

# 4 Why did they go to America?

Why? Zone

Thousands of people emigrated from Britain to America in the 1600s. Nowadays that journey only takes a few hours by plane – but it wasn't so easy then. It took many weeks by ship and it was very dangerous. On one trip, 100 out of 450 people died of disease. One way or another, the travellers knew they had probably said goodbye to family and friends for ever...

1 Look at these illustrations and work out why people decided to risk such dangers to go to America. Make a list of the main reasons.

**1** 1649-1660

England should be ruled by a king. I am not staying to be ruled by Parliament.

**John Washington**  
In 1649 Parliament executed King Charles I and ruled the country without a king. Many of Charles' supporters (called Royalists) went to America. John Washington was among them.

I dare not stay in England now that there is a king again.

**William Goffe**  
signed the death warrant to execute Charles I. Eleven years later Charles' son became king and wanted the regicides for king killers put on trial. Goffe fled to America.

**2** 1700

Goodbye England. I would rather have been whipped than sent to America.

**Elizabeth Hardy**  
was deserted by her husband in London and left with no money. She stole goods worth less than a pound. She was only 19 but she was sentenced to transportation to America for life. In the 1700s 70 per cent of London's criminals suffered the same fate. Charles Scoldwell was even transported for life for stealing two ducks.

**3** 1760

We don't know what America is like but it cannot be worse than starving at home.

**James MacMichael**  
had once been an army officer. He was one of the many Irish and Scots who travelled to America in the 1700s. He left Ireland because people paid high rents for their farmland but still faced death from starvation because, year after year, harvests were poor. If they tried to get work in the towns the wages were so low that they still could not buy enough food to eat. Despite his previous status, when James arrived in America he felt that he was looked upon as a barbarian.

death warrant – Todesurteil / regicides – Königsmörder / on trial – vor Gericht / fled – floh  
whipped – ausgepeitscht / deserted – verlassen / sentenced – verurteilt / suffered – erlitten / fate – Schicksal / starving – verhungern / starvation – Hungertod / harvests – Ernte / wages – Löhne / barbarian – Barbar

**4** 1680

Captured, sold, then sold again! One day I will be free to choose where I live.

**Olaudah Equiano**  
was a slave. He was captured in West Africa aged ten, and was sold to an owner in Britain. In 1762 he was sold to a slave owner in the West Indies. But Equiano was one of the few slaves whose story had a happy ending. He scraped together enough money to buy his freedom and went on to campaign against slavery for the rest of his life. After he gained his freedom Equiano took jobs on sea-going ships, and in 1773 he took part in a voyage of exploration to the North Pole; one of the other crew members was fifteen-year-old Horatio Nelson (see pages 28–31). Equiano eventually returned to England and in 1789 wrote a book about his life which was a great success. He married an Englishwoman and had a family.

**5** 1606

America is there anything more exciting than exploring a new country? I wonder what other adventures I'll have?

**Captain John Smith**  
travelled to America with one of the first groups of English settlers. He was just 26 but had been travelling round Europe since he was 15, fighting as a soldier for most of the time. In America the settlers struggled to grow enough food so Smith volunteered to contact the local Indians. However, the Indians captured him and were about to execute him when the chief's daughter, Pocahontas, saved his life. After that the Indians helped the settlers until Smith returned to England.

**6** 1630-1640

God is helping us to escape the King's religious laws. Soon we shall be able to pray as God wants us to.

**Anne Bradstreet and John Winthrop**  
were Puritans. Between 1630 and 1641 80,000 Puritans travelled to America from Britain so that they could use their simple religious services. They hated the religious services that King Charles I was forcing on his people. Anne later became a poet. John was a lawyer who became a political leader in America.

**Think**  
Which helped you most in this task: the pictures, the descriptions or the word bubbles? Why?

captured – gefangen / scraped together – zusammenkratzen / to campaign – sich einsetzen für / gained – bekommen / success – Erfolg / exploring – erforschen / to struggle – kämpfen mit / volunteered – meldete sich freiwillig / execute – umbringen / services – Gottesdienste / was forcing – zwingen / lawyer – Rechtsanwalt