

TOPIC: Results of the Great Irish Famine

Aim: What was life like for Irish immigrants to the United States during the early national period?

Standards: United States History (1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4); Language Arts (3).

Do Now Activity: Read the letter from the British representative in Philadelphia to the British Secretary for Foreign Affairs and answer questions 1-3.

Motivational Activity: Is anyone in class an immigrant to the United States? Is there anyone whose parents or grandparents were immigrants? Why did you or members of your family come to the United States? What was life like for them before they immigrated? What was life like when they first arrived in the United States? Activity: Read and discuss the letter from the British representative in Philadelphia to the British Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Key Questions:

How were people able to travel to the British colonies in America if they could not afford the fare?

What is the shift in Irish immigration to the United States?

In your opinion, what does this change suggest?

Activity: Read and discuss the letter from John Doyle to his wife.

Key Questions:

According to this letter, what was the hardest part about immigrating to the U.S.?

Why does Doyle think many people would stay home if they knew the truth?

In your opinion, why were men usually the first member of the family to migrate to the United States?

If you were a poor Irish agricultural worker during this time period, would you have been willing to make the sacrifices needed to migrate to the U.S.? Explain.

Summary: How was Irish immigration to the United States during the early national period similar to and different from immigration to the United States today?

Application: Read and discuss the traditional ballad about Irish immigration to the United States.

Homework: Interview an immigrant to the United States about the reasons they came to the United States and their experience when they arrived.

ACTIVITY SHEET: Pre-Famine Irish Immigration to the United States

A) This is an edited version of a letter written in 1789 by a British representative in Philadelphia to the British Secretary for Foreign Affairs. During the colonial era, many Irishmen and women could not afford to pay their fare to the new world, so they arrived as indentured servants. According to the letter, this pattern appears to be changing.

Source: E. Abbott, ed., *Immigration: Select Documents and Case Records* (U. of Chicago, 1924).

Formerly, a large portion of the passengers from Ireland were indented servants. Those who could not redeem themselves by paying their passage money within a limited time, were indented for a term of years to any master who would advance the price of their passages. Lately, passengers from Ireland have chiefly paid their passage before they embarked; the passengers who have arrived this year have been for the most part people in tolerable good plight with some property who have come to settle as farmers or to engage in some branch of manufacture.

Questions

- 1- How were people able to travel to the British colonies in America if they could not afford the fare?
- 2- What is there a shift in Irish immigration to the United States?
- 3- In your opinion, what does this change suggest?

B) Frequently families were divided when only one member could afford to immigrate to the United States. This letter was written by John Doyle on January 25, 1818 to his wife Fanny, who remained in Ireland.

Source: William D. Griffin, *The Book of Irish Americans* (Times Books, 1990), pp. 119-120.

Oh, how long the days, how cheerless and fatiguing the nights since I parted with my Fanny and my little angel. Sea sickness, nor the toils of the ocean, nor the starvation which I suffered, nor the constant apprehension of our crazy old vessel going to the bottom, for ten tedious weeks, could ever wear me to the pitch it has if my mind was easy about you. But when the recollection of you and of my little Ned rushes on my mind with a force irresistible, I am amazed and confounded to think of the coolness with which I used to calculate on parting with my little family even for a day, to come to this strange country, which is the grave of the reputations, the morals, and of the lives of so many of our countrymen and countrywomen.

As yet it's only natural I should feel lonesome in this country, ninety-nine out of every hundred who come to it are at first disappointed. Still, it's a fine country and a much better place for a poor man than Ireland. Much as they grumble at first, after a while they never think of leaving it. One thing I think is certain, that if emigrants knew beforehand what they have to suffer for about the first six months after leaving home in every respect, they would never come here.

Questions

- 1- According to this letter, what was the hardest part about immigrating to the U.S.?
- 2- Why does Doyle think many people would stay home if they knew the truth?
- 3- In your opinion, why were men usually the first member of the family to migrate to the United States?
- 4- If you were a poor Irish agricultural worker during this time period, would you have been willing to make the sacrifices needed to migrate to the U.S.? Explain.

C) The Irish brought a great love of music with them to America. Many ballads refer to their hopes and dreams for life in the United States. In this ballad, the author remembers the life he left behind in Ireland.

Source: Robert L. Wright, ed., *Irish Emigrant Ballads and Songs*, Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1973, p. 354.

Oh I'm sitting on the stile (step) , Mary, where we sat side by side,
On a bright May morning long ago when first you were my bride;
The corn was springing fresh and green and the lark sang loud and high,
And the red was on your lips, Mary, and the love lay in your eye.
The place is little changed, Mary, the day is right as then,
The lark's loud song is in my ear and the corn is green again;
But I miss the softness of your hand and your breath warm on my cheek,
And I still keep listening for the words, you never more will speak.
'Tis but a step down yonder lane, the little church stands near,
The place where we were wed, Mary, I see the spire from here;
And the grave-yard stands between us both where you took your final rest,
Where I laid you, darling, down to sleep with your babe all on your breast.
I'm very lonely now, Mary, for the poor make no new friends,
But oh they love the better still the few our Father sends;
And you were all I had, Mary, my blessing and my pride,
There's nothing else to care for now since my poor Mary died.
I'm bidding you a long farewell, my Mary kind and true,
But I'll not forget you, darling, in that land I'm going to;
For they say there's bread and work for all and the sun shines always there,
But I'll ne'er forget my Mary were it fifty times as fair.

Questions

- 1- How does the author describe Ireland in this song?
- 2- What happens to Mary?
- 3- Why is the author of the song leaving Ireland for the United States?
- 4- In what way is Mary a metaphor for Ireland?