



## Forced to Flee: Famine and Plague

*The focus of this lesson plan is the Irish Potato Famine.*

### **Subject**

World History

### **Grade level**

6-8

### **Duration**

Three class periods

### **Objectives:**

Students will

- review important facts about the Irish Potato Famine;
- explore primary resources related to the famine; and
- create a classroom mural about the experience of the famine.

### **Materials:**

- Computer with Internet access
- Print and online resources
- Color printer
- Scissors
- Paper, pencils, markers
- *Forced to Flee: Famine and Plague* video and VCR (or DVD and DVD player)

### **Procedures**

1. After watching *Forced to Flee: Famine and Plague*, review facts about the Irish Potato Famine. Where did it occur? (*Ireland*) When did it occur? (*1845–1850*) What happened to the potato crops? (*A fungus from Mexico infected them.*) Why was this so devastating? (*Potatoes were Ireland's main crop and food source.*) How did most landlords respond to tenants who couldn't pay their rent? (*They evicted tenants from their homes, which were often torn down.*) What happened to the people? (*More than a million died; some were sent to crowded, disease-ridden work houses; more than a million emigrated to America on in dirty, overcrowded coffin ships.*) For more information, the following site provides a brief overview:

The Irish Potato Famine

[http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/historyonline/irish\\_potato\\_famine.cfm](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/historyonline/irish_potato_famine.cfm)

2. Ask students to describe how they think the Irish felt during the famine. (*Answers may include angry, helpless, sad, hungry, tired, and hopeless*).
3. Tell students that they will explore primary sources that describe life in Ireland during the famine. These sources include personal accounts, newspaper articles, photographs, drawings, songs, and poems. Working with partners, students will select at least three sources from which to create a collage. If they highlight a newspaper article, personal account, or long poem, have them select one descriptive or powerful excerpt. Students should then print or copy the items and create a collage to present to the class.
4. Allow students to use print and online resources in their research. The following Web sites provide a wealth of images and text.

Interpreting the Irish Famine (See Photographs and Drawings)

<http://www.people.virginia.edu/~eas5e/Irish/Famine.html>

Views of the Famine (see "Master Picture List")

<http://departments.vassar.edu/~sttaylor/FAMINE/index.html>

Journey of an Irish Coffin Ship (personal account)

<http://www.people.virginia.edu/~eas5e/Irish/RWhyte.html>

Immigrants and Exiles: Irish in Ireland (newspaper article, personal account, cartoon, songs, pictures, official documents)

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/education/int/hist/immigrants/irish\\_in\\_ireland/index\\_irish\\_ireland.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/education/int/hist/immigrants/irish_in_ireland/index_irish_ireland.shtml)

Famine Poetry

[http://www.nde.state.ne.us/SS/irish/unit\\_7.html](http://www.nde.state.ne.us/SS/irish/unit_7.html)

Irish Famine: "The Horror" (See Activity 3: Famine Scenes for personal quotes)

[http://www.nde.state.ne.us/SS/irish/unit\\_4.html](http://www.nde.state.ne.us/SS/irish/unit_4.html)

Songs About Famine

<http://history.wisc.edu/archdeacon/famine/songs.html>

5. Give students one class period to research and collect their sources about the famine. Then have them create a small collage on a plain white piece of paper, clearly labeling each item.
6. In their presentations, students should explain what each item reveals about the famine experience. Pin each collage on a classroom bulletin board to create a mural. As a class, discuss what students have learned. What were some of the most powerful images or words? Which personal stories, images, or documents do they think they'll remember?

## **Evaluation**

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

**3 points:** Students showed a strong understanding of the Irish Potato Famine; gathered at least five appropriate sources for their collage; developed a creative and comprehensive collage; clearly presented their collage to the class; and participated actively in class discussions.

**2 points:** Students showed a satisfactory understanding of the Irish Potato Famine; gathered four or five appropriate sources for their collage; developed a competent collage; presented their collage to the class with adequate explanation; and participated somewhat in class discussions.

**1 point:** Students showed a satisfactory understanding of the Irish Potato Famine; gathered three or fewer appropriate sources for their collage; developed an unsatisfactory collage; presented no explanations about the collage; and did not participate in class discussions.

### **Extensions**

**For “The Black Death” segment:** As a class, review how the Black Plague spread from Asia throughout Europe. What caused the plague? Would a plague of this nature have the same devastating effect in Europe today? Why or why not? (*No, the plague was caused by a bacterium, which would be treated with antibiotics today.*) Have students use print and online resources to learn more about the Black Plague. (The following site is a good starting point, with an overview, map, images, and personal quotes: <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/plague.htm>.)

### **Vocabulary**

#### **blight**

**Definition:** A plant disease, caused by bacteria, fungi, or viruses, that destroys the plant

**Context:** A fungus that had been brought to Ireland from Mexico caused the potato blight in 1845.

#### **famine**

**Definition:** An acute shortage of food leading to widespread hunger and starvation

**Context:** Almost one million people died during the Irish Potato Famine.

#### **landlord**

**Definition:** Someone who owns property that is rented to tenants

**Context:** Many landlords evicted Irish farmers who could not pay their rent.

### **Academic Standards**

**The National Council for Geographic Education** (NCGE) provides 18 national geography standards that the geographically informed person knows and understands. To view the standards online, go to <http://www.ncge.org/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following NCGE standards:

- Human Systems: The process, patterns, and functions of human settlement; How forces of cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control of Earth’s surface.

**The National Council for the Social Studies** (NCSS) has developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of the NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org>.

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- People, Places, and Environments
- Production, Distribution, and Consumption

**Credit**

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