



Members of a Celtic group from Ft. Collins, Lalla Rookh, perform at the Otis Music Festival held in the music-rich town of Colorado's eastern plains. Photo by Georgia Wier (NE Colorado CCA Folklorist Collection at City of Greeley Museums).

Look for these icons for resources accessible on this website



**Audio**



**Video**



**Lesson Plan**

## St. Patrick's Day and the Irish

**Description:** Encourages students to draw on observational skills to begin to recognize certain Irish ethnic traditions: names, foods, music, holiday celebration.

**Grades:** 1-2

**Author:** Bea Roeder

**Materials Included:** Art, music and geography projects.  
Discussion questions.  
Recordings (accessible on this site or on cassette - see Resources Section for ordering information)  
*"Do Not Pass Me By"*  
*"A Calling Card for Friendship"*

**Materials Needed:** Shamrock, newsprint and crayons or paints, globe. Video "The Secret of Roan Inish." Irish foods or photos of foods. Irish guest (step dancer)

**Standards:** This activity can be used to address these Colorado Model Content Standards:  
**Geography: 1, 2, 4, 5**  
**History: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6**  
**Music: 4, 5**  
**Reading and Writing: 4, 5, 6**

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**Unit Goals**

- To explain why we celebrate St. Patrick's Day
- To introduce students to the concept of ethnic heritage
- To introduce students to Ireland and Irish history, particularly Irish emigration to the U.S.
- To give both the Irish and the potato as examples of the interconnections between people, places, and plants
- To explore a few of the different meanings the word "home" may have

**Standards: Geography 1, 2, 4, 5**

**Unit Description**

This unit is designed for St. Patrick's Day, March 17<sup>th</sup>. If possible, encourage students to attend the annual St. Patrick's Day parades (downtown Denver or in Colorado Springs, along West Colorado Blvd., between about 21<sup>st</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> streets), and to notice what may be different about this particular parade, if they have seen other parades. The parade is sometimes held the weekend before St. Patrick's Day.

This unit encourages students to draw on their observational skills to begin to recognize certain Irish ethnic traditions: names, foods, music, and a holiday. A resource page is provided to help teachers identify some Irish traditions. Students can then go home and try to learn a little about their own ethnic heritage. Where is one of their parents from? What is a holiday or family tradition that they used to celebrate as a child? Do they still celebrate it? If so, how? What does "home" mean to the child? To the parent? To a grandparent?

This unit is best done over two days, to allow time for children to interview a family member and share the information they gather about their heritage, and to learn from what others offer.

### Resources Needed



- Mary Casey and Pat Flanagan Irish music section on ***Do Not Pass Me By*** Volume I side B #4 and on ***A Calling Card for Friendship*** Volume I Side A #6 and 7.
- Shamrock
- Newsprint or other large paper and crayons or paints
- Video: *The Secret of Roan Inish*, 1993 by Skerry Movies Corp, 1995, Columbia Tristar home video. Segment of grandfather telling story of the skelkie, scenes showing sea, cottages, seals, and gulls. (May be available at your local video store.)
- Globe to locate United States and Ireland, show distance from Colorado and stress that Ireland is an island; the sea is an important part of "home" to the Irish.

### Additional Resources

If possible, Irish soda bread or photos of some Irish foods (film shows seaweed).

Irish guest: step dancer who can demonstrate and teach children a couple of steps; or someone from Ireland.

Contact your nearest local Irish club or pub to request a presenter or check out the websites listed under "Irish Resources" in the Resources section.

### Classroom Activities

Today, we'll do several things. We'll talk about why this day is special to the Irish. We'll find Ireland on the globe, so you know where it is and perhaps, where one of your ancestors came from. We'll listen to an Irish song. You'll get to draw or paint a picture, so listen for something that paints a picture in your mind. Then we'll watch a few minutes of a video and talk about what you learn from it. Finally, bring some Irish soda bread for students to taste (if available)!

### Guided Conversation

#### Ask Students

- What day is today? (St. Patrick's Day, March 17)
- What do you know about St. Patrick's Day?

#### Possible Responses

- **Wearin' o' the Green** - If you don't wear green, someone might pinch you; If you do wear green and someone pinches you, you can pinch them back, twice!
- **Shamrocks** are used in decorations. A shamrock is a three-leaf clover.
- **Many people eat corned beef and cabbage.** Corned means soaked in brine (salt water) to preserve it so it won't spoil; corn (like corn-on-the-cob) has nothing to do with it!
- **Irish soda bread** - some communities have bread baking contests. It's made with baking soda instead of yeast for leavening and has raisins, buttermilk, and flour in it.

### St. Patrick's Day Parade

Many cities in the United States have a St. Patrick's Day parade. Denver has a really big one with about 200 entries: floats, groups of Irish step dancers, and bands of bagpipers—and a covered wagon from Four Mile Historic Park pulled by a team of draft horses. The parade in New York City, which dates back to 1792, is the largest in the United States, and a major event for Irish-Americans. As many as 125,000 marchers participate, stopping at St. Patrick's Cathedral for the blessing of the archbishop of New York.



Floats such as this one help create the festive atmosphere of the annual St. Patrick's Day Parade in downtown Denver. Photo by Bea Roeder (Colorado Historical Society: MSS2450).

The Boston St. Patrick's Day parade is even older; it goes back to 1737. In fact, during the American Revolution, General George Washington besieged Boston and finally forced the British to evacuate on March 17, 1776. His secret password for the day was "Boston," and "St. Patrick" was the appropriate response. The oldest celebration may be in Savannah, Georgia, which boasts the oldest Irish society in the United States, the Hibernian Society, founded in 1812 by 13 Irish Protestants.

- How many of you have gone to a St. Patrick's Day parade? What was it like? Were any of you in the parade?

- What parts of the parade that you saw were Irish?

### Possible Responses

- Bagpipes (not just Scottish! Irish and Celtic peoples in northern Spain and coastal France also play bagpipes)
- Other Irish instruments: bodhran, Irish tin whistle, Irish harp
- Irish wolf hounds
- Step dancers: dances with names like jigs and hornpipes
- Did some of the men wear purses? Derby hats?
- Was there a float for St. Patrick?
- Was anyone dressed up as a leprechaun? Did the leprechaun have a pot of gold?

Leprechauns are “little people,” maybe two feet tall, often we see images of an old man making himself a pair of shoes called brogues, often wearing green and a hat. It is said that if you take your eyes off a leprechaun, he will disappear.

Names sometimes help identify someone as being Irish. What are some Irish names? (See Teachers' Resource Pages at the end of this essay.)

Who was St. Patrick? (Some terms in this description may need to be explained to students.) He was not even born in Ireland! Patrick was born around the year 390. He grew up along the coast in England, which at that time was part of the Roman Empire. His grandfather was a Christian priest. Remember, the Protestant Reformation didn't begin until the sixteenth century; during St. Patrick's lifetime,

all Christians were Catholic. Tensions between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland have caused many deaths on both sides.

Patrick's father was a deacon—a lay leader in the church—and an official of the Roman Empire who also had a farm. Patrick was captured by Irish raiders and sold into slavery in Ireland. He was bought by a minor king and made to tend sheep. He was hungry much of the time and often cold. He escaped after six years by simply walking away—but he had to walk nearly 200 miles to reach the coast. Then he got on a ship and went to a monastery on the European continent in Brittany. He must have been a very outstanding monk, because he was made a bishop, a leader of the church. Very soon after that, he returned to Ireland, about 432, as a missionary to the “pagans.”

Can you imagine going back to the people who captured you and held you as a slave, to try to teach them your religion? St. Patrick was a very loving and kind person. In fact, he was such an impressive and persuasive person that he is credited with almost single-handedly converting the Irish to Christianity. I say “almost” single-handedly, because he realized it was important to train some of the best leaders among the new Christians to become priests. He founded churches, monasteries, and convents. He is famous because he influenced so many people by his good example. He didn't need an army to threaten or force people; he convinced them he had something worth learning and doing in a peaceful way.

Note to teachers: Certainly, another side of this story exists from the viewpoint of the indigenous peoples of Ireland who practice the old religion, or paganism, and who were forced to conform to Christianity.

Divide large classes into three groups: one will draw a St. Patrick's Day picture or symbol (Activity 1); one will listen to the *Do Not Pass Me By* recording (Activity 2); and one will work together to find the state of Colorado, the country of Ireland, the continent of Europe, the city of Rome, and the region of the Andes on the globe (Activity 3). The groups switch activities until everyone has finished all three projects.

### St. Patrick's Day Art Project

Pass out paper and crayons or paints and brushes while offering ideas for a subject for art work. Remember: the purpose of this activity is to release the students' creative energies and help them process what they have heard. There are no "wrong" efforts here. Do not censor or criticize; encourage and create a warm, supportive atmosphere where even a shy child may feel safe to explore and express new ideas.

Suggest students draw something related to today, St. Patrick's Day. It might be a parade, or one thing they saw at the parade, St. Patrick, or something Irish. Some students may prefer to draw something from their own ethnic heritage; that's all right too.

We'll be talking about "home" and "homelands." Maybe a few students want to draw a picture of home. What makes a house become a home? In particular, the students' homes? Maybe a special person or pet? A favorite room or toy? A special tree or place in the yard or neighborhood?

### Irish Music



Now we'll listen to an Irish song. This is sung by Mary Casey, a woman who lives in Denver, and it will help you understand another reason Irish people came to the United States. (*Do Not Pass Me By* Volume I side B #4)

### First Verse

I have heard the neighbor singing  
her love song to the morn.  
I have seen the dew drop clinging  
To a rose, just newly born.

### Listening Questions

1. Where was Mary Casey born and raised? (Cork, on the southern coast of Ireland)
2. Who did she learn these songs from? (Her mother in Ireland)

Some songs are called ballads. A ballad is a song that tells a story, usually a sad story. "Kevin Barry" is called a political ballad. This means it was written to defend and promote one side of a political conflict by telling a sad story. This ballad was written by the Irish to tell how much they suffered under the rule of England. This song apparently was written before any Irish won their independence from England. Now, only Northern Ireland remains under English rule, while more of Ireland is independent. There is still much conflict in Ireland, and many people are killed every year by terrorists. Dublin, where Barry died, still suffers much violence.

A song is a poem set to music. Ask students to identify which words rhyme. What images does the song suggest? What does the singer hear? What does the singer see? What time of day is it?

3. Do you know who the "British" are? (People from England are sometimes called "English" and sometimes "British," because England, like Rome, created an empire, called Great Britain or the British Empire.)
4. How old was Kevin Barry when he was picked up by the British? (18 years old.)

# TIES THAT BIND

## Folk Arts Lesson Plan - St. Patrick's Day and the Irish

5. Why did the British police arrest him? (They suspected he was fighting for Irish independence.)

6. What happened to him? (He was tortured and then hung on the gallows, because he would not betray anyone else who may have been fighting against the British, for Irish independence.)

"The song tells about a young man who was arrested for political connections which he apparently did not have," Mary's husband explains. The song itself declares he was

Another martyr for old Ireland,  
another murder for the Crown  
whose brutal laws may crush the Irish  
but can't keep their spirit down.

. . .Lads like Barry will free Ireland;  
for her sake they live and die.



Now listen to another Irish musician. Pat Flanagan is a Denver Irishman and musician. (*A Calling Card for Friendship* Volume I Side A # 7; *Do Not Pass Me By* Volume I Side B #4) Ask the following questions about this selection:

- How old was Flanagan when his parents took him to Ireland? (Six years old) He learned many songs while there.
- What instrument does he play? (Accordion) He plays for caeli, Irish parties with live music, singing, and dancing. Many groups around Colorado hold a caeli every month.



Members of a Celtic group from Ft. Collins, Lalla Rookh, perform at the Otis Music Festival held in the music-rich town of Colorado's eastern plains. Photo by Georgia Wier (NE Colorado CCA Folklorist Collection at City of Greeley Museums).

### Geography of Colorado and Ireland

1. Let's find Ireland on the globe, so you know where it is and where some families' ancestors are from.

- How big is the earth that this globe represents? (23,000 miles in diameter)

2. Locate the United States and Colorado.

- How long does it take to walk across Colorado Springs? (All day, going 3-4 mph) Or your own town? (estimate the time)
- How long does it take to drive across Colorado? (All day, going 50-60 mph)
- Colorado is about 2,000 miles from the Atlantic Ocean.

3. Locate Ireland, Scotland, and Britain.

- What is Ireland like? (a relatively small island)



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- How far is it from Ireland to the United States?
- How long did it take the Titanic to cross the ocean? (It didn't; it sank.)
- Did you know the Titanic was built in Belfast, Ireland?
- For more research: How long did it take sailing ships to cross the ocean in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries?

4. When St. Patrick was alive, the British Isles were all part of the Roman Empire.

- Where is Rome?
- Point out the "boot" of Italy on the European continent.
- The British Isles are considered part of the continent of Europe. What continent do we live on?

5. Many Irish left Ireland during the potato famine in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

- Where does the potato come from? Andes of Peru, in the continent of South America.
- Why was the potato important for Ireland? It became the main crop of Ireland for many years. Then a blight killed Ireland's potatoes.
- Where do potatoes grow now? Peru, Ireland, Colorado, Idaho, and many other places. The San Luis Valley of Colorado grows many potatoes; it is a high mountain valley.

**Extra Geography Exercise**

Students who have already done the globe exercise may want to explore the relationships between different geographic entities. How might they illustrate one or several of the following?

**A city** Colorado Springs, Denver, Dublin, Rome, student's home town

**A state** Colorado, Idaho, student's or parent's home state

**A country** Ireland, Italy, Peru, the United States

**A region** a coastal area like the British Isles; a mountain region like the Andes or the Rocky Mountains

**A continent** North America, South America, Europe, or the continent student's ancestors emigrated from

**Video Learning Activity**

**The story:** We'll watch a little of a video and then talk about what you learn from it. In the video, a grandfather explains to his granddaughter why a certain small island is "home" to their family. Her cousin talks about an Irish legend about seals. A seal that can turn itself into a woman (compare other legends about mermaids) is called a selkie, and this family believes that one of their ancestors was a selkie, and that this ancestry explains an occasional dark-haired child with a strong love of the sea and unusual abilities as a fisherman.

### Watching and Listening

Some other words will be different, too. Listen carefully to the Irish “brogue,” or accent, to see what you can understand. The tarred canvas boat they use is called a “curragh.” The girl’s name is Fiona.

Look carefully at the scenery. What is Ireland like? How is it different from Colorado?

Pay attention to the house they live in, and the cottages they used to live in. Do you think the word “home” means the same thing to this little girl as it does to you?

Homework! Ask a parent or grandparent or family member to describe the home they grew up in. Here are some sample interview questions, but students may suggest others:

- If you lived in more than one house as a child, which do you consider “home”?
- Where was it? (city or country, Colorado or some other place?) Is this place an important part of your early memories? If so, describe what you remember of it.
- What people were part of your family when you were growing up? (This might be a parent or grandparent or several generations of assorted aunts, uncles, and cousins) Irish families tend to include all of the latter.
- What family activities do you remember as most fun? Most common?

### Group Discussion

On the second day, allow students to describe the home someone in their family described. Discuss how it compares with the students’ current homes. How have times changed? Do families seem to be the same size?

Drama Project: Form groups of five or six to play a family. Have several props available and allow each group to select one: maybe a tool—broom, iron, hammer, firewood, apron, rolling pin—or toy, like a ball, deck of cards, or jump rope.

Each group will discuss both their “older generation’s” homes and their own, and select one to portray. Teacher may wish to assign each group a type of family: older or contemporary, positive or dysfunctional, large or small. After each skit, larger group may discuss both the positive and negative aspects of each “family” presented.

### Some Aspects To Consider

- What holds a family together?
- How can family members offer each other support and encouragement?
- What roles do different members of a real family take on? Who works, shops, cleans, takes care of a sick person, plays with young children, repairs things that break down, makes or buys clothing?
- Do material goods really matter?
- Are relationships more important? If so, do family members spend enough time with each other, concentrating on each other’s needs to build a healthy family?
- Do you let your family know what’s really important to you?

## Teacher's Resources Pages

## Irish Americans

- Beginning in pagan Celtic times and continuing in Christianity, the Irish seem to have a blessing for every occasion: for waking in the morning, lighting the hearth fire, and going to sleep. Here are a couple of Irish blessings:

"May you be in heaven a half-hour before the devil knows you're dead."

"May the road rise up to meet you and the wind be always at your back."

- In the 1990 census, one out of six Americans identified themselves as having some Irish ancestry. The Irish were some of the first immigrants to the United States, beginning before Independence. During the 1630s-1650s, there was extraordinary political upheaval in Ireland, due to the British invasion. Many Irish refugees were shipped to work as servants on American plantations.

- The Irish potato famine led to extensive emigration from the 1820s-1850s. Note an interesting interplay here: the potato is an American vegetable native to the Andean highlands of Peru. It adapted well to Ireland's rocky soils, but blight struck and wiped out most of the harvest for several years in a row. (PBS has a fine three-part documentary on this period and the subsequent experiences of Irish in America.) Many Irish starved to death; many emigrated. Two million Irish arrived during the potato famine, between 1840 and 1860. In 1850, 26% of New York's population had been born in Ireland.

- Andrew Jackson was the first Irish American president. The term "hillbilly" was coined to refer to Appalachian Ulster Irish, whose folk songs celebrated "King Billy," William of Orange, a Protestant Irish hero who defeated Catholic James II in 1690. (Ulster is the name of an ancient kingdom in ancient Ireland. Later, it became a province with nine counties, three of which, in 1921, joined what is now the independent Republic of Ireland; the other six remain under Great Britain in Northern Ireland.)

- Irish immigrants had a primary influence on Southern and mountain culture: traditional music, especially Irish jigs, hornpipes, and reels inform bluegrass.

- "When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again" is a cheerful reworking of the mournful Irish folk song, "Johnny I Hardly Knew Ye."

- Irish-Americans were a significant portion of the U.S. frontier troops. The lively Irish jig "Garryowen" became the stirring march, 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry theme. They also distinguished themselves during the Civil War.

- Irish Catholics were not well received by WASP Americans. "Scotch-Irish" came to mean Protestant Irish. Job ads often included the phrase, "No Irish Need Apply." However, Irish immigrants found work building canals, railroads, and in mines, and some came West. After the terrible years of the potato famine, most avoided farming as a way of life. They tend to cluster near the sea, as in New York and Boston, because the sea brought memories of their homeland.

- Seven hundred thousand young single women came to the U.S. from Ireland to work as domestic servants between 1885 and 1925. Many sent part of their earnings home to help their families and to help pay passage for another family member to come to the United States. The Irish perfected the urban political “machine” and elected legendary mayors, such as Richard Daly of Chicago.

- Some Irish names you may recognize:

Bono, lead singer of the Dublin-based rock group, U2

John F. Kennedy

Grace Kelly

Pat and Mike jokes

The fighting Irish (Notre Dame)

“I’ll take you home again Kathleen” and

“When Irish eyes are smiling” (songs)

- Belief: A four-leafed clover discovered on St. Patrick’s Day will bring good luck all year!

- The Titanic was built in Ireland. Belfast is known for its large shipyards; at one time, it was the leading shipbuilder. This was in part due to the demand for Ireland’s linens, especially during the American Civil War, when northerners blockaded the south and prevented the export of cotton. Once again, note how intertwined Ireland’s fate has been with affairs in crops from the New World.

- Many Irish political prisoners were sent by the British—to relieve their overcrowded jails—to both the American colonies and to new penal colonies in Australia.