

Embracing Cultural Diversity: Ireland

A Cross-Curricular Lesson Plan

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ELE90/103005
978-0-7877-1985-2
Release Date 2015

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Dayton, OH 45401-0802
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The pages in this packet were originally published in
One Classroom, Many Cultures, (ELE90/1030).

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Lorenz Educational Press
Milliken Publishing Company
Teaching and Learning Company
Show What You Know® Publishing
LEP interactive

FAST FACTS: Ireland

Full Name: Republic of Ireland

Capital City: Dublin

Currency: Euro

Location

Ireland is an island found in the northwestern part of Europe. To the east of Ireland, across the Irish Sea, is the island of Great Britain. Ireland is the third largest island in Europe, with an area of over 32,500 square miles. It is actually divided into two separate territories. The Republic of Ireland occupies the majority of the land, with Northern Ireland, a part of Great Britain, located to the north.



The People

Ireland is home to over six million people, most of them (about 4.4 million) in the Republic of Ireland. The remaining 1.7 million Irish live in Northern Ireland, and are subjects of Great Britain.

A native Irish language does exist, though it is rarely used today. It is spoken by a very small minority of Irish people, or at special ceremonies. The official language of the country is English.

The Government

Ireland is governed by a cabinet of seven to fifteen members. This cabinet is given executive authority over the country, and is led by the Prime Minister, called the Taoiseach (TAY-shuhk). The Irish government does have a President. The President is responsible for appointing the Prime Minister and other cabinet members, who are chosen by the Irish parliament.

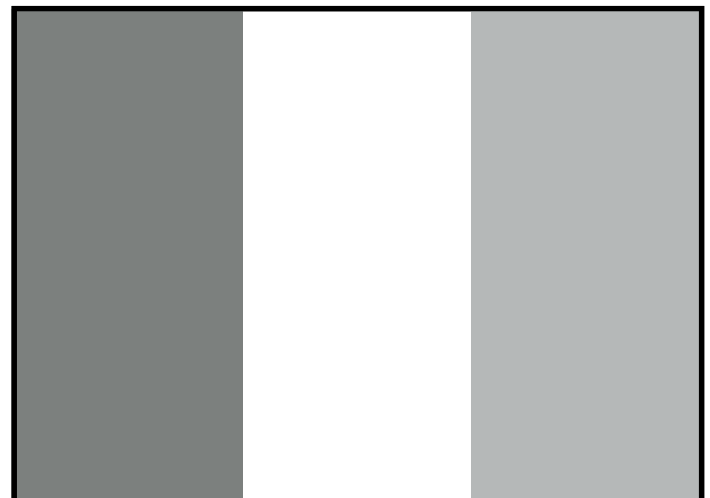
The Land

Ireland is divided into four provinces: Connacht (cohn-UHT), Leinster (LEHN-ster), Munster, and Ulster. These provinces are further broken up into 32 counties, only six of which lie in Northern Ireland. Remember, Northern Ireland is controlled by Great Britain.

The coasts of Ireland are covered with mountains, while the interior of the island is made up of plains. Ireland is often referred to as “The Emerald Isle.” It rains a lot in Ireland, and the climate is very mild. As a result, the entire island is covered with lush, green vegetation.

The Flag

The Irish flag is split into thirds, each with a symbolic coloring. The left of the flag is green, and represents the Catholic residents of Ireland. The right side is orange, symbolizing the island’s Protestant population. The middle of the flag is white, and is meant to symbolize peace and harmony between the Catholics and Protestants.



Irish Celebrations! (Hooleys!)

Saint Patrick's Day

March 17th

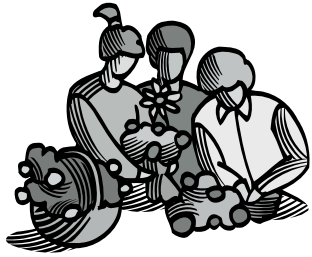
Easily Ireland's most important and celebrated holiday, Saint Patrick's Day is a celebration of Saint Patrick, patron saint of Ireland. It is the national holiday of Ireland, but has become extremely popular in the rest of the world. The Irish celebrate by dressing in green clothes. Irish food and drink is consumed, and large celebrations are held all over the country. A five-day festival is held in Dublin, including a giant parade through the city streets.



Easter Monday

Monday after Easter Sunday

Monday is a Christian holiday that is celebrated in many countries, including Ireland. Families and friends gather together to celebrate their faith. Sometimes egg-rolling competitions take place. When celebrating Easter Monday, it might be wise to wear a raincoat. One popular tradition is dousing friends and family with blessed water.



Labour Day

First Monday of May

This holiday celebrates Irish workers and their contributions to the country. It is also sometimes called May Day, a festival that involves singing, dancing, and the decoration of homes with egg shells and flowers.

Samhain (Celtic New Year)

October 31

This festival began thousands of years ago as a day to celebrate the end of the harvest. The Irish lit large fires and prayed to the gods that the sun would return after the winter and allow their crops to grow again. People dressed in costumes to protect themselves from any bad luck. Today, Samhain is more commonly known as Halloween. Irish children dress in costumes and carry lanterns from house to house, asking for treats.

Christmas

December 25th

The Irish celebrate Christmas much like the rest of the world. The insides of homes are decorated with live Christmas trees. After Midnight Mass, children go to bed and wait for Santa to arrive with gifts. Gifts are placed in children's rooms in large sacks. Families and friends gather to celebrate the season.



Saint Stephen's Day

December 26th

A holiday celebrating the life of Saint Stephen, this day is full of tradition in Ireland. It is also known as Wren's Day. Groups of people carry a wren (sometimes a fake one, sometimes an actual live bird) to different houses, singing and dancing, asking for money. Families and friends visit one another as well.

Limerick

The limerick is a very old form of poetry popularized by the Irish in the 18th century. Limericks were originally written or spoken to describe the adventures of Irish people, and took their name from one such poem, "Will You Come Up to Limerick?" Limerick is a town in Ireland.

There are five lines in a limerick. The first, second, and fifth lines all rhyme, and contain eight syllables. The third and fourth lines rhyme also, and are made up of five syllables each. Read the sample limerick below.

There once was a young man named Stan,
Who fancied himself a sports fan,
He went to the games,
Knew the players names,
His job was being Hot Dog Man!

Limericks are often silly poems meant to make readers laugh. It's also very common for the poems to begin with "There once was a..." but they certainly don't have to.

Now it's your turn. Keeping in mind the rules listed above, try writing your own limerick. It can be about anything you want. Try writing one about yourself, or maybe one about your best friend. Share your limericks with your classmates and teachers.