

Teacher's Guide

Northwest Passages

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Produced By



LIVING VOICES

*The story of an
Immigrant Family*

Co Produced by
*The Nordic Heritage
Museum*



ARTSFUND



**THE NORDIC HERITAGE MUSEUM
AND
LIVING VOICES PRESENT**

NORTHWEST PASSAGES

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Northwest Passages tells the story of the development of the Pacific Northwest, focusing primarily on the years between 1880 and 1920. It is an examination of forces that pulled people here from regions throughout the United States and the world, the dreams they hoped to fulfill, the realities they encountered, and the established communities of people who were affected by this great influx. The “passage” of our title refers not just to a journey from one place to another, but also from one time to another, from an old way of life to a new way of life—that was embodied in the dream of the bountiful, prosperous, rugged Northwest.

THE TIMES OF NORTHWEST PASSAGES

Throughout the history of the northwest its character has been marked by diversity, diversity of people, lifestyles and landscapes. The first people in this land walked, paddled canoes and rode horses. Now we can cross Washington State by air in 35 minutes. Where once there were paths and dirt roads, now there are speeding rails and interstate freeways. Log cabins have gained skyscrapers as neighbors.

The lands abundant resources have been the basis for much of Washington’s economic growth - timber, wheat, apples, fishing and canning, coal mining and more.

This program is a story about the northwest during its years of astounding change. Our title **Northwest Passages** describes just what was happening in this region between the 1880’s and 1920. . a passage between one world to a new world and a whole new way of life.

The people who lived in the northwest, as well as other regions, have left their mark on the landscape and the culture. The generations of newcomers have transformed the Northwest, especially during the years of this program.

If one moment in time, one physical act symbolized the passage from the old to the new, it would be the final spike that marked the completion of this country’s first northern transcontinental railroad. In the past, the journey from the Midwest to the Northwest was one of intense endurance and hardship.

Now with the R.R. you could travel to this remote Washington territory in safety and - if you had the money - even in comfort, in just five days.

The old way of life was one that had hardly changed since the first explorers ventured into this distant corner of the country. It was a region inhabited by many diverse native tribes, navigated by the Spanish, and explored by the early trappers, and hunters. The first outsiders to settle here were the few hardy pioneers who withstood not only the journey, but also the daily hardships of living in a rugged, isolated territory.

Now through the almost magical power of transportation this region was transformed into the growing modern society we live in today.

For Washington, the thirty years between the final railroad spike and WWI was a time of hurried catch-up. The Civil War had just ended; the Southern cities were in ruin, and the industrial North was experiencing the rewards of victory at a when time Seattle, Tacoma, and Spokane were just struggling villages.

With a direct link railroad, it took Washington only a few years to accomplish the amazing economic and social transformation that took many decades in the eastern states.

Like a train heading in a straight line along the tracks, Washington rode moved away from its isolated frontier past, towards a future of global markets, commercial agriculture, expanding industries, and modern, populated cities.

The dramatic changes during these “passages” years included new patterns of settlement. The railroad made it easy to travel and settle here for people around the U.S. and all over the world. Since the Railroads owned much of the land near the railways they actively promoted the benefits of moving to this region so that they could sell this land to the outsiders. The newcomers poured into Washington in such large numbers they altered the patterns of life:

- ◆ New communities sprung up (often bringing together specific national groups of immigrants).
- ◆ Native-Americans were affected by increasing competition over land and land use.
- ◆ Cities grew at an extraordinary rate.

There were slow times during these years of intense rapid growth and the region was gripped by a severe depression from 1893-1897. Yet, the events of one single day changed everything. Suddenly a gloom caused by four years of economic hard times seemed to disappear. On July 17th 1897 the Alaskan steamer, **The Portland** entered Seattle’s Elliot Bay bringing news and evidence of Gold in the Yukon.

Northwest Passages is the story of all these things as seen from the point of view of one person. How did these changes affect one family, one community? That is the experience of **Northwest Passages**.

THE STORY

Anna Julia Larson is six years old when her family emigrates from Sweden. Following the encouragement of his brothers who were already established in the Northwest, Julia's father decides to take his family away from their ancestral home. The pain of parting is felt keenly by Julia's mother, who has serious doubts about their prospects in America. She says good-bye to her relatives for the last time, knowing that she will never see any of them again.

The family (Julia, her older brothers Anders and Edvin and her parents) travel safely across England and then across the Atlantic to Ellis Island. In Ellis Island they are persuaded to leave behind the first of their Swedish traditions by adopting a different last name. No longer will they identify themselves by the traditional paternal surname. Instead, they call themselves "Berg", which means "mountain" in Swedish—"For the mountains they left behind in Sweden and for the mountains waiting for them in America."

When the train arrives in Seattle, the sight of a bustling city greets Julia. The Alaskan gold rush is on and Seattle is poised to become the great city of the Pacific Northwest. Julia and her family do not stay in Seattle, but journey on to Preston where her Uncle Jacob meets them. Like many families relocating to the rugged Northwest, the Bergs will count on the help of family and community to help them establish a home. Uncle Jacob takes them to their homestead.

To the surprise of the new arrivals, their new home is nothing more than a plot of undeveloped wilderness. The Bergs would have to live in tents while they built their own house from what elements their immediate surroundings have to offer. It is in a tent that the first "American" Berg is born, Astrid, Julia's little sister.

Astrid barely survives the harsh environment during her first year. But soon, they have built themselves a sturdy house and Mr. Berg has established himself at the lumber mill. The Bergs settle into a routine that includes traditional celebrations as well as new observances of their unique positions as new Americans.

At Mother's insistence the children are only allowed to speak Swedish at home. School for the children is the only place where English is the main language. Julia is a quick study while Anders is fast to defend himself from those who would cast him as a dumb Swede.

Uncle Karl who has spent the last few years in Alaska digging for gold visits the Bergs'. He has apparently done well for himself, causing Anders to follow him around in admiration of his fancy clothes and trinkets. When Anders declares his intention to follow Uncle Karl to Alaska there is a bitter battle with Father. Anders insists he is only following his father's example by seeking "a better life", but Father is quick to point out the difference between real opportunity and wasting your life on "gold and dreams!" Anders follows his own dreams and disappears on a ship to Alaska.

Preston continues to grow despite harsh weather, forest fires, and mill accidents. Upon completion of high school, Edvin takes a job as a lumberjack. In order to fit in at work he changes his name from Edvin to Eddie. Mother is aghast! "What kind of name is that for a Swedish Boy?" Eddie is quick to reply, "an American one!"

Julia decides to go to high school despite her mother's misgivings. The high school is far away from the Berg homestead and would be better attended if she could stay in town. Mother will

only allow her to attend if stays at home. Julia has no choice but to walk to school, maintain her studies, and do her chores at home.

Eddie celebrates Julia's graduation from High School by treating her to trip to Seattle to attend the Seattle Yukon Pacific Exposition of 1909. Seattle has grown tenfold since her arrival from Sweden. However, girls from the University of Washington tease Julia when they hear her immigrant accent.

Returning to Preston brings bad news to the Bergs. A letter from Alaska informs them that Anders has been killed for his gold. Ander's death leaves the family heartbroken.

Julia knows that life must go on. She learns that there is a new "Swedish" hospital in Seattle and they are starting a nursing school. Mother is against any further education for Julia as her "place is at home until she gets married!" Julia defies her mother and enrolls in nursing school. Her father helps her find work at the mill cookhouse to pay for her expenses.

Though exhausting, Julia graduates from Nursing school in the top of her class. She is chosen for a special nursing job with a traveling doctor. Julia meets Dr. Johnson, a pioneer doctor with years of experience in rural medicine for farmers and Native-Americans.

Their first trip takes them to Roslyn, Washington to check up on the coal miners. Some of the coal miners are African-Americans, brought to Roslyn years before to replace striking miners. Things got so bad for many of the African-American families that they "had to hide in the church grave yard to avoid a riot." Though things had settled down since the strike, life was still not easy for African-Americans in Roslyn. Work is hard to find, and even if a job is open, employers are more likely to give it to a non-English speaking European immigrant than a native born African-American.

Our miner is fast to react when an explosion rocks the town. The blast in the mine traps many miners far below the surface. Some are pulled out but many are lost forever. One African-American woman, seeing her husband pulled from the mine goes into labor. After the birth Julia learns more about this woman's life and is pleased to learn of her desire to be a nurse. However, Julia learns a hard lesson when the woman makes it clear that the color of her skin made entry into most schools impossible for her.

Julia becomes aware of the experiences of non-Europeans who are also trying to make a better life in America. A Chinese man tells her the story of his father who was chased out of Tacoma. Wishing to be with his son, the man sends for him from China, but immigration sends him back after detaining him for months.

As World War One begins in Europe, Julia and the doctor continue their rounds, treating wounds from work accidents to attacks of appendicitis. Julia and Doctor Johnson travel to Alaska, where she meets Mr. Tanaka. This Japanese man learned to speak Swedish while working on the railroad. He now works as an English / Swedish / Japanese interpreter. Julia learns that Mr. Tanaka's met his wife overseas through a matchmaker who used photograph's to match couples for marriage.

At Washington's Colville Reservation Julia witnesses a disturbing incident. The local Sheriff is brought to the reservation to take away a Native woman's child. Julia learns that Native American children are forcibly removed from their families and placed in boarding schools where they are stripped of their native culture in an effort to "civilize" them. The incident caused Julia to consider the differences between giving up your culture and having it taken away.

America enters World War One. Julia's work increases as young men are shipped off to war. Mill accidents increase as less experienced workers take over. Eddie is drafted and sent to Europe. Susy announces that she and Eddie will be having a baby. Astrid now, in nursing school, is excited at the possibility to going off to war when she graduates.

While visiting Preston, Julia is called to the mill and is devastated to find that her father has been killed in an accident. The entire town turns out to attend Mr. Berg's funeral. With no one else at home, Julia wonders how her mother will be able to function.

Susy receives a telegram from the army. Eddie is reported missing in action.

Things are made worse in 1918 when the flu sweeps across the world killing millions, including thousands in Washington State. Dr. Johnson and Julia are called to the Indian boarding school where children are passing away with out a chance to see their families. Astrid calls Julia home; "Mother's got it!"

Julia and Astrid try desperately to comfort their mother but she is unable to survive the symptoms of the flu. Julia and Astrid must inform Mother's family in Sweden of her death. Though they have spoken Swedish all their lives, they were never taught how to read or write in Swedish. Julia is able to hire a man in the village to write the letter.

Julia recalls her parent's dream of a better life. Communicating to her Swedish family reminds her that despite the pain she has experienced; her parents have given her a great gift. She has been given an education and chances she would never have received in the old country. Her family has been the recipient of possibilities that could only be dreamed about when her parents were young. But despite the distance she knows the old country will always be a part of her. "Anna-Julia Larson is who I was in Sweden. Julia Berg is who I am in America. But I don't have to choose between them. They both live inside me, here and wherever I go."

THE END

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

NORTHWEST PASSAGES DISCUSSION TOPICS

Development of the Northwest

The settlement of the Pacific Northwest was dramatically affected by the completion of the first Northern Transcontinental Railroad. The journey, which had previously taken 6 months by wagon coming from the Midwest, could now be completed in 5 days. In providing quick, safe transportation, the railroad companies were largely responsible for the burst of growth this region experienced beginning in the 1880's.

- ◆ **What groups/people were in the Northwest prior to the 1880's?**
- ◆ **What was good about the coming of the railroads? What was bad?**
- ◆ **Who benefited from the railroads? Who suffered?**

The Influence of Community

New settlers to the Northwest often sought out communities of people from their own country. Immigrants like Julia and her family were aided in their transition to a new environment by relatives who had come before. They had the support of a community of people with shared traditions, language and values.

- ◆ **How do Julia's relatives help her and her family adjust to life in Washington?**
- ◆ **What are the advantages of a shared community?**
- ◆ **What are the disadvantages?**
- ◆ **What happens when communities become too insular?**
- ◆ **What happens when traditions are lost?**

Relations between Communities

Economic and racial tensions affected the relationships between the different communities in the Northwest. Established communities viewed newcomers as a threat to their job security and way of life. Newcomers were often treated violently. Native American communities suffered greatly, and often lost the ability to maintain and nourish their communities.

- ◆ **How many types of communities are represented in this story?**
- ◆ **How do laws help or hurt different communities?**
- ◆ **Who makes the laws?**
- ◆ **How do communities thrive?**

Opportunities in the Northwest

Many settlers to the Northwest came in search of better working conditions. The dream of a prosperous life on the West Coast was influenced dramatically by the discovery of gold, first in California, and then in the Yukon. The abundance of natural resources lured people to the logging, fishing, farming and mining industries; the railroads also were a main source of employment. The cyclical boom-and-bust nature of work in the Northwest, however, led to precarious employment situations. Seldom did working men, and women, attain the independence they sought in this area. Many workers made careers in several industries throughout the year, going from job to job, as the market demanded.

- ◆ **What industries were represented in the story?**
- ◆ **Who worked in these industries?**
- ◆ **What obstacles did Julia face in finding work?**
- ◆ **How much freedom did the characters have in shaping their working lives?**

Social Forces: War and Disease

The involvement of the United States in World War One (The Great War) affected economies, working conditions and family structures. Unions, which had been struggling for decades to gain a foothold in the Northwest, finally began gaining power. The World War was also instrumental in spreading the most virulent strain of flu that had ever been experienced. With armies meeting and spreading out all over the globe, the highly contagious combination of influenza and pneumonia was carried to populations throughout the world. The United States alone saw more than 10 times the number of deaths from the flu than military casualties from the war.

- ◆ **How did the US involvement in WWI affect Julia and her community?**
- ◆ **How did people respond to the flu pandemic?**
- ◆ **How did the characters' social roles change in regard to WWI and the flu?**
- ◆ **How do different communities respond to each other in time of crisis?**

Family and Transition

Julia is a transitional figure in her family, a young woman with a Swedish accent and American clothes. She represents both the old way of life with its traditions, and the new way of life with its changing impressions. Immigrant children and children of immigrant parents play an important role in bridging the cultures of their parents and their new American communities.

- ◆ **What conflicts does Julia experience within her family?**
- ◆ **How can children honor the perspective of their parents and also have their own goals?**
- ◆ **Have you experienced a conflict like those in the story with your parents?**
- ◆ **What were the experiences of the other families in the story: African American, Chinese, Japanese, and Native American?**
- ◆ **How can we learn to value the traditions of families that are different than our own?**