

Countries Around the World™

Ireland

Program Summary

Meet 10-year-old Jack. He and his family live in Limerick, a town in the south-western part of Ireland. Join Jack as he and his cousin Grainne leave their home and travel across the country to the capital city of Dublin, stopping periodically to investigate some of the country's many sites. Students will experience Irish folklore and rural life when Jack retells a Celtic myth on the shore of Lough Gur before exploring Bunratty Castle and visiting a traditional 19th-century Irish village to listen to tales told by a *seanchaí*, a traditional storyteller. Then, Jack and Grainne arrive in the town of Newgrange to explore an ancient burial mound, and visit a pony farm and a peat bog. When Jack finally arrives in Dublin, he introduces students to aspects of Ireland's government, history and contemporary culture when he watches a hurling match, wanders the library of Trinity College and pays a visit to the memorial commemorating the 19th-century potato famine.

Country Information

- **location:** Western Europe, occupying 5/6 of the island of Ireland in the North Atlantic Ocean, west of Great Britain. Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom.
- **capital:** Dublin
- **official languages:** English and Irish Gaelic
- **type of government:** republic, parliamentary democracy
- **total area:** approximately 70,280 sq km
- **climate:** temperate maritime, modified by North Atlantic Current, with mild winters and cool summers; consistently humid; overcast about half the time
- **terrain:** mostly level to rolling interior plain, surrounded by rugged hills and low mountains; sea cliffs on west coast
- **natural resources:** includes natural gas, peat, copper, lead, zinc, silver, barite, gypsum, limestone and dolomite
- **industries:** includes steel, lead, zinc, silver, aluminum, barite, gypsum mining and processing, food products, brewing, textiles, clothing, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, machinery, rail transportation equipment, passenger and commercial vehicles, ship construction, glass and crystal, software and tourism
- **agricultural products:** includes turnips, barley, potatoes, sugar beets, wheat, beef and dairy products

Vocabulary

Éire — The Gaelic name for Ireland.

Gaelic — Any of several related languages of the ancient Celts spoken mainly in Ireland and Scotland. Both Gaelic and English are spoken in Ireland today.

Celtic — Referring to the Celts, members of an Indo-European people from whom the Irish are descended.

scone — A small, light biscuit made from oatmeal, wheat flour, barley meal, or other similar ingredients.

seanchaí — Also *seanachai*. A traditional Irish storyteller.

tumulus — A grave mound made from either stones or earth.

peat — An organic material made primarily from partially decayed plant matter found in marshy or damp regions, called bogs. It can be dried and used as fuel.

hurling — A traditional Irish game resembling field hockey, played by two teams of 15 players each.

European Union (EU) — A family of democratic European countries that are committed to working together for peace and prosperity. Ireland is a member of the European Union.

euro — The currency of Ireland and several other nations of the European Union.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Provide students with an outline map of Western Europe. Have students locate and label Ireland, its capital and neighboring countries. Ask students questions such as: In which body of water is Ireland located? Which countries are closest to Ireland? What do you think the climate and people of Ireland are like, based on its location?
- Ireland has a long been known for its tradition of telling stories about supernatural beings and mythic heroes. Lead a discussion about legends and folklore and their importance to culture. What is the purpose of myths and legends? How do they reflect the culture of the people who produced them? What are examples of myths and legends in the United States?
- “Éirinn go Brách,” which is often expressed as “Erin go Bragh” in the United States, is a popular Irish phrase meaning “Ireland Forever.” Discuss with students the idea of national pride and what this saying might mean to Irish people living around the world. Have students come up with mottos that express the pride they have for their own community.

Follow-up Activities

- Ireland is famous for its many castles. Students can design their own castles similar to the ones found in Ireland. They can even build models of them for display in the classroom. Then, have each student invent a “history” for his or her castle (i.e., who lived there, battles and/or ceremonies that took place there, etc.) and share it with the class.
- Jack comes from the town of Limerick, and it is widely believed that's where the famous type of poem gets its name! Students will have fun writing their own limericks and sharing them with the class. For help on how to write a limerick, visit the following web site: www.gigglepoetry.com/poetryclass/limerickcontesthelp.html.
- In Ireland, tea-time is a popular tradition that continues today. Students will enjoy participating in an afternoon tea in the classroom. Allow them to sample the scones, breads and jams often associated with this practice and introduce them to the etiquette of tea-time as well. As an extension, students can host a tea-time with another class. Students can partake in the preparation of tea and scones. During the tea-time, students can share with their guests all of the things they have learned about Ireland.
- Ireland is well-known for its rich oral tradition. Share an Irish folktale with the class. A few folktales can be found at: www.darsie.net/talesofwonder/ireland/ireland.html. Consult the “Print Resources” section for vividly illustrated retellings of Irish tales. When finished, ask the students to respond to the story. What motifs were present in the tale? Is it a hero quest? A romantic tale? A humorous tale? Then, have students write their own versions of an Irish folktale or fairytale complete with illustrations. Encourage students to act as *seanchaí* and share their stories with the class. If possible, invite an Irish storyteller to come and address the class or attend a storyteller's festival.

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- Working in groups, students can pretend they are opening an Irish restaurant and create a menu featuring traditional Irish foods. Each member of the group should come up with a meal for breakfast, lunch, dinner and dessert. Instruct students that for each dish, they need to provide a name, a brief, descriptive caption, an illustration or picture of the food and the price. Have the students name their restaurant and construct a menu resembling one found in actual restaurants.
- It's common in Ireland to have family history represented on a coat of arms. Students can create their own coat of arms representing their families. For a detailed list of the meanings of traditional symbols and samples of coats of arms, visit: www.fleurdelis.com/meanings.htm.
- Hurling is an extremely popular sport in Ireland, but it's not well known in the United States. Working in small groups, have students investigate the rules and equipment associated with the sport. Then, students can create their own hurling teams by choosing an Irish city to represent, a team name and designs for the team's uniforms and equipment. Students will have fun writing a "fight song" for their team and role-playing as fans singing it at an important match. As a resource, visit: www.gaa.ie/page/all_about_hurling.html.
- The Irish Potato Famine was a period of great struggle and hardship in 19th-century Ireland. Many people died and many sought to escape Ireland by emigrating to other countries, such as the United States, Canada and Australia. Students can visit www.irishpotatofamine.org/ to learn more about this period of Irish history. The interactive website includes pictures, video reenactments and diary entries. To feel the impact of this event through the eyes of a child, share Patricia Reilly Giff's historical fiction novel, *Nory Ryan's Song* (Yearling, 2002).
- In the program, Jack and his cousin Grainne visit a reenactment of a 19th-century village without modern conveniences. Engage students in a discussion about what life would be like if they didn't have the benefit of technology, electricity, modern transportation, etc. How much technology is incorporated into your daily life? What would you miss the most? The least? How much would you have to change the way you live? Would anything stay the same?

Suggested Internet Resources

- www.irishcultureandcustoms.com/index.html
This comprehensive site features information about Irish culture and customs, including a monthly column called "Kids' Ireland," which presents Irish stories for children.
- www.irelandemb.org/index.html
Learn more about Ireland's culture, history, politics and economy from this site presented by the Embassy of Ireland in Washington, D.C.
- www.cia.gov
The CIA World Factbook web site presents detailed and up-to-date information on Ireland and many other countries. Topics include geography, people, government, economy, transportation and communication. On the main page of the CIA site, click on the "World Factbook" link.

Suggested Print Resources

- Blashfield, Jean. *Ireland*. Children's Press, Danbury, CT; 2002.
- Deady, Kathleen. *Ireland*. Capstone Press, Mankato, MN; 2006.
- Doyle, Malachy. *Tales from Old Ireland*. Barefoot Books, Cambridge, MA; 2006.
- Krull, Kathleen. *A Pot O' Gold: A Treasury of Irish Stories, Poetry, Folklore, and (of Course) Blarney*. Hyperion Books for Children, New York, NY; 2004.
- Talbot, Hudson. *O'Sullivan Stew*. Penguin Young Readers Group, New York, NY; 2001.

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