

Pioneer Children

During the 19th century, Queen Victoria ruled the British Empire. The British Empire was made up of dozens of overseas countries and territories including Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Some British families emigrated to other parts of the world to start new lives there.

Pioneer Children

Every year from about 1840, thousands of children sailed from the British Isles in ships leaving from ports such as Liverpool. Some went to America; others went to countries in the British Empire. Between 1840 and 1914, about 19 million people left Britain. Families went with their children. They were sad to leave their homes and relatives, but hoped to find a better life abroad. They set off for 'new' countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa.

Sending children abroad

Sending children abroad seemed a good way to improve their lives. Maria Rye raised money in Britain to send girls to Canada. Caroline Chisholm opened a home in Australia to help newly arrived girls settle and find work. Mrs Chisholm believed that women and children would 'civilize' the colony more quickly. She helped single mothers with children by arranging for them to travel with married men 'for protection'. She also lent poor families money to pay their passage (fare) to Australia.

The long voyage

Most emigrant children travelled the cheapest way — steerage*. This meant being crowded with people and luggage on the decks of a steamship for a voyage that might take from two to six weeks. There was little room to play games on the crowded ship, but plenty of sea air! For some it was a thrilling adventure. Others must have been terrified in stormy seas, as the ship rolled, heaved and groaned, making most of the passengers seasick.

Lots to learn on arrival

Children were usually quicker than grown-ups to adapt to their new world. New little Australians got used to hot sun and unusual plants; new Canadians played in deep winter snow. Emigrant children soon learned which strange animals were harmless (Australian kangaroos, Canadian beavers) and which were best avoided (snakes and spiders in Australia, bears and wolves in Canada). Life was hard at first, but most children quickly settled and did well in their new homes.

Glossary

steerage — lower deck of a ship

An abridged extract from *People in the Past: Victorian Children* by Brenda Williams.

1

Read lines 1-7. Give one reason why people emigrated from Britain between 1840 and 1914.

.....

1 mark

2

Write down a word to describe Caroline Chisholm's personality. Explain your choice.

.....

.....

.....

2 marks

3

Think of one word that means the same as "thrilling" (line 19).

.....

1 mark

4

Give two examples of things that children new to Australia had to get used to.

.....

.....

2 marks

5

Is this a fiction or a non-fiction text? How can you tell?

.....

.....

.....

2 marks

6

Do you think the journey on the ship sounds fun? Explain your answer.

.....

.....

.....

2 marks

Total
out of 10