What is the Legacy of the Great Irish Famine?

PART ONE

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Stories of Famine Generosity

BACKGROUND

The popular book *Random Acts of Kindness* celebrates anonymous acts of generosity and encourages readers to practice their own quiet gestures of goodness. Random acts of kindness are a version of the golden rule of "doing unto others" that is a principle of every religious faith and of basic morality. Stories of hospitality rewarded and random acts of kindness date back as far as the eighth century in European folk literature. There are many medieval stories, usually religious tales, of mysterious beggars, who are received generously by the poor and who are then rewarded for their kindnesses. In Ireland these kind of tales are a type known as *Hospitality Blessed.*

RESOURCES

HANDOUTS

Mrs. Fitzgerald and the Milk

A Meal for a Stranger

CLASSROOM MATERIALS

Software for computer graphics design

Copies of *Random Acts of Kindness* (Conari Press Editors, Berkeley: Conari Press, 1993)

ADDITIONAL READING

Lysaght, Patricia. "Perspectives on Women During the Great Irish Famine From Oral Tradition," *Béaloideas, 64-5* (1996-7), 63-129.

McHugh, Roger. "The Famine in Irish Oral Tradition," R. Dudley Edwards and Desmond Williams, eds., *The Great Famine*. Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1962, pp. 404-405.

O'Gráda, Cormac. "Famine Memory." *Black 47 and Beyond: The Great Irish Famine in History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999, pp. 194-225.

Póirtéir, Cathal. *Famine Echoes*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1995.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

Create picture books of the texts discussed.

Explore art materials, including computer graphics.

Describe the role of *rescuers* during a time of crisis.

STANDARDS

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.

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.

Arts 2: Students will be knowledgeable about and make use of the materials and resources available for participation in the arts in various roles.

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

ELA 2: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Explore narrative accounts of important events from world history to learn about different accounts of the past to begin to understand how interpretations and perspectives develop.

Investigate the roles and contributions of individuals and groups in relation to key social, political, cultural, and religious practices throughout world history.

Explain the literal meaning of an historical passage or primary source document, identifying who was involved, what happened, where it happened, what events led up to these developments, and what consequences or outcomes followed.

Compare and contrast stories with similar themes.

DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING

INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

- evaluate and connect evidence
- draw conclusions
- view information from a variety of perspectives
- ask and answer logical questions
- present information
- participate in interpersonal and group activities
- work with others to solve problems
- communicate results of research and projects
- acquire and organize information
- make decisions about process
- reflect upon content/form opinions

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

Arts

English Language Arts

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

1. Read *Mrs. Fitzgerald and the Milk* to the students. Ask students to meet with a partner and discuss what they heard. What is the problem in the story?

Students should listen to the text again and make notes about what they heard. Partners compare notes.

Students should write down some words that describe Mrs. Fitzgerald and Mr. Fitzgerald. Which of the Fitzgeralds would students like to have for a neighbor? Why?

Write down what Mr. Fitzgerald was thinking when he saw the pans full of milk. Why did he decide not to interfere with his wife's help to her neighbors after that?

Why did Mr. Fitzgerald want to keep all of the milk?

2. Ask students to read *A Meal for a Stranger*. How is the story like *Mrs. Fitzgerald and the Milk*? How did the man in *A Meal for a Stranger* feel about his wife's hospitality to the stranger? Did he behave like Mr. Fitzgerald?

3. The Irish people have always valued hospitality and generosity. Before the Great Irish Famine, people traveling the roads could almost always be sure of a meal or shelter in any household. The famine, with its hunger and especially its famine-related diseases, changed that custom. Still there were people, usually women, who gave what they had to the poor. They were rewarded with good luck. Stories are still told about such women today.

Ask students: Do you know any stories about people who help their neighbors? Why do people help their neighbors, friends or strangers? Are they rewarded? How? Is it a reward to know you helped someone else?

4. Students can make picture books of one of the two texts. They can be encouraged to use the computer for the text and for some of the illustrations.

ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

Ask students to write a story that is similar to *Mrs. Fitzgerald and the Milk* and *A Meal for a Stranger*, depicting a *rescuer* that they know. Remind them that even small "acts of kindness" count.

TEACHER REFLECTION

This activity benefitted from Rosalie Rafter's presentation to the New York State English Council on listening called *Lend Me Your Ears* (October 21, 1999) which combined attention to listening skills with developing an understanding of narrative structure.

Teachers have had success with a book buddy program between students in the Multicultural Literacy and Citizenship Project at I.S. 292 in East New York and pre-schoolers in the neighboring Morris L. Eisenstein Learning Center. Students wrote and illustrated a book called *The O'Connors Comes to New York* which they read to their reading buddies. Fourth graders can do similar projects with younger students and present copies of their books to younger classes.

Teachers may want to use this activity with the other two activities that work with the theme of hospitality rewarded: *Proverbs and Famine Stories* and *Hospitality Rewarded: People Helping Others.*

ADDITIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCE

For younger students:

Ask students to interview their friends and family to find out how they have experienced an act of kindness or generosity. Draw illustrations, add quotes, and create a *Generosity Bulletin Board.*

For advanced students:

Ask students to research and locate examples of generosity during other significant world events such as the Holocaust, war time, civil unrest, or natural disasters like earthquake, fires, floods, or hurricanes.

Mrs. Fitzgerald and the Milk

I often heard of Mrs. Ned Fitzgerald, Mountinfant [Co. Cork], two miles north of our village. She was grandmother to the present owners and always helped the poor and never left a hungry man, woman or child go unfed from her door.

This good woman never refused to give her skim milk to the poor and often her husband used to blame her for giving away the milk and letting the calves go hungry. It was told how one day he was ploughing near the house and he saw so many poor people leaving the house with "gallons" of milk on their heads that he got vexed and made for the house to scold his wife for giving away so much milk. "You are giving away all my milk and starving my calves and not caring a bit what price they'd be making." She said the calves had grass and water and wouldn't starve and that she couldn't refuse poor neighbors a drop of milk for their starving children. "There's milk going all day," he said, "and come now and show me what you have for the calves in the evening."

He ran out to the dairy himself and she thought, "Tis unknown what he'll do when he finds all the pans empty." But when he went into the place, lo and behold, all the pans were full of milk and cream they were, though he had seen the milk being taken away all day. He got an awful surprise and went back to his plough, and 'twas said he never again interfered with his good wife about what milk she would give to the poor. His calves grew and thrived and he never had better calves than he had that very year when his wife had all the milk given away to the children of her poor neighbors.

Source: Roger McHugh,"The Famine in Irish Oral Tradition," in R. Dudley Edwards and Desmond Williams, eds. *The Great Famine*. Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1962. pp. 404-405. Permission pending.

A Meal for a Stranger

There is one outstanding incident still related here about the Famine years. In this district there lived a woman and her husband. (Their grandson and his children live here now.) They were small farmers. One day the husband and his workman were working not far from the house. Coming on to dinner time the wife got a meal of porridge ready for the three and put the plates on the table.

She then went out to call the men and when she returned, she found a stranger in the kitchen. He was red-headed and of wild hungry appearance. He asked the woman for something to eat as he was starving. She hadn't much in the house besides what was cooked on the plates and she thought of the two men who would be in any moment. She told him he could have a meal.

He cleaned one plate and the greater portion of the second. Then he thanked the woman and left. The husband and the workman came in almost immediately and were asked if they saw a stranger passing. They said they had not. The wife told what had happened, and the husband said it was all right as the one plate of porridge would do for the two of them, and they could make up for it at supper. It was said that from that day on everything prospered with that family—stock, crops, milk, undertakings.

Source: Collected from Mrs. Hartigan who was born in 1878 in Co. Cork, Manuscript volume 1068, pp. 204-206. Department of Irish Folklore, University College, Dublin. In Cathal Póirtéir, *Famine Echoes*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1995. Used with permission of the publisher.

Proverbs and Famine Stories

BACKGROUND

A proverb is a short and clever statement that says something about life that is believed to be true. They are usually attached to a folk tale that has a moral or leads to a message. Students are probably familiar with the proverbs:

Look before you leap.

Haste makes waste.

You can't tell a book by its cover.

Waste not; want not.

Don't put all your eggs in one basket.

Students will find that proverbs collected from adults are usually used for instruction and for a mild reproof. People also use proverbs to "cap" a conversation or as a response to somebody else's story. This activity is an opportunity for students to talk with adults and to collect proverbs from them.

RESOURCES

HANDOUTS

Mrs. Fitzgerald and the Milk

A Meal for a Stranger

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Bailey, Karen. *Irish Proverbs*. Belfast: Appletree Press, 1986.

CLASSROOM MATERIALS

Art supplies

Books of Proverbs, including *Irish Proverbs*, by Karen Bailey

Posted Irish Proverbs:

Do not mistake a goat's beard for a fine stallion's tail.

If you lie down with dogs, you'll rise with fleas.

Firelight will not let you read fine stories, but it's warm and you won't see the dust on the floor.

A trout in the pot is better than a salmon in the sea.

The longest road out is the shortest road home. (Bailey pp. 7, 9, 13, 19, 60)

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

Recognize proverbs and describe their meanings.

Create and illustrate sample proverbs.

Connect proverbs to literature related to the Irish Famine.

STANDARDS

SS2: 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.

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 2: Students will be knowledgeable about and make use of the materials and resources available for participation in the arts in various roles. (Visual Arts)

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

ELA 2: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Interpret and analyze documents and artifacts related to significant developments and events in world history.

Explore the lifestyles, beliefs, traditions, rules and laws, and social/cultural needs and wants of people during different periods in history and in different parts of the world.

Explain the literal meaning of a historical passage or primary source document, identifying who was involved, what happened, where it happened, what events led up to these developments, and what consequences or outcomes followed.

Recognize different levels of meaning.

Create their own stories, poems, and songs using the elements of the literature they have read and appropriate vocabulary.

Know and use a variety of sources for developing and conveying ideas, images, themes, symbols, and events in their creation of art.

Develop skills with a variety of art materials and competence in at least one medium.

DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING

INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

- evaluate and connect evidence
- reflective thinking
- identify premises and rationale for points of view
- present information
- communicate results of research and projects
- synthesize information
- conceptualize and observe
- reflect upon content/form opinions

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

Arts

English Language Arts

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

1. Share the same proverbs given in the Background section of this activity and post them in the classroom (see Classroom Materials). Ask students if they can think of additional proverbs, such as: *Charity begins at home, There is luck in sharing a thing, Don't postpone a good thing,* and *A fool and his money are soon parted*. They should consult with adult friends and family, as well as teachers, librarians, and on the Internet. Ask students to illustrate any proverb, including those that they make up on their own.
2. Ask students to review the proverbs and determine which ones go best with *Mrs. Fitzgerald and the Milk* and *A Meal for a Stranger.*
3. Students can make their own illustrated collections of proverbs.

ASSESSMENT OPTION

Ask students to discuss interpretation of an Irish proverb as it applies to the Great Irish Famine.

TEACHER REFLECTION

Proverbs in languages other than English will be interesting for others and will give bilingual students an opportunity to share their culture with classmates.

Mrs. Fitzgerald and the Milk

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This good woman never refused to give her skim milk to the poor and often her husband used to blame her for giving away the milk and letting the calves go hungry. It was told how one day he was ploughing near the house and he saw so many poor people leaving the house with "gallons" of milk on their heads that he got vexed and made for the house to scold his wife for giving away so much milk. "You are giving away all my milk and starving my calves and not caring a bit what price they'd be making." She said the calves had grass and water and wouldn't starve and that she couldn't refuse poor neighbors a drop of milk for their starving children. "There's milk going all day," he said, "and come now and show me what you have for the calves in the evening."

He ran out to the dairy himself and she thought, "Tis unknown what he'll do when he finds all the pans empty." But when he went into the place, lo and behold, all the pans were full of milk and cream they were, though he had seen the milk being taken away all day. He got an awful surprise and went back to his plough, and 'twas said he never again interfered with his good wife about what milk she would give to the poor. His calves grew and thrived and he never had better calves than he had that very year when his wife had all the milk given away to the children of her poor neighbors.

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A Meal for a Stranger

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She then went out to call the men and when she returned, she found a stranger in the kitchen. He was red-headed and of wild hungry appearance. He asked the woman for something to eat as he was starving. She hadn't much in the house besides what was cooked on the plates and she thought of the two men who would be in any moment. She told him he could have a meal.

He cleaned one plate and the greater portion of the second. Then he thanked the woman and left. The husband and the workman came in almost immediately and were asked if they saw a stranger passing. They said they had not. The wife told what had happened, and the husband said it was all right as the one plate of porridge would do for the two of them, and they could make up for it at supper. It was said that from that day on everything prospered with that family—stock, crops, milk, undertakings.

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Hospitality Rewarded: People Helping Others

BACKGROUND

In this activity students will explore how different families show hospitality, and the intangible rewards of being welcoming and hospitable. Students will read two stories about the Irish value of hospitality and read an old Irish poem on the same theme to discover that the messages in *Mrs. Fitzgerald and the Milk* and *A Meal for a Stranger* are very old themes.

Teachers may want to combine this activity with the activity *Stories of Famine Generosity.*

RESOURCES

HANDOUTS

Mrs. Fitzgerald and the Milk

Meal for a Stranger

CLASSROOM MATERIALS

Poem *Hospitality in Ancient Ireland* (in the Learning Experiences section of this activity) on the board

Art supplies for drawing

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

Describe hospitality in the readings, in Irish life, and in their personal lives.

Describe ways to welcome guests to their homes and newcomers to their school.

Describe how hospitality could be rewarded (with no monetary reward involved).

STANDARDS

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

ELA 2: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.

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.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Ask specific questions to clarify and extend meaning.

Understand the literary elements of setting, character, plot, theme, and point of view and compare those features to other works and to their own lives.

Use inference and deduction to understand the text.

Recognize different levels of meaning.

Present personal responses to literature that make reference to plot, characters, ideas, vocabulary, and text structure.

DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING

INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

- reflective thinking
- draw conclusions
- interpret information
- conceptualize and observe

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

English Language Arts

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

1. Read *Mrs. Fitzgerald and the Milk* and *A Meal for a Stranger* and discuss the messages in each story.
2. Ask students to read a very old poem from the 13th century manuscript the *Leabhar Breac* (LAUW-er BRACK) (written on the board) which means *speckled book,* to learn how early the custom of hospitality was expressed in Irish literature. The poem is written in the form of a prayer. Note that the poem represents one religious view, but symbolizes a theme that is relevant to all perspectives about how to treat your fellow human being.

   HOSPITALITY IN ANCIENT IRELAND

   Oh King of stars!
   Whether my house be dark or bright,
   Never shall it be closed against any one,
   Lest Christ close His house against me.

   If there be a guest in your house
   And you conceal aught from him,
   'Tis not the guest that will be without it,
   But Jesus, Mary's Son.

   Translated by Kuno Meyer
   from the *Leabhar Breac* (*Speckled Book*)
   13th century
3. Even today in the Irish countryside, a candle is lit and placed in the window on Christmas Eve to show Mary that she and Jesus would be welcome in that house. Have students ever heard the expression, "I'll leave a light in the window for you?" How are guests welcomed to their homes?

   What other customs do people have for welcoming strangers? Construct a list of the ways that the students can be welcoming to newcomers who are joining their class or school and ways to share with others who are in need. What do they do now? Could they do something more?

ASSESSMENT OPTION

Illustrate something that represents hospitality in Irish homes or any other settings. Perhaps draw a special cake, welcome home signs, or candles in the window.

TEACHER REFLECTION

Students realize that life is different from long ago in rural Ireland where the custom was to welcome a stranger into one's home. Today, children are taught not to open the door to a stranger. Still, students can apply concepts of the activity to welcoming newcomers into families, class or school, neighborhoods, and communities.

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He cleaned one plate and the greater portion of the second. Then he thanked the woman and left. The husband and the workman came in almost immediately and were asked if they saw a stranger passing. They said they had not. The wife told what had happened, and the husband said it was all right as the one plate of porridge would do for the two of them, and they could make up for it at supper. It was said that from that day on everything prospered with that family—stock, crops, milk, undertakings.

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The Countess Kathleen O'Shea

BACKGROUND

This story is adapted from the text of "The Countess Kathleen O'Shea" that W.B. Yeats included in his Irish folklore collection *Irish Fairy and Folktales*. Later, Yeats turned the legend into his first play *The Countess Cathleen* (1892), a play that was criticized because of its unconventional theme. Instead of the usual Faustian treatment of one who sells her soul to the devil, the Countess is saved by the intervention of angels.

RESOURCES

HANDOUTS

The Countess Kathleen O'Shea

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

Describe the impact of "giving up something precious."

Describe reactions to the story, explaining why folk tales such as *The Countess Kathleen O'Shea* were created as a result of the Great Irish Famine.

STANDARDS

ELA 2: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Understand the literary elements of setting, character, plot, theme, and point of view and compare those features to other works and their own lives.

Present personal responses to literature that make reference to the plot, characters, ideas, vocabulary, and text structure.

Explain the meaning of literary works with some attention to meaning beyond the literal level.

DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING

INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

- analytical thinking
- reflective thinking
- interpret information
- form opinions
- make generalizations
- identify patterns and themes

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

English Language Arts

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

1. Ask students to read *The Countess Kathleen O'Shea.* Why do the men with the gold think that they can buy souls in Ireland? What did the Countess Kathleen think would happen to her soul if she sold it? Why does the Countess Kathleen lock herself in her room after she sells her soul? Why do the angels take her soul?
2. Ask students: What words would you use to describe the Countess? Draw the scene when the Countess sells her soul to the men.
3. This is a story about people giving up precious things for others. Ask students:

   Do you know anyone who has given up something precious for somebody else? Has someone ever given up something precious for you? Write something about someone who has given up something precious to help another. You might want to write a letter to that person. (Remind students that even a penny, a special stone, a hair clip, can be *precious*. The significance is in the sentimentality, not the monetary value.)
4. Sometimes people use the expression, "I'd sell my soul for...."

   They are not really serious, but what do they mean?
6. Does the Countess believe she is really selling her soul? Does she think it is wrong to do it? Why does she do it? Do people ever do wrong things for what they consider to be the "right" reasons?

ASSESSMENT OPTION

Write a paragraph that describes the Countess Kathleen. (If you were to describe her to someone, what would you say?)

TEACHER REFLECTION

Students may be unfamiliar (or uncomfortable) with the concept of *selling souls* (to the devil) and all that is implied by the decision Countess Kathleen makes. The views of different religions should be taken into consideration when carrying out this activity. Younger students may have difficulty comprehending that alternative solutions (such as merely buying more food) are not possible. Background information on the realities of the famine will be necessary.

Students may also want to discuss the question of whether stealing food when you and your family are starving is the "right" thing to do.

The Countess Kathleen O'Shea

A long time ago in Ireland, two strange men appeared in a country town. They were dressed in silken coats, and they wore gold bands around their dark hair, but they seemed to be very old. They were not from Ireland, but they were able to speak Irish. They each had a large bag of gold, and they sat in the window of their inn counting each shiny piece over and over again.

One day the woman who kept the inn said to them, "Gentlemen, you seem to have a great amount of gold. Do you know that people here are poor and very hungry? Why don't you help them with your wealth?"

"We would do that, good lady," said one of the men, "but we don't want to help those who only pretend to be poor."

When the news went around that there were men with bags of gold in the town, the poor came to the door of the inn. Some were not ashamed to ask for money. Others were very shy because they were poor.

"We are not going to give money to you," said one of the rich men, "but we will buy from you."

"We are too poor. We have nothing we can sell."

"You can sell your soul. We are buying souls for the devil. We will give twenty gold pieces for old souls. We will give fifty gold pieces for souls of grown people. And we will give one hundred gold pieces for the souls of the very young because they are the freshest and purest.

The Countess Kathleen O'Shea heard of the men's offer to buy the souls of the poor. She was always very good to the poor and she thought of a plan to help them without losing their souls. She called one of her helpers.

"Patrick, how many pieces of gold do I have?"

"You have 100,000 pieces."

"What is the worth of my jewels?"

"The same again."

"And the worth of all of my land?"

"Double the gold and the jewels."

"Sell all my gold, my jewels and my land, Patrick. Leave me only my house and my garden. Give the money from the sale of my wealth to the poor."

Patrick sold the gold, jewels and land and he gave the money to the poor to buy food. The rich men stayed on at the inn.

"The money will run out soon, and then there will be souls to sell. The king has promised that food will be coming from across the sea, but it won't come for another month."

The men were right. The poor people had money for three weeks, but when their money was gone, there was still a week before the food would arrive.

"We still offer to buy your souls," said the men when the poor gathered around the inn. The poor were very hungry and began to think that they had no choice but to sell their souls.

Suddenly, a woman in a black cloak appeared among them and went to the door of the inn. When the men appeared, she drew back her hood revealing the beautiful face of the Countess Kathleen.

"Gentlemen," she said, "I have a very special soul to sell, but it will cost you all of your gold pieces." What soul could be so precious?" they asked.

"My soul is that precious," said the Countess Kathleen.

The rich men could not believe their good luck. The pure soul of the Countess Kathleen would be a prize for the devil.

"How much do you want for your soul, beautiful lady?"

"Two hundred thousand pieces of gold. It will be gold enough to feed all the poor until food arrives from over the sea.

"The money will be yours if you sign this paper."

The men gave the Countess a paper edged in black and fixed with a big red seal. The Countess looked at the paper sadly for a while. Then she grabbed the pen from one of the men and signed her name quickly. The men counted out two hundred thousand gold pieces, and the Countess wrapped her cloak around her and left. She spoke to no one until she returned to her home. She called Patrick and spoke to him sadly.

"Please give this money to the poor. It will buy them food until the food arrives from over the sea. The poor will not have to sell their souls. I am going to my room now. Do not let anyone enter my room. Good-by now, Patrick, and thank you."

The Countess went to her room and locked the door. She did not come out again. After three days, Patrick and her other helpers unlocked the room. They found that she had died of sadness.

When they heard that the Countess was dead, the rich men came to her home with the paper that she had signed to claim her soul. Before they could take her soul for the devil, two angels appeared and carried off her soul.

"She sold her soul," said the angels, "but she sold it to save her people. She will have a special place in heaven."

Source: Adapted from W.B. Yeats, "The Countess Kathleen O'Shea," *Irish Fairy and Folk Tales*. New York: Modern Library, n.d. pp. 248-251. Permission pending.

Hunger in Ireland After the Great Irish Famine

BACKGROUND

The problem of hunger continued in Ireland into the twentieth century. There was widespread rural poverty, and there were famine conditions in western counties in 1923-24. The land question was settled with the 1903 Irish Land Act which provided for tenants to purchase their land, but the Land Act did nothing to help the very poor. The Congested Districts Board had some success trying to improve the rural economy in distressed areas, but it failed to alleviate poverty. Workers in Dublin also suffered from poverty and hunger in those years, especially during the strike of the Irish Transport and General Workers when 24,000 union members were locked out by their Dublin employers until February 1914.

RESOURCES

HANDOUTS

Hunger

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Esse, James [James Stephens]. *Hunger*. Dublin: The Candle Press, 1928.

Martin, Augustine. *James Stephens: A Critical Study.* Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977.

McCartney, Donal. "From Parnell to Pearse (1891-1921)," in T.W. Moody and F.X. Martin, eds., *The Course of Irish History.* Rev. ed., Dublin: Mercier Press, 1984. pp. 294-312.

McCourt, Frank. *Angela's Ashes*. New York: Scribner, 1996.

Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath*. New York: Harper, 1951.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

Describe information gathered about poverty, share observations about the writings, and draw conclusions.

Describe the impact of the shift from rural to urban poverty in the early 20th century in Ireland.

STANDARDS

SS2: 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 4: 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 nonmarket mechanisms.

ELA 2: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Explain the literal meaning of a historical passage or primary source document, identifying who was involved, what happened, where it happened, what events led up to these developments, and what consequences or outcomes followed.

View history through the eyes of those who witnessed key events and developments in world history by analyzing their literature.

Study about how the availability and distribution of resources is important to a nation's economic growth.

Understand how scarcity requires people and nations to make choices which involve costs and future considerations.

Present responses to and interpretations of literature and primary sources.

Use inference and deduction to understand the text.

Recognize different levels of meaning.

DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING

INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

- observe and conclude
- reflective thinking
- view information from a variety of perspectives
- form opinions

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

English Language Arts

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

1. James Stephens wrote his story *Hunger* under the pen-name James Esse in 1918. The story describes a poor Dublin house painter and his family after the Dublin lock-out and at the start of World War I. The painter's work was seasonal, and his wife had to stretch his wages. Ask students to read the first passage from the handout *Hunger*.

What does the expression "make ends meet" mean? If making ends meet means making wages cover expenses (ends), what does Stephens mean when he says there was "nothing but ends"?

2. Stephens is describing a family on the edge of starvation. How does he describe hunger? Ask students how they feel when they are hungry. Do they get cross? Do they feel tired? Do they have pains in their stomachs? Do they get headaches? What happens if everyone in the house is hungry?

3. What is the tone (Stephen's attitude) in this passage? Is he angry that the painter and his family have to live in such conditions? We know that Stephens really cared about poverty because he wrote an angry letter about poverty to the labor paper *The Irish Worker* during the Dublin lock-out. Why isn't he angry in *Hunger?* How does the reader respond to the passage? Do students think that Stephens uses a dry, factual tone to get his reader to respond? Does that tone keep the attention of the readers on hunger?

4. When World War I begins, conditions get worse for the painter. There is less work and construction slows down because it is difficult to get supplies. The painter's wife hears there is work in Scotland at a factory that makes ammunition, and she manages to makes ends meet enough to raise the fare for him to go to get work. While she waits for him to send money, she begs and thinks of becoming a street singer. Ask students to read the second passage from *Hunger*.

The woman is not a very good beggar. Why? Ask students to list the ways the people she meets respond to her. Ask students if they have ever seen people begging. How do people respond to beggars? Do they respond in the ways that Stephens describes? How do people look (or not look) at the begging woman?

What are the different ways that we can look at another person? Why is the way we look at people important? What do we mean when we say, "He/she won't look me in the eye?" Are students aware that in some cultures, people don't look at one another in the eye? (Animal behaviorists tell us that eye contact between animals is very important.)

The woman does not hear from her husband and things get harder and harder for her little family. The children cry for food. One child has died of hunger-related causes; another little one dies of starvation.

Only her last child, disabled and confined to a chair, is alive when she is befriended by a charitable gentleman who pays her rent, gives her money for food and promises to find work for her and to locate her husband. He does locate her husband; he has died of hunger and exposure in Scotland. The gentleman renews his promises of help to the woman and promises to send a doctor to see the disabled child. Stephens ends his story with a description of the gentleman.

> *And he went away all hot and cold, beating his hands together as he walked, and feeling upon his shoulders all the weariness and misery of the world (29).*

Ask students to think of how they would feel if they were in his position after confronting such desolation. Why does he feel the "weariness and misery of the world?"

5. Ask students to find examples of different kinds of writing and media that treat the subject of poverty: factual data, documents, editorials, photo essays, documentaries, feature films, memoirs and fiction. Working individually or in groups, ask students to evaluate each example. What is most effective about each type of message? Which example is most compelling?

ASSESSMENT OPTION

"Her earnings were small, for she could not get in touch with people; they recognized her at a distance as a beggar, and she could only whisper to the back of a head or a cold shoulder."

Write a page describing how this quote symbolizes the fate of the woman as a beggar, and the reaction of the public who are not suffering as she is.

TEACHER REFLECTION

The American Depression is a good theme for this activity. John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* condemns California fruit growers for letting fruit spoil rather than giving it to poor children:

> *There is a crime here that goes beyond denunciation. There is a sorrow here that weeping cannot symbolize. There is a failure here that topples all our success. The fertile earth, the straight tree rows, the sturdy trunks, and the ripe fruit. And children dying of pellagra must die because a profit cannot be taken from an orange. And coroners must fill in the certificate—died of malnutrition—because the food must rot, must be forced to rot* (477).

Teachers may want to contrast the death of the house painter (who had tried for two weeks to get work, was hired, and died the following morning) with the episode in *Angela's Ashes* when Malachy McCourt goes to England during World War II to work in a munitions factory. Men had been recruited from the Limerick lanes to work and each week their families received money orders. Frankie and the boys look forward to what their father's wages will bring them:

> *We'll all have new boots and coats so we won't be coming home from school famished. We'll have eggs and rashers on Sunday for breakfast and ham and potatoes and cabbage for dinner. We'll have electric light and why shouldn't we?* (221).

Sean O'Casey, Stephens' contemporary, was a railway worker and labor organizer before he became a playwright in the 1920s. His early Dublin plays and the first three volumes of his autobiography describe the poverty of working class Dubliners at the turn of the 20th century.

Hunger

Wages which have to be stretched so lengthily give but the slenderest sum toward a weekly budget: it was she who had to stretch them, and the doing of that occupied all the time she could spare for thinking. She made ends meet where nothing was but ends, and they met just over the death line of starvation. She had not known for three years what it was like not to be hungry for one day, but life is largely custom, and neither she nor her husband nor the children made much complaint about a condition which was normal for them all, and into which the children had been born. They could scarcely die of hunger for they were native to it: they were hunger, and there was no other hunger but them: and they only made a noise about food when they saw food. (9)

Her earnings were small, for she could not get in touch with people; they recognized her at a distance as a beggar, and she could only whisper to the back of a head or a cold shoulder. Sometimes when she went towards a person that person instantly crossed the road and walked for a while hastily. Sometimes people fixed upon her a cold, prohibitive eye, and she drew back from them humbled, her heart panting and her eyes hot at the idea that they took her for a beggar. At times, someone, without glancing at her, stuck a hand in a pocket and gave her a penny without halting in their stride. One day she got twopence, one day she got sixpence, one day she got nothing. But she could hold out to the end of the week. (21)

Source: James Esse [James Stephens]. *Hunger*. Dublin: The Candle Press, 1918. pp 9, 21. Reprinted with permission of The Society of Authors, literary representative of the Estate of James Stephens.

Relief After the Great Irish Famine

BACKGROUND

This activity is designed to give students a sense of the type of work the Irish engaged in after the famine, beginning with a discussion of the life of a stone breaker from a poem by Padraic Colum. In the poem, Colum uses the name *tinker* for Ireland's traveling people. (Tinker was considered a derogatory name and was replaced with *itinerant* and *traveler*.) Travelers are a small minority group in Ireland whose lifestyle is similar to the Romany Gypsies who travel around England and the continent. Years ago travelers went around the country in horse-drawn wagons; today they live in trailers. The name *tinker*, one who mends metal objects, referred to their work which, with horse trading and casual labor, was their means of support. Today travelers sell scrap metal and junk. While many of their woman and children beg, travelers are eligible for government support programs and many communities have worked to help those travelers who want to join the settled community find housing and employment.

RESOURCES

HANDOUTS

The Stone Breaker

Men Breaking Stones

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Gmelch, Sharon and Pat Langan. *Tinkers and Travellers.* Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 1975.

Kissane, Noel. *The Irish Famine: A Documentary History*. Dublin: National Library of Ireland, 1995. pp. 17.

CLASSROOM MATERIALS

Poem on the board from Learning Experiences #3.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

Describe the types of jobs available after the famine

Explain why people may be in low-level/entry-level jobs.

Evaluate job opportunities and identify personal preferences.

Create poems about work.

STANDARDS

SS2: 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 4: 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 nonmarket mechanisms.

ELA 2: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.

CDOS 2: Students will demonstrate how academic knowledge and skills are applied in the workplace and other settings.

CDOS 3b: Students who choose a career major will acquire the career-specific technical knowledge/skills necessary to progress toward gainful employment, career advancement, and success in post-secondary programs.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Analyze the roles and contributions of individuals and groups to economic practices and activities.

Investigate important events and developments in world history by posing analytical questions, selecting relevant data, distinguishing fact from opinion, hypothesizing cause-and-effect relationships, testing these hypotheses, and forming conclusions.

Understand how scarcity requires people and nations to make choices which involve costs and future considerations.

Develop conclusions about economic issues and problems by creating broad statements which summarize findings and solutions.

Identify significant literary elements and use those elements to interpret the work.

Recognize different levels of meaning.

Read aloud with expression, conveying the meaning and mood of a work.

Produce interpretations of literature, making reference to the literary elements found in the text and connections with their personal knowledge and experience.

DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING

INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

- analytical thinking
- observe and conclude
- view information from a variety of perspectives
- conceptualize
- reflect upon content/form opinions

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

English Language Arts

Family and Consumer Science/Career Development

STUDENT-CENTERED TEACHING AND LEARNING

Student Career Awareness

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

1. Explain to students that the kind of work associated with "famine work" continued to be the basis of public employment through the rest of the century. In the handouts, the 1898 photograph of the men breaking stones and women carrying stones is in An Chearthú Rua (Carraroe), Co. Galway. How would students describe the photograph? What is their response to the photograph? Do students respond to the women in the photograph in the same way as they respond to the men in the photograph?
2. Padraic Colum's *The Stone Breaker* is the voice of a stone breaker of the period. Ask students to read and respond to the poem. What kinds of work does the speaker miss as a stone breaker? What is his attitude toward the land? He suggests that sailing and farming take strength and art. Does he think there is strength and art in the work of the stone breaker? Fishing and farming involve an intimate relationship with nature. What kind of relationship does the stone breaker have with the land and like about him? Why does the stone breaker curse the tinker? What is the reality of the tinker's life? What is the reality of the stone breaker's life? How will the stone breaker free himself of this work?
3. Students working part-time may want to do other work instead of fast-food restaurant worker, office worker doing xeroxing, polishing cars at a car wash, check-out clerk at a super market. Ask students to think about working at such repetitive, and often dead-end jobs when they would rather be working at something else. Ask them to describe the work they want to do, to identify tasks or working conditions that make their current jobs unpleasant, an encounter with someone who sees them at their work, and

their thoughts about how it would be possible for them to leave their unsatisfactory jobs and move on to a better life.

Note: The purpose of this activity is to encourage students to consider possibilities and to think about how jobs can be rewarding and fulfilling. It is important, however, that students also recognize that people often work in low-level jobs because of lack of education, lack of knowledge about job and educational opportunities, past history that affects their ability to get a better job, location and transportation, access to child care, etc. It should also be stressed that many people take great pride in their jobs and should be recognized for the challenges of jobs that are termed "low-entry", and for the pride they take in working as a nurse's aide, in janitorial work, food service, etc.

Here is an example of a poem describing someone studying to be a teacher and who is working as a subway toll collector:

No young people to teach
and to share my love of books.
Oh, to watch them flower in the light
of my mentoring.

The sun never shines
on the cage under the street
where I sort change,
swipe cards and
nab kids jumping the turnstiles.

The homeless
pity me behind bars.
Could they know that
there is a teacher inside?

Shifts finish.
Days pass.
I stack credits like tokens.
They will take me
to my classroom.

Ask students to write their own answering poems to *The Stone Breaker* using their three elements: a description of the work they would like to do, why they would like to do it, and how the poet will stay on the job or will move on to the work he/she really wants to do. Ask students to use at least one metaphor and one simile in the poem.

ASSESSMENT OPTION

Would you rather be the stone breaker or the tinker? Explain your choice.

TEACHER REFLECTION

This activity is part of a series of activities that looks at conditions in Ireland after the Great Irish Famine, conditions that explain why emigration continued from rural Ireland well into the twentieth century. Students' responses to the photograph from Carraroe is always interesting in the way they respond to the gender difference in the tasks.

The Stone Breaker handout provides an opportunity to talk about the world of work and the kind of work available to teenagers. Writing their answering poems provides them an opportunity to find the language to talk about their own work experiences. Most students find they can write a poem when they are given a template or framework. Notice that the sample is not rhymed. If there is a requirement for meter and rhyme, students usually focus on those elements rather than on finding the vivid language to express their ideas. Students who want to work in regular meter or to use rhyme will do so.

ADDITIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCE

For younger or advanced students:

Select an entry-level job that you can observe at a local employer, such as McDonald's, grocery store, factory, etc. What are the working conditions? How are employees treated? What activities have to be done to earn a paycheck? What would cause pride in a job, and what could contribute to boredom and frustration? What are the opportunities for advancement?

The Stone Breaker

No kind earth may I ever sweeten
Nor seed to its growth ever cast:
O for strength at lough or harrow
Or art for the sail in the blast!

My back to the sun all the daytime
And my head o'er the hateful heap:
My world is the flint and the limestone,
O harsh is the harvest I reap!

The rise and the fall of the hammer,
And no share in the life around -
No ear for the bird or the ballad,
I hear but the one dulling sound.

"A man without heart in his hammer,"
A tinker cried out going by -
I watched him swing down on the wide road
And gave him my curse for reply.

What thought could he have of my toiling
As on to his wand'rings he went,
Of the hours of my aching sorrow,
Of a back now broken and spent?

I'm but an old man on the roadside,
Stone-breaking for bread all the day,
Waiting the last fall of the hammer
And God then to call me away.

Padraic Colum

Source: Padraic Colum. "Poems," *The Journal of Irish Literature. A Padraic Colum Number*, II, 1 (January 1973). pp 88.

Men breaking stones and women carrying stones on relief works at An Cheathrú Rua (Carraroe), Co. Galway, 1898. (The Mansion House Committee, *Relief of distress in the west and south of Ireland, 1898*, [1898], p.11.)

Source: Noel Kissane, **The Irish Gamine, A Documentary History**.
Dublin: National Library of Ireland, 1995. p. 177.
Used with permission of the author and the National Library of Ireland.

Public Monuments: Remembering the Past

BACKGROUND

In this activity, students will develop an appreciation for public monuments by evaluating those designed during the 150th anniversary of the Great Irish Famine that commemorated the dead and the diaspora.

Students will explore the role that the creation of public monuments played in Irish society and in the communities of the Irish diaspora.

For this activity, the following definitions will be useful:

Representational Monuments: Monuments that try to create a likeness of a person or an object

Nonrepresentational Monuments: Monuments that depart from an actual likeness to try to convey an emotion or concept.

RESOURCES

HANDOUTS

Famine Memorial, Carraroe, Co. Galway

Quayside Memorial, Sligo

The Australian Monument to the Great Irish Famine

The Boston Irish Famine Memorial

Limerick Famine Memorial

ADDITIONAL READING

Kerr, Joan. *The Australian Monument to the Great Irish Famine 1845-1848.* Willoughby New South Wales: Great Irish Famine Commemoration Committee, 1999.

O'Toole, Fintan. "$1m Famine Memorial a Monument to Kitch," *The Irish Times,* July 3, 1998.

Winter, Joy. *Sites of Memory: Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

The Boston Irish Famine Memorial Website: www.boston.com/partners/famine_memorial/

The Grosse Isle Website: parcscanada.risq.qc.ca/grosse_ile/stopover_e.html

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

Compare monuments to the Great Irish Famine in terms of design and meaning portrayed.

Explain the importance of monuments in educating viewers about history.

Draw conclusions about the effectiveness of monuments.

STANDARDS

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

SS2: 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.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Consider different interpretations of key events and developments in world history and understand the differences in these accounts.

View history through the eyes of those who witnessed key events in world history by analyzing their art.

Discuss and write their analyses and interpretations of their own works of art and the art of others, using appropriate critical language.

Look at and discuss a variety of art works and artifacts from world cultures to discover some important ideas, issues, and events of those cultures.

DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING

INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

- reflective thinking
- identify patterns and themes
- observe and conclude
- probe ideas and assumptions
- identify premises and rationale for points of view

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

Arts

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

1. Ask students to look at photographs of monuments created on three continents to mark the 150th commemoration of the Great Irish Famine: Australian Monument to the Great Irish Famine (Sydney), Boston Irish Famine Memorial (United States), and Carraroe, Limerick, and the Quayside Memorial, Sligo (Ireland) The Sligo Famine Graveyard memorial "Faoin Sceach" is the New York State *Great Irish Famine Curriculum* logo. All of the monuments have the same purpose: to honor those who died or who emigrated during the Great Irish Famine (1845-1852).

Ask students to create a chart and respond to each of the monuments. What is the message of each? How does each monument convey its message? Ask students to compare and contrast the monuments. How are the monuments the same? How are they different? What is the difference between monuments that are representational and those that are not representational? Ask students: Which do they think are the most effective in sending a message? Least effective? What were the designers trying to say?

2. In 1998, *Irish Times* columnist Fintan O'Toole was critical of the Boston famine memorial, a memorial he thought offered "pious cliches and dead conventions." He quoted Paul O'Brien, a member of the famine monument committee, as saying that they "pushed for a memorial that would be easy to comprehend." O'Toole concluded, "A mature culture is one which can, among other things, create complex images of its own past. Three years into the 150th anniversary of the Great Irish Famine, there's not much sign that Irish Culture, at home or abroad, is capable of doing that. We prefer the past to be presented in easily comprehended parables and undemanding effigies." O'Toole's comments suggests another dimension for students to analyze: complexity. Which monuments are "easy to comprehend?" Which of the monuments require the observer to make meaning of the image(s)? What emotions do students think should be the result of viewing a monument dedicated to the Great Irish Famine?

ASSESSMENT OPTION

You have been asked to be part of an international jury to award a prize to the most effective public monument to the Great Irish Famine. Each jury member has been asked to review the public monuments and to nominate one of the monuments for the prize. The nominating letter must be at least five paragraphs long and include an analysis and reference to specific details about the following criteria: image, design, scale, relationship to the people it represents, relationship to those who visit the monument) to support your choice.

TEACHER REFLECTION

This activity can result in an interesting discussion about the purpose of a monument. Why are they built? What monuments are students familiar with in their own regions? Have they walked or driven by a monument without stopping to contemplate the meaning of the monument?

ADDITIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

For advanced students:

Have students do a similar exercise with other monuments: monuments to the victims of the European Holocaust, American military monuments (e.g., the Marine Corps monument, the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial). Have students pay special attention to the difference between representational and non-representational monuments.

While the subject is not the famine, *Sites of Memory: Sites of Mourning*, Jay Winter's study of the culture of commemoration in Europe after World War I, argues that efforts to collectively remember the dead turned to traditional frames of reference: language, rituals, forms, images which helped mourners to live with their losses and perhaps to move on and separate from their dead. How have designers of famine monument used traditional frames of reference in their work? Winter's work involved studying people creating a culture of commemoration to cope with personal bereavement, a very personal sense of loss. What kind of loss do the famine memorials express?

Famine Memorial, Carraroe, Co. Galway.

Trá na bPáisti	**The Childrens' Strand**
Cumhdaithe	**Protected**
i mbaclainn Mhuire	**in Mary's arms**
Go lúidh, a Thiarna,	**they lie, O Lord,**
Ár naíonáin gan ainm	**our nameless infants**
Is ár ngaolta caoine	**and our gentle relatives**
A sciobad uainn	**who were snatched from us**
le linn ar Ghorta Móir	**duing the Great Famine**
1997	**1997**

The People of An Chearthrú Rua (Carraroe) erected this Famine monument on the site of a killeen, a grave for unbaptized children.

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

Quayside Memorial, Sligo
The Emigrant Family
Bronze figure on a stone plinth 8 feet high

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

The Australian Monument to the Great Irish Famine 1845-1848,
Sydney, Australia by Hossein and Angela Valamanesh of Adelaide.

Describing the monument, Professor Joan Kerr of the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research at Australian National University wrote:
"The high stone wall cutting the institutional buildings off from the unrestricted life of the city has been cleverly incorporated into the memorial as a Symbol of the almost insuperable barrier that divided early colonists from their origins, families and memories. Breached but not broken down, a section seems to have dramatically changed direction to join past and present, old and new, Ireland and Australia, the forced emigrant and the willing settler. The transparent screen that takes its place bearing the names of all of the Irish migrant women who lived at Hyde Park is a tribute to those whose journey created this bridge between a fondly remembered yet tragic past and a more promising yet alien future. Complementing this ambiguous vision is a long, bronze table that similarly crosses time and place in juxtaposing the empty plate of famine and the modest provisions that ensured survival in the new land. The mixture of loss and hope is echoed in the fragmentary Irish women's voices issuing from the nearby lilli-pilli tree in Paul Carter's evocative soundscape.

Source: Joan Kerr. *The Australian Monument to the Great Irish Famine 1845-1848*. Willoughby New South Wales: Great Irish Famine Commemoration Committee, 1999. Permission pending.

The Boston Irish Famine Memorial, Washington and School Street

"Two life-size sculptures, one depicting a family leaving Ireland's shores, impoverished and desperate, and another depicting a family arriving in Boston, filled with hope and determination," designed by Robert Shure and eight narrative plaques telling the story of the Irish in Boston.

Source: The Boston Irish Famine Memorial Website: www.boston.com/partners/famine_memorial/
Permission pending.

Broken Heart
Famine Memorial, Limerick, Co. Limerick.

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

Creating Monuments to the Past

BACKGROUND

In this activity, students will create designs for representational or non-representational famine monuments. Students can write journals as they create, participating in critiques of the projects using the language of art criticism. This activity can be used in conjunction with *Public Monuments: Remembering the Past,* where definitions of different types of monuments are included.

RESOURCES

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Scruggs, J.C. and J.L. Swerdlow, *To Heal a Nation: The Vietnam Veteran's Memorial.* New York: Praeger, 1985.

Scully, Vincent. "The Terrible Art of Designing a War Memorial," *New York Times*, July 14, 1991 (Arts and Leisure), pp. 28.

CLASS MATERIALS

Sketch paper, pencils or charcoal, clay, wood, metal, and stone (or any other medium) for sculpting monuments.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

Convey an idea for a monument with design and description.

Reflect on the design and critique process in a journal.

Design a monument to the Great Irish Famine.

STANDARDS

SS2: 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.

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 2: Students will be knowledgeable about and make use of the materials and resources available for participation in the arts in various roles. (Visual Arts)

Arts 3: Students will respond critically to a variety of works in the arts, connecting the individual work to other works and to other aspects of human endeavor and thought. (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 the past and present society. (Visual Arts)

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

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Investigate the roles and contributions of individuals and groups in relation to key social, political, cultural, and religious practices throughout world history.

Analyze the roles and contributions of individuals and groups to social, political, economic, cultural, and religious practices and activities.

Analyze different interpretations of important events and themes in world history and explain the various frames of reference expressed by different historians.

View history through the eyes of those who witnessed key events and developments in world history by analyzing their literature, diary accounts, letters, artifacts, art, music, architectural drawings, and other documents.

Read and write diaries and journals.

Know and use a variety of sources for developing and conveying ideas, images, themes, symbols, and events in their creation of art.

Develop skills with a variety of art materials and competence in at least one medium.

Compare the ways ideas and concepts are communicated through visual art with the various ways that those ideas and concepts are manifested in other art forms.

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

DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING

INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

- reflective thinking
- view information from a variety of perspectives
- present information
- participate in interpersonal and group activities
- communicate results of research
- make decisions about process
- conceptualize and observe

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

Arts

English Language Arts

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

As students follow these steps to design a monument, they should keep a running journal.

1. Ask students to select the historical (or any other) aspect of the famine that they wish to mark. **Journal entry:** Why did you choose this event? What details do you think offer strong visual images?
2. Students can begin to explore images for their monuments. They can complete two or three sketches of images they are considering for their monuments. **Journal entry:** Students can evaluate their sketches in terms of the suitability of their images for three-dimensional monuments. What demands does a monument make on an artist? (People will view it from all sides. It has to convey a certain mood. What will it be? Pride? Sorrow? Horror? Outrage? Nostalgia?)
3. Students can continue to work on images and refine them into three-dimensional designs. Each student can select a medium and an inscription. **Journal entry:** Students can discuss their selection of their texts for their monuments. Will students write their own inscriptions or choose the words of others?
4. Students can create their inscriptions for their monuments and can consider the placement of their inscriptions. Will an inscription go on the monument? Will it go on the plinth? Students can design the lettering for their inscriptions.
5. Students can finalize the sketches of their images and can present their choice of images and discuss their plans for executing their designs: medium, design, inscription. **Journal entry:** Students can respond to the class critique. Have students communicated their visual messages effectively? What advice has each found most helpful?

6. Students can execute models to scale in clay, wood, metal, or stone. Final class critique and student exhibition of their famine monuments.

Note: Students can create a display of their sketches.

ASSESSMENT OPTION

Describe the process of designing and presenting an idea and how it would feel as an artist if public approval was required before the monument could be made.

TEACHER REFLECTION

This activity is designed to make use of the aesthetic principles that students developed in the activity entitled *Public Monuments: Remembering the Past.* This activity can be adapted for less experienced students by substituting a two-dimensional design (poster, painting, print, or collage) for the more demanding three-dimensional project.

Music of the Great Irish Famine

BACKGROUND

Irish music in both the Irish and English languages offers insight into social history. A contemporary response to the Great Irish Famine in the Irish language folk song tradition is a form of the traditional lament; a response in the English language song tradition is the ballad. In both cases, students will see that we often turn to music to express feelings for which words are inadequate.

Students will need background information on the Great Irish Famine. (See the background materials provided the beginning of this curriculum.)

(Note: The first part of this activity is for any music class, but the second part of the Learning Experiences is designed for more advanced music students.)

RESOURCES

HANDOUTS

Amhrán na bPrátaí Dubha

Skibbereen

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Copland, Aaron. *What to Listen for in Music*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1939.

ní Annagáin, Maighréad and Séamus de Chlanndiolúin, ed. *Londobh an Chairn: Being Songs of the Irish Gaels.* Dublin: Oxford, 1926.

O'Canainn, Tomás. *Traditional Music in Ireland.* Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.

O'Riada, Seán. *Our Musical Heritage.* Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1982.

Smith, Sally Sommers. "The Origin of Style: The Famine and Irish Traditional Music," *Érie-Ireland*, XXXII (Spring 1997), pp. 121-135.

Williams, William H.A. *'Twas Only an Irishman's Dream: The Image of Ireland and the Irish in American Popular Song Lyrics, 1800-1920.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996.

Wright, Robert L. *Irish Emigrant Ballads and Songs.* Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University, 1975.

DISCOGRAPHY

Paddy Moloney *Long Journey Home* (Soundtrack) BMG 09026-68963-2. Includes Paddy Moloney, "Emigration Theme," Liam O'Maonlaí, "White Potatoes," and Sinéad O'Connor, "Skibbereen."

Mary O'Hara *Songs of Ireland* TLP 1024. Includes "The Famine Song."

Patrick Casside, *Famine Remembrance.* Windom Hill Records.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

Describe different types of Irish music.

Describe how the Great Irish Famine is depicted in music.

Create lyrics and/or a song about the Great Irish Famine.

Interpret Irish music in liner notes.

Perform some of the songs of the Great Irish Famine.

Design an album cover for their Great Irish Famine album.

STANDARDS

ELA 2: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.

SS2: 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.

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. (Music)

Arts 2: Students will be knowledgeable about and make use of the materials and resources available for participation in the arts in various roles. (Music)

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. (Music)

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Study about different world cultures and civilizations focusing on their accomplishments, contributions, values, beliefs, and traditions.

View history through the eyes of those who witnessed key events and developments in world history by analyzing their music.

Compose simple pieces that reflect a knowledge of melodic, rhythmic, harmonic, timbrel, and dynamic elements.

Use traditional or nontraditional sound sources, including electronic ones, in composing and performing simple pieces.

Through listening, analyze and evaluate their own and others' performances, improvisations, and compositions by identifying and comparing them with similar works and events.

DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING

INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

- reflective thinking
- work with others to solve problems
- communicate results of research
- make decisions about process
- conceptualize

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

Music

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

1. Great Irish Famine songs include those where the singer describes the famine as it is happening to a suffering people. Liam O'Maonlaí's [MWAN-lee] track *White Potatoes* on *Long Journey Home* is a song written by a Galway farmer named Peatsai O'Callanáin who lived through the Great Irish Famine. The original version of the song has thirty three verses, but O'Maonlaí sings just three stanzas in the traditional sean-nós [SHAN NOH-se] style, a style of unaccompanied singing characterized by ornamentation. Paddy Moloney includes his English translation of the verses in the liner notes to the track. The song is a farewell to the white potatoes that begins with praise and turns to anguish when they spoil. It is important that students have background information on the Great Irish Famine so that they understand why a song would be dedicated to potatoes.

My thousand farewells to the white potatoes
Whose presence brought us cheer
And great pleasure when they came to us
Laughing with us at the head of the table.
They nourished the nurse, and the child
The weak and the strong, the young and the old.
But the reason for my anguish and my distress
Is that the potatoes have rotted without storm or frost.
(Trans. Maureen Murphy)

In other verses, the singer tells the human cost of the loss of the Fataí Bána [FAT-ee Bawn-a, white potatoes]: the deaths, the workhouse, the yellow meal. Ask students to listen to the O'Maonlaí track with the Moloney or Murphy translation. How does the singer convey the emotion of the sense of loss? Ask them to listen carefully to the O'Maonlaí's ornamentation in the song. What does it sound like? Is there any similarity between vocal and instrumental ornamentation?

2. Tell students:

We often turn to music to express that which cannot be adequately expressed in words. The Great Irish Famine is an event that has prompted some people to express their responses in musical terms. The musicians of the Great Irish Famine range from folk singers of the 19th and 20th centuries to contemporary popular and classical artists and composers.

Ask students to read the lyrics and Maureen Murphy's literal translation of "The Song of the Black Potatoes," a song written by Máire ní Dhroma [MAUR-a Nee-Ruma] of Ring, county Waterford where the parish lost 22 percent of its population during the Great Irish Famine (O'Gráda 220). What is the difference between the literal translation and song lyrics? Describe the meter and rhyme of the lyrics. The lyrics add an allusion, a literary device that briefly refers to a person, a place or an event that the author thinks would be well-known to the listener or reader. What is the allusion in the lyrics?

The singer pleads to the King of Glory to help those suffering from hunger. What does the singer ask? According to the singer, what are the possible reasons for the terrible hunger in Ireland? What has happened to the poor? What happens to those families who must go to the poorhouse? Who are "the proud ones?" What do they do? What does the singer criticize them about? What images in the singer's words are most evocative?

3. Another genre of song of the Great Irish Famine is the narrative ballad. When a son asks his father why they left Ireland, the father describes the famine, the loss of crops and stock, their eviction, the death of his wife and his departure in the dead of night with his infant son. What can students learn about Irish social history from the songs for the potatoes and *Skibbereen*?

The music and lyrics for *Skibbereen* are in the *Remember Skibbereen* activity. When students learn to sing "Skibbereen," they might try to sing it in the sean nós style. Sinéad O'Connor sings *Skibbereen* on a track of *Long Journey Home*.

4. In addition to singing a traditional famine song, Sinéad O'Connor has written a contemporary song called "Famine" for her *Universal Mother* album. The song describes what O'Connor feels are the residual effects of the Great Irish Famine on the people of Ireland today.

5. There is also symphonic music composed in memory of the Great Irish Famine. "Emigration Theme," from Paddy Moloney's "symphony in progress" on the Great Irish Famine appears as a track on *Long Journey Home*. Patrick Casside's *Famine Remembrance* album was composed as a famine commemoration piece.

What do students notice about the music of the Great Irish Famine? What is the rhythm of the music? Does the selection have a pattern of regular stresses? Where does the accented beat fall? Ask students how they respond to the repetition of the stressed first beat in *Skibbereen.*

What melodies appeal to students? How does the melody lead the students through the piece? Does the melody appear from beginning to end or does it appear, disappear and reappear? How does the composer use the melody to give the piece its power? Can they characterize a line of the melody that they like? Why do they like it? Does it have a sense of completion or wholeness? Where are the high points and low points? Where is the climax of the line? (Copland 50)

Some of the Great Irish Famine music consists of a single melody line; there is no harmony. Irish traditional music usually has a melody line elaborated with ornamentation but little or no harmony because traditional

musicians, like jazz musicians, compose or recreate the melodies on the instrument (generally the uilleann [UL-inn] pipes and the fiddle) at each performance. Musicians learn new melodies (tunes) by hearing them or playing them with other musicians.

Tone is the special quality of sound in a musical piece. It is often achieved by using a particular instrument or instruments. Traditional Irish music or music composed in a traditional idiom is usually scored for the uilleann pipes, the fiddle, the flute, the tin whistle, the concertina or the accordion, the harp and the *bodhran* [BOW-rawn, a goatskin drum]. In the past years, the Irish have added the bouzouki and the banjo to traditional session instruments. Ask students to listen to Paddy Moloney playing the tin whistle in *Famine Theme* from *Long Journey Home*. What special quality does the tin whistle give to the piece? What would happen if the instrumentation were changed to a flute? A violin? A French horn?

6. Ask students to produce their own Great Irish Famine song, an album cover (title, a color design: graphic or collage) and the liner notes. The music can be traditional folk songs, contemporary popular and commissioned choral/orchestral works. Student work can be original compositions, student solo or ensemble interpretation of the Great Irish Famine.

Liner notes should be written to introduce listeners to the theme of each song.

(Some students may be able to create an *album* of songs and should order the tracks by a specific theme.)

ASSESSMENT OPTION

Write the lyrics to a song that would portray some aspect of the Great Irish Famine. Make it a poem, a ballad, a story, or just words that capture the emotions of the Irish people in the mid-1800s. Describe the type of music that would be appropriate for the type of lyrics selected.

TEACHER REFLECTION

Many students are familiar with Irish music and contribute comments about their own favorite bands when contemporary musicians' interpretations of the Great Irish Famine are discussed. What students find interesting is the way that Irish musicians fuse Irish history, traditional elements in music with contemporary popular and rock music. While few students were daring enough to try sean-nós singing, they were able to see that the style has similarities to some of the conventions of jazz.

This is an activity that introduces a number of aspects about Irish music to students: Irish traditional music, Irish popular music and Irish classical music written about the Great Irish Famine. Particularly recommended is the music from *Long Journey Home* which is the soundtrack for the PBS series of the same name that chronicles the Irish immigrant experience.

Amhrán na bPrátaí Dubha [ORE-on na BRATEE DOVE-a]
The Song of the Black Potatoes

O! King of Glory, hear and answer us,
From bondage save us, and come to our aid,
And send us bread, as we cry in misery,
And may the poorhouse be in ashes laid.
If for our sins we pay this penalty,
Open our hearts, that they may be cleansed be!
One drop of Thy Blood! O! send to comfort us,
In grief and hunger we are sore dismayed.

O! Pity's King and blessed Lamb of Love,
Look down from Heaven above upon our ills,
Oh! Shepherd, keep now Thy sheep from straying
Whom Thy bitter pain bought on Judea's hills.
O! when bread did abound! 'Twas little we thought of Thee,
We felt no need, nor aid we sought of Thee,
Oh Pity's King! relieve our agony,
And ease the pains of those dread Famine chills.

No work of God's are these deed accursed,
The poor dispersed in grief and pain,
The poorhouse gates that clanging close on them,
And wedlock bands forever rent in twain.
The children they reared, with parents' care for them,
The poorhouse bare doth rudely tear from them.
Or should they die, no cry their mother hears,
Though they be lying near, by hunger slain!

Oh pity the proud ones, all earth possessing
That for these distresses must surely pay,
Oh, sad their fate, who the poor oppressing
Do richer grow by their moans each day.
The potatoes that failed, brought the nation to agony,
The poorhouse bare, and the dreadful coffin ship.
And in mountain graves do they in hundreds lie,
By hunger taken in their beds of clay.

Source: Robert L. Wright ed., “Amhrán na bPrátaí Dubha,” *Irish Emigrant Ballads and Songs*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Press, 1975. pp. 91-92. Used with permission of the author and the publisher.

Amhrán na bPrátaí Dubha [ORE-on na BRATEE DOVE-a]

The black potatoes have scattered our neighbors,
Some to the poor house and some over the sea.
Hundreds are thrown in the mountain graveyard.
O King of Heaven, take our part.
O God of Glory, help us. Answer us.
Release our bonds and ease our case.
From Your heart, shower us with life
And destroy the poorhouse that is in our midst.

If it is because of our sins that this gap came between us,
Open our hearts and banish the bitterness.
Let a drop of Your true spirit restore us
and, King of Heaven, ease our case.
It is not You we think of night or morning
But the misery of life that makes our elegy.
O, Jesus, lift this cloud from us
So that we would see your vision each moment of the day!

The poor of Ireland suffering with misery,
Sorrow, distress and the pain of death.
Poor children crying and screaming each morning
With long hunger and no food to be found for them.
It was not God who created this trouble,
Poor people cold and wandering
Or shut behind the gates of the dismal poorhouse
Where husbands and wives are separated till death.

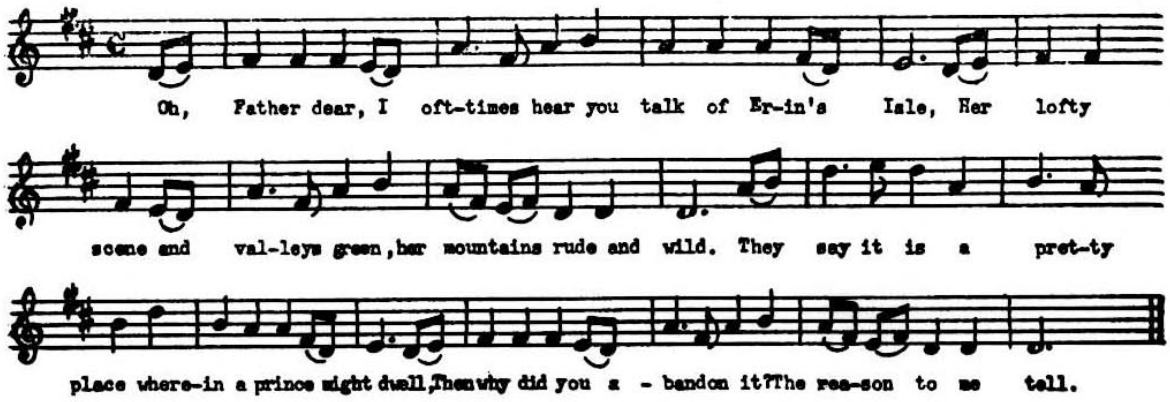
The children reared with parents' care
Are taken cruelly and without pity,
To be without their mothers and they dying.
O King of Pity and Blessed Bright Lamb,
Look down on us with misery in our bones.
Don't let the poor souls of us stray
From the good you brought us with your pain.

The gentry who have all the great wealth
will be paying the King of Grace for this distress.
They wrong the poor of the world who never get riches
But who are laboring all their lives.
They are working that way from morning
till evening sweating buckets.
And all they get from their best effort,
Is to come home and see their houses knocked down.

trans. Maureen Murphy

Source: Maighréad ní Annagáin and Sémus de Chlainndiolúin, eds. *Londubh an Chairn: Being Songs of the Irish Gaels.* Dublin: Oxford, 1926. Permission pending.

SKIBBEREEN



Oh, Father dear, I oft-times hear you talk of Erin's Isle,
Her lofty scene and valleys green, her mountains rude and wild,
They say it is a pretty place wherein a prince might dwell,
Then why did you abandon it? The reason to me tell.

My son, I loved our native land with energy and pride
Until a blight came on the land, and sheep and cattle died,
The rent and taxes were to pay, I could not them redeem,
And that's the cruel reason why I left old Skibbereen.

It's well I do remember that bleak December day
The landlord and the sheriff came to drive us all away,
They set my roof on fire with their demon yellow spleen,
And that's another reason why I left old Skibbereen.

It's well I do remember the year of forty-eight,
When I arose with Erin's boys to fight against the fate,
I was hunted through the mountains for a traitor to the Queen,
And that's another reason why I left old Skibbereen.

Oh, Father dear, the day will come when vengeance loud will call,
And we will rise with Erin's boys and rally one and all,
I'll be the man to lead the van beneath our flag of green,
And loud and high we'll raise the cry: 'Revenge for Skibbereen!'

Source: Patrick Galvin. *Irish Songs of Resistance.* New York: Oak Publications, 1962. pp. 46. Permission pending.

Famine Memory in Seamus Heaney's "At a Potato Digging"

BACKGROUND

In this activity, students will be looking at Seamus Heaney's poem "At a Potato Digging." Heaney and other poets of his generation were influenced by Patrick Kavanagh (1905-1967) who wrote an important poem called "The Great Hunger" (also discussed in this activity). In the poem, the "Great Hunger," an expression used for the Great Irish Famine of 1845-52, is not actual physical starvation but the emotional starvation of rural Ireland in the 1930s.

Ireland is a country of potato producers; however, their relationship with the potato crop is an uneasy one. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there were periodic crop failures and regular months of hunger each year as the poor Irish awaited the potato harvest. In 1845 the crop failed and it failed again in 1846, 1848, and 1849. Many poor Irish lived on a diet of potatoes and buttermilk. Since there were no alternative food sources, thousands of Irish died from starvation or famine-related diseases. Others fled. The population of Ireland in 1841 was 8,175,000; in 1851 it fell to 6,552,000.

Seamus Heaney's poem "At a Potato Digging" describes contemporary farm laborers, many of whom are seasonal workers, at the exhausting and mind-numbing task of digging potatoes after the mechanical digger has turned up the drill (potato ridge). The poet recalls earlier ruined harvests and a famine god who must be appeased.

The poem's linking land and history may have influenced Heaney's "Feeling into Words," a 1974 talk to the Royal Society of London, where the poet spoke about the history located in the great expanse of bog in the center of Ireland:

> *I began to get an idea of bog as the memory of landscape or as a landscape that remembered everything that happened in or to it. In fact, if you go round the National Museum in Dublin, you will realize that a great proportion of the most cherished material heritage of Ireland was found in a bog.*

It is recommended that this activity be used with the activity Poetry and Painting: Seamus Heaney's "At a Potato Digging" that introduces students to three paintings: Paul Henry's *Potato Diggers*, James Mahony's*Searching for Potatoes in a Stubble Field*, and Jean Francois Millet's *The Gleaners*. Students are invited to respond to the paintings and to make connections between the paintings and Heaney's poem.

There is also a potato digging sequence in the film *Cal* where Cal has joined a group of casual laborers "lifting spuds" on the Morton farm (see Classroom Materials). Students should come to appreciate the labor-intensive, back-breaking work involved.

(**Note:** Teachers should preview the handouts.)

RESOURCES

HANDOUTS

At a Potato Digging

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Heaney, Seamus. "At a Potato Digging," *Poems 1965-1975*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980. pp. 21-23.

Kavanagh, Patrick, "The Great Hunger," *The Collected Poems*. Newbridge: The Goldsmith Press, 1990. pp. 79-104.

Mitchell, G. Frank. *Treasures of Irish Art: 500 B.C. to 1500 A.D*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1977.

Vendler, Helen. *Seamus Heaney*. London: Fontana, 1998.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

Analyze and interpret the poem "At a Potato Digging" and an excerpt from the poem "The Great Hunger."

Use information about the Great Irish Famine to discuss how Heaney uses the past in his poem "At a Potato Digging," about the potato gatherers of the present.

Use literature to explore Irish history to determine whether the potato continues to play a significant role in Irish cultural life.

Understand the role of cultural memory in literature.

STANDARDS

SS2: 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 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 2: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.

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

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Describe the relationships between people and environments and the connections between people and places.

Identify and compare the physical, human, and cultural characteristics of different regions and people.

Relate new information to prior knowledge and experience.

Support interpretations and decisions about relative significance of information with explicit statement, evidence, and appropriate argument.

Identify significant literary elements and use those elements to interpret the work.

Recognize different levels of meaning.

Evaluate literary merit based on an understanding of the genre and the literary elements.

Present clear analysis of issues, ideas, texts, and experiences, supporting their positions with well-developed arguments.

DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING

INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

- identify patterns and themes
- consult and interpret primary sources
- conceptualize and observe
- reflect upon content/Form opinions
- take and defend positions
- analytical thinking

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

English Language Arts

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

1. Distribute the handout "At a Potato Digging." Before starting the discussion of the poem, ask if students would like to know anything about the poem. What do they observe? What can they infer from their observations?

   Divide students into four groups with each group directed to examine one part of the poem paying particular attention to figurative language and to diction. Look at Heaney's verbs!

2. Ask the students: How does Heaney describe the potato diggers? What is the relationship between the machine and the workers? What is Heaney's attitude toward the land? Is it simple or complex? Give examples of his ambivalence ("black mother," "bitch earth"). Is there any resolution to this ambivalence in the poem?

   Listen to the opening lines of Patrick Kavanagh's "The Great Hunger" below. How might these lines have influenced the opening lines of the poem "At a Potato Digging"?

   Clay is the word and clay is the flesh
   Where the potato-gatherers like mechanised scarecrows move
   Along the side-fall of the hill - Maguire and his men.
   If we watch them an hour is there anything we can prove
   Of life as it is broken-backed over the Book
   of Death? Here crows gabble over worms and frogs
   And the gulls like old newspapers are blown clear of the hedges, luckily.
   Is there some light of imagination in these wet clods?
   Or why do we stand here shivering? (79-80)

3. The poet tells us about where the potatoes grow, how they are grown and how they are harvested. Are the potatoes in Part 2 merely potatoes? What poetic devices are effective in this section of the poem?

4. While parts 1, 2, and 4 of the poem are set in the present, Part 3 recalls past harvests and famine harvests. What kind of imagery does Heaney use to describe the hungry Irish? How effective are these images? What is the poet's attitude toward the land in this part of the poem? While Heaney sets the famine in the historical past, is there a sense that past is present? What links past to present in the poem?

5. The potato diggers stop for lunch and thankfully break their fast with tea and bread. What is the significance of "timeless" and "faithless" in this part of the poem? How does Heaney treat timelessness and faithlessness in the whole poem? Heaney's simile "mindlessly as autumn" in Part 1 belies the autumn memory of failed harvests. Later, he says you can smell the ruined harvest. While the diggers may not recall the famine, they respond to its presence in the folk memory and appease the famine god with ritual offering of tea and crusts of bread. The nature of the offerings and thankfulness alludes to the co-existence of pagan and Christian tradition in rural Ireland.

ASSESSMENT OPTION

Heaney suggests we go deeper and deeper to find the hoards of history preserved in the bog of Ireland's past. Write an essay discussing how Heaney moved from present to past to pre-history in "At a Potato Digging." Are events of the past still alive in the present? If so, how? How do you think the potato diggers are aware of this? Your essay should have an introduction, three or more paragraphs of exposition that use details from the text, and a conclusion.

TEACHER REFLECTION

An effective method of teaching poetry is described in Marie Ponsot and Rosemary Dean's *Beat Not the Poor Desk.* In their approach, teachers ask students if they have any questions about any detail in the poem. Students then make observations about any aspect of the poem: imagery, diction, form, and they list their observations on the board. Students organize their observations, and make inferences about meaning from those observations. Using this methodology, even the most reluctant readers of poetry find they have things to say about the poem. ("The poem is divided into four sections." "The stanzas are four lines and they rhyme." "The poet says the potatoes are like skulls.")

ADDITIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

For younger/advanced students:

Heaney is known for his bog metaphor for Irish history. Some of Ireland's national treasures, particularly metalwork, have been discovered preserved in the great expanse of peat bogs in the middle of Ireland. Find examples of the early Irish treasures in books and on the National Museum of Ireland website.

For advanced students:

Look at the form of "At a Potato Digging." Why does Heaney divide the poem formally into four parts? What is the relationship between the parts? There is a musical form called a sonata which is usually four movements. In its classic form, the movements contrast slow-fast-slow-fast. Do you think Heaney's poem could be considered a sonata in words? Could you find music to score each section of the poem, or could you write music yourself for the poem? Compare Heaney's style with Kavanagh's.

At a Potato Digging

I

A mechanical digger wrecks the drill,
Spins up a dark shower of roots and mould.
Labourers swarm in behind, stoop to fill
Wicker creels. Fingers go dead in the cold.

Like crows attacking crow-black fields, they stretch
A higgledy line from hedge to headland;
Some pairs keep breaking ragged ranks to fetch
A full creel to the pit and straighten, stand

Tall for a moment but soon stumble back
To fish a new load from the crumbled surf.
Heads bow, trunks bend, hands fumble towards the black
Mother. Processional stooping through the turf

Recurs mindlessly as autumn. Centuries
Of fear and homage to the famine god
Toughen the muscles behind their humbled knees,
Make a seasonal altar of the sod.

II

Flint-white, purple. They lie scattered
like inflated pebbles. Native
to the black hutch of clay
where the halved seed shot and clotted
these knobbed and slit-eyed tubers seem
the petrified hearts of drills. Split
by the spade, they show white as cream.

Good smells exude from crumbled earth.
The rough bark of humus erupts
knots of potatoes (a clean birth)
whose solid feel, whose wet inside
promises taste of ground and root.
To be piled in pits; live skulls, blind-eyed.

III

Live skulls, blind-eyed, balanced on
wild higgledy skeletons
scoured the land in ‘forty five,
wolfed the blighted root and died.

The new potato, sound as stone,
putrefied when it had lain
three days in the long clay pit.
Millions rotted along with it.

Mouths tightened in, eyes died hard,
faces chilled to a plucked bird.
In a million wicker huts
beaks of famine snipped at guts.

A people hungering from birth,
grubbing, like plants, in the bitch earth,
were grafted with a great sorrow.
Hope rotted like a marrow.

Stinking potatoes fouled the land,
pits turned pus into filthy mounds:
and where potato diggers are
you still smell the running sore.

IV

Under a gay flotilla of gulls
The rhythm deadens, the workers stop.
Brown bread and tea in bright canfuls
Are served for lunch. Dead-beat, they flop

Down in the ditch and take their fill,
Thankfully breaking timeless fasts;
Then, stretched on the faithless ground, spill
Libations of cold tea, scatter crusts.

Seamus Heaney

Poetry and Painting in "At a Potato Digging"

BACKGROUND

Landscape painters as well as poets have been inspired by the image of agricultural workers at harvest time. Such painters usually portray the workers with sympathy and dignity, as people who work nobly and who are integrated with the land that they work. The pictures have a calmness and purposefulness about them. They also share certain ideas about how to portray the workers. (Some critics would say that those ideas contribute to the formation of an *archetype* or prototype.)

This activity invites students to look at paintings of harvest workers and to study them individually, to analyze elements in the paintings, and to compare the way the artists treat the harvest worker figure. Students may want to think about what artists contribute to our appreciation and perception of social history.

RESOURCES

HANDOUTS

At a Potato Digging

Potato Diggers

The Gleaners

Searching for Potatoes in a Stubble Field

ADDITIONAL READING

Arnold, Bruce. *A Concise History of Irish Art*. New York: Praeger, 1968.

Barnet, Sylvan. *A Short Guide to Writing about Art.* Boston: Little Brown, 1981. (Barnet has, as a model, Robert Herbert's essay analyzing "The Gleaners.")

Snoddy, Theo. *Dictionary of Irish Artists of the 20th Century.* Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1996.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

Use the language of art criticism to analyze *Searching for Potatoes in a Stubble Field* and to compare that drawing with Paul Henry's *Potato Diggers* and Jean Francois Millet's *The Gleaners*.

Analyze and discuss the relationship between one or more of the paintings and Heaney's poem "At a Potato Digging."

Create a poem in response to *Searching for Potatoes in a Stubble Field,* Henry's *Potato Diggers*, or Millet's *The Gleaners.*

Provide a musical score for "At a Potato Digging."

STANDARDS

SS2: 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 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 2: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.

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

Arts 3: Students will respond critically to a variety of works in the arts, connecting the individual work to other works and to other aspects of human endeavor and thought. (Visual Arts)

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Describe the relationships between people and environments and the connections between people and places.

Identify and compare the physical, human, and cultural characteristics of different regions and people.

Relate new information to prior knowledge and experience.

Support interpretations and decisions about relative significance of information with explicit statement, evidence, and propriety argument.

Recognize different levels of meaning.

Evaluate literary merit based on an understanding of the genre and the literary elements.

Present clear analysis of issues, ideas, texts, and experiences, supporting their positions with well-developed arguments.

Compare the ways ideas and concepts are communicated through visual art with the various ways that those ideas and concepts are manifested in other art forms.

DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING

INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

- identify patterns and themes
- consult and interpret primary sources
- conceptualize and observe
- reflect upon content/Form opinions
- take and defend positions
- analytical thinking

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

English Language Arts

Arts

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

1. Ask students to look at the drawing *Searching for Potatoes in a Stubble Field.* What are the figures doing? What is *stubble*? What does it mean that the figures are searching for potatoes in a stubble field? How do the figures relate to the landscape?

How do the figures relate to one another? If they could speak, what would they say to one another?

How do students respond to the figure of the man sitting behind the woman? What details tell the viewer about the conditions of the figures?

2. A drawing like *Searching for Potatoes in a Stubble Field* was the photojournalism of the day. What message about conditions in Ireland does the drawing portray? How effective is the image? What can a drawing do that a photograph cannot do? Would it encourage the viewer to take some kind of action? What kind of action?

3. Ask students to look at Paul Henry's painting *Potato Digger*s. With a partner, they will describe the painting to one another. Ask them to consider the following questions:

What did you think about *Potato Diggers* when you saw it first? Share your first impressions. What is going in the painting?

Where is the standing figure looking? Why? How does she relate to the other figure in the painting? How much space does the standing figure occupy in the painting?

What does Henry suggest by the scale of the main figure?

Is there shading in the colors? What have you seen that you want your partner to see in the painting?

What kinds of shapes does Henry use? Are the shapes round or flat? How do the shapes of the Henry figures compare with the shapes of the figures in the *Searching for Potatoes in a Stubble Field* drawing?

4. Now ask students to look at Jean Francois Millet's *The Gleaners*.

Describe the three figures in the painting. How do they relate to each other? How do they relate to their environment?

Millet (1814-1875) was a French painter who was born in Normandy. Notice that he is the oldest of the painters. He is also the most famous. *The Gleaners* hangs in the Louvre. Do you think that Paul Henry was influenced by *The Gleaners*? Refer to details in the paintings.

ASSESSMENT OPTION

If you were to choose an illustration for Heaney's poem, which of the works of art would you choose? Would you prefer to make your own illustration instead? Discuss the reasons for your choice in an essay that draws on at least three details from the paintings and three details from Heaney's poem.

Note: Another assessment idea is taken from Jerry Matovcik and Jim Daszenski's 1999 presentation to the New York State English Council. Students discuss how to *read* a painting, to read some of the poems on paintings written by poets, and to respond to a painting with a poem.

TEACHER REFLECTION

This activity is an opportunity to introduce students to the function of an arts critic (art, dance, drama, film, literature, music). In *A Short Guide to Writing About Art*, Sylvan Barnet quotes the poet W.H. Auden's essay "Reading" from his book of prose writings *The Dyer's Hand:*

> What is the function of a critic? So far as I am concerned, he can do me one or more of the following services:
>
> **1.** Introduce me to authors or works of which I was hitherto unaware.
>
> **2.** Convince me that I have undervalued an author or a work because I had not read them carefully enough.
>
> **3.** Show me relations between works of difference ages and cultures which I could never have seen for myself because I do not know enough and never shall.
>
> **4.** Give a "reading" of a work which increases my understanding of it.
>
> **5.** Throw light upon the process of artistic Making.
>
> **6.** Throw light on the relation of art to life, to science, economics, ethics, religion, etc. (Barnet 3).

ADDITIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Teachers may want to pair other poets and painters who have produced literature and art on the theme of work: e.g., Robert Frost and Grandma Moses.

At a Potato Digging

I

A mechanical digger wrecks the drill,
Spins up a dark shower of roots and mould.
Labourers swarm in behind, stoop to fill
Wicker creels. Fingers go dead in the cold.

Like crows attacking crow-black fields, they stretch
A higgledy line from hedge to headland;
Some pairs keep breaking ragged ranks to fetch
A full creel to the pit and straighten, stand

Tall for a moment but soon stumble back
To fish a new load from the crumbled surf.
Heads bow, trunks bend, hands fumble towards the black
Mother. Processional stooping through the turf

Recurs mindlessly as autumn. Centuries
Of fear and homage to the famine god
Toughen the muscles behind their humbled knees,
Make a seasonal altar of the sod.

II

Flint-white, purple. They lie scattered
like inflated pebbles. Native
to the black hutch of clay
where the halved seed shot and clotted
these knobbed and slit-eyed tubers seem
the petrified hearts of drills. Split
by the spade, they show white as cream.

Good smells exude from crumbled earth.
The rough bark of humus erupts
knots of potatoes (a clean birth)
whose solid feel, whose wet inside
promises taste of ground and root.
To be piled in pits; live skulls, blind-eyed.

III

Live skulls, blind-eyed, balanced on
wild higgledy skeletons
scoured the land in ‘forty five,
wolfed the blighted root and died.

The new potato, sound as stone,
putrefied when it had lain
three days in the long clay pit.
Millions rotted along with it.

Mouths tightened in, eyes died hard,
faces chilled to a plucked bird.
In a million wicker huts
beaks of famine snipped at guts.

A people hungering from birth,
grubbing, like plants, in the bitch earth,
were grafted with a great sorrow.
Hope rotted like a marrow.

Stinking potatoes fouled the land,
pits turned pus into filthy mounds:
and where potato diggers are
you still smell the running sore.

IV

Under a gay flotilla of gulls
The rhythm deadens, the workers stop.
Brown bread and tea in bright canfuls
Are served for lunch. Dead-beat, they flop

Down in the ditch and take their fill,
Thankfully breaking timeless fasts;
Then, stretched on the faithless ground, spill
Libations of cold tea, scatter crusts.

Seamus Heaney

"The Potato Diggers"

Source: Paul Henry. “The Potato Diggers.” Used with permission of the National Gallery of Ireland.

The Gleaners

Source: Jean Francois Millet. Musé du Louvre. Permission pending.

Source: "Searching for Potatoes in the Stubble Field." *Illustrated London News*. Reprinted with permission.

Folk Memory in "The Hungry Grass"

BACKGROUND

Folk memory is the account of history that is passed down by oral tradition, that is, by word of mouth. The American historian and folklorist Richard M. Dorson has identified five areas where folk memory can supplement the conventional range of primary sources which are available in print or electronic form to the historian. Dorson says that folk memory is a source of popular attitudes, prejudices and stereotypes; it offers an insight into concepts of myth, symbol and image; it is a way to help separate fact from fancy; it is a means of verifying incidents, and it is a way of providing data about minority groups.

The Irish folk memory surrounding the Great Irish Famine offers many good examples of Dorson's analysis. It is in the collection of oral tradition about the famine that one finds Irish voices to answer the official documents of that event. The tradition of the hungry grass is associated with place legends connected to the famine. In his note to the poem, Donagh MacDonagh [DUN-a Mac Dun-a] explains the significance of the title "The Hungry Grass." "It is believed in many parts of Ireland that anyone passing over a spot where a victim of the Famine of 1847-48 died is seized with an overpowering hunger and weakness. The grass at such a place is known as *Féar Gorta* [FARE GORT-ta] or *Hungry Grass*.

RESOURCES

HANDOUTS

The Hungry Grass

At a Potato Digging

My Dark Fathers

ADDITIONAL READING

Dorson, Richard M. "Oral Tradition and Written History." *Journal of Folklore Institute*, (1964), pp. 200-234.

McHugh, Roger. "The Famine in Irish Oral Tradition," in R. Dudley Edwards and T. Desmond Williams, eds., *The Great Famine: Studies in Irish History 1845-1852*. Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1962, pp. 391-436.

O'Gráda, Cormac. *Black '47 and Beyond: The Great Irish Famine*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

Understand the significance of a folk tradition about the Great Irish Famine in the work of modern Irish poets.

Understand the persistence of the past in the present, particularly the influence of folk memory on history.

Analyze three poems about the Great Irish Famine from the perspective of looking at folk memory.

STANDARDS

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 world in which we live—local, nation, 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 2: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.

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

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Describe the relationships between people and environments and the connections between people and places.

Identify and compare the physical, human, and cultural characteristics of different regions and people.

Relate new information to prior knowledge and experience.

Support interpretations and decisions about relative significance of information with explicit statement, evidence, and propriety argument.

Identify significant literary elements and use those elements to interpret the work.

Recognize different levels of meaning.

Evaluate literary merit based on an understanding of the genre and literary elements.

Present clear analysis of issues, texts, and experiences, supporting their positions with well-developed arguments.

DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING

INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

- identify patterns and themes
- consult and interpret primary sources
- conceptualize and observe
- reflect upon content/Form opinions
- take and defend positions
- use analytical thinking

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

English Language Arts

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

1. Ask student to read the handout of Donagh MacDonagh's *The Hungry Grass*.

The poet describes an eerie experience that connects him with another person, a victim of starvation, with Irish history and with the folk tradition of the *hungry gras*s. Ask students to describe what happens. What words are used to describe the events depicted in the poem?

What do students think caused the poet's experience of hunger and weakness? Was it the *hungry grass*? If so, how would they explain it?

2. Nettles are plants covered with hair-like stingers that grow in waste ground. They are full of vitamins and iron and can be boiled into a nutritious soup. How else did food sources or images of food fail the starving man? (The obsessive concern with food shriveled the heart of the hungry man.)

3. Find some examples of figurative language of the poem.

What similes are in the poem?

What images are especially vivid?

4. Ask students to share legends that they know about local places; stories told as true happenings about persons, places, or historical events. Legends often have historical validity. Some, like "The Hungry Grass," involve popular beliefs. Ask students to collect legends about their neighborhoods, towns, cities, or regions. Are there stories of memorable characters who are *legends* in the area? Are there legends about local history? How do their local legends contribute to the history and image of the area?

Legends are not limited to the past. There are legends about contemporary babysitters, hitchhikers, athletes, and stolen cars. This is an opportunity for students to make a book of local legends for their class or school library.

ASSESSMENT OPTION

Compare the memory of famine in "The Hungry Grass" with Seamus Heaney's "At a Potato Digging" and Brendan Kennelly's "My Dark Fathers." Are there any famine images common to all three poets?

TEACHER REFLECTION

Discussing these poems, students became interested in the way folk memory persists down through the years. Cormac O'Gráda's chapter "Famine Memory" describes some of the key famine events and issues that are represented in the folklore collected about the Great Irish Famine. Students will see how folk tradition influences contemporary poets. Are there some American folk memories that have persisted, such as The Great Depression, World War II, or The Civil Rights Movement?

Tom Hayden's collection *Irish Hunger: Personal Reflections of the Legacy of Famine* offers a rich collection of texts that demonstrate they way the Great Irish Famine has affected contemporary writing.

The Hungry Grass

Crossing the shallow holdings high above sea
Where few birds nest, the luckless foot may pass
From the bright safety of experience
Into the terror of the hungry grass.

Here in a year when poison from the air
First withered in despair the growth of spring
Some skull-faced wretch whom nettle could not save
Crept on four bones to his last scattering,

Crept, and the shriveled heart which drove his thought
Towards platters brought in hospitality
Burst as the wizened eyes measured the miles
Like dizzy walls forbidding him the city.

Little the earth claimed from that poor body,
And yet remembering him the place has grown
Bewitched and the thin grass he nourishes
Racks with his famine, sucks marrow from the bone.

Donagh MacDonagh

Source: Donagh MacDonagh, *The Hungry Grass*. London: Faber and Faber, 1947. pp. 7.
Reprinted by permission of Faber and Faber.

At a Potato Digging

I

A mechanical digger wrecks the drill,
Spins up a dark shower of roots and mould.
Labourers swarm in behind, stoop to fill
Wicker creels. Fingers go dead in the cold.

Like crows attacking crow-black fields, they stretch
A higgledy line from hedge to headland;
Some pairs keep breaking ragged ranks to fetch
A full creel to the pit and straighten, stand

Tall for a moment but soon stumble back
To fish a new load from the crumbled surf.
Heads bow, trunks bend, hands fumble towards the black
Mother. Processional stooping through the turf

Recurs mindlessly as autumn. Centuries
Of fear and homage to the famine god
Toughen the muscles behind their humbled knees,
Make a seasonal altar of the sod.

II

Flint-white, purple. They lie scattered
like inflated pebbles. Native
to the black hutch of clay
where the halved seed shot and clotted
these knobbed and slit-eyed tubers seem
the petrified hearts of drills. Split
by the spade, they show white as cream.

Good smells exude from crumbled earth.
The rough bark of humus erupts
knots of potatoes (a clean birth)
whose solid feel, whose wet inside
promises taste of ground and root.
To be piled in pits; live skulls, blind-eyed.

III

Live skulls, blind-eyed, balanced on
wild higgledy skeletons
scoured the land in ‘forty five,
wolfed the blighted root and died.

The new potato, sound as stone,
putrefied when it had lain
three days in the long clay pit.
Millions rotted along with it.

Mouths tightened in, eyes died hard,
faces chilled to a plucked bird.
In a million wicker huts
beaks of famine snipped at guts.

A people hungering from birth,
grubbing, like plants, in the bitch earth,
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Hope rotted like a marrow.

Stinking potatoes fouled the land,
pits turned pus into filthy mounds:
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IV

Under a gay flotilla of gulls
The rhythm deadens, the workers stop.
Brown bread and tea in bright canfuls
Are served for lunch. Dead-beat, they flop

Down in the ditch and take their fill,
Thankfully breaking timeless fasts;
Then, stretched on the faithless ground, spill
Libations of cold tea, scatter crusts.

Seamus Heaney

My Dark Fathers

My dark fathers lived the intolerable day
Committed always to the night of wrong,
Stiffened at the hearthstone, the woman lay,
Perished feet nailed to her man's breastbone.
Grim houses beckoned in the swelling gloom
Of Munster fields where the Atlantic night
Fettered the child within the pit of doom,
And everywhere a going down of light.

And yet upon the sandy Kerry shore
The woman once had danced at ebbing tide
Because she loved flute music—and still more
Because a lady wondered at the pride
Of one so humble. That was long before
The green plant withered by an evil chance,
When winds of hunger howled at every door
She heard the music dwindle and forgot the dance.

Such mercy as the wolf receives was hers
Whose dance became a rhythm in a grave,
Achieved beneath the thorny savage furze
That yellowed fiercely in a mountain cave.
Immune to pity, she, whose crime was love,
Crouched, shivered, searched the threatening sky,
Discovered ready signs, compelled to move
Her to her innocent appalling cry.

Skeletoned in darkness, my dark fathers lay
Unknown, and could not understand
The giant grief that trampled night and day,
The awful absence moping through the land.
Upon the headland, the encroaching sea
Left sand that hardened after tides of Spring,
No dancing feet disturbed its symmetry
And those who loved good music ceased to sing.

Since every moment of the clock
Accumulates to form a final name,
Since I am come of Kerry clay and rock,
I celebrate the darkness and the shame
That could compel a man to turn his face
Against the wall, withdrawn from light so strong
And undeceiving, spancelled in a place
Of unapplauding hands and broken song.

Brendan Kennelly

Source: Brendan Kennelly. *Selected Poems*. Dublin: Allen Figges. 1969. pp. 15-16.
Reprinted with permission of. Bloodaxe Books

Place in Poetry of the Great Irish Famine

BACKGROUND

In this activity students will read contemporary Irish poetry that addresses famine memory and landscape. They will consider Eavan Boland's suggestion that map-making cannot adequately represent historical and human reality and they will read Elizabeth Bishop's poem "The Map," another meditation on representation and reality. After discussing personal and community history and map-making, students will construct their personal maps.

RESOURCES

HANDOUTS

That the Science of Cartography is Limited

The Map

Kylemore Castle

Kylemore Abbey, Connemara

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Bishop, Elizabeth. from *The Complete Poems 1927-1979*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979.

Boland, Eavan. *In a Time of Violence*. New York: Norton, 1994.

Kelleher, Margaret. *The Feminization of Famine.* Cork: Cork University Press, 1997.

Murphy, Richard. *The Price of Stone*. London: Faber, 1985.

Villiers-Tuthill, Kathleen. *Patient Endurance: The Great Famine in Connemara.* Dublin: Connemara Girl Publications, 1997.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

Describe the poetic devices used in sonnets and in the ballads.

Rewrite Murphy's sonnet as a ballad.

Describe how the poets use the famine in their poems.

STANDARDS

ELA 2: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.

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.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Analyze and produce historic maps.

Analyze historic events from around the world by examining accounts written from different perspectives.

Make perceptive and well developed connections to prior knowledge.

Support interpretations and decisions about relative significance of information with explicit statement, evidence, and appropriate argument.

Identify significant literary elements and use those elements to interpret the work.

Recognize different levels of meaning.

Read aloud with expression, conveying the meaning and mood of a work.

Produce interpretations of literary works that identify different levels of meaning and comment on their significance and effect.

DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING

INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

- evaluate and connect evidence
- observe and conclude
- reflective thinking
- draw conclusions
- interpret information
- conceptualize
- consult and interpret primary sources

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

English Language Arts

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

1. Ask students to look at a map of New York State and to describe how roads are represented. They are usually drawn in color codes on map sheets laid out in a system of coordinates. Look at road maps of New York State. What do the color codes for roads mean on the road maps? What kind of code can students suggest for a road that was a famine road? How might it be represented? Are there any other kinds of roads or routes that suggest special cartographic considerations? How could students map the railway lines that were used to transport people to Auschwitz? How would students map the underground railroad in New York State? As a class or in a group, design a map that shows key points on an underground railroad.

2. Eavan Boland' poems *That The Science of Cartography is Limited* (see handout) is about what maps tell us. In the poem, what does the speaker say she wishes to prove? How does she do it? Is she successful? According to the poet, what are the limitations of the science of cartography (map making)? What doesn't appear on the map of Ireland? What kinds of imagery does Boland use in her poem?

3. Boland refers to Relief Committees giving famine work in 1847. These relief plans employed the poor at a small daily wage, often eight or ten pence per day, on public works projects such as road building. Boland's poem suggests that map-making cannot adequately represent the historical and human reality of the place where starving people built a road until they died and the work stopped.

Ask students to read Elizabeth's Bishop's poem *The Map* (see handout). How does Bishop deal with representation and reality in her poem? Does she share Boland's concern with the things that maps cannot convey? What is her response to the inadequacy of maps?

Many of Bishop's poems are concerned with matters of geography. She was especially concerned with her own relationship to place. Ask students to think about their own relationship to place. Where do they locate themselves? Can they *map* themselves in that place? Ask students to construct that location in visual terms: maps, drawings, photographs, collage and write a prose commentary that explains their location.

4. Ask students to read the handout of Richard Murphy's sonnet *Kylemore Castle*. The consequences of

famine appears in this poem also. The Great Irish Famine took away many of the local people. The poor of a later generation were hired by some of their landlords to make improvement to their estates. Mitchell Henry (1826-1910), a wealthy Liverpool cotton manufacturer and a Member of Parliament, built a castle on his County Galway estate. Henry's wife Margaret Vaughan was from Co. Down. Their 19th century Gothic castle and lavish entertaining contrasted grotesquely with the poverty around them. Today, Kylemore is a girls' boarding school run by Benedictine nuns.

Notice that his speaker is an unusual choice: Kylemore Castle itself. What is the effect of using a place as a narrator?

Mortmain literally means dead hand, but here it is used metaphorically to mean an impersonal owner. Is the metaphor consistent with the tone of the poem? What is the relationship between the metaphor and the macabre description of Margaret Vaughan Henry? Are there other ghosts in the poem?

There are two kinds of sonnets: *Petrarchan*, which is named for the Italian poet who used the form, and *Shakespearean*. Petrarchan sonnets have an octave (eight lines) and a sestet while the Shakespearean sonnet has three quatrains and a concluding couplet. Both kinds of sonnets have regular rhyme schemes. Which kind of sonnet is "Kylemore Castle?"

ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

In an essay, compare and contrast the way Boland and Murphy have written their poems of famine reminders in the Irish countryside today. In your answer include a discussion of the following poetic devices: imagery, meter, rhyme, figures of speech (metaphors/similes), and form and support your points with references from the texts.

TEACHER REFLECTION

In her study of the representation of the female in famine literature, Margaret Kelleher includes a description written by Emily Lawless in *Ireland* (1887):

> *Certain words and certain combinations of words seem to need an eminently local education in order adequately to appreciate them. These two words, "Famine road," are among the number. To other, larger minds than ours they are probably without any particular meaning or inwardness. To the home-staying Irishman or Irishwoman they mean only too much. To hear them casually uttered is to be penetrated by a sense of something at once familiar and terrible. The entire history of two of the most appalling years that any country has ever been called upon to pass through seems to be summed up, and compendiously packed into them.*

There are several references to the famine in the Kylemore area in *Patient Endurance: The Great Famine in Connemara*. One describes the tour to the region in early 1847 by the English Quaker William Edward Forster. He reported that there were 100 men making a new road and that the wages were four shillings and six pence each week. Most men had to walk five or more miles to get to work, and they were required to purchase Indian meal which was sold for between two shillings and ten pence and four shillings for a stone (14 pounds) at their work sites. Forster wrote, "...what is this but slow death—a mere enabling the patient to endure for a little longer time the disease of hunger?" These would have been the people the Castle says were "cleared away."

That the Science of Cartography is Limited

—and not simply by the fact that this shading of
forest cannot show the fragrance of balsam,
the gloom of cypresses,
is what I wish to prove.

When you and I were first in love we drove
to the borders of Connacht
and entered a wood there.

Look down you said: this was once a famine road.

I looked down at ivy and the scutch grass
rough-cast stone had
disappeared into as you told me
in the second winter of their ordeal, in

1847, when the crop had failed twice,
Relief Committees gave
the starving Irish such roads to build.

Where they died, there the road ended

and ends still and when I take down
the map of this island, it is never so
I can say here is
the masterful, the apt rendering of
the spherical as flat nor
an ingenious design which persuades a curve
into a plane,
but to tell myself again that

the line which says woodland and cried hunger
and gives out among sweet pine and cypress,
and finds no horizon

will not be there.

Eavan Boland

The Map

Land lies in water; it is shadowed green.
Shadows, or are they shallows, at its edges
showing the line of long sea-weeded ledges
where weeds hang to the simple blue from green.
Or does the land lean down to lift the sea from under,
drawing it unperturbed around itself?
Along the fine tan sandy shelf
is the land tugging at the sea from under?

The shadow of Newfoundland lies flat and still.
Labrador's yellow, where the moony Eskimo
has oiled it. We can stroke these lovely bays,
under a glass as if they were expected to blossom,
or as if to provide a clean cage for invisible fish.
The names of seashore towns run out to sea,
the names of cities cross the neighboring mountains
-the printer here experiencing the same excitement
as when emotion too far exceeds its cause.
These peninsulas take the water between thumb and finger
like women feeling for the smoothness of yard-goods.

Mapped waters are more quiet than the land is,
lending the land their waves' own conformation:
and Norway's hare runs south in agitation,
profiles investigate the sea, where land is.
Are they assigned, or can the countries pick their colors?
-What suits the character or the native waters best.
Topography displays no favorites; North's as near as West.
More delicate than the historians' are the map-makers' colors.

Elizabeth Bishop

Kylemore Castle

Built for a cotton king, who loved the view
Unspoilt by mills, improved by famine's hand
That cleared away people, petrified I grew
Grotesquely rich on mountainous, poor land.

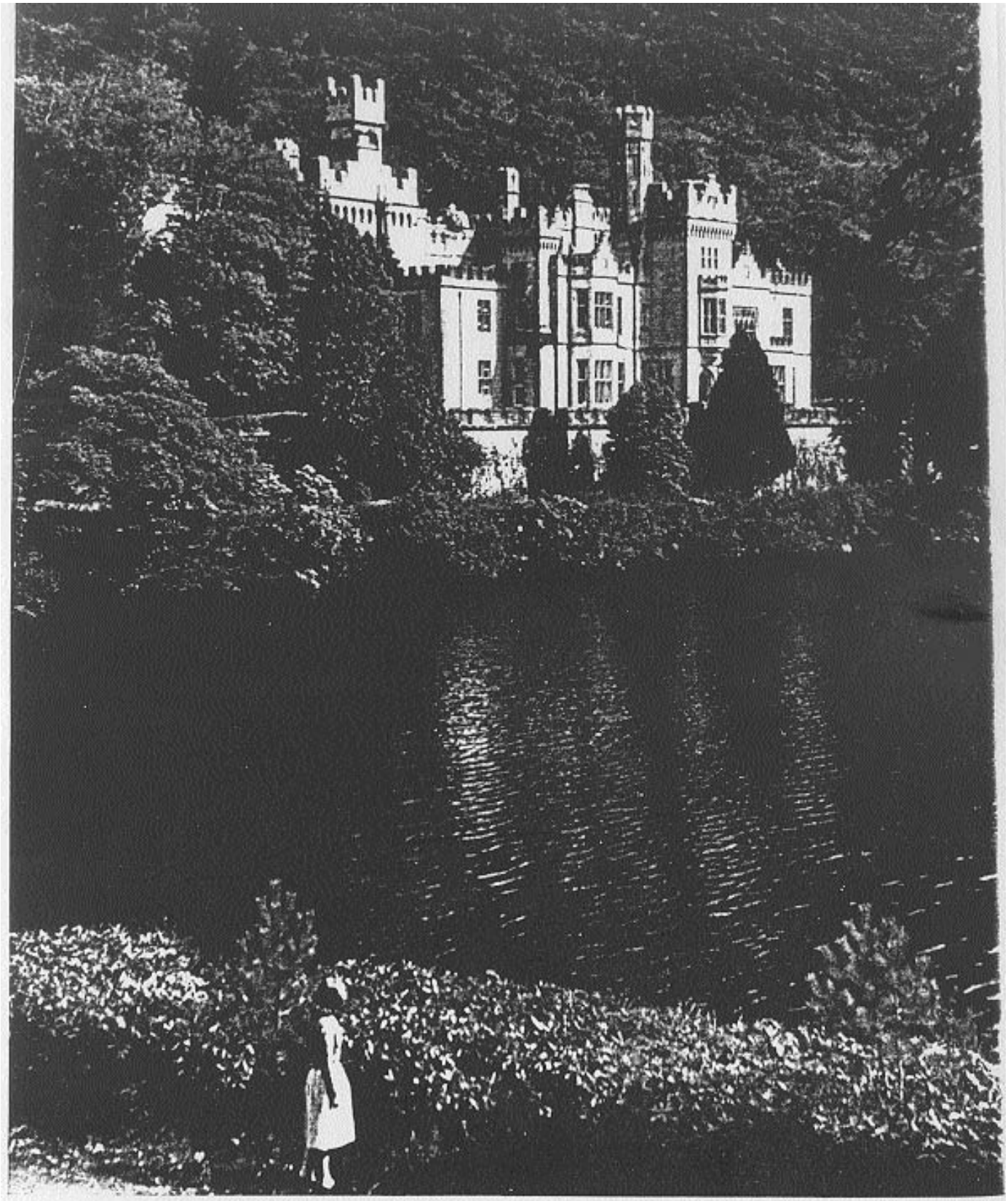
To last for ever, I had to be faced in stone
Dressed by wage-skeletons; a spindly pile
Of storm-grey turrets that defended no one,
And broke my maker, with his fabricated style.

Coming from church to hold her usual place
On Christmas nights, wheeled to the dining-room,
His wife's corpse embalmed in a sealed glass case
Obeyed his command in the brandy-lit gloom.

Now, my linenfold panelled halls retain
In mortmain his dark airs, which nuns maintain.

Richard Murphy

Source: Richard Murphy. *The Price of Stone*. London: Faber, 1985. pp. 77.



32. KYLEMORE ABBEY, CONNEMARA. For all its late-Tudor airs, this mansion was built in the nineteenth century. It stands the north side of Lough Poolacappul in the lovely Pass of Kylemore.

Source: Photograph by Adolf Morath. *Country Life Picture Book of Ireland*. London: Country Life, Ltd., 1954. pp. 32.

Famine Anecdotes in Brendan Kennelly's "My Dark Fathers"

BACKGROUND

In this activity, students will examine two forms of literature that describe in great detail the impact of the Great Irish Famine on families in Ireland: a poem *My Dark Fathers,* and a first-hand account from the book *The Workhouses of Ireland.*

In the Introduction to his *Selected Poems*, Brendan Kennelly described the influence of two famine anecdotes on his poem *My Dark Fathers,* a poem that describes the poet's relationship with history. This passage can be shared with students:

One day I attended a talk given by [Irish short story writer] Frank O'Connor about the famine that happened in Ireland in the nineteenth century and had such a harrowing effect on the Irish character. I was trying, at the time, to write a poem about that history which I had lived with since childhood. During his talk, O'Connor spoke of a traveler's [Mrs. Ansenath Nicholson's] description of a woman dancing on the Kerry shore:

> *"This woman who danced before me, was more than fifty, and I do not believe that the daughter of Herodias herself was more graceful in her movements, more beautiful in her complexion and symmetry, than was this dark-haired matron of the mountains of Kerry."*

This image struck me immediately. The woman was the entire people, capable of spontaneous artistic expression: capable of it, that is, before the famine. But then came the terrible desolation. O'Connor made me aware of Peadar O'Laoghaire's Mo Sgéal Féin *[Peter O'Leary's My Own Story] where there is the following description of the dead and dying:*

> *You saw them every morning after the night out, stretched in rows, some moving and some very still, with no stir from them. Later people came and lifted those who no longer moved and heaved them into carts and carried them up to a place near Carrigastyra [CARRIG-astra], where a big deep pit was open for them, and thrust them into the pit.*

This is "the pit of doom" in my poem. There is a description of a man named Paddy bringing his wife Kate from the workhouse back to his hut:

> *Next day a neighbor came to the hut. He saw the two of them dead and his wife's feet clasped in Paddy's bosom as though he were trying to warm them. It would seem that he felt the death agony come on Kate and her legs grow cold. so he put them inside his own shirt to take the chill from them.*

In the poem I identify this woman, dead from famine disease, her "perished feet nailed to her man's breastbone," with the woman comparable to the daughter of Herodias, dancing on the shore in Kerry. Perhaps the most frightening consequence of famine is described in George Petrie's collection of The Ancient Music of Ireland*—the terrible, unbearable silence. To my mind this meant not only the silence that followed racial suffering akin to what Hitler inflicted on the Jews, but it meant that Ireland became the grave of song. I was witnessing the death of the dance.*

This awful, unwonted silence which, during the famine and subsequent years, almost everywhere prevailed, struck more fearfully upon their imaginations, as many Irish gentlemen informed me, and gave them a deeper feeling of the desolation with which the country had been visited, than any other circumstance which had forced itself upon their attention.

These images of the pit, the woman, the rows of the dead, the terrible silence, were in my mind after hearing O'Connor's talk. Shortly afterwards, I was at a wedding and a boy was asked to sing. He did so, but during the song he turned his back on the wedding party. In his averted figure I saw the woman who forgot the dance, the land that rejected its own singers (Selected Poems, ix- xi).

RESOURCES

HANDOUTS

My Dark Fathers

The Workhouses of Ireland: The Fate of Ireland's Poor

At a Potato Digging

ADDITIONAL READING

Lucas, A.T. *Furze. A Survey and History of its Uses in Ireland* (1958), p. 186.

O'Laoghaire, Peadar. Excerpt from *Mo Sgéal Féin (My Own Story)* in John O'Connor, *The Workhouses of Ireland: The Fate of Ireland's Poor.* Dublin: Anvil Books, 1995. pp. 190-193.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

Describe the Great Irish Famine textual sources that Brendan Kennelly used to write his poem *My Dark Fathers.*

Identify poetic devices in the poem.

Analyze how Kennelly used famine anecdotes in *My Dark Fathers* and draw conclusions.

Draw conclusions about why the Great Irish Famine continues to exert such a strong influence on Irish literature.

Describe the impact of the anecdotes about the Irish Famine on the poet, influencing his writing.

Describe the impact of the Great Irish Famine on the suppression of Irish culture, particularly music.

STANDARDS

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.

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

ELA 2: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.

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

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Analyze and produce historic maps.

Analyze historic events from around the world by examining accounts written from different perspectives.

Make perceptive and well-developed connections to prior knowledge.

Support interpretations and decisions about relative significance of information with explicit statement, evidence, and appropriate argument.

Identify significant literary elements and use those elements to interpret the work.

Recognize different levels of meaning.

Read aloud with expression, conveying the meaning and mood of a work.

Produce interpretations of literary works that identify different levels of meaning and comment on their significance and effect.

DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING

INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

- evaluate and connect evidence
- observe and conclude
- reflective thinking
- draw conclusions
- interpret information
- conceptualize
- consult and interpret primary sources

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

1. Share the background information with the class. Then ask students to listen to (or read) the handout with Peadar O'Laoghaire's story of the Buckley family in the Macroom Workhouse, *The Workhouses of Ireland.*

What details are especially vivid?

Did those who lost loved ones have any religious consolation? (The passage is from the autobiography of a priest.)

Father O'Laoghaire wrote his autobiography in Irish. What point was he making about the advantage of knowing Irish in the workhouse?

Does Father O'Laoghaire suggest that there was a model way to behave even in the worst days of the famine? What was that model?

2. Ask students to read the handout *My Dark Fathers.*

What is the meaning of the metaphor "the night of wrong?"

How has Kennelly used the O'Laoghaire's passage in stanza one of the poem?

3. The American traveler Asenath Nicholson, traveling in Ireland just before the famine in 1844, saw a woman dancing on the shore in Kerry:

> *This woman who danced before me, was more than fifty, and I do not believe that the daughter of Herodias herself was more graceful in her movements, more beautiful in her symmetry, than was this dark-haired matron of the mountains of Kerry.*

Who was the daughter of Herodias? What struck Mrs. Nicholson about the dancing woman? What did that dancing woman mean to the poet? What does he suggest happened to the woman when the famine came?

4. The antiquarian George Petrie described the silence brought by famine in his book *The Ancient Music of Ireland:*

> *This awful, unwonted silence which, during the famine and subsequent years, almost everywhere prevailed, struck more fearfully upon the imagination...*

Find the poet's references to silences or absences.

5. Furze is a thorny wild plant that grows in the mountains in Ireland. It has a mustardy-yellow flower. The furze plant had multiple uses in the Irish countryside including: fences, fuel, fodder, manure, and roofs. A Kerry saying classifies soils according to what they produce: "gold under furze, silver under rushes and famine under heath (barren land); however, in the poem, the furze-covered grave is associated with famine. Discuss how the use of an image like *furze* can portray a strong message.

What mood does the poet create in the poem? Which words are particularly effective in creating that mood? Dark literally means "absence of light." What are some connotations of dark? What does Kennelly mean by "darkness" in his poem?

6. Kennelly says his dark fathers were "committed always to the night of wrong." Did they commit themselves or were they committed by others or by other factors? Is Kennelly's poem his effort to right the wrong of the night of wrong?

7. A spancel is a length of rope used to tie an animal's front and hind legs together to prevent it from wandering away. In what ways are Kennelly's dark fathers spancelled?
8. The expression "turning his face against the wall" means that one has given up and awaits death. What brought the poet's "man" to that extreme? What is the poet's response?
9. Describe the Kennelly's attitude toward the famine. How does his use of figurative language, poetic devices, and choice of form enhance meaning?

ASSESSMENT OPTION

Compare *My Dark Fathers* with the O'Laoghaire passage, Seamus Heaney's *At a Potato Digging* and Donagh MacDonagh's *The Hungry Grass*. How does the famine figure in each work? Describe each writer's attitude toward the famine.

TEACHER REFLECTION

This activity is an opportunity for students to discuss how historical events continuously serve as sources for poetry, short stories, and novels. The Great Irish Famine was a source of folk memory, and continues to play a significant role in Irish literature. Teachers may want to use this activity with the activities *Famine Memory in Seamus Heaney's "At a Potato Digging," Folk Memory in Donagh MacDonagh's "The Hungry Grass," Place in the Poetry of the Great Irish Famine, Michael Longley's Elegies for Children,* and *The Influence of Poverty on James Tyrone's Long Day's Journey Into Night.*

My Dark Fathers

My dark fathers lived the intolerable day
Committed always to the night of wrong,
Stiffened at the hearthstone, the woman lay,
Perished feet nailed to her man's breastbone.
Grim houses beckoned in the swelling gloom
Of Munster fields where the Atlantic night
Fettered the child within the pit of doom,
And everywhere a going down of light.

And yet upon the sandy Kerry shore
The woman once had danced at ebbing tide
Because she loved flute music—and still more
Because a lady wondered at the pride
Of one so humble. That was long before
The green plant withered by an evil chance,
When winds of hunger howled at every door
She heard the music dwindle and forgot the dance.

Such mercy as the wolf receives was hers
Whose dance became a rhythm in a grave,
Achieved beneath the thorny savage furze
That yellowed fiercely in a mountain cave.
Immune to pity, she, whose crime was love,
Crouched, shivered, searched the threatening sky,
Discovered ready signs, compelled to move
Her to her innocent appalling cry.

Skeletoned in darkness, my dark fathers lay
Unknown, and could not understand
The giant grief that trampled night and day,
The awful absence moping through the land.
Upon the headland, the encroaching sea
Left sand that hardened after tides of Spring,
No dancing feet disturbed its symmetry
And those who loved good music ceased to sing.

Since every moment of the clock
Accumulates to form a final name,
Since I am come of Kerry clay and rock,
I celebrate the darkness and the shame
That could compel a man to turn his face
Against the wall, withdrawn from light so strong
And undeceiving, spancelled in a place
Of unapplauding hands and broken song.

Brendan Kennelly

Source: Brendan Kennelly. *Selected Poems*. Dublin: Allen Figges. 1969. pp. 15-16.
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The Workhouses of Ireland: The Fate of Ireland's Poor

An t-Athair Peadar O'Laoghaire (1839-1920) in his Mo Sgéal Féin (Mo SCALE-FANE, My Own Story) recounts a family's experience of the workhouse which, as he says, was typical of the fate of many thousands of families. This is a translation:

The Famine came, and Sheila, her father and mother and little Diarmuid [DEERmud] had to go down to Macroom [MA-croom] and go into the workhouse. As soon as they were inside they were separated. The father was put with the men and the mother with the women. Sheila was put with the little girls and little Diarmuid with the younger children. The workhouse was full and all the poor people in it were sunk in every kind of dangerous sickness. The people were falling with the sickness as fast as they came in, God save the hearers, and dying as soon as it came on them. There was not room in the workhouse for half of them. Those who could not get in just went and lay down on the bank of the river below the bridge. They were to be seen there every morning after spending the night there, stretched in rows, some stirring, and some who were quiet enough and stirring no longer. Presently people came and lifted those who were still, put them into carts and carried them up to a place near Carrigastyra [CARRIG-STY-ra] where a big, wide, deep pit gaped open for them, and threw them all into the pit together. The same was done with those who were dead in the workhouse after the night.

Not long after they went in and he was separated from his mother, little Diarmuid died. The small corpse was heaved into the cart, carried up to the big pit, and thrown into it with the other corpses. But it did not matter to the child. His soul was happy above in the presence of God long before his body was thrown into the pit. Soon Sheila followed little Diarmuid. Her young body went into the pit, but her soul ascended to where Diarmuid was, in the presence of God, and in the joy of Heaven, where she had solace and the company of the saints and angels, and the Virgin Mary.

The father and mother were enquiring as much as they could for Sheila and Diarmuid. The children were not long dead when they heard of it. All the poor people knew Irish, but those in charge did not know it, or knew it but badly, so that the poor people could often get information secretly about one another. When the parents found that the children were dead, they grew so heartbroken that they could not stay in the place. They were separated, but they managed to get some word to each other. They agreed to steal away.

Kate was the wife's name. Patrick slipped out of the workhouse first. He stood up at the top of Sop Road waiting for Kate. After a while he saw her coming, but she was walking very slowly. She had the sickness. They went on up Sop Road towards Carrigastyra, and reached the place where the big pit was. They knew that their children were below in the pit among all the other corpses. They stood by the pit and cried their fill.

Above at Derryleight [DERRY-Light], east of Cahireen [CARE-een], was the cabin where they had lived before they went into the workhouse. They left the big pit and faced north west towards Derryleight, where the cabin was. It was six miles away, and night was falling, but they kept on. They were hungry and Kate had the sickness. They had to walk very slowly. When they had covered a couple of miles, Kate had to stop. She could travel no further. They met neighbours. They were given a drink and some scraps of food, but everyone was afraid to let them in because they had come straight from the workhouse, and the wife had the bad sickness. So Patrick took his wife up on his back and continued north-west towards the cabin.

The poor man himself was very weak. He would have found it hard to do the journey, even without a burden. Laden as he was, he had to stop often and rest his burden behind him on the ditch for a while. But however tired he was, he continued the journey and did not part with his burden. He reached the cabin. It was cold and empty before him, without fire or heat.

The next day some neighbour came to the cabin and went in. He saw the two of them lying dead, with his wife's feet held to Patrick's breast, as if he were trying to warm them. It would seem that he had noticed the death weakness coming on Kate and her feet growing cold, and he drew them to his breast to take the chill off them.

Source: John O'Connor. *The Workhouses of Ireland: The Fate of Ireland's Poor.* Minneapolis: Irish Book and Media, 1995. Translation of Father Peadar O'Laoghaire's *Mo Sgéal Fein* (My Own Story), C.T. O'Ceirin (Cork, 1970), pp. 48-50, and S. O'Sullivan (Dublin, 1973), pp. 10-12. Reprinted with permission of Irish Book and Media.

At a Potato Digging

I

A mechanical digger wrecks the drill,
Spins up a dark shower of roots and mould.
Labourers swarm in behind, stoop to fill
Wicker creels. Fingers go dead in the cold.

Like crows attacking crow-black fields, they stretch
A higgledy line from hedge to headland;
Some pairs keep breaking ragged ranks to fetch
A full creel to the pit and straighten, stand

Tall for a moment but soon stumble back
To fish a new load from the crumbled surf.
Heads bow, trunks bend, hands fumble towards the black
Mother. Processional stooping through the turf

Recurs mindlessly as autumn. Centuries
Of fear and homage to the famine god
Toughen the muscles behind their humbled knees,
Make a seasonal altar of the sod.

II

Flint-white, purple. They lie scattered
like inflated pebbles. Native
to the black hutch of clay
where the halved seed shot and clotted
these knobbed and slit-eyed tubers seem
the petrified hearts of drills. Split
by the spade, they show white as cream.

Good smells exude from crumbled earth.
The rough bark of humus erupts
knots of potatoes (a clean birth)
whose solid feel, whose wet inside
promises taste of ground and root.
To be piled in pits; live skulls, blind-eyed.

III

Live skulls, blind-eyed, balanced on
wild higgledy skeletons
scoured the land in ‘forty five,
wolfed the blighted root and died.

The new potato, sound as stone,
putrefied when it had lain
three days in the long clay pit.
Millions rotted along with it.

Mouths tightened in, eyes died hard,
faces chilled to a plucked bird.
In a million wicker huts
beaks of famine snipped at guts.

A people hungering from birth,
grubbing, like plants, in the bitch earth,
were grafted with a great sorrow.
Hope rotted like a marrow.

Stinking potatoes fouled the land,
pits turned pus into filthy mounds:
and where potato diggers are
you still smell the running sore.

IV

Under a gay flotilla of gulls
The rhythm deadens, the workers stop.
Brown bread and tea in bright canfuls
Are served for lunch. Dead-beat, they flop

Down in the ditch and take their fill,
Thankfully breaking timeless fasts;
Then, stretched on the faithless ground, spill
Libations of cold tea, scatter crusts.

Seamus Heaney

Language and Identity: James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Seamus Heaney's "Traditions"

BACKGROUND

Ireland has two official languages. People speak English and the Irish language. Irish is one of three Gaelic languages (Irish, Scots-Gaelic, Manx) in the family of Celtic languages (Breton, Cornish, Gaelic, Welsh) which is a branch of the very old Indo-European parent language. Irish was Ireland's first language; the English introduced the English language as the language of administration, law and commerce. When they introduced a plan for primary education in 1831, English was the language of instruction. English became the language of literacy, and for a country that experienced heavy and steady emigration to North America, it was an advantage for emigrants to speak English.

English as it is spoken in Ireland has been influenced by its contact with the Irish language. Certain phonemes (smallest units of sound) are pronounced as Irish phonemes. For example, an *s* next to *a*, *e*, or *i* is pronounced *sh* (the name Sean). We also find patterns of Irish syntax or word order in the English spoken in Ireland and a few loan words from Irish like *shanty* and *galore*.

In this activity, the students will analyze the attitude toward English as it was spoken in Ireland, as expressed by James Joyce in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Seamus Heaney in his poem "Traditions."

RESOURCES

HANDOUTS

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

Traditions

ADDITIONAL READING

Davis, Thomas. "Our National Language," in Maureen Murphy and James MacKillop, eds. *Irish Literature: A Reader*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987. pp.126-129.

Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. New York: Viking Press, 1967.

Kelleher, Margaret. *The Feminization of Famine: Expressions of the Inexpressible?* Cork: Cork University Press, 1997.

Kiberd, Declan. "Ireland and the End of Empire." *Inventing Ireland.* London: Jonathan Cape, 1995. pp. 251-259.

McCrum, Crain and MacNeill, *The Story of English*. New York: Penguin, 1993.

CLASSROOM MATERIALS

Videos, cassette tapes of interviews with individuals from other countries, to depict accents and forms of articulation (e.g., Australian, British, Irish, Caribbean, Indian, etc.)

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

Analyze excerpts from James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.*

STANDARDS

SS2: 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.

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

ELA 2: Students will listen, speak, and write for literary response and expression.

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

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Investigate the various components of cultures and civilizations including social customs, norms, values, and traditions; political systems; economic systems; religions and spiritual beliefs; and socialization or educational practices.

Understand the broad patterns, relationships, and interactions of cultures and civilizations during particular eras and across eras.

View history through the eyes of those who witnessed key events and developments in world history by analyzing their literature, diary accounts, letters, artifacts, art, music, architectural drawings, and other documents.

Make perceptive and well developed connections to prior knowledge.

Recognize and understand the significance of a wide range of literary elements and techniques.

Recognize different levels of meaning.

Make precise determinations about the perspective of a particular writer or speaker.

DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING

INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

- analytical thinking
- observe and conclude
- view information from a variety of perspectives
- interpret information
- conceptualize
- consult and interpret primary sources

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

English Language Arts

MULTI-CULTURALISM

Appreciation of different languages

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

1. Ask students to jot down some of the differences they notice between English as it is spoken in the United States and the language as it is spoken in other English-speaking countries: Australia, the Caribbean islands, India, Ireland, Scotland, South Africa, and Wales.

What do students notice?

Are there differences in pronunciation, in vocabulary and in the syntax of sentences?

Are there influences of another language or languages on English as it is spoken in those places?

2. Distribute the handout *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* excerpt. In this scene from *Portrait*, Stephen Dedalus helps the Dean of Studies at his college, an English Jesuit priest, light a fire. As they talk, Stephen realizes that while they both speak English, they speak different English. Many Irish people pronounce an *s* next to an *e*, *a* or *i* as and *sh*. (Think of the name Sean.) Given that pattern, how would Stephen have pronounced *Christ*?

While English is Stephen's first language, he calls it *an acquired speech* because English was brought to Ireland as a language of conquest. What other places *acquired* English? What are some of the characteristics of English as it is spoken in places such as Australia, the Carribean, India? Students might want to review a segment of the PBS series *The Story of English* or read the section in its companion volume about one of the other places where English was introduced as the language of conquest or colonization.

The thought of English as an "acquired speech" makes Stephen uncomfortable. Why? What words does he use to express his uneasiness? Does the language we speak say something about who we are? What is the relationship between language and identity? What is the relationship between language and meaning?

3. The nineteenth century Irish writer Thomas Davis (1814-1845) wrote in his essay "Our National Language" (1843), "To lose your native tongue, and learn that of an alien, is the worst badge of conquests—it is the chain on the soul." Ask students to consider how they would feel if they were *required* to speak a language other than their own language in their own country.

4. The Nobel Laureate Irish poet Seamus Heaney wrote a later poem called "Traditions" that appeared in his 1972 collection *Wintering Out*. Heaney too speaks of the difference in the English as it is spoken by natives and settlers in Ireland but his sense of community is wide enough to be comfortable with the two traditions.

5. Distribute the handout of Seamus Heaney's poem "Traditions." What are the two traditions in the poem?

There are a lot of allusions in "Traditions." The "gutteral muse" refers to certain sounds in the Irish language that require the use of the uvula, the fleshy lobe at the back of the soft palate, for their production. When English replaced Irish as the usual spoken language, Heaney says an Irish speaker's uvula became *vestigial*. What does he mean?

Bulled refers to the Papal Bull, or Papal edict, that authorized the Norman invasion of Ireland in 1172. The coming of the Normans to Ireland marked the beginning of nearly 800 years of the English presence in Ireland and with it, the English language.

A Brigid's Cross, a cross made of rushes, marks the feast of St. Brigid on February 1st. (It is the logo of the Irish national radio and television broadcasting system.) An outhouse is an outbuilding, not an outside toilet.

In stanza II, Heaney refers to the "furled consonants of lowlanders," the trilled sound of the **r** made by the lowland Scots Presbyterian settlers of Northern Ireland. A bawn is a fortified enclosure, the kind of structure that Scots "planters" or settlers constructed for security.

In the last stanza, Heaney makes three literary references. The first is to MacMorris, the touchy Irishman in Shakespeare's *Henry V.* When Fluellen refers to MacMorris' nation, MacMorris retorts, "Of my nation. What ish my nation? Ish a villain and a bastard and a knave and a rascal—What ish my nation? Who talks of my nation?" Edmund Spenser used the phrase "anatomies of death" to describe the Irish victims of famine during the sixteenth century Desmond Rebellion. Finally, Bloom is Leopold Bloom, the hero of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. A Dublin-born Jew, a man of compassion and decency, Bloom is the target of ridicule by a character called *the Citizen*, a chauvinistic, Irish-speaking nationalist who can not count Bloom an Irishman because of his religion. When the Citizen asks Bloom his nationality, Bloom sensibly says, "Ireland. I was born here. Ireland."

6. Seamus Heaney, author of "Traditions," was born and raised in Northern Ireland, the part of Ireland that is in the United Kingdom of Great Britain. For Heaney, the matter of Irish identity is very important, but he wants an inclusive Irishness, one that embraces all members of the Irish community regardless of language, politics or religion. Does Heaney "fret in the shadow" of English?

ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

Write an analysis of the passage from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and "Traditions," comparing and contrasting the two writers' attitudes about the English language in Ireland, paying particular attention to tone.

TEACHER REFLECTION

This activity uses the Irish example to illustrate one of the dialects of English that is spoken in the world today. We can look at English as it is spoken in India and see similar examples of the influence of native Indian languages on the Indian dialect of English. The PBS series *The Story of English* devotes segments to different dialects of English as it is spoken around the world and offers students the opportunity to hear speakers of those dialects discuss the English of their regions. Teachers may also want to use the activity *Language and the Great Irish Famine.*

ADDITIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

For advanced students:

Margaret Kelleher's *The Feminization of Famine* (see Additional Readings in this activity) is a valuable contribution to the comparative study of the Great Irish Famine and the Bengali Famine on the 1940s. She examines the visual and verbal images of famine to demonstrate the gender nature of famine representation.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

The little word seemed to have turned a rapier point of his sensitiveness against this courteous and vigilant foe. He felt with a smart of dejection that the man to whom he was speaking was a countryman of Ben Johnson. He thought:

> The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words home, Christ, ale, master, on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language.

Source: James Joyce. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. New York: Viking Press. 1967, pp. 189.

Traditions
For Tom Flanagan

I

Our guttural muse
was bulled long ago
by the alliterative tradition,
her uvula grows

vestigial, forgotten
like the coccyx
or a Brigid's Cross
yellowing in some outhouse

while custom, that 'most
sovereign mistress',
beds us down into
the British isles.

II

We are to be proud
of our Elizabethan English:
'varsity', for example,
is grass-roots stuff with us;

we 'deem' or we 'allow'
when we suppose
and some cherished archaisms
are correct Shakespearean.

Not to speak of the furled
consonants of lowlanders
shuttling obstinately
between bawn and mossland.

III

MacMorris, gallivanting
round the Globe, whinged
to courtier and groundling
who had heard tell of us

as going very bare
of learning, as wild hares,
as anatomies of death:
'What ish my nation?'

And sensibly, though so much
later, the wandering Bloom
replied, 'Ireland', said Bloom,
'I was born here. Ireland.'

Seamus Heaney

Michael Longley's Elegies for Children

BACKGROUND

The Irish poet Michael Longley visited Anne Frank's house and the Polish ghettoes. Profoundly moved, he wrote two elegiac poems for the children of the European Holocaust which suggest a link with the children of the Great Irish Famine. The poems individualize human suffering with the details of ordinary life, remember the child victims of those terrible events, and, in "Ghetto," introduce the concept of the rescuer.

RESOURCES

HANDOUTS

The Cairn at Dooaghtry

Ghetto

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Volavkova, Hanna, ed. *I Never Saw Another Butterfly: Children's Drawings and Poems.* New York: Pantheon, 1993.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

Describe the concept of *rescuer*.

Describe the tone in Longley's poem "The Cairn at Dooaghtry."

Describe the impact of two defining events on the lives of children: The Great Irish Famine and the European Holocaust.

Describe how children's drawings can illuminate their experiences during the European Holocaust.

STANDARDS

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)

ELA 2: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.

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.

SS2: 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.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Understand how different experiences, beliefs, values, traditions, and motives cause individuals and groups to interpret historic events and issues from different perspectives.

Describe historic events through the eyes and experiences of those who were there.

Consider different historians' analyses of the same event or development in United States history to identify

the facts and evaluate the authors' perspectives.

View history through the eyes of those who witnessed key events and developments in world history by analyzing their literature, diary accounts, letters, artifacts, art, music, architectural drawings, and other documents.

Recognize different levels of meaning.

Read aloud with expression, conveying the meaning and mood of a work.

Present responses to and interpretations of literature, making reference to the literary elements found in the text and connections with their personal knowledge and experience.

Produce interpretations of literary works that identify different levels of meaning and comment on their significance and effect.

Analyze works of art from diverse world cultures and discuss the ideas, issues, and events of the culture that these works convey.

DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING

INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

- evaluate and connect evidence
- reflective thinking
- view information from a variety of perspectives
- conceptualize
- make generalizations
- identify patterns and themes

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

English Language Arts

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

1. Ask students to think about an historical site in New York State they have visited that involved rescuing people from difficult situations: John Brown's Farm near Lake Placid, Ellis Island, the Holocaust Museum, the Tenement Museum, the Harriet Tubman Home in Auburn and other Underground Railroad sites throughout the state. What impressions of those visits come to mind? What would it have been like for the children or teenagers who lived at or were associated with those sites? Ask students to think about and write down what they might like to have done to help the children. The class can share ideas and talk about the idea of being a *rescuer*.
2. The Irish poet Michael Longley's visits to sites associated with the European Holocaust (Anne Frank's house in Amsterdam and the Polish ghettoes), and his familiarity with the Great Irish Famine in west Co. Mayo, are linked in two poems that speak to the vulnerability of children and their innocent suffering. Share the two poems (see the handouts) with the students, beginning with a description of a burial place, the cairn at Dooaghtry.

   The poem "The Cairn at Dooaghtry" describes a burial place. Cairns are mounds of stones covering a grave site. Strictly speaking, cairns cover sites of prehistoric graves, but some cairns are associated with other later grave sites. The cairn in this poem marks a cillín [KILL een], the grave of unbaptized children. Some of the tiny victims of the Great Irish Famine are buried in cillíní. How does the poet link the children buried in the cairn with the children in the concentration camp at Terezin? Why did the children at Terezin walk on tip-toe?
3. Where does Longley think the children should be instead of "The Cairn at Dooaghtry" and Terezin? A *duach* is the Scots Gaelic word for the sandy plain behind the sand dunes that is sometimes a place to graze cattle in the west of Ireland. The dunes and the *duach* would be a safe playground for children.
4. The word *scree* is a stony slope on a mountainside. The *scree* becomes a landslide of stones that makes a raised beach, the memorial to the innocent suffering of children. A writer's attitude in a piece of writing

is called tone. The tone can be admiring, indignant, ironic, sympathetic or angry. What is Longley's tone? How do readers think Longley feels about the little children? How does he feel about conditions in the world that are threatening or destructive to children?

5. In "Ghetto," Longley dreams of being a rescuer. Both poems express a longing to give comfort to those who suffered, particularly the children. Do the poems inspire a similar dream in students: to give comfort to those who suffer? Define your concept of "rescuer" and write biographies of people whose actions on behalf of others qualify them to be called "rescuers." Frame your response as a biographical essay or as a biographical poem. Ask them to select people they know personally, or people they have read about, heard about in school, or seen in a video or television show. Using the Internet and other resources, ask students to find out more about their rescuer.

   Read the poem "Ghetto" aloud. Ask students to share with the class what they observe about the poem. Put responses on the board and discuss students' observations, noting themes and contrasting interpretations. Ask a student to read the poem again. Longley's poem "Ghetto" was written after the poet visited the Polish ghetto sites. When he describes the experience of children and teenagers, he describes them with the details of ordinary life. Is it effective? Why? How does the reader respond to the little girl's conversation with her doll? What does the reader remember about Longley's evocation of the little schoolboy?

   Working in groups or in pairs, ask each group to look at one stanza and discuss how Longley uses "ordinary details" to represent the reality of children's lives during the holocaust.

   In stanza V, the poet thinks of the joy of walking into Terezin with potatoes to feed the hungry. He doesn't just say he'd bring in a sack of Irish potatoes, he names the varieties that he'd choose: "My delivery of Irish Peace, Beauty of Hebron..." Is the catalogue of potatoes effective? Why? What else do readers notice about the potatoes Longley brings? The allusion to the potatoes resistant to the potato-blight links the victims of the holocaust with famine victims.

   In the last stanza of "Ghetto", Longley refers to the drawings made by children in concentration camps. The drawings have been collected in *I Never Saw Another Butterfly: Children's Drawings and Poems* (see Additional Readings in this activity). Students may want to look at the drawings to see the way children looked at their lives. How does students' knowledge of the childrens' circumstances affect the way they view the drawings?

ASSESSMENT OPTION

The poet Longley included the concept of the rescuer in his two poems *Ghetto* and *The Cairn at Dooaghtry*. How do you think people became rescuers? What does it take to fulfill the role of rescuer? How would it feel to help out, and what if such help would put your own life at risk? What if it felt like your rescue work just made a tiny impact on a huge problem—like feeding one family when you knew others were hungry?

TEACHER REFLECTION

Students who had read *The Catcher in the Rye* have pointed out that Holden Caulfield had a similar yearning to protect the innocent by being the catcher in the rye. Discussing stanza 1 of *Ghetto*, students who had seen *Schindler's List* recalled the scenes of Jewish possessions being left behind as families left their homes for the ghetto or for the transports to the concentration camps. They were interested in the recent news stories about returning stolen properties including financial assets to Holocaust victims or their heirs.

The activity *Heroes of the Great Irish Famine* gives a number of short biographies of famine rescuers.

The Cairn at Dooaghtry

Children lie under the cairn, unhallowed souls
Whose playground should be the duach and the dunes.
No higher than little children walking on tiptoe
Past SS guards at the selections in Terezín,
The cairn has become a scree, the scree a landslide
And a raised beach the memorial to all of them.

Michael Longley

Source: Michael Longley. *Gorse Fires*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1991, pp. 44.

Ghetto

I

Because you will suffer soon and die, your choices
Are neither right nor wrong: a spoon will feed you,
A flannel keep you clean, a toothbrush bring you back
To your bathroom's view of chimney-pots and gardens.
With so little time for inventory or leave taking,
You are packing now for the rest of your life
Photographs, medicines, a change of underwear, a book,
A candlestick, a loaf, sardines, needles and thread.
These are your heirlooms, perishables, worldly goods.
What you bring is the same as what you leave behind,
Your last belonging a list of your belongings.

II

As though it were against the law to sleep on pillows
They have filled a cathedral with confiscated feathers:
Silence irrefrangible, no room for angels' wings,
Tons of feathers suffocating cherubim and seraphim.

III

The little girl without a mother behaves like a mother
With her rag doll to whom she explains fear and anguish,
The meagreness of the bread ration, how to make it last,
How to get back to the doll's house and lift up the roof
And, before the flame-throwers and dynamiters destroy it,
How to rescue from their separate rooms love and sorrow,
Masterpieces the size of a postage stamp, small fortunes.

IV

From among the hundreds of thousands I can imagine one
Behind the barbed-wire fences as my train crosses Poland.
I see him for long enough to catch the sprinkle of snowflakes
On his hair and schoolbag, and then I am transported
Away from that world of broken hobby-horses and silent toys.
He turns into a little snowman and refuses to melt.

V

For street-singers in the marketplace, weavers, warp-makers,
Those who suffer in sewing-machine repair shops, excrement-
Removal workers, there are not enough root vegetables,
Beetroots, turnips, swedes, nor for the leather-stitchers
Who are boiling leather so that their children may eat;
Who are turning like a thick slice of potato-bread
This page, which is everything I know about potatoes,
My delivery of Irish Peace, Beauty of Hebron, Home
Guard, Arran Banners, Kerr's Pinks, resistant to eelworm.
Resignation, common scab, terror, frost, potato-blight.

VI

There will be performances in the waiting room, and time
To jump over a skipping rope, and time to adjust
As though for a dancing class the ribbons in your hair.
This string quartet is the most natural thing in the world.

VII

Fingers leave shadows on a violin, harmonics
A blackbird fluttering between electrified fences.

VIII

Lessons were forbidden in that terrible school.
Punishable by death were reading and writing
And arithmetic, so that even the junior infants
Grew old and wise in lofts studying these subjects.
There were drawing lessons, and drawings of kitchens
And farms, farm animals, butterflies, mothers, fathers
Who survived in crayon until in pen and ink
They turned into guards at executions and funerals
Torturing and hanging even these stick figures.
There were drawings of barracks and latrines as well
And the only windows were the windows they drew.

Michael Longley

Source: Michael Longley, *Gorse Fires.* London: Secker & Warburg, 1991. pp. 40-43.

Historical Context for *Angela's Ashes*

BACKGROUND

In *Angela's Ashes*, Frank McCourt's autobiography of growing up poor in Ireland, he describes Limerick as a dismal, rainy city of poor, pious people. When the McCourts returned to Limerick in 1934, they were among many Irish who returned home during the American depression. Ireland had its own economic problems. Only eleven years after a turbulent period of political revolution (1916-1923), the Irish *taoiseach* [TEE-shook, leader and the term for the Irish Prime Minister] had refused to make land payments and some old debts to England and an economic war involving tariffs on each other's goods further depressed the Irish economy. There was wide-spread poverty and a high rate of infectious diseases like polio, diphtheria, typhoid fever, and tuberculosis.

This activity was designed for class participation in an email exchange with Irish students, where students swap information about Brooklyn, New York, and Limerick, Ireland, while sharing a reading of *Angela's Ashes.* Their study of Brooklyn will introduce them to New York City urban history. It will also show students that writers are selective about details they give their readers when writing about place.

There are at least two other accounts that have appeared about growing up in Limerick since McCourt's *Angela's Ashes:* Gerard Hannan's *Ashes*: *The Real Memoirs of Two Boys From the Limerick Lanes* and Ghristóir O'Flynn's *There is an Isle: A Limerick Boyhood.*

(Note: This activity can be used in conjunction with *Hunger in Angela's Ashes.*)

RESOURCES

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Hannan, Gerard. *Ashes*: *The Real Memoirs of Two Boys From the Limerick Lanes*. Limerick: Treaty Stone, 1997.

McCourt, Malachy (Forward). *Through Irish Eyes: A Visual Companion to Angela McCourt's Ireland.* New York: Smithmark, 1998.

O'Flynn, Ghristóir. *There is an Isle: A Limerick Boyhood.* Boulder: The Irish American Book Company, 1988.

CLASSROOM MATERIALS

Copies of *Angela's Ashes* (McCourt, Frank. New York: Scribner, 1996)

Copies of *There Is An Isle: A Limerick Boyhood.* (O'Flynn, Ghristóir. Boulder: The Irish American Book Company, 1998.

SUPPLIES AND MATERIALS

Reference books, computer, tape recorder for interviews, materials for making the class book.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

Utilize multiple resources, including the Internet, to compare Brooklyn, New York, and Limerick, Ireland.

Analyze literature to explore conditions during the American depression for the poor in Brooklyn, New York, and Limerick, Ireland, in the 1930s.

Exchange email with their counterparts in Limerick, Ireland and produce a class book to share with them.

Create maps of Brooklyn, New York, and Limerick, Ireland, in the 1930s.

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.

SS2: 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 to 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 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 2: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.

ELA 4: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for social interaction.

Arts1: 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 2: Students will be knowledgeable about and make use of the materials and resources available for participation in the arts and various roles. (Visual Arts)

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Explore different experiences, beliefs, motives, and traditions of people living in their neighborhoods, communities and State.

Describe historic events through the eyes and experiences of those who were there.

Analyze historical narratives about key events in New York State and United States history to identify the facts and evaluate the authors' perspectives.

Explain the importance of analyzing narratives drawn from different times and places to understand historical events.

Explore the lifestyles, beliefs, traditions, rules and laws, and social/cultural needs and wants of people during different periods in history and in different parts of the world.

Present geographic information in a variety of formats, including maps, tables, graphs, charts, diagrams, and computer-generated models.

Interpret and analyze information from textbooks and nonfiction books for young adults, as well as reference materials, audio and media presentations, oral interviews, graphs, charts, diagrams, and electronic databases intended for a general audience.

Use details, examples, anecdotes, or personal experiences to explain or clarify information.

Produce oral and written reports on topics related to all school subjects.

Write social letters, cards, and electronic messages to friends, relatives, community acquaintances, and other electronic network users.

Use a variety of print and electronic forms for social communication with peers and adults.

Produce a collection of art works, in a variety of mediums, based on a range of individual and collective experiences.

Create art works that reflect a particular historical period of a culture.

DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING

INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

. reflective thinking

. consult and interpret databases

- participate in interpersonal and group activities
- communicate results of research projects
- gather information
- interpret information and data
- acquire and organize information
- reflect upon content/form opinions
- utilize multiple resources in research

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

Arts

English Language Arts

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

1. In groups, using reference books, the Internet, and interviews with people who remember the American depression in Brooklyn, New York, students can investigate one of the following topics that describes conditions in McCourt's neighborhood: employment, social welfare, public health, education, politics, sports, music, film. Groups can share information.

   Students can then create a class map of McCourt's Brooklyn devising their own scale and symbols.

   As a class, students can compile a list of questions to ask their Limerick partners about conditions in McCourt's Limerick. What things do they expect their Limerick partners will want to know about McCourt's Brooklyn?

   Exchange email and maps with Limerick partners. Share responses to *Angela's Ashes*.
2. Students can make a book called *McCourt's Brooklyn* for their Limerick partner class that will include the current events of the day, songs, sports, copies of photographs, and maps.
3. Since *Angela's Ashes* has been made into a film, there will be another opportunity to share responses. Which medium did students prefer? Why? Was there a difference in response between American and Irish students? Was there a difference in gender response? What about differences between generations?

ASSESSMENT OPTION

Ask students to write a reflection on the similarities and differences in the 1930s between the two cultures studied.

TEACHER REFLECTION

If students are unable to use the Internet to connect with Irish students, arrange for speakers from Irish societies to visit class and discuss living and working conditions in Ireland in the 1930's.

This activity has been field tested using a partnership between Valley Stream South High School and their counterpart in Limerick. In the students' email exchanges they learned about each other's lives and the difference between English as it is spoken in Ireland and as it is spoken in New York. Their *Angela's Ashes* project led to a joint project and a student exchange.

Hunger in *Angela's Ashes*

BACKGROUND

When Frank McCourt, author of *Angela's Ashes*, talked to students at Bay Shore High School about his boyhood in Limerick, he described what he wants his reader to feel about that experience. "I had a sense of urgency. I wanted to testify about poverty. I wanted to convey the stink of poverty. I wanted to convey the humiliation and shame of being poor." McCourt uses laughter to make his readers think, but he is very serious about the many effects of hunger and poverty.

This activity can be used in conjunction with *Historical Context for Angela's Ashes*.

RESOURCES

HANDOUTS

Angela's Ashes

CLASSROOM MATERIALS

Copies of Browne, Noel. *Against the Tide.* Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1996.

Copies of McCourt, Frank. *Angela's Ashes*. New York: Scribner, 1996.

Copies of *Through Irish Eyes: A Visual Companion to Angela McCourt's Ireland*. Foreword by Malachy McCourt. New York: Smithmark, 1998.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

Reflect upon and describe the impact of hunger and poverty on people's lives.

Describe how humor can be a literary technique to encourage readers to take a subject seriously.

Describe how dialogue in text can reveal the character of the speakers.

Describe how Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* and other memoirs tell about life in Ireland in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s.

STANDARDS

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

ELA 2: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.

SS2: 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.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Read historical narratives, myths, legends, biographies, and autobiographies to learn about how historical figures lived, their motivations, hopes, fears, strengths, and weaknesses.

Study about different world cultures and civilizations focusing on their accomplishments, contributions, values, beliefs, and traditions.

Interpret and analyze information from textbooks and nonfiction books for young adults, as well as reference materials, audio and media presentations, oral interviews, graphs, charts, diagrams, and electronic

databases intended for a general audience.

Read a variety of literature of different genres: picture books, poems, articles, and stories from children's magazines; fables, myths and legends; songs, plays and media productions; and works of fiction and nonfiction intended for young readers.

Understand the literary elements of setting, character, plot, theme, and point of view and compare those features to other works and to their own lives.

Evaluate literary merit.

Understand how multiple levels of meaning are conveyed in a text.

Explain the meaning of literary works with some attention to meanings beyond the literal level.

DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING

INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

- reflective thinking
- view information from a variety of perspectives
- interpret information and data
- conceptualize and observe
- reflect upon content/form opinions
- make generalizations

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

Family and Consumer Science

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

1. In the handout *Angela's Ashes*, Mrs. McCourt has taken the boys to the St. Vincent de Paul Society, a Roman Catholic men's charitable organization, to stand in a queue (line) to see if they can get something for their Christmas dinner.

Students should listen to the passage and take notes on what they hear. They should compare their notes with partners and discuss the passage. How did they feel when they heard the passage? How did the author expect them to feel? What do they learn from the conversation between Mrs. McCourt and the butcher? What are the vivid images in the passage? What was the attitude toward the poor in Limerick that is revealed in the Christmas pig's-head passage? How could the author "feel sorry" for the pig when he knew that the pig's head was his family's meal for Christmas? What does the pig's head symbolize? Pairs can share their responses.

2. Students will notice that all English speakers do not use the same pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax (word order) or expressions. When the schoolboys say *ate* for *eat*, they are giving the vowel *e* its Irish (language) pronunciation. When Angela McCourt answers the butcher with "I am not," she unconsciously answers the verb of the question with the verb—something necessary in Irish language because there are no words for *yes* or *no*.

When the butcher says "no harm in a pig's head," what does he mean? What does the work *docket* mean? What is its connotation in this passage? What do the Irish mean when they use the word Yankee? Why is Frankie called a Yankee?

3. Students should read the following passage about social welfare and the hungry Irish poor:

There was only the most rudimentary concept of what became known as welfare socialism throughout Europe. There was little or none in Ireland, where influential religious teaching rejected the "creeping socialism" of state intervention in time of family need. I recall a curate in Newtownmountkennedy informing his flock from the pulpit on one occasion, when he had thundered "communism" because of the local people's attempt to feed the school children a hot mid-day meal in winter. "They can come to my back door and ask for it, if they need it."

The passage is from *Against the Tide*, the autobiography of Noel Browne who grew up in poverty in the city of Derry in Northern Ireland. He was about fifteen years older than McCourt. Browne went on to be a doctor and it was he who eradicated tuberculosis in Ireland while he was Minister for Health. His life was spent in a passionate crusade for social justice in Ireland.

Ask the students to write an essay about how hunger and poverty affects someone's life, beginning with "Hunger and poverty can affect a person's life in many ways." In the essay compare and contrast the way Noel Browne expresses his attitude toward hunger in his book and the way McCourt expresses his attitude toward hunger in the pig's head episode in *Angela's Ashes*.

ASSESSMENT OPTION

Ask students to select either "Mam" or "the butcher" and write a page on the following question: What was Mam/the butcher thinking about when conversing, but did not necessarily reveal in the dialogue?

TEACHER REFLECTION

In field testing this activity, it was found that students felt uncomfortable because they found McCourt's passage funny. They were assured that laughter was McCourt's intention though he is very, very serious about poverty.

Ask students to think about how messages about poverty can be conveyed to the public without lecturing and statistics. For example, how does the singer/songwriter Jewel tell about her experiences living in poverty? How have people been encouraged to "Feed the World?" What do local newspapers, radio shows and charities do around the holidays to call attention to local poverty?

ADDITIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

For younger/advanced students:

Discuss with the class the causes of poverty, difficulties of overcoming poverty, resources available to the poor, and the emotional effects of poverty.

For advanced students:

Ask students to create a dialogue similar to the handout that reveals the character of the speakers and contains more than one level of meaning.

Angela's Ashes

Mam takes Malachy and me to the St. Vincent de Paul Society to stand in the queue and see if there's any chance of getting something for the Christmas dinner—a goose or a ham, but the man says everyone in Limerick is desperate this Christmas. He gives her a docket for groceries at McGrath's shop and another one for the butcher.

No goose, says the butcher, no ham. No fancy items when you bring the docket from the St. Vincent de Paul. What you can have now, missus, is black pudding and tripe or a sheep's head or a nice pig's head. No harm in a pig's head, missus, plenty of meat and children love it, slice that cheek, lather it with mustard and you're in heaven, though I suppose they wouldn't have the likes of that in America where they're mad for the steak and all classes of poultry, flying, walking or swimming itself.

He tells Mam, no, she can't have boiled bacon or sausages and if she has any sense she'll take the pig's head before they're all gone the way the poor people of Limerick are clamoring for them.

Mam says the pig's head isn't right for Christmas and he says 'tis more than the Holy Family had in that cold stable in Bethlehem long ago. You wouldn't find them complaining if someone offered them a nice fat pig's head.

No, they wouldn't complain, says Mam, but they'd never eat the pig's head. They were Jewish.

And what does that have to do with it? A pig's head is a pig's head.

And a Jew is a Jew and 'tis against their religion and I don't blame them.

The butcher says, Are you a bit of an expert, missus, on the Jews and the pig.

I am not, says Mam, but there was a Jewish woman, Mrs. Leibowitz, in New York, and I don't know what we would have done without her.

The butcher takes the pig's head off a shelf and when Malachy says, Ooh, look at the dead dog, the butcher and Mam burst out laughing. He wraps the head in newspaper, hands it to Mam and says, Happy Christmas. Then he wraps up some sausages and tells her, Take these sausages for your breakfast on Christmas Day. Mam says, Oh, I can't afford sausages, and he says, Am I asking you for money? Am I? Take these sausages. They might help make up for the lack of a goose or a ham.

Sure, you don't have to do that, says Mam.

I know that, missus. If I had to do it, I wouldn't.

Mam says she has a pain in her back, that I'll have to carry the pig's head. I hold it against my chest but it's damp and when the newspaper begins to fall away everyone can see the head. Mam says, I'm ashamed of me life that the world should know we're having pig's head for Christmas. Boys from Leamy's National School see me and they point and laugh. Aw, Gawd, look at Frankie McCourt an' his pig's snout. Is that what the Yanks ate for Christmas dinner, Frankie?

One calls to another, Hey Christy, do you know how to ate a pig's head?

No, I don't, Paddy.

Grab him by the ears an' chew the face offa him.

And Christy says, Hey, Paddy, do you know the only part of the pig the McCourts don't ate?

No, I don't, Christy.

The only part they don't ate is the oink.

After a few streets the newspaper is gone altogether and everyone can see the pig's head. His nose is flat against my chest and pointing up at my chin and I feel sorry for him because he's dead and the world is laughing at him. My sister and two brothers are dead, too, but if anyone laughed at them I'd hit them with a rock.

Source: Frank McCourt. *Angela's Ashes*. New York: Scribner, 1996. pp. 97-98.

Hunger as a Political Weapon

BACKGROUND

The use of hunger as a weapon has a long history in Irish tradition. Early Irish law of the 7th and 8th century mention the hunger strike as a way to assert one's rights. In Early Irish literature the poet Seachán Torpéist went on a hunger strike to protect his privileges as a poet. The Irish expression "I'll fast on your doorstep" is a reflection of that ancient custom of fasting to humiliate one's enemy. It shows a willingness to disregard one's physical well-being to protect one's honor or one's rights.

In the Irish War for Independence (1916-1921), when Ireland could not match England for military power, the Irish turned to moral force to accomplish their political goals. While a prisoner in Mountjoy Jail in 1917, Thomas Ashe (1885-1917), who had organized a hunger strike to protest the treatment of political prisoners, died while being force-fed by the British.

RESOURCES

HANDOUTS

Bobby Sands

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Kiberd, Declan. "Ireland and the End of Empire," *Inventing Ireland.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995. pp. 251-259.

Lee, J.J. *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society.* New York: Cambridge University Press, l989.

O'Clery, Conor. *The Dictionary of Political Quotations on Ireland: 1886-1987.* Boston: G.K. Hall, 1987.

Spear, Percival. *A History of India 2.* New York: Penguin Books, 1982.

CLASSROOM MATERIALS

Quote on the board from Learning Experience #1

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

Explain the use of "moral force" and "hunger strikes" as a means of non-violent protesting.

Describe the philosophical positions of McSwiney and Gandhi and write letters to the Editor from a hunger striker and explain his/her position.

Analyze the roles of Irish and Indian individuals who used suffering as a "moral force" against British colonialism, and conclude whether their political goals were achieved.

STANDARDS

SS2: 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.

ELA 2: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.

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

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Analyze the roles and contributions of individuals and groups to social, political, economic, cultural, and religious practices and activities.

Analyze different interpretations of important events and themes in world history and explain the various frames of reference expressed by different historians.

View history through the eyes of those who witnessed key events and developments in world history by analyzing their literature, diary accounts, letters, artifacts, art, music, architectural drawings, and other documents.

Identify historical problems, pose analytical questions or hypotheses, research analytical questions or test hypotheses, formulate conclusions or generalizations, raise new questions or issues for further investigation.

DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING

INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

- acquire and organize information
- analytical thinking
- inquire, question, probe
- think rationally about content
- view information from a variety of perspectives
- observe and conclude

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

1. The most famous Irish use of the hunger strike as a moral force was when Terence MacSwiney, the Lord Mayor of Cork, died on a hunger strike in Brixton Jail. MacSwiney became Lord Mayor after Tomás MacCurtáin, the previous Lord Mayor, was shot at his home by members of the Royal Constabulary in March, 1920. When MacSwiney was elected Lord Mayor, he said, on March 30, 1920:

> *This contest of ours is not, a rivalry of vengeance, but one of endurance—it is not they who can inflict most, but those who can suffer most, will conquer—though we do not abrogate our function to demand and see that evil-doers and murderers are punished for their crimes* (O'Clery 60).

Ask students: What does MacSwiney mean when he says those who can endure the most suffering will win? Why does MacSwiney think that is so? Do students agree with his premise? Do students agree with MacSwiney's opinion?

MacSwiney's words were tested on August 17, 1920 when he was sentenced to two years imprisonment for possession of a secret code and announced he was beginning a hunger strike:

> *I will put a limit to any term of imprisonment you may impose as a result of the action I will take. I have taken no food since Thursday, therefore...I shall be free, alive or dead, within a month (O'Clery 61).*

MacSwiney lived for seventy-four days. His hunger strike drew world attention and sympathetic British public opinion. When his body was being transported back to Ireland, silent British lined the streets. Did MacSwiney's death prove his point that they who suffer most will win?

2. While Ireland was waging its War for Independence, India, another British colony, was working for Home Rule. The two groups of nationalists shared the pages of journals and newspapers and often appeared together to advance the cause of independence from British rule.

The nationalist leader Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) shared MacSwiney's belief that the moral force of suffering could achieve political goals.

At the heart of his ideas lay the doctrine of *ahimsa* or non-violence. Violence was the expression of unreason and hate, the antithesis of love, and love was the essence of the spirit which permeates the

universe. Therefore the opponent must be met with reason and entreaty; if he insisted on violence this must be borne cheerfully as a form of self-purification. Accepted suffering, in Gandhi's view, had healing and converting qualities. The opponent, unmoved by reason, would be won by cheerful suffering in a good cause. Along with *ahimsa* went severe self-discipline which included vows and fasts of purification and penance (Spear 198).

Working in groups, students can compare MacSwiney and Gandhi's views about suffering as a moral force. What was the difference between their views?

3. On May 5, 1981, Bobby Sands died on a hunger strike in Northern Ireland's H-Block; he was the first of ten who would die before the strike ended on October 3, 1981. The hunger strike protested the withdrawal of political prisoner status for those convicted of terrorism. Public opinion around the world was critical of British inflexibility with the hunger strikers that led to needless suffering and death.

Distribute the handout *Bobby Sands*. The Irish poet Caitlín [CAT-leen] Maude (1941-1982) wrote a poem in Irish about Bobby Sands. Who is the narrator of the poem? How does the speaker describe himself? Why can't the speaker find rest in his own country? What has happened to street games? Why does he call himself an Indian?

TEACHER REFLECTION

Irish non-violent protest movements begin with Daniel O'Connell's successful use of constitutional means to achieve Catholic Emancipation and to press for the repeal of the Act of Union. His commitment to non-violence influenced generations of Irish to continue to advance nationalist goals using peaceful means. Teachers may want to review the activity *Daniel O'Connell: Irishman of the Millennium* with students.

This activity offers the opportunity to discuss the effective use of non-violence rather than violence to achieve political goals or social change. It invites comparison with the American Civil Rights Movement when courageous people elected to use non-violence in their campaign for racial equality and social justice. This activity would also be effective in a Global History and Geography class that is studying nationalist movements among colonized peoples.

ADDITIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCE

For advanced students:

Investigate to find out who else has conducted hunger strikes to make a statement or to draw attention to an issue. For example, the suffragists often refused to eat (and were force-fed) when they were jailed for protesting. A group of Chinese students conducted a "hunger strike" after Tiananmen Square. Discuss the motivation of these individuals and the outcome of their actions.

Bobby Sands

In my own place in the North
life is like the stormy weather –
far more rain than sun.
But there was a sunburst over my cot,
and I never gave into the dark skies.
Look at me –
not able to find rest in my own country.
Nor could any saint.
I wallopped stones
along with every schoolboy,
understanding that it wasn't
a street game at all –
and I was the Indian.

Trans. Maureen Murphy

Source: Caitlín Maude. *Caitlín Maude-Dánta,* Dublin: Coiscéim, 1984. pp. 70.
Permission pending.