

## A HISTORY OF IRELAND IN 100 OBJECTS, A SELECTION 5TH & 6TH CLASS LESSON PLAN

### Daniel O'Connell's 'chariot' 1844



In September 1844, a man climbed up the steps of this splendid 'chariot' and settled himself into the seat. Six grey horses and driver drew him through the streets of Dublin and 220,000 people came out to cheer.

It must have been a great feeling to nod and smile and wave to those crowds.

But then, this was a man known and admired the length and breadth of the country: Daniel O'Connell.

He was being taken from what later became Griffith Barracks army jail (which is now an ordinary primary school) to his home on Merrion Square.

Daniel, together with his son John and others, had been sentenced to a year in prison but this sentence had been overturned or dismissed and they had all been released.

The 'chariot' was modelled on the magnificent chariots of ancient Rome. It was an amazing, showy, slightly mad affair: 3m high, with silk and wool upholstery and pictures along the side of shamrocks, a harp, a round tower and a wolfhound.

You don't really see cars like that nowadays. And you didn't really see carriages like that then.

But Daniel was famous. And he was famous because of his work for Catholic Emancipation. The Catholic religion is a form of Christianity, and most of the people of Ireland were Catholic at that time and also very poor.

A number of laws had made life hard for Catholics but, perhaps, the worst was the one barring them from becoming members of parliament.

Irish Catholics had no say in the running of their own country.

Daniel, himself a Catholic, had worked to change this. He had decided to force the issue by running for parliament himself, and he won a seat quite easily in Co. Clare. The British knew that if they barred Daniel from becoming a member of parliament, there would be outrage in Ireland. And Daniel knew this too. It was all part of his plan, and the plan worked.

Daniel was eventually allowed to take up his seat in parliament and, with that, Catholic Emancipation was won.

In fact, as a direct result of what Daniel did, people of other religions, for example Jews in Britain, earned the right to be represented in parliament.

Daniel became known as The Liberator and he now turned his energy towards repealing or dissolving the Act of Union, to make Ireland separate to Britain.

It was during his campaign to repeal the Act of Union that he was imprisoned and later released from Griffith Barracks.

But the campaign wasn't successful. The Act of Union was not repealed until much later.

That's not to say the campaign wasn't hugely important, however. One of the strategies that Daniel decided upon was to do something that had never been done before in Ireland. He organized mass meetings. And these weren't ordinary mass meetings. They were monster meetings, with tens of thousands of people attending.

So it's fair to say that Daniel got people really energized about politics. They began to feel that together they could make a difference; that together they could change things.

Daniel didn't confine himself to Irish issues, either. He was also involved in the campaign against American slavery. At one stage, he spoke at a meeting with Frederick Douglass, an ex-slave and anti-slavery activist, who came over to Ireland and Britain on a speaking tour in 1845. The two men were said to have been very influenced by each other.

But back to our 'chariot'. Sitting there, waving to the crowds on that September day in 1844, Daniel must have looked and felt like a king. And for over 20 years, that's exactly what he was: the uncrowned king of Ireland.