

What Was It Like to Immigrate to Canada in the 1900s?

For an immigrant, coming to Canada can mean leaving friends, family, and possessions behind. Here are a few examples of what early immigrants to Canada might have brought along.

The Clothes on Your Back

Most immigrants were only allowed to bring a couple of small suitcases.

“They came with almost no items of value; their few belongings were carried in sacks of various kinds and a few battered cardboard suitcases...”

— Arthur Vaughan, Canadian customs officer, post-World War II period



Photos

Most immigrants considered photos priceless, a reminder of family and friends left behind.



“... the suitcase in which [my mother] had put all our keepsakes and money was stolen and we were left with no money and few clothes and to her lasting sorrow, no mementos of our old life.”

— Dutch immigrant Adriana J. Williams, arrived in Canada from Holland, May 3, 1955

No Food, Please!

Many families came ready to cook. Tins of cooking oil were routinely found in luggage arriving at Pier 21. Others tried to bring sausages or cheese from their home country. Immigration officers confiscated food items for health and safety reasons.



Let's Talk About ... Continuity and Change

With a partner or small group, discuss the following questions: What can you tell about the immigrants who came to Canada by what they brought? What expectations do you think they had for their life in a new country? What do you think immigrants coming to Canada today might bring with them?

Let's Role-Play

Working with a partner, role-play a phone conversation between two family members. One family member has recently immigrated to Canada. The other family member is going to immigrate to Canada soon. Formulate questions that the person planning to move might ask the family member who already lives in Canada. For example, What am I allowed to bring with me?



Sohana Syeda, Mohammed Ahmed, and their daughter, Nawra Roya, celebrate their new citizenship in Kingston, Ontario, on November 15, 2012. During the ceremony, 63 new Canadians from 30 countries were granted citizenship.

Ships like the S.S. *Waterman* brought immigrants to Canada in the mid-1900s.

