AIM QUESTION: What does demographic data tell about the impact of the Great Famine on life in Ireland?

TEACHER BACKGROUND:

This lesson is designed for inclusion in a tenth grade global history unit on the impact of industrialization on the lives of ordinary people. Study of the Great Irish Famine allows students to explore a number of essential social studies questions related to the causes of events and the responsibility of government to respond to them. No one knows exactly how many people died in Ireland's great Famine of 1845-52, but in a population of more than eight million people, the death count reached at least one million. Another million and a half people emigrated. This human disaster occurred within the jurisdiction of Great Britain, the richest and most industrially advanced empire in the world at that time. According to historian Christine Kinealy in an article in *Natural History* magazine (January 1998), "the potato blight was an ecological disaster that struck Ireland when it was particularly vulnerable. But what transformed the blight into a famine was the failure of the British government, along with landlords and merchants, to meet the challenge and implement effective action." Conditions in Ireland became so bad during the potato famine that according to one report: "Most of the dead were buried in fields or along the roads. The corpse was frequently wrapped with straw ropes and buried in this way without a coffin. . . . Tombstones were not erected as it was difficult to find men with the strength to make the graves. . . . Bodies actually lay unburied by hedges for rats soon devoured the flesh and only the skeleton remained. During the famine people died from a variety of causes, though relatively few from actual starvation. Most were felled by relapsing fever, typhus, dysentery, and cholera. Their vulnerability to these diseases made worse by hunger, inadequate shelter, overcrowding in workhouses, and hard labor on work relief projects.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Examine the chart A, Population of Ireland, 1841-1871, on the ACTIVITY SHEET and answer questions 1-3.

2. Discussion. Sometimes an examination of a large amount of numerical information helps us understand things about a society we may not see when we look at individual cases. In our society today, how do we know how many people live here and who they are? How often does the government collect census information? What are some of the possible uses of this information?

3. Charts help us organize a large amount of information, locate key data, find patterns in the data, which we call trends, draw conclusions about changes in societies, and to think of new questions that we need to explore. For example, examine the chart, Population of Ireland, 1841-1871. What key information is included in this chart? What is the population of Ireland in 1841, before the Great Famine? What happens to the population of Ireland from 1841-1851? Between 1851-1861? 1861-1871? What pattern or trend can you discover in this chart? In your opinion, why does this trend continue after 1851? What other information do you think you need to know to really understand what is happening?

4. Working in groups, identify key information and trends in charts (graphs) B, C, and D. Complete a rubric for each chart (graph). On your rubric explain the following: Key Data - What important information is provided on this chart (graph)? Trends - What patterns do you discover in this data? Conclusions - What conclusions can you draw from the different data and trends? Questions - What more do you need to know to understand what is taking place?

Student group reports on demographic charts (graphs) to the full class.

SUMMARY QUESTION: What does demographic data tell about the impact of the Great Famine on life in Ireland?

HOMEWORK: Explaining economic data. Select a chart or graph that presents economic data from the United States or another country or region of the world. Use the format from class to analyze the data presented in the chart or graph.

APPLICATION: Some people argue that control of information is a powerful political tool. They want laws that force governments and business to make information available to the public. Do you agree with this idea? Explain.

PROJECT: Select a country other than the United States in the world today. Assemble or create between 5 and 10 charts and graphs that describe economic conditions in the country. Use the format from class to analyze the data presented in the charts or graphs. Write a 250-500 word essay describing economic conditions in this country.

ACTIVITY SHEET- Demographic Impact of the Great Irish Famine

A) Population of Ireland, 1841-1871

Source: Helen Litton (1994). *The Irish Famine*. Dublin: Wolfhound Press, p. 8.

1841	8,175,000
1851	6,552,000
1861	5,799,000
1871	4,412,000

Questions

1- What is the population of Ireland in 1841, before the Great Famine?

2- What happens to the population of Ireland from 1841-1851?

3- In your opinion, why does this trend continue after 1851?

Chart	B) Reported Deaths	C) Families Evicted	D) Migration to the U.S.
Key Data			
Trends			
Conclusions			
Questions			

B) Reported Deaths in Ireland, 1843-1852
Source: Helen Litton (1994). *The Irish Famine*. Dublin: Wolfhound Press, p. 8.

1843	70,499
1844	75,055
1845	86,900
1846	122,899
1847	249,335
1848	208,252
1849	240,797
1850	164,093
1851	96,798
1852	80,112

C) Number of Families Evicted, 1847-1851
Source: Christine Kinealy (1995). *This Great Calamity*. Boulder, CO: Roberts, Rinehart.

Year	Number of Evictions
1847	6,026
1848	9,657
1849	16,686
1850	19,949
1851	13,197

D) Migration from Ireland to the United States, 1842 to 1855
Source: R. Edwards and T. Williams (1956). *The Great Famine, Studies in Irish History, 1845-1852*. Dublin: Browne and Nolan.

Year	U.S.
1842	49,000
1843	23,000
1844	37,000
1845	50,000
1846	68,000
1847	117,000
1848	154,000
1849	177,000
1850	181,000
1851	216,000
1852	193,000
1853	157,000
1854	111,000
1855	57,000

B) Reported Deaths in Ireland (in thousands), 1843-1852
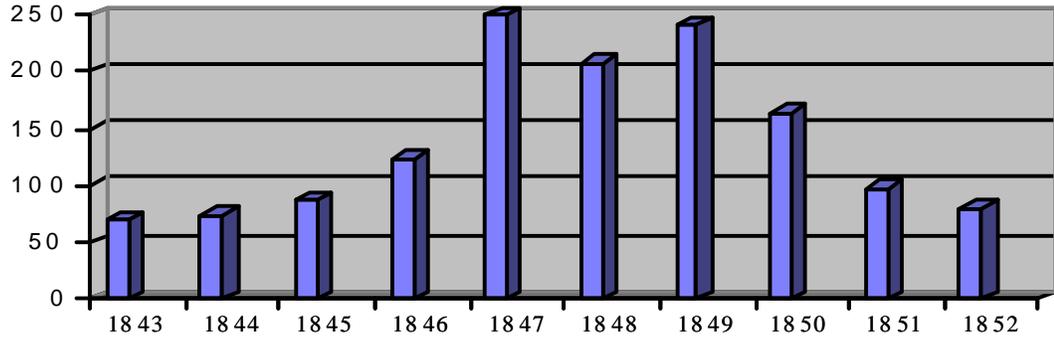
C) Number of Families Evicted, 1847-1851
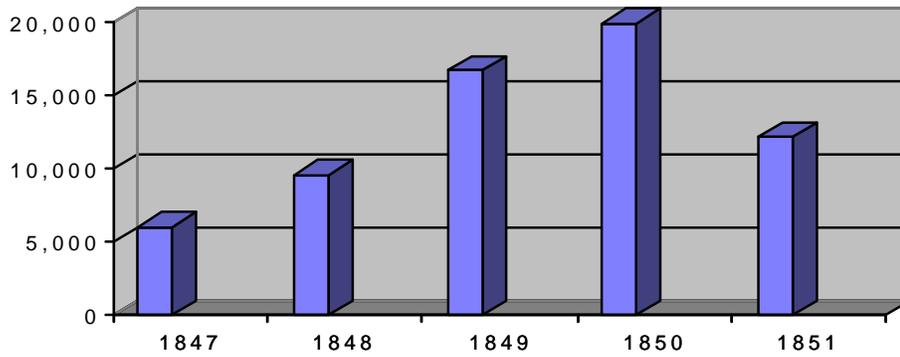
D) Migration to the United States (in thousands), 1845 to 1855