

All About the USA

by Emily Winston

(Adapted book. Pre-Intermediate level)

CHAPTER 1

Early History of America

The Voyage of the Mayflower

On 6th September, 1620, a group of 102 pilgrims sailed from England to America, "the New World", on the ship the Mayflower. The pilgrims left England because they wanted religious and political freedom. The long, difficult journey across the Atlantic Ocean continued for 65 days. There were storms on the way and water entered the ship, but the pilgrims decided to continue on to the New World.

Early on 9th November, 1620, the pilgrims saw land in the distance. They were very excited because their journey was near the end. The ship finally reached land and some pilgrims left to explore the area. They saw a good place and decided to build a village there. Each family built

a small house and they had land to grow vegetables and keep their animals. Later, they called the village Plymouth.

The first winter was very cold and 45 people died from the extreme temperatures and from hunger. But the pilgrims didn't lose hope.

After a few months, in March 1621, the pilgrims met a Native American for the first time and he introduced them to his tribe. The Native Americans taught the pilgrims how to grow corn, beans and pumpkins. After this, life became better for the pilgrims.

Other people wanted to try life in the New World and many immigrants moved there. By the 1750s, the British had 13 colonies on the east coast of North America and about two and a half million colonists lived there. But France and Spain also owned big areas of land in North America and wanted to influence the New World, too.

From 1754 to 1763, the British army and the colonists fought the French over land in North America. The British won the war and got some of the French land. But then, the British government asked for taxes from the colonists to pay for the war. The colonists thought this was ridiculous because they didn't have a representative in the British government and they refused to pay the taxes. The 13 colonies decided to join together to fight the British.

On 4th July, 1776, the colonies declared independence from Great Britain. Their leaders published the Declaration of Independence on this date. Then, the fighting started. The colonists, led by George Washington,

fought many long, difficult battles. In the end, they defeated the British and signed the Treaty of Paris in 1783. They called their new nation the United States of America (USA).

CHAPTER 2

Expansion and the Civil War

The French still owned some land to the west of the colonies. In 1803, the French Emperor Napoleon offered to sell the land to the United States for \$15 million. The president, Thomas Jefferson, accepted the offer and signed the Louisiana Purchase Agreement. This doubled the size of the country and people started to move west. By 1848, the country extended from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean.

As the New World expanded, the Native American population began to suffer. Their land and traditions were in danger. In the 1830s, the US Government created the first Indian territory in the area now called Oklahoma. They forced more than 15,000 Cherokee people to leave their homes in Georgia and walk 1,600 kilometres to their new territory. Around 4,000 Cherokee people died on the way and they called this journey the "Trail of Tears".

The American Civil War (1861-1865)

A Diary Extract

1860

‘There are problems in our country. The people in the north live in towns, But in the south, they live on plantations and own slaves. ‘The plantation owners want to keep their slaves. But the people in the north want to abolish slavery. They say it is cruel.

Abraham Lincoln is now the President of the USA. He wants to end slavery. The people in the south want to leave the Union and have their own nation, called the Confederate States of America, or the Confederacy. But Lincoln wants to keep the country together. ‘What will happen?

1861

The south has got their Confederacy. It’s got 11 states now. Richmond, in Virginia, is the capital. They think they’re a different nation from the Union in the north. Confederate soldiers attacked a Union fort called Fort Sumter yesterday. So now, we're at war! I'm. very frightened.

1864

This war is terrible! Thousands of people are dead. Both the people in the north and the south are suffering. The war can't continue for long because the Confederates are losing. They have got fewer soldiers than the Union.

1865

Today, General Robert E. Lee, the Confederate army leader, surrendered to General Ulysses Grant, the Union army leader. I can't believe it! It's the end of the war! But more than 600,000 Americans are dead. Now, the slaves are free and the country is one nation. But we'll never be the same again!

CHAPTER 3

The Capital of the USA

The City

Today, Washington, D.C. is the capital of the USA, but before this, the capital was Philadelphia, the home of the Declaration of Independence. Philadelphia wasn't a good location for the government because it wasn't in the centre of the country. So in 1791, George Washington, the first president, marked a 260-square-kilometre area near the Potomac River and asked architects to design a city there. Later, this area became "Washington". The government moved there in 1800, and then people started to live there.

The White House

Architect James Hoban started to construct the White House in 1792 and finished it in 1800. John Adams was the first president to live there. Many presidents made changes to the White House. In 1902, President Theodore (Teddy) Roosevelt added the West Wing as a working area because his big family needed the original office space as a living area.

There are 132 rooms and 35 bathrooms in the White House. It is 21 metres high and 51 metres wide. One of the most famous rooms is the Oval Office. This is the president's official office. The Red Room and the East Room are special staterooms on the first floor. The president entertains important people there. But it's not all work and no play. The president's family have got a bowling alley, a tennis court, a swimming pool, a cinema and a jogging track. The White House is an official residence, but also a very comfortable home for the president and his family.

CHAPTER 4

Symbols of the USA

The Statue of Liberty

France gave the Statue of Liberty to the United States in 1886 to show the friendship between the two countries. Building the statue was a combined effort between the two countries. France paid for the statue and the United States paid for the pedestal.

In 1876, a French sculptor called Frederic Auguste Bartholdi designed the statue in France, to commemorate the centennial of the American Declaration of Independence.

Soon, it was ready and they divided the statue into 350 individual pieces and put them into 214 boxes. The pieces arrived in New York, and then workers built the statue on the pedestal.

In the 1800s and 1900s, most immigrants arrived in the USA on ships. The Statue of Liberty was the first thing these immigrants saw as their ships sailed into New York Harbour. It meant the start of a new life for them.

The Statue is 93.1 metres high and there are 354 steps from the pedestal to the head of the statue. Her first finger is 2.44 metres long. The outside of the statue has got

copper on it. The green colour is from the copper naturally changing colour in the air. There is a thin cover of gold on the torch to make it look like a flame. People can climb up to the head and look out at the view.

Today, this magnificent statue still symbolises freedom and democracy.

Fun facts:

- 40 people can stand In the head.
- The length of the right arm is 12.8 m.
- The length of the nose is 1.37 m.
- The width of the mouth is 91.4 cm.
- The statue weighs 204,116.72 kg.

The American Flag

In 1777, government officials passed the Flag Act. They decided to have a flag with 13 stars and 13 stripes to represent all 13 colonies of the United States of America. But more states joined the Union, so they changed the flag many times. At first, they added a star and stripe for each state. But soon, the flag was full of stripes. In 1818, they decided to have a flag with 13 stripes to represent the 13 original colonies, and a star to represent each state in the Union.

Today, the flag has got 13 stripes and 50 stars - for all 50 states of the USA.

The American Eagle - Emblem of Freedom

In 1782, Congress selected the bald eagle as the official emblem of the United States, because it symbolised beauty, strength and long life.

The eagle appears on the official seal of the USA with an olive branch with 13 leaves in one talon and 13 arrows in the other. The eagle faces the olive branch to show that the USA prefers peace, but is always ready to fight.

Some people believe Congress chose the eagle because of a story from the War of Independence. During a battle, the noise woke some eagles and they flew over the fighting men, screeching loudly. The soldiers shouted, "The eagles are calling for freedom!"

So this bird became a symbol of freedom and power for the new country.

CHAPTER 5

Famous Places

The Grand Canyon

The Grand Canyon, one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World, is in the state of Arizona in the southwest of the USA. It is one of the biggest canyons in the world, at 446 km long and 29 km wide. Nearly five million people visit this amazing place every year. Over thousands of years, the Colorado River cut 1.5 kilometres into the rock. This showed millions of years of the Earth's geological history and created beautiful shapes and colours. President Theodore Roosevelt advised Americans, "You can't improve on it. But what you can do is keep it for your children and your children's children... as the one great sight every American must see."

The Grand Canyon became a national park in 1919.

Niagara Falls

Niagara Falls, on the frontier between the USA and Canada, is actually three different waterfalls: American Falls, Bridal Veil Falls and Canadian Horseshoe Falls. Together, they are the second biggest waterfalls in the

world. More than 2,838,000 litres of water fall over Niagara Falls every second! One fifth of the world's fresh water eventually flows through the area. More than 13 million people come to see Niagara Falls every year.

In 1960, a seven-year-old boy called Roger Woodward was in a boat in the upper Niagara River. Suddenly, the boat turned over and threw him into the water. The water carried Roger, wearing just a life jacket and swimsuit, in the direction of the falls. The child went over the falls and miraculously survived the experience! He was the only person to survive going over the falls with only a life jacket.

Redwood Forests

Redwood forests near the west coast of the USA, have got some of the biggest redwood and sequoia trees in the world. Many of the trees are more than 2,000 years old.

Redwoods and sequoias are important to the environment because they absorb huge amounts of carbon dioxide.

Redwood trees are the tallest trees in the world. In 50 years, they can grow more than 30 metres. The tallest redwood tree is 115.5 metres high - that's taller than London's Big Ben!

The world's biggest tree, by volume, is the General Sherman sequoia tree in the Sequoia National Park, California. It is one of the main attractions there.

People also enjoy driving their cars through the giant trees growing over the roads in the park.

Death Valley

Death Valley is part of the Mojave Desert in California. It is the hottest place in the USA, and the lowest, driest place in North America. Badwater Basin is the lowest place in Death Valley at 86 metres below sea level. Furnace Creek is the hottest area, with a recorded temperature of 56.7 degrees C in 1913.

The rocks are intense reds, blues and greens because of different minerals. One rocky area is called the Artist's Palette. It is one of the most beautiful places in Death Valley.

CHAPTER 6

American Holidays and Traditions

Thanksgiving

The first Thanksgiving was in 1621. The pilgrims invited the Native Americans to a big meal to celebrate their first successful harvest. They ate duck and deer meat, corn and squash. However, the feast didn't become a tradition until much later.

From 1846 to 1863, magazine writer Sarah Hale wrote letters to five presidents asking them to make Thanksgiving a national holiday. Finally, President Lincoln made it a national holiday in 1863.

Today, most Americans want to spend Thanksgiving with their families. They celebrate with a special meal. They usually have turkey, yams, mashed potatoes, pumpkin pie and cranberry sauce.

Many families watch the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York on TV. The parade includes giant balloons of famous television and cartoon characters. The parade usually includes Father Christmas - a sign that Christmas is coming.

Independence Day

"The 4th of July" is the birthday of the United States of America because the leaders of the new nation published the Declaration of Independence on this date, in 1776.

Many people hang the American flag outside their homes on this day. It is a national holiday, so most people don't work and there are events all over the country. People celebrate with picnics and barbecues.

Traditionally, they have hamburgers, hot dogs, corn, watermelon and ice cream. As it gets dark, there are concerts and firework displays to end this special day.

CHAPTER 7

Famous Americans

The Wright Brothers: Wilbur (1867-1912), Orville (1871-1948)

In 1878, Milton Wright gave his sons, Wilbur, 11, and Orville, 7, a toy helicopter. The boys loved it and this inspired them to construct and fly their own models. Their fascination with flight continued all their lives. In their free time, they began to test different designs of aeroplanes.

On 17th December, 1903, the adult Wright brothers took a plane to Kitty Hawk, an empty beach in North Carolina, Orville piloted the plane and it rose into the air, stayed there for 12 seconds and flew 36.5 metres. Success! They made three more flights that day. On the last flight, Wilbur piloted the plane for 59 seconds, over a distance of 60 metres. That day, the Age of Flight began.

John F. Kennedy (JFK) (1917-1963)

John Fitzgerald Kennedy was one of the youngest men to become President of the United States. He brought new hope to Americans and promised to give them employment and improve their living conditions.

On 22nd November, 1963, Kennedy and his wife, Jacqueline, went to Dallas, Texas. Many people were on the streets to see the President's car pass. Suddenly, somebody fired at Kennedy and he fell forward. The car hurried the injured president to hospital. Sadly, President Kennedy died a short time later. The entire nation was shocked. The people couldn't believe the young president was dead.

Millions of people around the world watched Jacqueline Kennedy and her two young children, Caroline and John F. Kennedy, Jr, lead the funeral of this popular man. It was a very sad day for everybody.

Martin Luther King - A Man with a Dream

Martin Luther King (1929-1968) was one of the most important civil rights leaders in the United States. He was a pastor in Montgomery, Alabama. At that time, there was discrimination against black people.

There were many demonstrations in the early 1960s to end this discrimination and to give equal rights to all people. King became famous for non-violent protest.

On 28th August, 1963, Martin Luther King gave a famous speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.

"I have a dream," he said, "... that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be

judged by the colour of their skin, but by the content of their character."

The next year, he became the youngest person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. He was only 35.

In 1968, a criminal, James Earl Ray, assassinated Martin Luther King in Memphis, Tennessee. After that, the third Monday of January became Martin Luther King Day, so people can remember this heroic, peaceful man.

CHAPTER 8

Famous American Writers

Mark Twain (1835-1910)

One of America's best writers, Mark Twain, was born Samuel Langhorne Clemens in Florida, Missouri. His family moved to Hannibal, Missouri in 1839 and he grew up swimming, fishing and playing near the Mississippi River. As an adult, he became a steamboat pilot and met many interesting characters on the river. Later, as a writer he expressed the American spirit in his books *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Twain wrote with humour and his books are still popular today.

Harper Lee (1926-)

Nelle Harper Lee was born in Monroeville, Alabama, on 28th April, 1926. She only published one book, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, based on the racism in her hometown in the 1930s. Surprisingly, her book became an immediate best seller and she received a Pulitzer Prize for it in 1961. One year later, Universal Pictures made a film of it. It won three Oscars and three Golden Globes. In 1999, readers of the

Library Journal voted *To Kill a Mockingbird* "The Best Novel of the Century". Today, there are more than 30 million copies in print and it is always high on the "best-sellers" list.

Stephen King (1947-)

Stephen King is a very popular writer of horror stories. He also writes suspense, science-fiction and fantasy novels. King was born in Portland, Maine, and began to write stories at the age of seven. He always enjoyed science-fiction and monster films. His first book, *Carrie*, was very successful and King stopped doing his other jobs and concentrated on writing. Many of his books are now films including *Carrie*, *Salem's Lot*, *The Shining*, *Misery*, *The Shawshank Redemption*, *The Green Mile* and *The Mist*.

CHAPTER 9

Sports in the USA

Basketball, baseball and American football are popular sports in the USA.

Basketball

James Naismith, a sports teacher in Massachusetts, invented basketball in 1891. It was immediately popular because students played it inside during the long winter. Players threw a ball into a fruit basket on the wall and scored points. But then, they climbed up a ladder to get the ball! Later, they cut a hole in the bottom of the basket and the ball fell through. Nowadays, we use a ring with a net.

Today, the NBA is one of the top professional basketball leagues. Michael Jordan and Magic Johnson were basketball legends in their day. Today's stars include Kobe Bryant, LeBron James, Kevin Durant and Dwayne Wade.

Baseball

Baseball is often called the national sport of the USA. It is a bat and ball game played by two teams of nine players on an area with four bases. The teams take turns

batting. The batting team tries to score 'runs' by hitting the ball and then running round all four bases to 'home'.

American Football

On 6th November, 1869, teams from Rutgers and Princeton Universities met and played a football game together, based on English rugby rules. At first, the game was very violent and some players died because of their injuries. Walter Camp, the father of American football, helped write the rules to develop the game. Today, the rules make the game safer and players wear helmets and other protective equipment.

The Super Bowl is the championship game of the National Football League. It takes place on the first Sunday in February and about 100 million people watch the game on TV every year. It's the most important sporting event of the year in the USA and companies pay a lot to promote their products during it. Popular singers and musicians also play before the game and during the break.

CHAPTER 10

American Space Travel

In 1958, the US Government formed the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to be responsible for the American space programme. But the Americans weren't the first people to fly into space. In 1961, a Russian, Yuri Gagarin, became the first person to fly around the Earth. His flight took 108 minutes. Later that year, the first American, Alan Shepard, flew into space and in 1962, NASA sent John Glenn into space to orbit the Earth.

In 1961, President Kennedy challenged NASA to send a man to the moon and return him safely to Earth. NASA immediately started the Apollo programme and in 1969, Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins started their journey to the moon in Apollo 11. On 20th July, 1969, the entire world watched as Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on the moon, saying the famous words, "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind."

NASA also explored other planets in the solar system. In 1976, a spacecraft called Viking I landed on Mars. Another spacecraft, Mars Pathfinder, landed there in 1996. The Pathfinder had a robot vehicle inside called a rover. This robot explored Mars and sent 16,500 pictures back to Earth with 8.5 million measurements. NASA lost contact with the Pathfinder in September, 1997.

In the 1980s, the USA started to develop a space shuttle - a reusable space vehicle. Sadly, two space shuttles, Challenger in 1986 and Columbia in 2003, exploded and all the astronauts inside them died.

Most space projects today are international because they are very expensive. For example, the International Space Station is a laboratory in orbit around the Earth. It is a combined effort between Japan, Russia, the USA, Canada and Europe. They do experiments and test equipment for flights to Mars. The Space Station is a good example of international cooperation.

CHAPTER 11

Myths and Legends

Bigfoot

According to legend, there are tall, hairy ape-like creatures living in the forests and mountains in the United States. There were always stories about these creatures, but people didn't really pay attention until 1958.

At that time, a man called Jerry Crew found an enormous footprint in California and publicised a picture of it. Crew said it was the footprint of "old Bigfoot", so after that, people used this name for the creature. Then, in 1967, two men filmed a "Bigfoot". Later, more and more people began to see Bigfoots in different places. Of course, there were many hoaxes. For example, people dressed up in ape costumes and filmed each other. Who knows if this creature really exists?

Johnny Appleseed

Imagine a man walking thousands of kilometres to plant apple trees. Johnny Appleseed did this. His real name was John Chapman and he was born in Massachusetts in 1774.

Johnny dreamed of a land with apple trees, so he walked west across the country carrying a big bag of apple seeds. He created apple orchards in Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Pennsylvania and Ohio.

Johnny lived a simple vegetarian life. He was a friendly man and loved animals. Some say he wore a sack on his body and a pot on his head. He didn't wear shoes, even in winter.

For 50 years, this extraordinary man planted trees across the country and became a living legend.

Blackbeard's Ghost

In the early 18th century, a pirate called Edward Teach, also known as "Blackbeard", terrorised ships along the east coast of America for 27 months. He stole money and jewellery from passengers and sometimes killed them. In 1718, some British soldiers tried to capture Blackbeard. There was a violent battle on a ship and the soldiers finally killed him. Then, the British leader, Lieutenant Maynard, cut off Blackbeard's head and threw his body into the sea. According to legend, the head shouted, "Come on, Edward!" and the body swam three times around the ship and then went under the water.

Many people say Blackbeard's ghost is still searching for his head.

CHAPTER 12

The USA Today

Hollywood

Every year, millions of people around the world watch the Academy Awards on TV. They love watching the stars walking along the red carpet and seeing the Oscar winners. People usually think of Hollywood as the centre of the "entertainment world".

All visitors to this famous place in California want to see the Hollywood sign, Hollywood Boulevard and the stars on the pavement along the Walk of Fame. They visit the film sets of Universal Studios, Metro Goldwyn Mayer and Warner Brothers, too.

Hi-Tech

Many hi-tech innovations from the USA changed our lives forever. Bill Gates started Microsoft with Paul Allen on 4th April, 1975. Microsoft is the world's largest software maker and one of the world's most valuable companies. Bill Gates also developed Windows. This program makes our computers easier to use. Steve Jobs started Apple and gave us iPhones, iPods and iPads.

Then, Google in California changed the way we search for information and provided us with other Internet uses. Today, people use Google to store their documents and photographs and they use Google maps to find their way around.

Now, thanks to social networks like Facebook and Twitter, people can contact long-lost friends and family members.

Food

Some of the most famous food chains in the USA today are places like McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken and Pizza Hut. Many Americans enjoy eating fast food. It's delicious, filling and cheap.

Unfortunately, it's not very healthy because food like hamburgers and chips have got a lot of fat and salt in them. Because Americans eat a lot of fast food, many of them are obese. This is a real problem in the USA today.

However, many fast-food restaurants are now selling healthier meals, so people can enjoy a salad or fruit instead of chips or fried chicken.

- THE END -

Hope you have enjoyed the reading!