

Grade level: 9-12
Famine curriculum

Lesson aim: Does Katherine Patterson's characterization of Brigid MacBride challenge the New England nativists' stereotypes about the Irish?

New York State Language Arts Standards. 2 Students will produce interpretations of literary works that identify different levels of meaning and comment of their significance and effect.

Historical background: Nineteenth century Irish immigrants were least welcomed in New England where want ads often carried the words "No Irish Need Apply." The Irish were unwelcome because they worked for cheaper wages than their American counterparts. They were suspect because they were Catholic. (Early in the century, in 1831, a nativist mob burned the Ursuline convent in Charlestown, Massachusetts.)

Lesson:

1. Look at the cartoon of a group of Irish living in what was called a shanty town. (Shanty is Irish for old house.) What are some negative stereotypes in the cartoon? What negative stereotypes does the cartoon share with descriptions of the Irish in Lyddie? Identify three stereotypes and fill in the chart below citing the text for each of your examples.

STEREOTYPE ABOUT THE IRISH CITATION IN THE TEXT

How does Patterson treat the nineteenth century stereotypes of the Irish in Lyddie?

1. How does Patterson develop the character of Brigid? What was Brigid like when she arrived at the mill? What did she learn from Lyddie? What did Lyddie learn from her? When Brigid comes and finds the work hard, Lyddie says, "They be such fools, those Irish." Does her opinion change? Why? Why not? Use examples from the text. Describe their friendship.