



Celebrating the Green: The History of St. Patrick's Day

Educator's Guide

Each year on March 17th, a sea of green sweeps up New York's Fifth Avenue in the largest St. Patrick's Day parade in the nation. On the other side of the Atlantic, towns throughout Ireland honor the man who brought Christianity to the Emerald Isle with feasts and festivals. With its roots in Ireland, this documentary explores the ways the celebration of this holiday revealed the friction between the Irish and the British. Despite the prominence of these celebrations, many students are unaware of how and why this holiday has grown in appeal.

Celebrating the Green: The History of St. Patrick's Day explores how Irish immigrants in America transformed a religious festival into a celebration of all things Irish.

This one hour program draws upon the commentary of historians, archival footage, and primary sources to recount the evolution of St. Patrick's Day. In the 235 years since the first small St. Patrick's Day parade in New York, Irish immigrants in America have seen this day as an opportunity to celebrate their heritage. But as it developed, this holiday became and continues to be nationwide phenomenon as Americans don green and participate in parades throughout the country each year. Providing insights into the meaning and history of this holiday, this documentary presents an excellent opportunity for classroom discussions of U.S. immigration history. Educators can use this program to spark discussions about how holidays are made and transformed, and the dynamics of ethnic identity in the contemporary United States.

Curriculum Links:

Celebrating the Green: The History of St. Patrick's Day would be useful for History, American Culture, Social Studies, and Current Events courses. It is a great companion for events and activities related to St. Patrick's Day. It is appropriate for middle school and high school. It fulfills the following standards as outlined by the National Council for History Education: (1) Patterns of social and political interaction and (2) Civilization, cultural diffusion, and innovation.

Objectives:

Students will examine the origins of the feast day as well as the cultural message of the holiday. They will also learn the political implications of St. Patrick's Day in respect to centuries-old turmoil between the Irish and the British regarding Irish colonization.

Vocabulary:

Ask students to define the terms below using a dictionary; students may also want to make their own lists of vocabulary words to define as they are watchign this program.

- indelibly
- lucrative
- metaphor
- paraphernalia
- patron
- pilgrimage
- pinnacle
- relish
- solace

Discussion Questions:

1. Some have said that St. Patrick's Day causes boundaries to come down. What does this mean? How does the holiday eliminate boundaries?
2. Discuss how the traditions of St. Patrick's Day are a mixture of the Old World and the New World.
3. Patrick was born into a wealthy family of the Roman Empire. How did this privileged youth become a religious man?
4. Discuss how St. Patrick attracted followers to Christianity by incorporating local customs with Christianity.
5. St. Patrick's Day is associated with feasting and revelry. What are the origins of these celebrations?
6. Corned beef and cabbage is the traditional dinner for St. Patrick's Day. How and where did this tradition begin?
7. Describe the custom of 'drowning the shamrock.'
8. Discuss how St. Patrick's Day is a combination of Christian, Pagan and Gaelic traditions.
9. What is the political symbolism of the shamrock?
10. How did the St. Patrick Day celebrations come to America? Why do you think this holiday is still so popular today?

Extended Activities:

1. Cartoons are a time-honored tradition in American politics. Ask students to draw a political cartoon that illustrates the power of the Democratic 'Green Machine.'
2. At the library or online, ask students to locate photographs from past St. Patrick's Day parades and write a short essay about where and when the photograph dates from and its historical context.
3. In small groups or individually, ask students to create a poster or broadside celebrating St. Patrick's Day.

Books:

Lee, J.J. and Marion Casey. Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States. (New York University Press, 2007.) (For Educators and High School Students)

Jacobson, Matthew Frye. Special Sorrows: The Diasporic Imagination of Irish, Polish, and Jewish Immigrants in the United States. (Harvard University Press, 1995.) (For Educators)

Miller, Kerby. Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America. (Oxford University Press, 1988). (For Educators)

Pingry, Patricia A. The Story of Saint Patrick's Day. (Candy Cane Press, 2002). (For elementary school readers)

Websites:

HISTORY(tm) St. Patrick's Day site:

<http://www.history.com/content/stpatricksday>

BBC St. Patrick's Day page:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/saints/patrick_1.shtml