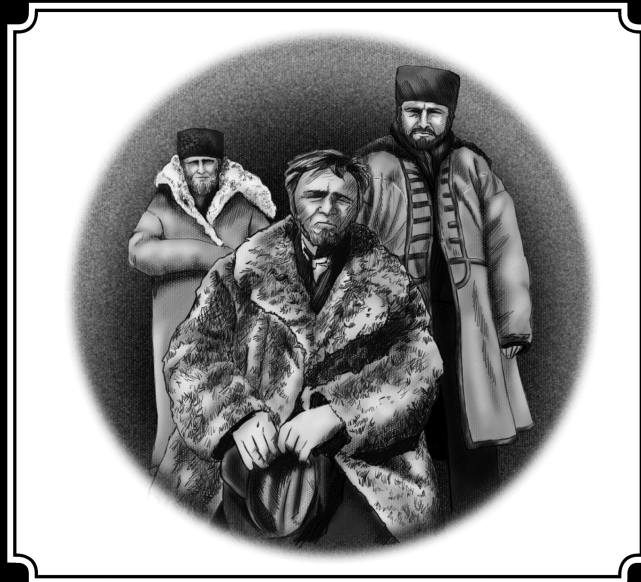


# THE MEN IN SHEEPSKIN COATS

## Online Resource

CELEBRATE CANADA  
through  
READERS' THEATRE

THE MEN  
IN SHEEPSKIN COATS



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## A Summary of the Script

*The Men in Sheepskin Coats* tells the story of the beginning of Ukrainian immigration to the Canadian West. Wasył Eleniak and Ivan Pylypiw, the first “men in sheepskin coats,” came to Canada from the province of Galicia in Ukraine on September 7, 1891. Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier and Minister of the Interior Clifford Sifton wanted to build a strong Canada by promoting immigration. Doctor Joseph Oleskiw encouraged Ukrainian farmers such as Ivan Nimchuk and his family to come to Canada. Many other Ukrainians followed them.

## Settlement of the Canadian West

At the time of Confederation (1867), politicians realized that settling the Canadian West was very important in creating a prosperous Canada. The original four provinces of Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia soon expanded to include Manitoba, Prince Edward Island and British Columbia. The Canadian Pacific Railway was built to transport new settlers across the country. Canada was now a country from sea to sea. However, many settlers were needed to populate the large area of the Canadian West.

The Dominion Lands Act (also called the Homestead Act) in 1872 declared that settlers could own their own land within three years by living on the land, building a house and starting to cultivate the land. Most early homesteaders in the West came from Ontario and Quebec. There were also some early Icelandic and Mennonite immigrants. However, there were still very few settlers in the vast area of the Canadian West.

In 1896, the Liberal party won the federal election in Canada, and Wilfrid Laurier became prime minister. One of his most famous sayings was, “The twentieth century will belong to Canada.” Laurier and his minister of the interior, Clifford Sifton, wanted settlers in the Canadian West. In 1896, when Laurier took office, immigration was under 20,000 people per year. When he left office in 1911, immigration numbers had increased to more than 300,000 people per year. Many of these immigrants settled in the Canadian West.

Laurier and Sifton launched an extensive advertising campaign to attract settlers to Canada. They were looking for newcomers who were experienced farmers and who would work hard to build a strong country. Millions of posters and pamphlets in many different languages were distributed in the United States, Great Britain and

Eastern Europe. Writers and speakers were paid to spread exciting stories about Western Canada in these countries. Foreign journalists were brought to Canada so that they could promote the country when they returned home.

One of the main groups that responded to the advertising campaign was the Ukrainians. In 1895, the Ukrainians did not have a country of their own. Some of them lived in the provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire while others lived under the Tsar of Russia. Their rulers spoke other languages and had customs that seemed strange. The small farmers of the province of Galicia in Western Ukraine felt crushed by the Polish overlords. With an average farm of 7 \_ acres for a family of five, Ukrainians could not earn a living from their land. The future did not look very good for their children. Many of them decided to travel to Canada where free land was offered. Despite the harsh realities of the journey, where hunger and disease were everywhere, thousands of Ukrainians traveled by train and then by ship to Canada. There, they became known as “men in sheepskin coats” because of their traditional Ukrainian coats made from sheepskin.

# Activities Before Reading

1. Immigration is still important in building Canada today. Ask students if they know anyone who has recently immigrated to Canada. List the countries of origin. Create a bulletin board display showing all the countries represented.

2. Read through the list of characters with your students. Have them read the names aloud together until they are all comfortable with the pronunciation of each name. Which characters were Ukrainian immigrants? Which characters held positions in Canada's government?

The following pronunciations of character's names may be useful during this activity:

- Ivan Pylypiw (AY-van Pi-LI-piv)
- Wasyl Eleniak (VA-sil E-Li-neeak)
- Doctor Joseph Oleskiw (JO-sef O-LES-kiv)
- Ivan Nimchuk (AY-van NEEM-chook)
- Maria Nimchuk (MA-reea NEEM-chook)

3. Show students a map of the world. Locate the places mentioned in this script: Alberta, Hamburg, Montreal, Ottawa, and Ukraine. What challenges might immigrants at the end of the 19th century have while traveling to Canada? Ask your students to work in pairs to create a chart of the differences between "Travel Today" and "Travel in the 19th Century."

4. Clifford Sifton tells Prime Minister Laurier, "I think a stalwart farmer in a sheepskin coat, born on the soil, whose fore-fathers have been farmers for ten generations, with a stout wife and a half dozen children, is good quality. They will help us build the Canadian West!" Why did Sifton think Ukrainians would help Canada? What qualities did settlers need in order to thrive in the Canadian West? What qualities do immigrants to Canada need today? In what ways have these qualities changed? Ask your students to work in groups to create a Venn diagram comparing these qualities.

5. Examine a poster used to advertise immigration to Canada's West (note website suggestions below). What was the government advertising in this poster? Does this poster portray Canada accurately? Who was the intended audience for these posters? Write a paragraph about why truth in advertising is important.

# Extending the Experience

1. Pretend that you are one of the immigrants in this script. Write a letter to a relative back in the Ukraine describing your journey to Canada, perhaps including your impressions of your new country.

2. Create a poster advertising Canada today. Write a paragraph explaining where you would use this poster and the reasons for your choices for images and words.

3. In a small group or with your class, discuss or debate Laurier's claim that, "The twentieth century will belong to Canada."

4. Draw a timeline to illustrate the events in this script.

5. Ukrainians were only one of the immigrant groups to help settle the Canadian West. Choose one of the other immigrant groups and research some of their experiences. Present your information in a newspaper or magazine article, a podcast, on a website, or as a powerpoint presentation.

# Tips for Voice and Expression

Character	Reading Level	Description
Narrator	challenging	The narrator provides background information about the history surrounding the events in the script. The narrator also provides a clear transition from one scene to another.
Ivan Pylypiw	moderate	Ivan Pylypiw was one of the first two “men in sheepskin coats” to come to Canada. He was a very determined and enthusiastic man who returned to Ukraine to encourage others to join him in his new country of Canada.
Wasył Eleniak	easy	Wasył Eleniak was one of the first two “men in sheepskin coats” to come to Canada. He was very excited to travel to Alberta where he made a home for his family.
Wilfrid Laurier	moderate	Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier was elected in 1896. He wanted to build a strong Canada by promoting immigration.
Clifford Sifton	challenging	Minister of the Interior Clifford Sifton was appointed by Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier to promote immigration to Canada from Europe. Sifton decided that advertising was a good way to promote immigration.
Doctor Joseph Oleskiw	moderate	Doctor Joseph Oleskiw was a professor at the university in Lviv. He spoke to farmers in Ukraine about the advantages of immigrating to Canada.
Ivan Nimchuk	moderate	Ivan Nimchuk was a farmer who immigrated to Canada with his family from Ukraine.
Maria Nimchuk	moderate	Maria Nimchuk was a farmer who immigrated to Canada with her family from Ukraine.
Villager #1	easy	This is one of the people who listened to Oleskiw’s speech about the advantages of immigrating to Canada.
Villager #2	easy	This is one of the people who listened to Oleskiw’s speech about the advantages of immigrating to Canada.

### **Books of Interest**

*A Prairie as Wide as the Sea - The Immigrant Diary of Ivy Weatherall*

by Sarah Ellis (Scholastic Canada 2001)

*Kobzar's Children edited*

by Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch (Fitzhenry & Whiteside 2006)

*Lesia's Dream*

by Laura Langston (HarperTrophyCanada 2003)

*Silver Threads*

by Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch (Fitzhenry & Whiteside 2004)

*Yellow Boots*

by Vera Lysenko (CIUS Press 1954)

### **Websites of Interest**

The Last Best West – Advertising for Immigrants to Western Canada 1870-1930

<http://www.civilization.ca/cmc/exhibitions/hist/advertis/ads1-01e.shtml>

Library and Archives Canada - The Kids' Site of Canadian Settlement

<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/settlement/kids/021013-2171-e.html>

Saskatchewan Settlement Experience

<http://www.sasksettlement.com/>

University of Manitoba – Immigration and Immigration Policy in Canada

[http://www.umanitoba.ca/libraries/archives/prairie\\_immigration/educational\\_site/illhist/01.shtml](http://www.umanitoba.ca/libraries/archives/prairie_immigration/educational_site/illhist/01.shtml)

University of Waterloo – Immigrants to Canada The Ukrainians

<http://jubilation.uwaterloo.ca/~marj/genealogy/ukrainian.html>