

Lesson 5: Irish migration worksheet

Enquiry question:

Famine or fortune? Looking at the reasons for the Irish diaspora

Read through this information, you will need the facts from it for the upcoming true/false activity.

Irish migration to Great Britain has occurred from the earliest recorded history to the present. There has been a continuous movement of people between the islands of Ireland and Great Britain due to how close they are to each other. This migration has increased and decreased in response to politics, economics and social conditions in both places.

Today, millions of residents of Britain are either from Ireland or have Irish ancestry. It is estimated that as many as six million people living in the UK have an Irish grandparent (around 10% of the UK population).

The most significant migration followed a series of potato crop failures in the 1840s - the Great Famine. It is estimated that more than one million people died, and almost the same again emigrated.

For many, the USA, Canada or Australia were the most attractive destinations, with England simply a stepping-stone, but one that became home for some.

During the 19th and 20th centuries Irish soldiers formed a significant proportion of the British Army.

A further wave of emigration to England also took place between the 1930s and 1960s by Irish escaping poor economic conditions following the establishment of the Irish Free State.

This was furthered by the severe labour shortage in Britain during the mid-20th century, which depended largely on Irish immigrants to work in the areas of construction - canals, roads and railways - and domestic labour.

There has been a long history of anti-Irish sentiment (like racism) in Britain, and the Irish have been discriminated against in terms of housing, jobs and access to public life.

One cause of these negative attitudes is a history of antagonism between Roman Catholics (religion of most Irish people) and Protestants (most British people).

Great Britain has approx. 869,000 Irish-born residents recorded in the recent census. This is approximately 1.4% of the population. 10% of the Great British population claim at least 25% Irish ancestry, and 25% of the population claim some Irish ancestry.

In 1997 the Commission for Racial Equality published the first major study of Irish immigration and experiences of racism in England.

Saint Patrick's day is widely celebrated throughout Great Britain. Birmingham and Manchester have particularly large parades.