

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.

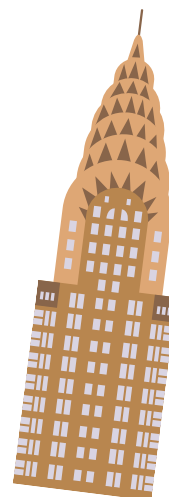
- New York **used to be** a small Dutch settlement.
- Many immigrants **used to arrive** by ship.
- People **didn't use to live** in tall skyscrapers.
- Did people **use to travel** by plane?

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

1. New York used to be called New Amsterdam.
2. Millions of immigrants used to arrive through Ellis Island.
3. People didn't use to drink alcohol legally during Prohibition.
4. Many buildings didn't use to be very tall.
5. Children didn't use to spend as much time online as they do today.
6. My grandparents didn't use to use smartphones.
7. I didn't use to like history, but now I love it.
8. We used to 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?



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Vocabulary 1

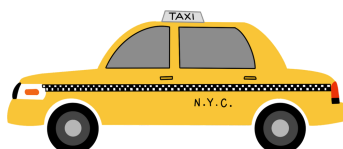
Are these definitions correct?

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



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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.

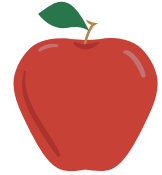
Today, New York is a global centre for business, fashion, art, and entertainment. More than eight million people live there, and hundreds of languages are spoken in its streets. People still come to New York from all over the world, hoping to build a better future and achieve the American Dream.

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?

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Comprehension 2

Word Formation

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

1. Millions of immigrants came to New York looking for a better life. (IMMIGRATE)
2. Harlem is famous for its rich cultural heritage. (CULTURE)
3. The city became more diverse as people arrived from many countries. (DIVERSITY)
4. During Prohibition, many activities became illegal. (LEGAL)
5. New York offers many exciting opportunities for young people. (OPPORTUNE)
6. Many old buildings were replaced during the city's growth. (GROW)
7. The American Dream gave many people hope for a better life. (LIVE)
8. New York is one of the world's most famous 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 used to be a small Dutch settlement.
2. Millions of people used to arrive by ship.
3. The city didn't use to have many skyscrapers.
4. People didn't use to buy alcohol legally.
5. Ellis Island used to welcome immigrants.
6. Different communities used to create their own neighbourhoods.
7. New York didn't use to be so international.
8. Many people used to 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

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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?

