

## **Problem Solving: Immigrants and Tenements** **Christopher Martell, Ed.D.**

*This problem solving activity is designed to help students better understand early 20<sup>th</sup> century tenement living. Students should read the following problem and brainstorm solutions.*

Please read the following scenario and following the following instructions to solve the problem.

1. The neighborhood of 151 Elm Street, called Mała Polska, was crowded with Polish immigrants during the early 1900s. Little Poland's residents formed regionally-based lodges and societies. The tenement at 151 Elm Street had no indoor toilets and no running water. Residents had access to water and outhouses in the building's backyard. While the outhouses of 151 Elm Street hooked up to sewage lines, many tenement privies of the time did not. Those residents endured filthy sanitation conditions every time they collected water.
2. Each apartment in the tenement has a similar layout (see next page). Each consists of three rooms, progressively gaining in size from front to back. This included a small front room generally used as a bedroom and two larger rooms—a kitchen in the middle and a living room in the back. The apartments are, in general, sparsely furnished, with hardwood floors and a few large pieces of furniture. The living rooms have two large windows stretching almost from floor to ceiling, while the back rooms lead out into the common hallway of the tenement.
3. Many immigrants and their children worked to provide necessary income for the family. The positions filled by children and women were often in sweatshops and tenement flats, doing home-based piecemeal or shining shoes and hawking newspapers. Workers in the 1800s labored long hours under poor conditions for paltry pay.

### **In teams of two, your challenge is:**

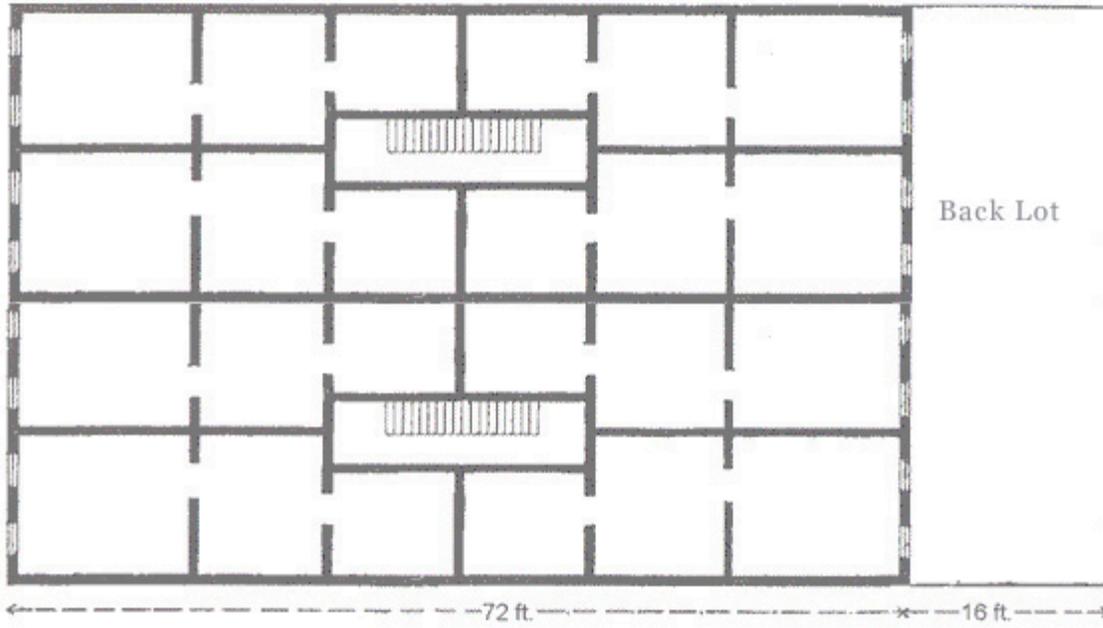
A. Please redesign the tenement build in 1869 to help solve the problems of death, disease, and labor related to the structure and set up of the tenement building.

Draw your new building. Your building must exist in the same footprint (there are two buildings adjacent to your building blocking the ability to build windows on the sides).

The building is currently 4 stories with 8 apartments a floor (32 total). Your new building must be the same number of apartments (32). You may change the height of the building, but the technology is not available to build above 10 stories.

B. Then explain each change. How will these improve the lives of immigrants (the problems in numbers 1 through 3 above)?

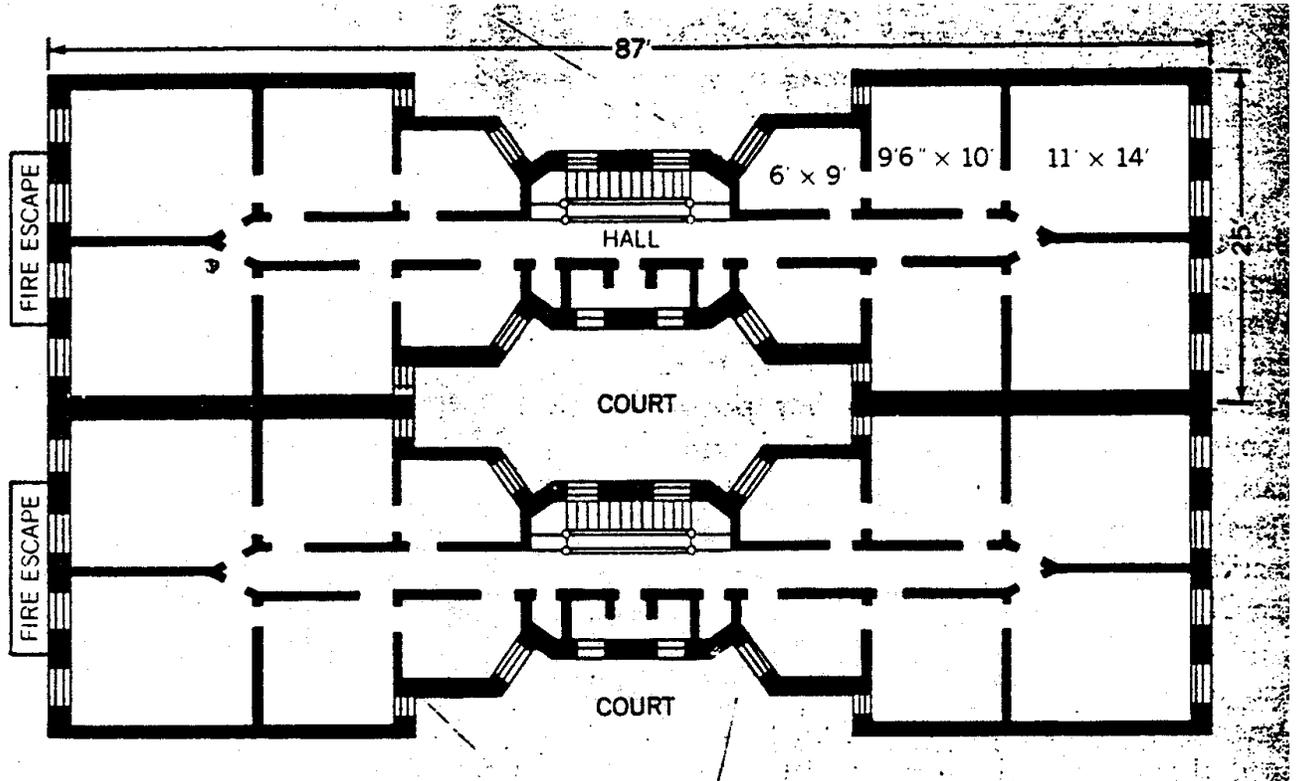
C. Then explain what reforms to society or what laws you believe the government should pass to better the lives of immigrants during this time period (and today).



### Your Final Product

Did your redesign look something like this? This is called a dumbbell tenement, because of its shape.

Architects in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century designed buildings with courtyards and more windows to help increase the living standards of tenement residents...



Sometimes a whole family was crowded into a single room.