

TOPIC: Pre-Famine Ireland

SUBJECT/GRADE LEVEL: Social Studies, Grade Level 9 (Supplemental, Language Arts, Grades 9-12).

TITLE: Emigration to the United States from Pre-Famine Ireland

AIM QUESTION: Why did large scale Irish emigration predate the famine?

NEW YORK STATE SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS:

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

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

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

TEACHER BACKGROUND: Sometimes people migrate from one country to another because of personal reasons, sometimes because of major international events, and sometimes because of conditions in their home country. Generally there is both a push and a pull that stimulates migration. In this lesson students examine the push and pull behind pre-famine Irish migration to the United States. Patterns of migration prior to the Great Irish Famine also raise questions about whether the famine precipitated change in Ireland or accelerated changes that were already in the process of unfolding.

Reflection: Teachers report that students enjoyed discussing comparisons between emigration in the past and present. Students were particularly interested in comparing the reasons that different groups emigrated and discussing the problems of intergenerational conflict caused by acculturation. Some students had copies of letters exchanged by members of their family divided by migration to the United States. One teacher brought in letters from immigrants and family members in the “old country” published in the Jewish Daily Forwards. In another class, Haitian students discussed and played to music by Waclef.

AIM: Why did large scale Irish emigration predate the famine?

ASSESSMENT:

- Students will demonstrate an understanding of cause and effect in history and the ability to support conclusions based on an evaluation of evidence through individual and group writing assignments and during group and class discussions.
- Students will demonstrate the importance of examining and respecting multiple perspectives when explaining historical events.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to examine and explain the significance of primary source documents.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to explore the use of poetry and songs in the creation of metaphors for understanding historical events and the use of historical events as symbolizes in an examination of the human condition.

DO NOW ACTIVITY: Activity Sheet A. Read the first stanzas from the song “Paddy on the Railway.” What does this song tell us about emigration from Ireland to the United States?

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY: Is anyone in class an immigrant to the United States? Is there anyone whose parents or grandparents were immigrants? Why did you or members of your family come to the United States? What was life like for them before they immigrated? What was life like when they first arrived in the United States?

TRANSITIONAL ACTIVITY: Sometimes people migrate from one country to another because of personal reasons, sometimes because of major international events, and sometimes because of conditions in their home country. Generally there is both a push and a pull that stimulates migration. What factors push people to migrate? What factors pull people to a new country? We will use statements by Irish immigrants to try to understand why people migrated from pre-famine Ireland to the United States.

ACTIVITY:

- Activity Sheet A. Read and discuss the letter from the British representative in Philadelphia to the British Secretary for Foreign Affairs. Key Questions:

How were people able to travel to the British colonies in America if they could not afford the fare? What is the shift in Irish immigration to the United States? In your opinion, what does this change suggest? In your opinion, why are people leaving Ireland for the United States?- Read and discuss the letter from John Doyle to his wife. Key Questions:

According to this letter, what was the hardest part about immigrating to the U.S.? Why does Doyle think many people would stay home if they knew the truth? In your

opinion, why were men usually the first member of the family to migrate to the United States?

If you were a poor Irish agricultural worker during this time period, would you have been willing to make the sacrifices needed to migrate to the U.S.? Explain.

SUMMARY QUESTION: What does prefamine emigration from Ireland to the United States suggest about conditions in pre-famine Ireland? Explain.

HOMEWORK: Write a poem or song exploring the push and pull immigration during a particular historical era.

APPLICATION: Read and discuss the traditional ballad about Irish immigration to the United States. In what way is Mary a metaphor for Ireland? Explain your answer.

PROJECT:

- Interview an immigrant to the United States about the reasons they came to the United States and their experience when they arrived.
- Design an advertising poster to attract pre-famine Irish immigrants to the United States.

(Edited Version)

ACTIVITY SHEET A: Pre-Famine Emigration from Ireland to the U.S.

1) "Paddy on the Railway." This traditional Irish American folk song has many versions and verses. The Great Irish Famine begins in 1845. The song begins in 1841. What does this song tell us about emigration from Ireland to the United States?

Source: E. Fowke and J. Glazer, *Songs of Work and Protest* (Dover, 1973).

In eighteen hundred and forty one, I put my corduroy breeches on, I put my corduroy breeches on, to work upon the railway. Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, to work upon the railway.

In eighteen hundred and forty two, I left the old world for the new, bad cess (luck) to the luck that brought me through, to work upon the railway. Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, Filly-me-oori-oori-ay, to work upon the railway.

2) This is an edited version of a letter written in 1789 by Phineas Bond, the British consul in Philadelphia, to Lord Carmarthen, British Secretary for Foreign Affairs. In the letter, Mr. Bond describes the arrival Irish immigrants in Pennsylvania. During the colonial era, many Irishmen and women could not afford to pay their fare to the new world, so they arrived as indentured servants. Mr. Bond comments that there seems to be a shift to better off free labor.

Source: Annual Report of the American Historical Association, 1896, I, pp. 643-645. Extract from Edith Abbott, *Immigration: Select Documents and Case Records*, The University of Chicago Press, 1924. Reprinted by New York: Arno Press, 1969, pp. 9-10.

Formerly, my Lord, a large portion of the passengers from Ireland were redemptioners or indented servants. Those who could not redeem themselves by paying their passage money within a limited time, were indented for a term of years to any master who would advance the price of their passages. Those who came out as servants were indented in Ireland for so many years to the master or owner of the vessel and the original indenture was either assigned or a new one given upon their arrival in America to the first person who would pay the price demanded for their time.

The laws of Pennsylvania require certain freedom dues to be allowed by the master to the servant upon the expiration of the term of servitude. Lately, my Lord, few redemptioners or servants have arrived here from Ireland, the passengers from thence have been chiefly such as have paid their passage before they embarked; in this sort of trade there is very little risk and great profit, the passengers who have

arrived in the Delaware this year from Ireland have been for the most part people in tolerable good plight with some property beforehand and who have come to settle as farmers or to engage as artificers in some branch of manufacture. A large embarkation of this description of passengers as well as of redemptioners and servants is expected in the course of next year.

Questions

1- How did people travel to the British colonies in America if they could not afford the fare?

2- In your opinion, why is there a shift in Irish emigration from indentured servants to free laborers in this period?

C) Because of health and economic circumstances, it was often difficult, if not impossible, for families to emigrate together. This letter, dated, January 25, 1818, is from John Doyle, who was living in the United States, to his wife Fanny, who remained in Ireland.

Source: William D. Griffin, *The Book of Irish Americans*, NY: Times Books, 1990, pp. 119-120.

Oh, how long the days, how cheerless and fatiguing the nights since I parted with my Fanny and my little angel. Sea sickness, nor the toils of the ocean, nor the starvation which I suffered, nor the constant apprehension of our crazy old vessel going to the bottom, for ten tedious weeks, could ever wear me to the pitch it has if my mind was easy about you. But when the recollection of you and of my little Ned rushes on my mind with a force irresistible, I am amazed and confounded to think of the coolness with which I used to calculate on parting with my little family even for a day, to come to this strange country, which is the grave of the reputations, the morals, and of the lives of so many of our countrymen and countrywomen.

As yet it's only natural I should feel lonesome in this country, ninety-nine out of every hundred who come to it are at first disappointed. Still, it's a fine country and a much better place for a poor man than Ireland. Much as they grumble at first, after a while they never think of leaving it. One thing I think is certain, that if emigrants knew beforehand what they have to suffer for about the first six months after leaving home in every respect, they would never come here. However, an enterprising man, desirous of advancing himself in the world, will despise everything for coming to this free country, where a man is allowed to thrive and flourish without having a penny taken out of his pocket by government; to act and

speak as he likes, provided he does not hurt another, to slander and damn government, abuse public men in their office to their faces, wear your hat in court and smoke a cigar while speaking to the judge as familiarly as if he was a common mechanic. Hundreds go unpunished for crimes for which they would be surely hung in Ireland; in fact they are so tender of life in this country that a person should have a very great interest to get himself hanged for anything.

Questions

- 1- According to John Doyle, what was the hardest part of emigrating to the United States? Why?
- 2- What does John Doyle find so surprising about life in the United States? Why?
- 3- If you were an Irish peasant during this time period, would you have been willing to make the sacrifices needed to emigrate to the United States? Explain your answer.

ACTIVITY SHEET B) An Irish ballad

The Irish brought to America a great love of music. Many of the early Irish ballads refer to the hopes and dreams of the emigrants as well as the severe hardships they encountered on their journeys. In this ballad the emigrant remembers the one he left behind.

Source: Robert L. Wright, ed., *Irish Emigrant Ballads and Songs*, Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1973, p. 354.

Oh I'm sitting on the stile, Mary, where we sat side by side,
On a bright May morning long ago when first you were my bride;
The corn was springing fresh and green and the lark sang loud and high,
And the red was on your lips, Mary, and the love lay in your eye.
The place is little changed, Mary, the day is right as then,
The lark's loud song is in my ear and the corn is green again;
But I miss the softness of your hand and your breath warm on my cheek,
And I still keep listening for the words, you never more will speak.
'Tis but a step down yonder lane, the little church stands near,
The place where we were wed, Mary, I see the spire from here;
And the grave-yard stands between us both where you took your final rest,
Where I laid you, darling, down to sleep with your babe all on your breast.
I'm very lonely now, Mary, for the poor make no new friends,
But oh they love the better still the few our Father sends;
And you were all I had, Mary, my blessing and my pride,
There's nothing else to care for now since my poor Mary died.
I'm bidding you a long farewell, my Mary kind and true,
But I'll not forget you, darling, in that land I'm going to;
For they say there's bread and work for all and the sun shines always there,
But I'll ne'er forget my Mary were it fifty times as fair.

Questions

- 1- Why was Mary left behind in Ireland?
- 2- In what way is Mary a metaphor for Ireland? Explain your answer.