A New Beginning in Kansas

Many African Americans living in Southern states came to Kansas after the Civil War. They were told stories of good land with rich soil and water. They had hopes of a better life here. This is one boy's story.

My parents and I said goodbye to Mr. Dixon and the big farm in Kentucky. Kansas was to be our new home. Mama called it the "promised land." She told me we would have our own land in Kansas in a place called Nicodemus. Papa could plant the crops he wanted. We would have a new home too. Mama was excited about that. But best of all was that I would go to school. I would learn to read and write. Papa said that was very important.

There was plenty of land for crops in Nicodemus. But when we got there it was too late in the season to plant. Papa worried about what we would eat. We were surprised that there were no trees. We had to build a dugout. It was a big hole in the ground with a roof on top. It wasn't what Mama had in mind for a home. But it was our own and that was all that mattered.

The first year was tough. People from other towns brought food and clothing when we were cold and hungry. Then more people from Kentucky moved to Nicodemus. They brought milk cows and extra food. Things began to improve. Soon Papa was plowing and planting crops in our own fields. I got to go to school. It didn't take me long to learn to read and write. I was so proud. This promised land is home to us now.