TOPIC VII: The Amazing Potato and the History of Ireland

INTERDISCIPLINARY MIDDLE GRADES (4-8) PACKAGE

AIM 7.13: How did Irish Americans help change life in the United States?

TEACHER BACKGROUND: The consequences of the Great Irish Famine altered more than the course of Irish history; the Irish diaspora changed the shape of world history, especially that of the United States, Canada, Australia and England. In the 1990 federal census, 44 million Americans voluntarily reported their ethnicity as Irish. Irish immigrants and Irish-Americans have made significant contributions to every phase of American life, including politics, labor, sports, religion, arts, entertainment, and business. They produced American mayors, governors and presidents. They invented both the submarine and Mickey Mouse; making fortunes and Fords. They earned more Congressional Medals of Honor than any other ethnic group, and they helped build the American labor movement. They wrote about the American dream, and they lived it. Irish immigrants have also known discrimination, poverty and hunger and the harrowing details of their lives have been described by Irish-American writers. New York State is especially proud of its Irish heritage. In 1855, 26% of the population of Manhattan was born in Ireland. By 1900, 60% of the population was of Irish descent. Today, thousands of New Yorkers trace their ancestry to famine era immigrants who helped develop the infrastructure, economy, and social and political institutions of our state.

For this lesson, students read sections from biographies of Mary “Mother” Jones and Henry Ford. Jones was a leading labor organizier and Ford a leading industrialist at the start of the 20th century. After reading and discussing these biographies, students select an American of Irish ancestory and write their biography.

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY: If you had to choose the 10 most important people in United States history, what criteria would you use to make your choices? Why?

TRANSITIONAL ACTIVITY: List student ideas on the board. Discuss and evaluate suggestions. Create criteria for evaluting the most important people in United States history.

ACTIVITY: Read either the biography of Mary “Mother” Jones or Henry Ford. Based on this biography and the class criteria, you select this person as one of the the 10 most important people in United States history? One of the 100 most important people in United States history? Explain your recommendation.

SUMMARY QUESTION: Should Mary “Mother” Jones or Henry Ford be considered as one of the the 10 most important people in United States history? One of the 100 most important people in United States history? Why?

PROJECT: Select an Irish American from ACTIVITY SHEET 3 - Irish in America. This list of people of Irish ancestory who influenced life in the United States was prepared by WGBH and PBS for a 1998 series, Irish in America. Research the person’s life. Write their biography. In your report, explain how they influenced life in the United States. Would you recommend that they be considered as one of the the 10 most important people in United States history? One of the 100 most important people in United States history? Why?

ACTIVITY SHEET 1 - The Autobiography of Mother Jones

I was born in the city of Cork, Ireland in 1837. My people were poor. For generations they had fought for Ireland's freedom. Many of my folks have died in that struggle.

My father, Richard Harris, went to America, and as soon as he had become a United States citizen he sent for his family. His work as a laborer with railway construction crews took him to Toronto, Canada. Here I was brought up but always as the child of an American citizen. Of that citizenship I have ever been proud.

After finishing the common schools, I attended the Normal school with the intention of becoming a teacher. Dress-making too, I learned proficiently. My first position was teaching in a convent in Monroe, Michigan. Later, I came to Chicago and opened a dressmaking establishment. I preferred sewing to bossing little children.

However, I went back to teaching again, this time in Memphis, Tennessee. Here I was married in 1861. My husband was an iron moulder and a staunch member of the Iron Moulders' Union.

In 1867, a yellow fever epidemic swept Memphis. Its victims were mainly among the poor and the workers. The rich and the well-to-do fled the city. Schools and churches were closed. People were not permitted to enter the house of a yellow fever victim without permits. The poor could not afford nurses. Across the street from me, ten persons lay dead from the plague. The dead surrounded us. They were buried at night quickly and without ceremony. All about my house I could hear weeping and the cries of delirium. One by one, my four little children sickened and died. I washed their little bodies and got them ready for burial. My husband caught the fever and died. I sat alone through nights of grief. No one came to me. No one could. Other homes were as stricken as was mine. All day long, all night long, I heard the grating of the wheels of the death cart.

After the union had buried by husband, I got a permit to nurse the sufferers. This I did until the plague was stamped out.

I returned to Chicago and went again into the dressmaking business with a partner. We were located on Washington Street near the lake. We worked for the aristocrats of Chicago, and I had ample opportunity to observe the luxury and extravagance of their lives. Often while sewing for the lords and barons who lived in magnificent houses on the Lake Shore Drive, I would look out of the plate glass windows and see the poor, shivering wretches, jobless and hungry, walking along the frozen lake front. The contrast of their condition with that of the tropical

comfort of the people for whom I sewed was painful to me. My employers seemed neither to notice nor to care.

Summers, too, from the windows of the rich, I used to watch the mothers come from the west side slums, lugging babies and little children, hoping for a breath of cool, fresh air from the lake. At night, when the tenements were stifling hot, men, women and little children slept in the parks. But the rich, having donated to the charity ice fund, had, by the time it was hot in the city, gone to seaside and mountains.

In October, 1871, the great Chicago fire burned up our establishment and everything that we had. The fire made thousands homeless. We stayed all night and the next day without food on the lake front, often going into the lake to keep cool. Old St. Mary's church at Wabash Avenue and Peck Court was thrown open to the refugees and there I camped until I could find a place to go.

Near by in an old, tumbled down, fire scorched building the Knights of Labor held meetings. The Knights of Labor was the labor organization of those days. I used to spend my evenings at their meetings, listening to splendid speakers. Sundays we went out into the woods and held meetings.

Those were the days of sacrifice for the cause of labor. Those were the days when we had no halls, when there were no high salaried officers, no feasting with the enemies of labor. Those were the days of the martyrs and the saints.

I became acquainted with the labor movement. I learned that in 1865, after the close of the Civil War, a group of men met in Louisville, Kentucky. They came from the north and from the South; they were the "blues" and the "greys" who a year or two before had been fighting each other over the question of chattel slavery. They decided that the time had come to formulate a program to fight another brutal form of slavery -- industrial slavery. Out of this decision had come the Knights of Labor.

From the time of the Chicago fire I became more and more engrossed in the labor struggle and I decided to take an active part in the efforts of the working people to better the conditions under which they worked and lived. I became a member of the Knights of Labor.

One of the first strikes that I remember occurred in the Seventies. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad employees went on strike and they sent for me to come help them. I went. The mayor of Pittsburgh swore in as deputy sheriffs a lawless, reckless bunch of fellows who had drifted into that city during the panic of 1873. They pillaged and burned and rioted and looted. Their acts were charged up to the striking workingmen. The governor sent the militia.

The Railroads had succeeded in getting a law passed that in case of a strike, the train-crew should bring in the locomotive to the roundhouse before striking. This law the strikers faithfully obeyed. Scores of locomotives were housed in Pittsburgh.

One night a riot occurred. Hundreds of box cars standing on the tracks were soaked with oil and set on fire and sent down the tracks to the roundhouse. The roundhouse caught fire. Over one hundred locomotives, belonging to the Pennsylvania Railroad Company were destroyed. It was a wild night. The flames lighted the sky and turned to fiery flames the steel bayonettes of the soldiers.

The strikers were charged with the crimes of arson and rioting, although it was common knowledge that it was not they who instigated the fire; that it was started by hoodlums backed by the business men of Pittsburgh who for a long time had felt that the Railroad Company discriminated against their city in the matter of rates.

I knew the strikers personally. I knew that it was they who had tried to enforce orderly law. I knew they disciplined their members when they did violence. I knew, as everybody knew, who really perpetrated the crime of burning the railroad's property. Then and there I learned in the early part of my career that labor must bear the cross for others' sins, must be the vicarious sufferer for the wrongs that others do.

These early years saw the beginning of America's industrial life. Hand and hand with the growth of factories and the expansion of railroads, with the accumulation of capital and the rise of banks, came anti-labor legislation, came strikes, came violence, came the belief in the hearts and minds of the workers that legislatures but carry out the will of the industrialists.

ACTIVITY SHEET 2 - The Story of Henry Ford

(adapted from "The Fords of Fairlane" in *The Famine Ships*)

Henry Ford, inventor of the mass production in the automobile industry, was a direct descendant of a Famine emigrant. His father William was 21when he left Ireland with the rest of the family in 1847.

The Fords were a family of Protestant tenant farmers who lived in County Cork, Ireland near a town called Ballinascarty. Because of the potato blight, their crop failed and they were faced with starvation. Famine and fever did not care if a potato farmer was Roman Catholic or Protestant. A few large stones still mark the spot where they used to have a single-story cottage.

In those days, ships to America loaded and sailed from the port city of Cork. To get there, the Ford family had to travel 30 miles. They loaded their belongings on to a handcart along with the younger members of the family. The older children and their parents walked alongside. On rocky paths it was between a two and three day trip.

Boarding a ship to America only took a few minutes. The bigger problem was having money for the fare, which was a little more than $10 for each adult and older child, and half fare for the smaller children.

In the emigration party were grandmother Rebecca, a 71-year-old widow, her son John and his wife Thomasina, with their seven children. William was the oldest. They were joined by another of Rebecca's sons, Robert, his wife and four children. William's mother Thomasina failed to survive the journey to the United States. She almost certainly was a victim of ships fever, but there is no record of her burial.

For years John and Robert had ignored entreaties to leave Ireland from three older brothers, Samuel, Henry and George, who had gone to America in 1832. The older Fords were farmers in Dearborn, Michigan, near Detroit. That is where the remaining 15 members of the Ford family headed when they arrived in America.

John Ford bought an 80-acre farm near Dearborn from a man he had known at home in County Cork. However, his son William did not settle on the farm. He moved around the country and spent some time working on the Michigan Central Railway, extending the line to Lake Michigan. Eventually William went to work on a farm owned by Patrick Ahern, who was also originally from County Cork, where he had been a neighbor of William's mother.

Wliiam Ford soon married the youngest member of the Ahern family, an adopted daughter named Mary Litogot. The first of their six children, Henry Ford, was born on July 30, 1863. Like his father, as a young man, Henry did not take easily to

farming. He later wrote, "My earliest recollection was that, considering the results, there was too much work on the place."

A fall from a horse at the age of 12 got Henry Ford to begin tinkering with engines. He set up a small shop in one of the farm buildings and by the age of 15 he had constructed his first steam engine. About the same time, he saw a traction engine for the first time. He later recalled, "I was off that wagon and talking to the engineer before my father knew what I was up to, it was that engine which took me into automotive transportation."

Henry soon his father's farm and became a machinist's apprentice. After finishing his apprenticeship, he maintained and repaired steam engines and then went to work as an engineer for the Edison Company electric company in Detrot. Henry Ford was 30 years old before he became involved with the internal combustion engine. He build his first car, the Quadricycle, in 1896.

Although his first car company led to bankruptcy, Henry Ford, son of a Famine emigrant, become the first mass-producer of the automobile. He revolutionized American industry.

Henry Ford was almost forty when the first Ford motor car was sold, but he never forgot his family's origins. In 1912, at age 49, he travelled to Cork and visited the farm his forefathers had worked for 250 years. Ford died in 1947 at age 83.

ACTIVITY SHEET 3 - IRISH IN AMERICA

This list of people of Irish ancestory who influenced life in the United States was prepared by WGBH and PBS for a 1998 series, Irish in America. Select one of these people. Research their life. Write their biography. In your report, explain how they influenced life in the United States. Would you recommend that they be considered as one of the the 10 most important people in United States history? One of the 100 most important people in United States history? Why?

Nellie Bly (born Elizabeth Cochrane, 1864-1922): Journalist and adventuress who went around the world in 72 days.

Matthew Brady (1823-1896): Civil War photographer.

William J. Brennan, Jr. (1906-1997): U.S. Supreme Court Justice.

James Cagney (1904-1986): Actor whose Oscar-winning role in 1942 was in Yankee Doodle Dandy, the life of Irish-American composer George M. Cohan.

Charles Carroll III (1737-1832): The only Catholic to sign the Declaration of Independence, Carroll was born in Maryland, whose laws at the time prohibited Catholics from voting, holding office, worshipping openly, or educating their children as Catholics. Despite this rampant anti-Catholic prejudice, Carroll took an active part in the Revolution, using his business acumen to help the colonies arm themselves against Britain. He served as a U.S. Senator in the first Congress, and when he died was reputedly the richest man in America.

Buffalo Bill Cody (1846-1917): Western scout and showman.

George M. Cohan (1872-1942): The father of American musical comedy, Cohan was born into theater. He gradually worked his way from his family's vaudeville troupe to Broadway, where by the 1920s he was doing ten productions in a single year. In his long career as author, composer, director and performer, this powerhouse of the popular stage had a favorite theme: star-spangled patriotism. His World War I composition, Over There, won him a Congressional Medal, while I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy brought the honor of defining what it meant to be an American.

Father Charles Coughlin (1891-1979): Having spent his childhood in Ontario, Canada, Father Coughlin moved in 1926 to Royal Oak, Michigan to serve as pastor of a new church, the Shrine of the Little Flower. This small parish in a largely Protestant community soon found itself menaced by an active Ku Klux Klan. Coughlin needed a broader constituency (for financial reasons as well as solidarity) and so he began broadcasting his sermons over a local radio station. By 1930, the magnetic priest had won a national audience of 40 million listeners. But Coughlin wasn't just lecturing about religion. In these post-Crash years, the radio priest was campaigning against the gold standard and Wall Street, decrying the evils of modern capitalism. When Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected in 1932, Coughlin called him the salvation of the nation. But his adoration soon turned bitter: Coughlin thought the New Deal monetary reform was moving too slowly. He launched his ownpolitical organization -- the National Union for Social Justice -- and became passionate in his hatred of Roosevelt, calling the New Deal a communist conspiracy. In 1938 he also turned against Jews. He began expressing sympathy for Hitler and Mussolini. This rapid extremism lost him many supporters. In 1940 he ran out of money for his broadcasts; two years later Coughlin withdrew from the political fray. He maintained his parish duties until 1966.

Davy Crockett (1786-1836): Born to a pioneer family living on the Nolichucky River in east Tennessee, Crockett eventually made his home in the northwest corner of the state. A member of the Tennessee militia, Crockett's second enlistment was under Andrew Jackson at Pensacola. His political career advanced quickly; he

spent several terms in Congress as a Democrat, but eventually broke with Jackson. After only one term as a Whig, he gave up on politics and reportedly said, "You can all go to Hell and I'm going to Texas." He settled in east Texas in 1835 and died when the Alamo fell a year later.

Harry L. "Bing" Crosby (1904-1977): Entertainer who made over 850 recordings and appeared in over 50 films, including Going My Way for which he won an Oscar in 1944.

Richard J. Daley (1902-1976): mayor of Chicago from 1955 until his death.

Dorothy Day (1891-1980): Journalist and peace activist; founder of the Catholic Worker movement.

Mary Harris Jones ("Mother Jones") (1837-1930): Foremost labor agitator in the United States; helped organize the International Workers of the World (IWW).

F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940): Novelist and author of, among others, The Great Gatsby (1925).

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn (1890-1964): labor activist and organizer for the Industrial Workers of the World ("IWW"); first woman to head the U.S. Communist Party.

John Ford (1895-1973): Film director who won Oscars for The Informer, The Grapes of Wrath, How Green Was My Valley, The Battle of Midway and December Seventh.

Henry Ford (1863-1947): Pioneering automobile manufacturer.

Jackie Gleason (1916-1987): Actor best known for his role as Ralph Kramden in The Honeymooners.

W.R. Grace (1832-1904): Business leader, steamship line operator and first Roman Catholic mayor of New York.

Helen Hayes (1900-1993): The "first lady of American theater," who won Oscars for The Sin of Madelon Claudet and Airport.

William Randolph Hearst (1863-1951): Editor and publisher of the largest newspaper chain in America; member of Congress.

John Joseph Hughes (1797-1864): A native of County Tyrone, at the age of 21, Hughes emigrated to America, where he found work on the canals and later as a seminary gardener. It was in the United States that he began studying for the priesthood. He was ordained in 1826 in the Philadelphia diocese, and in 1842 became archbishop of New York. An outspoken leader of the city's Catholic community, he vigorously promoted the growth of parochial schools. He was also the force behind the building of a new cathedral in 1858.

Andrew Jackson (1767-1845) Born in the Carolina hills to an immigrant farming family from Ireland, Jackson fought in the Revolution at the ripe-old age of 11. By the end of the war, he was alone, all but one member of his immediate family dead from the conflict. He decided to study law and to head farther west. By the time he was 30, he had been elected to Congress, won a seat on the supreme court of Tennessee, and set up a modest estate that would soon become a major cotton plantation. However, it was his military career that won him national recognition. During the War of 1812, Jackson's troops crushed the Creek Indians and then, at the Battle of New Orleans, the British. In 1821 he was named military governor of the Florida Territory; in 1828 he defeated John Quincy Adams to become the 7th President of the new Republic. Jackson appealed to the common man and in many ways advanced the causes of majority rule: he waged war on the Second Bank of the United States for the power that it gave to a few unelected bankers, and he sought to build a new mass political party. Yet Jackson's vision of democracy was limited: he condemned abolitionism and brutally subjugated Native Americans.

Buster Keaton (1895-1966): Vaudevillian and early film star.

Gene Kelly (1912-1996): Entertainer who danced his way into American hearts in the musicals On the Town, An American in Paris and Singin' in the Rain.

Grace Kelly (1928-1982): Film and stage actress, who won an Oscar for The Country Girl, she was also Princess Grace of Monaco.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy (1917-1963) Kennedy's political career began in 1946, in a run for Congress in the district where his parents had been born. The working-class community which elected him was not his; Kennedy had gone to Choate and Harvard and lived an almost aristocratic life. Yet he had a sense of history and learned quickly. His election in 1960 as the 35th President of the United States -- the first Roman Catholic to hold that office -- was a crowning triumph for the Irish.

Joseph P. Kennedy (1888-1969): Born in East Boston and educated at Harvard, Kennedy began his swift climb to fortune as a bank president. He quickly amassed millions in the pre-Depression stock market. After the Crash of 1929, power shifted from Wall Street to Washington, and Kennedy made himself a confidante of President Roosevelt. Roosevelt named him chairman of the newly formed Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) in 1934, and in 1937, Ambassador to England. The first Irish Catholic Ambassador to the Court of St. James, Kennedy served in that role until 1940. Rumors that he favored appeasement soured his relationship with Roosevelt and dimmed his own political career. But Kennedy's ambitions never faltered. He turned his attention to his sons, three of whom became United States senators and one, the 35th President.

George Meany (1894-1980): President of the American Federation of Labor; instrumental in merger of AFL with CIO.

Eugene McCarthy (1916-): Congressman from Minnesota; candidate for President in 1968.

Joseph McCarthy (1908-1957): Senator from Wisconsin.

Mary McCarthy (1912-1989): Writer and author of, among others, The Group.

John McCloskey (1810-1885): First American cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church.

Joseph McKenna (1834-1926): US Attorney General and Justice of the Supreme Court.

Andrew W. Mellon (1855-1933): Banker, capitalist and Treasury Secretary under President Harding.

Edward R. Murrow (1908-1965): CBS correspondent.

Flannery O'Connor (1925-1964): Novelist and short-story writer; author of, among others, A Good Man is Hard to Find and Other Stories.

Sandra Day O'Connor (1930-): First female Supreme Court justice, appointed in 1981.

John O'Hara (1905-1970): Novelist and short-story writer; author of, among others, Butterfield 8 and From the Terrace.

Georgia O'Keefe (1887-1986): Painter.

Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953): Son of a matinee idol best known for his portrayal of the Count of Monte Cristo, O'Neill attended Princeton briefly, then fled his immigrant family and its lace-curtain respectability. For 6 years he wandered, making his home in waterfront bars and brothels. A bout of tuberculosis in 1912 brought his reckless living to an end, and in the solitude of a hospital, O'Neill began writing plays. Within a decade, he had won a Pulitzer and a reputation as the one-time down-and-outer who created works of high art. He became a cultural hero, an American success. And yet he wondered if it was all worthwhile. After winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1936 (the first American playwright to do so), O'Neill turned his back on Broadway; he turned instead to the past, to his family's passage from Irish peasant to Nobel laureate. It is during these years that he wrote the Irish masterpieces, The Iceman Cometh, Long Day's Journey Into Night, and Moon for the Misbegotten, the work for which he would be remembered. In 1944, he put his pencil down and never wrote again.

Gregory Peck (1916-): Ocsar-winning actor whose roles included To Kill a Mockingbird.

Margaret Sanger (1879-1966): Pioneer birth-control advocate.

Alfred E. Smith (1873-1944): Born on New York's Lower East Side, Al Smith left school before he'd finished the eighth grade and worked for 6 years at the Fulton Fish Market. But politics was the road upward for the Irish. Smith began by running errands for the Tammany boss, Tom Foley. When he was 22, he got a paying job serving subpoenas and from there on, the opportunities multiplied. In 1903 he won election to the state legislature. Several terms later, in 1915, he was elected Sheriff of New York City, then President of the Board of Aldermen, and finally Governor of New York. In four terms as Governor, Al Smith would change the focus of government, instituting rent control, subsidized housing and hospital care, price limits on electric power, heat, and telephones. In 1928, with the backing of Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Smith won the Democratic presidential nomination. Feelings of great pride in the Irish American community would soon turn to bitterness and shame, as religion became the issue of the campaign and Herbert Hoover rode the tide of anti-Catholicism into the White House. Smith suffered another blow in 1932, when President Roosevelt kept Smith out of his New Deal government.

Alexander T. Stewart (1803-1876): entrepreneur; "invented" the American department store.

Ed Sullivan (1902-1974): Journalist and television producer, whose Ed Sullivan Show ran for 22 years.

John L. Sullivan (1858-1918): Born in the Roxbury section of Boston, Sullivan made his name one night in the Dudley Street Opera House, when he knocked a professional fighter into the orchestra pit and boldly announced to the crowd, "My name is John L. Sullivan and I can lick any man in the house." Three years later he got a title fight with Paddy Ryan, another in the distinguished line of world champions. John L. knocked him out in eleven minutes -- and declared himself champion of the world. Then he did what no man had ever done before: he challenged America, offering a thousand dollars to any man, anywhere, who could stay on his feet for four rounds. And wherever he went, the Irish came out to cheer him. He became a very rich man, of indisputable elegance; a real hero. His career would have its ups and downs, as would his personal reputation, but even when he was old and gray, John L. took to the road, shaking hands along the way. He knew the Irish needed a hero they could touch.

Louis H. Sullivan (1856-1924): Modernist architect and father of the skyscraper.