

Migration to Britain through time

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Migration is rarely absent from the news and arouses political, social cultural and emotional responses which range from compassion to hostility, racism and anti-racism. By exploring migration in the past, it is possible for children to go beyond current issues and appreciate that, rather than being a recent characteristic of the times in which we live, it forms part of our past which stretches back to earliest times. This carries the risk of seeing the past through a twenty-first century perspective and it is necessary to focus on using this study as a means of providing a context for the world in which we live, while appreciating distinctions between the past and present. There are many opportunities to develop this as a topic within the National Curriculum at both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

Studying the history of migration at Key Stage 1

You could focus on the experiences of people in the community who have come to your locality from different parts of Britain or the world, inviting individuals to tell their stories and explore the reasons why they migrated. This could be followed by focusing on individuals who have come to Britain in the past, such as Oloudah Equinano, Mary Seacole or a significant local figure.

Studying the history of migration at Key Stage 2

Migration can be taught through a local study, relating a pre-1066 topic such as the Romans to its broader historical context or as a post-1066 study. Whichever focus is used, it needs to be related to migration in a broader chronological context.

Migration as a local study

You could begin with a focus on people who have moved to the local community, including the children and their families. This could lead on to the study of particular people or communities who have come

to the local area in the past, which could in turn be related to what was happening elsewhere in the country. Some of these links may be obvious, such as identifying the main communities which settled in the area. Some locations such as Spitalfields in London provide evidence of Huguenot, Jewish, and Bangladeshi settlers and more recently people from Somalia. However, even where recent migration is less obvious, place names, archaeological sites or museum displays provide evidence of earlier settlers such as Anglo-Saxons or Vikings. In order to understand the significance of local evidence it is necessary to relate this to a broader understanding of people who have migrated to Britain in the past.

Migration as an overview related to Britain before 1066

Prehistoric settlers, Romans, Saxons and Vikings are examples of migrants. The reasons why they came and their impact can be related to Britain's long arc of development though using a card-sort exercise to compare them with migrants who have arrived here since 1066. This can be achieved using an overview card-sort exercise (you will find out about different people who have come to Britain and this exercise in Activity 4). Specific topics, such as evidence of black settlers in Roman London, could be used to compare with black settlers from Tudor times to indicate that their presence is not restricted to more recent times.

Migration in a British history post-1066 topic

Should you choose to focus on a specific period or event such as the Tudors, Georgians, Victorians or World War II this should include the role and experiences of people who have come to Britain at that time. As with pre-1066 topics an overview lesson comparing and contrasting their experiences with people who came here at different times would contribute to children's understanding of 'big picture' history.



'The Ejectment' from *The Illustrated London News*, 16 December 1848
 Lordprice Collection / Alamy Stock Photo

Migration as post-1066 thematic study

Case study: Irish migration in the context of the long-term development of multicultural Britain

This article will focus on Irish migration and relate this to the development of Multicultural Britain. Our lead enquiry question is 'Why have people come from Ireland to Britain?' This of course only deals with the first part of their story and naturally leads to another enquiry question, 'What have been the experiences of Irish people who have come to Britain?' Our intention is to address this in a future publication. We consider that our planning approach can be applied with an alternative migrant group such as black or Jewish settlers.

The following provides you with a contextual overview of Irish migration, although you will find that our activities have made adaptations to ensure that they are accessible for Key Stage 2 children. The proximity of Ireland and Britain has meant that movement between them has been a long-term feature of their histories. Irish people have been the largest minority group in England for centuries, crossing backwards and forwards across the Irish Sea. People from mainland Britain have gone to Ireland. The eastern part of Ireland called the Pale was colonised in the Middle Ages, while in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the whole country was invaded, with English Protestant landlords taking over the lands from the Catholic population, bringing in English and Scottish (especially in Ulster) settlers. All of Ireland was part of the United Kingdom between 1801 and 1922, after which most of Ulster continued to be in the Union.

With respect to migration from Ireland, it was significant in promoting the spread of the Christian church beyond its shores. People have travelled here for work since the Middle Ages, but improved sea steamers and the increased demand for workers during the industrial revolution pulled many to Britain. The Famine/Hunger (1845–49) had a catastrophic impact in Ireland which resulted in huge migration. Starvation and evictions of tenants unable to pay their rents are prominent images of what took place and the extent to which the government or landlords' actions were enough is hotly debated. Some historians have argued over whether it was the result of population outstripping resources. However, more contentious is the view that the English government and English landlords could have done more to have helped the starving population and suggesting that what took place was an avoidable hunger rather than a famine. The government's actions were affected by a belief common at the time that it should not get involved in the economy, which meant that it did not take steps to stop food exports from Ireland. However, food imports of grain were allowed after 1846, while public works and soup kitchens were established by the government and charities. Wealthier or more fortunate people fled the country either to America or mainland Britain but not everyone had the means to do this. Migration continued into the twentieth century, especially between 1930–60, again driven by improved work opportunities. There was also some migration from Northern Ireland to escape from the Troubles during the last 25 years of the twentieth century. Traditionally migrants came for seasonal work on the land. During the nineteenth century many men worked as navies for the railways or as masons, bricklayers or carpenters, while women found work in the mill towns in the north west of England. They contributed to the armed forces, notably during the Boer War and World War I

and worked in industries and on the land during World War II. They also found work in the construction industry and as nurses in the NHS during the post-war boom of the 1950s and 1960s. Writers such as Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw, and artists such as William Mulready or Daniel Maclise while local studies have indicated that migrants were involved in a range of occupations.

Activity 1: What can we find out about recent migration?

This activity should begin with children considering questions such as: 'How long have I lived here?' 'How long have my parents and grandparents (or a friend) lived here?' This could be developed into an oral history exercise exploring why a relative or friend moved to the town or village in which they live from another part of Britain or the world.

Activity 2: Why have people come here from Ireland?

The first stage of this activity will focus on the recent past: skimming through the 'stories' section of the *Moving Here* website about people who came here in the 1950s or 1960s, in the Huddersfield Community Centre or Luton Irish Forum folder. These experiences can be compared with people in the children's research. The second stage relates to a longer arc of the past and requires the children to place Irish migration cards on a time line and compare and contrast them with both the recent migrants from Ireland and their oral history project (this timeline will need to relate to at least 2,000 years as it will be revisited in Activity 4).

Long-term Irish Migration

- In 563 Saint Columba founded a monastery on Iona, a small island in the Inner Hebrides of Scotland.
- The monastery of Lindisfarne, off the coast of Northumberland, was founded by Saint Aidan in 635.
- Since the Middle Ages, Irish people have come for seasonal work to Britain.
- Many people came to escape from famine/hunger in the mid-nineteenth century.
- Irishmen have been recruited for the army, for example during the Boer War (1899–1902), World War I (1914–18) and World War II (1939–45).
- From the 1930s to the 1960s people came for work, which was more readily available in Britain than Ireland.
- There were job opportunities for people during World War II.
- Some people came to escape from violent unrest in Northern Ireland during the 1970s and 1980s.

Review: What are the main reasons why people have migrated to Britain from Ireland? How far does this compare with what we found out in Activity 1?

Activity 3: Why did so many people come here from Ireland in the mid-19th century?

Stage 1: Show the children a picture of people starving and ask the questions: 'What can I see?' 'What does this tell me?' 'What do I want to ask?' It would be useful for the teacher to respond to these questions to provide a brief context to the story without overlapping.



Stage 2: This uses an illustration called 'The Ejectment' in *The Illustrated London News*, 16 December, 1848. The first stage of the activity requires groups to freeze-frame the picture and generate questions they want to ask the bailiff and tenant, or tenant's wife. The teacher or TA hot-seats the characters to answer children's questions using the context prompt cards below. The children review this by asking the following: 'How far might this explain why people came to Britain?' 'What do we still need to find out?'

Hot-seating cards

Bailiff

I am an important local person, so I do not have much to do with the tenants. I am employed by the landlord who owns the land the family is occupying. It is my job to make sure that the rent is paid to the landlord. If it is not, I must evict people from their homes. I know people will be homeless and may even starve because they have lost their land as well as their homes, but I could lose my job if I do not do what the landlord tells me. Some of my landlords are Protestant and some also live in England, but wherever they are, they need money to live on and pay taxes, particularly in these hard times.

Tenant

I am a Catholic and do not own any land. I rent land from a landlord. It is not a lot of land but it was enough to keep us housed and fed with potatoes and pig meat. We managed all right until the failure of the potato crop, which has hit us hard. I had to sell the pig to buy food and even sold our best clothes in order to survive. For the past few weeks, my children have searched the fields and woods for food – the odd potato, berries, even nettles. There is no way of earning money and we cannot see our way to pay our rent this year. Now that we have lost our cottage and land, I do not know what we will



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

do. Some of our evicted neighbours have ended up living in ditches, some have gone to the workhouse, others have left Ireland while some have died from disease or starvation. What will become of us?

Stage 3: Ask the class to identify what they can see in a cartoon called *A Terrible Record* and the chart demonstrating migration to Britain from Ireland, to answer the following question: 'How do the cartoon and chart build on the story in Stage 2?' (The chart can be found in the following website www.irish-genealogy-toolkit.com/Irish-immigration-to-Britain.html)

Stage 4. This activity uses a card sort exercise to examine the following questions: What pushed people from Ireland? What pulled them to Britain? What stopped people from leaving Ireland?

Irish migration in the mid-nineteenth century

- We could get work in Britain's towns and factories, and building the railways.
- Without crops we cannot pay our rent and have been evicted from our cottage.
- The coming of steamships will make it easier for us to get to Britain from Ireland.
- Our family are starving because terrible harvests in 1845 have destroyed our potato crop.
- Our land is owned by a rich landlord who wants his rent.
- We do not have enough money or help to be able to leave Ireland.
- We have sufficient money to leave.

h. We live in the south east of Ireland and our harvests have not been as bad as those of people in the west of the country.

Review: What do you think was the most important reason why many people migrated at this time? Look at information on the timeline you completed in Activity 2. How does this compare with why people migrated at other times?

Activity 4: How similar were the motives of Irish migrants to those of other people who have come to Britain?

The following information provides you with a brief contextual overview of the different people who have come to Britain. Evidence of the earliest people has been found in Africa, and consequently the first settlers in Britain, like all humans, will have derived from them. Early hunter-gatherers arrived in search of food around 11,700 years ago. The first Neolithic farmers arrived in around 4,000 BC and had their roots in Anatolia (modern Turkey). Roughly 1,500 years later Bronze Age invaders arrived in Britain; we now call them Beaker People, and they were originally from the Russian steppes. The Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Vikings and Normans are associated with successful invasions and the nature and diversity of their impact within these islands was clearly immense. The diverse ways these people changed Britain is well worth exploring. Some migrants such as Jews, Huguenots (French Protestants), Ugandan Asians came to escape persecution. Irish migrants in the mid-nineteenth century fled famine/hunger at home. Black migrants in the seventeenth and eighteenth century are typically associated with the slave trade. Black, Irish and Polish

migrants came to support Britain during World War II. Flemish weavers in the fourteenth century, black and Asian migrants from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent, together with people from Ireland in the aftermath of World War II, were invited here to support the country's labour needs. Some people have taken the decision to migrate here through choice, some through rights as members of the Commonwealth or EU, while others, such as Syrian refugees, for example, have been forced to leave their home.

The first stage of this activity involves putting cards representing different people who have come to Britain (you can make cards for this activity using information about migrant groups in the pull out poster with this edition) on a timeline. In the second stage children look at the timeline to find any broad similarities between the Irish migrants and other groups. The final stage involves identifying a group which they think has (a) the most in common and (b) the least in common

with Irish migrants, and justify their choice. This will be followed by a review question: 'What are the main points which I have learnt about the development of multicultural Britain?' Following this activity, the class can reflect on the main things which the topic has told them about migration and any questions they have with respect to Irish migration and/or other migrant groups. This provides an informed historical context for discussing contemporary news events associated with migrants, such as Syrian refugees, should it arise.

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Resources

HA Publications

Aronovsky, I. (2013) 'Diversity and the History Curriculum' in *Primary History*, 65.

Gove-Humphries, A., Bracey, P. and Jackson, D. (2017) 'Why is diversity so important? How can we approach it?' in *Primary History*, 75, pp. 8–13.

Doull, K. and Bracey, P. (2019) 'Diversity: guidance for history subject leaders and teachers' in *Primary History Summer Resource*, Historical Association.

School textbook

Brougham, F. and Farrell, C. (2007) *The Great Irish Famine: step up history*. London: Evans.

History education texts

Alexander, C., Weekes-Bernard, D. and Chatterji, J. (2015) *History Lessons: teaching diversity in and through the History National Curriculum*, London: Runnymede.

Bracey, P., Gove-Humphries, A. and Jackson, D. (2017) 'Teaching diversity in the history classroom' in I. Davies (ed.), *Debates in History Teaching*, London: Routledge, pp. 202–12.

Claire, H. (1997) *Reclaiming Our Pasts*, Chester: Trentham Books.

History textbooks

Kushner, T. (2012) *The Battle of Britishness: migrant journeys, 1685 to the present*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Winder, R. (2004) *Bloody Foreigners: the story of migration to Britain*, London: Little Brown.

Websites

www.irish-genealogy-toolkit.com/Irish-immigration-to-Britain.html#ImmigrationBritainWork

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20131105215942>

www.movinghere.org.uk/galleries/histories/irish/irish.htm

Should you wish to explore websites related to other migrant groups please refer to:

Doull, K. and Bracey, P. (2019) 'Diversity: guidance for history subject leaders and teachers' in *Primary History Summer Resource*, Historical Association.