

Grade level: 10-12
Famine curriculum

Lesson aim: To examine the way that a modern Irish poet uses folk tradition about the Irish famine.

Historical background: In his note to this poem, Donagh MacDonagh explains the significance of the title. "It is believed in many parts of Ireland that anyone passing over a spot where a victim of the Famine of 1847-48 died is seized with an overpowering hunger and weakness. The grass at such a place is known as Féar Gorta or Hungry Grass.

1. Read Donagh Mac Donagh's "The Hungry Grass."
2. The poet describes an eerie experience that connects him with another person, a victim of starvation, with Irish history and with the folk tradition of the "hungry grass." Describe what happens?
3. Nettles are plants covered with hair-like stingers that grow in waste ground. They are full of vitamins and iron and can be boiled into a nutritious soup. How else did food sources or images of food fail the starving man?
4. Discuss the figurative language of the poem.
5. What do you think of this gradition of the hungry grass? What do you think causes the experience of hunger and weakness?