

Summary Description

This is the second in a series of eleven lessons that introduces the student to European American history.

Learning Objectives

To have the student learn a few key facts about Irish American history and culture.

Approximate Time for Lesson

60 minutes

Suggested Maturity Level for Instruction

Student should be able to read simple words and perform simple addition and subtraction. Also, student should be able to sit still and engage in one-on-one conversation.

References:

Travel Through the Ireland Story, Wesley Johnston -

<http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/index.htm>

American Heritage for Irish Heritage - <http://www.irishamericanheritage.com/>

St. Patrick's Day (go to <http://www.history.com/minisites/stpatricksday/>)

Materials Needed

1. Internet Access - Pull up the following:
 - a. Europe Map (go to <http://www.sitesatlas.com/Maps/Maps/Europe.htm>)
 - b. Picture of coffin ship (go to <http://www.emigrantletters.com/IE/output.asp?ArticleID=211374&CategoryID=6574&ArticleOutputTemplateID=452&ArticleStateID=2>)
2. St. Patrick's Day Maze

Preparation

Make sure you have materials open, printed and/or available prior to beginning the lesson.

Script

Introduction (5 minutes)

1. Teacher: Last week, we learned about the German Americans who are the largest group of Americans in the United States population today. Today, we will begin to learn about the Irish Americans. The Irish Americans come from the country of Ireland [[point to Ireland on the Europe Map](#)].
2. Teacher: The Irish Americans today make up the second largest group of people in the United States and like the Germans, the Irish came to the United States by ship, but they came had a harder time coming to the United States than the Germans did.

3. Teacher: So are you ready to learn about the Irish? [Get positive response from Student and begin lesson].

Lesson (50 minutes)

1. Teacher: Great. Now, the Irish came to the United States for some of the same kind of reasons than the Germans did like they wanted to make more money for their families, they wanted more religious freedom, but one thing that was different about why the Irish moved to the United States was because of famine. Have you heard of that word before? [Get Student's response].
2. Teacher: Famine is a terrible thing. Famine means when there is not enough food for everyone living in one place. Luckily for the United States, there have not been any famines. But for other countries around the world there were famines and when famines appeared, many people died.
3. Teacher: Well, in Ireland in those days, almost half of everyone who lived there mostly ate potatoes. Also, for the farmers, growing potatoes was cheaper than growing other crops like wheat. So, most of the farmers in Ireland grew only potatoes. One day, a fungus, which is like a germ, infected some potatoes. And those infected potatoes infected other potatoes - and those potatoes infected even more potatoes. Soon, almost all the potatoes for that year were lost to the fungus.
4. Teacher: With nothing to eat, the Irish starved to death, and this was known as the Great Famine. Some were so hungry that they ate the rotten potatoes and got really sick and died anyway. So with no food anywhere, what would you do? [Engage the Student in conversation but come to the point that one solution was to move to another place that has food].
5. Teacher: That's right. And so, some of the Irish started to move to the United States in ships. But these ships were so dirty and crowded with people that many people who made the long journey to the United States actually ended up getting sick and died on the ships. Sometimes ten people shared a room and there was not enough water or food for everyone - and that was if you bought a ticket with a room! Most of the Irish couldn't afford to buy these tickets and for them, they were stuck in the bottom of the ship and weren't even allowed to go up to the deck of the ship to walk around! And if someone was sick, there was no separate place for the sick person to go. And so that sick person got others sick as well. You would have to live this way for the entire journey to the United States, which could take up to two months. In fact, if you could imagine that you had one friend to the left of you and one friend to the right of you, it would probably be true that one of the three of you would die during the journey.
6. Teacher: And that is why they called these ships "coffin ships". Would you like to see a picture of the inside of a coffin ship? [Show Student picture of coffin ship].

7. Teacher: But even though the Irish knew how terrible the journey might be for them, they still moved to the United States because if they didn't they were thinking that they would probably starve or die of disease.
8. Teacher: And once the Irish reached the United States, life was not that easy either. You see, the Americans who were already there would make fun of them and there were some restaurants that wouldn't even let Irish Americans sit and order food. Also, some people didn't let Irish Americans work at their companies. Can you think of reasons why Americans would do this to the Irish? I mean, it's not that the Irish looked any different than the Americans - they were all from Europe. Why do you think the Americans would treat the Irish so unfairly? [\[Engage the Student in conversation but come to the point that religious differences caused most of this unfair treatment\]](#).
9. Teacher: And isn't it funny to think that some of the Americans that originally came from Europe came here for religious freedom (religious freedom means that you can believe in anything thing you want to - in God, someone or something other than God, or even more than one god), and those same Americans were making fun of the Irish for believing in another religion?
10. Teacher: Another reason why the Americans made fun of the newly arrived Irish Americans was because they were mostly uneducated and so had to work the jobs that Americans didn't want to work. Uneducated means that you didn't go to school to learn. Anyway, tough work, like building bridges or digging canals was taken up by many Irish Americans. For Irish American women, being a maid was common.
11. Teacher: But the Irish were a strong and smart people. They persevered and never gave up. They learned that, since there were so many of them in the United States, that if they acted as one team, they can be a powerful group that can vote on important decisions about who would be elected mayor of cities, or which laws would be created to help run the government. And eventually, the Irish became respected and accepted into American way of life. In fact, almost half of all of our 44 US Presidents come from Irish families. Walt Disney, the man who created Disneyland and Disney World, was part Irish. Ben Stiller, the actor who played in "Night at the Museum", is part Irish. Why, there are just too many famous people to name that came from the Irish.
12. Teacher: But no matter where you came from, there is one day in the United States where we celebrate something very Irish - St. Patrick's Day. What do you know about this day? [\[Engage the Student in conversation\]](#).
13. Teacher: That's good. St. Patrick's Day, March 17, is a day to celebrate the life of St. Patrick, a man that helped bring the religion of Christianity to Ireland. This day also brings images of shamrocks (three-leaf clovers), which are considered a symbol for Irish pride and good luck. Also, pictures of leprechauns are often seen during this day, which is really a leftover image of the religion that the Irish believed in before St. Patrick brought Christianity over. Finally, you have to wear green on St. Patrick's Day or else you'll get pinched!

14. Teacher: Why green and not some other color? Well, green is one of the important colors of Ireland - you can see it in their flag. But also, if you were to fly over Ireland on an airplane, you will see mostly green – it's basically covered with grass and trees and that so the color green represents their country. You wear green on St. Patrick's Day to show pride in Ireland. Finally, the pinching thing – well, why people pinch you if you're not wearing green is a mystery. This tradition has many explanations like if you wear green, then the leprechauns cannot see you and if you don't wear green, then the leprechauns will see you and pinch you. Another explanation is that since everyone must show Irish pride on St. Patrick's Day, if you don't wear green then you will be punished (by pinching) for being different. But the truth to why people pinch on St. Patrick's Day still remains a mystery.
15. Teacher: OK – time for an activity. Since leprechauns appear on St. Patrick's Day, we're going to help them find what they love best, a pot of gold!
16. Teacher: [\[Showing the St. Patrick's Day Maze\]](#) First, you will need to complete the maze to help the leprechaun find the gold. Once you're finished with the maze, you can color the leprechaun. You may begin. [\[Allow 10 minutes for this exercise\]](#).
17. Teacher: All done? Great job! You may already know it, but on St. Patrick's Day some people celebrate by eating an Irish dinner, made of corn beef and cabbage. Maybe your parents will make that for you on St. Patrick's Day, or you can just ask them to make it for you if you want to know what it tastes like.
18. Teacher: OK – time for review. Get in front of the class. [\[Have the Student stand in front of you \(consider inviting other members of the family also to set the stage\) and ask her the following:](#)
 - a. Why did the Irish move to the United States? Any one of the following: 1) To provide adequate food and clothing for their families, 2) to gain religious freedom, and 3) to escape from the Great Famine.
 - b. What was the name given to ships that carried the Irish over to the United States? Why were the ships given that name? The ships were named coffin ships because the living conditions in those ships were so horrible that one in three passengers would not survive the long journey.
 - c. What was one thing that the Irish Americans discover that could make them really strong in American life? Voting as one group could help Irish Americans live with more control over how Americans would live their lives since the votes would decide important issues, laws, and elections.
 - d. What's the name day we celebrate today that came from the Irish? St. Patrick's Day

Teacher reviews any questions that the Student missed].

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People of America - European Americans Lesson 2 - Irish - Part I (4/29/09)

Wrap Up (5 minutes)

Teacher: [\[Clapping\]](#) You did GREAT! Wonderful job! Are there any questions that you have regarding the Irish Americans? [\[Engage in conversation with the Student and resolve further questions by researching the Internet\]](#).