

# Teacher Overview Objectives: *Causes and Effects of the Irish Potato Famine*

## NYS Social Studies Framework Alignment:

Key Idea	Conceptual Understanding	Content Specification
10.3 CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION: Innovations in agriculture, production, and transportation led to the Industrial Revolution, which originated in Western Europe and spread over time to Japan and other regions. This led to major population shifts and transformed economic and social systems. (Standard: 2, 3, 4; Themes: MOV, TCC, GEO, SOC, ECO, TECH)	10.3d Social and political reform, as well as new ideologies, developed in response to industrial growth.	Students will examine the Irish potato famine within the context of the British agricultural revolution and Industrial Revolution.

Objective	Guiding Question and Activity Description
Describe the causes of the Irish Potato famine.	What caused the Irish Potato famine? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• secondary source analysis</li> </ul>
Describe the effects of the Irish Potato famine.	How did the Irish Potato famine impact society? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• primary and secondary source analysis, image analysis Regents multiple choice questions</li> </ul>

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# What caused the Irish Potato famine?

Objectives: Describe the causes of the Irish Potato famine.

The Neolithic Revolution led to settled societies that **relied**, or depended on crops for food. Many societies experienced food **surpluses**, or an excess of food. Other societies experienced the opposite, **famines**.

**A famine is an extreme scarcity or shortage of food.**

**Directions:** Make predictions as to what events might lead to a **famine**.

## But is a famine a *natural disaster* or a *man-made disaster*?

Famines result from a combination “triple failure:”

**Production failure:** Crops fail due to fungus and bacteria or a natural disaster destroys crops.

**Access failure:** The cost of available food is too expensive.

**Response failure:** Governments do not intervene quickly or aggressively enough to address the famine.

Source: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/somalia/famine-somalia-causes-and-solutions>

## What caused the Irish Potato famine?

**Directions:** Read the text below and respond to the questions.

In the 1600s, both England and Scotland colonized Ireland. As they colonized Ireland, they took the best farmland.

### 1. Why might the English take the best farmland when they colonized Ireland?



Source: [http://public.media.smithsonianmag.com/legacy\\_blog/potato.jpg](http://public.media.smithsonianmag.com/legacy_blog/potato.jpg)

The potato crossed the Atlantic Ocean from the Peru (in the Americas) to Europe through the **Columbian Exchange**. The potato fed Europe’s **rapidly growing populations** that developed during the **Industrial Revolution**.

By the early 1840s, potato was the main source of food for Ireland’s rural poor. In 1845, a bacteria arrived accidentally from North America through trade and a **blight** or fungus destroyed the potato crop in Ireland. The 1845 crop failure was followed by more devastating failures in 1846–49. Each year’s potato crop was almost completely ruined by the blight.

2. By the 1840s, what was the main source of food for the rural poor in Ireland? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Where did this food come from? Why was this crop so important?

#### **4. What arrived to Ireland in 1845? How did this impact the crops?**

Other crops such as wheat and oats were not affected by the blight. However, these crops were not available to the Irish for food. Under British rule, most of the Irish farmland was used to grow crops that were **exported** or sent outside the country for sale. The British landlords that owned most of the farmland shipped the uninfected crops for sale overseas, leaving the Irish with the infected potatoes. This led to a **famine** or extreme shortage of food. This became what historians call the **Irish Potato famine**.

#### **How did the British landlords respond to Irish Potato famine?**

#### **Why might British landlords have made this decision during the famine?**

The British government's efforts to relieve the famine were controversial. Charles Trevelyan was in charge of Irish relief efforts during the famine. He believed in minimal intervention and attempted to encourage the Irish to be more self-reliant. He wrote, "...Besides, the greatest improvement of all which could take place in Ireland would be to teach the other people to depend upon themselves for developing the resources of the country, instead of [relying on] the assistance of the government on every occasion..."

#### **5. How did Sir Charles Trevelyan believe the government should handle the famine? Why?**

#### **6. Which of the following thinkers (Thomas Malthus, Adam Smith and David Ricardo, Jeremy Bentham, Karl Marx) do you think most influenced Sir Charles Trevelyan's ideas about government intervention? Explain.**

The Irish landowners themselves were expected to provide relief. However, when the poor and starving ran out of money to pay rent, the landlords soon ran out of funds with which to support them. The British government limited their help to loans, soup kitchens, and providing employment on road building and other public works. Throughout the famine, many Irish farms continued to export other high-quality foods to Britain because the Irish poor did not have the money to purchase them.

#### **7. How did the British government decide to help the Irish?**

#### **8. Why did Irish farms continue to export high-quality foods?**

**9. Using your knowledge of thinkers and ideologies from the Industrial Revolution, what advice do you think the following people would have given to the British government during the famine?**

Thomas Malthus	Adam Smith and David Ricardo	Jeremy Bentham	Karl Marx

Sources:  
<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-the-potato-changed-the-world-108470605/?all>, <http://www.britannica.com/event/Irish-Potato-Famine>  
[http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Irish\\_Potato\\_Famine\\_\(1845%E2%80%931849\)](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Irish_Potato_Famine_(1845%E2%80%931849))  
[https://books.google.com/books?id=kuvTEO7yEXIC&pg=PT56&pg=PT56&dq=charles+trevelyan+assistance+of+the+government+on+every+occasion&source=bl&ots=RphHwx6cYL&sig=VrBN\\_CNsbknQnT\\_XWoY9Xh4qjE&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewixzYbNi7vJAhXJD4KHZAECi8Q6AEIHjAA#v=onepage&q=charles%20trevelyan%20assistance%20of%20the%20government%20on%20every%20occasion&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=kuvTEO7yEXIC&pg=PT56&pg=PT56&dq=charles+trevelyan+assistance+of+the+government+on+every+occasion&source=bl&ots=RphHwx6cYL&sig=VrBN_CNsbknQnT_XWoY9Xh4qjE&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewixzYbNi7vJAhXJD4KHZAECi8Q6AEIHjAA#v=onepage&q=charles%20trevelyan%20assistance%20of%20the%20government%20on%20every%20occasion&f=false)  
<http://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2012/12/irish-famine>

**Synthesizing Causes**

**Directions:** Using the reading above, identify evidence of the following types of “failures” that exacerbated the Irish Potato famine.

<p><b>Production Failure</b></p> <p>ex: Crops fail due to fungus and bacteria or a natural disaster destroys crops.</p>	
<p><b>Access Failure</b></p> <p>ex: The cost of available food is too expensive.</p>	
<p><b>Response Failure</b></p> <p>ex: Governments do not intervene quickly or aggressively enough to address the famine.</p>	

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# How did the Irish Potato famine impact society?

Objectives: Describe the effects of the Irish Potato famine.

Directions: Using the political cartoon below, respond to the questions.

*A Terrible Record, 1881*



"In forty years I have lost, through the operation of no natural law, more than Three Million of my Sons and Daughters, and they, the Young and the Strong, leaving behind the Old and Infirm to weep and to die. Where is this to end?"

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great\\_Famine\\_\(Ireland\)#/media/File:A\\_terrible\\_record\\_John\\_Johnson\\_political\\_%26\\_satirical\\_cropped.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Famine_(Ireland)#/media/File:A_terrible_record_John_Johnson_political_%26_satirical_cropped.jpg)

Observations

Inferences

What does this image reveal about the impacts of the Irish Potato famine?

**Directions:** Using the text and images below, identify the effects of the Irish famine.

We entered a cabin. Stretched in one dark corner, scarcely visible, from the smoke and rags that covered them, were three children huddled together, lying there because they were too weak to rise, pale and ghastly, their little limbs— on removing a portion of the filthy covering— perfectly emaciated, eyes sunk, voice gone, and evidently in the last stage of actual starvation.

—William Bennett, *The Peoples of Ireland* from the NYS Global History and Geography Regents Exam, August 2002.

**According to this excerpt, what was one effect of the Irish famine?**

Census figures show an Irish population of 8.2 million in 1841, 6.6 million a decade later, and only 4.7 million in 1891. It is estimated that as many as 4.5 million Irish arrived in America between 1820 and 1930. [...] Pre-famine immigrants from Ireland were predominately male, while in the famine years and their aftermath, entire families left the country.

Source:

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/immigration/irish2.html>

**According to this excerpt, what were two effects of the Irish famine?**

About one million people died from starvation or from typhus and other famine-related diseases. [...] Ireland's population continued to decline in the following decades because of overseas emigration and lower birth rates.

Source: <http://www.britannica.com/event/Irish-Potato-Famine>

**According to this excerpt, what were two effects of the Irish famine?**

## Synthesizing Effects

**Directions:** Using the reading above, complete the chart below by indicating the effect the Irish famine had on population, immigration, and quality of life.

<b>Population</b>	
<b>Immigration</b>	

<b>Quality of Life</b>	



## Regents Multiple Choice Check for Understanding

1. What was an immediate result of the mass starvation in Ireland in the late 1840s?

- (1) expansion of the Green Revolution to Ireland
- (2) acceptance of British rule by the Irish
- (3) migration of many Irish to other countries
- (4) creation of a mixed economy in Ireland

2. Many critics believe that the policy of the British government during the Irish Famine

- (1) contributed to food shortages
- (2) ignored military concerns
- (3) discouraged emigration
- (4) led directly to civil war

3. One way in which the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain in the 18th century and the potato blight in Ireland in the 19th century are similar is that they both led directly to

- (1) significant human migrations
- (2) more equitable distribution of wealth
- (3) growth in the number of subsistence farmers
- (4) rapid increases in food production

4. What was the primary reason that large numbers of people left Ireland in the 1840s and 1850s?

- (1) The people faced mass starvation.
- (2) A political revolution had started.
- (3) A smallpox epidemic broke out in the country.
- (4) The people sought better educational opportunities.