

'Tha Shein Ukrosh'

A Mystery to investigate
the reasons for the existence
of an Irish diaspora

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1. The exercise

'Tha Shein Ukrosh'

The word 'diaspora' is used when a society is spread around the world away from the home country. There is, for example, a Jewish diaspora and also an African diaspora.

Tasks

In this exercise your first task will be investigate the question: Why is there an Irish diaspora?

You will then reflect upon how you approached the first task.

Task 1

To investigate the question ' Why is there a Irish diaspora?', you will work with prompt cards (page 3) in an open and unstructured way by doing the following.

1. Decide which cards are relevant or irrelevant to the issue. Are there any 'red herrings'?
2. Arrange the cards into groups where you can see links. Can you put headings to these groups?
3. Prepare a detailed explanation of your answer using selected cards.
4. You may want to identify one card which you think identifies the main reason, or provides a turning point.
5. You may wish to arrange some cards into a chronological sequence.

Task 2

This task is a debriefing exercise to see how you went about the first task and to evaluate which strategies worked best for you by considering, discussing, looking up, or asking about a list of 'thinking words' (page 7).

1. Choose any **3** skills from this list that you think you have used in this task, and be able to explain how and at which points you have used them.
2. Choose any **3** skills from this list that you **have** used in this task **and** in other subjects, and explain how and where you have used them.
3. Choose any **3** skills from this list that you have used in this task, and **could** use in other life situations and, again, explain where/ when/ how you could use them.

2. Cards for sorting

Around 400 years ago, Elizabeth I took away the lands of Irish rebels and placed English and Scottish settlers there. These settlements were known as Plantations, and their people, all Protestant, remained loyal to the English monarch.

About 300 years ago, Oliver Cromwell arrived in Ireland. He was determined to punish Royal supporters. He captured many important towns, but in Drogheda and Wexford, mass killings of unarmed townspeople took place.

By 1688,

70% of the population (Catholic) owned 20% of the land.

30% of the population (Protestant) owned 80% of the land.

Most Ulster Presbyterians were poor, small land holders and labourers, and were vulnerable to crop failures, smallpox and livestock diseases. Their landlords continually raised their rents.

The potato was introduced into Ireland, and quickly became the most important food in the country. By the 1840's many people could not afford to eat anything else. In the homes of poorer people, potatoes were eaten at every meal. In 1845, a disease attacked the potato crop in most countries in Europe. It was caused by a fungus. There was no known cure at the time. The crop failed again in 1846, 1848, 1849 and 1851.

As in most famines, children were particularly badly affected. They needed more nutrition than adults. Without a proper diet they became wizened and shrunken, looking like old men and women, their eyes bulging.

William Bennet, a Quaker, discovered in a village in 1847 :

" In one cabin was a sister, just dying, lying by the side of her little brother, just dead... When asked what was the matter, people replied 'Tha shein ukrosh' - indeed, the hunger. We learned the terrible meaning of that sad word 'ukrosh'.

Many died of starvation, but even more died from epidemic diseases arising from starvation. Typhus, relapsing fever, dysentery and scurvy swept Ireland during the famine, and cholera made an appearance in 1849. Together, famine and disease killed over one million people.

Even though the potato crop had failed, Ireland was producing many other foods. People in other countries could afford to pay good prices, and so large amounts of food were exported from Ireland.

Riots broke out in Galway in the west of Ireland in 1848, when crowds attacked a potato store.

Shortly before the famine, workhouses had been set up, as in England. Life in the workhouse was very unpleasant. However, in some places people were so hungry that they fought to get in.

From a newspaper of the 1840's :

" It was the most appalling sight I ever witnessed. Women, young and old, running wildly to and fro with small portions of their property to save it from the wreck - children screaming and mothers wailing... the bailiffs were given orders to pull down all the walls and root up the foundations in order to prevent the poor people from daring to take shelter in the ruins."

William Dillon, a shopkeeper, described areas of Liverpool when he said ...

"There is a place in Liverpool called 'Little Ireland', for most part lived in by Irish... It is filthy dirty, and covers a small space in which a great many people live - perhaps as many as three families in a house."

Liverpool was an important and busy port. Ships sailed from there to North America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The fare from Liverpool to America was the cheapest available - £3 to £5 for the cheapest type of passage, called steerage. The fare to Australia and New Zealand was between £15 and £20.

Many of the ships were unsuited to such long voyages, and sank before they reached their destinations. Very often there was not enough food or water on these ships and, because of overcrowding, disease spread rapidly. It has been said that about one out of every five people who left Ireland died on the voyage. The ships became known as 'coffin ships'.

Irish Overseas Emigration, 1825-75

1825 : 15,000 per year
1830 : 18,000 per year
1835 : 25,000 per year
1840 : 65,000 per year
1845 : 247,000 per year
1850 : 250,000 per year

1855 : 70,000 per year
1860 : 37,000 per year
1865 : 90,000 per year
1870 : 80,000 per year
1875 : 26,000 per year

"UNION IS STRENGTH"

A cartoon from *Punch* magazine
17 October 1846

John Bull (England) gives his Irish brother some food and a spade to 'earn your own way of living'.

Punch believed that self-help was the way forward, and saw Irish laziness as the cause of continuing disaster.



"HEIGHT OF IMPUDENCE"

A cartoon from *Punch* magazine
12 December 1846

Irishman to John Bull: 'Spare a trifle yer Honour, for a poor Irishman to buy a bit of - a Blunderbuss with.'

In this cartoon, John Bull is accosted by a violent Irishman demanding money for a weapon. 'Paddy' is given ape-like features. This became increasingly common in hostile images of the Irish.



"THE ENGLISH LABOURER'S BURDEN"
OR THE IRISH OLD MAN OF THE MOUNTAIN.

A cartoon from *Punch* magazine
24 February 1849

Loans from the British Government to help those affected by the famine were seen as unacceptable burdens on England's 'respectable' poor.



From 'The Decent Irish Boy', a nineteenth-century song about emigrant who found work and popularity in Glasgow:

I'm working here in Glasgow, I've got a decent job
I'm carrying bricks and mortar and me pay is fifteen bob
I rise up in the morning, I get up with the lark,
And as I'm walking down the street, you can hear the girls remark:
'Hello Patsy Fagan! You're the apple of me eye.'

From an emigrant letter, James Quinn, 'The Sinner of Hollywood', to his mother, 4 May 1923:

California is going to be my home, mama, and I wish you could decide to come out and live with me ... everything is so ideal here for old folks.... At present I'm doing well selling, and would stay at it if I could have my own business.... Do you know anyone who wants in on the ground floor of a 20,000 barrel a day proposition? NO, its not oil it's virgins. The Blessed Mother sells better than popcorn to the Latin element in California. I make between 20 and 30 bones a day working for the big guy, where if the stock was mine I'd be making \$50.

3. Thinking words

Plenary - what & how have we learned?

You will need to consider, discuss, look up, or ask about the following words:

adapt		evaluate		link	
apply		explain		negotiate	
assess		hypothesise		organise	
assumption		identify		prioritise	
compare		interpret		reflect	
contrast		interrelate		sequence	
convert		judge		structure	
decide		justify		summarise	
differentiate		juxtapose		visualise	

Working with a partner:

(Tick the boxes where you have used those skills in this piece of work.)

- ❖ Choose any **3** skills from this list that you think you have used in this task, and be able to explain how and at which points you have used them.
- ❖ Choose any **3** different skills from this list that you have used both in this task and in other subjects, and explain how and where you have used them in other subjects.
- ❖ Choose any **3** different skills from this list that you have used both in this task and in other situations in your life and, again, explain where/ when/ how.

Thinking skills in the National Secondary Strategy

A ‘mystery’ is a powerful activity which has been incorporated into the National Secondary Strategy programme for developing thinking skills. It is one of the ten exemplified strategies in the ‘Leading in Learning’ whole-school initiative.

Mysteries are designed to encourage pupils to deal with ambiguity, to make links between disparate, apparently unconnected pieces of information, fit them together to make sense of disorder, read between the lines, come up with a variety of ideas and evaluate them.

The normal procedure with a mystery is to give pupils one open question, such as in this case ‘ Why is there a Irish diaspora?’, and leave pupils to work with the cards (page 3) in an open and unstructured way to follow their own thinking patterns.

After they have given an initial explanation, supplementary tasks can be set with a more structured and precise focus in order to guide and scaffold their thinking.

The following questions/tasks provide some examples:

1. Decide which cards are relevant or irrelevant to the issue. Are there any ‘red herrings’?
2. Arrange the cards into groups where they can see links. Can they put headings to these groups?
3. Prepare a detailed explanation of their answer using selected cards.
4. They may want to identify one card which they think identifies the main reason, or provides a turning point.
5. They may wish to arrange some cards into a chronological sequence.

Debriefing the history will take the form of identifying, categorising and prioritising causes; patterns of change; drawing inference from sources, etc..

There is a concluding activity to debrief the thinking.

Students consider, discuss, look up, or asking about a list of ‘thinking words’ on page 7.

They then

1. Choose any **3** skills from this list that they think they have used in this task, and be able to explain how and at which points they have used them;
2. Choose any **3** skills from this list that they **have** used in this task **and** in other subjects, and explain how and where they have used them; and
3. Choose any **3** skills from this list that they have used in this task, and **could** use in other life situations and, again, explain where/ when/ how they could use them.

What is different about Irish emigration?

History of emigration

Although emigration from Ireland began in the pre-Christian era, it became a large-scale phenomenon only in the age of the first English empire, with considerable (but untallied) numbers leaving Ireland during the 17th and 18th centuries, sometimes for the Continent; more often for the British colonies in the western hemisphere.

Mass emigration, however, began only at the close of the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. Although sizeable emigration continues to the present day, the era of mass emigration from Ireland was from 1815 to the beginning of the First World War. A reasonable estimate is that between 1801 and 1921 at least 8 million Irish men, women, and children permanently left the country. Thus, the claim by President Mary Robinson, in December 1990, that there are over all the world 70 million persons who claim as part of their cultural heritage at least partial Irish descent, is not excessive.

Destinations

As for destinations, a simple formulation is that, prior to the Great Famine, Canada was the most common destination for Irish emigrants; between the Famine and the First World War, it was the United States of America; thereafter, it was Great Britain.

Difference 1 - emotionally loaded

Emigration as a concept in Irish historical writing and social criticism has a set of connotations and contextual limitations different from those which generally apply in European writing. In the world literature, migration, which means out-migration, is joined to in-migration (or 'immigration') to cover the general phenomenon of human movement, usually permanent, from one region or nation to another. The conceptual apparatus is not, for the most part, emotionally loaded and, a therefore, dispassionate 'laws' (or, at least, tendencies) for worldwide migration have been articulated by historians and social observers.

'Emigration' from Ireland, however, departs from this world-based conceptual structure in several ways. First, emigration is rarely seen as being part of a general migration process in which in-migration is recognized as being as important as out-migration. Secondly, emigration is usually treated as a singularly Irish phenomenon and not as part of larger processes which, in fact, affected all of western Europe during the same period. Third, emigration in much (though not all) of the literature is treated as something tragic, or as something for which the nation should be ashamed. A synthetic layer of 'exile' is cast over the entire phenomenon, even though it is clear that the majority of those who emigrated from Ireland did so as part of a set of conscious decisions which, in most cases, improved their life-chances.

Two central issues

Historians of emigration in Ireland have yet to resolve two central issues of debate. The first is the extent to which emigrants from Ireland were selected. That is, did the best leave, or the dregs, and what does the answer mean for understanding the Irish society which the emigrants left behind? The second question is whether or not the large-scale migration hurt Ireland economically. On the one hand, economic historians point out that surplus labourers were siphoned off, thus reducing the number of economically dependent individuals. A counter-argument suggests that the individuals who left were those most likely to have been the recipients of social investment (especially primary education) and that their emigration effectively exported to other nations the Irish social capital invested in them.

Difference 2 - role of women

Among the most notable characteristics of Irish emigration from 1815 to the present day is that (uniquely among European nations) Irish women were as large a part of the emigrant stream as were Irish men. This had implications both for Ireland (unlike most European countries, a surplus of single females did not develop) and for the new homelands: the numbers of women were sufficiently balanced to make it possible for Irish-born persons to marry within their own ethnic group.

How helpful is the term 'Irish diaspora'?

Diaspora is a concept that during the 1990s became fashionable in world history and in the specific Irish context as well. Indications of each of these phenomena are: that in 1995 the International Congress of Historical Sciences denominated 'Peoples in Diaspora' as one of the three central themes of historical research for the 1990s; and, in her inaugural speech as president of Ireland in December 1990, Mary Robinson articulated a concern with the Irish diaspora, a major theme of her presidency.

'Diaspora' comes from the Greek word for 'dispersal'. Its primary reference until the later 20th century was to the diaspora of the ancient Israelites and their descendants, the Jewish people. The term came to be used during the 1970s by historians of peoples whose historical origin was Africa. It also became common currency among Armenian historians. Thence it spread to almost every group that has had a history of widespread out-migration. Political scientists tend to limit the term to groups who are minorities (frequently refugee minorities) in larger polities and who identify more with their former homelands than with their new homes. Historians, however, have not limited the concept in that way.

Whether the concept will replace the older one of 'emigration' in the context of Irish history is uncertain. 'Diaspora' has the advantage of removing the Irish homeland as the metropole through which all Irish dispersal must be apprehended. Unlike emigration, 'diaspora' permits a multi-generational study of the dispersal of Irish culture around the world. On the other hand, if it becomes simply another word for 'out-migration', then nothing is gained.

State aid or self-help in the Irish Famine?

What was Ireland like in 1845?

Ireland in 1845 was part of the United Kingdom, governed from London, and was on the verge of a major disaster. Its population was over 8 million. Many lived on small plots of land on which it was possible to survive only because most of these people ate potatoes as the main part of their food. In 1845 the potato crop failed, destroyed by a fungus, the potato blight. It failed again in 1846 and 1848.

How severe was the suffering in Ireland during the famine?

All contemporary accounts emphasise the horrific conditions, with *'cowering wretches almost naked in the savage weather prowling in turnip fields ... little children, their bodies half-naked, their faces bloated yet wrinkled and of a pale greenish hue [colour] ... children who could never, oh it was too plain, grow up to be men and women.'*

Daniel O'Connell, the Irish leader, told the House of Commons: *'Ireland is in your hands, in your power. If you do not save her, she cannot save herself. I solemnly call on you to recollect that I predict with the sincerest conviction that a quarter of her population will perish unless you come to her relief.'*

By the time the famine ended in 1850, about one million people died of starvation or diseases associated with famine. A further million left the country, mainly migrating to North America and Britain.

What did the government do to help?

Successive British governments took three main measures to provide famine relief.

First, they imported grain, Indian corn, into Ireland, partly to give people food to eat and partly to try to keep the price of food down.

Secondly, they set up public works so that people could earn money to buy food. By February 1847 700,000 people were so employed but by the middle of the year nearly all work had ceased.

Thirdly, soup kitchens provided food in the form of a porridge called 'stirabout'. This government aid was in addition to the shelter provided by overcrowded workhouses and the relief given by private charity, most notably by the Society of Friends (Quakers). The Quakers gave food, clothing and seed where they were most needed.

Did the government do enough?

Many people thought that the British government did not do enough to help relieve the suffering in Ireland. They thought that the government could have stopped the export of food from Ireland and could have given more money to relieve the suffering instead of making people earn money on public works.

Why did the government not do more?

The government's actions were, however, limited by two factors. *First*, there was the policy of *laissez-faire*, the Victorian belief about the proper role of government. Victorians believed that the government's main duty was to maintain law and order, defend the realm, and keep public expenditure to the minimum. Governments should not interfere with the economy or the private lives of people. There should be a 'free market' for people to buy and sell goods as they wished. People should stand on their own two feet. To provide free food would take away the self-respect of Irish people, who would be better off earning their food. More importantly, it would stop private traders from making up for the shortage of food.

Secondly, leading figures in England were suspicious of the Irish. They thought that the Irish were exaggerating the extent of suffering to extract money from England. At the Treasury (where the British government's money was managed), the most important civil servant was Charles Trevelyan. Unsympathetic to the Irish, thinking them a disorderly race, he was more interested in saving money than in saving lives.

Punch & the Famine

The English satirical journal, *Punch*, consistently under-estimated the severity of the crisis in Ireland and depicted the famine as a moral issue. It blamed indolence of the Irish for the continuation of the famine and for 'sponging' on the British taxpayer. Hard work or industry (symbolised by a shovel) at home or emigration were *Punch's* answers to poverty in Ireland.

In the main, British press coverage of the Famine was coloured by anti-Irish prejudice and political and practical considerations. The general tenor was that the Irish were a backward race and lived on inferior food - the potato; they were ungrateful and disloyal; Ireland was a drain on British resources; and Britain was being flooded with Irish paupers. *Punch*, in particular, along with *The Times* 'reinforced traditional animosities and alienated the sympathies of the British upper and middle classes'.

What were the consequences of the Famine?

The Famine had important consequences for Ireland and, particularly, for relations between Britain and Ireland. Many in Ireland resented the actions of the government or at best saw them as inadequate. This helped to make Irish people even more bitter towards England. Such bitterness took root in the new Irish communities abroad, especially in America. It helped to motivate Irish nationalist movements, providing supporters of Irish Home Rule with an argument for demanding separation from Britain.

Some songs about leaving Ireland

1. MY BETSY

Our ship is now waiting, her anchor she's weighing,
Farewell to the land that I'm going to leave;
My Betsy has parted with father and mother,
With me for to cross o'er the wide western wave.

So hasten dear Betsy, my dear blue-eyed lassie,
Bid farewell to Mother and come with me;
I'll do my endeavour to make your heart cheery.
Till we reach the green fields of Americay

2. THOUSANDS ARE SAILING TO AMERICA

This song simply tells of those people who are emigrating to America and who 'can no longer stay' in Ireland.

Oh, you brave Irish people, wherever you be,
I pray stand a moment and listen to me.
Your sons and brave daughters are now going away,
And thousands are sailing to Americay.

CHORUS:

*Ah good luck to them now, and safe may they land,
They are pushing their way to a far distant strand,
For here in old Ireland no longer can stay,
For thousands are sailing to Americay.*

On the night before leaving they're bidding goodbye;
And it's early next morning their hearts give a sigh.
They will kiss their dear mothers and then they will say
Goodbye, father dear I'm now going away.
(CHORUS)

It is now you will hear that very last cry,
And a handkerchief waving and bidding goodbye.
The old man tells them be sure to write
And watches the ship till she goes out of sight.
(CHORUS)

3. THE LEAVING OF LIVERPOOL

This song is sung by a sailor. His ship is ready to leave Liverpool for California. When he returns from this long journey he says he will marry his girlfriend whom he is leaving behind.

Fare you well the Princes landing stage,
River Mersey fare you well.
I'm off to California,
A place I know right well.

CHORUS:

So fare you well my own true love,
When I return, united we shall be.
It's not the leaving of Liverpool that grieves me,
But my darling when I think of you.

I'm off to California,
By the way of the stormy Cape Horn,
And I will send you a letter, love,
When I am homeward bound.
(CHORUS)

The tug is waiting at the pierhead
To take us down the stream,
Our sails are loose and our anchor secure,
So I'll bid you good-bye once more.
(CHORUS)

4. THE DACENT IRISH BOY

The hero of this song has emigrated to Glasgow, where he has found work and is very popular.

I'm working here in Glasgow, I've got a decent job
I'm carrying bricks and mortar and me pay is fifteen bob
I rise up in the morning, I get up with the lark,
And as I'm walking down the street, you can hear the girls remark:

'Hello Patsy Fagan! You're the apple of me eye.
Hello Patsy Fagan! You're the apple of me eye.
You're a dacent boy from Ireland, there's no one can deny.
You're a rarem taren, divil may caren dacent Irish boy.'

5. THE MOUNTAINS OF MOURNE

This song is a love letter from an Irish immigrant in London to Mary, his wife or sweetheart, whom he has left behind in County Down. He tells her what he has done, the people he has seen and some of the differences between life in London and Ireland.

Oh, Mary this London's a wonderful sight,
With the people here working by day and by night.
They don't sow potatoes nor barley nor wheat,
But there's gangs of them digging for gold in the street;
At least, when I asked them that's what I was told,
So I just took a hand at this digging for gold,
But for all that I found there I might as well be,
Where the mountains of Mourne sweep down to the sea.

I believe that when writing a wish you expressed
As to how the fine ladies of London were dressed.
Well if you believe me, when asked to a ball,
They don't wear a top to their dresses at all.
Oh, I've seen them myself, and you could not in truth
Say if they were bound for a ball or a bath.
Don't be starting those fashions now, Mary Macree,
Where the mountains of Mourne sweep down to the sea

An emigrant letter

James Quinn, 'The Sinner of Hollywood', to his mother, 4 May 1923

James was trying to make his fortune in America by selling religious statues in California. His ultimate fate is not known but, even allowing for obvious bravado, Hollywood certainly offered James opportunities which it is doubtful he would ever have had in Ireland.

Dearest Mother,

This is a special for you. I wrote a general letter few days ago, telling of my punk luck.

california is going to be my home, mama, and I wish you could decide to come out and live with me. You could do me a whole fork-ful of good. And everything is so ideal here for old folks. Of course, I wouldn't want you to come until I had a decent home fixed up.

I'm still an adventurer. Every morning I wake up and say 'Oh Life! Where is thy wallup?' and go forth to seek said kick without which I can't exist. Whether I get it in going up in a plane, shoving the gas to my Henry T Ford at the tune of 45 per, or acquiring a new love affair, I just simply got to get it. By the way, I'd love to tell you of my "amores" since I hit california. I had to buy a file and index my love letters. I was getting so mixed up. When I fall for a fresh sweetie I just naturally sheik her around and boost myself, until the soup gets too thick, then I crawl out and look for someone with more appeal, usually on the eve of a marriage. You must know a girl at least two days before marrying her in the crowd I mix with. so I have a new sweet mama three times a week.

I'm not hell on looks, but when it comes sheiking "Move over, Valentino, and let me show you how!" Next month I will be back in Hollywood seeking a job. If I went back as an extra now, I'd lose all chance of getting a part later. At present I'm doing well selling, and would stay at it if I could have my own business. But I lack capital. DO you know anyone who wants in on the ground floor of a 20,000 barrel a day proposition? NO, it's not oil it's virgins. The Blessed Mother sells better than popcorn to the Latin element in california. I make between 20 and 30 bones a day working for the big guy, where if the stock was mine I'd be making \$50.

Love.

J