

SOURCE CREATIVE WRITING ACTIVITY NO. 1

Read the following memories of people who were evacuated as children during the Second World War.

The Journey

Source 1.

'Summer 1939...Grandma told Paul and Peggy, and myself that we were going on a holiday near the hop fields. On arriving at Gillingham Station we found hundreds of children all going on the same holiday. Everyone was carrying their gas mask and we were all given an apple and a bar of chocolate. I could not understand why so many were crying. My only fear was that I would be separated from Paul and Peggy. After having our names taken we all boarded the train for the unknown. On arrival at our destination buses were waiting for us; all I can remember is a big room and lots of ladies picking children to go with them. My cousins and I kept close together as we did not want to be parted. A lady chose Peggy and off she went. I remember crying because I did not know if I would see her again. Paul and I waited a long time...we did not want to be parted and the ladies only wanted one child. At last a lady said that she would take both of us - it was a very frightening time and I cannot remember how we arrived at the lady's house. All I can remember is that it was a big house with a lot of garden...coming from a town where we had no gardens it looked wonderful...Thus began the happiest time of my young life.'

Source 2

'I can remember vividly being taken by coach to a railway station, our only luggage a small case and a gas mask over our shoulder. I cannot remember much about the actual journey, I cannot even remember if my mother was there to see us off, but I do remember wearing a large luggage label and that my brother wore a brown school cap. The journey was a long one, I can remember a stop at a large station and people giving us drinks and biscuits...By the time we arrived in Bideford it was quite late in the evening, we were taken to a hall in the town where people were waiting to choose an evacuee. I do not think that there was much in the way of organisation; anyone with a spare room was asked to accept a child or children into their home. It was very late we were very tired and confused. It seemed that no one was prepared to take twins and the organisers were reluctant to separate us. A lady named Mary Hill offered to have us for a day or two until alternative accommodation could be found. Mr and Mrs Hill gave us a clean and stable home life for over five years, we were very happy with them and I think they must have been devastated when we had to return home.'

Source 3

'My brother, sister and I were put on a train packed with kids at Waterloo Station. I had strict instructions from my mother to look after my younger brother and sister and make sure we stayed together. I was just ten years old. When we arrived at our destination in a Dorset village we were assembled on the village school playground. I remember it was sweltering hot. The news soon spread that we had arrived and a crowd of local people gathered to look us over. It was as if we were cattle at a cattle market; stared at, commented on, examined one by one, even looking in our hair for fleas. Hours later there were still a few children left standing in the playground in the hot sun with their bundle or battered suitcase beside them. We must have seemed an alien lot to those villagers with our London accents; scruffy clothes and runny noses. Many children were red eyed from crying. Not surprising considering that we were taken away from our parents, familiar surroundings and dumped hours later over a hundred miles away from home, then taken off to live with total strangers. What started as an adventure had turned into a living nightmare that we would remember for the rest of our lives.'

Activity:

Imagine you are an ten year old evacuee in 1939. Write a letter home to a family member describing the experience of your journey to an 'area of greater safety' and how you feel about being evacuated:

- Did you feel excited about a new adventure or not want to leave home?
- How do you feel about leaving your home and family?
- What was good about the journey? (Nice scenery, you like train journeys, a tasty packed lunch? A pleasant teacher to travel with? Can you imagine something else?)
- What sort of place are you hoping to stay at? A farm? A house?
- Are you travelling alone or with brothers or sisters?
- What happened on the journey?
- What would you like to say to or tell your family?
- How do you feel about the people who have agreed to take you into their home?

