

The St. Patrick's Day Shillelagh

Book by Janet Nolan

Literature based unit study by Celia Hartmann

Pronunciation: shillelagh = shuh-LAY-lee or shuh-LAY-luh (means cane or walking stick in Gaelic)

Social Studies

Geography: Ireland

The beginning of our story takes place in Ireland. Ireland is the third largest island in Europe. It lies to the northwest of Continental Europe with the island of Great Britain lying to the east. Politically it is divided into the Republic of Ireland, a sovereign state occupying five-sixths of the island, and Northern Ireland, a part of the United Kingdom, occupying the northeastern sixth of the island. The name *Ireland* derives from the name *Ériu* (in modern Irish, *Éire*) with the addition of the Germanic word *land*.

Capital: Ireland's capital is Dublin; Northern Ireland's capital is Belfast.

Official languages: English and Gaelic.

Population: The population of the island is slightly under six million (2006), with 4,239,848 in the Republic of Ireland and about 1.7 million in Northern Ireland.

Flag: Ireland's flag is made of three equal-sized rectangles of orange, white and green. (The green is by the flagpole.)

Climate: Ireland has a cool, often-cloudy climate.

History: Irish Potato Famine 1845 to 1849

Also known as the *Great Hunger* or the *Great Famine*. In 1845, half of Ireland's potatoes were infected with a disease (see Blight in Science lessons). The following year, even more plants were killed. By 1847, almost all potato plants had died. Because potatoes were almost the only food the poor Irish farmers lived on, many of them starved to death. Many left Ireland. (You can read more on the last page of the book.)

Older Student Research Project: An older student--Jr. High/High School aged--may wish to research the political aspect of the Famine. Great Britain refused to help

the Irish during the Famine, and animosity between the two countries continues even today as a result.) You may also want to take this opportunity to learn more about immigration.

History: Brooklyn Bridge -- 1870 to 1883

The Brooklyn Bridge is one of the oldest suspension bridge in America. It stretches over the East River and is nearly 6,000 feet (more than a mile!) from end to end. It took 13 years to build (1870-1883). At the time it opened, it was the largest suspension bridge in the world.

History: "Rosie the Riveter"

During WWII, so many men were away at war that there were very few left on the home front to work in factories. Workers were needed in the factories to keep the army supplied. Many women began to work in the factories, taking the place of the men who were now at war. These women became symbolized by "Rosie the Riveter."

Oral Storytelling (including Language Arts and Art ideas)

In the days before most people could read and write, stories were handed down from generation to generation by oral storytelling. And, like in our book, if the story is not told, it can become forgotten. Are there any stories in your family? Pass them along now to your child--before they become forgotten!

Take some time this week to help your student write down stories that you would like to be passed from generation to generation so that they will be preserved. Perhaps this could be a family project. As a family, go to your parents or grandparents and ask them to share family stories. Write them down.

Have your student(s) illustrate the book. Have copies made and bound or place in a nice folder. Give a copy to your parents or grandparents as a gift.

Family Tree

Through this story, we learn a bit about Kayleigh's family tree. Does your student know who your mother and father are? Your grandparents? Make a family tree with your student this week. Be sure to tell stories about each family member. You may even want to make a small scrapbook with your student-- something that he

can show his own children someday.

Heirlooms

Discuss the term *heirloom* with your student-- an heirloom is a piece of personal property handed down from generation to generation. Ask your student, "What was the heirloom in this story?" If you have any heirlooms that were passed down from your ancestors, take some time to share them with your student. Is there a story behind the item? Do you plan to pass it down to your student? You may even want to visit a grandparent to learn about other family heirlooms.

Bible and Character

Bible Study: Remember

Using a concordance (teach your student how to use one!), look up the word *remember* in your Bible. What does God have to say about remembering?

You may want to just concentrate on this story. The Old Testament prophet Samuel set up a stone of remembrance (I Samuel 7:10-13) to mark a victory over Israel's enemies.

Bible Study: Generations

What does the Bible say about telling the next generation about the things God has done? What else does God tell us to tell our children?

Deu 6:1-9 Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it: That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey. Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. Deu 6:8 And thou shalt

bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

Language Arts

Vocabulary

shillelagh: a short stick, often thick and used as a weapon (i.e. a club)

farewell: to say good-bye

court (verb): to try to win the affections of another in hopes of marriage

lass: A girl or young woman (particularly an unmarried one)

wee: little or very small

Gaelic: The ancient language of the Irish

reel: a lively Celtic dance

generations: people who descend from a common ancestor. For example, Mommy is one generation and you are my child, so you are another generation. We both descend from Nana, who is my mom and she is another generation. Her mom, your Great Nana, was another generation.

famine: an extreme and general scarcity of food

Adage

Besides the story of Fergus and the shillelagh, what else did each person pass down to the next generation? A few words. In some cases, these words were an *adage*. An adage is a few words of wisdom, much like the Proverbs in the Bible. Make a list of the adages in this story.

Declan to Emmet: The past that walks with me today will walk with you tomorrow.

Emmet to Mary Maeve: Remember, a good story takes its time in the making and its time in the telling.

Mary Maeve to Garrett: May the stories of our past guide you to your future.

Garrett to Kayleigh: A good story never has to end as long as someone remembers to keep telling it.

Journalism: Newspaper Headlines

Notice the New York Times Newspaper and Headline. Headlines are designed to get people's attention--to make them want to read the article. If you have some newspapers at home, look at the headlines together. Discuss whether or not the

headline was appropriate for the article. Did it grab your student's attention? Why or why not? Can your student think of some headlines for the articles in your newspaper?

Art

Illustrating

See Social Studies lesson-- Oral Storytelling.

Applied Math

Pennies

For a younger child sitting in on the story, perhaps you could introduce/review the penny. Make up story problems about Fergus getting pennies for shining shoes or for selling newspapers. Work on whatever skills the student needs (For example, to work on counting by 5s.....Fergus received 5 pennies for each newspaper he sold. How many pennies did he get for selling 5 newspapers? 5, 10, 15, 20, 25....25 cents.)

Stars on the Flags (and a little history too)

Look at the page where Emmet comes home from WWI. Ask your student if the flag looks different than our flag of today. Have your student count the stars (either individually or by multiply 6 rows times 8 stars). Ask how many stars our flag of today has and whether he can figure out why they have differing numbers. (Alaska and Hawaii had not yet been admitted, so we only had 48 states).

Time line

Create a time-line of the story. Start with Fergus and place him at about 1847, the time when Irish really started leaving Ireland in mass numbers. Continue with Declan (have your student review the Brooklyn Bridge building dates and choose a year that is appropriate). Emmet fought in WWI (again have your student review the dates for the war and choose an appropriate year.) Mary Maeve worked in the factories during WWII (review dates and choose). Help your student choose approximate dates for Garrett and Ryan and finally ending with Kayleigh (maybe pretending she just found it this year). Don't forget to add your student on the time line--is he perhaps about the same age as Kayleigh?

Have your student determine how many years have passed since Fergus left Ireland. How many years passed between Fergus leaving Ireland and when Declan worked on the Brooklyn Bridge? Emmet and WWI? Mary Maeve and WWII? How many years have passed since WWI? Since WWII? Between WWII and your student was born? etc.

Converting Years to Days

For extra multiplication practice for an older elementary student, have him roughly calculate the number of days it took for the Brooklyn Bridge to be built, for the First World War, and for the Second World War. Use the approximate number of years each lasted: 13 years for the Bridge ($365 \times 13 = 4,745$ days), 4 years for WWI ($365 \times 4 = 1,460$), and 6 years for WWII ($365 \times 6 = 2,190$ days)

Science

We get our science lessons from the opening words of the story:

Day after day, Fergus felt a rumble in his empty belly as he sat beside his favorite blackthorn tree, watching the clouds reach down from the sky and touch the earth. It was a terrible time in Ireland, when Fergus was a child. The potatoes had rotted in the fields and children lay in their beds at night hungry.

Stomach

Review the parts of the digestive system: food passes through the mouth, esophagus, stomach, small intestine, large intestine, rectum, and out the anus. What makes an empty belly rumble?

Your brain automatically turns your digestive system on and off several times a day and digestion continues no matter what (even if you don't eat). The rumbling you hear is actually produced by gas in your intestines squeezing together to mix and digest food, and the medical term for it is *borborygmus*. The rumbling is produced every time your body is in digestion mode, but you hear it more clearly and loudly when there is no food there to muffle the sounds.

Botany: Blackthorn Tree

A tree native to the British islands. It is often used as a hedge and the dark blue sloe berries are enjoyed by birds. Its white flowers appear in spring before the leaves.

There is much legend and lore behind this plant. Some say that Christ's crown of thorns was made from the Blackthorn tree's sharp thorns. Some believed that if the tree had many berries on it, the winter would be severe. The Celts believed the tree had protective "powers." In Irish folklore it was believed that the "little people" lived in Blackthorn bushes.

If your student is interested, spend some more time learning about trees native to your area.

Clouds

You may wish to take this time to review various types of clouds and cloud classifications. (See the HSS unit for [Island-Below-the-Star](#) or [Time of Wonder](#)). Also use this time to discuss specifically the low level clouds: cumulus, cumulonimbus, stratocumulus. Clouds stay suspended in the air because of the lifting action of the wind currents. How then did the clouds in the story reach down and touch the earth? The "clouds" were probably fog.

Fog

Fog is basically a cloud that is right above the ground. As the air warms around it, it dissipates. There are different kinds of fog. Let's look at three of them.

Radiation Fog: When the nights are cold, clear, and calm (remember Fergus' last night when he cut the branch?), the ground releases the heat it had absorbed during the day. As the ground then becomes cooler, a cloud of water droplets forms above the ground.

Advection (also called Land) Fog: This kind of fog forms when warm, moist air travels over a cold surface.

Sea Fog: This fog is carried from one place to another on the winds.

(Sources: [Fog & Mist](#) and [Wiki](#))

Botany: Blight

The potato plants rotted because of a blight. The blight was a plant-destroying disease (there is discrepancy as to whether phytophthora is a mold or a fungus--good research project for an older student) that attacks every part of the potato plant. It is a serious problem even today, and not just among potato plants. It also

affects other vegetables and even flowers.

Just for Fun

- Eat lots of potatoes this week! Eat them baked, fried, boiled, mashed, scalloped. Don't forget potato cakes for breakfast!
 - Do a little Irish dancing (or at least watch one)
 - Listen to some Gaelic music. ("Siuil A Run" by Celtic Woman is a good choice; Enya often sings in Gaelic.)
 - Play a tin whistle, fiddle, flute or drum.
 - Tap out rhythms with a stick.
 - Play hide-and-see
-

Materials and information on this website may be used for your own personal and school use. Material may not be shared electronically or be used for resale.

© Homeschool Share