

### 3.3 Discovery of Blight

TOPIC: Impact of the Great Irish Famine

SUBJECT/GRADE LEVEL: Social Studies, Grade Level 10.

TITLE: The Discovery of the Potato Blight in Ireland

AIM QUESTION: How did people first learn about the potato blight?

TEACHER BACKGROUND: The Dublin Evening Post reported the first appearance of the potato blight on September 9, 1845. The fields were green; the potato crop looked healthy; however, suddenly - overnight- the fields turned black and there was an overpowering, sickening smell of rot. Experts were puzzled by the cause of the blight. They thought that fungus which attacked the potato plant was the result of the disease; later, botanists realized that the fungus itself, phythopthera infestans, was the cause. Realizing the danger to crop loss, the British government directed the local police to file weekly reports on the extent of the potato crop loss.

AIM: How did people first learn about the potato blight?

DO NOW ACTIVITY: Examine of Daniel McDonald's "The Discovery of the potato blight in Ireland" and answer questions 1 and 2.

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY: Examine and discuss McDonald's "The Discovery of the Potato Blight in Ireland."

ACTIVITY:

- A monologue is a person speaking alone with or without an audience. In groups of six, assign the figures in the painting: old man, man in the foreground, man in the background, woman looking into the potato pit, woman with her head on her arm, child. Have each person design a monologue describing the feelings of her/his character. Groups will present their monologues to the class beginning with a tableau. Students will take up the positions of the figures in the painting and will hold their positions while each speaker in turn steps forward to speak her/his monologue. Speakers will give their monologues and return to position. Groups will decide the order of their speakers. Class will design a common set, but groups may choose their own costumes.

- Remember that your character is speaking at a critical moment. What has happened? Does your character realize the significance of the moment? What is going through your character's mind? What does your character's speech reveal about your character? Monologues may be in poetry or in prose. They must be at least thirty lines long.

APPLICATION Analyze the chart "Return showing the proportion of actual crop loss" (1846). Kissane, 31. : Design a map to represent the proportion of crop loss by area. Address the following questions

1. Look at this early (1846) chart of the losses titled "Return showing the proportion of actual crop lost." The information is reported by county. The numbers represent the electoral divisions (voting districts within the county). Which county reported the most serious loss? Which counties reported losses in one or more electoral district greater than seventy percent?
2. Choose one province (Ulster, Munster, Leinster, Connaught) and graph the reports by decile (tenth) from the counties of that province.
3. Design a map that shows the extent of damage from blight in this early report to the government. Choose how you will represent the extent of loss (1/10, 2/10, 3/10). Leave blank the counties that did not report.
4. If you were a member of the British government responsible for making a decision about how to handle the blight how would you determine where you would give attention first? Explain how you arrived at your decision.

ACTIVITY SHEET: Daniel McDonald's "The Discovery of the potato blight in Ireland."

1. What did you think of first when you looked at "The Discovery of the Potato Blight in Ireland"?
2. Daniel McDonald (1821-1853) lived during the Irish famine when a disease called blight destroyed the country's potato crop. Potatoes were the main food source for many families in rural Ireland. Crop failure meant the threat of starvation. Does the painting reveal the seriousness of the discovery of blight? The first blight appeared in 1845. The potato crop also failed in 1846, 1848 and 1849. By then, the population of Ireland had declined from 8,175,124 (1841) to 6,552,385 (1851). When do you think McDonald painted this picture? Was it when the blight first appeared? Was it later? When?
3. Potatoes were the only food source for the poor in rural Ireland. Crop failure meant starvation. Describe the scene when the potatoes were uncovered and found to be destroyed by blight. Create the scene. Who are the speakers? What do they say to each other?
4. Look at the colors of the painting. Has McDonald painted the potato pit and the potatoes in a special way? What is their hue (color)? We say that yellow as a hue has a high value because it is a light color. If a yellow is really yellow, we say it is saturated or has high saturation. Using the terms: hue, value and saturation, describe the way the McDonald painted the potatoes.
5. Describe the subject of the painting. What is happening? What is the relationship between the people in the picture and the landscape? Does the landscape look threatening? Does the way the landscape looks make the blight more (or less) of a surprise? Why?
6. How are the figures related to each other? Do they share the same feelings? Are they equally important?
7. Discuss the composition of the painting. Is there any significance to the way McDonald places the figures? Does their arrangement form a larger shape?
8. Discuss the images in the painting. Who is the older man in the picture? What is he doing? Could he be a symbol? If so, what does it symbolize? Look at the expressions on the faces of the other figures? Are they worried? frightened? sad? hopeful?