

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

Emigrant's Teapot, Late-19th to Mid-20th Century



This is a teapot. A very sturdy teapot. A very durable teapot. Made by hand by a skilled tin-smith, this is a teapot that could, and probably did, take its fair share of knocks.

This teapot has definitely poured a lot of tea into a lot of cups.

And did you know that we are world record holders when it comes to drinking tea?

Now, there are bigger countries out there, with much bigger populations that may overall drink more tea than us, but that doesn't count. This world record is all about the amount of tea people in any one country drink, and we Irish drink about six or seven cups a day, which, you have to admit, is an awful lot of tea. Such an awful lot of tea that no other country on the entire planet even comes close.

So it's fair to say that we like our tea.

We like it so much that for generations we brought our teapot with us when we boarded ships for long voyages to faraway countries, like America.

In fact, this teapot is all about travelling. It was made by a Traveller for a start. A man named Mike Maughan from Galway. Mike was a highly-respected tin-smith who travelled from place to place, making and mending every day items like teapots, saucepans, lanterns, candle holders and milk-pans.

A lot of people packed teapots like this when they were heading to other countries, because a lot of people had no choice but to leave Ireland. More people left Ireland in the 11 years after the famine than in the 250 years before it. And the reason they left was that they were desperately hungry.

And people kept leaving, or, as it is more commonly known, emigrating. For years and years and years, they kept emigrating. Even when things got a little bit better, they kept emigrating. People weren't so desperately hungry anymore but they were still desperately poor, and they kept leaving because there was no work and no hope and because they heard that life was better in other countries.

Records even show that some children as young as 10 travelled on their own and arrived in strange, new countries alone. Can you imagine how scared and lonely those children felt? In fact, for over 100

years people kept leaving Ireland. It actually got to the stage where it was genuinely thought that there would soon be no Irish people left. Most would have moved away, and those still living in the country would simply die out.

Luckily that didn't happen, and we're all still here today!

But Mike's teapot tells a story. It's a story about hunger and poverty and the need for something ordinary and familiar when you find yourself in very strange and unfamiliar surroundings.

It's true that people still leave Ireland, and this can be very sad for the people who leave and for the people left behind. Nowadays emigrants probably don't pack a teapot for their flight to other countries. But they may well seek out a supermarket or café to buy their favourite tea when they get there. Or they might ring home and ask for it to be sent out to them as soon as possible.

Irish people didn't die out in the end, and in one particular way they didn't change that much either.