

Level: 7-9

Aim: To compare the experience of the famine Irish who immigrated to Australia with the experience of those who immigrated to the United States.

New York State Standards: Language for Information and understanding. Students will use reference sources to compare the experience of Australian and American immigrants: reasons for choosing the destination, the journey: shipboard conditions, route, length of journey, ports of arrival, reception.

Historical background: While the famine Irish who came to the United States financed their journeys with their own resources or with private programs of assisted emigration including subsidies from landlords to leave the land. Before 1837, Australia was a penal colony with convicts supplying the labor to English settlers. After 1837, emigration to Australia was encouraged by the government and by private individuals who subsidized the passage for immigrant laborers. There was still a demand for more workers including women who would work as domestic servants.

Between 1848 and 1850, when Irish workhouses were overcrowded, 4,000 Irish girls between 14 and 18, classified as workhouse orphans were sent to New South Wales. Within three years 70% of the girls were married. They were Australia's pioneer women. During the 1997 commemoration of the Famine, the Australia Famine Commemoration Committee chose to mark the occasion with a monument to the Irish famine workhouse girls at the Hyde Park Barracks, the reception site for the girls in Sydney. Is there a web-site?

Lesson:

1. Marya and Breege, the orphan heroines of The Hungry Wind, agree to join the party of Irish workhouse girls who are emigrating to Australia because they might be reunited with their uncle Tom who was transported to Australia for stealing bacon to feed the hungry.

Read the passage describing the girls' journey from Plymouth to Sydney.

2. Read the description of the Irish girls who travelled to Australia aboard the Thomas Arbuthnot. Charles Edward Strutt, the ship's doctor, kept a diary of the voyage. The girls left Plymouth on October 10, 1849; they landed in Sydney on February 8, 1850.