

# IRELAND'S GREAT HUNGER MUSEUM

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## **Pack Your Suitcase: Emigration and the Great Hunger**



*The Finishing Touch*, 1876  
James Brenan (1837-1907)

# Pack Your Suitcase

A lesson in immigration, decision making, and what impacts our choices

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## Included in this Lesson Plan:

- Background historical information
- Background primary source documents and activities related to Irish emigration in the 19th century
- A Pack Your Suitcase worksheet which can be used individually or for a group activity, and requires some math and discussion, and recording with a pencil
- A comparison of 19th century and modern US immigration
- A model citizenship test

## This lesson will help develop:

- critical thinking
- the ability to develop and express reasoned decisions and competing arguments
- using dialog to develop and express a particular point of view
- understanding how technology, scarcity and emotions affect decisions
- comparing past to present, especially family life and technology
- analyzing purchase choices, and the differences between needs and wants
- simple math skills in calculating, estimating and adjusting
- understanding primary sources in researching history

## This lesson will meet the following Connecticut Social Studies Frameworks:

- ECO 4.1 Compare the benefits and costs of individual choices
- ECO 4.2 Identify positive and negative incentives that influence the decisions people make
- GEO 4.7 Explain how human settlements and movements relate to the locations and use of various natural resources
- INQ 3-5.6 Gather relevant information from multiple sources while using the origin, structure, and context to guide the selection
- INQ 3-5.9 Use evidence to develop claims in response to compelling questions
- INQ 3-5.11 Construct explanations using reasoning, correct sequence, examples, and details with relevant information and data
- INQ 3-5.15 Draw on disciplinary concepts to explain the challenges people have faced and the opportunities they have created, in addressing local, regional, and global problems at various times and places
- CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.4.NBT.B.4 Fluently add and subtract multi-digit whole numbers using the standard algorithm
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.3 Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.9 Integrate information from two texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably

# Background

**This lesson is about choices that need to be made when leaving your home.**

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Emigration is when someone leaves their home country and moves to live in a different country. During the Great Hunger, many Irish people left Ireland for good. People emigrated for many reasons. Some left because there was not enough food, and others because their landlord had evicted them. Many landlords evicted their tenants to avoid paying for their care. Some of these landlords also paid to put the Irish living on their land on a boat headed for the United States, Australia, England or Canada.

## Basics of Emigration

- Between 1845 and 1855, 2 million Irish people emigrated to places like the United States, Australia, England, and Canada.
- Conditions on the ships were terrible, with people packed in next to each other below deck. Many people died during the trip across the Atlantic, due to fever and poor living conditions on the ships. These ships became known as "coffin ships" because of the high mortality rate for their passengers. Some estimates say that almost 30% of immigrants died on board the ships.
- On board the ships, a family of four could have as little as six square feet to share.
- Passengers were allowed no more than an hour a day above deck.
- Many of these emigrants had never left the areas where they grew up, and were suddenly moving from a rural environment to an urban one, where people did not speak the same language and frequently discriminated against the newly arriving Irish for their nationality and religion.

You are going to fill out a list of what to take, and what to leave. The list has several items to consider, but you are limited by how much you can take total.

*(See Pack Your Suitcase, Page 10)*

# Activity One

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## What was it like?

Here are some writings about the journey from Irish emigrants during the mid 1800s. They are primary sources of information, as they were written by people who actually lived during that time, and experienced the coffin ships. The spelling errors have been corrected for comprehension, but you may notice that the grammar can be very different from how we speak today!

*Before the emigrant has been at sea a week, he is an altered man. How can it be otherwise? Hundreds of poor people, men, women and children, of all ages, huddled together, without light, without air, wallowing in filth and breathing a fetid atmosphere, sick in body, dispirited in heart; the fevered patients lying between the sound, in sleeping places so narrow as almost to deny them ... a change of position; living without food or medicine except as administered by the hand of casual charity; dying without the voice of spiritual consolation and buried in the deep without the rites of the Church. The food is generally ill-selected and seldom sufficiently cooked, in consequence of the insufficiency and bad construction of the cooking places. The supply of water, hardly enough for cooking and drinking, does not allow washing. In many ships the filthy beds, teeming with all abominations, are never required to be brought on deck and aired: the narrow space between the sleeping berths and the piles of boxes is never washed or scraped ... until the day before arrival at quarantine, when all hands are required to "scrub up" and put on a fair face for the doctor and Government inspector. No moral restraint is attempted; the voice of prayer is never heard; drunkenness ... is not discouraged. In the ship which brought me out of London last April... the meat was of the worst quality. The supply of water shipped on board was abundant, but the quantity served out to the passengers was so scanty that they were frequently obliged to throw overboard their salt provisions and rice (a most important article of their food), because they had not water enough both for the necessary cooking and the satisfying of their raging thirst afterwards. They could only afford water for washing by withdrawing it from the cooking of their food. I have known persons to remain for days together in their dark close berths, because they thus suffered less from hunger, though compelled at the same time, by want of water to heave overboard their salt provisions and rice. No cleanliness was enforced; the beds never aired; the master during the whole voyage never entered the steerage, and would listen to no complaints.*

**Stephen DeVere to T. F. Elliot, Agent-General for Emigration, November 1847**

*We have arrived on the 31st after five weeks' passage - all in good health with the exception of a few [who were] removed to hospital. We interred twenty-six on our passage who were weak and destitute before we left home. On the Evening of the 25th of April we had a dreadful storm - the Sea washing fore and aft. We had to close the hatches and nail them down and all passengers on board accepted a watery grave.*

***Mathais Ferguson, Head Manager of the ship Æolus to Sir Robert Gore Booth, Bart. Partridge Island, St. Johns N B June 5th, 1847***

*A still more horrible sequel is to come. The survivors have to wander forth and find homes. Who can say how many will Perish on the way or the masses of houseless, famished and half-naked wretches that will be strewed on the inhospitable snow when a Canadian winter sets in?*

*Famine and pestilence are at the gates and the conscience stricken nation will almost fear to see the 'writing on the wall'.*

*Miscalculation and want of care, are terms far too mild to apply to such wanton negligence as resulted in the immediate sacrifice of upwards of 25,000 souls, four-fifths of whom fell upon their way to Canada. From the report issued at the end of the season, it appears that, of the 98,105 (of whom 60,000 were Irish) that were shipped for Quebec, besides those who afterwards perished, whose number can never be ascertained. Allowing an average of 300 persons to each, 200 vessels were employed in the transmission to Canada of Irish emigrants alone, and each of these vessels lost one-third of her living cargo ere she again set sail upon her return to Europe.*

*If we suppose those 60,000 persons to be an army on their way to invade some hostile power, how serious would appear the loss of one-third of their number before a battle was fought? Yet the 40,000 who landed upon the Canadian shores had to fight many a deadly battle before they could find peace or rest.*

***Robert Whyte, The Journey of an Irish Coffin Ship, 1847***

*We had been five nights and nearly four days with only one hatchway open for a few hours at a time, and 300 souls confined below, breathing up the close, polluted, and unhealthy atmosphere constantly in all ships, especially immigrant ships, where large numbers of human beings are crowded together in a small space; in this case rendered doubly sickening and intolerable from the causes before alluded to. So oppressive was the atmosphere we were compelled to inhale, that it was proposed to break open the hatchways when both were closed upon us. Had they broke open the hatchways during the storm, the ship would inevitably have sunk, as it was constantly shipping a sea. On the other hand, to remain much longer below would be certain death. We all felt a sense of suffocation, and a difficulty of breathing which plainly indicated that the air so necessary to our existence was wanting, and unless speedily renewed, death would soon ensue.*

***William Smith, An Emigrants Narrative; or a Voice from the Steerage, 1850***

# ***Activity One***

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Use the primary sources you just read on pages 3 and 4 to answer the following questions:

1. How long was the journey of Mathais Ferguson?
2. According to Robert Whyte and William Smith, how many passengers did these ships carry on an average journey?
3. What fraction of these passengers does Robert Whyte tell us died onboard?
4. What did they do with the bodies of those who had died on Stephen DeVere's ship?
5. In the last passage from William Smith, why did the ship's crew keep the hatches closed when the people below had so little air?
6. What are some of the dangers of traveling on these ships? Why do you think people continued to emigrate on them?



# Activity Two

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## What did they bring?

So many people were emigrating to North America in the mid-1800's that a guidebook for emigrants was published and sold. The guide contained advice on when to leave, where to go, what to pack, and what to do once they arrived in North America, among other things.

Read an excerpt from this guide below, then complete Activity Two.

### **VERE-FOSTER's Penny Emigrant Guide** **"Emigration to North America"**

*The advantages of emigration to North America, rather than to Australia, wages being about the same in both countries, are as follows: -*

- 1. Because, while the lowest expense of passage for one person to Australia is 15, six persons can often get for less than that sum to North America; and while the one in Australia can earn the means of sending one relation, the six in America can earn the means of sending for thirty six of their relations, and even more, for they will lose five months less time in their own voyage out and the voyage home of their money letters,*
- 2. Because in North America a very large number of emigrants are much more sure of finding employment, owing to their being a much larger resident population to give employment; since all the Australian Colonies, Van-Dieman's Land, and New Zealand, put together, do not contain much over, 350,000 inhabitants, including natives, and between twenty and thirty thousand convicts, whereas the population of North America exceeds already 26,000,000*
- 3. Because the price of land is far cheaper,*

*The best parts of North America for emigrants to go are the peninsula of Upper Canada between Lakes Ontario, Erie, and Huron, the country back of Toronto, the State of Ohio, Western New York, Western Pennsylvania, Western Virginia, Indiana, and the more thickly settled parts of Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, and Wisconsin. In all these States, except Iowa, railroads and other public works are being carried on extensively, and Iowa will, no doubt, soon begin.*

*The proper time to sail for New York and Philadelphia, for those who are going far into the interior of the country, or have no homes to go to near the coast, is from the middle of February to the middle of August. Travelling is extremely expensive in winter.*

*In my recent voyage in the "Washington," from Liverpool to New York, I took the following articles, for the use of myself and messmate: -*

*Tin Water Can*

*Large Tin Hook-Saucepan*

*Frying-pan*

*Large Tin Basin, for washing and  
for preparing bread*

*Tin Teapot*

*Tin Kettle*

*Two deep Tin Plates*

*Two Pint Mugs*

*Two Knives, Forks, and Spoons*

*Small Calico Bags*

*Towels*

*Blanket*

*The extra articles of clothing most advisable to take, on account of their superior cheapness and quality in this country, are woollen clothing, and boots and shoes.*

*Passengers should be particularly cleanly on board a crowded ship, to prevent ship fever from breaking out.*

*Emigrants should go at once into the interior, for the chances of employment are 100 to 1 against them at the seaport. The propensity of emigrants to remain about large cities, and especially those on the coast, is very much complained of by Americans, and with too much foundation. There they loiter, days, weeks, and months, lazy and indolent, spending in the meanwhile their precious money, and still more precious time, quietly waiting for Providence to turn up something for them, until their last penny is spent, their trunks are retained by the lodging-house keepers, and they are turned out beggars on the streets. Providence seldom helps those who do not strive to help themselves.*





# Activity Three

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## How did they feel?

Using the painting *The Finishing Touch* by James Brenan on the cover of this packet, answer the following questions.

*The Finishing Touch* shows a young woman about to leave home to travel to America. A local sign-maker puts the 'finishing touch' on her traveling case with her name and destination. Her little brother carries in peat, used as fuel for fires and cut from bogs, in a basket. Her father, using a cane, can likely no longer gather the peat due to some sort of injury or illness.

1. What do you think the father is feeling? How can you tell?
2. Why do you think the young woman is going to America alone?
3. Do you think it would be easy to leave your home and move to a new country? Why or why not?
4. Do you think this family has a lot of money? Why or why not? What in the painting tells you that?

# Pack Your Suitcase

**Item List – You will look over the item list and decide what YOU are going to take with you from Ireland to your new home in America.**

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**Consider these questions as you choose:**

- 1) What would be the most important things you would take, and why do you consider them the most important?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) What items on this list do you think you would not need to take with you? Why?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3) Your suitcase would have to hold everything you are taking with you to your new home. Because you would have to carry this bag wherever you went, you don't want it to be too heavy. You can only pack up to 40 pounds.
  - On the list on the next page, choose what you would include, up to 40 pounds total.
  - When you have your list, get in a group with others and compare what you chose to include. Did you choose the same things? Compare your reasons and discuss.

# Pack Your Suitcase

Take no more than 40 lbs. with you, or you won't be able to carry your bag!

Item	Weight (in Lbs.)	Number Packed	Lbs. Packed	Item	Weight (in Lbs.)	Number Packed	Lbs. Packed
Tea	2			Handkerchiefs	1/2		
Coffee	2			Clothes	5		
Sugar	1			Books	5		
Keepsakes	5			Coats	10		
Mirror	5			Dishes	5		
Tools	5			Family Heirlooms	5		
Toys	3			Quilts	15		
Fiddle	1			Granny's Clock	7		
Uilleann Pipes	15						

**Subtotal:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Subtotal:** \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL WEIGHT OF YOUR  
PACKED SUITCASE:**

*(must be 40 lbs. or less)*

*If you packed all of these items in your suitcase, it would weigh 89 1/2 pounds! What will you leave behind?*

# Then and Now

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The Irish immigrants in the 1800s had very different challenges than immigrants today.

In the 1800's, the journey to America was dangerous and expensive. Most people traveled by boat. Many people became ill or died on their way. Once they made it to America, they faced discrimination and difficulty finding jobs. Gaining citizenship was a relatively simple process. People wishing to become US citizens would swear their intent in a local court of record, and after a waiting period (usually 2-5 years) they would reappear in the same court with 2 witnesses who could vouch for them. The prospective citizen would take the oath of allegiance before a judge, and officially become a US citizen.

Today, immigrants to the US arrive many different ways. Some people take planes, or boats, or even walk for days in dangerous conditions. Before traveling to the US, most people hoping to immigrate apply for a visa. A visa is a special paper or stamp that goes into your passport, saying that you are allowed to enter, leave, or live in that country for a certain amount of time. There are a limited number of visas available every year. If you have family already living in the US, you will likely be able to apply for a visa directly. 480,000 visas a year are available through this method. If you do not have family within the US, you will be entered in a lottery. Only 55,000 people a year are granted visas from this lottery. When they arrive, modern immigrants also face discrimination and trouble finding jobs.

Gaining citizenship is much more difficult today than it was in the 1800's. You must have legally lived in the US for at least 5 years. You must not have spent long stretches of time outside of the US during your time living here. You must be at least 18. You must be able to speak, read, and write English. You must pass a citizenship test. If you meet all the qualifications, and pass the citizenship test, you are eligible for citizenship. Then you must file paperwork to apply for your citizenship. As of 2017, it costs \$640 to file the application, plus an extra \$85 fee. Once your application has been accepted, you will be fingerprinted and go through an interview with a US Citizenship and Immigration Services officer. The interview will test your knowledge of English and of U.S. civics. If you are approved for citizenship after your interview, you will then take an oath of loyalty to the United States and finally become a citizen. It is much more complicated to become a US citizen today than it was in the 1800's.

# Citizenship Test

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Take this example of a modern US Citizenship Test. Would you be able to pass it?

1. What do the stripes on the American flag represent? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. What country did we fight during the Revolutionary War? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What are the three branches of our government? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. What did the Emancipation Proclamation do? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. What are the first ten amendments to the Constitution called? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Name one right guaranteed by the first amendment. \_\_\_\_\_

7. Who was the first President of the United States? \_\_\_\_\_

8. How many amendments are there to the Constitution? \_\_\_\_\_

9. How many states are there today? \_\_\_\_\_

10. What are the colors of the American flag and what does each symbolize? \_\_\_\_\_

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