

Why is the Irish Famine important in British & Irish History?

Lesson 1

What was it like to live in Ireland in the early 19th century?

The complete four-lesson unit is available on-line:

Student workbook: http://hometown.aol.co.uk/KHA200/Famine_Important_2_Wkbk.pdf

Notes for teachers: http://hometown.aol.co.uk/KHA200/Famine_Important_1_Notes.pdf

Nottingham Pilot Scheme (Christ the King School)

'Ireland in Schools'

School of Education, University of Nottingham

Key question 1: What was life like in Ireland in the early nineteenth century?

Lesson objectives By the end of this lesson pupils will	Starter activity	Main activity	Plenary	Learning outcomes All pupils will be able to ...
<p>1. know that (a) population increase in Ireland was high and this put pressure on the land and (b) the advantages and disadvantages of relying on the potato as the main source of food;</p> <p>2. understand that hand in hand with poverty there existed a rich and enduring culture.</p>	<p>Pupils in pairs match up key words with definitions (A4 sheet), in pencil first. Discuss answers and ensure everyone understands the key terms.</p>	<p>1. Examine sources 1-3 with class; in groups of 4 pupils freeze-frame one of the sources. Give each group an opportunity to do a ‘tunnel of thoughts’ from the characters in their scene.</p> <p>2. Read sources 4-10; discuss questions 2-4 before pupils record the answers.</p> <p>3. For question 5 use a visual image of a set of scales surrounded by key words. Working in pairs pupils can ‘weigh up’ the negative and positive aspects of life in pre-Famine Ireland. This can be used for a piece of extended writing to question 5. Use knowledge of pupils’ abilities to suggest level of response and number of key word/phrases they should include in their answer.</p>	<p>‘Snowball’ activity - ask one pupil to say a fact they have learned in lesson; they in turn name another pupil who repeats the first fact and adds one more, then names another pupil who repeats the first two facts before adding another and so on. Give a target - e.g., keep ‘snowball’ going until someone can repeat 8-10 different facts.</p>	<p>1. give 5 facts about life in Ireland before the Famine (highlighting both positive and problematic aspects);</p> <p>2. explain the contrast between poverty and culture, a few by using 5 key words (less able), most by using 10 key words and supporting detail from the sources (core), some by using all/most key words and supporting argument using sources and statistics/graphs (G&T).</p>
<p>Key words: landlords, tenants, population growth, sub-division, folk tradition, poverty.</p>				
<p>Cross-curricular issues: literacy - key words; numeracy - graphs; citizenship - 2c, 3a; thinking skills - information processing, creative thinking, evaluation.</p>				
<p>SEN: peer support plus stepped activity to question 5.</p>			<p>G&T: question 5 - expectations of higher level response</p>	
<p>Homework: question 5 could be completed using the ‘scales’ prompt sheet.</p>				

1. What was it like to live in Ireland in the early 19th century?



1. Festive group dancing to the 'uilleann' pipes, Waterford, by S.T. Roche, 1820s



2. *Children Dancing at the Crossroads* by T. Fowler, c. 1850



3. *The Market-place at Ennis* by W.T. de Lond, c. 1845

'The young women carry their white stockings and dress shoes in their hands going to the Cushendall Fair, till they are just at the entrance to the village; they then stop at the nearest stream and wash and dress.'

4. Cushendall Fair, early 19th century, M.E. Collins, *Ireland 3*



5. A landlord's house



6. His tenants' cabins

80 per cent of Irish people lived in the countryside and worked on the land. However, they did not own the land they farmed. Instead the land was owned by about 20,000 landlords. Each landlord had a large estate of thousands of acres. He divided his land into farms and rented them out to tenant farmers. If the tenants did not pay their rent they were evicted from (thrown out of) their farms. Tenants lived in farmhouses or small cabins. Landlords lived in large houses with servants and fine food. Some, called absentee landlords, did not live in Ireland at all, but lived on estates in England.

7. Landlords and tenants

	GB	Ireland
1801	10.7	5.2m
1821	14.2	6.8m
1841	18.5	8.2m

8. Population growth

Population growth was higher in some parts of Ireland than others, putting great pressure on land. A common practice, especially in the West, was for tenants to divide their land among their sons. Sub-division created many small farms in Ireland as the sons themselves also sub-divided land. Many thousands of families thus had to exist on smaller and smaller plots of land.

9. Sub-division of land

Upon average, a man, his wife and four children, will eat thirty-seven pounds of potatoes a day. The family live on potatoes and buttermilk six days a week; the Sabbath is generally celebrated by bacon and greens ... An Englishman, seeing a number of fine florid children in a cabin, said to the father: 'How do your countrymen manage to have so many fine children?' 'It is the potato, sir,' said he.

10. A visitor to Ireland, 1806

For about a century and a half, the potato has been the only food of the peasantry of Ireland. A very limited portion of land, a few days labour, and a small amount of manure will create a stock upon which a family may exist for twelve months.... Nearly every soil will produce potatoes; they may be seen growing from almost barren rock on the side of a mountain, and in the bog where the foot would sink many inches in the soil.

11. A visitor to Ireland, 1843

Year	Acres (000)	Produce (000 tons)
1844	2,378	14,862
1845	2,516	10,063
1846	1,999	2,999
1847	284	2,046
1848	810	3,077
1849	719	4,024

12. The potato crop, 1844-49

		A. West	B. Midlands & the South	C. North & East
	Farm size	Small, less than 5 acres (usually ½ - 1½).	Usually large, most were over 30 acres.	Mostly under 30 acres.
	Type of farming	Infertile land made potatoes the main crop.	Dairy farms for milk and butter. Cattle fattened for export to Britain.	Fertile land made mixed farming possible and profitable - wheat potatoes and flax in the North. Cows were also kept for meat, milk and butter.
	Homes	Small cottages or cabins housing farm labourers or cottiers.	Sturdy, comfortable but usually not luxurious.	Small, thatched cottages
13. Economic regions of Ireland				

- Look at sources 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6.
Freeze-frame one of the scenes.
What do the pictures tell you about life in Ireland in the early nineteenth century?
- Look at sources 7 & 8.
Make a bar chart, comparing population growth in Great Britain and Ireland.
Calculate the rate of population growth in Britain and Ireland.
Using source 7 and your knowledge of the economic development of Britain in the early nineteenth century, why do you think that Britain could absorb population increase more readily than Ireland.
- Look at sources 9-11.
How do they help to explain how Ireland was able to support a more rapid increase in population than Britain?
- Look at sources 12 & 13.
What are the disadvantages of relying on the potato as the main source of food?
Which part of Ireland would you expect to be worst hit by the failure of the potato crop?
- Taking into account all these things, how far do you think that 'the grinding poverty endured by the poor, pre-Famine Ireland' was balanced by 'the exuberance of its folk tradition in music and dance'?