

"These stories are wonderful, believable and historically consistent..."

They brought a tear, goosebumps and the chills."

- C. Warren Moses, Children's Aid Society CEO and Archivist

Orphan Train Riders



Amanda Zieba

ORPHAN TRAIN RIDERS:
IRISH STRONG WILLIAM
UNIT STUDY



Listen In!

Irish Strong William



Irish Strong William



Listen to the story here: <https://youtu.be/QVq5HeTGmL4>

Irish Strong William

“There’s nothing left for us to love in Ireland.

Ireland killed everything we loved... your mother, your sister and all of our potatoes. America, that’s where we’ll be going. They will have food in America. I will get a good job building railroads in America. Everything will be better in America,” Da declared.

AMERICA. AMERICA. AMERICA.

William had been hearing about America for the past uncountable number of days as their ship crossed the ocean. He didn’t much care where the ship stopped, as long as it stopped. He’d had enough of this smelly, rocking, ship full of sick people.

AMERICA, AMERICA, AMERICA.

His father wasn’t the only one talking about America. His new friend, Shane, who was traveling alone talked about it constantly.

“There are big buildings in America. Anyone can earn lots of money in America. The richest people in the world live in America,” Shane would ramble on.

AMERICA. AMERICA. AMERICA.

William was glad his little brother Hugh couldn't talk yet, but he wouldn't be surprised if his first word was "America."

It was obvious to William that everyone on the boat really wanted to get to America. What wasn't obvious to him was why America would want them... a boat full of starving and tired Irishmen.

When they finally landed, they stood in long lines, took showers, and then waited to be examined by doctors. Throughout the entire process Shane chattered away about America.

"Do you know they call entering America 'walking through the Golden Door'? I wonder if there is lots of gold in America. Maybe I can find some and send it back to my family in Ireland. One day we'll have enough, and they'll be able to join us here. Then all of us will live together again. America, that's where everything is going to change!"

At last, it was their turn to be examined. Shane went first, then William, then baby Hugh and finally Da.

"Sir I'm sorry, but you'll have to step out of line," the doctor said firmly to William's father.

"What's wrong?" Da asked, alarm creeping into his voice.

"Only healthy people are allowed to be let into America. You are sick. You have tuberculosis. I can see the beginning stages in your throat. It is not uncommon for people sharing small spaces, like the boat you have been traveling on, to contract the disease. I am sorry, but you will not be allowed into the country."

"What... what am I supposed to do?" Da asked in shock.

"You can go back to where you came from," the doctor answered coldly.

"But what about my boys?" Da asked in panic.

“They are healthy. They can continue on into America. Now please, move aside. I have more immigrants to examine.”

Da walked numbly to the side of the room, motioning William and Hugh into his arms. Shane also walked over.

“Boys, I... I don’t know what to do. I wish your mother were here,” Da whispered hugging them close. The three of them stood silently, hugging fiercely until Da spoke again suddenly. “Shane. You are traveling alone. Do you want some company?”

“I... I...” the boy stammered, unsure of what to say.

“Would you take William? I will give you our travel money,” Da said pressing a wad of bills into his hand. “You are old enough to find good work. Together you two can make it.”

Shane looked at him in shock, but finally answered. “Yes. I can take him.”

“Da, no! I don’t want to leave you!” William cried as he realized what was happening.

“Listen William,” Da said sternly. “There is nothing for you in Ireland. If you come back, you will surely starve. I am sick. I cannot help you anymore. I will take baby Hugh and travel back to your grandmother’s. She will take care of him.”

“Please Da, don’t leave me,” William begged.

“I don’t want to hear another word. Except this: Trust...” Da began waiting for William to complete the family motto.

“in God,” William said softly.

“Honor,” Da continued.

“Your family.”

“Irish...”

“Strong,” William finished looking into his Da’s shining green eyes.

Nothing else needed to be said. William’s father gave him one more tight hug, stood holding Hugh with one arm, turned, and walked out the door. Shane took hold of William’s hand and marched him in the opposite direction... to America.



2

Chapter

“Stay here. I’ll be back,” Shane demanded shooing William into the back of a crate. The crate

was nestled behind a heap of trash in the back of an alley. It was where they would be sleeping tonight.

Shane had never left William alone before and the whole situation was making William feel nervous.

“But where are you going?” William asked.

“Don’t worry about where I am going. Just stay in that box and don’t get out until I come back!”

Shane yelled at him as he walked away.

That had been hours ago, when it had just begun to get dark. Now it was pitch black and Shane was not back. William huddled in the back of the crate and shivered in the cool night air. The sounds of the noisy city surrounded him and kept him from falling asleep.

“Shhh! It’s just me. Move over and make some room for me.”

“Shane?”

“Yeah Shane. Who else would it be? Now go to sleep!”

“Shane, I’m hungry,” William quietly whined.

“I can give you a knuckle sandwich or you can go to sleep!” Shane responded gruffly.

William tucked himself down into the crate wondering when Shane had gotten so mean. He was always nice on the boat, making up games to keep him occupied. He agreed to help William when his

He was scared and alone. He was about to cry when he remembered the last thing his father had said to him. Trust in God. Honor Your Family. Irish Strong. He was repeating that mantra when he heard footsteps coming his direction. Closer, closer, closer. Suddenly something grabbed his foot and he cried out.

Da had gotten sick. He comforted William and until this point had taken good care of him. But something seemed different tonight. Now that Shane was back though, William wasn't so scared, and it was a bit warmer with two of them tucked into the box. He was finally able to fall asleep.

In the morning William awoke with a sore

neck and an empty belly. His stomach grumbled loudly so he nudged Shane awake and picked up where last night's conversation left off.

"Shane, I'm hungry."

"Well, whatdya want me to do about it?"

Shane answered grouchily.

"Let's use some of my Da's money to buy breakfast."

"We can't... It's all gone," Shane said softly, his voice changing from mean to ashamed.

"Gone! We spent it all already?" William asked confused.

"No, I lost it gambling last night," Shane said so softly it almost came out as a whisper.

"Shane, my Da trusted you!" William yelled.

"I know. I screwed up okay! But we've been wandering the streets for three days with no place to stay and no work together. I thought if I won a little more money we could pay to stay at a boarding house, and I could leave you there while I worked. But I... I lost."

"So now what do we do?"

"I dunno."

"Shane? I'm still hungry."

"I know kid. Me too."

They crawled out of the box, dusted themselves off and walked together out of the alley. Even though it was early, the streets were already busy with vendors getting their carts ready for the day's customers. The delicious smell of the food being sold made the boys' mouths water.

"Hey, I have an idea," Shane said pulling William off to the side of the street. "Here's my plan." he said whispering into William's ear.

"Are you sure?" William asked after hearing the plan.

“Are you hungry or not?”

William was still angry at Shane for losing his Da's money and he didn't really trust that this was a good plan. But he didn't know what else to do.

“Yes,” William finally agreed, ready to do almost anything to get some food.

“Alright then, get going,” Shane said shoving him forward.

William stumbled into the street and walked nervously over to a pastry cart. When he got near the front of the cart, he pretended to trip and threw himself in front of the vendor's feet. He was so nervous and overwhelmed that the tears came easily.

As he made a fuss, the cart vendor bent to help him up and check for injuries. Then Shane snuck up to the back of the cart and snatched two pastries. Within moments the vendor had William back up on his feet and was on his way.

“That was brilliant!” Shane praised when they met up again a few blocks down the road. “Let's do it again.”

The boys greedily gulped down their stolen breakfast as they walked and searched for the next victim of their plan. A few minutes later Shane pointed to a milk cart and William nodded. William repeated the same routine, but this time it didn't work out as well. When the vendor turned to look at William, he saw Shane out of the corner of his eye.

“Stop! Thief!” the vendor yelled.

Shane turned and ran... straight into the belly of a cop. Shane bounced off the man and turned to run the other direction, but the policeman was too quick and too strong. He stretched an arm out and grabbed Shane by the collar. He marched Shane over to the vendor, made him hand back the milk and apologize. Then the officer began walking down the street... Shane's collar still firmly gripped in his big muscular hand.

William stood stunned for a moment, but then ran off after Shane and the policeman. He was breathing hard when he finally caught up with them.

"Please sir," William pleaded "Where are you taking him? Are you taking him to jail?"

to hire me, even if I am 15 and strong, when I have to drag this little 'un around. So..."

"Yes," the policeman said, motioning for him to continue the story.

The policeman stopped, walked Shane over to an alley and sat him down on pile of boxes, a pile not all that different from the one they had slept in last night. The policeman lifted William up to sit next to him. The three of them sat for a moment staring at each other.

"Alright, tell me your story lads." the cop barked. William and Shane were surprised to hear his Irish accent. Somehow it made him a bit more trustworthy. It was Shane who spoke first, figuring he'd better do his best to get them out of the mess he created.

"I see," the policeman said. "Well, let me tell you my story. My name is Officer Sullivan. When I was 15 I also came to this country from Ireland. New York is and was a hard place, especially for an Irishman. But, with some honest hard work and some friends, I was able to get a good job. Now I have a family and a place of my own." "Irish strong," William said softly.

"Well, officer, we just got to America three days ago. I came by myself, see, because I'm trying to earn some money for my family. William's family starved, except his Da and baby brother. But when we got here, his Da was sick, and so he asked me to take him. We don't know anyone here and we didn't have anywhere to stay. I thought maybe if I made a little money we could get a place. But no one's about

"Say again?" Officer Sullivan asked.
"It's something my Da always says, Irish strong... that's what you were," William explained.

“You’re right. And when I saw your red headed freckle face,” he said pointing to Shane, “I knew where you were from. And you little one, your dark green eyes are a dead giveaway. So, how about I be your friend in New York? Let me take you to a place that helps kids like you. Will you come with me there?”

“Do they have food?” asked Shane.

“Yes, food and much more. They have showers, clean clothes, and beds to sleep in,” Officer Sullivan said. “This’ll do you more good than a night in jail. Remember to thank me tonight in your prayers. I might have just saved your lives.”

“Yes,” Shane answered quickly for the both of them. “Yes, we’ll go.”

Officer Sullivan walked them to a large building and left them with the farewell “Irish strong.”

He thought about leaving. Maybe Officer Sullivan was wrong. Maybe these were not nice people who would help them. As he shifted his legs to stand up, a well-

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Chapter

Even though Shane and William had been up for quite a while, it was still very early. William sat on top of his leather suitcase they had retrieved from the alley and stared up at the door. He was not sure if he wanted to see what was on the other side.

His bare feet were caked in dirt and his shaggy sandy hair didn’t lay quite flat. The smell of food was promising, but the sound of adult voices on the other side of the wooden door had him feeling uneasy. William still didn’t much like adults. Even though the last one who had brought them here had been nice, he still left. Adults, they always seemed to be leaving him.

dressed man opened the door and looked out. He didn't say anything but nodded and motioned the boys to enter.

William looked at Shane, still willing to follow his lead, even after all the trouble he had gotten them into. Shane shrugged.

"We don't have anywhere else to go. It's probably better than sleeping in a box," Shane explained and then walked through the doorway. William looked carefully at the man standing at the door once more before making up his mind and following Shane inside.

Once the man had closed the door, he took the lead and walked them through a series of hallways until they arrived at a dining room of sorts. William was surprised to see it was filled with children of all ages. There were kids his age, babies, some about the same age as Hugh and some older than even Shane. The three of them walked to a table, sat down and were served a steaming plate of eggs and oatmeal.

After a few bites, the man welcomed the boys

to the Children's Aid Society, introduced himself as Mr. McCully and then asked them how they came to be here. Shane, the guilty party, wasn't really excited to tell the tale, but William had no problem offering up all of the details.



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Chapter

Mr. McCully listened carefully, occasionally stroking his enormous bushy beard as William told their story. When William was finished, he let out a heavy sigh. Just thinking about all that had happened made him feel tired.

“Did Officer Sullivan tell you what we do here?” Mr. McCully asked.

“He told us you help kids,” William said.

“He’s right. We do,” Mr. McCully confirmed and both boys relaxed a little. “We help lots of kids and we help them in lots of different ways. Some kids we send to school. We give some kids a cheap place to stay while they work in the city. But I have different plans for you two. Shane, I think that you would be a great addition to a farm family, especially since you already probably know some farming skills

from potato farming in Ireland. We would like to teach you how to grow some of our American crops like corn and wheat and also how to take care of animals like cows, horses, pigs and chickens. You can learn all of this out at our Farm School. It would be very helpful for you to know these things and it might not be such a shock from city life if you spend some time there first. It also seems like you could use some help getting rid of some bad habits like gambling and stealing... we can help you with that too. Then, once you learn what you need to know, we’ll send you on a train to a family who will love and care for you.”

“I guess that sounds like an alright plan,” Shane agreed.

“What about me? Can I go learn how to be an American farmer too?” William asked.

“I’m afraid not. The Brace Memorial Farm school is only for older boys. You are much too young. But don’t worry, some family will want you just the way you are,” Mr. McCully spoke

kindly. William and

Shane looked at each other nervously.

“You mean you’re going to split us up?”

William cried horrified and scrambled to clutch
Shane’s arm tightly.

“Please sir, I promised his Da I’d look after him.
Can’t you make an exception? I promise to look after
him real good,” Shane begged.

“No. I’m sorry lad. There is a train headed to
Indiana in a few hours, and William, you will be on
it. Shane, you will leave for the farm tomorrow.
Finish your breakfast now and I promise to find you
before you each leave,” Mr. McCully said firmly.

William leaned into Shane and began to

quietly cry. Shane sat in shocked silence, too upset
to even finish his breakfast. They sat this way for a
long time. Finally, Mr. McCully came back over and
told Shane to say goodbye to William and then
follow the older boys out of the dining room.

Shane turned to William and said the only

words that he knew that might give him courage and
hope: Trust in God. Honor your family. Irish strong.
Then, with one last sad look, he left.

“Those are some nice words lad. Have you
heard them before?” Mr. McCully asked gently.
William only nodded. “You know, I’ve been thinking
about you since I left your breakfast table. Here’s
what I know about you William. You are from
Ireland. You came here on a big boat and when you
got here your father, a strong Irishman was denied
entry because he was sick. So, he told Shane, to take
care of you. Is Shane also Irish?” William nodded
yes. “I see,” Mr. McCully continued. “And then when
you got in trouble on the street, Officer Sullivan
brought you to me. Did you know that he is an
Irishman?”

“Yes,” William said. “He told me to stay Irish
strong, just like my Da.”

“And do you also know that I was born in
Ireland?” Mr. McCully asked, his big bushy
eyebrows arching up.

“You were?!?” William asked excitedly.

“I was. Now, it seems to me that since you left your Da, you have been passed into the hands of one good Irishman to the next. And I have no reason to believe why it should not continue. I have made arrangements and I will be joining you on this afternoon’s train. I will do my best to deposit you into a loving, and if possible, Irish family.”

“Really? You’d do that for me?” William asked skeptically. He still wasn’t entirely trustworthy of adults, but between Officer Sullivan and Mr. McCully, he might be ready to change his mind.

“I would. Now let’s go get clean and dressed. We don’t have much time before we depart for the train station.”

A few hours later William was standing under the awning of the Children’s Aid Society clean and smartly dressed. He watched the other children fidget nervously as they looked out to the muddy streets as rain poured down. Rain or shine the train

left at noon, so they walked as quickly as they could to the station. The group was led by Mr. McCully who had the only umbrella of the group. What had started out as a hopeful event for William, now felt like a big wet mess. Something bad was always happening, even after someone promised something good.

At the train station tickets were bought, feet squelched noisily in wet shoes and 25 children boarded the train. The rain fell in thick sheets, washing over the train, making it impossible for the children inside to see out the windows as they left New York City. They sat, huddled and shivering, in wet clothes.

William leaned against the window and began to cry, his tears mimicking the raindrops that slid down the windowpane. He hoped that Mr. McCully was right, that someone wonderful would be waiting for him in Indiana, maybe even an Irish family. He tried to think positive, but it had been a long miserable day, and he had a hard time believing it was going to get any better.



5

Chapter

When it was time to go to sleep, they pulled off their still damp clothes and slid between the covers of their Pullman car beds in their under clothes. Their outfits were hung to dry so they would be wearable in the morning.

“I bet Mr. McCully is sad now that he paraded us through the streets to the train stations in our new uniforms,” William overheard another child whisper.

One look over at Mr. McCully and William decided sleep was a much better option than talking nasty about the man in charge, especially since he had been nothing but nice to William. He closed his eyes tight and tried to forget all of the events of the day.

He dreamed of a ship rocking and tossing in the waves. A great storm was crashing down on the ship. In the dream William, his Da and his brother Hugh were up on the main deck. They were trying to stand despite the rain and wind. Suddenly lightning flashed and William fell to the deck. He looked up in time to see his father and Hugh being pitched overboard.

“Nooooo!” he yelled and awoke, sitting straight up in his seat. He started crying, looking around the train car for a familiar face. His heart was racing and tears were streaming down his face.

“No, no, no,” he cried into his hands. “They’re gone.” He felt a gentle hand on his shoulder and then the warmth of someone sitting next to him.

“Shh, it’s alright,” a man’s voice soothed. It almost sounded like his father.

“Everyone leaves me!” William cried. “First my Mum and sister, then Da and Hugh and now Shane is gone too! I will always be alone!”

“Now that’s not true,” the man, who William

now recognized as Mr. McCully, soothed. "In a few hours we will be pulling into Indiana where many wonderful people are waiting to add you and the rest of these children into their families. Come now William, Irish strong."

William sniffed and rubbed the back of his hand across his fair face, wiping away the tears. He half listened as Mr. McCully continued to talk about Indiana and what his new life would be like. At some point he must have fallen back asleep because the next thing he remembered was a child's voice shouting,

"We're here!"

After many wild minutes, the group exited the train car and walked down the city street to a large building with colorful signs. William heard another child say that it was an opera house where movies were shown. William had never heard of such a thing and was eager to see what was inside.

He hustled in through the doorway, but then stopped cold when he saw the crowd of people. Mr. McCully stepped up next to him, took his hand and walked him in the rest of the way. He stood William next to other children his age. He saw that everyone looked a little nervous and for some reason, that made him feel a little better.

He looked out into the crowd, remembering that Mr. McCully said that he would do his best to put him with an Irish family. He tried to find a group of people with red hair or lots of freckles like The first thing William noticed about Indiana was that it was not raining. He didn't have time to



Shane. He tried to find a tall man with thick dark hair like his Da. He listened for a voice that sounded like his Mum. But there were so many people and nothing stuck out. He didn't get to pick them out anyway... it was the other way around.

He did his best to stand still as Mr. McCully talked to the people telling them how the process worked.

"If you find a child you'd like to adopt, please bring them to me and we can start on the necessary paperwork. Remember, if you are choosing to take home a child you are agreeing to care for him or her as you would your own children, making them truly a part of your family. This includes sending them to school and taking them to church. Now, before we begin... are there any Irish families present?"

William searched the crowd again, his eyes sweeping the crowd, looking for a hand up. But he saw none.

"Sorry lad, I tried," Mr. McCully said as he patted him on the shoulder and then stepped off the stage.

There was a general rush to the front of the movie theater, everyone anxious to have the first pick. Mr. McCully stopped the herd from crushing the children and made them get into an orderly line. Then he went to the back and waited. Several couples quickly chose babies or very young toddlers and then went to meet Mr. McCully.

Couples passed through the line, talking to children, asking them questions and occasionally even feeling their muscles. William remembered Mr. McCully saying this was farm country and he supposed the people were looking for strong and healthy children. There were very few children left on the stage, but no one stopped to talk to William. He was confused.



7

Chapter

Irishmen stole his job as a canal builder. My father hates the Irish. And so do I,” the boy explained. He faced forward and refused to say another word to William.

“May the cat eat you and the devil eat the cat!” William cursed at the boy.

“No one wants you,” the boy next to him leaned over to say in a nasty whisper. “Because you are Irish. Mr. McCully was trying to help you but really he marked you damaged goods. These people here don’t like the Irish.”

“What do you mean?” William asked.

“Well, you all came to America when your potatoes died right?” the boy asked and William nodded. “So, you came here, to America, poor and starving. How are you supposed to make their country better? They think you made it worse. They wish you would just go back where you came from.”

“How do you know this?” William challenged.

“My father used to talk about it all the time.

William felt his face redden and his eyes fill with tears. How could Mr. McCully and Officer Sullivan not tell him this? How could they put him up here like a fool hoping someone would take him? After what felt like hours, William was the only one left on stage and there was no one left in the auditorium looking for children. At some point he had sat down while Mr. McCully finished paperwork with all of the adopting couples. Finally he was finished and walked over to William. He sat down next to him on the stage with a heavy sigh.

“My Da always said a good run is better than a bad stand,” William said bravely to the older man.

“I would agree, but my Da always said a good laugh and a long sleep are the best cures in the doctor’s book. What do you say we get outta here and

get some dinner on our way back to New York? I know a great pub a few hours from here.” Mr. McCully said.

“Sure,” William agreed sadly.

Together they left the opera house and walked down the street to the train station. They boarded and ate bologna sandwiches on their laps to hold them over until dinner and said very little. It was almost night fall when they pulled into Norfolk Station. William sleepily followed Mr. McCully as they walked through the town. It was quite a walk. As they neared the end of one street, William could hear lively music coming from one of the buildings. As they walked into this building his spirits immediately lifted.

It was as if he had stepped across the ocean and back into Ireland. Happy faces and clothing he recognized surrounded him on all sides. Rowdy music and Gaelic dialect flooded into his ears. And deliciously familiar smells of potatoes and bread greeted him welcomingly. Mr. McCully smiled

broadly as he showed William to a booth seat. He chatted fondly with the serving girl who brought them bread and something to drink.

“Cheers,” she said after promising their dinner would be out shortly.

“What is this place?” William asked Mr. McCully.

“We are in Norfolk, Massachusetts and this is Brandon’s Pub,” he answered plainly.

“All of these people look Irish,” William pointed out.

“Aye, and they are,” Mr. McCully affirmed.

“But I thought that boy said no one like us Irishmen. Why are they all here?”

“Well, just because someone says something harsh doesn’t mean we back down and go home! Where’s the Irish strong in that? No... everyone in here has heard their fair share of mean things, but the way they got through it was sticking together.

They've made a nice place for Irish people here in Norfolk."

William sat and thought about this while he ate his dinner. He watched the men drinking and talking. He watched the workers serving food. He watched a few people dance to the music.

Everywhere he looked there was something to bring a smile to his face. He suddenly wished that he could live here.

"Who ya got here McCully?" a friendly redhead woman asked.

"This here is William. He comes from our fair Ireland. He's been riding the train with me. Today we've been to Indiana. Just on our way back to New York now."

"Ah, I see. Well, that's beyond the pale," she commented sadly.

"Why's that?" asked William. "Well, I'm needing a dish boy that's what. My Robbie's just gone off fighting in the civil war and I don't have enough help in this place! See over there?" she asked pointing. "That's Dana. She's a fine dishwasher, but

no good at dish collecting. And that over there is my husband, Brandon. The only thing he's good for is pouring drinks. My other son Collin is always playing the bagpipes in that noisy band and I'm busy cooking! Plus, I have an empty bed to fill too. I wonder where I'd find a good strong Irish lad to help me," she trailed off pretending to think about her problem.

"Oh! I could help!" William nearly shouted.

"Away with the fairies! You're crazy! Do you think you'd want to stay here? With me and this rowdy bunch?" she teased him.

"Oh yes ma'am. I'm a hard worker and I know I could help."

"My darling, we'd love to have ya. My name is Bridget little love. I'm plenty busy now but wait around a bit and you and me and Mr. McCully over there, we can set things right," Bridget said rushing back to the kitchen, winking at Mr. McCully.

"Does she mean it? Can I really stay here?" William asked.

“I promised I’d do my part and deliver you into the hands of an Irishman. Is an Irishwoman good enough?” Mr. McCully asked seriously.

“Yes sir!” William cheered. “Thank you for helping me. I will do just as my Da said.. Trust in God. Honor this family and my old one, and always be Irish strong.”

Mr. McCully patted him gently on the head and turned to look at the stage where the musicians were standing. Just then the band stopped for a break and one of the members walked straight over to their table.

“Evening Mr. McCully,” the fiddle player said shaking Mr. McCully’s hand. “Who’s this?” he asked looking at William.

“Well, hello there Garrett! This is William, he was a train rider, but I think I’ve found him a home here in Norfolk,” Mr. McCully cheerfully explained.

“Is that so?” Garrett asked.

“Yes! I’m going to help Bridget with the dishes!” William piped into the conversation excitedly.

“Well long life to you lad. Did you know, I was once a rider on the orphan train?” Garrett asked him.

“You were?” William asked, amazed.

“Yes, now scoot over and I’ll tell you all about how Mr. McCully plucked me from the streets of New York and found me a home here in Norfolk.

Afterward

August 1864

Dear William,

It hardly seems possible that we've been in America just four months. It's different than I imagined it would be, but better in some ways too. Mr. McCully came to see me out at the Farm School when he got back from riding the train with you and gave me this address. I hope this letter gets to you.

Life at the Farm School was a lot of work, but there was always plenty of food and I made some good friends too. Even though most of us ended up being adopted in different towns and states, we have plans to meet up and visit when we turn 18.

I'm living in Wisconsin now, on a dairy farm. Good thing I learned how to milk a cow before I got here! My new family is very nice, and I especially like having brothers again. I am working hard to earn money of my own to send back to my family in Ireland. It's a long shot, but I still hope that they too will come to America.

Please write and tell me of your new life!

Irish Strong!

Shane

Orphan Train Riders: Irish Strong William

1. On a piece of paper write the word and its definition. .

immigrant

mantra

clutch

pastry

vendor

victim

denied

sooth

curse

auditorium

2. Then create flashcards using a thesaurus, with the vocabulary word on the front side and a synonym for the word on the back side

3. Alphabetize your flashcards

4. Sort your flashcards into three piles, noun, verbs and adjectives.

5. Select two words and write a sentence that includes both.

True or False

Write T if a statement is TRUE and F if a statement is False.

1. At Ellis Island, everyone was let into America, no matter what.
2. It was very difficult for immigrants to make a good living in America.
3. William had to leave everyone in his family behind as he entered America.

Multiple Choice

Write A, B,C or D in the answer space to indicate your choice for the best answer.

1. William was adopted in the state of...?
 - a. New York
 - b. Skibereen, Ireland
 - c. Indiana
 - d. Massachusetts
2. Why was William's dad not allowed to come into America?
 - a. He was Irish.
 - b. He had tuberculosis.
 - c. He had small pox.
 - d. He had yellow fever.
3. How did William and Shane get breakfast once they ran out of money?
 - a. They begged a vendor for some milk and a croissant.
 - b. They didn't eat until they got to the Children's Aid Society.
 - c. They stole from a pastry cart.
 - d. They didn't eat breakfast; they went hungry.

Journal Questions

Think about your answer to each question and then write out your thoughts in complete sentences.

1. Leaving home can be scary. William had to travel very far away from his home. Tell about a time when you were far away from home and how you felt.
2. Both Da and Shane believed that everything would be better in America. Why do you think they kept talking and talking about America. Did that help in anyway?
3. The children traveling on the orphan train were often bored on the very long ride from New York to their new homes. Without technology, how would you have entertained yourself on the train ride?
4. If you were William and given the choice, would you go back to Ireland with your father, or into America with Shane? Explain your choice with at least two reasons.
5. Even though Shane made some bad choices, William continued to trust and follow him. Why do you think William continued to believe in Shane?
6. Do you think Mr. McCully was helping or hurting William when he asked the crowd about Irish families in Indiana? Explain your thought process.
7. William used a motto or a mantra to help him stay brave in tough times. What do you do to keep hope alive and stay strong when you feel alone or scared?
8. Do you think Shane was a good friend to William? Why or why not? Tell about a time when you were a good friend to someone.
9. Would William have had a better life if he had just stayed in Ireland? Use details from the story to support your answer.
10. Do you think Mr. McCully would have helped Shane and William if they were not Irish? Explain your answer with at least two reasons.

Orphan Train Riders: Irish Strong William

COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES

Map Work

Using a map and the mileage scale measure the distance William traveled to get to his new home in Norfolk, Massachusetts.

Distance #1: Dublin, Ireland to New York City = _____ miles

Distance #2: New York City to Indianapolis, IN = _____ miles

Distance #3: Indianapolis, IN to Norfolk, MA = _____ miles

_____ + _____ + _____ = _____ Total Miles

Fact or Opinion

Write F if the statement is a FACT and O if the statement is an OPINION.

1. William stayed Irish Strong.
2. Shane was a criminal.
3. Officer Sullivan did the right thing by taking the boys to the Children's Aid Society.

Questions and Answers

Answer in complete sentences.

1. Who was traveling alone to America?
2. Where did Da and Hugh go instead of America?
3. When did Shane begin to be mean to William?
4. Why were Shane and William split up once they got to the Children's Aid Society?
5. How did Da expect to make a living in America?

Orphan Train Riders: Irish Strong William

Figurative Language

In every language there are figurative phrases that mean something completely different than what they literally say. For example, if we say, "It's raining cats and dogs!" there aren't really cats and dogs falling from the sky. We just mean that it is raining really, really hard.

In this story there are several Irish phrases that use figurative language. Read each phrase and try to decide what it really means. Use context clues from the story to help you.

1. May the cat eat you and the devil eat the cat.

2. A good run is better than a bad stand.

3. A good laugh and a long sleep are the best cures in the doctor's book.

4. Away with the fairies!

Sequence of Events

Put the Irishmen and Irishwomen in order according to when they helped William in the story. Number 1 to 5.

- ____ Officer Sullivan
- ____ Da
- ____ Mr. McCully
- ____ Bridget
- ____ Shane

Orphan Train Riders: Irish Strong William

Creative Writing

Pretend you are William and write a letter response to Shane telling him about your new life in Norfolk. Remember to appropriately date your letter and use correct friendly letter format.

Poster

Create a poster advertising the benefits of the Children's Aid Society. Why would a kid want to go to this organization for help? How can they help children in need?

Drawing

Re-read the part of chapter 2 when the policeman makes Shane return the stolen milk to the vendor. Then draw a picture of this scene including the policeman, Shane, the milk vendor and William. Put special emphasis into how each character is feeling and show that emotion on the faces in your drawing.

Creative Arts

Create a menu for Brandon's Pub. List food items and prices for appetizers, entrees, drinks and dessert. use fun lettering, pictures of food and be creative. To go above and beyond, research favorite Irish dishes and include them in your menu. When you are finished, let your family order items and then make them together.

ANSWER KEY

True and False

1. F
2. T
3. T

Multiple Choice

1. D
2. B
3. C

Fill in the Blank/Short Answer

1. cow
2. beds
3. churches

Fact or Opinion

1. O
2. F
3. O

Complete sentence answers.

1. Shane
2. Back to Ireland, to William's grandmother's house
3. After he lost William's father's money
4. Shane was going to farm school and William was traveling on the orphan train right away
5. He was going to make money being a canal builder.

Figurative Phrases

1. May the cat eat you and the devil eat the cat: a curse meaning "forget you!"
2. A good run is better than a bad stand: it is better to try than to do nothing.
3. A good laugh and a long sleep are the best cures in the doctor's book: try to stay positive and things will be better in the morning.
4. Away with the fairies: That's crazy!

Sequencing

- 3 - Officer Sullivan
- 1 - Da
- 4 - Mr. McCully
- 5 - Bridget
- 2 -Shane