

The history of New York

ESL Worksheet | reading & used to A2+/B1 |

time: around 60 min



Warm-up

1. What comes to your mind when you think of New York?
2. Why do you think millions of people wanted to move there?
3. Would you like to live in a very big city? Why? Why not?
4. Do you think New York has changed a lot over the last 100 years? In what ways?

A bit of grammar

When do we use USED TO?

We use used to to talk about things that were true in the past but are not true now.

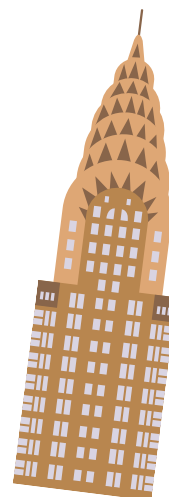
- New York used to **be** a small Dutch settlement.
- Many immigrants used to **arrive** by ship.
- People didn't use to **live** in tall skyscrapers.
- Did people use to **travel** by plane?

1 Complete the sentences with used to or didn't use to.

1. New York _____ be called New Amsterdam.
2. Millions of immigrants _____ arrive through Ellis Island.
3. People _____ drink alcohol legally during Prohibition.
4. Many buildings _____ be very tall.
5. Children _____ spend as much time online as they do today.
6. My grandparents _____ use smartphones.
7. I _____ like history, but now I love it.
8. We _____ travel by train every summer when we were children.

2 Let's talk!

1. What games did you use to play as a child?
2. What TV programmes or cartoons did you use to watch?
3. Did you use to have a favourite toy?
4. Where did your family use to go on holiday?
5. What food didn't you use to like?
6. What hobby did you use to have?



The history of New York

Vocabulary 1

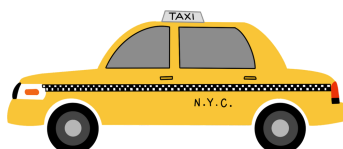
Are these definitions correct?

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| 1.settlement | A place where people begin to live and build a community. |
| 2.immigrant | A person who leaves a country for a short holiday. |
| 3.neighbourhood | A part of a town or city where people live. |
| 4.culture | The traditions, food, music and way of life of a group of people. |
| 5.illegal | Allowed by law. |
| 6.organised crime | Criminal groups that work together to make money illegally. |
| 7.powerful | Having no influence or control. |
| 8.diverse | Made up of many different kinds of people or things. |
| 9.achieve | To fail to reach a goal. |
| 10.opportunity | A chance to do something. |

Vocabulary 2

Practise the new words!

- 1.Why do people become **immigrants**?
- 2.Is your **neighbourhood** quiet or busy? Describe it.
- 3.What makes your country's **culture** unique?
- 4.Can you think of something that is **illegal** in most countries?
- 5.Why is it important for police to stop **organised crime**?
- 6.Would you like to live in a **diverse** city? Why or why not?
- 7.What **opportunity** would you like to have in the future?
- 8.What is one goal you would like to **achieve** this year?



The history of New York



Reading

New York: The City of Dreams, Money and Secrets

Today, New York is one of the world's most famous cities, but it used to be a small Dutch settlement called New Amsterdam. In 1664, the British took control of the city and changed its name to New York.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, millions of people arrived in New York from Europe and other parts of the world. Many entered the United States through Ellis Island, hoping for a better life. As different communities settled in the city, neighbourhoods such as Little Italy, Chinatown, and Harlem became important centres of culture, food, and music.

In the 1920s, the United States introduced Prohibition, a law that made selling alcohol illegal. However, many people continued to buy and sell it secretly. This helped organised crime groups, often called the Mafia, become richer and more powerful. Although many famous Mafia stories were later shown in books and films, they were based on real events from this period.

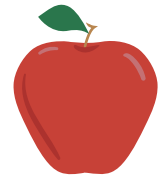
Today, New York is a global centre for business, fashion, art, and entertainment. More than eight million people live there, and hundreds of languages are spoken in its streets. People still come to New York from all over the world, hoping to build a better future and achieve the American Dream.

Comprehension 1

Answer the questions.

1. What was New York called before 1664?
2. Why did millions of people travel to New York?
3. Name three famous neighbourhoods mentioned in the text.
4. What was Prohibition?
5. How did Prohibition help organised crime?
6. Why do people still move to New York today?
7. What makes modern New York one of the world's most diverse cities?
8. Which part of New York's history did you find the most interesting? Why?

The history of New York



Comprehension 2

Word Formation

Complete the sentences with the correct form of the word in brackets.

1. Millions of _____ came to New York looking for a better life. (IMMIGRATE)
2. Harlem is famous for its rich _____ heritage. (CULTURE)
3. The city became more _____ as people arrived from many countries. (DIVERSITY)
4. During Prohibition, many activities became _____. (LEGAL)
5. New York offers many exciting _____ for young people. (OPPORTUNE)
6. Many old buildings were replaced during the city's _____. (GROW)
7. The American Dream gave many people hope for a better _____. (LIVE)
8. New York is one of the world's most _____ cities. (FAME)

Back to grammar!

1 What did New York use to be like?

Complete the sentences using used to and the words in brackets.

1. New York _____. (be / small Dutch settlement)
2. Millions of people _____. (arrive / by ship)
3. The city _____. (have / many skyscrapers)
4. During Prohibition, people _____. (buy alcohol / legally)
5. Ellis Island _____. (welcome / immigrants)
6. Different communities _____. (create / their own neighbourhoods)
7. New York _____. (not be / so international)
8. Many people _____. (dream / about a better future)

2 New York Then & Now

Choose three things that have changed in New York. Example:

New York used to have more factories, but today it has more offices and technology companies.

Ideas:

- transport
- buildings
- population
- jobs
- tourism
- crime
- entertainment

The history of New York



Speaking/Travel blog

The city that changed my mind

Imagine you have just returned from New York. Write 120–150 words about your visit. Include:

- what places you visited
- which neighbourhood impressed you the most
- something interesting you learnt about New York's history
- something that surprised you
- whether you would like to visit again

Try to use:

- used to
- at least five words from today's vocabulary
- linking words (because, although, however, first, finally)

Let's talk!

1. Why do you think New York became such an important city?
2. Why do people leave their home countries to start a new life?
3. Do you think cities become stronger because of immigration? Why?
4. Which New York neighbourhood would you like to visit first?
5. Why do you think Mafia stories are still so popular in books and films?
6. Would you rather live in New York or in a small town? Explain.
7. How has your hometown changed over the last twenty years?
8. Do you think the American Dream still exists today?
9. Which city in the world would you call the "City of Dreams"?
10. If you could spend one week in New York, what would you do?

