kitchen. Victoria could do the laundry and the scrubbing at this sink.