

TOEFL Junior: Reading Comprehension Test 19

Read the passage . 60 - 100 minutes

Sod Houses

Sod houses are an almost vanished part of America's past. Yet in Nebraska and some other states a century ago they were very common. Sod houses were built, as the name suggests, from sod - the top, grassy layer of the ground. The ground of the Nebraska plains was particularly suitable for this, because it was held together by the thick wiry roots of the grass that grows there.

To make a house, the settlers used a sod-cutter, drawn by horses, that cut through the top layer of the grassland. This had the additional benefit that the land cleared of grass in this way was suitable for planting corn. The builders would then cut the top layer they had ploughed into sections of about 50kg each, clearing about two acres of grass in the process. These sections were stacked on top of each other to make a thick-walled house that was cool in summer and warm in winter. Because many were built into the side of hills for extra stability, they were even useful shelters from tornadoes.

Sod houses spread across Nebraska, Kansas and North and South Dakota. They were common there, because all these areas had the same problem - there were no trees on the great plains, and so no wood to build with. Wood which was needed for the roofs was by far the most expensive part of each house, as it had to be painfully transported by wagon. The problem of building materials was solved by the arrival of the railways which could transport wood and other materials quickly and cheaply. Sod houses were abandoned for more modern buildings, and began to disappear. Now less than 100 remain, but they are carefully preserved as relics of pioneer life on the prairie.

1. Sod houses are made from -

- a. grass
- b. grass and soil
- c. wood
- d. wood and soil

2. Sod houses were built

- a. only in Nebraska
- b. on the prairies
- c. near the railways
- d. on hills

3. The houses were

- a. rather fragile
- b. the wrong temperature
- c. only temporary
- d. very strong

4. The place the grass was taken from

- a. began to disappear through erosion
- b. was planted with crops
- c. was stacked into sections
- d. was used for horses

5. The main reason that sod houses began to disappear was

- a. they were destroyed by tornadoes
- b. other building materials became available
- c. there were no trees for wood
- d. they were too expensive

6. The article says that the remaining sod houses are

- a. smaller than they were 100 years ago
- b. not inhabited any more
- c. now derelict
- d. sites of historical interest

7. Which part of the house cost most?

- a. The walls
- b. The sod
- c. The roof
- d. The floor

8. This article is mainly about

- a. developments in social history
- b. patterns of architecture
- c. American urban housing solutions
- d. the history of a type of house

Answers and Explanations

1. B
2. B
3. D
4. B
5. B
6. D
7. C
8. D