

Globetrotting Great-Grandparents: Ancestors Who Crossed Oceans

Have you ever wondered how your family first came to America? Many kids' great-great-grandparents made long trips across the ocean. They left their home countries and sailed far away for a new life. Their big journeys made today's families possible.

In the 1800s-1900s, over 30 million immigrants came to America. Immigrants are people who leave their native country to live in a new one. Most came from Europe. Life was hard there. There were not enough jobs and cities were crowded. People dreamed of owning land and farming in wide-open America. The trip was risky and scary. But it was worth it for a chance at a better life.

The ship trip took 1-3 months. Most immigrants traveled in "steerage." This cheap section was crowded at the bottom of the ship. There was no fresh air or windows. Kids often got sick. But families made it through the miserable trip. When they saw the Statue of Liberty, they knew they had arrived.

At Ellis Island, officials asked immigrants questions before entry. Anyone too sick or disabled could get sent home. Nurses checked for lice and disease. Officials asked about jobs and plans. They checked last name papers too. Many last names got changed or shortened there. After inspections, families were let in to find jobs and homes.

Some immigrants had relatives in America who helped them adjust. But most started from nothing. The language made it hard to get around. Signs, newspapers, and job searches confused new arrivals. They felt lonely too. Letters took weeks to reach loved ones left behind.

Despite challenges, immigrants kept trying. Big families often lived together to save money. Parents took any work they could get. Even little children worked to help out. Through hard work, families slowly built new lives.

Many homesteaders also moved out West in America. Homesteading meant claiming free land from the government. Just farm it for 5 years - then 160 acres was yours! It was a great chance, but going West was dangerous. People risked blizzards, sickness, and fights with Native tribes. But for free land, it was worth the risk.

Homesteading families traveled west in covered wagons on bumpy trails. It took 5-6 months. Their things got pulled behind in a cart. At night, wagons circled together for safety. During bad weather or Indian scares, kids hid inside. With no

stores, food came from hunting or saved supplies. When wagons broke, fathers fixed them. Rivers, mountains, and deserts challenged the pioneers. But finally reaching their claimed land felt like a triumph.

Thanks to our traveling great-grandparents, our families are in America today. Next time you hear an immigrant story, remember: Your ancestors were immigrants and pioneers too. They braved frightening trips so that you could have a better life.

Glossary

- immigrant - a person who comes to live permanently in a new country
- persevere - keep trying despite difficulties
- homestead - a house, land, and farm that a family owns and lives on

Questions

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Why did immigrants leave their home countries in the 1800s-1900s?
 - a) To find better opportunities and jobs
 - b) To explore new places
 - c) To flee bad weather
 - d) To sail on ships
2. What made the ship trip hard for immigrant families?
 - a) It was too expensive.
 - b) It took a long time with bad conditions.
 - c) They had to build their own ships.
 - d) There were no inspections at Ellis Island.
3. Based on the article, how did immigrant families adjust to America?
 - a) Their language skills helped them get jobs easily.
 - b) They had help from relatives already there.
 - c) Big families lived together to save money.
 - d) The government provided food, homes and English lessons.
4. Why did homesteaders go out West in covered wagons?
 - a) To find gold
 - b) To start farms
 - c) To map new land
 - d) To join Native American tribes
5. How did immigrants and pioneers shape modern families?
 - a) Their fun stories entertain us.
 - b) They started famous companies.
 - c) Their hard work provided opportunities for future generations.
 - d) They traveled the world for enjoyment.
6. What is the main idea of this article?
 - a) America provided chances for a better life.
 - b) Pioneers had an easy trip out West.
 - c) Despite challenges, immigrants and homesteaders kept trying.
 - d) New languages confused immigrants.