A LAND OF IMMIGRANTS

The USA is a land of immigrants. Between 1815 and 1914, the world witnessed the greatest peaceful migration in its history: 35 million people, mostly Europeans, left their homelands to start new lives in America. Why did these people risk everything by leaving their homes and families to see what the New World had to offer? How had the Old World disappointed them?

First, what forced emigrants to make the momentous decision to leave? One major cause of the exodus among European people was the rise in population which led to 'land hunger'. Another was politics. Nationalism brought about increased taxation and the growth of armies, and many young men fled eastern Europe to avoid military service. Also, the failure of the liberal revolutions in Europe caused the departure of hundreds of thousands of refugees.

Physical hunger provided another pressing reason. Between 1845 and 1848, the terrible potato famine in Ireland ended in the deaths of one million Irish people and the emigration of a further million who wished to escape starvation. Following the collapse of the economy of southern Italy in the 1860s, hundreds of thousands decided to stay afresh in America.

In short, people chose to leave their homes for social, economic and religious reasons. As a result, by 1890 among a total population of 63 million, there were about nine million foreign-born Americans.

But what were the attractions? First of all, there was the promise of land which was so scarce in Europe. Next, factories were calling out for workers, and pay and working conditions were much better than back home. Men were needed to build the long railroads, and settlers were needed to populate new towns and develop commerce. There was the space for religious communities to practise their faith in peace and comparative isolation.

This immigration meant that by around the 1850's Americans of non-English origin had started to outnumber those of English extraction. As we know, there were losers. To start with, there were those immigrants who were brought to the land by force, the slaves, to be used as a source of cheap labour for the tobacco plantations of the South. Nor should we forget the equally awful fate of the American Indians. By 1860, there were 27 million free whites, four million slaves and a mere 488,000 free blacks.

Nowadays, the USA is still seen by millions as the Promised Land. Gone are the days when you could buy US citizenship for one dollar. Yet, even though entry is strictly limited, refugees continue to find freedom and people from poorer countries a better way of life. As always, it remains a magnet to the ambitious and the energetic who are ready to commit themselves to the land that gives them a second chance.

A. Find words or phrases in the text which mean the same as the following.

1. great migration of masses :
2. important and urgent :
3. failure :
4. not much or enough :
5. origin:

B. Mark the best choice.

1. The lives of the 19th century European people were difficult because ___.

a) of the peaceful relationships among the nations of Europe
b) the population was going down gradually
c) there were too many of them, which caused a shortage of land
d) they had decided to leave their homelands for the USA

2. What is not given as a reason for emigration in the text?

a) Avoidance of military service
b) Politics
c) The search for adventure
d) Economy

3. Approximately how much of the American population was made up of foreign-born Americans in 1890?

a) One seventh. b) One third. c) A half. d) One fifth.

4. Which of the following is mentioned as an attraction of the USA in the text?

a) There were opportunities to get a good education.
b) Jobs were available.
c) People could lead a long and healthy life.
d) All of the above.

5. Which of the following is not true?

a) The story of the American Indians is as sad as that of the slaves.
b) Despite the strictly limited entry, people still go to the USA hoping to find a better life.
c) Religious communities' found peace and isolation in the USA.
d) Millions of people, most of whom were Europeans, migrated to the USA in the 18th century.

C.

1. What were the results of the potato famine that took place in Ireland between 1845 and 1848?

a) . ! : !
b)

2. Why were more men needed in the USA?

a)
b)

3. Why were the slaves brought to the USA?

LIVEWORKSHEETS