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Why is it important to study the Great Irish Famine?

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In 1997, the people of Ireland and of Irish descent around the world observed the 150th anniversary of the worst year (1847) of the Great Irish Famine, a catastrophe precipitated by a fungus that destroyed the potato harvests of 1845, 1846, 1848 and 1849. To mark the Great Irish Famine commemoration in New York State, the state legislature voted that studying the famine in Ireland be included in the Human Rights curriculum required in the state's public schools. The curriculum already included the study of slavery in the Americas and the European Holocaust.

The State Education Department selected the Hofstra University Department of Curriculum and Teaching to coordinate the development of Learning Experiences and instructional materials for grades 4 through 12, that are designed within the framework of the New York State Learning Standards. In addition to copies forwarded to all New York State school districts, the final curriculum eventually will be available on the internet, and as a CD-ROM.

The consequences of the Great Irish Famine altered more than the course of Irish history; the Irish diaspora changed the shape of world history, especially that of the United States, Canada, Australia and England. In the 1990 federal census, 44 million Americans voluntarily reported their ethnicity as Irish. Irish immigrants and Irish-Americans have made significant contributions to every phase of American life, including politics, labor, sports, religion, arts, entertainment, and business. They produced American mayors, governors and presidents. They invented the submarine and discovered the Comstock Lode. They earned more Congressional Medals of Honor than any other ethnic group, and they helped build the American labor move-

ment. They wrote about the American dream, and they lived it. Irish immigrants have also known discrimination, poverty and hunger, and the harrowing details of their lives have been described by Irish-American writers.

New York State is especially proud of its Irish heritage. In 1855, 26 percent of the population of Manhattan had been born in Ireland. By 1900, 60 percent of the population was of Irish descent. Today, thousands of New Yorkers trace their ancestry to famine-era immigrants who helped develop the infrastructure, the economy, and the social and political institutions of our state.

The Great Irish Famine occurred in a period where England, countries in continental Europe, and the United States were developing industrially and as modern states. The famine challenged the British government, international humanitarian organizations and philanthropic private individuals to provide aid to massive numbers of poor Irish, many living in remote areas, who were suffering from starvation and famine-related disease. The degree to which those involved responded continues to draw praise and condemnation more than a century later. The ideas they debated about the responsibility of government are still being discussed today.

Studies of the Great Irish Famine suggest that famine-related deaths and the accompanying mass emigration were the result of multiple causes, including a food shortage, the lack of individual resources to obtain food, and the failure of the government to adequately regulate markets and provide sufficient support. It is important to note that the economy of England in the 1840s was probably roughly equivalent to the economy of Indonesia today; however, it was the most advanced economy of its time. Economic conditions in Ireland were probably very similar to those contemporary Somalia.

One of the most vexing questions about the Great Irish Famine is the question of the availability of food. The Irish historian Mary E. Daly has calculated that by 1846 there was a significant food shortage with sufficient provisions for only five or six million of Ireland's population of over eight million. While there is no question there were serious food shortages, other commentators have argued that starvation was more the result of the inability

of the poor to purchase existing food. Significantly, the 1998 Nobel Laureate economist Amartya Sen has presented the same case for the Indian famines of the 1940s.

Perhaps the most compelling reason to study the Great Irish Famine is that hunger and homelessness are still with us; that there is want in a world of wealth. The famine's legacy has affected the psyches of the Irish and the Irish of the diaspora teaching us that distress and dislocation have long-term consequences on its victims and their descendants. The lessons of the Great Irish Famine have a claim on our fundamental humanity; they remind us that we have an opportunity to help our neighbors who face similar suffering. Students studying the Great Irish Famine in the context of other famines will develop a better understanding of the factors which contribute to famine in today's world and may, as a result, become actively concerned about the human right to adequate nourishment.

In addition, the Great Irish Famine provides a case study when exploring social concepts such as culture, religion, economics, scarcity, democracy, citizenship, public policy, and demographics and issues in science such as nutrition and the environment. Language arts lessons consider the literature of the Great Irish Famine and other famines in a comparative context and explore the way that the Great Irish Famine continues to provide themes, metaphors and symbols for contemporary Irish writers. The arts explore the visual, musical and dramatic representations of the Great Irish Famine. Overall, the curriculum enables students to examine and understand the intersection of art, music, and literature with science, culture and history.

The Great Irish Famine Curriculum and the New York State Learning Standards

The Great Irish Famine Curriculum is designed specifically to encourage the exploration of key concepts and develop critical skills outlined in the New York State Learning Standards for Social Studies.

Standard 1: History of the United States and New York

Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in the history of the United States and New York.

The study of Irish immigration to the United States and New York before, during and after the Great Irish Famine will: a) contribute to student understanding of the development of American culture, its diversity and multicultural context; b) illustrate the connections and interactions of people and events across time; and c) involve learning about the important roles and contributions of individuals and groups in United States and New York State history. Studying the Irish experience and comparing it to the expe-

riences of other groups will help students to better understand the problems confronting immigrants and the achievements of ethnic minorities throughout United States history.

Standard 2: World History

Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments and turning points in world history and examine the broad sweep of history from a variety of perspectives.

The study of the history of Ireland and Ireland's relationship with Great Britain, political conflicts, religious issues, the impact of the potato and the Columbian exchange on life in Ireland, the causes, responses to, and results of the Great Irish Famine and the study of events in Ireland in the context of other global catastrophes will: a) contribute to student understanding of world cultures and civilizations, including an analysis of important ideas, social and cultural values, beliefs and traditions; b) facilitate an examination of the human condition, the connections and interactions of people across time and space, and the ways different people view the same event or issue from a variety of perspectives; c) help students understand time frames and periodizations, make it possible to examine themes across time and within cultures, and focus on important turning points in world history; d) involve learning about the important roles and contributions of individuals and groups to world history and civilizations. In addition, the use of primary source historical documents, charts, graphs, literature, art, and music and a focus on historical complexity and multiple perspectives will enhance skills of historical analysis, including the ability to investigate differing and competing interpretations of the theories of history, hypothesize about why interpretations change over time, explain the importance of historical evidence, and understand the concepts of change and continuity over time.

Standard 3: Geography

Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of the geography of the interdependent world in which we live—local, national and global—including the distribution of people, places and environments over the earth's surface.

The study of the global migration of people and products, especially the impact of the potato and the Columbian exchange on life in Ireland and Irish emigration before, during and after the Great Irish Famine, an exploration of the Irish environment and its impact on historical events in Ireland and the world, and an examination of the relationship between demography, geography, resources, and historical events will: a) illustrate the essential elements in geographic analysis: understanding the world in spatial

terms, places and regions, physical settings (including natural resources), human systems, environment and society and the use of geography; and b) enhance the ability of students to ask and answer geographic questions; analyze theories of geography and acquire, organize, and analyze geographic information.

Standard 4: Economics

Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of how the United States and other societies develop economic systems and associated institutions to allocate scarce resources, how major decision-making units function in the United States and other national economies, and how an economy solves the scarcity problem through market and non-market mechanisms.

The study of the economic history of Ireland, including changing land ownership patterns, agricultural production by landless tenants, tenant-landlord relationships, Ireland's relationship with Great Britain, the development of economics as a social science influencing public policy decisions, and the short-and long-term impact of public policy decisions on economic markets, the allocation of food resources, relief plans, human hunger, and human survival will: a) contribute to student understanding of major economic concepts and systems, the principles of economic decision making and the interdependence of economies and economic systems throughout the world; and b) enhance the ability of students to make informed and well-reasoned economic decisions in daily and national life.

Standard 5: Civics, Citizenship and Government

Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of the necessity for establishing governments; the governmental system of the United States and other nations; the United States Constitution; the basic civic values of American constitutional democracy; and the roles, rights and responsibilities of citizenship, including avenues of participation.

The study of the history of Ireland and its relationship to Great Britain, including the absence of democracy and home rule, repeated Irish rebellions against British authority and public policy debates before, during and after the Great Irish Famine will: a) contribute to student understanding of civics, citizenship and government, and basic civic values (such as justice, honesty, self-discipline, due process, equality, majority rule with respect for minority rights, and respect for self, others, and property); b) involve learning about political systems, the purposes of government, and civic life, and the differing assumptions held by people across time and place regarding power, authority, governance, and law; and c) enhance the ability of students to probe ideas and assumptions, ask and answer analytical

questions, take a skeptical attitude toward questionable arguments, evaluate evidence, formulate rational conclusions and develop and refine participatory skills.

The Great Irish Famine is designed to support student mastery of the Learning Standards for the English Language Arts.

Standard 1: Language for Information and Understanding

Students will read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding. As listeners and readers, students will collect data, facts and ideas; discover relationships, concepts and generalizations, and use knowledge generated from oral, written and electronically produced texts. As speakers and writers, they will use oral and written language to acquire, interpret, apply and transmit information. Students' study of the Great Irish Famine will involve research projects and presentations; they will work individually and collectively to gather evidence from a variety of sources, to evaluate primary source documents, to discover relationships and to develop concepts and generalizations about the materials. Students will write persuasively about topics using their research to support their arguments, developing appropriate rhetorical structures and presenting their information and interpretation clearly, concisely and comprehensibly.

Standard 2: Language for Literary Response and Expression

Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression. Students will read and listen to oral, written and electronically produced texts and performances. They will draw on their own experiences to develop an understanding of the diverse social, historical and cultural dimensions that the texts and performances represent. As speakers and writers, students will use oral and written language for self-expression and artistic creation.

Students will respond to the literature of the Great Irish Famine, making reference to the literary elements in the text and connections with their personal knowledge and experience. They will examine the way that the Great Irish Famine experience continues to provide themes, metaphors and symbols for contemporary Irish and Irish-American writers and will identify different levels of meaning in the works. Students will consider Irish famine literature and write about the texts in terms of the different cultural settings, pointing out similarities and differences. Students will write their own responses to the famine texts: stories, poems, plays and literary essays; they will also produce books of stories and poems about Ireland for younger children.

Standard 3: Language for Critical Analysis and Evaluation

Students will read, write, listen, and speak for critical analysis and evaluation. As listeners and readers, students will analyze experiences, ideas, information and issues presented by others using a variety of established criteria. As speakers and writers, they will present, in oral and written language and from a variety of perspectives, their opinions and judgments about experiences, ideas, information and issues.

Students will develop essays, position papers, speeches and debates about the Great Irish Famine in the context of the wider challenges of hunger and homelessness. They will analyze issues, ideas, texts and experiences and support their positions with well-developed arguments that make effective use of details and supporting evidence.

Standard 4: Language for Social Interaction

Students will read, write, listen, and speak for social interaction. Students will use oral and written language for effective social communication with a wide variety of people. As readers and listeners, they will use their social communications with others to enrich their understanding of people and their views.

Students will use effective speech to interact with community members while participating in a hunger or homelessness community service activity. They will participate in an electronic discussion group, an e-mail exchange with Irish counterparts involving exchanges about the topics of the Great Irish Famine and immigration. Students will develop the persona of a famine-era character and write a series of letters to readers of the *New York Tribune*.

Because *The Great Irish Famine Curriculum* Guide includes a number of interdisciplinary cultural projects, it supports student mastery of the Learning Standards for the Arts.

Standard 1: Creating, Performing, and Participating in the Arts

Students will create and compose original work in their media: dance, music, theatre and visual arts. Student musicians will compose original works and perform musical works composed by others. Student actors will create and perform theatrical pieces, as well as perform in dramatic works composed by others. Students of the visual arts will make works of art that explore different kinds of subject matter, topics, themes and metaphors.

Activities and projects related to *The Great Irish Famine Curriculum* provide opportunities for dance students to learn traditional Irish dances and to choreograph their own works based on traditional forms; musicians to perform

Irish traditional music and to learn techniques such as fiddling styles and sean nós singing; theatre students to perform monologues which express the experiences of different characters in a famine village, and artists to develop an idea for a work of art that would be a memorial to famine victims of the Great Irish Famine or another famine.

Standard 2: Knowing and Using Arts Materials and Resources

Students will know about the materials and resources appropriate to their media. Students will become familiar with the collections: archival, print and electronic material in the students' fields. Students will pay particular attention to the technologies available to practitioners in each arts area.

The Great Irish Famine Curriculum provides opportunities for dance students to research particular styles of Irish dancing, for music students to collect data on Irish traditional music groups in the United States, for theatre students to form a production team to work to carry out the artistic concept of a director who is working with a new play on a hunger or homelessness theme, and for visual arts students to exhibit their famine pieces in a group show and write the descriptive material.

Standard 3: Responding to and Analyzing Works of Art

Students will respond critically to a variety of works in the arts, connecting individual work to other works and to other aspects of human endeavor and thought.

Students will reflect on, interpret and evaluate works in their media using the appropriate critical language and will demonstrate their understanding of principal elements in their media by framing their responses in terms of critical concepts.

The Great Irish Famine Curriculum will provide opportunities for dance students to develop their own aesthetic responses to Irish dance; for music students to analyze a traditional Irish "seisiún" (informal music session), for theatre students to compare live theatre with film performances of Irish plays, and for visual arts students to respond to and analyze contemporary Irish visual arts that commemorate the Great Irish Famine.

Standard 4: Understanding the Cultural Dimensions and Contributions of the Arts

Students will develop an understanding of the personal and cultural forces that shape artistic communication and how the arts in turn shape the diverse cultures of past and present society.

Students will study media in a world cultural context and

will understand how past and present cultures are expressed through the arts. They will explore the role the arts play in the lives of a people.

The Great Irish Famine Curriculum provides opportunities for dance students to study the way movement is used in different cultural settings, including Irish set dancing at American wakes; for music students to examine how Irish traditional music and the African-American spiritual shared certain musical elements in songs that expressed their group sense of sorrow; for theatre students to explain how Irish-American ethnic theatre supported or undermined Irish acceptance in America; and for students of the visual arts to see the gendered relationship between the visual and the literary representations of the Great Irish Famine and other famines, such as the Indian famines of the 1940s.

The Great Irish Famine (1845-52): An Historical Introduction

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The main goal of *Teaching the New York State Standards With The Great Irish Famine Curriculum* is to make accessible to public school students in New York State the history of the Great Irish Famine in the context of Irish history and culture. The curriculum writers have prepared Learning Experiences that have a variety of activities, handouts, and audio-visual materials, drawn from the best and most up-to-date historical scholarship. Their work has been reviewed by teams of historians and literary scholars in Ireland, as well as in the United States. This section offers an historical introduction providing teachers with a brief summary of events during the famine years.

Much is still not known about the human impact of the Great Irish Famine and debate continues about the interpretation of certain events. Even the dates assigned to the Great Irish Famine vary. The 1845-1852 dates chosen for the curriculum are based on Joel Mokyr's work on famine-related deaths (1983). Teachers can explain to students that history involves both research and constant re-evaluation. Selected historical sources are provided at the end of this essay.

The Great Irish Famine was a human catastrophe precipitated by a potato blight, a fungus that destroyed the harvests of 1845, 1846, 1848, and 1849. As a result of the ensuing famine, the official population of Ireland declined from 8,175,124 in 1841 to 6,552,385 in 1851, a loss of over 1.6 million people, to famine-related deaths and emigration. The official numbers are only an estimate, probably under-reporting the actual number of people who lived in Ireland in 1841, and minimizing the impact of the famine on the Irish people. Many of Ireland's poorest and most vulnerable residents, people on the west coast and in the interior, especially Gaelic speakers, were either skipped over by census enumerators or avoided being counted. These people disappeared without leaving any permanent record. Even using the official census count, one person in four disappeared between 1841 and 1851.

What was the cause of the Great Irish Famine? The famine that accompanied the failure of the potato crops was rooted in Ireland's troubled history as a colony of Great Britain. After the unsuccessful Irish rebellion of 1798, a rebellion inspired in part by the success of the American Revolution, the Act of Union of 1800 established a closer relationship between Great

Britain and Ireland. Thereafter, Ireland was governed directly by the United Kingdom parliament at Westminster (London). While Ireland elected representatives to parliament, Catholics were effectively excluded.

During the first decades of the nineteenth century, Irish politics was dominated by Daniel O'Connell, who helped secure some civil rights for Catholics and other religious minorities, including the right to serve in parliament. O'Connell was unsuccessful, however, in his campaign for the repeal of the Act of Union. An important O'Connell legacy was his parish-based organizational strategy that became the model for Irish constitutional nationalism and American urban ward politics.

Political events in this period masked more serious demographic and economic problems. Some 10,000 English and Irish landlords, many of whom were absentees, owned nearly all the Irish land which they rented out through a system of tenants and sub-tenants. During the Napoleonic wars, there was a strong demand for grain and for agricultural laborers. In response, the Irish population increased quickly; people, especially poorer people, married relatively young, and fathers distributed the right to their rented land among their sons. By 1841, nearly half of the Irish (45%) lived as tenants, sub-tenants or non-documented homesteaders on holdings of less than five acres. In the poorest, more desolate and densely populated areas of the west, the percentage was even higher. The pressure for land and food drove the Irish poor onto more and more marginal land. Fuel came from turf harvested from the surrounding bogs. Eventually the word "bog" became associated with poverty, and poor Irish were derisively called "bog-trotters."

Apart from the agricultural sector of the economy, there were few regular employment opportunities for Irish workers, an economic imbalance that contributed to later problems. Irish businessmen could not compete with British manufacturing concerns that were beginning to dominate world markets. The domestic textile industry, which had been a major source of rural income in the eighteenth century, suffered a major decline. In 1815, when grain prices dropped after peace was restored with France, the agricultural market became depressed and there were no alternative sources of employment to replace it. Visitors to Ireland

before the famine, like the American traveler Asenath Nicholson, observed how desperate the Irish were for regular (rather than seasonal) employment. Nicholson met many Irish who had been to America, had children in America or who hoped to go to America. Pre-famine emigrants were generally artisans (often displaced textile workers), farmers, servants or unskilled laborers who left Ireland for better economic opportunities in the booming economies of Lancashire in England and of the east coast of the United States. Many of the pre-famine Irish laborers in New York State worked digging the Erie Canal system and building the state's railroad network. Many women entered domestic service. Both Irish men and women also entered the rapidly expanding textile industry in the mill towns of New York and New England.

Under normal circumstances, the Irish cottiers, agricultural laborers and their families, lived on a monotonous but nutritious diet of potatoes and buttermilk. But no year was ever really normal. In pre-famine Ireland, there regularly were periods of want, the "hungry months" of summer before the new potato crop came in. There had also been a major famine in 1741 and, periodically, other crop failures. In all of those cases, however, healthy potatoes returned the following season and life continued as usual. While these earlier experiences should have provided some warning that a sustained period of crop failure could happen, the government and the country at-large were quite unprepared for the catastrophe that occurred when the potato crop failed four times in five years from 1845 to 1849. While the potato failed elsewhere in Europe, only the Irish relied on it as their principal source of food. Indeed, they relied primarily on only one kind of potato, a particularly high-yield variety called the "lumper."

The potato blight was reported first in Ireland in the *Dublin Evening Post* on Sept. 9, 1845. Almost overnight, healthy green fields of potatoes turned black and there was an overpowering, sickening sweetish smell of rot. The cause, unknown at the time, was a fungus called *phytophthora infestans* which caused blight. It probably arrived in Europe from North America where there had been blight in Maine in 1842. The blight spread quickly through Holland and Belgium to Ireland.

The first official Irish response to the potato blight was to try to estimate the extent of the damage. Police were instructed to report the losses weekly; experts were asked to investigate the situation, and an official committee was convened to assess the extent of the crop failure and to suggest possible remedies for what the government thought would be a short-term problem.

As the blight spread throughout the country, British Prime

Minister Sir Robert Peel authorized the purchase of American Indian corn, a commodity that did not interfere with the protected English agricultural market. Peel also appointed a committee to administer a government relief plan that supplemented that which was provided under the 1838 Poor Law Relief Act.

In January 1846 the government enacted its first famine relief measure, a Public Works Bill that authorized small-scale, county-based, relief projects. In March 1846 a bill for the construction of piers and harbors was passed to encourage the fishing industry. These measures gave work to able-bodied men, women and boys from afflicted households, but offered no assistance to the elderly, to the infirm or to young children. In response to the outbreak of infectious diseases like typhus, the government directed local Poor Law Guardians to designate separate facilities as fever hospitals and dispensaries and to segregate the sick. At the time there was no effective treatment for famine-related diseases.

In April, 1846, Government food depots were established in areas of great need, particularly in the west and southwest. In June, Parliament repealed the Corn Laws, the legislation that protected the United Kingdom's markets from cheaper imported grain. This last action was unpopular in Peel's political party and precipitated the collapse of his government.

Lord John Russell, whose family owned land in Ireland, replaced Robert Peel as Prime Minister in June, 1846; he would remain in office for the duration of the famine. By the summer and fall of 1846, it was clear that the disaster precipitated by the potato blight had become a famine. The 1845 infestation destroyed thirty percent of the potato crop and the fall 1846 crop was almost a total failure. As in earlier emergencies, people tried to cope with rising food prices by selling their livestock and their possessions, even their clothing. During this period thefts of food also were reported.

Under Russell, the government returned to a relatively orthodox laissez-faire economic policy in Ireland. It did not intervene to prevent speculators from profiting from food shortages, nor did it prohibit the diversion of grain from the food supply to distilleries nor did it block the export of grain from Ireland to England. While some individuals no doubt profited from the lack of government regulation, Cormac Ó Gráda's analysis of contemporary economic data suggests that no group—merchants, money lenders, or landlords—benefited much during the years of the Great Irish Famine itself.

There was opposition to Russell's policies in Ireland, such as a food riot when a shipload of oats left Youghal on

September 25, 1846; however, active Irish resistance to the British government's failing policies was never more than scattered. The extent of Irish resistance to the British government's famine policy is a question that continues to puzzle historians as well as sociologists studying historical patterns of passive acceptance by victims of policies that obviously threaten their very survival. In Ireland at the time of the famine this may have been because the Irish people, who had survived similar agricultural cycles in the past, believed they could weather this storm. Another explanation is that after centuries of colonial domination the Irish accepted their status as a subject people unable to influence government decisions. Whatever the case, no one was able to anticipate two more years of crop failure. Eventually, the strongest tended to emigrate while others grew ever weak and either concentrated on daily survival or lost hope and succumbed.

In an effort to provide a temporary solution to famine suffering, the Russell government passed a new Poor Law for Ireland. It was based on the assumption that Ireland would be held responsible for Irish relief. The law authorized relief projects financed by treasury loans that would be repaid by local Poor Law Rates (taxes) levied on the landlords of each union (district). The impact of the new law was limited. Only the poorest were eligible for relief work. The wages on the work projects were kept at or below market level so they would not compete with private employers. Poorer districts often lacked resident landlords willing or able to apply for and support the work. When public works projects were put into operation, wages were insufficient to meet the rising cost of food. The work projects also prevented able-bodied members of households from farming, fishing, or developing other food sources. Finally, conditions were made even more unbearable by the unusually severe winter of 1846-47, a winter of perishing cold, snow and icy winds.

As it became clear that the government response was inadequate, private relief organizations mobilized to meet the famine crisis. A number of prominent Irish Quakers met in Dublin on November 1, 1846 and founded the Central Relief Committee (CRC) of the Society of Friends. They set up soup kitchens where a quart of nourishing soup was available for a penny. Soup tickets could be purchased and distributed to the poor. In this private effort there was little of the demeaning bureaucracy that characterized government programs. The CRC's practical and generous intervention is still remembered today, and the Irish government issued a stamp in their honor during the 1997 famine commemoration year. The Irish Quakers, many of them abolitionists who had previously worked with their American counterparts in the struggle to end slavery, used their con-

tacts to bring the news of Irish suffering to the United States where American Quakers set up their own relief committees. Irish emigrants and other people of good will used the CRC as a channel to send contributions of food, money and clothes to Ireland.

The Quakers tended to channel relief funds to local Protestant clergy who often had wives and children to help with relief efforts. In many places Protestant and Catholic clergy worked cooperatively; however some evangelical Protestant missionaries in Ireland, like Rev. Edward Nangle of Achill, Co. Mayo, regarded the famine as an opportunity to win converts with food. While this type of proselytism remained vivid in Irish folk memory, the reality was that most conversions were temporary.

The role of the Roman Catholic Church in famine relief involved priests working among the poor of their parishes while their bishops appealed for famine relief from Irish immigrants abroad and from Catholics in Europe. On March 25, 1847, Pope Pius IX issued his encyclical *Praedessores Nostros*, which called on the world's Roman Catholics to pray for those suffering from the famine and to contribute funds to relieve the Irish poor. As the famine continued, the voice of the Irish hierarchy grew increasingly critical of the British government's response to the crisis, particularly its toleration of eviction of tenant farmers unable to pay the rent.

The General Relief Committee (GRC) of the City of New York, convened in February 1847 and coordinated other American aid to Ireland. The GRC sent \$250,000 to Ireland, much of the money raised from generous New Yorkers from all over the state. The committee also received a donation from the Choctaw nation, who collected \$170 for the Irish poor.

Despite the help from abroad, death raged during the winter of 1846-47, especially in the south and west of Ireland where the high price of food, the lack of local resources and employment, and the region's distance from alternative food sources intensified the suffering. By 1847, the British public was aroused by the press reports of the famine, especially accounts in *The Illustrated London News* with their graphic illustrations. On January 1, 1847, British merchant bankers and philanthropic individuals formed the British Association for Relief of Extreme Distress in Remote Parishes of Ireland and Scotland. They established a special fund to feed children on a diet of 10 ounces of bread and a half pint of meat or fish soup per day.

At the end of January 1847 the Russell government enacted a series of limited interventions which were insufficient to meet the crisis of a year that has come to be remembered as "Black '47." The measures included temporarily sus-

pending duties on imported grain until the next potato harvest, substituting soup kitchens for the public works projects, and permitting direct relief to the elderly, the infirm, the sick poor, and women with two or more dependents. Able-bodied workers also could receive aid for a limited period of time.

The government and its officials continued to misread the gravity of the situation. The government continued to maintain that Ireland's poor were Ireland's problem and that local landlords should be responsible for funding relief programs. The 1847 Poor Law Relief Act (Ireland) carried the Gregory Clause, a provision that excluded people who lived on more than one-quarter acre of land from government assistance. In effect, this law also provided landlords with a legal justification for the eviction of tenants.

Another remedial measure, the Temporary Relief Act (the Soup Kitchen Act), while a humanitarian departure from the government's previous practice, was woefully inadequate for a hungry and weakened population struggling to survive the second winter of the famine. Enacted in February 1847, it was not operational until March. A model soup kitchen was opened in Dublin in April, but the soup kitchen for County Galway's Clifden Union was delayed until the middle of May 1847. Once again, those most in need came last.

The quality of government soup became the subject of satiric ballads because it was less nutritious than the soup offered by the Quakers. Inadequate as they were, the soup kitchens did feed three million people, and the Irish considered them an improvement over overcrowded workhouses, where families were separated and people were treated like prisoners. By the spring of 1847, the workhouses had become death houses, especially for women and children who perished from dysentery and infectious diseases which killed care-givers—doctors, clergy, landlords and workhouse personnel—as well as the poor.

By 1847, local landlords, even those most willing to aid starving tenant farmers, found it difficult to pay the Poor Law tax rates. The Poor Law did not distinguish between resident landlords who used their own means to provide employment and relief to their tenants and the absentee landlords who ignored the crisis. All were charged the same rate. While he was critical of the entire landlord system, the Irish revolutionary John Mitchel distinguished between the responsible resident landlord and the absentee.

Unable to collect their rents, an increasing number of landlords resorted to evicting tenants who had fallen into arrears. On some estates, landlords used the famine as an excuse to consolidate land holdings and to clear off their tenants with programs of assisted emigration. The number of families served with eviction notices (1846-48) and actu-

ally evicted (1849-54) numbered 188,346, an estimated 974,930 people (5 persons per household). While mass evictions did not begin with the Great Irish Famine, most of the 19th century evictions took place during the famine decade. A haunting image in Irish folk memory is the specter of evicted tenants dying of starvation or disease—at least 974,930 of them—and their little cabins destroyed so they could not move back in. Evicted with no place to go, many of the homeless and landless sought refuge in makeshift shelters in ditches alongside the roads.

While some migration to the United States, Canada, England, and Australia was promoted and even assisted by landlords, most emigrants had to make their own way to new lands; as a result, it was generally the able-bodied Irish with some resources who left. In their weakened state, many died of fever en route, prompting the renaming of emigrant ships as "coffin ships." Thousands also died in a make-shift fever hospital in Grosse Isle, Quebec, in the St. Lawrence River. Famine immigrants crowded into Boston, Philadelphia and New York where they worked at unskilled labor and endured anti-Irish and anti-Catholic nativism. By the time of the 1850 United States census there were 961,719 Irish-born residents, 42.8 percent of the foreign-born population.

While 1847 is regarded as the worst year of the famine, the crisis was not over. The 1847 potato crop was healthy, but scant, owing to the scarcity of seed and the employment of able-bodied workers on the public works projects. The government pressed the Quakers to continue their soup kitchens, but their resources and workers were exhausted. They closed their soup kitchens in July, 1847 and spent the rest of the famine working on projects to encourage employment. Declaring the famine "over," Treasury Under-Secretary Charles Trevelyan, the official in charge of famine relief policy, closed the government soup kitchens from October 1, 1847.

The government's declaration, while suffering was still wide-spread, prompted collective responses by Irish religious leaders and nationalist politicians. Roman Catholic bishops met in Dublin and issued their strongest statement criticizing the government for putting the rights of property before the rights of human life. On November 2, 1847, Major Denis Mahon, whose efforts to clear tenant farmers off his estate had started before the famine, was assassinated; he was one of a half dozen landlords who were killed in the winter of 1847-1848. The official response to Mahon's death was a call to protect landlords and their middlemen from a tenantry that was viewed as desperate and lawless.

In 1847, Daniel O'Connell died. By the time of his death, two years of famine had seriously weakened support for his politics of constitutional nationalism. In early 1848, the

nationalist John Mitchel, who indicted government laissez-faire economic policies with the words, "Ireland died of political economy," began to call for an armed rebellion. In July, 1848, the nationalist Young Irelanders, who had split with O'Connell over the question of the use of physical force, staged a brief and unsuccessful rebellion near Ballingarry, County Tipperary. The leaders of the rebellion were convicted of treason and transported to Tasmania. Among the leaders who would play a significant role in United States history was Thomas Francis Meagher who in 1852 escaped to America where he became a journalist and a member of the New York Bar. During the American Civil War, Meagher recruited New Yorkers for an Irish Brigade that took heavy casualties in December 1852 at the Battle of Fredericksburg. By the end of the war, Meagher was a brigadier-general. He was later appointed acting governor of the Montana Territory.

The gallantry of units like the Irish Brigade helped to reduce anti-Irish nativism; as the losses in Irish regiments mounted however, the Irish community became hostile to the war, especially to the 1863 draft law with its provision that drafted men could purchase substitutes for \$300, an option beyond the resources of poor Irish immigrants. Irish bitterness against the law erupted in the July 1863 draft riots in New York City that lasted five days and made a scapegoat of the city's African-American population; eleven African Americans were killed by rioters and an orphanage for Black children was destroyed by fire. Order was finally restored by New York City police and the military, which included many Irish soldiers.

The fall of 1848 was made more miserable with the recurrence of cholera and an acceleration in evictions. The government passed the Encumbered Estates Act to facilitate the sale of lands by landlords who were bankrupted by the famine. Many landlords preferred to sell out rather than be pressed to support the poor; however, there were a few landlords like Mary Letitia Martin, the "Princess of Connemara," who inherited a heavily-mortgaged estate of 20,000 acres, spent large sums on relief and employment, defaulted on her mortgage, and lost her land. Almost destitute, like thousands of Irish, she emigrated to New York where she died in childbirth in 1850. The new landowners frequently evicted tenants to maximize the return on their investments. In 1849, there were 13,384 officially recorded evictions, twice the number from the previous year. This figure probably represents half of the actual number of those who were evicted.

By the 1850s, the Great Irish Famine had produced changes in Ireland that would alter the course of Irish and world history. In Ireland, the bottom third of the economic order consisting of poor people and the landless was largely

removed. The potato remained a staple food for the Irish, but the rural population was no longer dependent on a single crop. While the decline of Irish as the country's spoken language did not begin with the famine, Irish-speaking areas were hardest hit and those casualties accelerated the silencing of the language in the Irish countryside. The practice of dividing land among all sons was replaced by a system of a single inheriting son and a single dowered daughter. The other siblings had little option except to emigrate. The Great Irish Famine altered the balance of the population with the result that afterwards there were much fewer landless families or families with very small holdings and there was a relatively larger middle-class population with more conservative attitudes. Because of the important role the Irish played in shaping Roman Catholicism in the nineteenth-century United States, this conservative ethos came to predominate in the Catholic church in the United States.

A long term result of the Great Irish Famine was the nurturing of Irish nationalism, both among those who never accepted the Union between Great Britain and Ireland and those embittered by perceived British indifference to Irish suffering. In the early twentieth century, nationalists, supported by aid from Irish living abroad who considered themselves political or economic exiles, finally secured political independence and a democratic society for the majority of the Irish people.

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Addressing Controversial Historical Issues through the study of the Great Irish Famine

Maureen Murphy, Maureen McCann Miletta,
and Alan Singer

Studying the Great Irish Famine provides teachers and students with an opportunity to explore controversial issues in global history. The approach taken in *The Great Irish Famine Curriculum* is to emphasize the complexity of history by presenting multiple perspectives about the causes and significance of events. Activities, questions, and handouts (primarily consisting of primary sources) are part of the Learning Experiences that encourage students to think, write and

speak as historians, to analyze historical material, to question their assumptions, to gather and organize evidence before reaching conclusions, to discover connections between events, to recognize parallel developments that may not be directly related, and to realize that conclusions are subject to change as new evidence and more integrative theories emerge. As they study about the Great Irish Famine students should come to realize that historians do not have all the answers about the past or present and that they do not always agree.

The Great Irish Famine Curriculum gives students and teachers an opportunity to examine a number of essential social studies and historical questions that are also major components of the New York State Social Studies Learning Standards. Examples of essential questions include: a) “Are there historical or philosophical connections between Slavery and the African Slave Trade, the Great Irish Famine, and the European Holocaust, subjects that are focal points in the New York State Human Rights curriculum, but which happened in different eras?”; b) “What are the relationships between these events and broader historical developments?”; c) “What types of injustice and oppression constitute genocide?”; d) “Is there such a thing as human nature, and if so, what is it?”; e) “Why have some groups of people been victimized in the past?”; f) “How do people survive, resist, and maintain human dignity under inhumane circumstance?”; g) “Why do some people become rescuers while others collaborate with oppressors?”; h) “Should historians assign blame for historical events?”; i) “Should a focus for historians be identifying individuals or groups as villains or should it be examining the social, economic and political systems that generate human rights violations?”; j) “What criteria, if any, should be used to evaluate actions by individuals, groups, and societies?”; k) “Who should be considered citizens of a country

and what rights and responsibilities should accompany citizenship?”; l) “What are the relationships between history and geography?”; and, m) “When should the cause of a catastrophe be considered an act of nature and when should it be considered the responsibility of human institutions?”

Following is a discussion of some historical controversies that can help teachers think about issues related to the Great Irish Famine before they begin to examine specific lessons and documents.

A Point of View about History

The definition of history is complicated because it refers to a series of distinct but related ideas: (a) events from the past—“facts,” (b) the process of gathering and organizing information from the past—historical research, (c) explanations about the relationships between specific historical events, and (d) broader explanations or “theories” about how and why change takes place. In other words, history is simultaneously the past, the study of the past, explanations about the past, and explanations about human nature and the nature of society.

The pedagogy that informs the organization of the social studies lesson material in *The Great Irish Famine Curriculum* Guide draws on this broad understanding of history. It is not a list of facts to memorize, though it tries to incorporate a considerable amount of historical information. While we believe that drawing conclusions about the past is a vital part of the historical process, we try not to make a narrow ideological presentation. We hope the material in this guide allows room for widespread debate and promotes a broad dialogue on what makes us human and what is the responsibility of society.

To achieve these goals, the curriculum is document-based, and organized to promote an inquiry approach to learning history. Students and teachers can become historians, sifting through the past, examining different data and interpretations, and drawing conclusions based on a variety of evidence.

It is also recognized that teachers play a crucial role in the creation of curriculum because they choose the material that will ultimately be presented in their classrooms. Instead of dictating what should be taught, the curriculum offers teachers a broad range of primary source documents, interpretive passages, worksheets, literary resources, and

individual and group projects.

Drawing Connections between Historical Events

Study of the Great Irish Famine is part of a New York Human Rights curriculum that includes study of Slavery in the Americas and the Atlantic Slave Trade and the World War II era European Holocaust. Part of the task confronting teachers is to help students examine potential connections and/or parallels between these historical events. This involves students in exploring theories of historical change and ideas about human nature, culture and civilization, the role of government, and the political and economic organization of societies.

A difficulty in making direct comparisons between these events is that they happened in different historical eras, had different goals, and occurred in different social and economic systems. While studying Slavery and the Atlantic Slave Trade, students need to examine and understand the magnitude and specific historical context of a system that between 1500 and the end of the nineteenth century, enslaved millions of Africans and transported them across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas where they and their descendants were defined as non-humans and were expected to provide free labor in perpetuity. Historians have argued that this system of human exploitation played a central role in European colonial expansion around the world and that the labor of enslaved Africans was crucial to the development of commercial capitalism and the start of the industrial revolution.

On the other hand, while the social, political, and economic conditions that contributed to both the Great Irish Famine and the European Holocaust had deep historical roots, these events happened in a much narrower time frame and a more restricted locale and had different impacts on the affected peoples. The first year of the Great Irish Famine was 1845, the last failure of the potato crop was in 1849, and famine-related deaths tapered off by 1852. The famine occurred in part of the United Kingdom, the most powerful and prosperous country during the early part of the industrial era, and while Ireland suffered from a severe population decline during this period, most of it was the result of emigration rather than death.

The European Holocaust is generally studied in connection with the growth of Nazi ideology and power in Germany prior to and during World War II. It was precipitated by a culturally, technologically and industrially advanced nation that in the middle of the twentieth century sought to exterminate an entire group of people.

A problem teachers should consider when comparing these events is that historians prefer to limit the use of historical terms to specific, relatively narrow, historical contexts. These distinctions may or may not be appropriate in ele-

mentary, middle or high school social studies lessons. Examples of terms with complex and changing meanings that also have narrower technical definitions are racism and imperialism.

Racism is popularly used to define any form of prejudice or discrimination that is based on the belief that some hereditary groups are superior or inferior to others. In the United States during the era of slavery, enslaved Africans were defined as chattels, that is non-human forms of property, any person with a single African ancestor was considered non-white, and in the south, laws were passed to prevent manumission (the freeing of slaves). In Nazi Germany an effort was made to apply quasi-scientific notions of genetics and Social Darwinism to outlaw racial mixing between Aryans (Germans) and people who were deemed to be racially inferior, particularly Jews. In both situations, Africans and Jews were subject to severe restrictions and could not legally change their racial classification.

English observers of the Irish before and during the famine also described the Irish as an inferior race and often argued that their inferiority was the primary reason for the devastation caused by the famine. However, the focus in these documents tends to be on the culture, religion, and work habits of the Irish, rather than their biological heredity. Some observers even suggested that if the Irish renounced their way of life and lived like Englishmen, they would no longer be racially inferior. In this view of race, which is different from the ones employed in the United States during the era of slavery and in Nazi Germany, it is possible for individuals and entire groups to change their racial status. Students need to examine similarities and differences in the way the term racism is used in different settings and to decide where and when they believe it is applicable.

Imperialism generally is used to describe empire-building and the exploitation of one nation over another to obtain economic, military and political benefits. In its broadest sense it includes colonialism, the practice of creating permanent settlements in other lands, and mercantilism, the regulation of colonial economies to benefit the dominant power. It also has been used to describe the relationship between a dominant group that holds political power in a country and ethnic minorities who are subject to their power. Using this general definition, the term imperialism can be used to describe the historic relationship between England and Ireland.

Historians, however, tend to differentiate between forms of national domination, especially during different historical periods. The term imperialism and the designation "Age of Imperialism" are often reserved for describing the expansion of European influence in Africa and Asia as European nationalism and the needs of industrial economies spurred competition for markets and raw materials between 1870

and the start of World War I. Classroom teachers need to consider whether making this type of distinction will be meaningful for their students, and if so, how best to address it.

Addressing the Political Debate

The meaning of the Great Irish Famine has been contested by political activists and historians from the 1850s to the present day. The Great Irish Famine has been the source of nationalist anger, a historical problem to be coolly dissected and demythologized, and a reminder of the realities of hunger and poverty in the modern world. Mary Robinson, the former President of the Republic of Ireland, argues that reflection on the Great Irish Famine should spur action to prevent similar catastrophes in the present and future. We hope *The Great Irish Famine Curriculum* Guide will promote discussion about access to food and health care as human rights and an examination of the responsibility of governments to meet the needs of people in modern, democratic, industrial and post-industrial societies, topics that are fundamental parts of the New York State Social Studies Standards and the Economics and Participation in Government curricula.

A highly contentious political debate is over whether the government of Great Britain consciously pursued genocidal policies designed to depopulate Ireland through death and emigration. Explaining the causes of the famine and analyzing the impact of British policy have been complicated by continuing conflict over whether the six counties of Northern Ireland should remain part of the United Kingdom. While we do not believe that British policies during the Great Irish Famine meet the criteria for genocide established by the United Nations (1951) in a treaty signed by the United States, we believe it is a legitimate subject for discussion.

One way to approach the political debates is to explore the differences between the goals of political activists and historians. The primary concern of activists is to win support for their political position in an effort to bring about political, social and economic changes in society. While historians also have political views and goals, their professional commitment requires that they examine events from multiple perspectives and that they hold themselves to a higher standard when they draw conclusions based on evidence. As students read excerpts from primary source documents and interpretations of the causes of the Great Irish Famine and the reasons for British policies, they need to consider the following questions: a) “Is this commentator writing as a political activist or an historian?”; b) “What is her/his point of view about the Great Irish Famine and other events in Irish history?”; c) “Does her/his point of view aid in their examination of events or interfere with their analysis?”; d) “How could the argument be made more effective?”; and e)

“Can someone be impartial when researching and writing about a topic like the Great Irish Famine?”

The authors of the Great Irish Famine Curriculum acknowledge they have both individual and collective points of view, and they recognize that their views influence interpretations of famine history, as well as the way documents, organized lessons, and framed questions were selected. In general, it is believed the Great Irish Famine was the result of multiple causes, including a natural ecological disaster, rapid population growth, religious and cultural prejudice, a British imperial ideology that legitimized colonialism, government relief programs that were inadequate to the magnitude of need, and policies that favored English political and economic interests, especially the interests of emerging English industrial capitalism. To limit the impact of bias in the curriculum, international committees of historians, literary scholars, and educators, reviewed the package at different stages in its development. Hopefully, the documents will enable students to discuss alternative explanations and reach their own conclusions.

Significance of Religion

The United States has a long and valued tradition of a “wall of separation” between Church and State. This tradition, and the laws that support it, protects religious beliefs and church organizations from government regulations that might be used to stifle religious practice. They also prevent powerful religious groups from determining government policies, gaining unfair advantages, or stigmatizing families who choose not to believe.

In public education, the wall of separation has been redefined over the years. It now means that public schools cannot sponsor Bible readings or prayers and cannot present one set of religious beliefs as a norm that every moral person should follow. However, while public schools cannot teach religion, teachers are free to, and in some cases expected to, teach about religion.

Because of the importance of the wall of separation, many public school teachers hesitate to teach about religion. They fear that adherents to these beliefs might feel they are being presented incorrectly, or that people from other religious backgrounds, or people who reject all religions, will object to what their children are being taught. This presents a dilemma when teaching about Ireland and the Great Irish Famine, because the history and culture of Ireland cannot be separated easily from the religious beliefs of the people of Ireland. In many parts of the world, the mid-nineteenth century was a profoundly religious era when people were concerned about their salvation and that of others. While their beliefs were genuinely held, occasionally their zeal led them to adopt attitudes which today would be regarded

as evidence of bigotry and religious prejudice.

These issues are addressed in *The Great Irish Famine Curriculum* in two ways. First, the complexity of the matter of religion in famine historiography is acknowledged, and that complexity is examined in discussion of the way that Irish of different religious traditions responded to the famine crisis. Roman Catholic institutions, leaders, and practices played a major role in the daily life of most Irish, in resistance to British colonialism, and in providing support during the famine years. Common expressions, home ornaments, and even children's toys like St. Brigid's dolls have religious overtones. Rather than ignoring important aspects of Irish culture and history, the role of religion in Irish life should be examined. Students on all grade levels can use an examination of religion in Irish life to help them explore the role of religion in human history and why groups of people have often expressed their most fundamental values and beliefs through religion.

Second, *The Great Irish Famine Curriculum* pays tribute to rescuers from all religious denominations who aided in relief efforts. Some Protestant denominations, especially the Quakers, played a crucial role in providing famine relief. While the authors believe that anti-Catholic prejudice played a major role in justifying injustice, lessons encourage students to explore the role of religious and cultural prejudice in the joint history of Ireland and Great Britain and to draw their own conclusions.

Validity of Sources

The historical reliability of some of the material presented in this curriculum is a challenge because of point of view, or because of clouded origins. Instead of removing these documents, teachers and students, can act as historians, to evaluate their validity and historical significance. For example, John Mitchel and Charles Trevelyan are political leaders who are either attacking or defending British gov-

ernment policies. Readers must take that into account when evaluating their explanation of events. Newspaper accounts also contain political and social biases.

Some famine journals' authenticity have been challenged. Critics question whether Gerald Keegan's diary, first published in 1895, is an actual historical account or a work of fiction. Because of the debate surrounding the Keegan diary, and because other better-established primary source documents are available for examination, we decided not to include excerpts from the Keegan diary.

Global Perspective

In designing the *Great Irish Famine Curriculum*, it was decided that a narrow focus on the events between 1845 and 1852 did a disservice to history, students, and the victims of the Great Hunger.

The historical narrative begins with the origins of Ireland and the Irish and early ties between Ireland and Great Britain. The curriculum makes it possible to include sections on Ireland in the study of the Columbian Exchange, the Protestant Reformation, colonialism, early industrialization, the Revolutionary world at the end of the 18th century, the development of modern economic thought, the growth of 19th century imperialism, 19th century trans-Atlantic migration, the origins of the modern state, and United States history.

Because of the importance of examining essential social studies and historical questions, connecting the history of Ireland to other events in the past and present, and exploring themes in the New York State social studies learning standards, the curriculum includes a section that addresses the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and other human rights issues in global history and the contemporary world.

Ireland Today

BACKGROUND

In this activity, students will research the geography and weather of Ireland, and will learn some general political history. This activity can be used in conjunction with the activity *Meet the Irish*.

Note: Ireland is part of the European Union, whose purpose is to facilitate relations between the fifteen member states and their people by promoting economic and social progress, by asserting the identity of the European Union internationally, and by developing freedom, security, and justice.

RESOURCES

HANDOUTS

Ireland—Mountains Map
Ireland—Rivers, Lakes Map
The European Union
New York State/Ireland
Weather Forecast
Population of the Republic of Ireland

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Aalen, F.H.A., Kevin Whelan and Matthew Stout, eds. *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape*. Cork: Cork University Press, 1997.
Curley, Helen. *Local Ireland Almanac and Yearbook of Facts 2000*. Dublin: Local Ireland, 1999. (www.localalmanac.ie)
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CLASSROOM MATERIALS

Weather maps or weather information found on the internet
Topographical map of Ireland

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

Describe the weather, geography, and population of Ireland today.
Complete a population graph.

STANDARDS

SS 3: Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of the geography of the interdependent world in which we live—local, national, and global—including the distribution of people, places, and environments over the Earth’s surface.

ELA 1: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Study maps and diagrams that serve as representations of places, physical features, and objects.

Understand how to develop and use maps and other graphic representations to display geographic issues, problems, and questions.

Select and use strategies that have been taught for notetaking.

DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING

INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

- . draw conclusions
- . consult databases
- . gather information
- . chart information and data

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

Mathematics

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

1. What do students know about Ireland and the Irish? Ask students to brainstorm and list their information on the board. What can students conclude is their initial impression of Ireland and the Irish? What would they like to know more about? Circle the items that are based on stereotypes and impressions, rather than research and first-hand knowledge.
2. Continue with the following questions: Locate Ireland on a world map. Where is Ireland? What do students notice about its location? What country is Ireland's closest neighbor? Which country in Europe is closest geographically to the United States? Ireland's location between England and the United States is important for students to keep in mind when studying Irish history.

Find the Republic of Ireland on the handout of the map of the European Union. What is the European Union? What other countries are in the Union? A member of the European Union since 1972, the Republic of Ireland has benefitted from the Union's support of regional development. It has helped finance roads, industrial development, tourism and improved communications in Ireland.

Look at the map of Ireland. How large do students think Ireland is? It is 302 miles long and 220 miles wide. How does the size of Ireland compare with the size of New York State? (See the handout *New York State/Ireland*.) How does the east coast of Ireland compare with the west coast of Ireland?

Look at the handout of the *Ireland—Mountains Map*. Ireland is shaped like a saucer with mountains around the outside and low, spongy land called bog in the center. The Irish word *bog* (pronounced *bug*) means soft. Where are the mountains in New York State?

Ireland has a number of rivers. The river Shannon is the most important and the longest river in Ireland. Can students find it on a map and draw it on the handout? If students draw a line along the Shannon from north to south, what differences would they notice between the country east of the line and the country west of the line?

3. Ask students to look at the handout *Weather Forecast*. What do they notice about Irish weather? It is generally mild and damp. It is warmed by the Gulf Stream so palm trees can grow in some places, but it seldom gets over 70 degrees, even in the summer. Many days are showery. Ireland is called "The Emerald Isle," and there is a song about Ireland called "Forty Shades of Green." Do students think there is a connection between that green and the Irish climate?
4. Ireland was governed as one country until the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty which established the Irish Free State. The Protestant (or Unionist) majority of the people of Northern Ireland opted out of the Irish Free State in order to preserve their political ties with the United Kingdom. However, in 1949 the leaders of what was first known as the Irish Free State government dissolved all remaining political connections

with the United Kingdom and declared that their country was now the totally independent Republic of Ireland.

Read the following to the students asking them to take notes on the key points, and review the notes afterwards:

Since 1967 and the founding of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association to address religious discrimination in employment and housing, there has been tension between members of the Northern Ireland community who would like to see Northern Ireland join with the Republic of Ireland (Nationalists) and members of the Northern Ireland community who prefer the present union with Great Britain (Unionists). The tension has led to a generation of violence with terrible loss of life in both communities.

In November 1985 the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed between Great Britain and Ireland. The Agreement recognized that the political arrangement in Northern Ireland would change only if the people of Northern Ireland voted for a change. The Agreement also recognized the Republic of Ireland's interest in the matter of Northern Ireland.

During the last 25 years, one area where Unionists and Nationalists have cooperated has been in the European Union. The Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom are both members. Members of the European Parliament elected from Northern Ireland have worked together to get regional funding from the Union for projects to improve infrastructure (roads, telecommunications) and cultural heritage sites.

In April 1998, the "Good Friday" Agreement replaced the Anglo-Irish Agreement. It provided for an elected Northern Ireland Assembly and for North/South consultative and cooperative bodies. The implementation of the Agreement has been very slow because of disagreements between Unionists and Nationalists about power sharing and the "decommissioning" (turning in or destroying) weapons by the groups who used violence to further their political goals.

Discuss the implications of a generation of community violence on the lives of children in Ireland. How could the *troubles* influence daily life, progress, and economics in Ireland? Students who know the work of the Irish band the Cranberries will know their song *Zombie*. What does their song say about the troubles in Northern Ireland?

5. Distribute the handout *Population of the Republic of Ireland*. Ask students to make a chart of years, ages, and populations using this data. Then they can make graphs showing the percent of the population by intervals of the 0-24 age group in the entire population in 1971, 1981, 1991, and 1996.

ASSESSMENT OPTION

Using all of the handouts, describe the population, geography, and weather of Ireland.

TEACHER REFLECTION

In field tests, when introducing the Great Irish Famine, it was discovered that students did not know much about Ireland. Many could not locate it on the map. This activity is not only a useful introduction, it also provides images against which to measure the Great Irish Famine.

The tape of the debut of *Riverdance* at the Eurovision song contest was shown, and students were told that the host nation had the opportunity to represent aspects of its country and culture to viewers watching from all over Europe. What does *Riverdance* say about Ireland today? (Students mentioned youth and energy.) It was pointed out the way traditional elements were used in contemporary ways. Also discussed was ensemble singing and dancing, and the elements of cooperation involved. Students who sing in choirs and choruses or who play in musical ensembles shared their experiences about the relationship between the individual and the group when one performs as a member of an ensemble. Is *Riverdance* a metaphor for Ireland today?

ADDITIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

For advanced students:

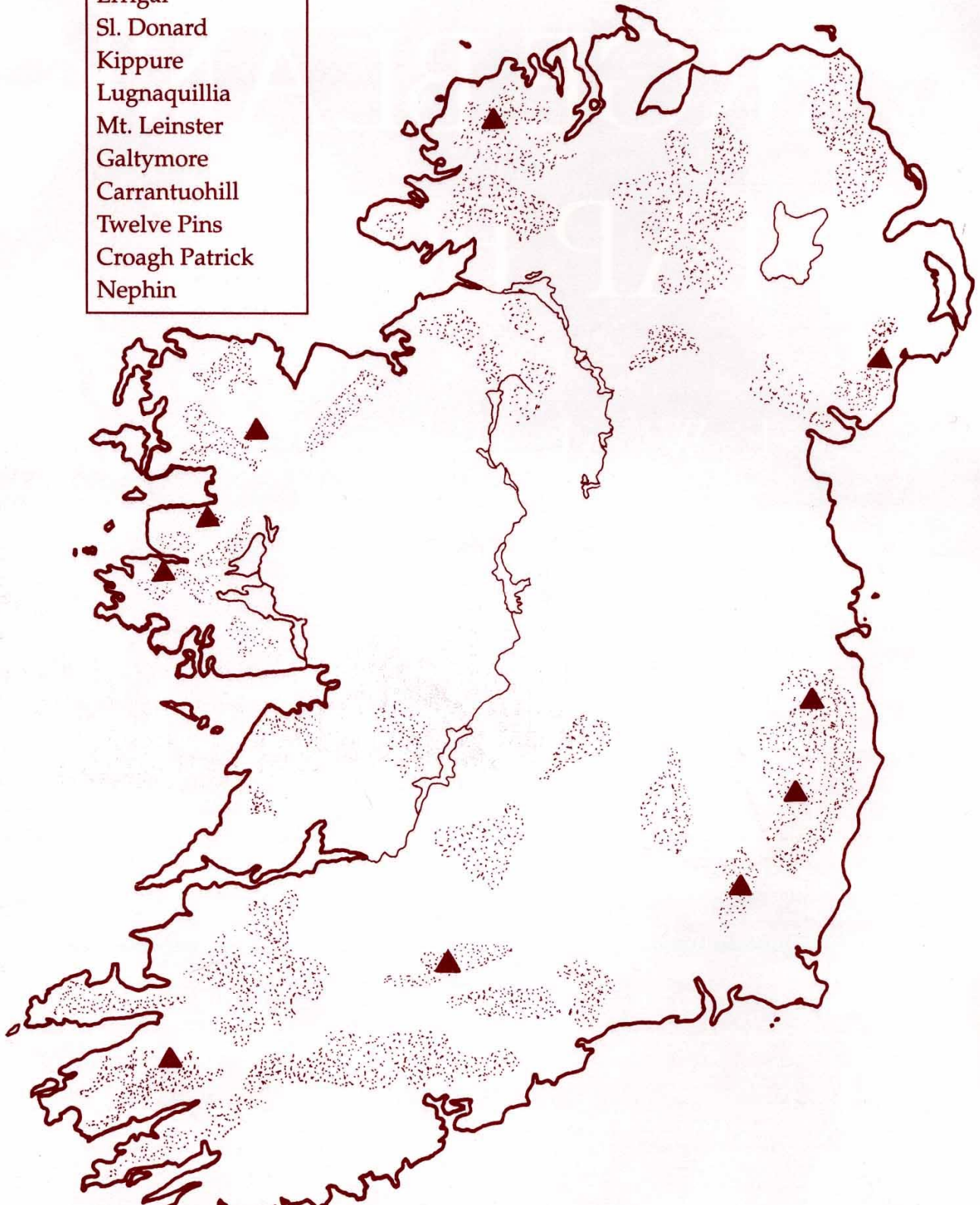
Conduct further research on the location of cities, products, key ports, entertainment, and transportation of Ireland.

Teachers may find the book *The European Commission 2000-2005* and their CD ROM *Hello Europe. A Youth Guide to Europe and the European Union* (ISBN 92-826-9902-0) a useful introduction for students to the European Union. Both are available from the Office of Official Publications of the European Communities, L2985 Luxembourg. The United States Information Service is located at 3 Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza, 305 E 47th Street, New York, NY 10017 (212-371-3804). The European Union website is <http://europa.eu.int>

IRELAND — Mountains

HIGHEST PEAKS

Errigal
Sl. Donard
Kippure
Lugnaquilla
Mt. Leinster
Galtymore
Carrantuohill
Twelve Pins
Croagh Patrick
Nephrin

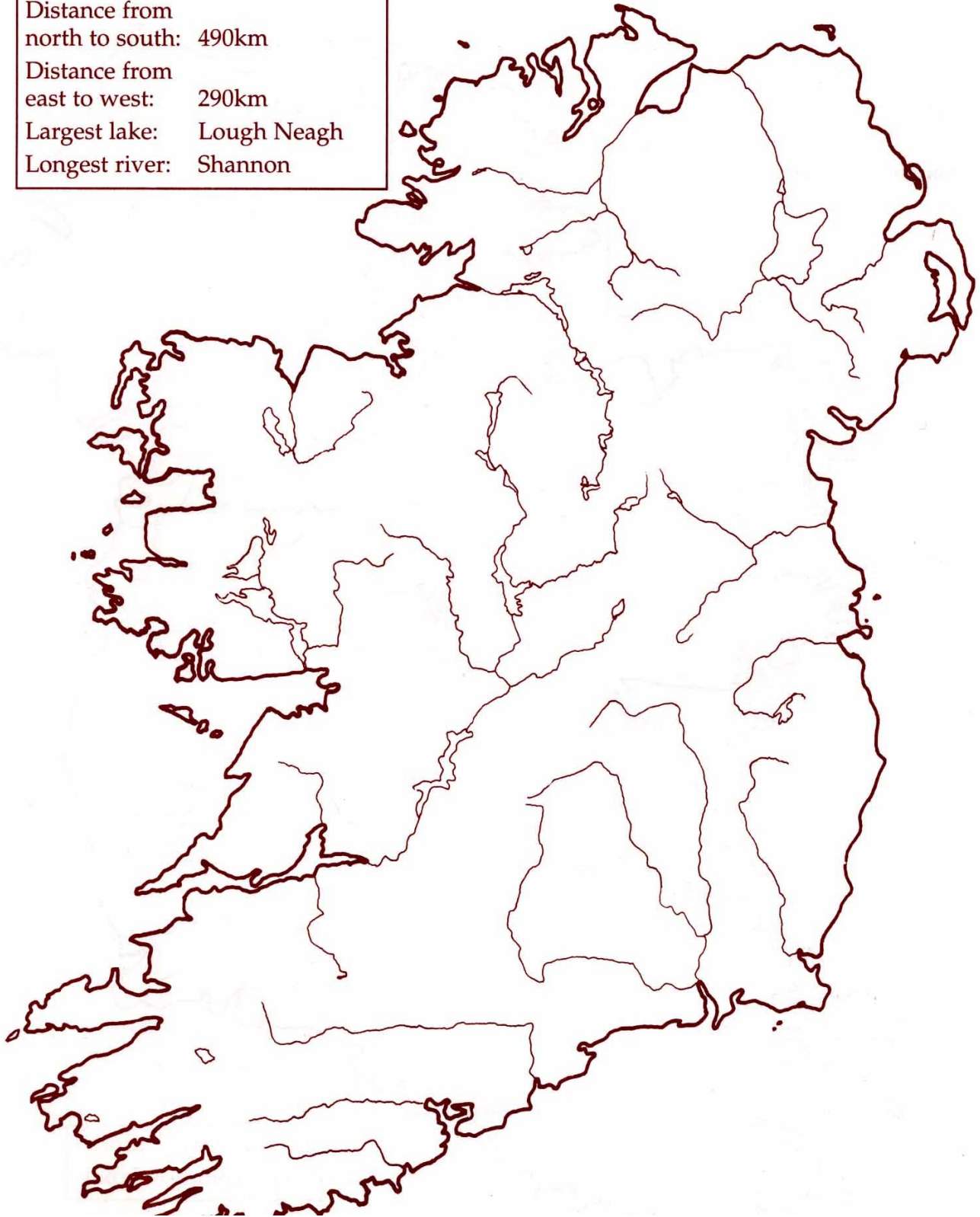


Source: C.J.Fallon. *Large Blank Map Book*. new ed. Dublin: C.J. Fallon, 1997.
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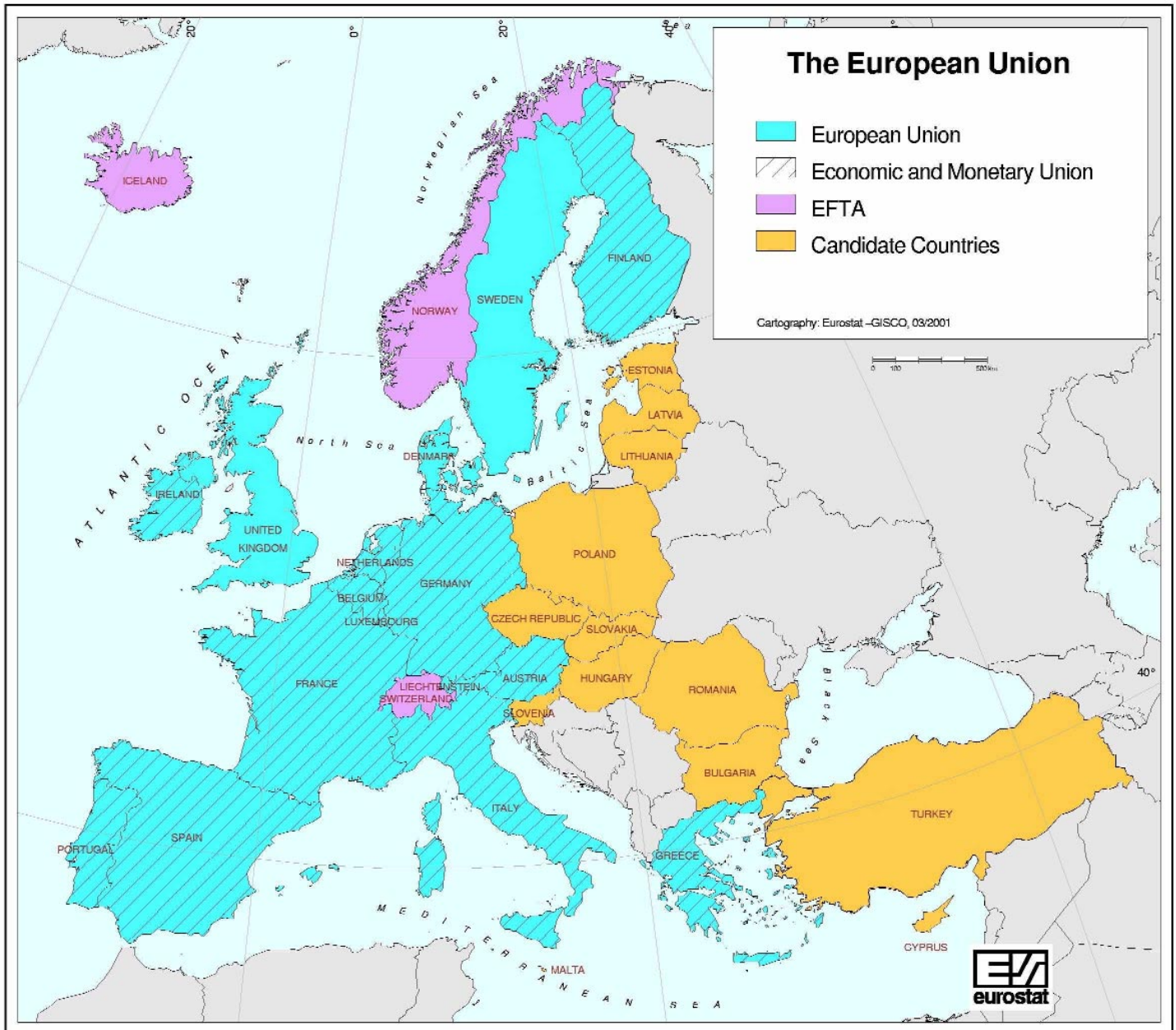
IRELAND — Rivers, Lakes

IRELAND: FACTS

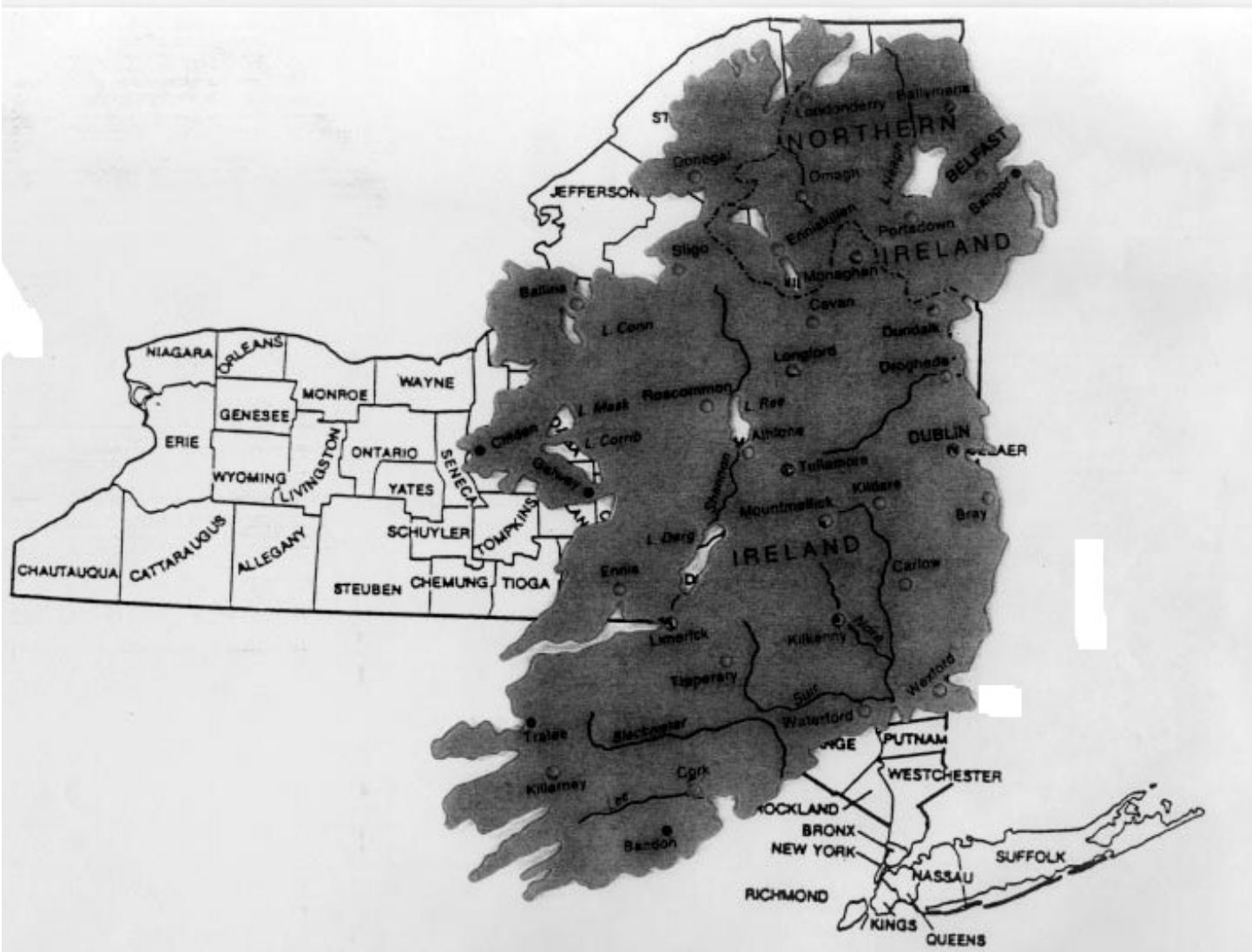
Area:	About 82,000km ²
Distance from north to south:	490km
Distance from east to west:	290km
Largest lake:	Lough Neagh
Longest river:	Shannon



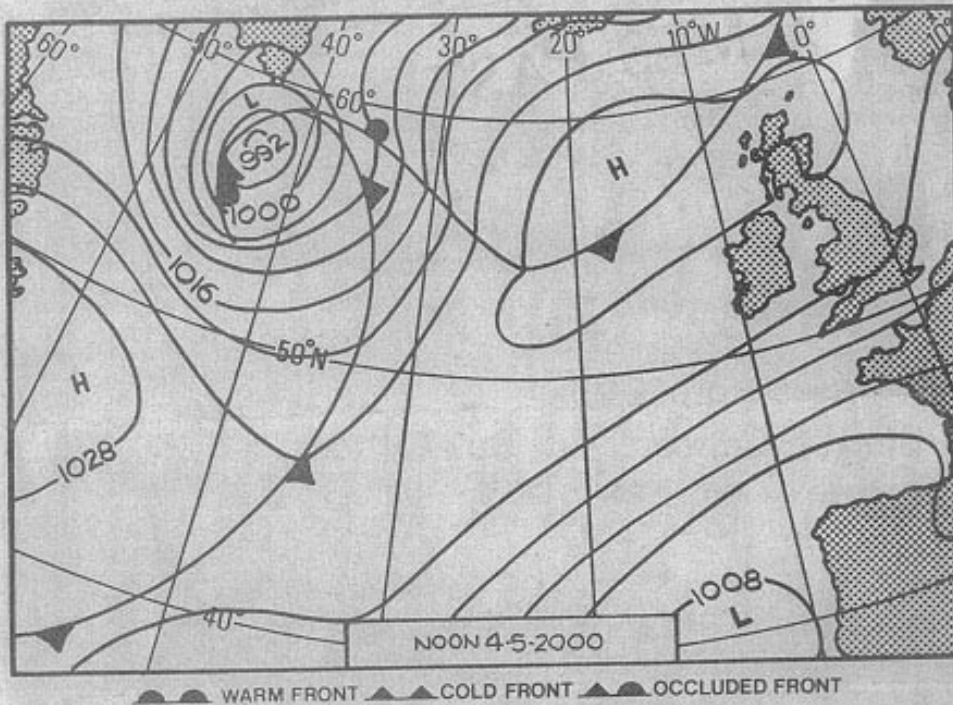
Source: C.J.Fallon. *Large Blank Map Book*. new ed. Dublin: C.J. Fallon, 1997.
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Source: **EUROPE**, Magazine of the European Union.
<http://www.eurunion.org/profile/brief.htm>



WEATHER FORECAST

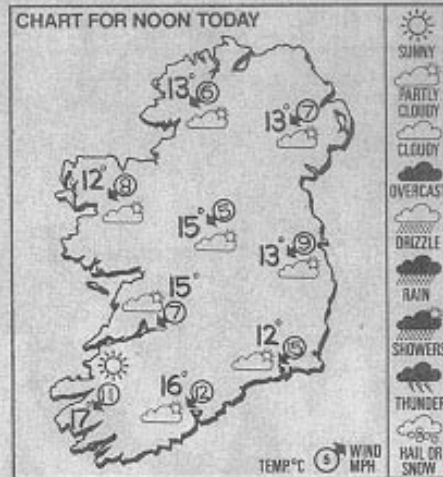


Meteorological Situation:

A dry, north-east to east airflow persists over Ireland with pressure remaining high.

Forecast from 6 am to midnight:

Mist, fog and associated low cloud may be slow to clear in some places during the morning but the day will be dry, with sunny periods for most areas. Light to moderate, north-easterly breezes will keep it cool along northern and eastern coastal margins but other areas will become quite warm. Highest afternoon temperatures, 14 to 19 degrees Celsius. A slight risk of isolated showers developing this evening but generally a fine end to the day, though



becoming rather cool everywhere soon after dark.

Outlook:

Mist and fog in places again overnight, then dry with sunny spells tomorrow.

The sunburn index for today is high.

Population of the Republic of Ireland

Ages	1971	1981	1991	1996
0 - 4	315,655	353,004	273,743	250,394
0 - 9	316,940	349,487	318,503	282,943
10 - 14	298,557	341,238	348,328	326,087
15 - 19	267,727	326,429	335,026	339,536
20 - 24	215,251	276,127	266,572	293,354
Total Population	2,978,248	3,443,405	3,525,719	3,626,087

Source: Helen Curley. *Local Ireland Almanac and Yearbook of Facts 2000*. Dublin: Local Ireland, 1999. pp. 152.

Meet the Irish

BACKGROUND

This activity is a travelogue with photographs to introduce students to Irish people and places, and to provide a context for the study of the Great Irish Famine. As they consider the famine, they will do so with the knowledge in information and technology that the Republic of Ireland is a member country of the European Union and that its economy has strengths in information and technology as well as in agriculture and tourism.

This activity can be used in conjunction with the activity *Ireland Today*, where the European Union is discussed.

RESOURCES

HANDOUTS

Meet the Irish

Book of Kells

Doors of Dublin

Moveen in 1849 and 1999

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Backhouse, Janet. *The Illuminated Manuscript*. Oxford: Phaidon, 1979.

Bain, George. *Celtic Art: The Methods of Construction*. New York: Dover, 1973.

The Book of Kells: Reproductions from the Manuscript in Trinity College, Dublin. With a Study of the Manuscript by Francoise Henry. London: Thames and Hudson, 1976.

Heffernan, Thomas. *Wood Quay: The Clash over Dublin's Viking Past*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988.

Liddy, Pat. *Dublin Be Proud*. Dublin: Chadworth Ltd., 1897.

Pritchett, V.S. *Dublin: A Portrait*. New York: Harper and Row, 1967.

Synge, John Millington. *The Complete Plays*. New York: Vintage, 1960.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

Describe the characteristics of Ireland, including its geography.

Survey and describe local monuments and transportation and make recommendations.

Explain the difference in time zones between Ireland and the United States.

Describe the *Book of Kells*.

Create a manuscript letter.

STANDARDS

SS 3: Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of the geography of the interdependent world in which we live—local, national and global—including the distribution of people, places and environments over the Earth's surface.

ELA 1: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding.

ELA 3: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for critical analysis and evaluation.

Arts 1: Students will actively engage in the processes that constitute creation and performance in the arts (dance, music, theatre, and visual arts) and participate in various roles in the arts. (Visual Arts)

Arts 4: Students will develop an understanding of the personal and cultural forces that shape artistic communication and how the arts in turn shape the diverse cultures of past and present society. (Visual Arts)

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Ask geographic questions about where places are located; why they are where they are; what is important about their locations; and how their locations are related to those of other people and places.

Analyze geographic information by making relationships, interpreting trends and relationships, and analyzing geographic data.

Gather and interpret information from children's reference books, magazines, textbooks, electronic bulletin boards, audio and media presentations, oral interviews, and from such sources as charts, graphs, maps, and diagrams.

Ask specific questions to clarify and extend meaning.

Establish an authoritative stance on the subject and provide references to establish the validity and verifiability of the information presented.

Analyze, interpret, and evaluate information, ideas, organization, and language from academic and nonacademic texts, such as public documents.

Use the elements and principles of art to communicate specific meanings to others in their art work.

Demonstrate how art works and artifacts from diverse world cultures reflect aspects of those cultures.

DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING

INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

- . acquire and organize information
- . analytical thinking
- . take and defend positions
- . communicate results of research

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

Arts

English Language Arts

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

1. Ask students to read the Dublin section of the handout *Meet the Irish*. Historian Alan Singer welcomes the reader with the traditional Irish greeting which means literally, "God save you!" If you were to answer him in Irish, you would say Dia's Muire Duit [Dee is-murra-git] which means God and Mary save you. What do students notice about the Irish greetings?

If Ireland is five hours ahead of New York, what time was it in Ireland when the Singers' plane left? If the flight is six and half hours what time did the flight arrive in Ireland? What time was it in New York when the plane arrived in Ireland?

Ask students to check the Dublin weather each day for a week in their daily papers or on the Internet and compare the Irish weather with their local weather. What do they notice over a one week period?

2. Nicknames for places are always interesting to study. The handout explains why Ireland is called the *Emerald Isle*. Why is New York State called the *Empire State*? Why is New York City called the *Big Apple*? Find out about other cities in New York State that have nicknames.

3. Wood Quay [key] was a dramatic discovery for modern Dubliners. While workmen were excavating for an office building along the Liffey at Wood Quay, they uncovered the site of an early Viking settlement.

While it is rare to find such a valuable site, it is possible to find interesting artifacts of people who lived in a place before us. Sometimes people working on building sites find evidence of earlier times: bits of china or glass, broken utensils, tin cans, coins, buttons, arrowheads, even bones. Why are such things valuable for local historians? Ask students to investigate whether local urban archaeologists have found any artifacts which tell us about the lives of people who lived in the area.

The Vikings gave the Irish language words for commerce and shipping. Where did our English words for market, penny, ship, rudder, anchor, oar come from?

4. Some years ago the Irish Tourist Board created a very popular poster of the doors of Dublin. (See handout *Doors of Dublin*.) What makes the poster so effective? The doors are of a style of architecture called Georgian. If students had to define the characteristics of a Georgian door, what would they say? Ask students to survey their neighborhoods for an interesting architectural feature (doors, windows, chimneys, gates, lights) and make their own posters.
5. Dublin has found that traffic has become a problem. The DART, Dublin's suburban railway line, is a help to people who live along the coast, but it does not serve people who live further inland. Ask students to take a survey of local public transportation in their areas. Are all areas served equally? How are people in rural and suburban areas served with public transportation? Ask students to design a survey to gather information about public transportation. Do people use it? When? Are they satisfied with it? Could it be improved? What recommendations could students make to improve local public transportation?
6. Ask students to notice local public monuments. Who do we celebrate? What occasions do we mark? What is similar about public monuments? Where do we put public monuments? Are there people in local history who deserve a monument? Why? Ask students to write to the local (village, city or county) head of parks and propose a monument to a person of local historical significance who has been overlooked.
7. The *Book of Kells* is a 9th century illuminated manuscript, and it has a number of special pages called *carpet pages*. These pages are highly ornamented with decoration, some with portraits and some with text that introduce the Books of the New Testament or introductory tables. The pages of the text even have fanciful animals that fill in spaces. Ask students to look at the handout of the reproduction of a page from the Gospel of Mark that introduces the line *Erat Autem hora tertia* [Now it was the third hour]. Can students make out the letters of the word ERAT? The E is decorated with a dragon head curled at the base of the letter. The R-A-T is painted simply in black letters. Ask students to look at the way the angel is painted. Is it realistic? What is the relationship between the figure, the letters and the panels of the design?

Pages like this were designed for ornamental gospels that would have been on display in churches. There is a rich tradition of such beautiful books, that were often commissioned by wealthy patrons. Books like these which combine portraiture, decoration and beautiful lettering are called *illuminated manuscripts*. Students can make their own illuminated manuscript page. The text will be their names. First letters should be highly decorative. Perhaps students can work a fanciful beast or bird into the letter. The decorations can symbolize hobbies, interests, favorite books, extracurricular activities, nicknames, and other items of personal interest.

8. Ask students to read the Clare section of the handout *Meet the Irish*. Students can visit the Kilrush Heritage website: www.westclare.com. West Clare was hit hard by the Great Irish Famine. The little townland of Moveen appeared as a deserted village in 1849; ruins of houses still dot the landscape in this area which is a popular tourist center today.
9. Students might like to read John Millington Synge's [sing's] play *Riders to the Sea* (see Additional Readings). It describes the life of Inishmaan fishermen at the end of the nineteenth century, fishermen who went out into the Atlantic in light, canvas-covered canoes called *currachs* [CUR-rahhs]. Inishmaan fishermen have always been skillful boatmen and careful about weather conditions, but the play reflects the worry about the dangers of the sea to fishermen who were not swimmers.

The play is written in the dialect of English called Anglo-Irish. It is English influenced by its contact with the Irish language. Students may notice the influence in the syntax.

10. Ask students to read "The Irish Countryside" section of the handout *Meet the Irish*. Ask students to share their impressions of what they have learned about Ireland and the Irish. Discuss the importance of understanding Ireland before studying the impact of the Great Irish Famine.

ASSESSMENT OPTION

Describe what you learned about the country of Ireland, in your own words.

TEACHER REFLECTION

This activity provides valuable background for students who do not know about Ireland. The activities that ask them to investigate subjects like local monuments, archaeological remains and public transportation are included to give students a chance to think about the heritage and the challenges that modern communities share. Experimenting with Celtic illuminated manuscripts and reading a text like *Riders to the Sea* introduce students to past Irish culture.

Meet the Irish

Dublin:

Dia duit! [DEE-ah git]

Our names are Alan Singer and Judi Singer. In June, 1999, we made our first visit to Ireland where we spent two weeks traveling. This is the story of our trip.

We met our friend Maureen at Kennedy Airport. She lived in Ireland when she was a student and she speaks the Irish language. Ireland has two languages—Irish and English. Students study both languages in school and there are schools where all of the subjects are taught in the Irish language. There is an Irish television station that has been nicknamed “T na G.”

The flight from New York to Dublin takes nearly six and a half hours. Most flights leave New York for Dublin about six o’clock in the evening. The plane flies northeast along the North American coast past Labrador; then it heads eastward for its 2,000 mile journey over the Atlantic Ocean toward Europe.

Ireland lies off the western coast of continental Europe. Until 1922, the 32 counties of Ireland were one country. That year a treaty between Ireland and the United Kingdom established a 26-county Free State now the Republic of Ireland or Eire, as it is known in the Irish language. Six counties of Northern Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom or Great Britain. The Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom are both members of the European Union, and representatives from Northern Ireland work together with representatives from the Republic of Ireland to get EU support for projects that help the entire region: transportation, communications, tourism, economic development.

The island of Ireland is nearly 300 miles from north to south and 170 miles from east to west. It has a 2,000-mile coastline which means that no spot on the island of Ireland is more than seventy miles from the sea. The island is shaped like a saucer with mountains and hills along the coasts and a flat central region that includes extensive bogland. (Bog is the Irish word for soft.)

When we arrived in Ireland we met our friend Margaret MacCurtain who is an historian. Margaret and Maureen were our guides during our first days in Ireland. The first thing we noticed was the weather. Ireland is much farther north than New York State, but the climate is milder. The Gulf Stream ocean currents from the Caribbean Sea moderate the temperature. It was cooler in Dublin in June than it was in New York, and palm trees can grow safely in Dublin gardens because it seldom is cold enough to freeze. It rained part of almost every day that we were in Ireland, and that is the usual weather. Because it rains so much Ireland is very green. That is why Ireland is called the Emerald Isle.

We started our trip in Dublin, the capital of the Republic of Ireland. It is a thousand-year-old city. The site of an early settlement along the River Liffey near where the river enters the Irish Sea appears on an ancient Roman map. That it was an early important river crossing is reflected in the Irish name for Dublin: Baile Átha Cliath [BALLA CLEE-ah], the Town at the Ford of the Hurdles. Later Vikings built a trading city on the site; an important archaeological site on Wood Quay uncovered the remains of Viking Dublin, but we can also find survivals of those Viking traders in the terms for commerce and sea transportation that their language gave to the Irish language. After the Norman Invasion in 1169, and particularly after the English military conquest began in 1541, when Henry VIII was declared King of Ireland, Dublin became Ireland’s administrative center.

As we walked through the streets of Dublin and along the Liffey we saw buildings that dated back to the last years of the 1700s. Dublin doorways are known all over the world for their bright colors, their brasswork and their fanlights, ornamental fan-shaped windows over the doors.

There is a lot of construction going on in Dublin. Many old stone buildings are getting new lives as apartments, office buildings, shops and entertainment centers. A stone building along the Liffey called the Point Depot is Dublin’s largest concert hall. Dublin has a city rail system called the DART that runs along the coast. They are working on a second suburban line that will serve other areas of the city and suburbs. Much of the Republic’s 3,500,000 people live in the greater Dublin area. Like all large metropolitan areas, morning traffic crawls into the city.

In Dublin we visited Trinity College, the National Library, the National Gallery and the National Museum. We especially liked walking through St. Stephen’s Green, a park in the center of the city. Dublin’s parks and public places have a number of statues and monuments. St. Stephen’s Green has a monument to those who died in the Great Irish Famine. There is another Great Irish Famine monument along the Liffey. Other monuments celebrate national leaders, writers and even fictional characters like Molly Malone who sold her shellfish “through streets broad and narrow.”

At the Trinity College, Dublin library we saw the famous *Book of Kells*, the hand-copied Gospels of the New Testament which are beautifully decorated and date back at least until the eleventh century. The National Library has exhibitions of archaeological artifacts from Early Ireland; it has a full-sized Viking ship built with traditional tools. Another exhibition tells the story of the 1916 Uprising that was part of the Republic of Ireland's struggle for independence from Great Britain.

We visited the old monastic site of Glendalough (the Glen of Two Lakes), a beautiful spot in the mountains south of Dublin which is popular with hikers and cyclists. The site is associated with St. Kevin a hermit monk who died in 619; its stone buildings are the remains of a little monastic center which was destroyed several times but which survives down to our own time.

For us the best part of Dublin was meeting people. Noel Kissane, The Keeper of Manuscripts in the National Library, gave us a tour of the Library, and Maureen and Margaret's friends the O'Braonáins [O'BRAY-nons] welcomed us to their home for dinner. While they normally speak Irish together, they spoke English during our visit so that we would feel included.

County Clare:

After Dublin, Margaret drove us across the width of Ireland to County Clare on the western Atlantic coast. It was a trip of about 120 miles or the length of Long Island from Brooklyn to Montauk Point. We were a little nervous about driving in Ireland because the traffic moves in the opposite direction. We drive on the right and people in Ireland, Great Britain and some of the Caribbean islands drive on the left.

Travel in Ireland is slower than in New York State because there are few highways. Trucks, cars, buses, farm vehicles and sometimes farm animals share two-lane roads and some of the road are very narrow. We took a ferry across the River Shannon to reach the town of Kilrush in County Clare.

In Kilrush we visited a local history museum that had an exhibition of Clare in the 1900s: the struggle between tenants and landlords and the Great Irish Famine. Mr. Considine, a Kilrush baker, gave us a tour of his shop that his family opened in 1847. Bars on the windows are a reminder that in 1847 bakers feared that hungry people would break in and try to steal the bread.

We traveled to North Clare to the Cliffs of Moher which tower 600 feet over the Atlantic and to the Burren, a limestone plateau overlooking the Atlantic that is so rocky it is hard to grow anything at all. Still, every spring, thousands of brightly colored wildflowers appear from tiny crevices between the rocks.

Farmers clear their land of rocks by using them for stone walls. When field are cleared, they can plant potatoes in mounds of soil called "lazy beds" which are laid out in rows and fertilized, sometimes with seaweed. The Burren is so wild that it was once described as "savage land, yielding neither water enough to drown a man, nor a tree to hang him, nor soil to bury him."

While we traveled around Ireland it seemed that Margaret and Maureen knew people everywhere. We visited Maureen's old friends the MacNamaras on their farm where we feasted on a dinner of roast lamb and potatoes.

Inishmaan:

We traveled to the island of Inishmaan on our own. We took a small eight-seat airplane which flew from the coast of Galway to the island landing strip in less than 10 minutes. Inishmaan is the middle of the three Aran Islands that lie at the mouth of Galway Bay. The island population is less than 150 people. Its two-room elementary school has only 16 students between the ages of four and fifteen.

Inishmaan is a place of incredible beauty and we went for many long, quiet walks. Because Ireland is so far north and it was the middle of June it did not get dark until almost eleven o'clock at night. At times the sky was very bright and it seemed as if we could see forever. However, when heavy clouds and fog rolled in off the sea, it was so overcast we could not even see to the next island.

The entire island is criss-crossed by stone walls that divide the land into small plots used for grazing cows and small gardens. It was here that we saw our first potato fields. Some of the little fields were covered with lush grass and flowers and other plots seemed to be all rock. The land has many old stone buildings and impressive pre-historic stone forts that were built over 1,000 years ago. While Inishmaan has pre-historic remains, its sweater factory uses computer-aided design and technologies to make the sweaters that are in demand in shops all over the world.

The cottage where the Irish writer John Millington Synge [sing] lived to learn Irish is on Inishmaan and has been restored. He wrote a very important play about island life called *Riders to the Sea*. Inishmaan continues to be a place

where people come to learn Irish or to practice their Irish with the island's native speakers. When we visited the island there were a group of eighty students studying to be teachers; they had come to the island for a summer Irish language institute. They were very friendly and glad to have a chance to talk about schools in Ireland and in the United States. They invited us to play basketball and to join them at the island pub for Irish music and singing.

The day we left Inishmaan the entire island was blanketed by a heavy fog. We decided to take the ferry and that was another adventure. We gritted our teeth and closed our eyes as the storm tossed the small boat around and the waves crashed over the deck. We were glad when our boat docked on the main land after a trip that seemed much longer than a half hour.

The Irish Countryside

During the next week we traveled by car and bicycle around the Irish countryside. We saw cows, goats and sheep everywhere. We visited a modern mushroom farm where the mushrooms grew inside giant humidified plastic tents. We also saw people using traditional tools to cut peat in the bog. A bog is the remains of a shallow lake filled in with partly decomposed vegetation. A foot or two under the top soil, the compressed plant matter has been lying since the last ice age for thousands of years. For centuries it has been cut into rectangular blocks, laid out to dry in the sun, stored, and used instead of wood or coal as a fuel in a fireplace or stove.

We visited the Great Irish Famine Museum in Strokestown and the famine graveyard in Sligo. The bronze tree "Faoin Sceach" (Under the Hawthorn), the logo for *The Great Irish Famine Curriculum*, stands in that graveyard. The lone tree was important in Ireland from the earliest times. The boulder stones surrounding it recalls ancient forms of burial. Another association with the *sceach* is the trees that took root in the ruins of cottages that were abandoned when people died or emigrated.

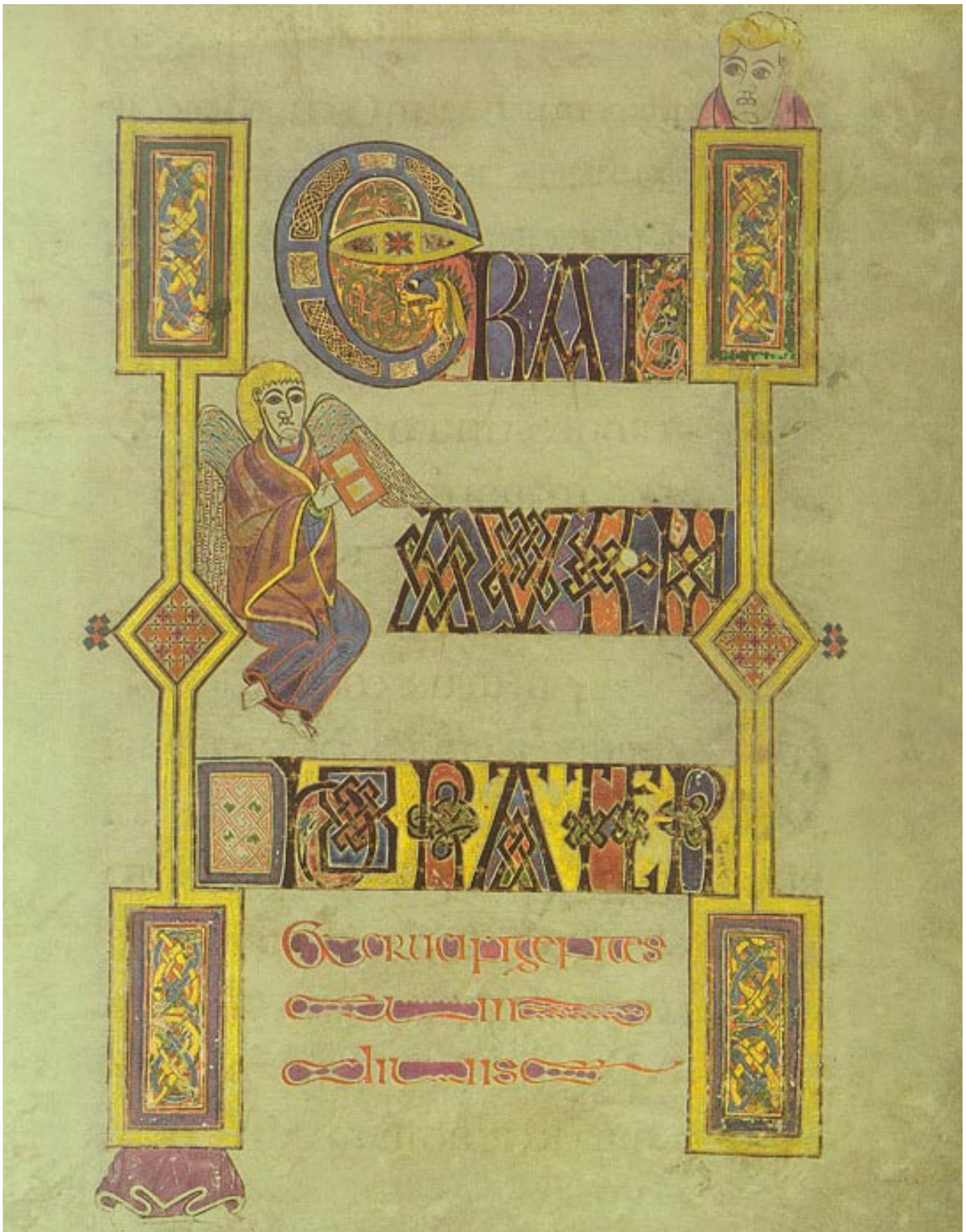
In Athlone we saw the remains of a famine workhouse. We biked along the banks of the River Shannon. In Tullamore we biked on the towpath of the Grand Canal that flows west from Dublin to the River Shannon. The canal was opened first in the 1790s.

One of the most beautiful parts of Ireland, and perhaps the entire world, is the Ring of Kerry, a 100-mile loop in the southwest's Iveragh Peninsula. We started in Killarney's national park with sparkling lakes, bicycle and hiking paths, mountains with peaks lost in the clouds, a working farm with buildings and tools dating from the early 1900s and a fancy country estate that was built in the early 1800s. From Killarney we drove through mountain passes and along cliffs overlooking the ocean. We stopped at the home of the Irish "Liberator," Daniel O'Connell, who lived in the 19th century. His house is now a museum.

We finished our tour at Tralee where we attended a performance of the National Folk Theatre which is called Siamsa Tíre (SHIM sa TEER a). Performers used traditional songs and dances to portray rural life and seasonal customs. In the first and last song and dance the performers mimed cutting peat in a bog.

After Tralee it was time to drive back to Dublin and head back to New York. We shopped for souvenirs of our trip: lots of books and posters, woolen scarves and tweed hats to reminds us of the people we met and the places we saw. We had a last dinner with Margaret and left early the next morning to catch our plane. We were sorry to be leaving. Slán [SLAWN, good-bye].

Source: Alan Singer. Great Irish Famine Curriculum Committee.



Carpet Page, Gospel of St. Mark

Source: *Book of Kells*, Trinity College, Dublin.
Used by permission of the Board of Trinity College.



Moveen 1999

Source: Photograph by Maureen Murphy. Great Irish Famine Curriculum Committee.



The Village of Moveen, three miles southwest of Kilkee.

(The Illustrated London News, 22 December 1849.)

A Chronology of Irish History Through 1949

BACKGROUND

The focus of this activity is on understanding the significance of specific dates in Irish history, and on understanding their relationship to events in other countries, including the United States.

RESOURCES

HANDOUTS

A Chronology of Irish History

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Bottigheimer, Karl S. *Ireland and the Irish: A Short History*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

Cremin, Peadar. *Footprints 4*. Dublin: C.J. Fallon, 1992.

CLASSROOM MATERIALS

Timelines for United States and global history (7500 BC-1950)

Library/Media materials depicting visual time lines

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

Identify significant events in Irish history and understand the consequences.

Relate events in Ireland's history to significant events around the world.

Understand how significant events can shape a country's history.

Understand that significant events in Ireland's history can be political, economic, geographical, social, and cultural.

Report on their ranking of Ireland's most important events.

STANDARDS

SS 1: Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments and turning points in the history of the United States and New York.

SS 2: Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in world history and examine the broad sweep of history from a variety of perspectives.

SS 3: Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of the geography of the interdependent worlds in which we live—local, national, global—including the spatial distribution of people, places, and environments over the Earth's surface.

ELA 3: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for critical analysis and evaluation.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Students will demonstrate their understanding of important world historical events by identifying and describing key events in Irish history and how those events relate to other major events occurring at the same time in the United States.

DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING

INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

- . acquire and organize information
- . analytical thinking
- . observe and conclude
- . probe ideas and assumptions
- . develop reflective thinking
- . consult and interpret databases
- . present information
- . synthesize information
- . make decisions about process
- . consult and interpret primary sources
- . identify patterns and themes

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

Arts

English Language Arts

PATTERNS TO ORGANIZE INFORMATION

Time lines

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

1. Explain that certain dates and events have special significance for countries. The events can involve weather, politics, war, economics, social change, inventions, geography, and culture.
Ask the students what they would consider to be significant events in world history. (For younger students, ask them what they would consider to be significant events in the life of a child, such as birthdays, divorce, moving, new school, etc.)
2. Ask students the following questions and list their responses on the board:
When does United States history begin?
What dates are most important in United States history?
Are there types of events that we consider to be especially important?
Can these events be ranked in importance? (Invite students to try to rank their list by importance, recognizing that “importance” is a matter of perspective.)
3. Review the handout *A Chronology of Irish History*, asking students to look for events that they think may have had a significant impact on Ireland’s history.
Ask students to prepare their own visual time line on the board with key events identified. Ask the class:
When does Irish history begin? When does United States history begin?
What were the *turning points* in Irish history?
Were there wars in Ireland? What were the outcomes?
Was Ireland ever invaded? Was the United States ever invaded?
How did America’s colonies become independent? How does America’s history of independence compare to Ireland’s?
What kinds of political action did the Irish use to achieve their political goals?
Were there any natural disasters in Ireland? What were the consequences?

Were there any significant economic events that changed the course of Irish history?

4. Divide students into groups and ask them to identify 10 historical events that they believe are significant in Ireland's history. They should choose at least one event from each of the following time periods: 7000 B.C–100 A.D.; 100–1500; 1500–1699; 1700–1800; 1800–1900; and 1900–1999.

The group is to write and present a report that explains why they chose their 10 events as the most significant in Irish history.

5. Ask students to select one event in Irish history and compare it with an event that was happening in another country at the same time. Emphasis should be on the influence of the events both locally and beyond the borders of the countries.

ASSESSMENT OPTION

Ask students to define “significant historical event” and defend their definition in an essay.

TEACHER REFLECTION

This activity encourages students to think about what kinds of events shaped a country's history. Ask students to identify events in the United States during their lifetime that they believe had an impact on the nation's history.

ADDITIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

For advanced students:

Students can create a correlating time line to show events occurring around the world at the same time as *A Chronology of Irish History* in this activity.

A Chronology of Irish History

- c. 7500 B.C.** Middle Stone Age people (mesolithic) arrive in northeastern Ireland, probably from Scotland.
- c. 3500 B.C.** New Stone Age people come to Ireland with agricultural skills. We can visit some of the archaeological sites that document their settlements.
- c. 2500 B.C.** Neolithic people build burial monuments called passage graves in the Boyne Valley at Dowth, Knowth and Newgrange. They are older than the pyramids.
- c. 2000 B.C.** The Bronze Age in Ireland. Bronze and gold ornaments, jewelry, and weapons in Ireland's National Museum indicate the skill and artistry of the Bronze Age people.
- c. 250** The Celts arrive from Europe bringing iron, their language and a common culture: social organization of small kingdoms based on the extended family, a cattle-based economy, a shared legal system. Celts were not town builders; they lived in rural farmstead settlements.
- 432 A.D.** This is the traditional date given as the start of St. Patrick's mission to convert Ireland to Christianity.
- 650-750** Irish monasteries produce metal work, architecture, high crosses, illuminated (decorated) manuscripts like the *Book of Kells*, which is preserved in the library of Trinity College, Dublin.
- 795** Norsemen in longboats arrive and raid the monasteries. The Norse found settlements along Ireland's eastern coast which become the cities of Dublin, Waterford, Cork, and Limerick.
- 1014** Irish forces under Brian Boru drive the Norsemen out of Ireland at the Battle of Clontarf. Norsemen had joined forces with Leinstermen who had opposed Brian Boru's power. (Leinster is the name of one of Ireland's provinces, the area around Dublin.) Brian was killed in the battle. He is called Ireland's first high king for his success at winning the support of powerful Irish families, the northern and southern Ui Neills.
- 1169** "Strongbow" (Richard de Clare) leads the Anglo-Normans' invasion of Ireland. The invasion came at the request of a king of Leinster [LEN-Ster] called Diarmuid MacMurrough [DEER-mud MacMURRAOW] who wanted help settling a feud of his own with another Irish king. The invasion had the approval of King Henry II and the blessing of Pope Adrian IV. The Normans were descendants of Norse settlers in France. The Normans invaded England in 1066. When the Anglo-Normans came to Ireland they brought more sophisticated weaponry and military skills, and a new legal system. 1169 marks the beginning of England's presence in Ireland.
- 1366** The Statutes of Kilkenny. Anglo-Norman settlers in Ireland had developed Irish ways. They spoke the Irish language; they dressed like Gaelic chiefs and adopted Gaelic social customs. The Statutes of Kilkenny try to legislate culture. Anglo-Normans are forbidden by law, and risk losing their lands, if they use the Irish form of their names, inter-marry with native women or adopt Gaelic culture.
- 1534** Henry VIII breaks with the Roman Catholic Church and founds the Church of England. Ireland remains Roman Catholic.
- 1541** Henry VIII declares that the King of England is also the King of Ireland.
- 1558** Henry VIII's daughter, Elizabeth I, becomes Queen of England. She tries to bring Ireland under English authority. Some Irish chiefs rebel. Their lands are taken and loyal Protestant settlers are brought to Ireland and "planted" on confiscated lands. She establishes the Church of Ireland by the Act of Uniformity, recognizing Protestantism as the state religion.
- 1685** Elizabeth's government begins "plantation" scheme for the province of Munster. An Irish rebellion by the Earl of Desmond is put down savagely.
- 1588** Ships from the Spanish Armada are wrecked off the west coast of Ireland. 1588 is the traditional date for the introduction of the potato to Ireland.
- 1595** Gaelic chief Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone, leads a rebellion in the province of Ulster that is initially successful, but he needs help. A Roman Catholic, O'Neill calls for help to Roman Catholic King Phillip III of Spain.

- 1601** Four thousand Spanish soldiers arrive to help O'Neill's forces, but are defeated by the English under Lord Mountjoy.
- 1603** O'Neill surrenders to the English.
- 1607** "The Flight of the Earls" (Earl of Tyrone and the Earl of Tyrconnell.) The two great Ulster families, their households and their followers leave Ireland for Europe. Historians often use the Battle of Kinsale or the Flight of the Earls to mark the end of Gaelic Ireland.
- 1610** Loyal Protestant English and Scottish settlers arrive in Ulster to settle on O'Neill and O'Donnell lands which were forfeited to the English crown.
- 1641** Native Roman Catholic Irish and Protestant planters fight over land. Taking advantage of unrest in England, the Irish rebel against new land owners. There were atrocities on both sides, but the year is remembered with bitterness by Ulster Protestants.
- 1649** The parliamentarians win the English Civil War, and King Charles I is executed. Oliver Cromwell, head of the English government, arrives in Ireland, captures and burns Irish towns and massacres Irish civilians. Catholic lands are confiscated and given to Cromwellians.
- 1660** British monarchy is restored.
- 1689** During the 1680s there are competing religious claims for the English throne. The followers of King William III support the Protestant claim; the followers of King James II support the Roman Catholic claim. Battles over those opposing claims were fought out in Ireland where winning meant control of land. James II arrives in Kinsale. Protestants in the city of Derry endure a siege that lasts three months. James II's forces are defeated at Enniskillen.
- 1690** William III lands in Ireland and defeats James II at the Battle of the Boyne. James flees.
- 1691** William III defeats Irish forces loyal to James II at the Battle of Aughrim, [AW-grim] Co. Galway. The Irish stand at Limerick (the siege of Limerick) wins concessions for James II's officers. They are allowed to go into exile in France. They become known as "the wild geese." The Treaty of Limerick promises civil rights for Catholics but the Penal Laws enacted by the English parliament restrict Roman Catholics from entering parliament, from public office, from the professions, from military commissions, and from religious worship (until about 1716). Catholics could not own land, so by 1703 only 14 percent of Irish lands are in Catholic hands.
- 1739-41** Severe weather. There is a serious famine in Ireland. It is estimated that at least 10 percent perish.
- 1750-1815** There is a long period of agricultural and population growth stimulated by British trade with North America and the Napoleonic wars.
- 1761** Secret societies in Ireland form to protest agricultural conditions: rents, unemployment, forced labor, enclosing common land and paying tithes to support the Church of Ireland.
- 1771** Benjamin Franklin visits Ireland.
- 1775-1783** American War of Independence.
- 1782** Henry Grattan's resolution for legislative independence for Ireland is approved by parliament and Ireland enjoys a measure of independence until 1801 and the Act of Union.
- 1791** Wolfe Tone founds the Society of the United Irishmen with an agenda for reform. Tone's United Irishmen reached across sectarian lines to encourage Catholics and Protestants to work together as Irishmen.
- 1798** A series of United Irishmen rebellions break out in Ireland in the spring and summer: Wicklow, Wexford, Antrim, Down. French land in Co. Mayo to join the United Irishmen. All are unsuccessful. The leaders are arrested and exiled. Many leaders and followers were executed, officially or unofficially. Historians now estimate the Irish casualties as at least 30,000, the vast majority of them killed by the British or their auxiliaries. In proportion to Ireland's population, more people were killed shortly before, during, and after the 1798 Irish Rebellion, the Irish equivalent of the American Revolution, than were killed in France during the Revolution and its aftermath.
- 1800** The Act of Union is passed. It takes effect in 1801 and abolishes the Irish parliament. Ireland is ruled directly by the British parliament until 1922.

- 1803** Robert Emmet's failed rebellion in Dublin. Emmet, tried and convicted for treason, makes his famous Speech from the Dock, now a school recitation piece, on Sept. 19 and is executed the next day.
- 1815** Corn Laws place heavy taxes on foreign grain imported into Great Britain. Irish grain can be sent to England without tax. The post-Napoleonic war precipitates a serious depression.
- 1816** Potato crop fails. Typhus fever epidemic kills about 50,000 people.
- 1828** Lawyer Daniel O'Connell wins election to parliament from Co. Clare. English law does not allow him to take his seat because he is a Roman Catholic.
- 1829** Catholic Emancipation Bill is passed allowing Roman Catholics to enter parliament. O'Connell takes his seat. Bill is regarded as a victory for religious tolerance in Britain.
- 1836** A royal commission reports that there are 2.4 million Irish living in poverty.
- 1838** A new Poor Law divides Ireland into 130 districts with workhouses that could accommodate 100,000 children, aged, and infirm. The Poor Law discourages "pauperism" by enforcing a harsh regime of work, diet, and segregation by age and sex. The Irish avoid the workhouses and they are half empty.
- 1839** The Year of the Big Wind. There is extensive destruction of houses in rural Ireland due to wind and fire.
- 1840** O'Connell forms the Loyal National Repeal Association dedicated to the repeal of the Act of Union. A series of mass meetings are held in 1843; O'Connell arrested for conspiracy.
- 1845** Potato blight first reported. This is the beginning of the Great Irish Famine. The potato harvest fails again in 1846, 1848, and 1849. The population of Ireland falls from 8,175,124 (1841) to 6,552,385 (1851), a decrease of nearly 20 percent, due to famine-related deaths and emigration. Evictions continue through the end of the century.
- 1848** A group of nationalists known as the Young Irelanders stages a short, unsuccessful uprising in Co. Tipperary. Leaders arrested and transported to prison in Van Dieman's Land (Tasmania).
- 1867** Unsuccessful rebellion by members of the Fenian brotherhood.
- 1870** Movement for Home Rule for Ireland begins. This movement is pledged to use constitutional (non-violent) means to achieve their goal of legislative independence for Ireland.
- 1877** Bad harvests; economic depression returns for three years.
- 1879** Land League founded to prevent evictions and ensure fair rents. Their ultimate goal was for Irish tenants to own their land. It will come in 1903 with the Wyndham Land Act. The Land League has strong support from the Irish in America.
- 1884** Gaelic Athletic Association founded to promote Irish games. It is the first of a number of cultural organizations which encouraged Irish pride and nationalism.
Prime Minister William Gladstone introduces his Home Rule Bill for Ireland in the House of Commons. It is defeated.
- 1893** Gladstone introduces a second Home Rule for Ireland Bill. It passes in the House of Commons, but it is defeated in the House of Lords.
The Gaelic League is founded to encourage the use of the Irish language. It plays a key role in the national movement. 1894 Irish Agricultural Organization Society, an agricultural cooperative society, is founded by Horace Plunkett.
- 1899** Irish literary theatre founded. It is the formal beginning of the Irish Literary Revival.
- 1912** Ulster Unionists sign Covenant to resist Home Rule.
- 1913** Lock-out of Dublin transport workers by employers. A bitter strike lasts six months.
The third Home Rule Bill passes in the House of Commons and it is again defeated in the House of Lords.
- 1914** The Home Rule Bill passes in the House of Commons. It receives the King's approval, but he suspends its start until the end of World War I.
- 1916** Armed insurrection in Dublin, planned by the Irish Republican Brotherhood and involving the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, begins on Easter Monday and lasts until Friday. Much of central Dublin is destroyed. Sixteen leaders are executed; rank and file sent to prison in Britain.

- 1919** Irish War of Independence begins. It is a guerrilla war between local units of the Irish Republican Army and the British authorities. The British bring in extra units including the notorious Black and Tans. The war ends with a truce in 1921.
- 1921** Anglo-Irish truce on July 11. Treaty negotiations follow. Ireland offered Free State status for 26 counties. There is extensive debate, and treaty passes.
- 1922** The Treaty is ratified in a general election in June, 1922. A civil war begins in June between the Irish Free State government and the Republicans over the terms of the treaty: an oath of office to the king and the partition of the six counties of Northern Ireland (Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry, Tyrone) which would continue to be part of the United Kingdom but would have a parliament for Northern Irish affairs at Stormont (Belfast). Irish Free State Constitution is approved for the twenty-six counties of the Irish Free State.
- 1923** Irish Free State survives the civil war which ends in May.
- 1925** Shannon scheme is approved, a hydroelectric project to develop an Irish power source that would help to electrify rural Ireland.
- 1932** Eamon DeValera leads the Fianna Fáil [FEE-anna Foil] party into the Dáil Eireann [DAWL AIRin, the Irish parliament] after the party defeats the government in a general election. This is a crucial test of the democracy of the Irish Free State, because it required the government to hand over authority to those they had opposed in the civil war 10 years before. The transition of power was carried out without incident.
- 1937** New Irish constitution replaces first Free State constitution.
- 1938** Douglas Hyde, a founder, with Eoin Mac Neill, of the Gaelic League, becomes the first President of Ireland.
- 1939** World War II begins Sept. 1. Irish Free State remains neutral. Northern Ireland is part of the Allied forces. In the course of the war American troops were stationed in Northern Ireland.
- 1941** Although Ireland is a neutral nation, Germans bomb Dublin and the eastern counties in 1941. German raids on Belfast kill more than 700.
- 1945** World War II in Europe ends May 8.
- 1947** British Education Act provides free secondary and university education to qualified students in Northern Ireland regardless of their ability to pay fees.
- 1949** Republic of Ireland declared April 18.