

TOPIC: Results of the Great Irish Famine

AIM: How did Irish immigrants describe their life in North America?

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

Do Now Activity: Imagine you are an immigrant to a new country. What would you write about in letters home to your family and friends?

Motivational Activity: Do you have friends or family who live in another part of the country or the world? How do we keep in touch with people with care about today? Irish immigrants to North America during the Great Famine wrote letters home to family and friends. We can learn a lot about their lives in the new world from these letters.

Activity: Divide the class into three groups. Each group reads one letter sent home by Irish immigrants to North America. Groups answers questions and report about the letter to the entire class.

Key Questions:

In your opinion, which of these immigrants had the most difficult time in North America? Explain.

In your opinion, why do conditions seem to be better for Irish immigrants in the United States than in Canada?

Summary Question: How did Irish immigrants describe their life in North America?

Application: Imagine you were a family member in Ireland who received one of these letters. Write a response.

Homework: If you immigrate to another country today you can keep your family informed about your new life using modern technology. Prepare one of the following to let people in the old world know about your life in your new country:
a) a web site; b) a photograph album; c) a scrap book with magazine pictures.

ACTIVITY SHEET: Letters from Irish Immigrants to North America

A) A letter from Bryan Clancy, St. John, New Brunswick, November 17, 1847.

Dear mother and brother,

I take the favourable opportunity of writing these few lines to you hoping to find you are all in as good health. We were very uneasy for ever coming to this country for we were in a bad state of health. During the voyage there was a very bad fever aboard. Peppy took the fever on the Ship and was taken to the cabin by the Captain's wife and was there from a week we were on sea till we come to quarantine. Then all the passengers that did not pass the doctor was sent to the Island and she was kept by the Captain's wife on the ship. Peppy was relapsed again and sent to Hospital and remained there nine or ten days but thank be to God we got over all the disorders.

I was at work at a dollar per day, but the place got very bad and no regard for new passengers nor even a nights lodging could be found. I met with Andy Kerrigan and he took me with him to his house and remained there for a month boarding.

Mary took a very bad fever and was despaired of both by priest and doctor. As soon as she got well, Andy took the same disease. I am sorry to relate that poor Bidy Clancy and Catherine McGowan died in Hospital and a great many of our friends.

I often wished to be at home again bad and all as we were. We often wished we never seen St. John. We are sorry for that we cannot send any relief to you. Any new passengers except they have friends before them are in distress. It's very hard to get work here.

The government are about to send all the passengers that were sent out here by Lord Palmerston and Sir Robert home again because they are sure that all of them that did not perish surely will this winter. I am very glad that Catherine did not come to this place for a great deal of our neighbours died here.

Questions

- 1- Why is Bryan Clancy "uneasy" about his decision to come to North America?
- 2- What happened to people on board the boat and in the quarantine station?
- 3- Why is the government thinking of sending them back to Ireland?
- 4- Based on this letter, what is life like for Irish immigrants to North America?

B) A letter from Catherine Hennagan, St. John, New Brunswick, February, 15 1848.

Dear Father and Mother,

I take the present opportunity of letting you know that I am in good health, hoping this will find you and all friends the same. I wrote you shortly after I came here but received no answer which makes me very uneasy until I hear from you and how you are. We had a pretty favourable passage. We cast anchor at Partridge Island after 5 weeks passage. There were 4 deaths on the passage but the second day after we arrived here and after the doctor came on board the sickness commenced. We were then put on the Island for 3 weeks and the end of which time my dear Little Bidy died. Thank God I got safe off and continue to enjoy good health since. Pen could not write the distress of the Irish passengers which arrived here through sickness, death and distress of every kind. The Irish I know have suffered much and is still suffering but the situation of them here even the survivors at that awful time was lamentable in the extreme. There are thousands of them buried in the Island and those who could not go to the States are in the poorhouse or begging through the streets of St. John. If you would wish to come here I would like you was here as I think times will mend here after some time and dear father I will soon send you some help. No more at present, but I remain your affectionate daughter till death.

Questions

- 1- Why is Catherine Hennagan worried about her family in Ireland?
- 2- What happened to Little Bidy?
- 3- What does Catherine Hennagan want her father to do?
- 4- Based on this letter, what is life like for Irish immigrants to North America?

C) A letter from Eoin Boyle, Augusta, Maine, December 13, 1847.

Dear Mother,

I write these few lines to you hoping to find you in good health. We were four weeks at sea. God favoured me I never was one day sick. The very night that I landed I got sick and kept the bed for two weeks and after that I fell in to good employment at four shilling per day British money. My sister Elon was employed the day after we landed in St John, New Brunswick. My sister Margaret left St. John and went to Boston which I was very sorry that I did not get to see her. Elon went after her to Boston and I got no account from them. I am working at present in the State of Maine on Real Road. The rate of wages all this summer was four shilling per day British. The wages during the winter is three shilling per day. I am getting along well here and getting good health. This is a good country for strong bodied men and very good place for girls. Good smart girls have 6s. shilling per week and their board.

Questions

- 1- What happened to Eion Boyle when he arrived in North America?
- 2- Why did Eion Boyle and his sisters go to the United States?
- 3- What kind of work is Eion doing in Maine?
- 4- Based on this letter, what is life like for Irish immigrants to North America?