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# Early Settlers

## Bring History Alive

Bring the Settler Era alive for your students with real-life experiences whenever possible. Activities such as the following reinforce concepts and give students a more thorough understanding of the life and times of early settlers.

## Early Settler Challenge

To understand what life was like for the early settlers, invite students to go through an evening without any modern conveniences: electric lights, refrigerators, running water, ball point pens, TVs or computers! Have them make a list of all the things they gave up. (Modern toilets should be allowed!) Request parent support with this challenge.

## Early Settler Diary

### Materials

brown paper bags  
plastic darning needle  
hemp thread

### Directions

1. Crumple and flatten the paper bags over and over again until soft and creased, resembling old paper.
2. Cut into pages and stitch together your diary.
3. Pretend that you are a child living in settler times. Describe your life through diary entries. Include specifics such as dates, locations and events.

Invite students and visitors to tell stories about their ancestors.

Invite museum curators, guests or classmates to show and tell about items they have from this period. Demonstrations about how these items were once used should be encouraged.

Visit a pioneer village, museum with pioneer displays, an outdoor farmers' market, a farm, a log cabin or century-old barns or buildings in your area.



Visit a pioneer cemetery. Be sure to show respect throughout this activity. What stories do the gravestones tell? Can you find the oldest one? Who settled this area first? Have children record names, ages, dates and family connections. Do the children notice any patterns? What surprises do they find?

Invite a quilters' group to display quilts, demonstrate their skills and assist students with sewing projects.

Read a novel about pioneer life throughout the unit.

Invite a folk singer to perform and teach your students some old songs.

Take children on a journey back in time by visiting a local sugar bush that uses pioneer methods of syrup making.

Go on a horse-drawn sleigh or wagon ride.

# Early Settlers

## New Frontiers

Step into the past, a time when ordinary people like you and I did extraordinary things that shaped their futures and the future of the new frontiers they settled. It all began with early explorers and traders from Norse lands, France, England and Spain who traveled in search of resource-rich lands and better routes to the Indies and Asia. In North America they found native people and natural resources and spread the word.

## Who Were the Early Settlers of North America?

By the 1600s European immigrants saw promise on the shores of North America and set sail. Their families grew; settlements expanded and word of opportunities spread, attracting immigrants by the thousands. By the 1700s colonies in the United States and Canada expanded into the vast Western frontier. The population of British North American colonies grew from about one hundred thousand in the 1760s to over two million by the 1850s. People migrated to the New World or the Western frontier—for pretty much the same reasons—some for adventure, but most hoping for the opportunity to build a better life for themselves and their families. Most were homesteaders—given land by the government so they could farm. Regardless of the year or place, most pioneers shared similar experiences and had much in common.

## Why Did They Leave Their Homelands?

Why would people abandon their homelands, leave their families and all they knew to step into the unknown wilderness on faraway shores?

Overcrowding, famine, war, revolution, religious persecution, evictions from tenant farms, lack of jobs and a sense of adventure led people to look to the New World for opportunities.



## What Would You Do?

Take yourself back to a place and time where food was scarce, you had little hope of finding a job and less hope of ever owning any land. People are talking about a New World—a place where fertile land is free for the taking. Would you leave all of the things you know for the possibilities beyond? What would it take to lure you from your home today? How bad would things need to be for you to leave?

# Early Settlers

## Put Yourself in Tommy's Shoes

### Materials

pair of old, leather shoes or boots reminiscent of pioneer times  
world map  
map of Tommy's destination  
(to be selected by students)

### Directions

1. Set the shoes on a platform. Ask children to put themselves in the shoes of Tommy, an Irish immigrant traveling to the New World.
2. What decisions would he have to make before he left? What problems would he have to solve? Lead children to realize that settlers had to figure out where they were going, how they would get there, how they would pay, what they would do when they got there and what they would need for the journey and settlement.
3. Have children create a life and character for Tommy. Does he have a wife and children that need to be considered?
4. Decide where Tommy is going to go. How will he get there and how will he pay for his journey? Immigrants saved money for the trip if they could, sold what they owned to pay for passage or agreed to work for others on the trip and/or when they arrived in the New World.
5. Map out the route Tommy will take from Ireland to his new destination.
6. When will Tommy leave? Think about the weather, availability of natural food sources and water supply where Tommy is going. Settlers aimed to settle in the spring, so they had time to build and farm before winter.
7. Talk about Tommy's fears, hopes and dreams for his new destination.
8. Have the class prepare Tommy's packing list. What would he need to survive the journey to the new land? What might he need when he gets there? Can he transport all of those things?

## Pioneer Propaganda

Most settlers chose destinations that offered free or inexpensive land. Governments hoped to establish colonies under their flags by encouraging their citizens to emigrate. Destinations were sometimes made to sound much better than they were.

## Come Settle

Create a pamphlet to describe a real or imaginary place that would entice people to emigrate. What qualities would attract settlers? What does the natural geography or established settlement in the area have to offer?

## The Truth About Settlement

If you were a settler who had been shocked by the hardships of your journey and the truths about your destination, what might you want to tell other unwary settlers who might be swayed by the pamphlets that told only one side of the story? Create a pamphlet to advise those wishing to emigrate. What might settlers need to know? How should they best prepare? What new skills might they need to survive?

