

TOPIC: Pre-Famine Ireland

SUBJECT/GRADE LEVEL: Social Studies, Grade Level 9.

TITLE: The English working class in the 1840s

AIM QUESTION: How did England treat the English working class in the 1840s?

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: There has been widespread debate over the failure of the British government to act to save Irish lives during the Great Famine following the destruction of the potato crop during the 1840s. Irish nationalist John Mitchel argued that if there had been a similar calamity in England, "there is no doubt" relief measures "would have been taken promptly and liberally." Examining the condition of the English working class during the 1840s can help students evaluate the Mitchel statement and decide if they believe British policy in Ireland was based on racism and religious prejudice toward the Irish or reflected economic beliefs during the period and the class nature of society.

Reflection: This lesson had some of the same problems as the lesson on economic ideas. Teachers made two recommendations. First, use pictures depicting child labor and poverty in England in the 19th century and in underdeveloped countries in the 20th century to open discussion of conditions in industrializing countries. Second, the information provided by Engels should also be offered in graph or chart form. Some teachers used this lesson to involve students in research on child labor today and broader discussions on the human rights of adults and children.

AIM: How did England treat the English working class in the 1840s?

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.

DO NOW ACTIVITY: Read section A from the *Condition of the Working Class in England* and answer questions 1-3.

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY: Are problems today the result of injustices like racism and prejudice, of ignorance, or are they just the way that things work? Are the rules fair or prejudiced? Maybe the system doesn't work for everyone, but it is the best system we have? How should we decide?

TRANSITIONAL ACTIVITY: Review Do Now Activity. Key Questions:

- What was the average age at death of the "labourers, mechanics and servants" in Liverpool, England in 1840?
- Why is the average age at death so low for this group of people?
- In your opinion, does the situation described by Engels exist in the world today? Explain your answer.

ACTIVITY:

- Read passage B and discuss Engels' conclusions about the situation in England in 1844. Key Questions:

What does Engels believe is the cause of high infant mortality among poor workers?

What does Engels offer as a solution to the problem?

- There has been widespread debate over the failure of the British government to act to save Irish lives during the Great Famine following the destruction of the potato crop during the 1840s. Irish nationalist John Mitchel argued that if there had been a similar calamity in England, "there is no doubt" relief measures "would have been taken promptly and liberally." In your opinion, based on Engels' writing, would he have agreed with Mitchel's charge? Why or why not?

In your opinion, when we examine British attitudes toward and treatment of the English working class and poor and towards the Irish during the potato famine, are we looking at racial and religious prejudice, or are we just looking at the way their

social system worked at that time? Did the British government treat the Irish poor any differently than it treated the English poor?

These are hard issues to resolve. What more would you want to know to help you answer these questions?

- Examine Engel's report on the attitude of the prosperous toward the poor in England in passages C, D, and E. Key Questions: According to Engels, what does Malthus's theory claim? Based on these documents, why are the English poor seen this way? If you were an English worker, how would you have responded? What would you have done about these conditions if you were well-off?

**SUMMARY QUESTION:** In your opinion, how will English attitudes toward the English poor affect the Irish during the Great Famine?

**HOMEWORK:** Write an editorial about poverty in the United States today. In the editorial explain your views on the question Are people poor in the United States today because of problems with the economic system, because of issues like racism or because of personal failures? Explain.

**APPLICATION:** How are the attitudes toward the poor in England in the 1840s similar to or different from attitudes expressed in the United States today? In your opinion, are people poor in the United States today because of problems with the economic system, because of issues like racism or because of personal failures? Explain.

**ACTIVITY SHEET: Condition of the Working Class in England**

A) The following information on life expectancy in England was reported by Frederick Engels in his book *Condition of the Working Class in England* (1844).

"In 1840 in Liverpool the average age at death of the 'gentry and professional persons' was 35 years, of 'tradesmen and their families' 22 years and 'labourers, mechanics and servants' was actually only 15 years. The main reason for the high death rate is the heavy mortality among infants and small children. If both parents go to work for their living, or if either parent is dead, the child is so neglected that its health inevitably suffers. In Manchester nearly 54 per cent of the workers' children die before attaining their fifth birthday. Only 20 per cent of the children of the middle class die before they are five. In the rural districts rather less than 32 per cent of all children die before they are five."

**Questions**

1- What was the average age at death of the "labourers, mechanics and servants" in Liverpool, England in 1840?

2- According to Engels, why is the average age at death so low for this group of people?

3- In your opinion, does the situation described by Engels exist in the world today? Explain your answer.

B) In the section on infant mortality Engels concluded: "These unfortunate children are simply the victims of our extremely defective social arrangements, which are perpetuated in the interests of the property-owning classes. The middle classes read these things every day in the newspapers, and do nothing at all about it. The middle classes should either put an end to this scandalous state of affairs, or they should hand over to the working classes the power to make regulations for the common good."

C) Engels reported on a conversation with a middle-class gentleman in Manchester. "I spoke to him about the disgraceful unhealthy slums and drew his attention to the disgusting condition of that part of the town in which the factory workers lived. He listened patiently and at the corner of the street at which he parted company he remarked: 'And yet there is a great deal of money made here.'"

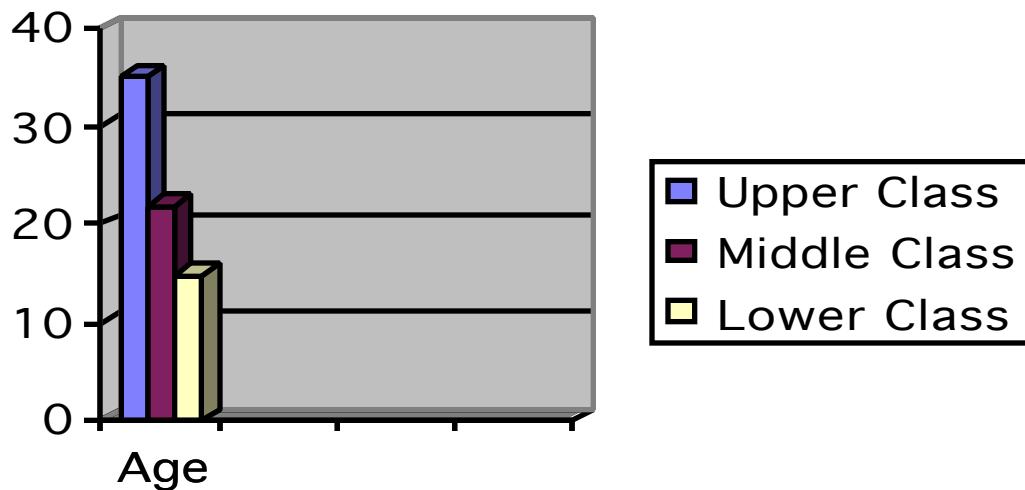
D) Engels included a letter written to the *Manchester Guardian* complaining about the poor. "For sometime past numerous beggars are to be seen on the streets of our town. They attempt - often in a truly brzen and offensive manner - to arouse the pity of the public by their ragged clothes, their wretched appearance, their disgusting wounds, and sores, and by showing stumps of amputated limbs. I should have thought that those of us who not only pay our poor rates (taxes) but also subscribe generously to charitable appeals have done enough to claim the right to be shielded from such disgusting and revolting sights."

E) Engels charged that England's attitude toward working people and the poor was based on a theory by Malthus that England was over-populated and that efforts to help the poor only made the situation worse. "(Malthus) argues that because the world is always over-populated it is inevitable that hunger, distress, poverty and immorality will always be with us. Consequently men must be divided into different classes. Some of these classes will be more or less wealthy, educated and moral and others will be more or less poor, miserable, ignorant and immoral. From these facts Malthus comes to the conclusion that private charity and public provision for the poor Are really useless since they merely serve to keep alive -- and even to promote the growth of -- the surplus population."

**A Comparison of Life Expectancy by Social Class, 1840**

	Urban Upper Class	Urban Middle Class	Urban Lower Class	Rural Population
Average age of Death, Liverpool, England	35	22	15	not available
Percent of child who die before age 5, Manchester, England	not available	20%	54%	32%

**1. Average age of death, Liverpool, England, 1840**



**2. Percent of child who die before age 5, Manchester, England, 1840**

