

Commemorate Canada - Irish Migration to Canada

Overview:

The purpose of this activity is to provide students with a better understanding of the factors that led to the migration of tens of thousands of Irish citizens to Canada in the late 1840s and the challenges they faced during the journey and after arriving at Grosse Île.

Time:

90 mins (can be divided)

Subject/topic:

History, Geography, Social studies

Grade:

7-10

Materials:

- Print or digital copies of **Grosse Île: Canada's quarantine island** by Patrick Taylor in the March/April 2022 issue of *Canadian Geographic* (page 23)
- GeoMinute: **The Irish Potato Famine and immigration to Canada**
- **Grosse Île, where the past comes alive** by Parks Canada
- A projector, SMART board, or another way of sharing the article and video
- Devices with internet access for research
- Paper
- Writing utensils
- Art supplies

Learning goals

- Understand the various reasons for the mass migration of Irish citizens to Canada in 1847.
- Learn the unique history of Canada's quarantine island, Grosse Île.
- Appreciate the difficulties faced by immigrants during their journey and after arrival as well as the challenges of those working on Grosse Île.

Lesson Description

Minds on:

Students will read the *Canadian Geographic* article **Grosse Île: Canada's quarantine island** by Patrick Taylor and discuss the causes of the mass emigration from Ireland to Canada in the 1840s and the significance of Grosse Île.

Action:

Students will deepen their understanding of this mass migration by creating three fictionalized diary entries from the perspective of an Irish citizen immigrating to Canada in 1847.

Conclusion:

Students will share what they learned in creating their diary entries and have a discussion about the historical significance of this mass migration.

Lesson Implementation

Minds on

Explain to students that they will be learning about the mass migration of a large number of people from one country to another. Ask them if they are familiar with the terms immigration and emigration and if they can identify how these two terms differ from one another.

- Immigration refers to the action of permanently moving to a different country.
- Emigration refers to the action of permanently leaving one's home country.

Over the course of human history, instances of mass migrations have occurred in regions all around the world. One migration of significance to Canada and its multicultural history is that of the Irish immigration to Canada in the late 1840s.

Individually, in groups, or as a class, read **Grosse Île: Canada's quarantine island** by Patrick Taylor from the March/April 2022 issue of *Canadian Geographic* (page 23). In addition, teachers can show the *Canadian Geographic* GeoMinute **The Irish Potato Famine and immigration to Canada**. Open a discussion with students using the following questions:

- What factors led to Irish mass immigration to Canada in 1847?
- Why was Grosse Île chosen as a quarantine island?
- Why did Grosse Île initially fail as a quarantine island?

Option: Divide students into groups and distribute one question to each group. Groups can discuss and then share their answers with the class.

Individually, in groups, or as a class, have students watch the video, **Grosse Île, where the past comes alive**. Have a discussion about what students believe is the significance of the different images in the video. *The woman is looking at pictures; who could they be? Perhaps family members she left in Ireland or perhaps ones who have passed? What do you think the different rooms and buildings were used for and why? What is the significance of the names and why do you think they are on display?*

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Connection to the Canadian Geography Framework:

Concepts of Geographic Thinking

- Spatial significance
- Patterns and trends
- Interrelationships
- Geographic perspective

Inquiry Process

- Ask geographic questions
- Acquire geographic resources
- Interpret and analyze
- Evaluate and draw conclusions
- Communicate
- Reflect and respond

Geospatial Skills

N/A

Action

Now that students understand why so many Irish immigrated to Canada during the late 1840s and what the conditions were like during their voyage to Grosse Île and the conditions on the island itself, they will have the opportunity to step into the life of an Irish immigrant.

Students will be creating a minimum of three diary entries from the perspective of someone emigrating from Ireland to Canada in 1847, landing at Grosse Île. Students can use the [Canadian Geographic](#) article, the [Irish Memorial National Historic Site](#) and the GeoMinute [The Irish Potato Famine and immigration to Canada](#) to help them in their research. If there is time for a more in-depth project, students can do further research and write lengthier diary entries.

To direct students' writing, ask them to think about the following for their character: name, age, occupation, marital status, and if they are traveling alone. Suggest the following topics for the entries:

Entry 1: Why I had to leave Ireland.

Entry 2: The boat ride from Ireland to Canada.

Entry 3: Arrival and subsequent days/weeks on the Grosse Île.

Students should ensure the information included in their entries is historically accurate, using the above suggestions for sources. Suggest that each entry should include a minimum of two historical facts about the Irish mass migration. In addition to the written entries, students can include poems, drawings, maps, etc.

Teachers should note that the topic of emigrating and difficult journeys may be a sensitive topic for some students. Please adapt requirements and the activity as necessary, for example, having students create a timeline of the emigration instead.

Conclusion and Consolidation

Have student volunteers share their diary entries. Lead a discussion about any emotions that arose while creating their entries. Ask students about how this activity changed their perspective on immigration, in particular the Irish mass migration in the 1840s. Guide discussion using the following questions:

- How might Canada look different if this mass migration did not happen?
- How might Ireland look different if this mass migration did not happen?
- Why is immigration important to Canada and the Canadian identity?

To conclude, have a discussion about the factors that cause, are causing, and/or might cause mass migration. Consider historical and present-day examples.

Extend your geographical thinking

- Research another mass migration in history or explore current migrations of people.
- Explore Grosse Île using [Google Earth](#) to visit the different locations discussed during the lesson.
- Visit the [Irish Memorial National Historic Site](#) website and plan a trip.
- Take a [virtual trip to Grosse Île](#) to learn about the science and immigration history of the island.



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Modifications

- The number of diary entries can be decreased or increased.
- The amount of detail required in the entries can be increased or decreased.
- Instead of a diary entry, students can perform a skit or interpretive dance, or create a piece of art to communicate the information.
- Instead of a diary, students can create a timeline of an Irish immigrant's journey to Canada in 1847.

Assessment Opportunities

- Assess students' answers through the discussions and presentations.
- Assess students' completed diaries.
- Students can exchange diaries and offer feedback.

Sources and additional resources

- The Canadian Encyclopedia: Grosse Île
- Grosse Île: Canada's quarantine Island, *Canadian Geographic*, March/April 2022
- Grosse Île and the Irish Memorial National Historic Site
- Grosse Île, where the past comes alive by Parks Canada
- Irish Central: When 40 Irish Famine ships anchored at Grosse Île quarantine station in 1847
- The Irish Potato Famine and immigration to Canada, *Canadian Geographic* GeoMinute
- National Library of Medicine: Quarantine at Grosse Île