

TOPIC: Impact of the Great Irish Famine

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

TITLE: Demographic Impact of the Great Famine

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

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:

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 Kineally 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.

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

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 acquire and use data presented on charts.

DO NOW ACTIVITY: Examine the chart and answer questions 1-3.

### **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?

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY: 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?

TRANSITIONAL ACTIVITY: 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?

ACTIVITY: Working in groups, identify key information and trends in the different charts. What conclusions can you draw from the different data and trends? What questions do you have about the data and the trends? What more would you like to know? Student group reports on demographic charts. Groups complete the following chart on the board.

Chart				
Key Data				
Trends				
Conclusions				
Questions				

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 I- The Great Hunger****A) 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

**B) Irish Grain Exports to Great Britain, 1800-1840 (in quarters)**

Source: R. Edwards and T. Williams (1956). *The Great Famine, Studies in Irish History, 1845-1852*. Dublin: Browne and Nolan.

Year	Wheat and flour (qtrs)	Oats and Oatmeal (qtrs)
1800	749	2,411
1805	84,087	203,202
1810	126,388	492,741
1815	189,544	597,537
1820	403,407	916,251
1825	396,018	1,629,856
1830	529,717	1,471,252
1835	661,776	1,822,767
1840	174,439	2,037,835

**C) Livestock (Cattle, Calves, Sheep and Pigs) Exported from Ireland to England, 1846-1849**

Source: M. E. Daley (1986). *The Famine in Ireland*, p. 57.

Year	Livestock Exported to England
<b>1846</b>	<b>926,600</b>
<b>1847</b>	<b>620,600</b>
<b>1848</b>	<b>886,700</b>
<b>1849</b>	<b>617,200</b>

**ACTIVITY SHEET II- Control of the Land****D) Land Holdings in Ireland by Size, 1841-1847**

Source: R. Edwards and T. Williams (1956). *The Great Famine, Studies in Irish History, 1845-1852*. Dublin: Browne and Nolan.

Size of holdings	1841	1847	Difference
less than 1 acre	not available	73,016	unknown
1 -5 acres	310,375	139,041	- 173,334
5 - 15 acres	252,778	269,534	+ 16,756
15 - 30	79,338	164,337	+ 84,999
above 30 acres	48,623	157,097	+ 108,474

**E) Percent of Land Holdings in Ireland, 1841 and 1851**

Source: R. Edwards and T. Williams (1956). *The Great Famine, Studies in Irish History, 1845-1852*. Dublin: Browne and Nolan.

Size of holdings	1841	1851
less than 1 acre	44.9%	15.5%
1 -5 acres	36.6%	33.6%
5 - 30 acres	11.5%	24.8%
above 30 acres	7.0%	26.1%

**F) 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

**ACTIVITY SHEET III- Survival****G) Overseas Migration from Ireland, 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.	%	Canada	%	Australia	%
1842	49,000	55.9%	39,000	44.0%	1,000	1.1%
1843	23,000	62.4%	14,000	36.2%	500	1.4%
1844	37,000	68.6%	16,000	30.4%	500	1.0%
1845	50,000	66.9%	25,000	23%		
1846	68,000	64.2%	38,000	35.8%		
1847	117,000	54.3%	97,000	45.2%		
1848	154,000	86.2%	23,000	13.8%	2,000	1.0%
1849	177,000	82.4%	31,000	14.3%	7,000	3.3%
1850	181,000	86.4%	24,000	11.7%	4,000	1.9%
1851	216,000	86.3%	29,000	11.8%	5,000	1.9%
1852	193,000	81.4%	22,000	9.8%	6,000	2.8%
1853	157,000	81.5%	22,000	11.6%	13,000	6.6%
1854	111,000	73.9%	23,000	15.3%	16,000	10.8%
1855	57,000	72.4%	6,000	7.9%	16,000	19.6%

**H) Migration to Liverpool, 1849-1853**

Source: Christine Kinealy (1995). *This Great Calamity*. Boulder, CO: Roberts, Rinehart.

Year	Total Migrants
1849	240,925
1850	251,001
1851	283,503
1852	232,331
1853	233,652

**I) Relief Funds Raised in United States Cities, 1846-1847**

Source: Christine Kinealy (1995). *This Great Calamity*. Boulder, CO: Roberts, Rinehart.

New York City	\$170,150
Newark and New Jersey	\$35,000
Boston	\$45,000
Baltimore	\$40,000
Philadelphia	\$50,000
New Orleans	\$25,000
Albany, NY	\$25,000
Washington	\$5,000
Total	\$395,150