
WW2 Evacuees

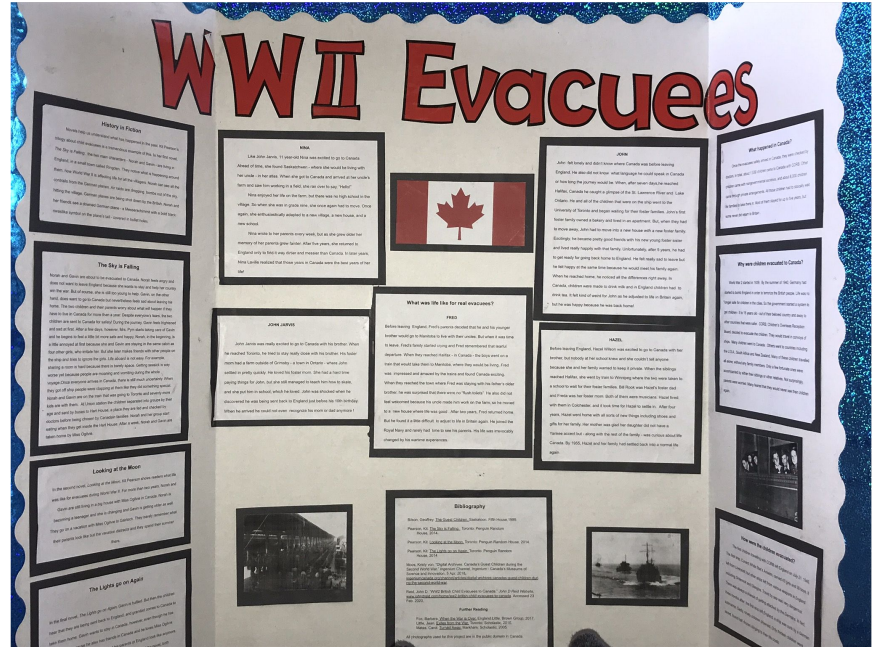
— Avneet Brar, Grade 6 —
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My Backboard

What was life like for real evacuees?

FRED

Before leaving England, Fred's parents decided that he and his younger brother would go to Manitoba to live with their uncles. But when it was time to leave, Fred's family started crying and Fred remembered that tearful departure. When they reached Halifax - in Canada - the boys went on a train that would take them to Manitoba, where they would be living. Fred was impressed and amazed by the trains and found Canada exciting. When they reached the town where Fred was staying with his father's older brother, he was surprised that there were no "flush toilets". He also did not feel welcomed because his uncle made him work on the farm, so he moved to a new house where life was good. After two years, Fred returned home. But he found it a little difficult to adjust to life in Britain again. He joined the Royal Navy and rarely had time to see his parents. His life was irrevocably changed by his wartime experiences.



Pictures of models



Why were children evacuated to Canada?

World War 2 started in 1939. By the summer of 1940, Germany had started to bomb England in order to terrorize the British people. Life was no longer safe for children in the cities. So the government started a system to get children - 5 to 15 years old - out of their beloved country and away to other countries that were safer. CORB, Children's Overseas Reception Board, decided to evacuate the children. They would travel in convoys of ships.

Where did the children go?

Many children went to Canada. Others went to countries including the U.S.A., South Africa and New Zealand. Many of these children travelled all alone, without any family members. Only a few fortunate ones were accompanied by either their siblings or other relatives. Not surprisingly, parents were worried. Many feared that they would never see their children again.



What happened in Canada?

Once the evacuees safely arrived in Canada, they were checked by doctors. In total, about 1,530 children came to Canada with CORB. Other children came with non-governmental societies, and about 6,000 children came through private arrangements. All those children had to stoically wait for families to take them in. Most of them stayed for up to five years, but some never did return to Britain.

How were children evacuated?

The first children travelling with CORB left England on July 21, 1940. The first ship, Cunard *White Star's Anselm*, carried 43 girls and 39 boys. It left from Liverpool, but other ships left from various seaports in England including Greenock and Glasgow.



Was travel by sea dangerous?

Travel by sea was very dangerous. There was always a chance of getting attacked by the Germans. That is why the ships would travel in part of convoys. In fact, three months after the first ship left England, a ship was sunk by a German submarine. Sadly, ninety children drowned. Only thirteen children were saved, found half-frozen clinging to their lifeboats.

Children

I read about the life of
children,
during WW2.

Fred

Hazel

John Jarvis

John

Nina

Fred

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Hazel

Before leaving England, Hazel Wilson was excited to go to Canada with her brother, but nobody at her school knew and she couldn't tell anyone because she and her family wanted to keep it private.

When the siblings reached Halifax, she went by train to Winnipeg where the two were taken to a school to wait for their foster families. Bill Rook was Hazel's foster dad and Freda was her foster mom. Both of them were musicians. Hazel lived with them in Colchester, and it took time for Hazel to settle in.

After four years, Hazel went home with all sorts of new things including shoes and gifts for her family. Her mother was glad her daughter did not have a Yankee accent but - along with the rest of the family - was curious about life Canada. By 1955, Hazel and her family had settled back into a normal life again.

John

John felt lonely and didn't know where Canada was before leaving England. He also did not know what language he could speak in Canada or how long the journey would be.



When, after seven days, he reached Halifax, Canada he caught a glimpse of the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario. He and all of the children that were on the ship went to the University of Toronto and began waiting for their foster families.

John's first foster family owned a bakery and lived in an apartment. But, when they had to move away, John had to move into a new house with a new foster family. Excitingly, he became pretty good friends with his new young foster sister and lived really happily with that family.

Unfortunately, after 5 years, he had to get ready for going back home to England. He felt really sad to leave but he felt happy at the same time because he would meet his family again. When he reached home, he noticed all the differences right away. In Canada, children were made to drink milk and in England children had to drink tea. It felt kind of weird for John as he adjusted to life in Britain again, but he was happy because he was back home!

John Jarvis

John Jarvis was really excited to go to Canada with his brother. When he reached Toronto, he tried to stay really close with his brother.



His foster mom had a farm outside of Grimsby - a town in Ontario - where John settled in pretty quickly. He loved his foster mom. She had a hard time paying things for John, but she still managed to teach him how to skate, and she put him in school, which he loved.

John was shocked when he discovered he was being sent back to England just before his 10th birthday. When he arrived he could not even recognize his mom or dad anymore !

Nina Laville

Like John Jarvis, 11 year-old Nina was excited to go to Canada. Ahead of time, she found Saskatchewan - where she would be living with her uncle - in her atlas. When she got to Canada and arrived at her uncle's farm and saw him working in a field, she ran over to say, "Hello!"

Nina enjoyed her life on the farm, but there was no high school in the village. So when she was in grade nine, she once again had to move. Once again, she enthusiastically adapted to a new village, a new house, and a new school.

Nina wrote to her parents every week, but as she grew older her memory of her parents grew fainter. After five years, she returned to England only to find it way dirtier and messier than Canada. In later years, Nina Laville realized that those years in Canada were the best years of her life!

History in Fiction

Novels help us understand what has happened in the past. Kit Pearson's trilogy about child evacuees is a tremendous example of this. In her first novel, *The Sky is Falling*, the two main characters - Norah and Gavin - are living in England, in a small town called Ringden. They notice what is happening around them, how World War II is affecting life for all the villagers. Norah can see all the contrails from the German planes. Air raids are dropping bombs out of the sky, hitting the village. German planes are being shot down by the British. Norah and her friends see a downed German plane - a Messerschmitt with a bold black swastika symbol on the plane's tail - covered in bullet holes.

The Sky is Falling

Norah and Gavin are about to be evacuated to Canada. Norah feels angry and does not want to leave England because she wants to stay and help her country win the war. But of course, she is still too young to help. Gavin, on the other hand, does want to go to Canada but nevertheless feels sad about leaving his home. The two children and their parents worry about what will happen if they have to live in Canada for more than a year. Despite everyone's fears, the two children are sent to Canada for safety!



During the journey, Gavin feels frightened and sad at first. After a few days, however, Mrs. Pym starts taking care of Gavin and he begins to feel a little bit more safe and happy. Norah, in the beginning, is a little annoyed at first because she and Gavin are staying in the same cabin as four other girls, who irritate her. But she later makes friends with other people on the ship and tries to ignore the girls. Life aboard is not easy. For example, sharing a room is hard because there is barely space. Getting seasick is way worse yet because people are moaning and vomiting during the whole voyage.

Once everyone arrives in Canada, there is still much uncertainty. When they got off ship people were clapping at them like they did something special. Norah and Gavin are on the train that was going to Toronto and seventy more kids are with them. At Union station the children separated into groups by their age and sent by buses to Hart House, a place they are fed and checked by doctors before being chosen by Canadian families. Norah and her group start eating when they get inside the Hart House. After a week, Norah and Gavin are taken home by Miss Ogilvie.

Looking at the Moon

In the second novel, *Looking at the Moon*, Kit Pearson shows readers what life was like for evacuees during World War II. For more than two years, Norah and Gavin are still living in a big house with Miss Ogilvie in Canada. Norah is becoming a teenager and she is changing and Gavin is getting older as well. They go on a vacation with Miss Ogilvie to Gairloch. They barely remember what their parents look like but the vacation distracts and they spend their summer there.

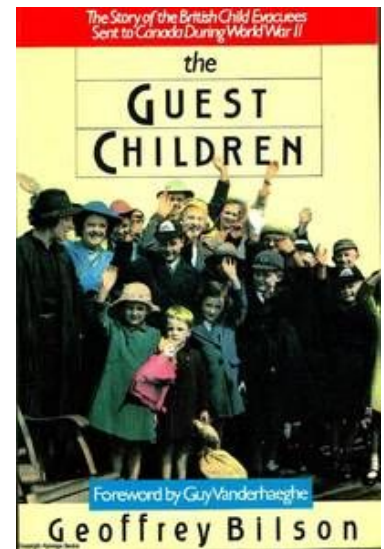
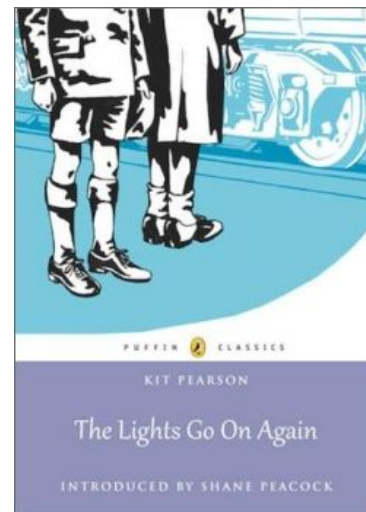
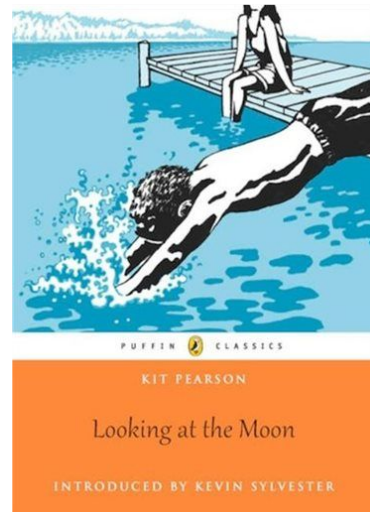
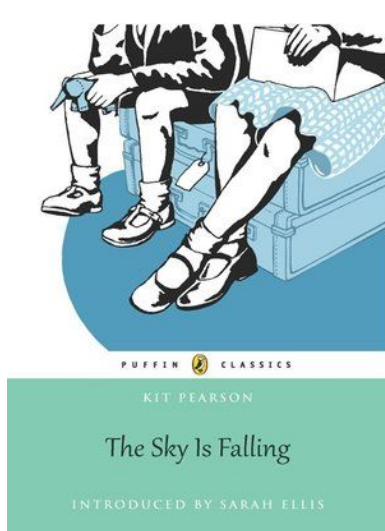
The Lights go on Again

In the final novel, *The Lights go on Again*, Gavin is bullied. But then the children hear that they are being sent back to England, and grandad comes to Canada to take them home. Gavin wants to stay in Canada, however, even though he has been bullied because he also has friends in Canada and he loves Miss Ogilvie. Moreover, he does not remember what his parents or England look like anymore. But Norah and her grandad do not let him stay. At the end of the novel, both children return to England.

“History tells us what people do; historical fiction helps us imagine how they felt.” - Cdn. novelist Guy Vanderhaeghe

Novels truly do help readers understand both the facts and feelings of history. Well-written stories show readers the truth about what life was like long ago.

Books



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All photographs in this project are in the public domain in Canada.

Further Reading

If you enjoyed this topic and would like to read some books about WW2 evacuees, here are some great children's stories I have read and can recommend!

Fox, Barbara. When the War is Over. Long Preston: Little, Brown Group, 2017.

Little, Jean. Exiles from the War. Toronto; Scholastic, 2010.

Matas, Carol. Turned Away. Markham: Scholastic, 2005.