

Expository
Text

THE LIFE OF A HOMESTEADER

by Raewyn Glynn



Mc
Graw
Hill

PAIRED
READ

Keeping History Alive

STRATEGIES & SKILLS

Comprehension

Strategy: Summarize

Skill: Sequence

Vocabulary Strategy

Suffixes

Vocabulary

agreeable, appreciate,
boomed, descendants,
emigration, pioneers,
transportation, vehicles

Content Standards

Social Studies

History

Word count: 898**

Photography Credit: Cover Nebraska State Historical Society, [Digital ID, nbhips I4567].

**The total word count is based on words in the running text and headings only. Numerals and words in captions, labels, diagrams, charts, and sidebars are not included.



Essential Question

How is each event in history unique?

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Introduction

In 1862, people in the United States heard some big news. The government was giving away land out west. It was part of the new Homestead Act.

People could get 160 acres of land for free. To get the land, people had to build a house on the land. They also had to farm the land. If they stayed for five years, they could keep they land.

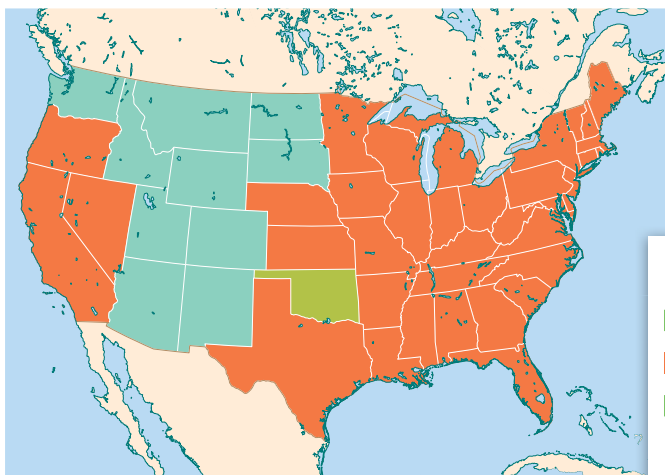
The railroads offered special trips out west to see the free land.



Many people went west to get the land. Some pioneers went on trains. Others went in vehicles such as covered wagons. The number of people heading to the **prairies** in places like Nebraska boomed.

The people who went were called homesteaders. They found that life on the prairie was very hard.

States and Territories in 1870



Pioneers moved west in the 1860s. They settled in territories that would soon become states.

Key

- Territories
- States
- Unorganized territory



Homes on the Prairie

The first thing homesteaders needed was a house. But there were not many trees on the prairie. So homesteaders built their houses out of sod.

Sod is prairie soil with grass roots in it. The grass is short and tough. It has a thick mat of roots. The roots helped the sod keep its shape.

It did not take a lot of time to build a sod house.



Sod was cut using a special **plow**. The homesteaders used the sod like bricks. They place strips of sod on top of each other. Sod walls were strong because the roots in the sod grew together. The roof of a sod house was made of wooden rafters covered in a layer of sod.

Plains Indians

The Great Plains was also home to Native Americans. Their lives changed when white settlers arrived. They were pushed off most of their lands by the railroads and by the homesteaders settling on the land.



Life in a sod house was not easy. A sod house was drafty. It leaked and always needed repairs. It was not easy to keep clean. There were rats, mice, and insects. Sometimes snakes dropped from the roof.

Most sod houses were one room. Fabric divided the room. Fabric was also used to catch dirt that fell from roof. There were animal skins or rag rugs on the floor.

Sod houses had dirt floors.





This family brought their piano outside to be photographed.

Homesteaders made the most of what they had. They made wooden crates into tables. They made beds from poles and ropes. They used cast iron stoves for heating and cooking.

It could be lonely on the prairie. Farms were not close to each other. Neighbors were far away. Homesteaders tried to make life more agreeable. They kept pets. Some had pianos.

STOP AND CHECK

How was sod used to make houses?

Homestead Challenges

Homesteaders hoped that crops would grow well on their new land. But there was not much rain. Wells were used for water. Windmills pumped the water.

The weather on the prairie was hard, too. There were rainstorms, tornadoes, and droughts. This weather damaged crops.

If homesteaders had wood they used it for fencing and for fuel.



Summers on the prairie were very hot. Sometimes it got as hot as 120°F.

Winters on the prairie were long and cold. People and animals were trapped by **blizzards**. There was one terrible winter where many horses and cattle froze to death.

Homesteads were often snowed in during winter.



Laura Ingalls Wilder

Laura Ingalls Wilder came from a family of homesteaders. Laura wrote a book about a very cold winter on the prairie. There was a lot of snow that winter. Laura and her family were stuck in the house and unable to get food.



There were not many trees on the prairie, so there was not enough wood for cooking and heating. Homesteaders used buffalo dung chips as fuel. They collected the chips in wheelbarrows.

Buffalo chips brought germs into the sod houses. People got sick a lot.

STOP AND CHECK

Why was winter on the prairie a challenge for homesteaders?

Women and children collected buffalo chips.



Daily Life

Homesteaders worked hard. Everyone in the family had to work. Men took care of the crops. Women took care of the house and garden. Children helped out with chores. They gathered fuel. They helped in the fields.

There were animals to take care of, too. The cows needed to be milked. The horses kept for transportation needed to be fed.

**Most homesteaders
grew corn.**



Homesteaders lived miles from any town or city. Going to the store was not easy. Families grew most of their own food. The food had to last through winter.

Corn was part of most meals. There were corn bread and corn grits. Meat was a special treat.

STOP AND CHECK

Why did homesteaders grow their own food?

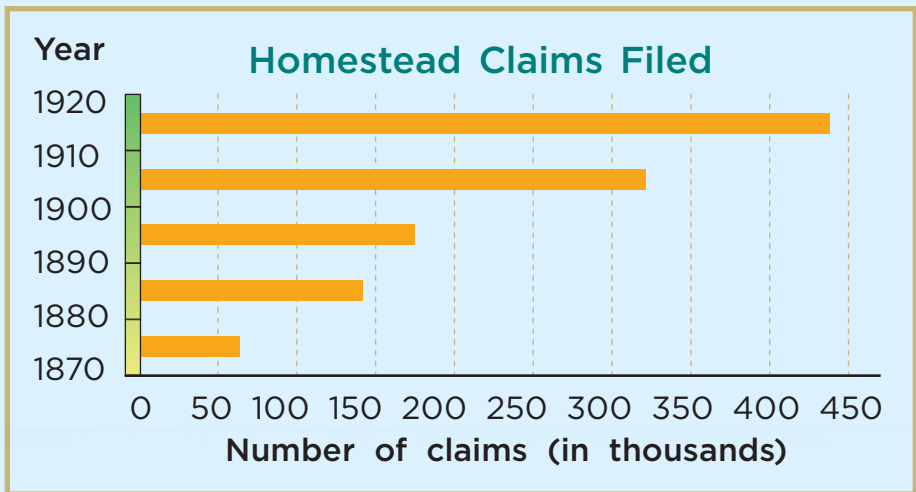
A Sweet Treat



Watermelons were a treat for homesteaders in summer. Many photographs showed homesteader families eating watermelons.

Conclusion

By 1900, over 600,000 homestead **claims** had been filed. Homesteaders had to have built a house, raised crops, and stayed on the land for five years. Less than half of the claims were successful.



These sisters filed claims and became homesteaders.





Some sod houses became barns when new wooden houses were built.

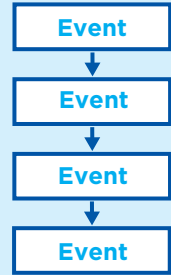
Farming the land for five years was not easy. Many homesteaders left their land.

But life got easier for the homesteaders who did stay. They found new ways to farm their crops. The trees they planted gave them wood for fuel and building. These homesteaders and their descendants made the prairie their home.

Respond to Reading

Summarize

Summarize *The Life of a Homesteader*. Use the chart to help you order the events.



Text Evidence

1. How do you know that this book is an informational text? **Genre**
2. What did homesteaders do first and last? Use the text on pages 4 and 14 to help you with your answer.
Sequence
3. What does the word *terrible* on page 9 mean? **Suffixes**
4. Write about how homesteaders settled on the prairie. **Write About Reading**

Compare Texts

Read about a website that brings history to life.

KEEPING HISTORY ALIVE



American Memory is a special website that brings history to life. The website is from the Library of Congress. On *American Memory* you can look at letters and photographs from the past.

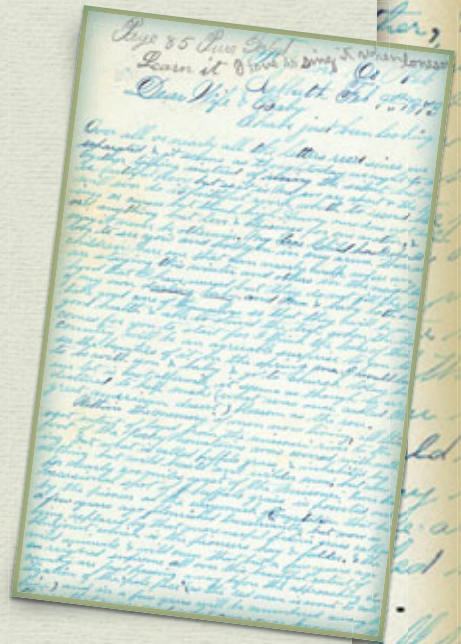
You can read letters written by a homesteader named Uriah. He wrote to his wife Mattie.



You can use the Internet to learn about history.

In his letters, Uriah wrote about life on the prairie. He told about a bad blizzard. He wrote about the house he planned to build. Uriah's letters help us understand what life was really like.

There are lots of photographs on *American Memory*. Some are by a man named Solomon Butcher. They show the history of emigration to the prairie.



This is one of Uriah Oblinger's letters to his wife Mattie.

The photographs show how people dressed. They show what people's houses were like. The photographs help us appreciate a way of life that is now gone.



Mary Longfellow
homesteader who
was photographed
by Solomon Butcher.

We are lucky that somebody saved Uriah's letters. We are lucky that someone saved Solomon Butcher's photographs. Take a look for yourself.

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>



Make Connections

Why do you think *Keeping History Alive* was written? **ESSENTIAL QUESTION**

How might the letters and photographs discussed in *Keeping History Alive* add to your understanding of *The Life of a Homesteader*? **TEXT TO TEXT**

Glossary

blizzards (*BLI-zerdz*) bad snowstorms with strong winds (*page 9*)

claim (*klaym*) a request for ownership of a plot of land (*page 13*)

plow (*plow*) a tool used to cut, lift, and turn over soil (*page 5*)

prairie (*PRAYR-ee*) flat, rolling land covered in grass with few trees (*page 5*)

Index

blizzards, 9, 17

buffalo dung, 10

crops, 8, 11, 13

plows, 4, 5

Great Plains, 3

Ingalls Wilder, Laura, 9

sod houses, 4–6, 10

Focus on Social Studies

Purpose To learn about the past from a primary historical source.

What to Do

Step 1 Choose one of the photographs of homesteaders from this book.

.....

Step 2 Study the photograph. What does it tell you? Look at any objects in the photo. Why are they in the picture? Note down your findings.

.....

Step 3 Write a paragraph on the people in the photograph and what you think their lives were like.

Conclusion What can photographs teach us about the past?

Thinkmark

The Topic

What is this book mostly about?

Sequence of Information

In what order does the author give us the information in this book?

Key Vocabulary

What new words did you learn in the text? What helped you understand the meaning?

Author's Purpose

What is the author's purpose for writing *The Life of a Homesteader*?

Make Connections

Do you think people today want to live like homesteaders?