

MIGRATION

COMING TO LEICESTER

an oral history
learning resource
Key Stage 3 / GCSE

01 *About Migration: coming to Leicester*

02 Curriculum links

03 Oral history in the classroom

04 Analysing oral history

05 Themes

09 Timeline

11 Transcripts & suggested activities

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About *Migration: Coming to Leicester*

Migration: Coming to Leicester is intended to help students think about the different communities who live in Britain today. The oral history material has been drawn from collections held at the East Midlands Oral History Archive at the University of Leicester.

The recordings feature memories of people who have arrived in the UK from other countries and contain a huge range of experiences, both good and bad. The narrators explain why they came to Britain, their expectations, the problems they faced when they arrived, how they settled down and how they celebrate their cultures now they are here.

The interviews from which these extract are taken were mainly recorded in the 1980s and 1990s and are the recollections of first and second generation immigrants. The views and opinions of their children and grandchildren are not represented here, due to the historical nature of material in the archive, but may provide a useful starting point for teachers and students to explore how the lives of younger members of Britain's communities differ from their elders.

Migration is, first and foremost, a normal human activity. Human beings have always moved from one country, locality and place of residence to settle in another. We tend to migrate from the homes of our families or guardians into our own homes. We migrate between regions, cities and towns. And we also migrate between countries.

<https://www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk/what-is-migration.html>

Curriculum links

You can use *Migration: coming to Leicester* to

support learning in History at Key Stage 3

about the Second World War, the creation of the Welfare State, Indian Independence and end of Empire, social, cultural and technological change in post-war British Society, and Britain's place in the world since 1945. It also offers opportunities for local studies of Leicester.

support learning in personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education

in the development of knowledge and understanding of the struggle for racial justice in Britain.

support learning in Citizenship at Key Stage 4

about diverse national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding

Oral history in the classroom

The practice of oral history can be defined as the recording, preservation and interpretation of historical information, based on the personal experiences and opinions of the speaker.

It may take the form of eye-witness evidence about the past recorded through interviews. It can also include folklore, myths, songs and stories passed down over the years by word of mouth.

The outputs of oral history – often recorded interviews – are valuable historical sources that can be used by researchers investigating the past.

Oral history is particularly useful for capturing stories from minority groups or small communities who may not be represented in more formal histories. It is useful when there is a lack of other sorts of written or visual evidence.

Using oral history archives in the classroom can encourage active listening and offer a sense of the past by listening to first-hand accounts of people who lived through historical events. It can show how people have different points of view and can experience things differently.

Useful links

Oral History Society
<https://www.ohs.org.uk/>

East Midlands Oral History Archive
<https://le.ac.uk/emoha>

British Library Sounds
<https://sounds.bl.uk/>

Analysing oral history

There are many ways in which you can analyse an oral history interview. You may like to consider the following approaches.

Story



Transcribe the extract.
Are there any themes emerging?
Who is telling the story (the narrator)?
Who is the story about (characters)?
Where is the story set?

Impact



What impact do you think the story had on the narrator?
What impact did the story have on you?
What does hearing the story add to its impact?
What questions do you think the interviewer was asking?
What else do you want to know? What questions would you ask?

Research



What is the historical context of this oral history?
What does the oral history add to our understanding of that historical context?

Creative response



Does the narrator use any descriptive language, such as metaphors or similes?
Rewrite the story, telling it in the third person.
Compare your stories as a whole class.

Themes

Coming to Britain as a result of war or persecution

01 Different from the others

A Jewish woman who was a schoolgirl in Germany in the 1930s, describes life under the Nazi regime: how life became difficult for her family, Jewish property was destroyed, and her father was taken away.

02 Just hush hush

A German woman talks about arriving in England having fled Germany during the Second World War. She explains how she was separated from her husband when they arrived in Dover and imprisoned and goes on to talk about how they were eventually reunited on the Isle of Man.

03 I wouldn't like to complain about it

A German man describes his journey to Leicester having been taken as a Prisoner of War (POW) by the Americans in the Second World War. He describes going out into town on a Saturday night.

04 Leave the country within ninety days

A man from East Africa describes how he heard that Idi Amin was going to expel the Ugandan Asians from Uganda in 1972 and how people couldn't believe that this was happening. He talks about the army roadblocks and how a local man disappeared during this time.

Leaving home to look for work

05 The soldiers they came back to unemployment

A woman recalls how she left Powys in Wales during the 1920s, when many parts of the UK were gripped by an economic depression, and came to live with an aunt in Leicester where she was able to find work.

06 I was restless

An Irish woman describes her boredom at home in Ireland and her determination to leave to look for work in England during the Second World War. She talks about how she joined the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRENS). She also explains how, as a schoolgirl, she had always been told to pray for the conversion of the English.

07 England expects

An Antiguan woman talks about leaving Antigua in the 1950s to get work in England. She describes the posters she saw advertising work and how she was asked to come to Leicester by a friend.

What people knew about the UK before they came and their first impressions on arriving here

08 I was scared stiff

An Irish priest explains how young Irish people working in England sent money home to their families. He knew little about England when he came in the 1960s and was very nervous.

09 They think that we are not human

A woman from Antigua explains why she came to England, having been told it was 'the best'. She talks about her amazement that many of the English people she met here were unable to read or write.

10 That's how English people go on

A woman from Antigua describes her experience of arriving in London in the 1950s and trying to make her way to Leicester. She came up against an abrupt porter and this is one of her first impressions of the English.

Problems people found when they came to Britain

11 Loneliness

A woman originally from Latvia talks about the problems Latvian men had when they arrived in the UK after the Second World War. People could feel isolated and were unsure if they could safely contact their families.

12 Oh she's writing

An Antiguan woman describes an example of prejudice she experienced working in a factory in the 1950s. Her colleagues were surprised to find that she was able to read and write.

13 England knew nothing about you

A woman from the Caribbean explains how she had never experienced racism and was not prepared to deal with it when she arrived in Britain in the 1960s. Caribbean people were taught a lot about Britain, but the British knew nothing about them.

14 We were the ones who paved the way

A woman from the Caribbean explains why she believes that Caribbean women were trailblazers who laid the foundations for the current generation. She talks about how she has brought up her children to not hate people in spite of the the hostilities that they have experienced.

15 Everything is teacher to you

A Somali man talks about the problems of learning a second language and how slang can be difficult to understand, even if you have a good grasp of a second language.

Preserving culture and identity

16 Completely different languages

A man from Lithuania, whose wife is Estonian, explains how his sons came to learn a little Estonian and Lithuanian as well as English.

17 That sense of feeling homesick

A woman from East Africa talks about her attitude to learning English. She explains how she feels that her skin colour will always set her apart.

18 Mother tongue

A woman from East Africa talks about her love of western clothes and how she became 'westernised' but also remained connected to her culture. She explains why she feels her children need to be able to speak in their mother tongue as well as English.

19 You clung to your own group

A woman, originally from Latvia, talks about the pressure she felt to assimilate and how encouraged her children to know about Latvia. This interview was recorded in the 1980s when the USSR still controlled Latvia.

20 I couldn't hold my identity the way I wanted to

A woman from Ireland explains that she felt she would lose her identity if she assimilated into the host culture. She also talks about the hostility that Irish people experienced living in Britain.

21 You'll try to worship the best way you can

A Somali man explains that mosques in Leicester don't conduct services in the Somali language, so people have had to fund their own places of worship.

22 A very joyous and happy time

A woman talks about celebrating Diwali in East Africa as a child in the 1970s, particularly the lighting of divas (candles). She talks about some of the rituals of the celebration.

Thoughts on returning

23 I don't consider myself a foreigner anymore

A German man who was a Prisoner of War in Leicester during the Second World War reflects on his nationality and how he feels a foreigner now when he returns to Germany. This interview was recorded in the 1980s.

24 Many people might think they might go back

A Somali man talks about the prospects for Somalis returning to Somalia. He explains that while older people may want to return, many younger people feel settled in the UK. This interview was recorded in 2004.

Timeline

1687

Huguenots - French Protestants - came from France fleeing religious persecution

From
1847

Over a million people emigrated from Ireland to escape the potato famine, settling in British cities, including Liverpool, Glasgow and London.

1881

Jewish people escaping persecution in Russia came to Britain. They were victims of pogroms caused by the assassination of Tsar Alexander II

1905

The Aliens Act introduced immigration controls and registration for the first time in the UK

1931

During the Spanish Civil War approximately 4,000 children came to the UK as refugees

1933

German, Austrian and Czechoslovakian Jewish people fled persecution from Nazi Germany and Austria

1939

Poles fled the invasion of Nazi Germany

1947

The Polish Resettlement Act allowed Polish refugees to bring dependants to the UK and access to work, housing and unemployment benefits

1948

The British Nationality Act gave Commonwealth citizens the right to British passports and work in the UK to fill postwar labour shortages. Jamaican immigrants arrived on *The Empire Windrush* to live and work in the UK

1971

Civil unrest in Pakistan and Bangladesh led to people seeking a new life in Britain. In the same year, a new Immigration Act 1971 made immigration from Commonwealth countries to the UK harder

1972

The president of Uganda, Idi Amin, ordered the expulsion of the country's Indian minority. Many emigrated to the UK

From
1975

Vietnamese refugees came to the UK after the Vietnamese War

1976

The Race Relations Act was introduced to promote equal opportunities regardless of race, colour, nationality, ethnicity or religion

1997

The UK handed back control of Hong Kong to China and 50,000 families were granted British citizenship under the 1990 British Nationality (Hong Kong) Act

From
1999

Application for asylum in the UK increased as people fled persecution in Eastern Europe and conflict in Somalia, Sri Lanka and the Middle East

2004

Poland joined the European Union allowing Polish people a legal right to come and live and work in the UK. Over 80,000 Poles made the move

2020

The UK left the European Union

Transcripts and suggested activities

These transcripts provide a written record of the audio recordings which form part of *Migration: coming to Leicester*.

They have been transcribed using a 'smooth verbatim' style of transcription. That means that the spoken words captured on the recording are written down word-for-word with light editing, such as the removal of 'ums' and 'ers' which the narrator (or interviewee) might add and the listening responses, such as 'uh-huh-' and 'okay' that the interviewer might add.

This form of transcription gives a sense of not just what the narrator says, but how they say it, whilst still making it easier to read than a fully unedited verbatim transcript.

With the political turnabout in 1933, obviously this began to have an impact. And I remember my father feeling - getting rather anxious and worried about the situation and talking to us about it. And then we began to feel it at school. There were four of us Jewish children and we had to sit in the front two rows in a special place. And then my father decided that it wasn't right that I should be sitting in a special place and be, as it were, regarded as something different from the others. So he took me away from this school and put me into another school. And so I had about two or three years. And then after that, things began to get gradually much worse because, for instance, going home from school we were not allowed to talk to some of our friends who were not Jewish in the street anymore. And my brother was regularly attacked and came home with a bloody nose every day. I remember whole rows of children coming in the opposite direction towards me and pushing me out of the way. I was somehow regarded as something that wasn't desired anymore and I felt very bad about it and I couldn't understand why all this was happening. And also people began to disappear, on the roads, in the streets. And nobody said anything. But people were not allowed to congregate in the street anymore. They used to hide themselves in their homes. And then there was also curfew for Jewish people and so we weren't allowed out after seven o'clock, or it could have been six or eight, I can't remember. But all these things seemed to start to encroach on us and then it got gradually worse and worse. And then my mother said we must leave the country. And she said she wondered whether I'd like to go to a college where we learned shorthand and typewriting because she said it was very important

Transcript 01



that I learned how to look after myself and how to earn money. And I was only thirteen-and-a-half. On one occasion, I think it was in November 1937, that I heard that the Nazis had set all the synagogues alight. And as I went with the tube, which was overhead rather than underground, to the college where I was learning shorthand and typewriting and some bookkeeping, I could see several fires rising from the synagogues as we passed. And, even then, I didn't quite understand what it was all about. Nobody had really talked to me about politics. But it seemed very sad, a very sad thing, that all the synagogues should be alight and being burned down. And then of course, after that, things began to kind of accumulate. And the horror began to suddenly be realised. I don't know how to explain myself very easily here. But my father's shops - my father had a series of shops, tobacco and delicatessen. And the gangsters, the Nazi gangsters, came and smashed in his glass window. And where it wasn't smashed in, they wrote on the glass in large letters, JEW. And although the assistants were not Jewish, they were also thrown out of the shop. And then the shops were smashed. And I think it was in June 1938 that they finally took my father away. He suddenly disappeared one day. I asked my mother why he wasn't coming home. She said they'd taken him away and she didn't know where he was.

And immediately we got to Dover we were separated and they said, 'you will be together tomorrow, don't worry.' Never told us where we were going. And I was brought to Holloway Prison and my husband went to Pentonville Prison. But we never - I didn't know where he was, he didn't know where I was. I was there for three weeks and he was there for one week. So one night, there was a terrible commotion - that was after three weeks - a terrible commotion during the night. And some people were awakened and, thank god, it was me too, because it would be dreadful if you heard all the others going out of their cells and you were left. Because that happened to somebody of the party. 'Where are we going?' 'Don't ask questions.' So we were put into buses. Onto the train. And the train went to... even on the train, we asked the police. The police escorted us. 'Where are we going?' 'Sorry I can't tell you.' Nobody knew where we were going. So we landed in Liverpool and we spent the night there, in the Sailors' Home. And we were brought to the Isle of Man. And I had never heard of the Isle of Man before. And on that boat I felt absolutely - that was about my lowest time. I thought, 'god, where's my husband? All alone here on the Isle of Man, what are they going to do to us?' That was always the fear. But i mean, having experienced things in Germany, I thought, 'What are they going to do to us? Why at night? Why all this hush-hush?' Because you never got a straight answer. If they would have only said, 'well you're going there for the duration,' or anything. No, just hush-hush. Anyway we arrived at the Isle of Man and we were brought into boarding houses, four to a room. And it was fantastic. It really was wonderful. If only they would have said, 'your husband is also on the Isle of

Transcript 02



Man' it would be... but if course they didn't say. 'Where are our husbands?'
'We can't tell you.' 'There's a war on.' 'There's a war on.'

Story and impact

Why do you think people from Germany were put into internment camps during World War Two? Try and think of as many possible reasons as you can.

Why might the narrator have found her internment on the Isle of Man 'fantastic' and 'wonderful'?

Research

Find out more about the internment camps on the Isle of Man during World War Two. You can find out more about the history of the Isle of Man on the Culture Vannin website. They have produced a video about World War Two internment on the island.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7iLKvMFmhEA>

You can find out more about the experiences of Jewish refugees who came were sent to internment camps on the Isle of Man during World War Two on Refugee Voices, the website of the Association of Jewish Refugees

<https://www.ajrrefugeevoices.org.uk/intervieweeexperiences/British-Internment---Isle-of-Man>

I wouldn't like to complain about it

Transcript 03

And then the American army just come around us and just cut our retreat off. And we were shot to pieces then. I was took Prisoner of War, yeah, by the American army. And we arrived in New York, I believe it was about the 11th November '44. From there we took a three-day journey down to Oklahoma. We stayed in a transit camp in Belgium for about nine weeks. We got shipped over from Antwerp down to Dover. And Good Friday '47, we come down to Shady Lane Camp, Leicester. Population of the camp in Shady Lane was approximately about a thousand men. Camp conditions, I wouldn't like to complain about it. It improved as time went on since I come to Shady Lane in '47. Once you was allowed out and you finished your work on a Saturday, usually you used to get back in the camp by about one o'clock, two o'clock. You used to go and change, put your best clothes on frankly, and you used to go out in town. But you had to be in by ten o'clock at nights.

What was the reaction of the general public? Was there any hostility shown or...?

Well I hadn't run across a lot of hostility, was pretty well-treated anyway.

Could you speak English?

Very, very little. I used to learn and that's a goal that was for the majority as well. We used to have English classes at the camp. Anybody interested in learning English, they could do. But I think the best way to learn English, to be together with English people. And that's how I practically learnt the English language myself.

Transcript 03



Story and impact

Plot the journey taken by this narrator on a map. Think about the reasons why he might have travelled to so many places. Why do you think he ended up in Leicester?

Research

There are many reasons why people migrate (move from one area to another) and there are different factors that motivate people to move. Two of these are called **push factors** and **pull factors**.

Push factors are things that prompt people to leave a place. In other words, there are factors 'pushing' them away from the place they live. This can include famine, disease, war or a lack of work.

Pull factors are things that prompt people to go to a certain place. In other words there are factors 'pulling' them to a certain place. This can include plentiful work, a better climate or going to join family members who already live in another place.

Consider this story in light of this.

Creative response

Create a dramatic account of the journey that this narrator made as a Prisoner of War. What sort of language might you use to make it appeal to readers?

Leave the country within ninety days

Transcript 04

It was announced on the radio was it?

It was on the radio at a public rally and also it was covered on the television news as well, that the British Asians who had had the British passport and were not the Ugandan citizens had to leave the country within ninety days. And full stop. Some of the heads of the various sort of, you know, organisations had a meeting with President Amin, thinking whether he was serious. And people, as general, could not believe it and that, for sure, thought that it was just one of Mr Amin's joke or something like that. That he would come back out of his announcement. But after a week there started coming up some decrees which - he used the word decree - and that if a person did not do this and that and they get the problems. And there used to be the army blocks. I lived in Soroti and to go to Kampala I had to cross more than about twenty, twenty-five army blocks before I could reach to the city. And every block I would be checked thoroughly. And would they find any faults with me, I would be punished by them without you going through any of the courts or anything like that.

And this happened immediately after the announcement of the expulsion? These kind of stringent rules came in or modes of behaviour at any rate?

That's correct, because the thing is, then, army had the full power and some of the so-called, at that time, they used to call the special units who started using all their powers to the extreme side, even including not to us but to get rid of their own enemies within the Uganda country as a whole. I remember one of the town clerks of my town had been bundled up into boot of a Volkswagen and driven off from the town at a high speed. And nobody has seen of him yet.

Transcript 04



Story and impact

Plot the journey taken by this narrator on a map. Think about the reasons why he might have travelled to so many places. Why do you think he ended up in Leicester?

Research

There are many reasons why people migrate (move from one area to another) and there are different factors that motivate people to move. Two of these are called **push factors** and **pull factors**.

Push factors are things that prompt people to leave a place. In other words, there are factors 'pushing' them away from the place they live. This can include famine, disease, war or a lack of work.

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Consider this story in light of this.

Creative response

Create a dramatic account of the journey that this narrator made as a Prisoner of War. What sort of language might you use to make it appeal to readers?

The soldiers they came back to unemployment

Transcript 05

So, I came to Leicester through unemployment. Wales was a dead country. There was no work at all. You had a farm labourer working for nothing. The farmers, where I come from, it was the farmers' industry. We didn't live around the mines. I come from Newtown, Powys and the people were all out of work. I know my father, he was one of the lucky ones. He worked in an office at Price Jones's and he was lucky. But my Uncle Frank he had to be retired and my Uncle Albert got stopped, both my two uncles, and Uncle Frank didn't get a job for five years. Living on the dole, they're living on the farmers, helping them, giving them potatoes, giving them swedes and giving them as much as they could in food. And that was the country I was brought up in, you know, in. But that was the 'Land for Heroes', Lloyd George's 'Land of Heroes', you know. Making it good for the soldiers. They came back to unemployment and they were unemployed. Most of them never did strike a blow. And I don't know how they lived off and on the dole. The little bit they got scraping here and scraping there. And one of my aunties made a friend of a Leicester girl and she came to Leicester for her holiday. And she liked Leicester so much she got a job. There was plenty of work in Leicester at the time. So, they came to Leicester. So, in 1923 we had no work. I was only in the shop, the music shop, at three shillings a week. My brother couldn't get a job at all. And so my aunties wrote and asked us to come to Leicester to live with them, you see. So we did. Well, Leicester at that time was the boom city of the country really. The shoes we were working on were quite busy and the hosiery was busy. I went to get in a shop in Leicester but they were paying ten shillings a week and tuppence on sales, you know, on every pound. Well, I

Transcript 05



thought I shouldn't sell much because they were going to put me on a button counter. And I didn't, it didn't appeal to me. So, I went in the hosiery. And I went in to A W Swan's at the time. And of course I worked there all my working time. I done all right and Swan's were, it was quite a good firm and always had plenty of work.

Story and impact

Why do you think the narrator struggled to find work in Wales?

What employment options were there in Leicester?

Research

Choose one of the industries mentioned in this oral history, such as the boot and shoe-making, and find out more about it.

Find out more about Lloyd George's 'land fit for heroes' slogan and what it meant to people.

I was restless

Transcript 06

I was, I think, I was 22 when I first come. I decided because most of my friends had come, you know, they'd come over here and I could. I was fed-up, you know, I was fed-up of depending on my parents and, you know what it's like, if you haven't got a job, you know. Or what it's like if you've got all day long and you've left school. And I used to read a lot but that didn't... And when we were 18 we were given nine shillings a week dole, you know, in Cork. And then the war started and there was posters everywhere, you know, 'Come and work in England. Join the WRENS.' Plenty of money, make a, you know, make a career for yourself and all that sort of thing. It took me a long time to make my mind up and I didn't want to leave Ireland and yet I was restless. And my sister decided to join the ATS.* I made an application to join the WRENS.** And my mother didn't mind. My father was away at the time and she helped me. She knew that once I'd made my mind up to come away that that was it. I wouldn't, you know, I'd keep at it. That I was very determined. I never intended to stop here. It was a chance to come here because my fare was paid. It was a challenge mostly and I wanted to see England. I thought England was a different place altogether to what I was brought up to believe it to be. The only way we were ever... we were not brought up to hate England at all. We were brought up to pray for England. For its conversion because we were made to believe that everybody over here was non-conformist, you know, and pagan, sort of, you know. The nuns'd have us praying all the time for the conversion of England.

***ATS** Auxilliary Territorial Service, a women's branch of the British Army during World War Two

***WRENS** Women's Royal Naval Service, the women's branch of the Royal Navy

Transcript 06



Story and impact

What do you think about the narrator's beliefs about England before she moved here?
Why do you think she held those beliefs?

Research

You can find out more about 'The vital role of women in the Second World War' on the Imperial War Museum website.

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/the-vital-role-of-women-in-the-second-world-war>

England expects

Transcript 07

Lots of us was leaving home because jobs were very scarce after you leave school and people were there knocking about, nothing to do. And so we started getting letters in the post office, the banks, the hospitals, posters, you know, saying that you were wanted in England, you know. And we always referred to England as our mother country 'cause that's what we were told from school. England expects every man to do his duty and Rule Britannia. So we, some of us, sold what we had. Some of our parents help us to get here. Some leave our jobs. It's not a lot, but it was a job. But hearing about England, learning so much about England, we decided to drop everything and go to the land of our mother country. They wanted nurse. They wanted people in the factories. They wanted people everywhere. It wasn't no particular. England needs you and from what we learn, as I say, we were glad to be going to England. i had a friend. She came to Leicester. So when she wrote and said she were there - she reached the August in the same, '55, and I was here in November the seventh. Yeah, because she says, 'come' 'cause she was lonely. oh well, if my friend wanted me to join her she wouldn't tell me England is bad at least. She said 'ah, come you'll get a job'.

Transcript 07



Story and impact

Consider the sacrifices that people leaving Antigua made in coming to the UK.

Research

Find out more about why people chose to migrate from the Caribbean to England in the 1940s and 1950s. A good starting point is to watch the Pathe news film 'Empire Windrush ship arrives in the UK carrying Jamaican migrants' from 1948.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2__Canb80NM

You can find out more by watching 'The Windrush Generation explained in 90 seconds'.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LBuMKx5s0o>

There are useful resources available on the Windrush Foundation website.

<https://windrushfoundation.com/>

I was scared stiff

Transcript 08

A number of my colleagues took the boat. Either went to England or went to the States. Yeah, quite a number. There was a lot of emigration at that time and England I think was the favourite spot at that time, more so than the States around that particular era. And I think, I think certainly a good number of my age group at the time would have come to England at the time. It was well known in the community, for example, that a lot of families were being supported by sons and daughters who were working in England. And English pound notes were, you know, were the gold that I suppose everybody had dreamed about. And bless their sons and daughters, they supported many of their families at home in Ireland during those days when they didn't have very much. Being very honest, I didn't know anything about England at the time. I had never been to England. I suppose I thought 'ah, it's a pagan country', you know, this kind of attitude and mentality we grew up with. And just thought I'd, you know, I'd like to work as a priest in England again because I'd never worked in England. I'd never even come to England before I was ordained. But I was terrified. I really was. I mean I, somehow or another, we had this vision of not just England people but, dare I say it, of protestants being people growing some kind of horns on them. I didn't know, I mean, it was terrible really when you think back on it. And I was terrified. I was scared stiff.

Transcript 08



Story and impact

The narrator remembers thinking that England was 'a pagan country' and that the English had horns growing out of them. Why do you think that they thought this?

Research

The Irish community was at one time Britain's biggest source of immigration. Read more about how numbers of immigrants from Ireland to Britain have fallen dramatically in the Guardian article, *'There's not many left now': census shines spotlight on Britain's dwindling Irish community* (15 November 2022)

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/nov/05/theres-not-many-left-now-census-shines-spotlight-on-britains-dwindling-irish-community>

They think that we are not human

Transcript 09

Well, you expect to get a job then, most of the people, better than what you were doing, because my friend says to me, 'I'm getting six pound a week', and that's a lot of money those days. I already checked it out, if I get six I will stay about two years or three years then I'll be back home. But here I am, 31 years. You know, people here some of the things they do, I'm surprised because lots of things they say from England and it it's from England it's the best. That's what we were taught. And coming here it's so different. I'm sorry to say, some of them so illiterate that you wonder if they're human and they think that we are not human. And sometimes they think if you're black, or your skin is black, you don't know anything and that's really wrong.

Transcript 09



Story and impact

How does 'they think that we are not human' make you feel. Write a response to this.

If you wanted to find out more about the experiences of this narrator when they came to Leicester, what questions might you ask? Think about asking closed questions and open questions. What do we mean by neutral questions? Try and make sure the questions you come up with are neutral.

Creative response

Many people were persuaded to come to Britain by advertisements that were posted in newspapers. Create an advertisement encouraging people to come to work in your local area. Think very carefully about the words that you use.

That's how English people go on

Transcript 10

This is the first impression that I get of your people. I was at St Pancras, standing there. Well, 'cause my friend says 'when you reach St Pancras don't stay in London because London is very fascinating. Come straight up to me. if you don't meet me at St Pancras, you come to Leicester. London Road Station. I'll be there'. So, I came. This other guy, his people meet him. So, I wondering around. Still forget she say to meet her at Leicester, London Road. And I see this white guy. He had on a overall. 'Well', I says, 'he must be somebody that you can ask, somebody in authority'. So, went up to him, said 'excuse me, can you tell me which train going to Li-icester?' He said, 'I beg your pardon?' I says, 'which train going to Li-icester?' He said, 'which train going to Leicester, you mean'. I said, 'oh'. He said, 'call it what the hell you like, it's Leicester. If you can read, go and look on that blackboard. And you see, when he's going I said, 'boy'. I says, 'oh, goodness, that's how English people go on'.

Transcript 10



Story and impact

Think about the encounter between the narrator and the person in 'authority' she approaches at St Pancras Station. How do you think this conversation might have made the narrator feel? Why? What do you think you would have done if this had happened to you?

Creative response

Put yourself in the shoes of the person 'in authority'. What questions might you ask them about how they behaved? In role, how might they answer?

Can you tell me about the sorts of problems that Latvian men had when they moved over here after the War?

Yes, they had quite desperate problems. The number one was loneliness. While they were all living in camps, in the agricultural hostels or miners' camps it wasn't so bad. They were all together. But there were not enough women, so they were lonely. And once the camps were dispersed - because by 1951 we were all allowed to take jobs where we could find. We didn't have to register anymore - they, people dispersed all over the country. And some of them found themselves very isolated. Accommodation was very difficult to find. What finished off people like us was furnished rooms with very conservative, very insular English landladies who could not understand the foreigners' strange ways. And that was actually a very serious, it had a very serious mental affect on the people. And the sad thing is that there were quite a few mental breakdowns. Thinking in figures, statistically, very high percentage.

Do you think that not being able to contact their relatives and family back home, do you think that sort of made it worse as well?

That definitely made it worse because some were very frightened. They were afraid to write. And some did write but then the contacts were lost because either the people became frightened at home or they were actually punished. Because this is it - if you had contacts with abroad under the Soviet system you became immediately a suspected person. So, people didn't know what had happened in many cases to their, well, parents, brothers and sisters. Specially thinking of these young men, they had not idea. Some had left wives and perhaps a baby that they had never seen.

Transcript 11



Story and impact

Explore the reasons why people from Latvia who moved to Britain began to feel isolated.

Research

Draw a timeline of key events that happened in Latvia in the 20th century and consider how these may have impacted on migration.

Oh, she's writing

Transcript 12

First day I had to... they gave me a list, said 'what you do, how much dozen at the end of the day you put down' because I wasn't on piecework, I was just working normally. So, they gave me the thing. So, I fold it out at the end of the day and this woman next to me, she's peeping to see if I could write. So, she caught the eye of the lady next-door to her. She says, 'oh, she's writing'. And the other one says, 'oh, she can read'. So I shout out, 'yes'. She turned red.

Transcript 12



Story and impact

Why do you think the narrator's work colleague made the comments that she did?

Research

Antigua and Barbuda is a member of the Commonwealth. Find out more about the Commonwealth.

England knew nothing about you

Transcript 13

In the Caribbean there was no such thing as racism. We knew nothing about racism so we weren't trained to handle the situation when we came here. I mean, when I came here first, even though I came to the hospital, I still had to go to the labour exchange to show my passport and to fill a form out. And when I fill that form out, because she didn't see me write - fill it out and put my signature - she asked me to fill one out in front of her because she didn't think I could write that good, you see. And that was the sort of racism that we met. And we didn't experience those things in the Caribbean. And we weren't ready for those things. I mean, in those days, you come here, you see another black person, and it doesn't matter how far away that black person is, you are moving closer and closer to get to know and just get to be near that person, because you feel a little bit safer near that person. I mean, you go into the market. And in the market you stand in the queue and they will pass over you and serve everybody at the back of you. And then they will tell you, 'what you want, my duck?' Well, I got so annoyed one day that I called for two pounds of everything on his stall and then walk away and left him there with them, you know, because I was really annoyed that these things could happen to you when you've been taught everything about England and England knew nothing about you, you see. And we were - we had the Union Jack. We flew the flag. We had Empire Day, 24th May, you know. We had Prince Charles's birthday. We had everything that's going we had to celebrate. We knew everything about England. I had a penfriend in Yorkshire. In Lancashire, with the cotton mills. When the cotton is grown there we'd see pictures of them coming back, of all the, what the mills looked like and how the cotton is being turned into cloth. And all that we get to know

Transcript 13



about. Yet they knew nothing about us. And to be told 'why don't you go back where you came from,' you know, was really hard.

Story and impact

What is racism?

What is a stereotype?

Creative response

Write a letter to an imagined person living in the Caribbean in the 1960s. What would you like to find out about their way of life?

We were the ones who paved the way

Transcript 14

We had the extended family. We had to save for our family. Send something back home. It was ten years before I got back home to see my mum and dad. And we had to say 'look after our family here'. Some of us didn't have very good husbands. So, therefore we were the ones, the Caribbean women, the black women from the Caribbean, we were the ones who paved the way. While all of this now, everybody's trying to help. Nobody helped us. I think we had a good rapport with the people from Poland here, especially here in Leicester, you know. There were Ukraines, they were very, very nice and they let us have rooms in their homes. We have blazed the trail for here, you know, in England. And because they don't see us with great big mansions, great big supermarkets and things like that, they think that we haven't done anything. But we were the ones who put the first stone down. And from that stone now they have mansions, they have supermarkets. And we're quite satisfied with our lot because we know we have brought our children up to tell them not to hate. Even though we have had that hate, we have asked them not to hate. My son has come from school and covered himself in talc because he think he would be white because of the pressure he had at school from teachers, from pupils, from everybody, you know what I mean. We have gone through so much that I think our story has got to be told. We were not skiving, we were not lazy, you know, we were there, hard-working. But nobody bothered to look and see what was happening to us.

Transcript 14



Story and impact

What does it mean to be a trailblazer?

Can you think of any trailblazers in society today?

Research

Explore the role of Caribbean women as trailblazers. Find out about female black activists such as Claudia Jones (1915-1964) and Olive Morris (1952-1979).

Everything is teacher to you

Transcript 15

You come to London and when you, even if you can speak the language already, you will have a difficulty in getting the straight language from people. What they're telling you, and you keep saying 'can you repeat that, can you repeat this', even if you're perfectly or communicate effectively the language. That's the first impression that I have got because back home you always have the BBC World Service with that fine accent, a focus on African people always. So you say 'okay, everything will be the same'. And then you're coming here and - alright, I'm not just hear good - I've figured out the different accents, but I can see different ways of speaking. But what I am always looking is, for example, the youth culture. I am always within the youth, whether they are Somali background or other backgrounds, they use the same language. 'Innit' and all that it was always a mystery to me until I get to the point understanding 'innit' - they mean 'isn't it'. They say 'oh, you need to have that ear'. And also the television is good. For example, if you tune into *Eastenders* you learn lots of language. And other daily soap operas on other channels. So, it is, everything is teacher to you when you're trying to grasp and understand. To start with, when I was trying to understand the *Eastenders* I have to run subtitles. So, that's how you train yourself. And when you're talking to the people, then yes, you act as if you don't understand any of English so they will come into your terms and try to repeat the way they want you to speak because they want you to understand the way. And they are good teachers. The street people are good teachers. That's how I get on in learning and trying to understand different dialects. it's most important that you comprehend the people that you live with.

Transcript 15



Story and impact

Imagine you are somewhere where you can't understand what people are saying and they can't understand you. How do you feel?

Research

Find out about about different languages that people in your class might speak.

Completely different languages

Transcript 16

I've got two sons and because my wife was Estonian and I am a Lithuanian we used to speak, didn't speak, each others languages, 'cause Lithuanian is absolutely different to Estonian.

Is that right?

Absolutely. Foreign language. Completely different languages. So while we was courting we spoke German, 'cause I speak German, Russian as well and the English. So, but when we in England, we started speaking English between ourselves. So the children learned that. But being a grandmother, she encouraged them to learn a bit of Estonian. So Edmund does speak Estonian reasonably. And he speaks a bit of Lithuanian, takes part with Lithuanians a lot. We are British and we remain British. But the fact is that we are, came from, the Baltics. We're still part of a Baltic people.

Transcript 16



Research

Create a map showing all the different countries which are referred to in this narrative.

Compile a glossary of some of the key words that you might need if you moved from Britain to these countries. Find out what these words are in the languages spoken in these countries.

That sense of feeling homesick

Transcript 17

If you can't speak the language then there's no point in living in the country where you are. I think language is the main barrier still. You must know English. I think people, immigrant people will, would learn more English if they got support. I think a lot of people tend to take the mickey out of them if they can't speak English. As when I came here, if you couldn't speak English, people were willing to teach you. To make you understand. To understand themselves. Or, if some of the English people tried to learn our language. I think that's the main thing. At the moment it's just a one-way train. We have to do everything, which I don't regret but I think that at times when it would be nice if it happened both ways as well. But I don't think it's going to happen. It's going to take a long, long time. I think one thing I've learnt is I can do everything to be westernised, but that's not going to change my colour. Even wearing westernised clothes or eating western food and everything - in my mind I thought it was going to help me, but deep inside you always have that feeling that your colour is never, ever going to change no matter what you do. I think you've got to have confidence in yourself, which I have. I think you must, once you are out, you must forget that you are coloured or you are white or somebody's going to discriminate you because of your colour, and that's something I have forgotten. There are two ways about it. On one side, I know I've got a British passport and I am British. but on the other side, because I am coloured, it's really difficult for other people to take me as British. And no matter what I do to make this as my country, deep inside I'll still find that sense of feeling homesick. There will be times. It's going to take a long, long time. I just hope that when my children grow up, they don't have difficulties or they don't experience the things which we do, because when

Transcript 17



my little girl goes to school - she's only seven - but when I ask her 'what sort of children do you know?' she says, she just gives me names. And she doesn't know 'this is a West Indian, this is English or this is Indian' which is very good for her. So I think when they grow up, it's going to be totally different things.

Story and impact

Explore the idea of homesickness. Have you ever felt homesick? How did it make you feel?

Creative response

Imagine that you are away from home. Write a letter explaining what you miss most and how you are feeling.

I adopted to many western ways, for instance, clothes. I just loved the clothes people wore here. I never wore make-up before and that was one thing I was frightened about. I thought my parents will tell me off. But they were very good. They said I could wear make-up, I could wear beautiful clothes as well. One thing I mustn't do is go out with boys. So, I was very glad that I was allowed to wear clothes and everything. I changed the food as well. I think in about a couple of years time I was more westernised than I was when I came over here. I knew I had to change because simply, if I didn't change... There was such an eastern and western way. When I used to go out I used to dress-up in western clothes, talk English, eat English food and everything. But deep inside I still used to miss my culture, used to miss wearing my clothes, eating my own food, talking my language. So once I was at home I used to forget everything about outside and start doing what I was doing in East Africa. And that's once thing I have learned my children as well. I try to talk to them in Gujurati - that is our mother tongue - because I think it is important for them that they should learn and love mother tongue.

Transcript 18



Story and impact

Explore what identity means? What factors influence who we are? Think about the similarities that people from different communities share? Discuss what community is and how people can belong to more than one community.

Creative response

Create a collage about your own identity using different materials, images or words. Think about what clothes you wear, special occasions, what language(s) you speak, what food(s) you eat.

You cling to your own group

Transcript 19

There was a terrific pressure on that you must become assimilated. And I was told even when I was doing my probation year and that, you must speak to children in English at home and all these kind of things. I mean, educationalists told you that there was a terrific pressure on us to become assimilated and you really did feel a foreigner and you cling to your own group. If you were interested in... you see, my sister has become assimilated as well. I mean, her children don't speak English, I mean, don't speak Latvian and it doesn't bother her. But I can't help it, it bothers me. To me it's important. I suppose it's the kind of person you are. So, my children speak Latvian and they are quite active in Latvian life, so. And I'm very active, yes, I do all sorts of things. I mean, I've done a lot of Latvian education, you know, to kind of learn about things and to be informed.

People don't forget what their heritage is or what their....

Well, yes, and it's such a terrific wealth as well although we're a tiny little country. but, I mean, the cultural wealth is immense. You see, we have, what, about two million folk songs which have been passed on by memory. And you can't translate it, you can't, you know. There's so much to it culturally, yes, and if you don't... and the language is the key to it. And if you haven't got the language you can't...

Did you ever think that you'd go back there or would you like to return?

Oh yes, if the Soviets weren't there I would go tomorrow.

Yeah.

I mean that is, I feel, how I would, you know, that's where I feel I really belong. I'm happy here, I don't feel an outsider here anymore, but my loyalty's still there.

Transcript 19



Story and impact

What does the word assimilated mean?

What does the narrator mean by 'cultural wealth'?

'You really did feel a foreigner and you clung to your own group' - explore this idea.

Research

You can find out more about folk songs as an aspect of cultural heritage on the website of the English Folk Dance and Song Society.

<https://www.efdss.org/>

I couldn't hold my identity the way I wanted to

Transcript 20

I always felt that if I integrated, you know, the way I was expected to, living in the host country, I think it would mean that I would have to forget some of my - I'd have to lose my identity. I couldn't hold my identity the way I wanted to. So to keep my identity, I, at that time, going back 38 year ago - I've been married now 40 year - I felt that I didn't know much about politics or history. In those days I didn't have time to read or study as I used to go out to work and then I had a family to bring up. And I felt in those days that I had to know more about my own identity. And then I come up against a lot of you know, sort of, you know, 'the Irish are pigs'. And once or twice I had arguments and being called 'an Irish pig' and things like that. And this kind of come over on me that I was in a foreign country. I knew then that I wasn't in Ireland and that I was in a foreign country.

Transcript 20



Story and impact

Explore the words 'integrated' and 'identity'.

Why do you think that the narrator feels that integrating might make her lose her identity?

Research

Explore the idea of 'holding my identity'.

Creative response

Create a collage about your identity using words and images.

You'll try to worship the best way you can

Transcript 21

If you are Muslim and your first language is not Arabic, you'll try to worship the best way you can. So, yes, there are many mosques here, but Somalis need also that extra bit of explaining in Somali, later on, what has been said in Arabic. So that need was there. So people put together money and hired a place, it's not provided by anybody, and then they hired that place. It is to do with that unique need from the people that speak Somali.

Transcript 21



Research

Find out more about the history of Somalia.

Somalia has a rich oral storytelling tradition and is known as 'The Nation of Poets'. The country had no written language until 1972 and poetry has always been used as a form of mass communication. Find out more about how Somali poetry is developing in the UK today.

A very joyous and happy time

Transcript 22

You were talking earlier about Diwali when you were a child in East Africa. What do you remember? What sort of sticks in your mind most of all?

I think most, what we remember most is lighting up of little 'divas'*. we couldn't wait. Morning and night we used to light up the whole of the house. Inside and outside, the house actually glowed with little 'divas'. And we used to look forward to lighting all these hundreds and hundreds of 'divas'. All along the lines of the window sills and on the doorsteps on the front of the houses and everywhere else. We see that in every house that you look they was all lit up with the 'divas'.

They're candles are they?

They're like little, like melted down butter which is like a ghee form and it's, like, lit up. And every time one goes off we couldn't wait to go running along to light it up. And then people just visiting. And there's all different varieties of sweet dishes has been cooked as well.

Were they special for Diwali?

For Diwali, yes. There's certain dishes that people normally just do it at Diwali times and you exchange those, whatever you cook, you exchange with your neighbourhood, your family, your friends. You have a great big tray of twelve inch by twelve, in a silver stainless steel plate and you have all these different varieties of food going to all different people. And they bring over their homemade food as well.

You were saying as well that you remember the whole house being cleaned.

Yes, yes, I mean, it's to say that 'okay, it's the festive day is coming'. So people clean

***Divya**

An oil lamp made from clay and lit during the Hindu festival of Diwali to symbolise prosperity for the year ahead.

Transcript 22



literally everything, the floor, the linen and everything. And they, on the foot-step of the house, they do a pattern which is what we call rangoli and it's made up of, like, dried powder, colourful powders, and sometimes soaked white rice, soaked in different colours and they make all different patterns. And other people tend to do a permanent colouring which is there permanently. So that's a big occasion for children as well as the household person to look forward to doing that.

Do you wear special clothes at Diwali?

Yes, we have clothes which is put away soon as Diwali is finished, that's gone in the suitcase. And we have all this jewellery, Indian costume, Indian jewellery. And special dresses. You have, always have new clothes to wear for, on the new day. Straight after Diwali it's the new year, which is the new year of the Hindu calendar. So on those days we're always told not to argue, not to fall out, not to cry, not to upset. So, everything was made a very joyous and happy time for everybody in the family.

Story and impact

What is a 'ritual'?

Find out about the different festivals that people in your class celebrate.

Creative response

Use the idea of 'festive day' as a starting point for a piece of creative writing.

I don't consider myself foreigner anymore

Transcript 23

Well one thing I can say now, I'm quite happy. I've got a good wife, I've got a good family, large family, things like that and I'm quite contented in my life now. I'm looking forward, in about three years, for retirement. I go over to Germany, frankly, all of us, both of us, every year and see my own family across there now. But when I go, even on holiday, on a bus trip to Germany, I'm a foreigner there. So I'm a nationalised British subject, travel on my own British passport, so I don't consider myself foreigner anymore in here.

Transcript 23



Story and impact

What do you think the narrator means when he talks about being 'nationalised'?

Research

How will Germany have changed since the narrator left in the 1940s?

Many people might think they might go back

Transcript 24

Many people might think they might go back, especially the old people who are frustrated, who are not getting... but that's not their decision and they know that. It's the decision is with the children, decision is with the younger people, the decision with the families, with the wife, with everybody in that household. So it's a tough one because the war is still going on so one cannot say 'I'll go back tomorrow. I'll do this A, B, C, D and in five years to come, when I go back, then I have this certainty'. There's not that certainty there and they know. On the other hand, they know it is very difficult to integrate when you are 50, about your empowerment. So some people are having this unrealistic thing, saying 'I will take my things and go back when the peace comes'. But the challenge is in their household. The first five, four years outside of the country when nothing goes right, yes, I get into hibernation or try to stay, stick together and go back. But five, four, five four years, it's a lot of time and you would miss where you are if you're not integrating. So I already passed that. I will do what I can while I'm here. I don't know what would happen in a few years' time and I'm not in a position, at least the last 15 years, to blame myself. The evidence dictated to me what to do not I planned it the way I wanted.

Transcript 24



Story and impact

Why do you think some older Somalis might want to go back to Somalia?

Research

For background on the war in Somalia go to the website of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

<https://www.icrc.org/en/where-we-work/africa/somalia>

Creative response

Use the idea of returning to somewhere you left a long time ago as a starting point for a piece of creative writing.

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