

Close Reading: Immigrants All

Directions:

1. Understand the purpose: *According to the author, what are the challenges and rewards of immigrating to the United States?*
2. Read the text once through to get the gist (main idea).
3. Ask questions – What does the author think you already know? What words do you need to learn? What parts are you having trouble understanding?
4. Reread. Highlight or underline words, phrases, or sentences that relate to your reading purpose.
5. Make annotations in the margins. Restate important ideas in your own words.

from *Immigrants All* by Eve Bunting

My heart was breaking. “I don’t want to go,” I whispered. And right at that moment, I didn’t want to go. My husband, my three small children, and I were boarding a plane in Ireland to start a new life in California, USA.

The decision to leave had been wrenching. It has been said that the urge to emigrate is born out of either “push” or “pull.” “Push,” because for some reason—economic or political—you need to go. “Pull” because you have relatives already in the far country, and the tug is strong to go where they are, where the grass is greener, and the sun shines brighter.

Whichever way and for whatever reason, it is never very easy. For us, the push was to make a better future for ourselves and our children

We came on a DC-6B, a comparatively small plane, because back then there were no passenger jets flying...

Our journey took twenty-two hours, over the polar ice cap. We landed to refuel in the Arctic, and all of it seemed like a dream, and not a happy one. I tried not to think of the grandparents left behind, waving as our plane lifted. Crying. It was hard; it is always hard.

In 1831, Rebecca Burlend, coming to America with her family to farm, wrote about her thoughts:

It was at Liverpool . . . that the throes of leaving England and all its endearments put our courage to a test. . . . We sat in profound silence for an hour together. Only now and then a sigh would escape us. Not infrequently I observed my dear husband’s eyes suffused with tears, which though unnoticed by him, fell down his sun-browned cheeks. . . .
“O Rebecca, I cannot do it, I cannot do it!”

But they did it, as so many before them had done and as so many after them would do. I hope Rebecca and her “dear husband” found fulfillment

Often the dream lives up to its promise. America is populated by business people, shop keepers, teachers, physicians, and homemakers with roots that go back, far and deep, to another land. They have enriched our lives.

For some, success exceeded their wildest dreams. Several of our presidents, including George Washington, were the sons or grandsons of parents who came from abroad. The great scientist, Albert Einstein came from Germany to settle in the United

States. The remarkable dancer and choreographer George Balanchine came from Russia, as did composer Igor Stravinsky. Levi Strauss, whose first name decorates the jeans so many of us wear, was an immigrant from Germany. The list could go on and on. Anthony J. O'Reilly became president of the H. J. Heinz Company, all fifty-seven varieties. My husband and I remember Anthony from when he played rugby football for Ireland in the days of his youth.

Immigrants all. And aren't we all immigrants, too? Except for Native Americans, didn't each person in this country originate somewhere in past time in another place, not here? A nation of immigrants, indeed.

For those who come today there is not the heartache of total separation from family and homeland. There are jet planes and bargain fares and frequent-flier miles. There are fax machines, direct phone lines, video cameras . . . and credit cards that will let you go or buy now and pay later. Technology has broken down the barriers of space and time.

Since the beginning, immigrants have created pockets of home in their new land. There have been countless Chinatowns and Little Italys, as newcomers banded together for comfort and familiarity. Now there are more. Today, Korean immigrants can watch the twenty-four-hour Korean channel on their television sets. Russian immigrants can listen to a performance from the Moscow Concert Hall. The links with home are not entirely severed.

A mayor of Miami once said of that city: "You can be born here in a Cuban hospital, be baptized by a Cuban priest, buy all your food from a Cuban grocer, and take your insurance from a Cuban bank."

The separation is easier perhaps. People, money, and ideas move from here to there and from there to here.

When my husband, my three small children, and I dragged ourselves off that plane in San Francisco, weary and scared, we were met by a customs official. As he stamped our papers he said, "Welcome to America." They were the first words we heard spoken in our new country. I've never forgotten them or the kindness of that official's smile. Whoever you are, wherever you are, Customs Man, I thank you.

Many years later when I wrote my picture book *How Many Days to America?* I remembered him. When my fictional family, coming from a Caribbean country in a small boat, finally reaches land, the people on the dock call, "Welcome to America!"

"But how did they know we would come today?" the father asks.

"Perhaps people come every day," the mother says. "Perhaps they understand how it is for us."

Perhaps they do. Or perhaps the family in my story was like us, blessed.

We prospered. My husband found a job. It wasn't easy, but he had faith and persistence, and like so many who came before him, he had a wife and children to support.

After waiting the necessary five years, he took the U.S. Citizen Petition Oath and became a "true American."

It's painful to give up your citizenship to your native country. In the end I did, and I'm proud to be an American. But still, when I hear "Danny Boy" sung or when I walk under cloudy skies, so like the skies of Ireland, my heart aches. When we plan a trip to visit our old country, we speak of "going home." When we are there, our vacation over, we speak again of "going home" . . . home to California. Two homes, one here—one there. I think that is how it must be, forever, for the immigrant.