

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

### Reclining Buddha, Late-19th Century



This is known as the Reclining Buddha. The Buddha's name is Siddhartha Gautama and although he was born a prince, he spent his life living the 'Middle Way', neither rich nor poor.

Most Buddhists believe that when you die, you come back to life again as someone or something else. It's called reincarnation, and you do this again and again until you learn how to live life wisely. At this point, you enter Nirvana or Enlightenment, and you are free from all pain and suffering.

This Buddha is made from the finest marble, smooth, elegant and very expensive. But it wasn't made here in Ireland or in any country nearby.

This Buddha was made in Burma, a country thousands of miles away, in Asia. And it made its way into one of our museums because it was stolen and taken back here, sometime in the late 1880s, by an Irishman named Colonel Sir Charles Fitzgerald.

Britain, our nearest neighbour, was attempting to build a vast empire at the time. Ireland was part of that empire, but Irish people also worked for the British. Many fought in the British army while others made their living, also in the army, as doctors for the sick and injured. Some even became important officials, helping to set up British government in faraway countries.

In fact, when Britain became involved in a war, while trying to extend its empire into South Africa, 28,000 Irishmen fought on the British side.

This wonderful Buddha, stretched out with its head propped up on its elbow, is a reminder of the important role Irish people played in the British Empire.