

Expository
Text

THE LIFE OF A HOMESTEADER

by Raewyn Glynn



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Education

PAIRED
READ

Keeping History Alive

VOCABULARY & SKILLS

Comprehension Skills

Sequence

Expand Vocabulary

drafty, droughts, fabric,
fuel, last, lonely, prairies

Vocabulary

appreciate, descendants,
pioneers, transportation,
vehicles

Content Standards

Social Studies
History

Word count: 695**

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**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.

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Essential Question

How is each event in history unique?

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Introduction

In 1862, the government started giving away land out west. It was part of the Homestead Act. People could get 160 acres of land for free. To get the land, people had to build a house. They had to farm the land. They had to live there for five years.

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



Many people went west to get the land. Some **pioneers** went by train. Others went in **vehicles** such as wagons. More and more people headed to the **prairies** of the Great Plains.

The people who went were called homesteaders. The land was mostly flat and dry. It was hard to farm.



Homes on the Prairie

The first thing homesteaders had to do was build a house. There were few trees on the prairie. So homesteaders built their houses out of sod.

Sod is prairie soil and grass. The roots of the grass hold the soil together. Houses made of sod are quick to build.

There were not many trees on the prairie.



Sod was cut using a tool called a plow. Homesteaders put strips of sod on top of each other. The walls of sod houses were strong. The roots in the sod grew together. Rafters, or planks of wood, formed the roof. The rafters were covered with sod.

STOP AND CHECK

Why were the walls of sod houses strong?

Native Americans lived on the Great Plains. They were forced to leave when railroads were built and homesteaders came.



It was not easy living in a sod house. A sod house was **drafty**. Wind could get in. Rain could get in, too. It was hard to keep a sod house clean. Dirt fell from the roof. There were also rats, mice, and insects.

Most sod houses were one room. **Fabric** was used to divide the room.

A sod house had dirt floors.





This family brought a piano to the prairie.

Homesteaders used what they had.
They made wooden crates into tables.
They made beds from poles and ropes.

Life could be **lonely** on the prairie.
Farms were not near each other.
Homesteaders tried to make life better.
Some kept pets. Some had pianos.

STOP AND CHECK

Why was life lonely
on the prairie?

Homestead Challenges

Homesteaders hoped their crops would grow well. But there was not much rain. Windmills pumped water from the ground.

There was often bad weather on the prairie. Rainstorms and tornadoes damaged crops.

There was little wood to build fences.



Summers on the prairie were very hot. **Droughts** were common when it didn't rain for a long time.

Winters were long and cold. People and animals were sometimes trapped by snowstorms.



Laura Ingalls Wilder wrote about her own homesteader family's troubles during a very cold winter on the prairie.



There were not many trees on the prairie. There was not enough wood for cooking and heating. Homesteaders used the dung from buffalo as **fuel** to light fires.

Buffalo dung had germs. People often got sick.

Women and children collected buffalo dung.



STOP AND CHECK

Why was winter on the prairie hard for homesteaders?

Daily Life

Homesteaders worked hard. Men grew crops. Women took care of the house. Children did chores. They helped in the fields.

There were animals to take care of, too. Cows were milked. Horses were fed. Horses were used for **transportation**.

**Most homesteaders
grew corn.**



Homesteaders lived far from towns and stores. So people grew most of their food. The food had to **last** through winter.

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

Watermelons were a sweet treat for homesteaders in summer.



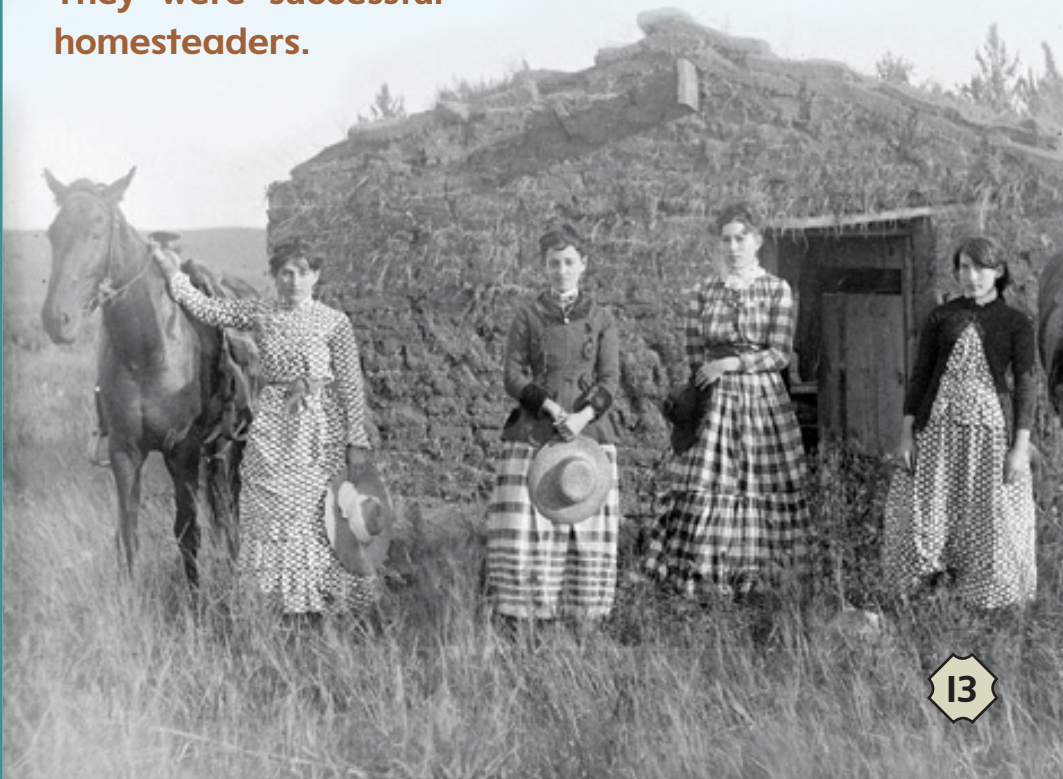
STOP AND CHECK

Why did homesteaders grow their own food?

Conclusion

By 1900, more than 600,000 homesteaders had put in claims to keep their land. They had to have built a house, grown crops, and stayed on the land for five years. Less than half of the claims were successful.

**These sisters put in claims.
They were successful
homesteaders.**





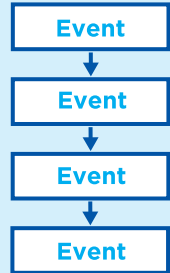
Some sod houses became barns when new wooden houses were built.

Farming for five years was hard. Many homesteaders left their land. Those who stayed found new ways to grow crops. They grew trees and used the wood for fuel and houses. These homesteaders and their **descendants** made the prairie their home.

Respond to Reading

Summarize

Use details from *The Life of a Homesteader* to summarize the text. Your chart may help you.



Text Evidence

1. What did the homesteaders do first when they arrived on the prairie? What did they do last?

Sequence

2. What does the word *rafters* on page 5 mean? What clues help you figure it out? Vocabulary
3. 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 website. It brings history to life. The website has letters and photographs from the past.

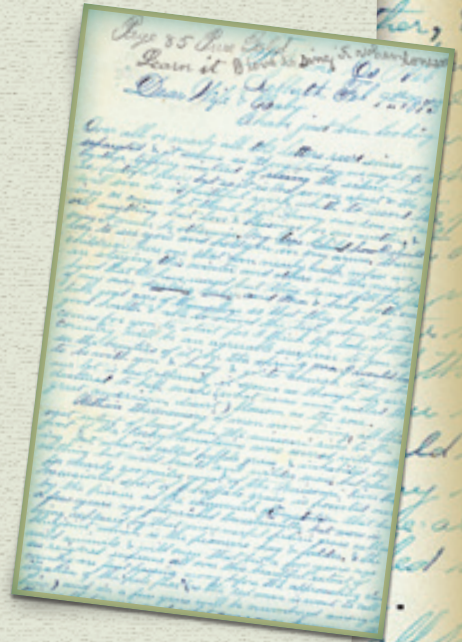
You can read letters written by a homesteader named Uriah. He wrote to his wife, Mattie.

You can use the Internet to learn about history.



Uriah wrote about life on the prairie. He wrote about a bad snowstorm. He wrote about the house he planned to build. His letters help us understand what life was like.

American Memory has many photographs. Some are by Solomon Butcher. They show the history of settlers moving to the prairie.



This is one of Uriah's letters.

The photographs show how people dressed. They show what houses were like. They help us **appreciate** the past.



This is Mary Longfellow, a homesteader whom Solomon Butcher photographed.

We are lucky that someone saved Uriah's letters and Solomon's photographs.

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



Make Connections

Why do you think *Keeping History Alive* was written? **Essential Question**

How do the letters and photographs in *Keeping History Alive* help you understand *The Life of a Homesteader*? **Text to Text**

Focus on Social Studies

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

What to Do

Step 1

Choose a photograph of a homesteader from this book.

.....

Step 2

Look at the photograph. What does it tell you? Look at the objects in the photo. Why are they in the picture?

.....

Step 3

Talk to your partner about what you think the homesteaders' lives were like.

Conclusion What can photographs teach us about the past?

Nonfiction

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?

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Grade 3 • Unit 3 Week 5

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