



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1990 Volume V: American Family Portraits (Section II)

Irish Immigrant Families in Mid-Late 19th Century America

Guide for Curriculum Unit 90.05.07
by Mary K. Baba

My unit focuses on Irish immigrant families in 19th century America in order to illustrate the experiences of all immigrants and their families during this time period. The unit begins with an overview of immigration in general during the 19th century. We will talk about the numbers of people coming to America and the countries from which they were coming.

Next, the unit specifically addresses the Irish immigrants and their families. It includes looking at the reasons the people left Ireland (mainly the Potato Famine), the trip to America (primarily shipboard conditions), and the processing procedures for admittance into the country. Once the immigrants were admitted, most settled in urban areas and faced harsh living and working conditions, which are examined in the unit. We also look at the discrimination the immigrants had to deal with and relate it to more recent discrimination faced by other groups, especially black Americans.

The strategies in this unit include reading first-hand accounts of immigrants' lives through diaries, letters, ballads and songs. Photographs and drawings will be used extensively for student discussion and writing. Each student will also be required to imagine himself/herself as an Irish immigrant coming to America and describe his/her experiences, thoughts and feelings in a personal journal. There will also be opportunities for the students to learn about Irish culture through folktales, myths, legends, and Irish cooking.

(Recommended for U.S. History, grades 8-12)

Key Words

Family Life History Immigration American Irish

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