

## Teaching a Year 3 class, with mainly minority ethnic EAL children about the Irish famine as part of learning about Victorian Britain

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The following scheme of work covered 5 weeks and was taught after the class had spent 5 weeks learning about Victorian children at work.

It was taught as a cross curricular project so that the children's experience and learning was not limited to the 'history slot' once a week. The teacher used literacy time, story time and music time in addition.

There is a considerable amount of reinforcement through different approaches of the concepts and content. The children were not only young and inexperienced in the methodology of history, but with a majority from minority ethnic backgrounds, and with English as an additional language, it was important to ensure that they understood the material. Accordingly, the teacher went for depth rather than superficial coverage.

1. Planning  
Weeks 1-5
2. Timeline
3. Letter to emigrant



Whole class mind-map of why famines occur

## Week 1

| Key questions and issues   | Organisation                              | Resources & assessment opportunities   |
|--|---|--|
| Where is Ireland ; where are the main areas we will learn about – the West; England, London, Liverpool   | Whole class                               | World map<br>Map of UK<br>Large map of Ireland (from Ireland in Schools project)                                   |
| What does famine mean?   | Whole class                               | Brainstorm - all ideas accepted  |
| Why does a famine happen? Teacher introduces the potato blight as a cause  | Whole class                               | Brainstorm - all ideas accepted (see the children's work below)  |
| Why does a famine happen?  | Groups of 3 producing own spider diagrams | Opportunity to see how much chrn had understood & whether they included the potato blight                          |
| Sharing their work on causes of famine round the world: summarised and scribed on sugar paper, including definition of famine produced by children                                     |   | Opportunity to check on def. of famine and reinforce different causes, and specific one for Ireland                |
| Reading first chapter of Marita Conlon-McKenna, <i>Under the Hawthorn Tree</i> , O'Brien Press, 0-86278-206-6*   | Whole class                               | Questions about meanings of words & other difficulties encountered in text   |
| First ten minutes of the video of <i>Under the Hawthorn Tree</i> which more or less matching the section read aloud  | Whole class                               | Children asked to start thinking of questions they want to ask the characters who might visit the classroom later. |
| Large posters of famine abroad brought in and contemporary famines discussed in more detail (At the time, Northern Sudan is in the grips of a severe famine, which was on television.) | Whole class                               | Discussion- sharing of knowledge and opportunity to ask questions  |

\* See also, Irene Barber, *Under the Hawthorn Tree - The Great Irish Famine. A Study Guide to the Novel and the Film*, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-583-9

Before the next session, teacher had made a book which covered the whole 'story' of the Famine from 1845 through to 1850. This was entitled 'The Great Hunger – The Irish Famine in the 1840s'.\* It was illustrated with primary pictorial evidence found on the web, which was also enlarged, backed and laminated. All the pictorial material in the book would also be used for children to use for historical enquiry and interpretation. The backed pictures also went later onto a large class time line, along with the children's annotations

## Week 2

| Key questions and issues   | Organisation   | Resources & assessment opportunities  |
|--|--|---|
| Teacher shows and reads the book about the Famine<br>Explanation of why some people talked about th 'Great Hunger', and others the 'Famine'                    | Class on carpet. Questions about vocabulary and meaning throughout.<br>Discussed 'primary evidence' and 'being historians' with the children.  | Ready made (hand made) book telling story of the Famine in pictures and captions^<br>Opportunity to provide overview knowledge and understanding. |
| What does our primary evidence tell us?<br>Revision of idea that historians are 'detectives' who use clues to find out what happened.                          | Working in pairs, with one piece of pictorial evidence between them and large pieces of sugar paper divided in 3, children used post-its to write 'what I can see and know', 'what I think – my opinion', 'what I would like to know   | Opportunity to assess how far children could interrogate and interpret the evidence and what their understandings were                            |
| Making a human time line<br>Children become more familiar with pictorial evidence and chronology of the Famine Consolidating idea of chronology and time lines | Each child or pair has a picture or a caption which replicates the text and pictures in the book they had worked with earlier, and the pictures they had used for interpretation of evidence.<br>Revising the order 'Before, during and after the famine' teacher manages groups to stand and join the time line in the right order. Then they go through the story they have created in a 'human time line' | Ready made captions, pictures used for previous activity<br><br>Opportunity to reinforce chronology and help with vocabulary                      |
| Learning two Irish songs<br>Learning about and using different interpretations – this time through music<br>Opportunity to involve EAL pupils actively         | Children on carpet: Words of both songs printed out large and put on small board. Teacher sang the verses – children learned the choruses and joined in 'Athenrye' – explained that this was a song about Michael who stole corn to feed his child during the Famine 'Molly Malone' – not from the famine times, but still Irish!  |   |

During this week teacher prepared sheets of paper which would be blue tacked to the white board in random order. These were used in Week 3 for children to consolidate their understanding of the chronology.

\* Possible published alternative include

McKeown, Arthur, *The Great Hunger*, Franklin Watts, 0-74963-447-2; and

Wilson, L., *How I Survived the Irish Famine. The [Fictional] Diary of Mary O'Flynn*, Gill & Macmillan, 0-71713-150-5.

^ See pages 6-8 for captions/timeline labels. The illustrations are in Appendix 4 of in the appendices to Hilary Claire's Multiverse scheme at <http://www.multiverse.ac.uk/attachments/2b9e0b77-137f-434c-be3e-cffd3e951d59.pdf>.

### Week 3

| Key questions and issues   | Organisation  | Resources & assessment opportunities  |
|--|---|---|
| What is the chronology of the Famine?  | Chrn in groups of 2 and 3: each with large piece of sugar paper and sufficient strips of ready –cut paper for several events and pictures.<br>‘Events’ randomly scattered on the white board<br>Children choose at least 3 events, set in correct order, and draw an accompanying picture to illustrate. Primary pictorial evidence available to help with realistic detail | Opportunity for children to reinforced vocabulary and chronology – show they have understand; use same evidence again, and interpret in own way |
| Extract from video: 1 <sup>st</sup> ten minutes of <i>Under the Hawthorn Tree. The Great Irish Famine</i> , Channel 4,/O’Brien Press, O-86215-496-1*<br>Another interpretation of the same material, reinforces reading from the book, provides vocabulary, visual detail to ‘fix’ period and ideas<br><i>What do we want to know?</i> | Children watch video instructed to consider what they would like to ask Margaret – the mother in the video and story.<br>Teacher goes through possible questions on sugar paper and saves for next session later in week (uses literacy time)   | Video   |
| Revise the songs   |   |   |

### Week 4

| Key questions and issues  | Organisation  | Resources & assessment opportunities  |
|---|---|---|
| Hot seating ‘Margaret O’ Brien’ who visits the class<br>Opportunity for interactive oral work, and for teacher to feed in considerably more detail about the Famine in response to children’s questions | Children have prepared questions during literacy time, using notes saved from previous week.  | Opportunity to gauge depth of understanding through nature of questions and relevance                                 |
| Freeze frame work from the pictorial evidence<br>Interpretation through drama   | Children in groups of 3 working with a picture to develop 3 frames – before their picture, the picture itself, and what happens next. | Opportunity for children with EAL or more difficulty with written work to interpret material, working collaboratively |
| Finish with performance of the songs – invite the head teacher.   |   |   |

\* See also, Irene Barber, *Under the Hawthorn Tree - The Great Irish Famine. A Study Guide to the Novel and the Film*, O’Brien Press, O-86278-583-9

**Week 5**

| Key questions and issues   | Organisation  | Resources & assessment opportunities   |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Why do people leave their countries? Introduce vocabulary – emigrate and immigrate<br/>Reminder that we have found that nearly a million Irish immigrated during the Famine.<br/>Look at world map – where Irish went (and later) where their own parents come from</p>           | <p>Discussion with whole class on carpet, using sugar paper for notes about why people might leave their countries.<br/>Many children (and their teachers) are first or second generation immigrants and they know about their identities and where their parents came from Discussion of economic and political reasons for emigration (many of the children are refugees and others families' came for economic reasons).</p> | <p>Opportunity to bring the relevance of the historical material into the children's own lives and draw on their own experiences</p> |
| <p>Identity work – who are we and where are we from?</p>   | <p>Each child has gone home and asked for more information about their identity, roots and why parents have moved. Children write and draw individual biographies using literacy time</p>   |  |
| <p>Mrs A visits – a refugee from Ethiopia during the Civil War comes to talk to the class- why she left; what happened to her when she came to England; how she tries to keep Ethiopian culture alive<br/>Finally, children sing Mrs A the songs they have learned from Ireland.</p> | <p>Mrs A is parent of a child in the class and she knows several children. Children on carpet. Listen and ask questions.<br/>Mrs A interacts – asking them what other languages they speak, and addresses one or two in their own languages.</p>  | <p>Opportunity to assess how far children have understood concepts of migration.</p>   |

## Time line of the famine years with captions

*These were used with Yr 3 children and a selection can be given to students for the human time line. The captions, along with the pictorial evidence, can be made into a book for the children to read and keep in their class. (NB - pictures to illustrate all the captions are available on line, but it would be enough to give the captions to students for the purposes of this activity.)*

### **BEFORE THE FAMINE**

Most of the poorer people lived on potatoes, specially in the West of Ireland. Potatoes were easy to grow, good for us, and cheap if we needed to buy them.

### **BEFORE THE FAMINE**

We grew lots of potatoes and had enough to feed our families and to store some for the winter.

### **BEFORE THE FAMINE**

We even had enough potatoes to sell at the market.

### **BEFORE THE FAMINE**

Most of us lived on someone else's land. We were the tenants and we had to pay rent to the landlord. We also had to work for the landlord. We grew potatoes for ourselves, but we grew corn for the landlord.

### **BEFORE THE FAMINE**

We fed our pigs on potato peelings and had pork sometimes, or took the pig to market.

### **BEFORE THE FAMINE**

We collected seaweed to spread on the land and help the potatoes to grow well.

### **IN 1841, BEFORE THE FAMINE**

There were more than eight and a half million people living in Ireland.

### **BEFORE THE FAMINE**

There were about 2 million people who didn't have any land and travelled around looking for work on other people's farms.

### **DURING THE FAMINE**

About one million Irish people died.

### **DURING THE FAMINE AND IN THE YEARS AFTERWARDS**

About one and a half million had emigrated to other countries - America, Australia, Canada and England.

### **IN 1845 DURING THE FAMINE**

A terrible thing happened. Our potatoes got the blight and most rotted in the fields. We had very little to eat, not enough to save for the winter, and almost nothing to plant the next year.

**IN 1846 DURING THE FAMINE**

The potato crop failed again. The corn grew but our landlords sold it. Or it was too expensive for us to buy.

**DURING THE FAMINE**

There were quite a lot of other crops and animals, but the landlords sold them to England so there wasn't anything for us to eat.

**IN 1846 DURING THE FAMINE**

A Christian group called the Quakers set up a FAMINE RELIEF COMMITTEE. They gave people food, and clothes and bedding.

**IN 1846**

The Quaker Famine Relief Committee set up SOUP KITCHENS to try and help the starving people.

**IN 1847 DURING THE FAMINE**

The potato crop failed for the third time. People in other countries sent money to help. People in India, America, the Caribbean, France and even a Native American tribe sent money.

**IN 1848**

The potato crop failed for the fourth time.

**IN 1849**

There was another year when the potato crop failed. Now many people were quite desperate.

**ALL THROUGH THE FAMINE YEARS FOOD WAS BEING EXPORTED**

There was more food being exported (sent out for sale) than was coming in, even though people in Ireland were starving to death. The food being exported was guarded by soldiers, because the people were so angry and so hungry.

**IN EARLY 1846 - EVICTIONS STARTED**

Irish people who couldn't afford to pay the rent were EVICTED by the landlords. Then their houses were knocked down so the people couldn't move back in.

**DURING THE FAMINE YEARS**

People took the roads with their children, begging for help and for food.

**DURING THE FAMINE YEARS - SOUP KITCHENS**

People were given a ration ticket for food. Children got  $\frac{1}{2}$  ration and grown ups got one ration each.

**DURING THE FAMINE YEARS - EVICTIONS**

The landlord would give the family a NOTICE TO QUIT. Then he would come with soldiers and they would knock down the house.

**DURING THE FAMINE: IN DECEMBER 1848 - CHOLERA**

The terrible disease, CHOLERA, started to spread through the workhouses.  
The Prime Minister of Britain refused to help.

**DURING THE FAMINE YEARS - WORKHOUSES**

Lots of people ended up with nowhere to go to, except the WORKHOUSES. These were places run by the Government to help very very poor people. But it was horrible in the workhouses, and people would only go there if they were desperate.

**DURING THE FAMINE YEARS - EMIGRATION**

About two million people decided to leave Ireland and make a new life somewhere else. They went to America, Canada, Australia and to England. Some landlords paid their tenants to emigrate.

**DURING THE FAMINE YEARS - EVICTION**

The soldiers used crowbars to destroy people's homes, when they had evicted the family.

**DURING THE FAMINE - EMIGRATION**

The conditions on the ships taking people to other countries were often terrible. Many people hoping for a new chance, died on the ships.

**DURING THE FAMINE YEARS**

The British government was in charge of Ireland, but they did almost nothing to help the starving Irish people.

**DURING THE FAMINE - EMIGRATION**

It was very crowded on the ships taking people to America or Canada. A whole family would sleep in one bunk. Lots of people got ill, but there were no doctors or nurses, or medicines.

**In 1851, AFTER THE FAMINE HAD ENDED**

There were only six and a half million people left in Ireland.

**Transcript of a letter from Marthew Robinson, Liskey, Co. Tyrone, Ireland, to James Robinson, c/o James Haslim, No. 31 Exchange Street, Boston, America, 2 April 1847**

Liskey, April 2nd, 1847

Dear James

I once more take up my pen to Inform you that I am still in Good health hoping that these few lines will find you in the same[.] I wrote you a letter on the twentyfirst of March 1847 and for fear you would not get it I now write aga[in] for If you could do any thing to asist Joseph and me getting on this spring I would like that you would do it as fast as possible and the more asistance you would give all the better as I could afford to take the more of my plishining [?] that is to say beds and such like and send me word all the things we would require to have with us as I was thinking of of setting a lodgings and washing[.] there wer seven pounds sterling left of the fine of the land and I got two pounds fourteen shillings and your uncle Jack Robinson got the rest[.] thank God James Dear I had my health to suppo[rt] my self and If I was with you now I could tell you an old story about your neighbours and acquaintences for it is not easy to now who is either friend or foe these times[.] the people whom you thought was your nearest and Dearest friends has turned out to be costley friends to you[.]

Dear James you wanted to hear in your last letter all the news about Ireland[.] there is news plenty since you left this but the worst news for Ireland is the failour of the potatoe crop[.] I had better than a rood of potatoes set last year and I never got a shillingsworth of meat out of them[.] the oat meal is 2"6d the peck and all small farmers has to leave their houses and they people are Dying in all quarters with hunger and starvation[.] Hary Gin [?] is sold his place to the Bartons that was after our[.] Jack McKnight has sold his place and is for America[.] Brine O Coll [?] and his daughter went to New York at November last and Nedy Oneils son James went and has wrote home to the mother to sell our old place and to go to him[.] Aunt Nelleys two sons Peter and Francis Oneil is going out this spring their sister Mary sent for them[.] saly smith of Clochigh sent for her two sisters she sent ten pounds[.] David Smith of Clochigh sent ten pounds to his father he is Clerk in a store in New York and 24 pound a year[.] James Robbs Daughters sent 5 pounds to take away the sister and Couzin[.] tilda fulton is no more there was two months between Matilda and her[.] Dear James I paid a great deal of Debt since you went away a paid 8 pounds of D[ebt] since I come to Mr Kings and If I had not paid it I [...] been hear for every one leaped at me because I was wi[th] Mr King} send word If the Country would fit any of Your uncle Jacks Mr Grays Daughters as I would wish to h[ave] one of them with me for company[.] let me now if Jo[...] Jackson give you the two shirts and two pairs of socks I sent with him and let me now

how you are for shirts socks and all you would stand in need of as I wou[ld] take them with me if possible[.] When you send the m[oney?] you can send it in the same way you sent the last for I h[ad]

no trouble in getting it[.] I took in Thomas Mr Gowan to the Provincial Bank in Omagh and we got it at on[ce.] Widow Russell is in good health and she wishes to now if [...] Jackson got the letter that she sent and she would go to a[merica?] if they would give her any encouragement for Ireland is do[ne.] Mary Jacksons family is beging and the last letter they got when I went to hear it Read the part that began to speak about J cut so I Dropped them from that forward[.] they got three poun[ds] first and then they got four secondly[.] Dear James I wou[ld] not like to part with the watch to I would give it to your s[elf] and Dear James I long to get out of this country from among these poor people for starvation is pictured almost in all countenances[.] no more at present but remains your affecionet Mother to Death

Marthew Robinson

Dear James be mindfull of your duty to God and Keep from among bad company

Write as soon as this comes to hand

Write in Haist