*Cultural Transformations in Irish Folklore*

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| **Introduction** | |
| This long, naturally formed branch of wood is called a shillelagh *(shil-AY-lee)*. A shillelagh is an Irish tool which functions as a walking stick, dueling weapon, and club all in one. They are designed to be lightweight for walking, but sturdy enough to withstand a duel. Shillelaghs are polished from one solid piece of wood. Owners hold onto the straight end and strike with the hooked knob.  Shillelaghs have a history in Ireland going back at least a thousand years. Shillelagh duels, much like sword or pistol duels in other parts of Europe, had a specific code of conduct. However, unlike other forms of dueling, shillelagh “duels” often evolved into full combat between clans, during which all participants needed to obey the code rules. The shillelagh was considered an honorable weapon as much as a practical tool. When Great Britain took control of Irish lands and banned the use of weapons for Irish subjects, these “walking sticks” became a form of resistance against the British. Their continued use as walking sticks allowed Irishmen to carry them openly, but they could double function as cudgels at a moment’s notice.  Many aspects of Irish life, from politics to agriculture and language, were repressed or banned by Great Britain during over eight centuries of English control over the region. As a result, many national traditions have become extremely endangered, or have died out entirely. However, recent generations have taken an interest in not just preserving but actively reviving these practices. This includes creating and promoting a Gaelic-only BBC channel, providing economic support for traditional Irish businesses and farms, and teaching more students the art of Irish handicrafts like shillelagh-making. The most recent conflict between Ireland and the United Kingdom, called The Troubles, ran from about 1968 to 1998. | |
| **Indiana Standards Connections:**  **6.1.19** *Analyze cause-and-effect relationships, keeping in mind multiple causations, including the importance of individuals, ideas, human interests, beliefs and chance in history.*  **6.1.20** *Differentiate between fact and interpretation in historical accounts and explain the meaning of historical passages by identifying who was involved, what happened, where it happened, and relating them to outcomes that followed and gaps in the historical record.*  **6.1.22** *Identify issues related to an historical event in Europe or the Americas and give basic arguments for and against that issue utilizing the perspectives, interests and values of those involved.* ***Examples:*** *The role of women in different time periods, decline of ancient civilizations, and attitudes toward human rights*  **6.1.24** *Identify individuals, beliefs, and events that represent various political ideologies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and explain their significance.*   * ***Examples:*** *liberalism, conservatism, nationalism, socialism, communism, fascism, popular sovereignty* | **Compelling Question(s):**   * What are the uses of the shillelagh? * What made the shillelagh an effective tool for both walking and self-defense? * What does the shillelagh represent in terms of Irish culture and resilience? |
| **Lesson Objectives:**  Students will learn about Irish culture and history through object-based learning strategies, focusing on the Shillelagh as a symbol of resistance. Students will explore how the shillelagh transformed from a tool to a symbol of resistance and honor. They will identify the role of national identity and tradition in the face of imperialism. They will connect the shillelagh to broader global historical themes, such as resistance movements and cultural preservation. | |
| **Materials** | |
| **History & Folklore**  [Shillelaghmaking- YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5oHuGzi0IqA)  [Irish Stick Fighting (Bataireacht) & Blackthorn- YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqYjjCcEEDQ)  [Walking Sticks Information- Olde Shillelagh](https://www.oldeshillelagh.com/store)  [History of the Shillelagh- Timeless Irish Treasures](https://timelessirishtreasures.com/pages/history-of-the-shillelagh)  **The Troubles**  [The Troubles Video Series YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLolzHiCNNbO9qRP9zsn739nR0VuEaGMBw)  [Understanding Northern Ireland’s ‘Troubles'](https://education.cfr.org/learn/reading/understanding-northern-irelands-troubles)  [What You Need to Know About the Torubles- Imperial War Museums](https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-troubles)  **Reading Resources**  [Shillelagh: The Irish Fighting Stick- Google Books](https://books.google.com/books?id=ZrFMHmsMmWAC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)  [Bataireacht: The ancient Irish martial art making a comeback- BBC](https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20221016-bataireacht-the-ancient-irish-martial-art-making-a-comeback)  [The stick is king: the Shillelagh Bata or the rediscovery of a living Irish martial tradition](https://web.archive.org/web/20120302040109/http://www.freifechter.com/files/stick_edited.pdf)  **Museum Collections**  [Cane- The MET](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/155768)  [Shillelagh- W2W Website](https://w2w.indiana.edu/explore-collections/shillelagh.html) | |
| **Learning Plan** | |
| **Activities**  **Introduction & Historical Context:**   1. Introduce students to the Irish walking stick or [Shillelagh](https://w2w.indiana.edu/explore-collections/shillelagh.html) and explain its origins in Ireland. Use the resources provided above and other [museum collections](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/155768) to show more examples of this type of object. Ask students their impression of the object, what do they think it is used for? What is it made of? Who would use the object? What culture group does it belong to? Do other cultures use similar objects? If yes, in what ways are the other culture's walking sticks different? 2. Watch [Shillelaghmaking- YouTube.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5oHuGzi0IqA) This video shows the process of crafting a shillelagh and provides important cultural information on Irish folklore, its elaboration process as well as the cultural significance of blackthorn wood used to craft the shillelagh. 3. After reading and watching the resources provided above in the materials section, describe the shillelagh's dual purpose as both a walking stick and as a weapon used in duels. Discuss how shillelaghs were part of Irish resistance during British rule. When the British banned weapons for the Irish people, the shillelagh served as a hidden weapon for self-defense, masked as a walking stick. Briefly explain how the shillelagh remains part of Irish culture today, including its revival in modern times.   **Participation:**  Ask students to fill out the table as shown below to classify the information learned in the lesson. The table is divided into two columns. On the left side, the object’s social function is stated. On the right side, the students will describe the object’s function with the information discussed in class. Encourage students to write their ideas in short and complete sentences. This activity can be done in small groups or as a class activity. If done in small groups, each group can be responsible for filling out a section of the table and then presenting their answer in front of the class. If done as a class activity, each student should participate in the discussion and fill out the table with the teacher.  **Final reflections:**  Encourage students to reflect and discuss these questions:  Think about the multiple meanings this Irish walking stick has:   * What are some of the historical events that has led to the creation and accumulation of new meanings of the walking stick in Ireland? * How do tools (material culture) and traditions like the shillelagh help preserve a culture and its history? * Encourage them to think about other objects or symbols in their own cultures that have multiple meanings and uses. | |
| **Assessment Suggestions**  Students will discuss how an object’s use can transform through history, acquiring more uses and meanings as the users modify it to meet their needs. itself based on the user’s needs. Emphasize that objects can have multiple meanings without erasing their original intended use or meaning. | |
| **Extensions**  Students can do outside research on other objects that have transformed from their initial intended use to become resistance symbols, such is the case of cooking pots used in many Latin American protests ([Cazerolazo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cacerolazo)) , umbrellas as used in [2014 in Hong Kong,](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014_Hong_Kong_protests) or the [Palestinian Keffiyeh.](https://kufiya.org/what-does-the-palestinian-keffiyeh-symbolize/) | |

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| **Social function** | **Cultural explanation** |
| **Irish Fighting Stick** | Also called *bataireacht*, it was used in Irish martial arts to fight English oppressors or to settle disputes, brawls, or confrontation among Irish people. This martial art followed specific rules and coded systems for personal defense similar to other martial arts. |
| **Irish folklore** | In Irish folklore, the shillelagh is imbued with mystical and symbolic meaning as the wood used to make them is grown in mounds that are associated with fairies. Blackthorn was believed to possess magical powers, with stories telling of shillelaghs that could summon rain or even grant strength in battle. Some folktales describe its protective nature and associated practices and rituals to activate this power. |
| **Walking stick** | The sturdy nature of blackthorn wood ensured durability, and its weight offered stability for walking, especially in rough rural terrain.  They have been altered to function as weapons and pass them off as walking sticks. This covert meaning was only known by the Irish population to protect their integrity from the British threat. People used it as a walking stick in public, but it could quickly be transformed into a weapon if needed. In this way, the shillelagh became a practical and symbolic tool for Irish people to resist British control and to protect their culture, traditions, and honor. |
| **Resistance symbol against the British** | Shillelaghs have long been used as weapons, particularly during times of social unrest. In the 18th century, during farmer rebellions against the oppressive demands of their landlords, they were wielded by working-class rebels who refused to pay exorbitant tithes. During British rule, when the Irish were forbidden to openly carry weapons, the shillelagh became a hidden symbol of resistance. People used it as a walking stick in public, but it could quickly be transformed into a weapon if needed. In this way, the shillelagh became a practical and symbolic tool for Irish people to resist British control and to protect their culture, traditions, and honor. |

Shillelagh Activity Possibilities

Some of the best opportunities for education are *integrative*—meaning that students are able to make connections across disciplines to reinforce the knowledge that they are developing. For example, they may be learning about Renaissance Italy in World Studies at the same time that they read Dante’s *Inferno* in English class while also studying Botticelli in Art. Feel free to combine and adapt some of the ideas across disciplines and standards to best suit your particular context. You can also collaborate with other teachers at your school or supplement the resources provided by contacting your librarian.

**Note: The following ideas are meant to give general guidance for teachers to include artifacts and other material culture in their classrooms. They are not meant to be treated as comprehensive activities or lessons that are one-size-fits-all for any classroom. They should be personalized to best fit the needs of a teacher’s individual context in accordance with prior student learning, student abilities, available resources, and any curricular guidance.**

**Art**

**Visual Arts – Responding:**

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| **Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work**  **Enduring Understanding: Individual aesthetic and empathetic awareness developed throughout engagement with art can lead to understanding and appreciation of self, others, the natural world, and constructed environments.**  **Essential Question(s): How do life experiences influence the way you relate to art? How does learning about art impact how we perceive the world? What can we learn from our responses to art?** | |
| **VA:Re7.1.1a** | Select and describe works of art that illustrate daily life experiences. |
| **VA:Re7.1.6a** | Identify and interpret works of art or design that reveal how people live around the world and what they value. |
| **VA:Re7.1.6a** | Identify and interpret works of art or design that reveal how people live around the world and what they value. |
| **VA:Re9.1.5a** | Appraise the impact of an artist or a group of artists on the beliefs, values, and behaviors of a society |
| **VA:Re7.1.Ia** | Hypothesize ways in which art influences perception and understanding of human experiences. |
| **VA:Re7.1.IIa** | Recognize and describe personal aesthetic and empathetic responses to the natural world and constructed environments |
| **VA:Re7.1.IIIa** | Analyze how responses to art develop over time based on knowledge of and experience with art and life |

**Visual Arts – Connecting:**

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| **Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.**  **Enduring Understanding: People develop ideas and understandings of society, culture, and history through their interactions with and analysis of art.**  **Essential Question(s): How does art help us understanding the lives of people of different times, places, and cultures? How is art used to impact the videos of a society> How does art preserve aspects of life?** | |
| **VA:Cn11.1.1a** | Understand that people from different places and times have made art for a variety of reasons. |
| **VA:Cn11.1.2a** | Compare and contrast cultural uses of artwork from different times and places. |
| **VA:Cn11.1.3a** | Recognize that responses to art change depending on knowledge of the time and place in which it was made |
| **VA:Cn11.1.4a** | Through observation, infer information about time, place, and culture in which a work of art was created. |
| **VA:Cn11.1.6a** | Analyze how art reflects changing times, traditions, resources, and cultural uses. |
| **VA:Cn11.1.7a** | Analyze how response to art is influenced by understanding the time and place in which it was created, the available resources, and cultural uses |
| **VA:Cn11.1.8a** | Distinguish different ways art is used to represent, establish, reinforce, and reflect group identity |
| **VA:Cn11.1.IIa** | Compare uses of art in a variety of social, cultural, and historical contexts and make connections to uses of art in contemporary and local contexts. |
| **VA:Cn11.1.IIIa** | Appraise the impact of an artist or a group of artists on the beliefs, values, and behaviors of a society. |

*Students can be asked to consider how art reflects time periods, beliefs, cultures, traditions, etc. In exploring the shillelagh or Irish walking stick, students are examining how items such as this transformed and acquired new meanings throughout history. Students could also explore the symbolism behind the objects' designs and motifs; if these modifications are functional or decorative; its cultural associations; how different cultures use art, artifacts, and props to demonstrate their interests, beliefs, and stature; how such items demonstrate social capital; etc. Students can discuss how other cultures with similar martial arts practices utilize fighting sticks and/or similar objects used to defend themselves such as the Mesoamerican macahuitl or the Māori taiaha.*

**Social Studies**

**Grade 6: History, Places, and Cultures in Europe and Americas**

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| **6.1.3** | ***Explain the impact of humans on the physical environment in Europe and the Americas.*** |
| **6.3.10** | *Explain the ways cultural diffusion, invention, and innovation change culture.* |
| **6.3.11** | *Differentiate between the terms anthropology, archaeology, and artifacts while explaining how these contribute to our understanding of societies in the present and the past.* |

**Ethnic Studies**

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| **ES.4.1** | *Students examine historical and contemporary economic, intellectual, social, cultural and political contributions to society by ethnic or racial group(s) or an individual within a group.* |

**Geography and History of the World**

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| **GHW.4.2** | *Use a variety of text (writing, maps, timelines and/or other graphic representations) to show the movement, spread and changes in the worldwide exchange of flora, fauna and pathogens that resulted from transoceanic voyages of exploration and exchanges between peoples in different regions. Assess the consequences of these encounters for the people and environments involved.* |
| **GHW.4.3** | *Identify and compare the main causes, players, and events of imperialism during different time periods. Examine the global extent of imperialism using a series of political maps.* |
| **GHW.4.4** | *Analyze and assess how the physical and human environments (including languages used) of places and regions changed as the result of differing imperialist and colonial policies.* |

**World History and Civilization**

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| **WH.7.3** | *Investigate and interpret multiple causation in analyzing historical actions and analyze cause-and-effect relationships.* |
| **WH.7.6** | *Formulate and present a position or course of action on an issue by examining the underlying factors contributing to that issue and support that position.* |

*Outside of the 6th and 7th grade Indiana standards, the exploration regarding how imperialism has led to an impact on other cultures and environments. Students should be able to examine the role of human environment interaction involved in the development of such items as the shillelagh included in this lesson. There’s room for them to make connections to contemporary issues that are similar to and a consequence of this result of imperialism.*

**Language Arts**

**Writing Skills:**

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| **4.W.5** | **Conduct short research on a topic.**   * **Identify a specific question to address (e.g., What is the history of the Indy 500?).** * **Use organizational features of print and digital sources to efficiently locate further information.** * **Determine the reliability of the sources.** * **Summarize and organize information in their own words, giving credit to the source** * **Present the research information, choosing from a variety of formats.** |
| **5.W.5** | Conduct short research assignments and tasks on a topic.   * With support, formulate a research question (e.g., What were John Wooden’s greatest contributions to college basketball?). * Identify and acquire information through reliable primary and secondary sources. * Summarize and paraphrase important ideas and supporting details, and include direct quotations where appropriate, citing the source of information. * Avoid plagiarism and follow copyright guidelines for use of images, pictures, etc. * Present the research information, choosing from a variety of sources. |

*Students could conduct research projects in which they examine examples of other objects utilized for other purposes other than their original intended function. They can reflect on the object’s transformations and modifications and how social movements, and their historical contexts influence their transformations.*