

The Blight Bites

The Irish Potato Famine

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In selecting a History Day topic, our group first considered the Puget Sound War, which was a battle between the Suquamish and other surrounding tribes. It seemed perfect, considering it was local. We soon changed our minds, however, when we found that there were not enough primary resources, and no one in our class had heard of the Puget Sound War. We changed our topic to Irish immigration, which was too broad of a topic, so we shortened it to the Irish Potato Famine during the period of four years: 1845 to 1849. This new topic fit the History Day theme of Conflict and Compromise, the famine and blight being the conflict and immigrating to a new country, America, the compromise.

We conducted our research first by concentrating on Internet resources. We found multiple primary resources, such as newspaper articles and political documents. We then divided and conquered the work: one person researched books and took notes on them, for example, while another found primary resources on the Internet and also took notes. After that, we banded together with all of our information and started focusing on narrowed-down topics. To end our research, we narrowed down the information further, keeping in mind the format we intended to use on our website. We could not use every source we found or every story on every immigrant, but we kept the crucial information about the famine and some of the more interesting facts.

We selected our presentation category for History Day by looking at all of the categories. A website seemed fun to us because we all had some experience with computers. The thought of including information—interesting facts, timelines, conflicts and resolutions—on a website people could access was very appealing. We had ideas about creating an exhibit, but none of them seemed as good as the website.

Our project on the Irish Potato Famine relates to the National History Day theme because it has conflict and compromise. The most obvious conflict was man versus nature: the struggle the Irish faced fighting the effects of the potato blight. There was also a deeper political conflict with the English. The English refused to help the Irish, saying that they had brought the blight on themselves. The political situation in Ireland created more conflict as many were faced with the decision of leaving their homeland and emigrating to America. The English compromised in the end and gave the Irish food because they were pleased that the Irish population had decreased. The English believed that it was sacrilegious that the Irish's population was increasing so rapidly, and they were threatened by growing political unrest among the Irish. They considered Ireland to be of no threat any longer and decided to help them onto their feet, but it was too late. Ultimately, more than 4,000,000 Irish died or emigrated during the famine.