



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
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St. Patrick - Symbol of Irishness

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The United States is made up of many people from different lands who came searching for a better life of religious freedom in one way or another. Most of these were ethnic groups immigrating in masses who strove to become blended into the American melting pot but also held onto traditions that ultimately set them apart from others.

The catholic Irish Americans embraced the celebration of St. Patrick's day. It is a partly festive, partly religious holiday celebrated annually on March 17th. Each year church services are followed by parades and parties commemorating the life of their patron saint and his gift of Catholicism to Ireland. Most Americans know of the festive part and can identify the wearing of the green with Irish pride, music, dancing, songs, and heroes represented in the parades.

The public celebration of St. Patrick began in New Haven 157 years ago, although it is believed that many Irish immigrants celebrated amongst themselves well before that. As J. F. Watts has noted, "The public celebrations of the day, which began in 1842 have always been more than just marching, singing, and dancing. They have been in reality a chronicle of the lives and times of New Haven's Irish people, a history of their causes and concerns, their hopes and fears, their triumphs and failures."

The aim of this unit is to introduce students to the story of St. Patrick and the history of the Irish in America by exploring the history of New Haven's St. Patrick's Day parade.

(Recommended for History, grades 5-8.)

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