

# Immigration poem

**This poem was written by a Jamaican immigrant. It describes the feelings and experiences of many of the early immigrants to Britain from Jamaica.**

## The men from Jamaica are settling down

From de land of wood an water  
Came they to where de air waz cold,  
They come to work wid bricks an mortar  
They heard de streets were paved wid gold,  
From de land of fish an ackee  
To de land of fish an chips came they,  
Touching on a new reality  
Where de sky waz white an grey.

Came they to here wid countless dreams  
Came they to here wid countless fears,  
In dis drama of many themes  
Each one of dem were pioneers,  
Each one of dem a living witness  
Each one of dem truly profound,  
A newspaper said people hear dis  
The men from Jamaica are settling down.

There waz no ackee an there waz no salt fish  
There waz no star apple an no callao,  
Soon there waz no time to dream, wonder or wish  
There waz so much community building to do,  
An back in Jamaica they waited for letters  
Where there were no letters, rumours were abound,  
But de newspaper said it was going to get better  
The men from Jamaica are settling down.

They went to the foundries, they went to de factories  
They went to de cities these true country folk.  
An when they got down to de true nitty gritty  
These true country lungs were soon covered wid smoke,  
Some dreamt of Jamaica, some dreamt of their wives  
Some dreamt of returning to bring something home,  
Some prayed to de God, an they asked de God why  
The men from Jamaica should struggle alone.

Soon there were more ships, an more ships an more ships  
Peopled wid colourful Caribbean folk,  
Men, women an children were making these trips  
Each one of dem carrying ship loads of hope,  
From all of de islands they came to dis island  
De National Health Service waz so welcoming  
An de movietone voice said that things were quite grand  
As the men from Jamaica were settling in.

Dis waz de new world, dis waz de white world,  
Dis waz de world they had been fighting for,  
Dis they were told waz de righteous an free world  
Dis waz de reason they had gone to war,  
Dis waz de land of de hope an de glory  
Dis waz de land of pleasant pastures green,  
Dis waz de royal land, dis waz democracy  
Where many Jamaicans were proud to be seen.

But it did not take long for de racists and fascists  
To show ugly heads as de wicked will do,  
Quite soon de arrivants had learnt to resist  
An quite soon they were dealing wid subjects taboo,  
Blacks in de unions, blacks in de dances  
Whites wid black neighbours an black civil rights,  
The men from Jamaica were taking no chances  
The men from Jamaica were not turning white.

A new generation rose up from these fighters  
A new generation wid roots everywhere,  
A new generation of buildings an writers  
A new generation wid built in No Fear,  
They too fought de Nazis, they too put out fires  
They too want to broaden their vision an scope,  
They too need fresh water for burning desires  
The men from Jamaica are so full of hope.

De future is not made of ships anymore  
De future is made up of what we can do,  
We still haven't got all that freedom galore  
An there's all those ambitions that we muss pursue,  
De past is a place that is ours for all time  
There are many discoveries there to be made,  
An if you are happily towing de line  
Be aware of de price your ancestors have paid.

Black pioneers came on de Empire Windrush  
On June twenty one nineteen forty eight,  
These souls were titanic, these minds were adventurous  
They came from the sunshine to participate,  
They are de leaders, they are de home makers  
They have been upfront since their ship came aground,  
But in-between lines you'll still read in de papers  
The men from Jamaica are settling down.

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### Age range

- Years 3/4 (SP4/5).
- Years 5/6 (SP6/7).

### Resources

Copies of the worksheet.

### Using the worksheet

On 22 June, 1948, the troop ship SS Empire Windrush arrived in Tilbury Dock, England. Many of the passengers on board were ex-servicemen from the Caribbean who had recently fought for Britain during World War II.

Three weeks after their arrival a young reporter called Peter Fryer wrote an article in a national newspaper that carried the headline 'The men from Jamaica are settling down'. It was an update on the progress being made by the passengers of the ship, but like many of the press reports of the time it overlooked the fact that not all of the passengers on the Windrush were Jamaican, and not all were men.

This poem is by a Jamaican immigrant called Benjamin Zephaniah. It was originally written as a commission for an independent television company called Crucial Films, who were working on behalf of the BBC. On receiving the first draft of the poem a representative from Crucial Films told the author that they thought it was a 'wonderful piece' but they would not be using it because they felt that the last few stanzas of the poem were too 'political' and too 'confrontational'; What they were looking for was 'something a bit more celebrational'.

The poem as it is here has been edited to make it a bit shorter. You can find the entire poem on [www.benjaminzephaniah.com](http://www.benjaminzephaniah.com). The complete poem has more political references.

The poem uses some words of Jamaican patois, such as "wid" for 'with' and "de" for 'the' and you may like to discuss this with the students.

### Younger students

You may like the students to read the poem on their own or as a class and then ask them some directed questions about the poem. Here are a few examples:

1. What challenges did these early immigrants face?
2. What are some of the reasons the author gives for why these men came to England?
3. What did the immigrants have to fight against in England? (Taboo subjects such as blacks in the union, racists, fascists.)
4. What does the author think of the people who came on the Empire Windrush?

### Outcomes

The students can:

- Understand why some immigrants may have come to the UK in the 1950s.
- Understand a little of what life was like for the early immigrants.
- Think about challenges faced by immigrants in the 1950s.

### Older students

You may like to have the students answer the directed questions as part of a class discussion, or they could read the poem and write about the challenges faced by the immigrants. Students may like to research stories of real-life immigrants.

### Outcomes

The students can:

- Understand why some immigrants may have come to the UK in the 1950s.
- Understand a little of what life was like for the early immigrants.
- Think about challenges faced by immigrants in the 1950s.