Irish literature has created a magical learning environment for our children, its range and quality enabling all of them to participate in our Ireland project and to produce work of fantastic quality.

Barbara Heath & Jo Robinson
Gorsemoor Primary School

Year 5 Scheme of Work
Literacy Hour & Beyond
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Gorsemoor’s Ireland project

Gorsemoor Primary School lies on a large new housing estate on the outskirts of Cannock in Staffordshire. A 5-11 school with an Early Years unit, it has 430 pupils on roll. For two years the school has made a special study of the island of Ireland in Years 5 and 6, particularly by using Irish texts in the Literacy Hour. The school re-inforces this learning experience with visits by Irish authors and by forging links with children in a primary school in Belfast and another in County Dublin.

Involving all children

In Years 5 and 6 there are some very gifted children, but there is also a significant minority of children on the Special Education Needs register - 18 in the current school year (2001-2), of whom 15 are boys. The range and quality of Irish children’s literature suits such a mix of children, allowing all the children to participate in a common project. They can all enjoy reading books which are suited to their individual interests and abilities.

Teaching schemes

For the texts used, Gorsemoor has produced teaching schemes, which generally contain NLS weekly planning sheets, examples of worksheets etc., and samples of children’s work. The schemes are reproduced in pdf format in the ‘Ireland in Schools’ CD-ROM, No. 01. The location of each scheme on the CD-ROM is given in italics.

Setting the scene

Children are introduced to the island of Ireland through cross-curricular activity sheets (IIS CD-Rom 01 in the History & citizenship directory: C208 Ireland Activity Sheets).

Historical fiction - Under the Hawthorn Tree

The favourite novel is an historical one - Under the Hawthorn Tree by Marita Conlon-McKenna (O’Brien Press, O-86278-206-6), the first of an award-winning trilogy, with exciting cross-curricular potential (IIS CD-Rom 01 in the Literature & literacy directory: L217 Under the Hawthorn Tree - Famine Story). A Channel 4 film of the book assists the less able and reluctant readers, as does the existence of excellent easy readers on the famine (such as The Great Hunger by Malachy Doyle, Franklin Watts, 0-74963-447-2, and Famine by Arthur McKeown, Poolbeg, 1-85371-505-0).

Other texts used

Among Irish myths, legends and fairy tales, the one which most captures the children’s imagination is ‘The Sea Woman’ as retold by Sionbhe Lally in the lavishly illustrated Favourite Irish Fairy Tales Poolbeg Press, 1-85371-777-0 (IIS CD-Rom 01 in the New trials directory: NL224 Sea Woman - Gorsemoor. For the cross-curricular aspects, see ‘Human Beings under a Spell’ on the IIS CD-Rom 01 in the Literature & literacy directory: L219).

Reluctant readers among the boys have responded well to fast-moving fantasies by Irish authors, such as The Battle below Giltspur by Cormac MacRaois, Wolfhound Press, 0-86327-356-4 (IIS CD-Rom 01 in the Literature & literacy directory: L211 and L216), and Cirque du Freak, by Darren Shan, Harper Collins, 0-06765-416-3 (IIS CD-Rom 01 in the New trials directory: NL221 Cirque du Freak).

It remains to be seen how the children respond to the reality of urban life in contemporary Ireland when they begin reading The Moon King by Siobhán Parkinson, (O’Brien Press, O-86278-573-1).

SEN

Books like The Lough Neagh Monster (IIS CD-Rom 01 in the New trials directory: NL223 Irish & Other Monsters) enable the children with special education needs to play a full part in the Ireland project. Such stories provide high interest material at a low reading age while at the same time offering opportunities to address key grammatical features and extend spoken vocabulary.

Another favourite with this group is the tale of the two giants, the outwitting of Cucullin by Finn MacCoul and his fearless wife (IIS CD-Rom 01 in the New trials directory: NL222 Giants’ Week). The group will shortly read two books by Siobhán Parkinson, an author who is fast becoming a favourite in Years 5 and 6: The Leprechaun Who Wished He Wasn’t (O’Brien Press, 0-86278-334-8) and Cows Are Vegetarians, the misadventures of a Dublin girl visiting her cousins in the country (O’Brien Press, 0-86278-694-0).
1. The text

*Under the Hawthorn Tree* by Marita Conlon-McKenna (O’Brien Press, ISBN O-86278-206-6) is the first of an award-winning trilogy, a gripping story of love, loyalty and courage set in the time when Ireland was devastated by the Great Famine of the 1840s. Three children, Eily, Michael and Peggy, are left to fend for themselves. Starving and in danger of the dreaded workhouse, they escape in the hope of finding the great-aunts they have heard about in their mother’s stories. With tremendous courage they set out on a journey that will test every reserve of strength, love and loyalty they possess.

The other two parts of the Famine trilogy are:


*Fields of Home* (O’Brien Press, ISBN O-86278-509-X) traces the lives of Eily, Michael and Peggy into adulthood. In America Peggy hears the call of the wild west. In Ireland Eily and her family struggle to make a living on a small farm and Michael works in the Big House and loses his job because the house is burned down and the landlord’s family leave Ireland forever. A poor evicted widow’s hovel is raised to the ground, and she walks away with dignity to the workhouse. ‘In both cases tragedy is confronted with pride. Survival is still difficult, but now there is the comfort of food - floury potatoes, butter, milk, boiled beef, and jams and tarts.’

**Study guides**


**Other famine books**

*The Long March* by Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick (Wolfhound Press, ISBN 0-86327-644-X) is inspired by the generosity of the Choctaw Indians who in 1847 raised 170 dollars for famine relief in Ireland. This superbly illustrated book tells the moving story of that tribe’s own dispossession and enforced exile. Young Choona struggles to understand why his people would care about white men dying on the other side of the world, as he learns the history of the Choctaw’s tragic Long March to freedom and appreciates the historical similarities between the two peoples, including great respect for the land, dispossession and potato eating.

*The Great Hunger* by Malachy Doyle (Franklin Watts, 0-74963-447-2) is an ‘easy reader’ telling how Art and his sister Maggie leave home when the potato crop fails and the landlord demands the rent and they go to Belfast and then to Liverpool in search of their father who is looking for work.

*Famine* by Arthur McKeown (Poolbeg Press, ISBN 1-85371-505-0) is another ‘easy reader’ showing how Joe and his daughter Maggie were forced to leave the family farm in the North of Ireland and emigrate to America, via Belfast.

*The Hungry Wind* by Soinhe Lally (Poolbeg Press, ISBN 1-85371-717-7) is a starkly realistic account of the impact and consequences of the famine on the family of Maeve and Breege from workhouse to Australia. Despite the grief, it is a story of hope and survival of the human spirit and is more suitable for older children.
2. The author

Marita Conlon-McKenna is Ireland’s bestselling children’s author. Born in Dublin in 1956 and brought up in Goatstown, Marita went to school at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, Mount Anville, later working in the family business, the bank, and a travel agency. In 1977 she married James McKenna and they have four children, Amanda, Laura, Fiona and James. They live in the Stillorgan area of Dublin. Marita writes for all ages - from very young children (Granny McGinty) to adults (The Magdalen). Her subjects range from the whimsical to the socially contentious.

Marita was always fascinated by the Famine period in Irish history and read everything available on the subject. When she heard a radio report of an unmarked children’s grave from the Famine period being found under a hawthorn tree, she decided to write her first book, Under the Hawthorn Tree, Children of the Famine. An immediate best-seller, it remained in the best-seller lists for two years. It has also been filmed for RTE and Channel 4, and is available on video. The publisher did not think it would sell.

Marita has been showered with awards. Under the Hawthorn Tree won the International Reading Association Award in 1991, the first time this prestigious award went to Ireland, the Reading Association of Ireland Top Award, and Österreichischer Kinder und Jugendlbuchpreis, Austria, in 1993. In 1993 The Blue Horse (1991), the story of a travelling family, won the Bisto Book of the Year Award. No Goodbye, Marita’s fourth novel (1994), tells of the heartbreak of a young family when their mother leaves home and is recommended by Book Trust in their guide for One Parent Families.

It was Marita’s ambition to be an author ‘ever since I was very, very small … even as young as five or six, I wanted to write and in particular, to write for children. When I tell that to children I meet in schools they can’t believe that but it was a thing I wanted very much’. Marita’s books are published throughout the world. ‘I get a big thrill when I see the foreign covers, some of which I like, some not so much. Foreign publishers often think that every child in Ireland has red hair and freckles. The American covers are beautiful, a bit like Little House on the Prairie.’
3. Lesson plans
NATIONAL LITERACY KS2 PLANNING SHEET

Class: Year 5  
Text used: *Under the Hawthorn Tree*  
by Marita Conlon-McKenna  
in conjunction with the video film and study guide

**Homework:**
- To re-read parts of the book as appropriate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Learning Objectives</th>
<th>Whole Class Shared Text Work</th>
<th>Whole Class Word/Sentc Work</th>
<th>Independent Work</th>
<th>Guides Group Reading/Writing (Y3/4) PLENARY (Y5/6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>To consolidate a basic element of standard English (adjectives) (S2)</td>
<td>To watch the programme ‘The Great Hunger’ on video</td>
<td>Adjectives. To revise what adjectives are</td>
<td>Character sketch sheet, using previous knowledge on adjectives to describe the characters of Eily, Michael and Peggy. This is a form of note-taking for future reference*</td>
<td>Children to share their adjectives with the class so that we have an overall opinion/view of the 3 characters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Characters presented (T3)</td>
<td>• To recap on who the characters are - Margaret, John, Bridget, Eily, Michael and Peggy</td>
<td>• To choose a person in the room, using adjectives to describe what that person is like</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To make notes on the characters to enable the children to use this knowledge in the next lessons (T14)</td>
<td>• To discuss briefly potato famine</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>• To use the note making skill, and know what ‘in your own words’ means (T20)</td>
<td>• To summarise programme ‘The Great Hunger’ in own words, Upper/Middle written; lower orally</td>
<td>• To discuss what the main concepts mean and why the famine happened (teacher input on the History element of the Irish potato famine)</td>
<td>Children to complete the worksheet on May 1846, ‘The day we buried Bridget’</td>
<td>To discuss that the death of a loved one is sad and that the feelings we have are normal following a loss. Children to share emotions of personal loss or the characters’ loss*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To know what empathy means and to think from the viewpoint of a character</td>
<td>• To identify main concepts: famine, blight, illness, sense of loss poverty</td>
<td>• The death of Bridget, how would they feel: Circle time on empathy of loss</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• To discuss what the main concepts mean and why the famine happened (teacher input on the History element of the Irish potato famine)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>• To write/perform poems in a different way - writing a prayer for Bridget (T5)</td>
<td>• To read pages 21-25 of the novel</td>
<td>• Children to draft a prayer for Bridget. Use to make comparison with a poem/celebration of life/what would you want to say at the moment of goodbye</td>
<td></td>
<td>Children to edit/evaluate their work in draft and complete a final version*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To edit their work (T22)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>• To investigate different versions of the same story in print or film and identify similarities and differences (T2)</td>
<td>• To compare the novel to the film so far. Ask the children which they think is better/brainstorm the qualities for/against the novel/film with specific reference to Bridget’s death</td>
<td>• Children to write out their final prayer</td>
<td></td>
<td>Children to perform the reading of the prayers to the rest of the class*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>We do extended writing once a week/Literacy lesson 4 times a week. We are also working in our Irish study books for PHSE.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extended Writing: A diary account from one of the children’s viewpoint. Today I feel/did etc.  
In Art, make a photograph frame for a character and mount the picture in the frame  

‘Ireland in Schools’ Staffordshire Pilot Scheme Gorsemoor P5
# NATIONAL LITERACY KS2 PLANNING SHEET

**Class:** Year 5  
**Text used:** *Under the Hawthorn Tree*  
by Marita Conlon-McKenna

**Week:** 2  
**Range:**  
* indicates opportunities for Speaking and Listening

**Homework:**  
- Children to try and learn their parts

## SPELLING PATTERNS

**TOP:**  
See spelling

**MIDDLE:**  
folder

**BOTTOM:**

## WK  | LEARNING OBJECTIVES | WHOLE CLASS SHARED TEXT WORK | WHOLE CLASS WORD/SENTC WORK | INDEPENDENT WORK | GUIDES GROUP READING/WRITING (Y3/4) PLENARY (Y5/6)
--- | --- | --- | --- | --- | ---
**M**  
- To have empathy for children of their age and real life history  
- To investigate how characters are presented (T3)  
- To watch the programme ‘On Their Own’ on video  
- To discuss the fact that people are starving and the effects on people’s lives  
- Read parts of ch. 3 of the novel ‘Nothing to Eat’ as appropriate  
- Talk about the roadworks and why John is still away  
- Circle time on how the children would feel to be left ‘Home Alone’. Talk about the Home Alone sheet with the children/Complete  
- Talk through the answers. Emphasis on ‘why'/personal opinions/how are the characters portrayed  
- Children will have ‘made up’ words of endearment. Opportunity to share them

**T**  
- Characters presented through dialogue (T3)  
- Talk about old language and the fact that languages have died out in Britain  
- Language used portrays characters  
- Introduce the fact that we use terms of affection when talking to children - Irish words  
  *a stair* - darling;  
  *a ghile* - beloved  
- Talk through how they are pronounced  
- Brainstorm terms of endearment today as a class  
- Record them on the wall of endearment  
- Children will have ‘made up’ words of endearment. Opportunity to share them

**W**  
- ‘To be in the role of characters, to convey feelings, reflections, moods through drama (T16)  
- To write own playscripts (T18)  
- To annotate a section of a playscript as a preparation for performance, taking into account pace, movement, gesture and delivery of lines (T19)  
- To evaluate performance (T20)  
- To look at the playscript. Read through it and discuss the learning objective elements  
- Discuss action, audience/role to ensure children can present the play  
- The children will be working in small groups of 3 to read/practise/perform the drama. They must get into character role.  
- The aim is to perform to the whole class by Thursday.  
- On the performance day, children to wear costumes etc. (Take digital photographs).  
- At the end of session children will have the opportunity to go on a walk to conservation area/around school  
- For the plenary we will watch the drama. We will evaluate the performance and how the children portrayed the characters well or how they could improve.  
- Perform in assembly

**F**  
We will continue to work in our Irish study books for PHSE.

**Extended writing:**  
Continue with diary writing. Use extended writing time to ensure the week’s work is complete and we have filled in all that is necessary.
### NATIONAL LITERACY KS2 PLANNING SHEET

**Class:** Year 5  
**Text used:** *Under the Hawthorn Tree* by Marita Conlon-McKenna

**Week:** 3  
**Range:**

* indicates opportunities for Speaking and Listening

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WK</th>
<th>LEARNING OBJECTIVES</th>
<th>WHOLE CLASS SHARED TEXT WORK</th>
<th>WHOLE CLASS WORD/SENTC WORK</th>
<th>INDEPENDENT WORK</th>
<th>GUIDES GROUP READING/WRITING (Y3/4) PLENARY (Y5/6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| M  | • To use knowledge gained to establish ‘need’ rather than ‘would like’  
   • To watch the programme ‘The Journey’ on video  
   • Talk about the programme and two key concepts  
   • Workhouse, history of Ireland | • Recalled main events in the film on video so far (in preparation for final programme)  
• Compare film to book. Which do children prefer? | • Read pages 62-3 and discuss the advice Mary Kate gave to the children.  
• Talk about herbal remedies | • Imagine that you are going on a journey  
  a. What advice might your mum give you if you were going on a journey?  
  b. What would you take with you if you were going on a journey?  
* | • Talk through children’s list but emphasis is on why you would take it  
* |
| T  | • To summarise the book/video - How do the children think it will conclude? What do they know? What do they need to find out? (comparing the novel and film) (T2) | | • Share the unusual cures information (children find this interesting) | | • Children read out their cures to the class  
* |
| W  | • To conclude the video and complete a conclusion on the children’s journey | • To watch the programme ‘The Search’ on video | • Discuss video - soup kitchen, dead man (why is he dead?)  
• How must the children feel? - bleeding the cow, the struggle, meeting aunts  
• Why the Irish disliked the English (soldier incident) | • Cover designs. Children to complete the worksheet activity | • To compare each others’ designs  
* |
| T  | • We will use this session to complete any work, to discuss the book and film and lives of the main characters and distribute and evaluate our work.  
• To prepare our work for display at the disseminating good practice conference at the Kingston Centre in Stafford. | | | |
| F  | We will continue to work in our Irish study books for PHSE. | | | |

**Extended writing:** Continue with diary writing.

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**SPELLING PATTERNS**

**TOP:** See spelling  
**MIDDLE:** folder  
**BOTTOM:**

**Homework:**

- Children to watch the news (are any people starving in the world today? If so, why?)
- Complete work in study books
4. Sample worksheets
from

This guide is arranged around the four episodes of the film:

1. Hunger
2. On their own
3. The journey
4. The search

There are 26 worksheets - those marked * are reproduced in the following pages:

1. Character sketches*
2. Beginnings
3. Everyday life in Ireland in the 1840s
4. Housing for rich and poor
5. Crop failure, hunger and famine
6. Disease and death
7. The hawthorn tree in folklore
8. Home alone* and follies
9. Lost languages
10. Saying goodbye
11. Before and after the famine
12. Public relief works 1846
13. The family tree
14. Starvation
15. Workhouses
16. Newry workhouse
17. Folk medicine*
18. Landlords
19. Cover design*
20. Boys’ work and girls’ work
21. Soup kitchens
22. Death
23. Famine in the Sudan, 1998
24. Famine song
25. Endings
26. Famine quiz
1  In the boxes above write adjectives which describe the three main characters. Decorate the frames above.

2  Journal entry: On a separate sheet, write a journal entry for the character you are shadowing. The title might be, for example, ‘May 1846, the day we buried Bridget’. You might like to complete these sentences:
   Today I feel ...
   I wish ...
   My mother ...
   My father ...
   The only good thing ...

   Now continue on your own.

Or you may prefer to structure your journal entry in your own way. Keep this piece of writing carefully.

Write a journal entry directly after each of the other three episodes.

3  Make a 3D frame using materials of your choice, eg pasta shapes, fluff, stones, shells. Draw a portrait of the character you have chosen and mount it in your frame.

4  Read diary accounts of other events. Check out the following:
   The Diary of a Young Girl, Anne Frank (Puffin Modern Classics, 1998, ISBN 014-03856-30)
   The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole, age 13½, Sue Townsend (Methuen, 1984, ISBN 0-413-53790-0)
May 1847
The day we buried
Bridget

My character is ____________________________________________

Today I feel ________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________

I wish ______________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________

My mother __________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________

My father __________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________

The only good thing __________________________________________
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________

I am not sure what is going to happen to us because __________________
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________
A prayer for Bridget
This is the advice Margaret O’Driscoll gave her children before she went to the village:

- Keep the fire going
- Get some water in
- Stay indoors
- Keep the door on the latch

1. Give the reasons behind each piece of advice.

2. What advice would your mother give you if you were home alone? Give reasons for each piece of advice.

CIRCLE TIME

3. Form a circle in the classroom. Each person in turn is given the opportunity to speak on the topic: Home Alone.

Move clockwise around the circle.

The speaker holds a ruler, and only the person with the ruler may speak. You may recount your own experiences or offer opinions.
When Margaret O’Driscoll left her children home alone and went into the village she gave them this advice:

Keep the fire going
Get some water in
Stay indoors
Keep the door on the latch.

Why do you think she gave them this advice?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

How do you think the children felt when Margaret left them?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

If your mother left you home alone what advice do you think she would give you and why?

1. ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________

2. ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________

3. ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
Margaret uses many terms of affection when talking to her children, some in the Irish language.
A stór: darling (pronounced: ‘a store’)
A ghill: beloved (pronounced ‘a gillah’)

1. What might an adult call you, other than your first name, if they were feeling affectionate towards you?
2. Brainstorm the subject with your classmates and fill in the wall of endearment words below.

How many community/minority languages are used by members of your class?
3. Display your findings on a class chart.

Three indigenous languages have died out in Great Britain and Ireland during the past 225 years: Cornish (c.1775), Nom, the Norse language of Shetland (c.1880) and Manx (1 974).

Four ancient indigenous minority languages remain: Welsh, Irish, Scots Gaelic and Channel Island French.

4. Do you know any family where any one of these four languages is the normal language of the home?

5. Suggest reasons why these languages are in decline.

6. Identify and list concerns about the fact that some languages have died out and others are in decline.

7. What do you think can be done to save them?

8. In the nineteenth century parents often supported the National Schools policy to promote English, as you can see in the extract opposite. Why did the father behave like this? Why was the punishment administered at school? Discuss.

THE TALLY STICK
‘The children gathered round to have a look at the stranger, and one of them, a little boy about eight years of age, addressed a short sentence in Irish to his sister but, meeting the father’s eye, he immediately cowered back, having, to all appearance, committed some heinous fault. The man called the child to him, said nothing, but drawing forth from its dress a little stick, commonly called a scoreen or tally, which was suspended by a string round the neck, put an additional notch in it with his penknife. Upon our enquiring into the cause of this proceeding, we were told that it was done to prevent the child speaking Irish; for every time he attempted to do so a new nick was put in his tally, and when these amounted to a certain number, summary punishment was inflicted on him by the schoolmaster.’

Sir William Wilde, 1853
Wall of Endearment

Margaret used many terms of affection when talking to her children, some in the Irish Language.

A stor (pronounced a store) means darling
A ghile (pronounced a gillah) means beloved.

1. What might an adult call you other than your first name if they were feeling affectionate towards you?
2. Brainstorm the subject as a class and record your answers on the wall of endearment below.

Make up some words of your own and say what they could mean.

1. ____________ means ____________________________
2. ____________ means ____________________________
3. ____________ means ____________________________
Mary Jane gives the children cures to take with them on their journey: one for fever, one for stomach ache and cramps and another for cuts, wounds and stings.

Folk medicine has a long and respected tradition in Ireland. In many parts of rural Ireland there were people like Mary Kate who were said to have cures for certain human and animal ailments. Often the cures were passed on from one generation to another, or were known only to special people like the seventh son of a seventh son.

The cure could be a prayer, a particular sign or ritual, or the application of a special preparation made from local sources.

Lone thorn trees were thought to have healing powers. If a patient transferred a rag from around their ailment to the thorn tree the ailment was also transferred to the tree, and the patient was cured.

Certain wells were renowned for having healing properties. Usually these cures were obtained by drinking the water or by saying a prayer or leaving some object at the site. These places often became places of pilgrimage.

**HERE ARE SOME UNUSUAL CURES**

- For a stitch in the side - rub the part affected with unsalted butter and make the sign of the cross seven times over the place.

- For weak eyes - a deconcoction of the flowers of daisies boiled down is an excellent wash to be used constantly.

- For the mumps - wrap the child in a blanket, take it to the pigsty, rub the child’s head to the back of a pig and the mumps will leave it and pass from the child to the animal.

- To cure warts - on meeting a funeral, take some of the clay from under the feet of the men who bear the coffin and apply it to the wart, wishing strongly at the same time that it may disappear ... and so it will be.

  Lady Wilde, 1887

If you know any local cures e-mail them to us at: Channel 4 website: http://www.channel4.com/schools. Go to the Forum section and click on the Under the Hawthorn Tree topic.

Here is an example: In West Cavan chewing the leaf of a hawthorn used to be recommended as a cure for heartburn.

1 Check out the labels on shampoo and cosmetic containers.
   How many plants can you find in the list of ingredients?

2 What are they used for?

3 Sketch the plants with help from a reference book/disc.
HOW OTHERS SEE IT
On this page you can see actual covers from translations of Under the Hawthorn Tree.
1. You are to design the cover of a new edition of Under the Hawthorn Tree. You will need to think about the following:
   - What is the story about
   - What the children look like and what they wear
   - Which details you want on the cover
   - What colour scheme suits the story.

2. Do some rough designs for your cover. Now select the best, improve on it and do a finished cover. Use it as a cover for your journal.

3. Hold a class or group discussion about the covers produced and compare them with the covers from translations of Under the Hawthorn Tree reproduced on this page.
5. Links

Literature/PSHE

Death and loss

*All Shining in the Spring* by Siobhán Parkinson (O’Brien Press, ISBN O-86278-334-8) tells how Matthew is looking forward to the new baby and planning how he will help to look after his little brother or sister. Then there is bad news - the baby is not growing properly inside its mother and will not live after it is born. Matthew is sad and afraid, but his mother and father help him through.

*The Summer of Lily and Esme* by John Quinn (Poolbeg Press, ISBN 1-85371-208-6) shows how, reluctant to leave the city, Alan finds friendship and comfort in a rural village with Tom the handyman and his granddaughter, Lisa, and with the eighty-two-year-old twins Lily and Esme. He matures and begins to appreciate the complexity of human relationships, especially when Lily dies.

‘Home alone’

*No Goodbye* by Marita Conlon-McKenna (O’Brien Press, ISBN O-86278-323-6) is a touching story about how four children (two girls, 12 and 6, and two boys, 14 and 10) cope when their mother suddenly leaves them and their father. According to *The Irish Times*, it is ‘a compelling tale, told with simple and undiluted power’.

Irish language

*An Chanáil* written and illustrated by Marie Louise-Fitzpatrick (An Gum, Dublin, No ISBN) is a delightful story of a boy, a dog and a canal ride (translation available from ‘Ireland in Schools’).

‘Gathering nuts’ is a short poem about a squirrel gathering nuts (*see Appendix B*).

History


Geography

‘Famine’ in *Our Place in Space. Primary Geography for Sixth Class* (Folens, ISBN 1-84131-023-9), pages 136-9, gives an overall view of famine in the world today in sections on a balanced diet, growing food staple crops, causes of famine (drought, natural disasters, plant disease, pests, war, debt repayment) and solutions.
6. **Children’s work 1**
   inspired by *Under the Hawthorn Tree* and work on the Irish Famine

   Year 5, Gorsemoor Primary School (high and low responses)
May 1847
The day we buried Bridget

My character is Lily

Today I feel concerned about my sister every day as we are closer to her death and we have very little food.

I wish all our family was together and back to normal. I just wish and hope God is looking after us all and will look after Bridget.

My Mother is crying because she has found Bridget dead. She is shaking and you could hear her heart.

My Father does not care about Bridget so he is having a normal day. I don’t know how we are going to tell him.

The only good thing is we still have mother and mother got some food.

I am not sure what is going to happen to us because the hunger is getting worse and no money and dad is not home yet.
May 1847
The day we buried
Bridget

My character is 11 Years old.

Today I feel determined, to give this determination some time because my sister has died because of it.

I wish this could be reversed and it has a dream because it is killing the nation.

My Mother is too upset. Sometimes when I watch her, I think it is killing her.

My Father is lucky to not know about Bridget, being he is best.

The only good thing is that we have one less mouth to feed.

I am not sure what is going to happen to us because my dad is probably dead by now I don't even know what he is. Wow, isn't such powerful phrases.
A prayer for Bridget

Dear Lord,

Keep Bridget safe until we meet again.

Until then tell her we all love her and

we are all thinking of her. Send her

wishes and patters from all of us. Love,

her to God.

Amen

Heath & Robinson, Hawthorn Tree, page 22
Performing Under the Hawthorn Tree
7. **Children’s work 2**
   inspired by Under the Hawthorn Tree and work on the Irish Famine

St Joseph’s RC Primary School, Penketh, adopted an Irish pathway through the curriculum at Key Stages 1 and 2, with an emphasis on work in Years 5 and 6.

A study of Under the Hawthorn Tree and Irish famine and migration was one of the main foundations of the pathway which inspired the whole school.
Children were given a questionnaire to fill in with their parents or guardians asking about Irish family connections.

The results were plotted on maps and graphs, which provided a background for the display of family photographs and children’s work.

The extent of Irish connections was a revelation and the sharing of the experience was the key not only to bringing together the whole school but also celebrating the school’s links with the wider community.
Year 6 - responding to the Irish Famine

Give Him Nothing

Give me bread, but give him nothing,
Give me drink, but give him nothing,
Give me clothes, but give him nothing,
Give me health, but give him nothing.
I am rich and he is poor,
I am England and he is Ireland.
So give me bread, but give him nothing.

Paul Connor

Greed vs Poverty

If the flower of hope is crushed
scatter the seeds of courage.
Whilst greed is king the peasant
hunger spreads disease of murder and fear.
A bloody swamp,
skeletons buried dead as hunger
grows and builds his home.

Cold, hungry in rages of pain,
sad, thin in eyes of fever,
the face of death carted away.

The present of death, we hope for the present,
the present of death we receive.

The jolly fat man of England looks to laugh
at the skinny starved man of Ireland.

The evil of England makes
the Ireland crops weep,
Enough for the English belly
but not enough for me.

Laura Price

My Thoughts

Miles of green land lay ahead of us,
as I look around a dusty old road is in the
corner of my eye,
A horse and cart carrying poor lost souls of Ireland.
Today I hope to find our lost relatives.

I pray for safety, I pray for everyone.
I hope for bread maybe today or tomorrow,
today I wonder what the English are doing
eating until they’re fat,

The Irish are dying the English are living.
I sometimes wonder what the English think about us,
I hope for a meal to fill Ireland forever,

But will my dreams come true.
Deep in my heart I know some English care
... That is what I think

Emily Foster

Gone

Today is just another starving day.
People dying in bushes with blowing winds.
Howling wolves scavenging for rotting skeletons.
What is up with us Irish, it’s disgusting.
God put us together not for you rich to steal
from the poor.
So what do we have left?

Edward Masterman

??When??

When will the desperation stop?
When will we feast again?
When will the dying stop?
When will we be free again?
When will we feel happiness in our hearts?
When will the evil be destroyed?

Stacey Talent

The Irish famine

Stick people scramble for health,
And the hungry search for leftover scraps,
As the famine destroys more,

Grandfather tells of how it used to be,
Before the English bought us,
Now we have nothing to feed,
Us the hungry.

Tony Cross

The Irish Famine

You have the food, we have nothing,
You have the money, we are poor,
You have a bed, we have the floor,
You have family, mine have all died,
You are greedy, I am not.

I have the food, you have nothing,
I have money, you are poor,
I have a bed, you have the floor,
I have a family, yours has died,
I am greedy, you are not.

Michael Wilson

The Irish Famine

No food, no family,
No hope, no faith,
No strength, no help.

We are starving more every day, less food every day,
please God help,
Our baby sister has died our Mother and Father gone,
Please God help.

Matthew Guy

Give us food Great Britain please,
Please God help.
The Irish Famine

People are starving,
People are dying,
Children are crying,
Disease is spreading around the town.

People are hungry,
People are getting the illness,
Adults are suffering,
The illness is spreading around the town.

People are starving,
People are dying,
Children are crying,
Starvation is spreading around the town.

Kerry Cross-Cook

Hunger Strikes

If you don’t have food,
you will die like the rest of them do.
from starvation.

Dying from fever is a bad thing to do
You will die like the rest of them do.
from fever.
If you have a disease
you will die like the rest of them do.
From disease.

Adam Clough

The Irish Famine

We walk lonely on the roads,
No mother no father,
The crunching noise of the stoney path is the only sound,
Everything silent.

We stop lonely on the ground,
No mother, no father,
The sound of the howling wind is the only sound,
Everything silent.

We start walking, wearily,
No mother, no father,
The only sound is us talking,
Everything silent.

The only wonder is will we make the rest of the journey?

Charlotte Atherton

Irish Famine

Why oh why has this happened?
What has happened to our potatoes?
The sorrowing children run not
healthy enough to help their poor father.
Why oh why has this happened?
What has happened to our potatoes?
Pale faced, bare footed children for healthy potatoes.
Why oh why has this happened?
What has happened to our potatoes?

Joanne Rothwell
In the autumn of 1845 a strange and deadly disease appeared on much of the potato crop in Ireland. The crop of 1846 was a total failure and this meant disaster for the Irish people, most of whom depended on the potato for food. Disease and famine stalked the land and people died in their thousands. Families were forced to sell clothes and treasured possessions in order to buy the yellow corn imported from America: men, weak with hunger, were forced onto road-building schemes in order to earn the pitance that might mean the difference between life and death. Many were so desperate that they fought to be allowed into the crowded workhouses, where fever and disease spread rapidly in the overcrowded conditions. It was to escape the workhouse that Filly, Michael and their young sister Peggy took to the roads. The horrors endured by the three children are graphically yet sensitively portrayed as we follow them in search of their great-aunts in far-off Castlagnetlaggart.

**LANGUAGE – ENGLISH**

- Vocabulary extension: Pestilence, despatched, forage, caloused, stylic, fragil.
- Descriptive writing: The author refers to the Irish countryside as green and lush, fine green pastures land all around (p.56), she also describes in detail the wildflowers, birds and animals (pp.19, 25, 29, 65, 91). What is the effect of these descriptions? Do they lighten the atmosphere of the story and/or highlight the horrors the children witness on their journey?
- Discussion: "No-one uttered a groaning or a kind word of comfort to the sorry band" (p.56). Suggest reasons why the inhabitants of the cottages and cabins declined to speak to the travellers. What words of comfort might they have offered? Would such words have consoled those on their way to the workhouse?
- Discussion: "Time had taught him a lesson. Things were better left unsaid." (p.12). Examine these statements and discuss if it is always best to leave things unsaid. What might Michael have said to those in a position to relieve his suffering and that of others?
- Discussion: Bob Geldof organised Band Aid, Live Aid and recently has campaigned to reduce debts of the developing world. Initially he was influenced by Michael Buerk’s TV documentary and he used modern technology and the media to relieve suffering. Had these resources been available in the mid-1800s, would the outcome have been different? Discuss how one person can shape international opinion.
- Discussion: "There was no God, and if there was he was a monster" (p.15). Michael was forced to this conclusion by the scenes he witnessed outside the workhouse. On whom might he have laid the blame? What events could he witness today that might cause him to think similar thoughts?
- Discussion: The ‘strange religious folk’ who set up the soup-kitchen in Kneen (p.79) might well have been Quakers. Why did the old man fear that ‘the heathens would try to convert them’ (p.82)? Might he have refused help from the soup-kitchen? Would he have been right to do so? Might the parents of a family have refused help for the same reasons and would they have been right? Did Filly make the right choice?
- Discussion: Daily newspapers and magazines featured cartoons and editorials that made many English people believe the famine was caused by the laziness and bad practices of Irish farm labourers. Assess the impact of ill-judged reporting of a disaster on the willingness of the public to contribute to famine relief.

**LANGUAGE – GAELIC**

- Measadh na Gaile: "The Great Famine (An Gorta Mór), resulting in death and emigration on a massive scale. It is cited as one of the main reasons for the decline of the Irish language in the nineteenth century. Suggest reasons why the inhabitants of the cottages and cabins declined to speak to the travellers. What words of comfort might they have offered? Would such words have consoled those on their way to the workhouse?
- Discussion: "Time had taught him a lesson. Things were better left unsaid." (p.12). Examine these statements and discuss if it is always best to leave things unsaid. What might Michael have said to those in a position to relieve his suffering and that of others?
- Discussion: Bob Geldof organised Band Aid, Live Aid and recently has campaigned to reduce debts of the developing world. Initially he was influenced by Michael Buerk’s TV documentary and he used modern technology and the media to relieve suffering. Had these resources been available in the mid-1800s, would the outcome have been different? Discuss how one person can shape international opinion.
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- Discussion: Daily newspapers and magazines featured cartoons and editorials that made many

Resource material available: Film and Study Guide (see p.62)
Appendix B

Gathering nuts

Suas agus síos
Suas agus síos
Isteach is
Agus suas arís.

Sue-us awgus shee-us
Sue-us awgus shee-us
Isstyac is
A wagus sue-us arish.

Up and down
Up and down
In and out
up again.

Ag balíu síolta
I s cnónna crua.
Beidh fleí ar
ball
Ag an iora
bheag rua.

Ag balyou shiol ta
I ss crow-na crew a
Bay fla are
ball
A g an yora
veg rue-ah

Collecting seeds
Gathering nuts
There will be a
feast
for the
little red squirrel.

Vocabulary

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* grammatical expression
Appendix C

**Famine in Ireland**

The Oxford Companion to Irish History edited by S.J. Connolly, OUP, 1998, 1-19866-240-8, 185, 228-9

Famine has afflicted societies since the beginning of history. It may be defined as a persistent failure in food supplies over a prolonged period. It is something experienced by society, whereas starvation is something that affects individuals. During famines more people are likely to die of famine-related diseases than from starvation. The causes are complex. Adverse weather conditions (drought, excessive rain, intense cold) at crucial times, effects of war (schorched earth policies, the provisioning of armies, disruption of trade), pestilence and disease: all these individually or in combination may be to blame.

Famine is generally perceived as the result of a failure of food supplies, typically arising from the Malthusian pressure of population on resources. However some analysts, following the Indian economist Amartya Sen, argue that famine is less commonly caused by an absolute shortage of food than by the lack of entitlements - that is, the existence of large numbers of persons who do not possess the means either of producing food or of acquiring it through purchase or through transfer payments sanctioned by the state or by custom. Famine thus becomes a product of political and social structures, rather than of neutral economic forces.

In Ireland over a period of six centuries from 1300 to 1900 there were up to 30 episodes of severe famine. Between 1290 and 1400 there were around a dozen, mostly clustering in the decades before and including the Great European Famine of 1315-17. Another dozen or so occurred between 1500 and 1750. After 1750 there were several periods of acute regional shortages, culminating in the Great Famine of 1845-9.

The famines experienced in Ireland over the centuries illustrate their nature both as event and structure. Bad weather to 1294-6 and 1308-10, for example, damaged grain crops resulting in many deaths. In 1315-17 wet weather produced devastating famine throughout Europe, exacerbated in the Irish case by Edward Bruce's scorched earth policy. Heavy rains destroyed crops in 1330-1 and the price of wheat and oats rose manifold. A century later in 1433 a severe famine led to the summer of slight acquaintance. In 1504-5 continual rain and storms ruined crops, and cattle disease decimated livestock. The 17th century was also heralded by bad weather, famine, and disease. The rising ot'641 ravaged crops and precipitated famine. Two famines in the 18th century, 1728-9 and 1740-1, caused great suffering. The famine of 1740 is noteworthy as the first potato crisis; in terms of mortality rates, it may have been greater than the Great Famine of 1845-9. The latter earns the sobriquet because it was the last and best remembered. But for 'this great calamity', it is doubtful that Ireland would be regarded as more famine-prone than other European countries.

Great Famine (1845-9), caused by the failure, in three seasons out of four, of the potato crop. The harvest of 1845 was one-third deficient. In 1846 three-quarters of the crop were lost. Yields were average in 1847, but little had been sown as seed potatoes were scarce. In 1848, yields were only two-thirds of normal. An alternative measure of the crop loss is demonstrated by the fall in potato acreage. Before the Famine it was 1 million acres, falling to around a quarter of a million acres in 1847.

A fungal disease, Phytophthora infestans, commonly called potato blight, damaged the crops. Its origins are unclear, though bird droppings imported as fertilizer from South America have been suggested as a likely source. The first region of Europe to be affected by blight was Belgium in June 1845. Transmission to Ireland was swift, the first signs appearing in September 1845.

To cope with the loss of a large part of the staple diet of one-third of the population, relief measures were implemented by private organizations and by government. The Society of Friends was at the forefront, providing food, clothing, cooking equipment, seeds, and money. Their kitchens dispensed soup in towns, cities, and rural districts. Religious houses, churches, and some local gentry were also involved in philanthropic work.

Government's response to the crisis was circumscribed by a range of influences. The prevailing ideology of laissez-faire held that any tampering with market forces would bankrupt landlords and dislocate trade. There was the belief that the collapse of the potato economy provided an opportunity for agricultural reorganization, through the consolidation of smallholdings and the removal of surplus population. (For many, indeed, the Famine, in line with the prevalent evangelical theology of the day, was seen as the workings of divine providence, acting to correct the ills within Irish society.) The government was also concerned to make Irish landlords meet the cost of a crisis widely blamed on their greed and negligence, and to ensure that local taxpayers did not evade their share of the burden of financing relief. As the crisis continued, repetition blunted the response of the British public to reports of Irish misery. Severe economic recession in Great Britain itself during 1847 further limited sympathy for Ireland's problems, as did the apparent ingratitude for help given displayed in the return of 36 repeal MPs in the general election of 1847 and the Young Ireland rebellion of 1848.

Heath & Robinson, Hawthorn Tree, page 30
In the first year of famine, 1845-6, Sir Robert Peel’s Tory government purchased Indian meal from America for sale from government depots, and inaugurated a programme of public works managed by grand juries and the Board of Works. The Whig government of Lord John Russell, which took office in June 1846, greatly extended the public works schemes, while refusing to interfere either in the internal market in food or in the export of agricultural produce. In February 1847 ideology was at last set aside and kitchens opened throughout the country to supply cooked food directly to the starving without cost or imposition of a ‘work test’. This operation at its peak supplied 3 million meals daily. From September 1847, however, the government wound up the soup kitchens, insisting that further relief should come from the greatly expanded but still wholly inadequate workhouses run under the poor law.

The severity of the Great Famine is indicated by the widespread incidence of disease. The potato-eating population had become accustomed to a diet rich in vitamin C and quickly succumbed to scurvy. Symptoms of marasmus and kwashiorkor, although not identified as such, were described in the medical journals. The lack of vitamin A in the famine-constrained diet was manifest in xerophthalmia - a disease causing blindness among workhouse children.

Typhus and relapsing fever were the most common diseases afflicting the weakened population. Both were transmitted by the body louse and famine conditions provided an ideal environment for spreading the infection as starving masses congregated in urban centres searching for food. Typhus affected the small blood vessels, especially the brain and skin vessels, which explains frequently described symptoms of delirium and stupor and the distinctive spotted rash. Relapsing fever, as the name implies, was characterized by numerous relapses. It usually invaded its victims through the skin. Popular names included ‘gastric fever’ and ‘yellow fever’, as some patients became jaundiced. Typhus and relapsing fever were no respecters of persons, afflicting rich and poor, old and young, though mortality among the rich was particularly high.

In the absence of official figures we will never know precisely how many died. Neither was there systematic enumeration of emigrants. Estimates of excess mortality range from half a million to just over 1 million; recent research supports the latter figure. Reliable figures are unavailable before 1849, but in that year the constabulary recorded the eviction of over 90,000 people, increasing to over 100,000 in 1850.

The legacies of the Famine were several. The population declined by one-fifth between 1845 and 1851 and never regained its pre-Famine level. The cottier class was decimated, altering the social structure of Irish society. Many thousands escaped hunger by emigrating to Britain, North America, and Australia, accelerating an outward flow already established.

The immediate cause of the Great Famine was blight, but there were underlying forces that had resulted in 3 million people subsisting on the potato. One view would be that the disasters of 1845-9 represented the culmination of long-term crisis resulting from rapid population growth against a background of economic decline. More recently some economic historians, pointing to the levelling off in population growth, to the progress of new, agriculturally based manufacturing industries such as brewing, distilling, and flour milling, and to improvements in transport, communications, and banking, have argued that the pre-Famine economy had not in fact ‘ground to a halt’. In this perspective the failure of the potato should be seen as a massive exogenous blow dealt to an economy that had begun to adjust to changing market conditions. These contrasting perceptions are central to the debate on how far the Famine changed the course of Ireland’s development in the 19th century. They also have at least an indirect bearing on the equally disputed question of whether the government of the United Kingdom, notwithstanding prevailing ideology, could have been expected to have done more to alleviate distress in a part of the world’s richest nation.
