



HERITAGES OF HUNGER LEARNING PROGRAMME



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This learning programme is a product of the Heritages of Hunger research project, funded by the Dutch Research Council NWO.

Heritages of Hunger investigates the enduring legacies and heritage of historical European famines to foster mutual understanding among communities by creating awareness of shared pasts.

Across six thematic modules, this resource introduces learners to key aspects of famine and its legacies: the causes and political contexts of hunger, its social and political impacts, responses to food crisis, and the ways famine is – or isn't – remembered today.

This learning programme is based on the findings and materials developed during the Heritages of Hunger project. The European focus of the project has defined the scope of this resource, though instructive examples from other past and present famines have also been included.



HOW TO USE THIS LEARNING PROGRAMME

The Heritages of Hunger Learning Programme offers six modules (12 lessons) which can be delivered either in their totality as part of an extended learning programme, or as discrete standalone lessons, or series of lessons, in any combination.

Each lesson is designed to be deliverable in a single session, but offers flexibility for in-depth focus, discussion and activity that allows for longer consideration and exploration of key

Neither the project nor this learning programme are exhaustive: not all famines that occurred in Europe's recent past have been included, nor is every aspect of each famine covered. But while the case studies offered here mainly focus on Europe, the themes it covers are widely applicable. Above all, this resource aims to show that the experience of famine is something that goes beyond national borders and national histories. Its impacts can both cross borders or be more localised.

With this resource, we aim to create awareness about famine: its causes, its effects, and its memory. By offering historical knowledge, we moreover hope to inspire users to take action against the enduring threat and occurrence of famine and food insecurity in today's world.

themes, events and ideas of particular interest.

Lessons are supported by learning activities that offer both digital and analogue opportunities for development and demonstration of learning and allow educators a range of options for delivery that accommodate diverse resource and time allocations to the programme.

The Learning Programme is structured as follows:

» MODULE ONE: WHAT IS FAMINE?

This is a single-lesson module that looks at the core concept of famine and how it has been experienced through a series of key case studies.

» MODULE TWO: HAVES AND HAVE NOTS

Module Two: Haves and Have Nots: This is a three-lesson module that looks at how famine has tended to impact the most vulnerable in society most significantly, using a wide range of case studies from a diverse historical and geographical range.

» MODULE THREE: FOOD & NUTRITION

Module Three: Food & Nutrition: This two-lesson module looks at the impact of famine on those affected and how they are forced to adapt what they eat and how they may access food.

» MODULE FOUR: AID, RELIEF AND PHILANTHROPY

This two-lesson module looks at how governments, third parties and the international community have responded to famine across a range of case studies from around the world and across history.

» MODULE FIVE: MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT

This two-lesson module explores the impact of famine in terms of the movement of people away from famine areas, both internally within an affected country, and externally in the form of emigration and refugees.

» MODULE SIX: MEMORY & COMMEMORATION

This two-lesson module examines the ways in which famines have been remembered by different nations and communities, drawing on a range of case studies to explore how memory of famine can be political and a powerful tool for national identity.



MODULE 1: WHAT IS FAMINE?



LESSON ONE WHAT IS FAMINE?

LESSON DESCRIPTION

This lesson will help inform students about the various causes of famine, serving as an introduction to famine history in select countries across the world. The lesson will look at common themes in how different famines have occurred and enable students to understand their complexities, drawing comparisons between different crises. The lesson will incorporate case studies and discussion of the following famines:

- » **The Great Irish Famine (1845-1852)**
- » **The Great Bengal Famine (1943)**
- » **The Nigerian Famine (1967-1970)**
- » **The Ethiopian Famine (1983-1985)**
- » **Food Insecurity in Germany (1914-1924)**
- » **The Dutch Hunger Winter (1944-45)**
- » **The Ukrainian Holodomor (1932-33)**
- » **The Finnish Great Hunger Years (1866-68)**



LESSON INTENTIONS

- ✓ To understand what is meant by the term famine.
- ✓ To discuss how and why famine has occurred in different countries.
- ✓ Understand some of the main conditions that have led to famine.



LESSON OUTCOMES

- ✓ Demonstrate a broad understanding of famine and recognise some of the complexities in defining what a famine is.
- ✓ Be able to list a number of conditions that may lead to famine.



USEFUL ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

[Global Famine Case Studies](#)

[Online Heritages of Hunger Repository](#)

[Online Heritages of Hunger Exhibition](#)

Additional study stimulus to that included in the module can be found here:

[The Great Frost \(Ireland 1740-41\)](#)

[Scottish Potato Famine](#)

[The Greek Famine \(1941-44\)](#)



CAUSES OF FAMINE

Famines have plagued human societies throughout history, causing immeasurable suffering and loss of life. These devastating events often result from a complex interplay of various factors, generally rooted in natural, economic, political, and social conditions. Understanding the causes of historical famines is crucial for preventing future occurrences and mitigating their impact. In this lesson, we will delve into some of the primary causes of historic famines.

DEFINITION

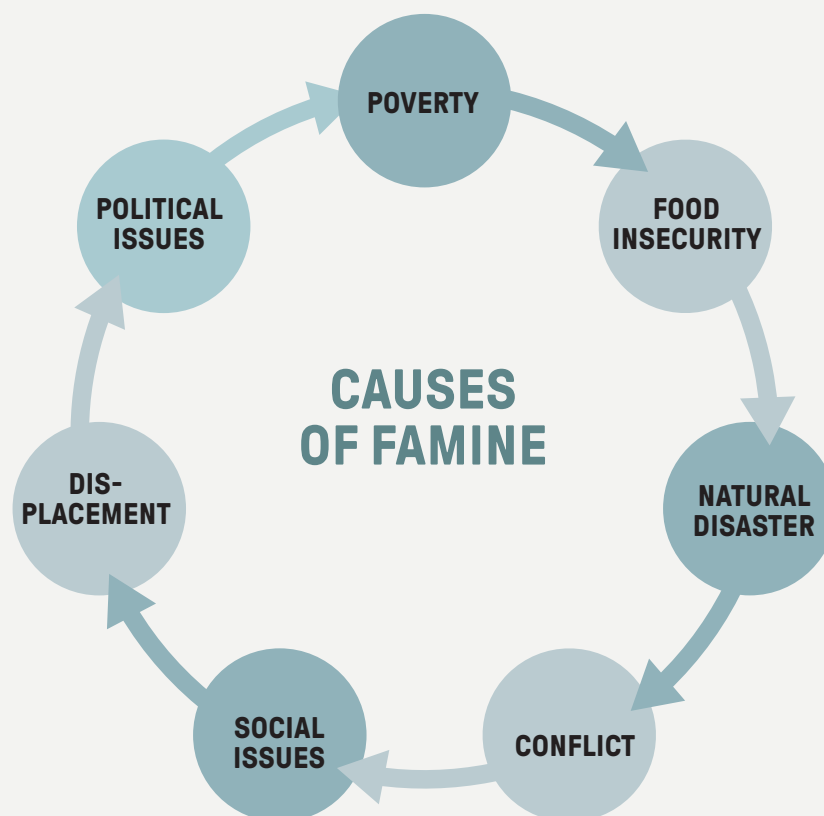
Famine is a situation in which a substantial proportion of the population of a country or region are unable to access adequate food, resulting in widespread acute malnutrition and loss of life by starvation and disease.

UN Refugee Agency



In the past, famines have stemmed from a combination of factors, such as conflict, displacement, chronic poverty, food insecurity, natural disasters, or other political and social issues.

Wars and conflict are usually the primary drivers of famine as they lead to forced displacement, disrupt people's traditional ways of accessing food and income, hinder humanitarian access, and push economies into a long-term decline. Natural disasters - such as droughts, flooding and cyclones - and the effects of climate change can also lead to famine, endangering agriculture and livestock activities in regions where the majority of the population live off the land.



SOME OF THE UNDERLYING FACTORS WHICH CAN LEAD TO FAMINE

NATURAL



Buried machinery in barn lot in Dallas, South Dakota, United States during the Dust Bowl - Image Credit 1

Climate and Weather

One of the most significant natural factors contributing to famines are adverse climate conditions. Prolonged periods of drought, extreme heat, or unseasonable rainfall can lead to crop failures and reduced agricultural yields. For example, the Dust Bowl in the United States during the 1930s resulted from a combination of drought and poor land management practices.

Crop disease has also been a significant causal factor in famine - including the Great Irish Famine of 1845-52. Pesticides have made crop disease preventable in the modern era, but access to them requires resources that may not always be available to those without money or influence.



Blighted Potato - Image Credit 2

DISCUSSION POINT

To what extent do you feel that famines are manmade?

In 1845 the potato famine in the Netherlands and Flanders was a natural disaster that blighted potato crops and demonstrated the destructive impact that crop failure can have:

On 20 September 1845, The Buck's Gazette published an article on the 'general failure of the potato crop' across Europe, due to a 'parasitical fungus' that like a 'plague spreads itself in every direction'. Countries in which the crops were badly affected, the article states, are 'Belgium, Holland, France', while 'Ireland, which it was hoped would escape, is now it appears, likely to participate in the calamity [...] the potato crisis, combined with failed wheat harvests and very cold winters, led to high food prices and increased poverty among the Dutch population. Between 1845 and 1847, excess mortality was between 22% and 32% [...] Newspapers reported several food riots that broke out in Delft in 1845 (Van der Wiel, 1991) and in other larger Dutch cities in 1847 (Paping and Tassenaar, 2007: 165–167). In Groningen, five people were killed in these skirmishes (Opregte Haarlemsche Courant, 6 July 1847).



Little Dutch boy with pan, on his way to a soup kitchen
- Image Credit 3

Source: Corporaal, M., & Jensen, L. (2024). Famine and 'hongersnood' as transnational memory: Literary legacies of the 1840s food crises in Ireland and the Netherlands. *Memory Studies*, 0(0).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/17506980241283894>



Mount Tambora
- Image Credit 4

Natural disasters, such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and tsunamis can destroy crops, disrupt food distribution, and displace populations. The 1815 eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia led to the "Year Without a Summer" in 1816, causing widespread crop failures and famine in Europe and North America.

Market Failures

Economic factors, such as supply and demand imbalances, can trigger famine. When food prices rise beyond the means of the poor, access to food becomes limited. The Great Bengal Famine in 1943 was made worse by market failures and hoarding, caused by Government price controls on rice which made it less profitable for farmers to sell. The price was reduced by the Government to help people afford it, but many farmers were unable to make a living selling at the Government price, so they stockpiled it in the hope of achieving a better price when the price controls were relaxed.



Great Bengal Famine 1943
- Image Credit 5

Resource Allocation

Unequal distribution of resources, such as land and wealth, can lead to food scarcity for marginalised populations. In many historic famines, elites or colonial powers often controlled the majority of fertile land, leaving peasants with poor land that produces poorer quality food.



Calcutta 1943
- Image Credit 6

SOME OF THE UNDERLYING FACTORS WHICH CAN LEAD TO FAMINE

ECONOMIC

SOME OF THE UNDERLYING FACTORS WHICH CAN LEAD TO FAMINE

POLITICAL

Government Policies

Political decisions can significantly contribute to famines. For example, the Soviet Union's policies during the Holodomor in the early 1930s, including forced collectivisation and grain confiscation, played a central role in causing mass starvation as the Government exerted control over access to food.



- Image Credit 7



Starvation was a result of the Nigerian Civil War for many civilians - Image Credit 8

Conflict and War

Wars and armed conflicts disrupt food production, distribution, and access. Civilians often bear the brunt of these disruptions, leading to widespread famine. The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) and the Ethiopian Civil War (1983-1985) both resulted in devastating famines.

Lack of Infrastructure

Insufficient infrastructure, including transportation and storage facilities, can impede the distribution of food during times of crisis. This was a significant factor in the Bengal Famine of 1943.



Great Bengal Famine 1943 - Image Credit 9

Social Inequality

Social structures that perpetuate inequality can leave marginalised groups vulnerable to famine. Caste systems in India, for example, have historically limited the access of lower-caste populations to food and resources.



- Image Credit 10

SOME OF THE UNDERLYING FACTORS WHICH CAN LEAD TO FAMINE

SOCIAL

CAUSAL FACTORS OF FAMINES ACROSS EUROPE

IRELAND (1845-1852)

The famine in Ireland, commonly known as the Irish Potato Famine or the Great Famine (1845-1852), was primarily caused by the devastating spread of a plant disease known as the potato blight (*Phytophthora infestans*). Potatoes were the staple crop for the majority of the Irish population, especially the poor, who relied heavily on them for sustenance.

FINLAND (1866-1868)

The Famine of 1866-1868 was the last famine in Finland, and the last major famine in Northern Europe. In Finland, the famine is known as “the great hunger years”, or suuret nälkävuodet. About 8.5% of the entire population died of hunger; in the hardest-hit areas it was up to 20%. The major cause of the famine was heavy frost from January until June and from September, which destroyed the crops. Government policies, however, restricted relief and did not help to alleviate the overall distress.

UKRAINE (1932-1933)

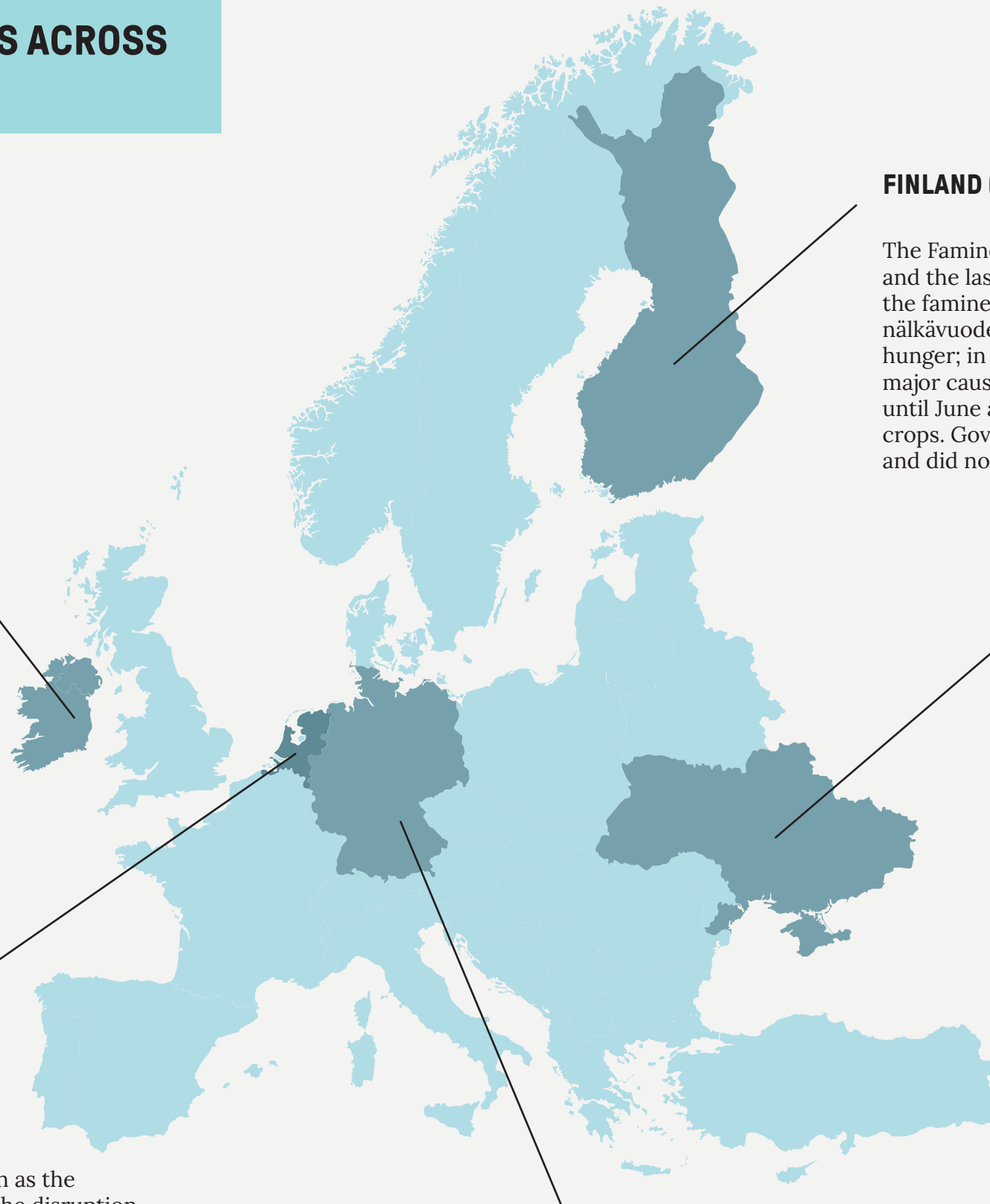
The Holodomor, a devastating famine that occurred in Ukraine from 1932 to 1933, had complex causes primarily rooted in Soviet policies. Joseph Stalin’s forced collectivisation of agriculture and grain requisitioning campaigns in Ukraine played a central role. The government’s aggressive ways of obtaining grain, combined with harsh penalties for those who resisted, resulted in the confiscation of food from Ukrainian farmers.

THE NETHERLANDS (1944-1945)

The Dutch Famine of 1944-1945, also known as the “Hunger Winter,” was primarily caused by the disruption of food distribution during World War II. The German occupation of the Netherlands led to a severe food shortage as supplies dwindled and transportation networks broke down. The Allies’ strategic bombing campaigns further hindered access to food, particularly in the west of the country.

GERMANY (1914-1924)

Famine in Germany during and after World War I was marked by a combination of economic difficulties and wartime conditions. During World War I, the blockade of Germany by the British Royal Navy severely restricted imports of food and fertiliser, resulting in food shortages of up to 30%, and this was compounded by the diversion of some agricultural production to the War Economy - with workers required to create munitions, uniforms and equipment instead of growing food.



OPTIONAL LEARNING TASKS



DIGITAL ACTIVITIES



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



DIGITAL INFOGRAPHIC CREATION

Students use online tools like Canva or Piktochart to create infographics explaining the causes and impacts of a specific historical famine. They should include statistics, images, and brief explanations of the famine's context.



ROLE-PLAY DEBATE SIMULATION

Students are assigned roles representing different stakeholders in a famine scenario (e.g., farmers, government officials, aid workers, economists). They debate potential solutions and policies to address the famine, considering various perspectives and interests.



CAUSE-AND-EFFECT CHAIN

In small groups, students create large paper-based cause-and-effect chains for a specific famine. They use sticky notes to show how different factors (natural, economic, political, social) interconnect and lead to famine conditions.



FAMINE PREVENTION POSTER CAMPAIGN

Students design and create posters that highlight strategies for preventing famines. They should focus on addressing the underlying causes discussed in the lesson, such as improving infrastructure, promoting sustainable agriculture, or developing early warning systems.



Image Credits

Image Credit 1

Sloan, 1936
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Dust_Bowl#/media/File:Dust_Bowl_-_Dallas,_South_Dakota_1936.jpg

Image Credit 2

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Highland_Potato_Famine#/media/File:Phytophthora_infestans-effects.jpg

Image Credit 3

Emmy Andriesse Amsterdam, early 1945
<https://www.leidenspecialcollectionsblog.nl/articles/emmy-andriesse-forbidden-photographs-of-the-hunger-winter-and-liberation-of-holland-1944-1945#PK%20F%20A%2003768>

Image Credit 4

Jialian Gao, 2011
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Mount_Tambora?uselang=ro#/media/File:Caldera_Mt_Tambora_Sumbawa_Indonesia.jpg

Image Credit 5

Unknown, 1940's
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bengal_famine_image.jpg

Image Credit 6

Calcutta 1946 BBC History
https://ichef.bbci.co.uk/ace/standard/976/cpsprodpb/3986/production/_132662741_begging.jpg

Image Credit 7

Ron Burton 1968
<https://histoire.ci/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/20011515436-04-biafra-nigeria-civil-war-super-169.jpg>

Image Credit 8

Lyle Conrad, 1960's
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Starving-woman-africa-biafra-nigeria-conflict-famine.jpg>

Image Credit 9

Unknown, 1943
https://www.wikiwand.com/en/articles/Bengal_famine_of_1943

Image Credit 10

Bengal Famine 1943
<https://s3.youthkiawaaz.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/06093157/bengalfamine-640x400.jpg>

Credits

This learning resource was co-developed by the Heritages of Hunger research consortium and Nerve Centre Derry

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Some of the text has been adapted from the Heritages of Hunger virtual exhibition, <https://heritagesofhunger.org>, courtesy of Charley Boerman (University of Amsterdam) and Niels Arnbak. The visual styling of this learning programme has partly been inspired by the concept, design, and realisation of the exhibition, courtesy of HOAX Amsterdam.

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 Anne-Lise Bobeldijk (NIOD)
 Charley Boerman (University of Amsterdam)
 Marieke van Egeraat (Radboud University)
 Laurence Gourievidis (Université Clermont Auvergne)
 Violetta Hionidou (Newcastle University)
 Lindsay Janssen (Radboud University)
 William Jenkins (York University)
 Lotte Jensen (Radboud University)
 Jason King (Irish Heritage Trust)
 Anne Lahtinen (The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas)
 Deborah Madden (Lancaster University)
 Jeremy Maron (Canadian Museum for Human Rights)
 Emily Mark-FitzGerald (University College Dublin)
 Mark McGowan (University of Toronto)
 Anne van Mourik (NIOD)
 Andrew G. Newby (University of Jyväskylä)
 Gloria Román Ruiz (University of Granada)
 Clara Vlessing (Radboud University)
 Ingrid de Zwart (Wageningen University and Research)

And the following organisations:

Canada Ireland Foundation
 Centro Documental de la Memoria Historica
 EuroClio
 The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas
 Holodomor Research and Education Consortium (HREC)
 HOAX
 Irish Heritage Trust
 Kuopio Cultural History Museum
 Museum Rotterdam
 NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies
 Radboud Pre-University College of Society
 Radboud University
 Red Star Line Museum
 Versetzmuseum
 Wageningen University and Research

Funding

Heritages of Hunger: Societal Reflections on Past European Famines in Education, Commemoration and Musealisation is a collaboration between Radboud University, NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, and Wageningen University and Research. It is funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO) under grant agreement no. NWA.1160.18.197.





MODULE 2: HAVES & HAVE NOTS



LESSON ONE IMPACT & ENTITLEMENT



LESSON DESCRIPTION

This lesson will explore how famine impacts different communities in different ways and students will understand how different societies have been impacted as a result. The lesson will incorporate case studies and discussion of the following famines:

- » **The Greek Famine (1941-44)**
- » **The Ukrainian Holodomor (1932-33)**
- » **The Great Irish Famine (1845-1852)**
- » **The Dutch Hunger Winter (1944-45)**



LESSON INTENTIONS

- ✓ Understand that famine can impact differently on different people and communities in the same country or region.
- ✓ Identify reasons why some communities may be more affected than others.



LESSON OUTCOMES

- ✓ Describe how different communities might have experienced famine and with different levels of severity.
- ✓ Understand how famine can impact differently at an individual as well as a community level.



Remembering Kostia, who died in the Ukrainian Holodomor
Image Credit: Heritages of Hunger Repository - Image Credit 1



USEFUL ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- > [Global Famine Case Studies](#)
- > [Online Heritages of Hunger Repository](#)
- > [Online Heritages of Hunger Exhibition](#)

Additional study stimulus to that included in the module can be found here:

- > [Image of a blind woman from Spanish famine](#)
- > [Woman and children during Dutch hunger winter image](#)
- > [Image from Dutch hunger winter](#)
- > [Documentary on the Leningrad Blockade](#)
- > [Ukrainian song focused on the experience of children](#)
- > [Video on the Spanish war](#)



INTRODUCTION

Famine is often thought to affect all people equally, with the notion being that if there is a shortage of food then everyone will surely find it difficult to access it, but this is rarely the case.

Famine is often not caused by an absolute lack of food in a particular place, but by a lack of access to food. There may be food available in that place, but not everyone has the means or opportunity to obtain it.

Very often, the lack of access to food is most acutely felt by the most vulnerable in the affected society. Those who are poorest, those who belong to minorities, and those lacking voice and representation, tend to be the most harmed by famine.

In this way the 'Haves' - those that have money, resources and/or influence, tend to be much less impacted by famine than the 'Have Nots' - those who do not have money, resources and/or influence.



DISCUSSION POINT

Why might the poor, minorities, and those lacking representation be the most severely impacted by famine?



WHY ARE DIFFERENT PEOPLE AFFECTED DIFFERENTLY?

There can be a number of reasons why famine might affect different people in different ways, and why the 'Have Nots' in a society might be affected more severely than the 'Haves'.



MONEY

When any goods or materials are in short supply, their price tends to go up. In times of famine, food can become very expensive and unaffordable to many people. Sometimes a shadow economy, or 'black market' for the illegal trading of food, may develop to provide unofficial access to food. In both cases, only those with sufficient resources are able to access sufficient food.



CASE STUDY

THE GREEK FAMINE (1941-44)



German soldiers
in a shop
- Image Credit 2

The Greek Famine of 1941-44 is an example of this. As a result of the German-led occupation of Greece in the War, with the support of Bulgaria and Italy, the country was effectively stripped of its own food and resources by the occupying forces, who sought to feed their own armies and people with Greek supplies. The country was divided into three zones between which no movements of people and goods was allowed. With the Allied Countries imposing a blockade on the country, now that it was under German control and regarded as enemy territory, a famine followed that claimed an estimated 300,000 lives.



The famine was characterised by the emergence of a significant shadow economy, where food and goods were traded illegally and at hugely inflated prices – making sure that only the wealthiest could afford them and leading to a strong public backlash against the abuse of a terrible situation for making profit.

Violetta Hionidou: Black Market, Hyperinflation, and Hunger

POWER



In a time of food scarcity, whatever food is actually available is very often controlled by the Government and the elites in a society. If you are not part of these groups, or favoured by them, you are very likely to find access to food much harder to secure.

If you are considered an opponent of the Government then food may be deliberately kept from you in favour of those others that are considered loyal.



CASE STUDY

THE UKRAINIAN HOLODOMOR (1932-33)

A soldier
guarding grain
in the Ukrainian
Holodomor
- Image Credit 3



The Ukrainian Famine (Holodomor) of 1932-33 is a key example of how this can happen. The Holodomor claimed almost four million lives in Ukraine and was triggered by the Soviet Government trying to replace individually owned farms in Ukraine with collectively owned State farms. The Ukrainian farmers resisted the Soviet model and were driven from their land for not complying, and much of the grain that they did produce was confiscated and used to feed Soviets outside of Ukraine.

The Soviet Government controlled the supply of food and chose to prevent many Ukrainians from accessing it because they refused to comply, leading ultimately to mass starvation that left almost 13% of the Ukrainian population dead.



GEOGRAPHY

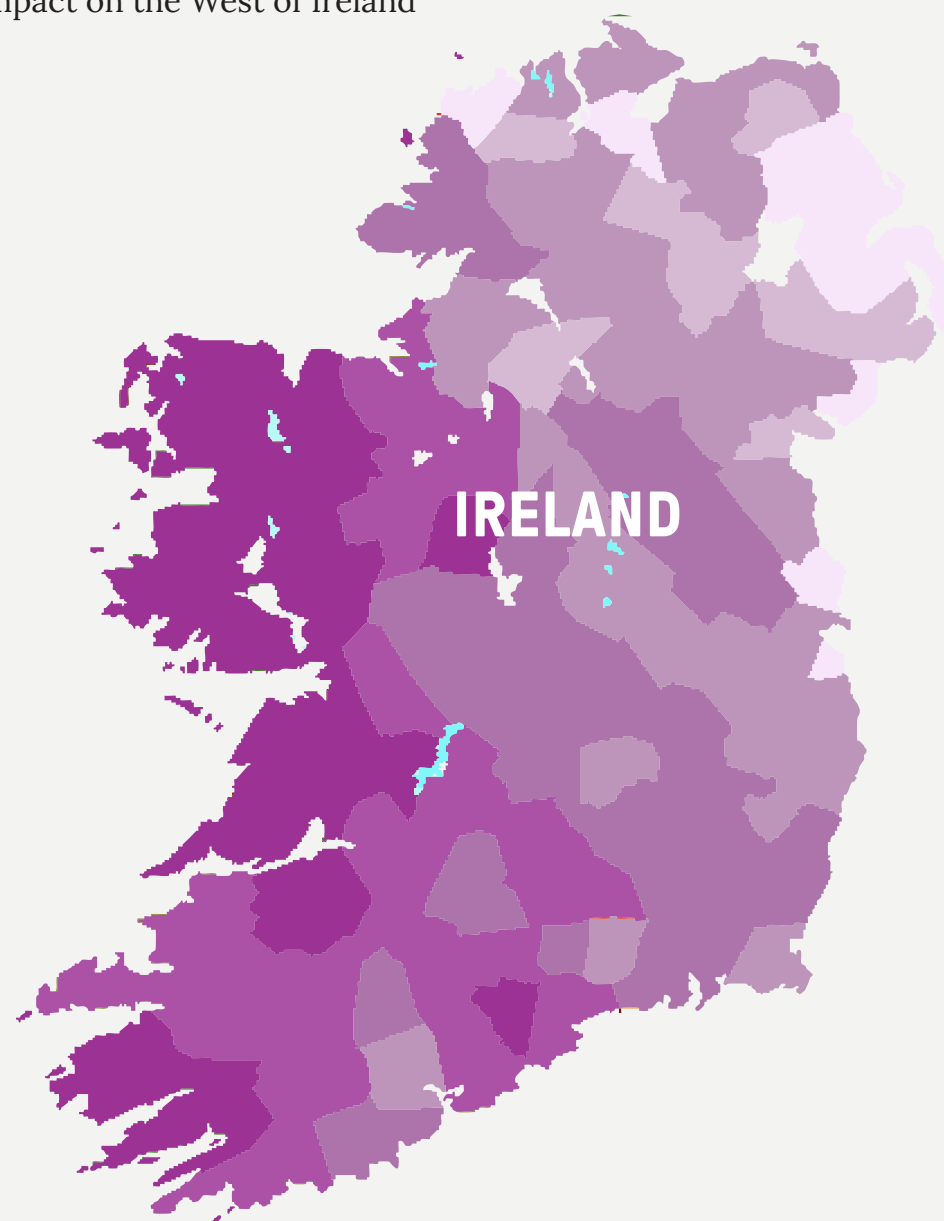
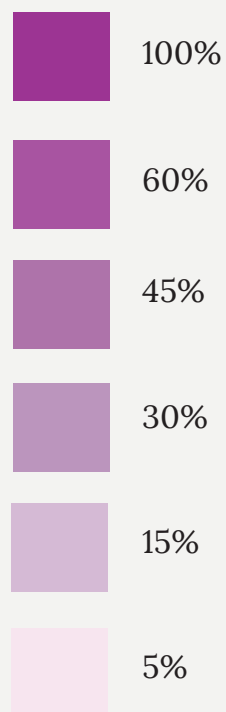
Where you live can be a significant factor in how you are affected by famine. During the Irish Famine (1845-1852), rural dwellers were more heavily affected by the failure of the potato crop – which was often effectively the key source of food for the small farms and communities in the West of the country. Over a million Irish people died in the famine and many more were forced to emigrate.



CASE STUDY

THE GREAT IRISH FAMINE (1845-1852)

Percentage of people taking up rations in 1847 demonstrating the disproportionate impact on the West of Ireland



Children boarding an evacuation ship in the Hague, 1945
- Image Credit 4



More recently in the Dutch 'Hunger Winter' (1944-45) it was the more urban west of the country that was hardest hit. Due to the liberation of southern parts of the Netherlands in September 1944, food transportation from Germany was made more difficult. The national railway strike, an act of resistance called for by the Dutch government exiled in London, was followed by German food blockades which prevented food from reaching the cities in the west.



Dutch children in a soup kitchen
- Image Credit 5

As a result of the famine, Dutch children were evacuated from the west of the country to the north and east, where shortages were not as severe. The Interkerkelijk Bureau, an organisation in which Protestant and Catholic churches worked together, played a major role in the evacuation of around 40,000 children. But many families also had to rely on personal connections and access to transport to find better places for their children.





STATUS

Different types of citizens can also be impacted in different ways by famine. Refugees and displaced people are disproportionately affected by famine. These groups tend to have low status and very little influence and find themselves most at risk from food scarcity and its effects.



Refugees in Western Sahara, 2007 - Image Credit 6

HOW DOES THIS IMPACT TODAY?

In 2021 severe funding constraints in West Africa, where hunger had reached a record high in a decade, forced the World Food Programme (WFP) to significantly reduce rations for refugees living in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. WFP assists on average 500,000 refugees in Southern Africa annually.



"As global hunger soars way beyond the resources available to feed all the families who desperately need WFP's help, we are being forced to make the heartbreaking decision to cut food rations for refugees who rely on us for their survival," WFP Executive Director David Beasley argued. As he also stated, "Without urgent new funds to support refugees – one of the world's most vulnerable and forgotten groups of people – many facing starvation will be forced to pay with their lives."

<https://www.wfp.org/news/escalating-needs-rising-hunger-refugees-caught-eye-perfect-storm>



INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES



The different factors above help us to understand how different communities can be impacted differently by famine, but there can also be different impacts on a more individual level.

Human beings have different requirements for food and nutrition depending on age, gender, activity level etc.

Young children require high levels of nutrition to support their growth and development, physical labour requires more calories to provide energy, and men generally require more calories than women each day. Pregnant women also have a greater nutritional requirement as they nourish their unborn children as well as themselves. Malnutrition of pregnant women can affect both the child, and the mother – often some years later.

These factors are significant in determining how famines might impact on an individual level.



Macedonian Refugees, 2015 - Image Credit 7

DISCUSSION POINT

How might famine impact different individuals in different ways?

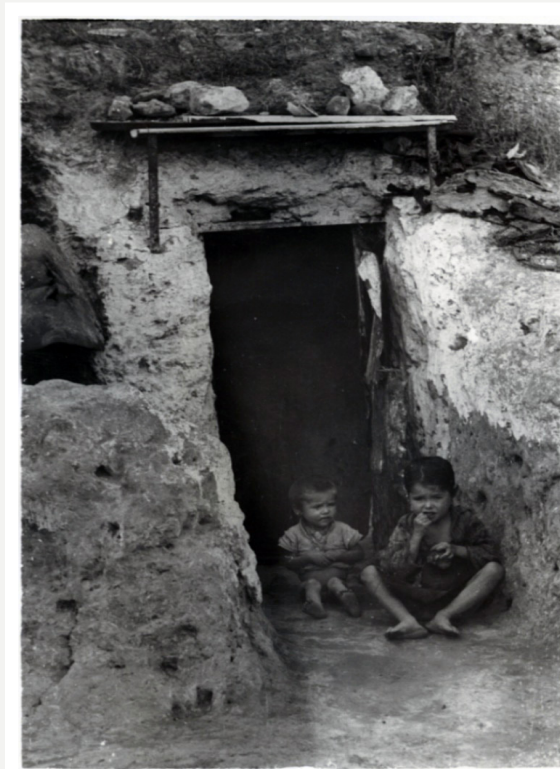


Rowan Gillespie's 'Ireland Park' famine memorial, Toronto
- Image Credit 8

IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Children are disproportionately impacted by famines. Lack of food weakens the whole body and makes it less resistant to illness and infection, particularly so in children whose bodies and immunity are not fully developed.

Malnutrition affects both physical and cognitive development – meaning that children who have suffered from it do not just have physical health risks, but also a greater risk of poor educational performance, poor wages and ongoing poverty.



Children in the Spanish Hunger Years
- Image Credit 9



“People are not just dying due to a lack of food. Hunger means their weakened bodies cannot fight off diseases like diarrhoea, measles or malaria, so death rates are high. Children are particularly at risk and often die at double the rate of adults. And those who survive will face ill health for the rest of their lives.”

Abukar Mohamud, International Red Cross, Somalia 2022



Children in Yemen
- Image Credit 10

IMPACT ON WOMEN

Woman looking for water in Dry riverbed
- Image Credit 11



The Widow Connor and her dying Child - The Irish Famine

- Image Credit 12

Today, 60% of those suffering from food insecurity (a key risk factor in famine) are women. In many countries there is an accepted culture of women eating least and last in the family when food is scarce.

In addition in some cases and some cultures, girls may be married off at an early age by their families in exchange for food or money. This often means the end of the girl's education and increases their chance of remaining in poverty.



> IMPACT ON THE ELDERLY

Famine has repeatedly impacted more severely on the elderly than on younger adults throughout history. Elderly people may be more vulnerable to illness or more quickly affected by malnutrition due to their age, but there has also been a cultural tendency to give priority in access to food to young people and economically productive adults when supplies are scarce – those with their lives ahead of them and those who may be most useful in helping the society to survive the famine.



A man lies in bed with edema in his legs during the hunger winter, The Hague (1944-1945) - **Image Credit 13**

> IMPACT ON THE UNWELL AND DISABLED

People with illness and/or disability are also disproportionately impacted by the effects of famine.

People suffering from illness or disability are at a higher risk during famines for a range of reasons. Increased nutritional needs due to illness, limited access to resources, social and economic marginalisation, dependence on caregivers, worsening health conditions, and increased mortality risk all increase the vulnerability of this group.

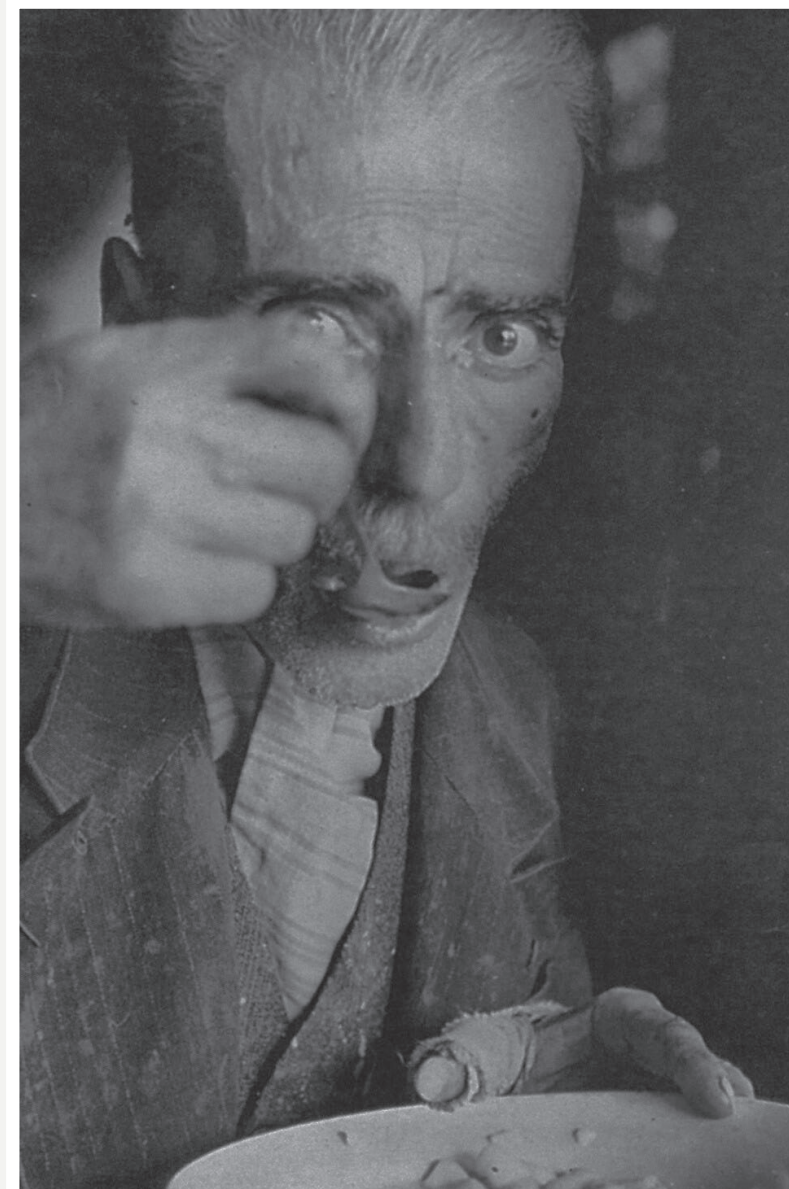
Addressing their needs requires specific support to ensure they receive adequate food, medical care, and social support during such crises.



CASE STUDY

THE GREEK FAMINE (1941-44)

The Greek Famine of 1941-1944 saw open acknowledgement that the elderly were not a priority when allocating precious supplies of food.



A Greek man at a soup kitchen - Athens 1942
- **Image Credit 14**



'the growing child, the pregnant woman and the heavily working manual labourer will become undernourished and vulnerable to infections and thus should be given priority in terms of food provision.'

(Anon as reported in a newspaper article August 1941, cited in Hionidou, 'If We Hadn't Left ... We Would Have All Died': Escaping Famine on the Greek Island of Chios, 1941-44, pdf p206)

CASE STUDY

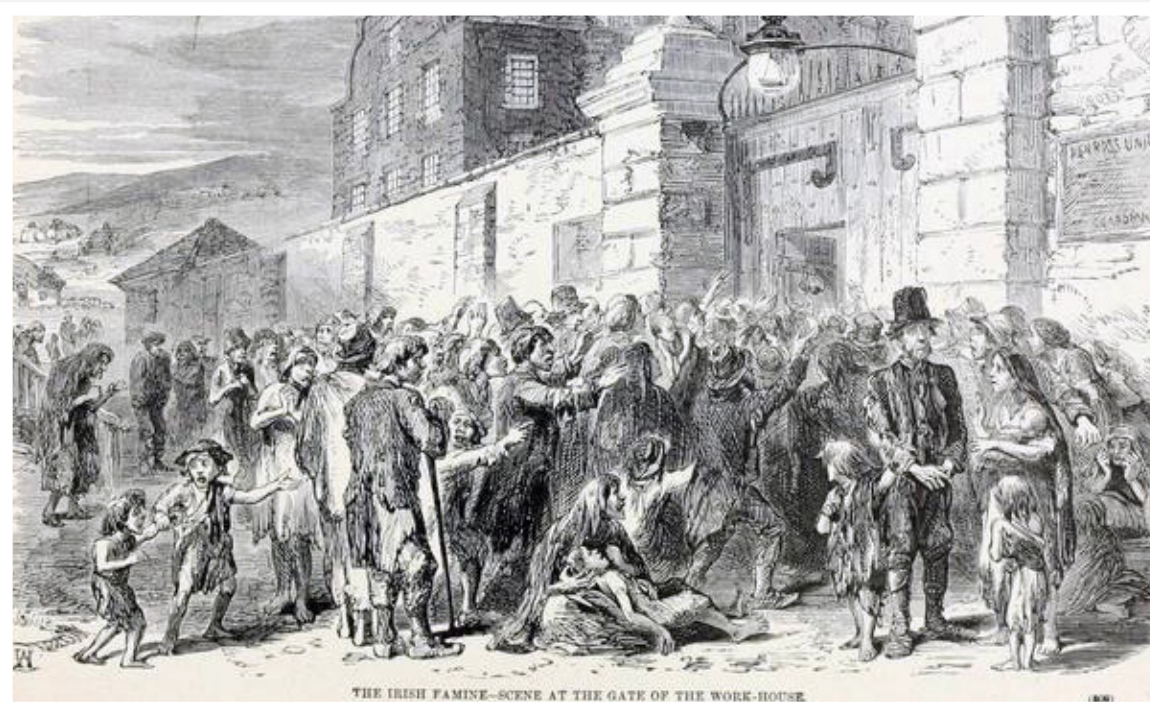
THE GREAT IRISH FAMINE (1845-1852)

During the Irish famine of 1845-52, many of the disabled and chronically ill were forced to rely on the workhouse system for survival. However, these institutions were overcrowded, poorly funded, and often lacked adequate food and medical care for the many starving people who also sought refuge there.



While there was room for about 93,000 people in workhouses across the country, there were approximately 120,000 inmates, 20,000 of whom were ill. The conditions in workhouses were harsh, and mortality rates among the sick and disabled were particularly high.

(Thomas Guinnane and Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Mortality in the North Dublin Union During the Famine')



- Image Credit 15

CONCLUSION

Throughout history, and right up to the present day, famines have had different impacts on different groups in society. Those that have the greatest access to power and resources are less likely to be seriously affected than those that do not.

On a more individual level, famine often impacts differently, with children, women, the elderly and the disabled at greatest risk of being most severely affected by famine.

OPTIONAL LEARNING TASKS



DIGITAL ACTIVITIES



DIGITAL TIMELINE

Have students create a digital timeline using a tool like Timetoast or Sutori, showcasing major famines throughout history and their varying impacts on different social groups.



ONLINE QUIZ

Develop a quiz using Kahoot! or Quizizz to test students' understanding of how famine impacts different communities and individuals.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



ROLE-PLAY

Assign students different roles (e.g., wealthy landowner, poor farmer, government official) and have them act out a scenario during a famine, discussing how it affects each of them differently.



POSTER CREATION

Have students create informative posters highlighting how famine impacts various groups (children, women, elderly, etc.) differently.



DEBATE

Organise a classroom debate on the topic "Is famine an equal opportunity disaster?" with students arguing for and against the statement.





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Nikolai Bokan, 1933

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Image Credit 2

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Menno Huizinga, 1945

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Saharaiak, 2007

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Image Credit 8

Toronto Famine Memorial

<https://www.irishamericanmom.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Statue-of-a-pregnant-Irish-woman-at-Torontos-Famine-Memorial-Ireland-Park.jpg>

Image Credit 9

Unknown, 1943

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Image Credit 10

Children in Yemen, 2013

https://newsmedia.tasnimnews.com/Tasnim/Uploaded/Image_/1401/01/13/1401011309541181325070624.jpg

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DFID, 2011

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Digging_for_drinking_water_in_a_dry_riverbed_\(6220146368\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Digging_for_drinking_water_in_a_dry_riverbed_(6220146368).jpg)

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Unknown, 1850

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Menno Huizinga, 1945

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Image Credit 14

Unknown, 1941

<https://www.oparlapipas.gr/2013/11/1941-1942.html>

Image Credit 15

John Clark Ridpath

<https://www.irishcentral.com/roots/history/st-jamess-hospital-dublins-history>



LESSON TWO: POWER, AGENCY & SOCIAL CLASS

LESSON DESCRIPTION

This lesson will enable students to understand how agencies of power and class can affect famine conditions. It will highlight the different hunger conditions faced by diverse communities across the world, allowing students to make a comparative study. The lesson will incorporate case studies and discussion of the following famines:

- » The Great Irish Famine (1845-1852)
- » The Ukrainian Holodomor (1932-33)
- » The Finnish Great Years of Hunger (1866-68)

LESSON INTENTIONS

- ✓ Understand how famine has impacted differently on different communities due to social conditions.
- ✓ Discuss the reasons why class and power can have an impact on famine.

LESSON OUTCOMES

- ✓ Understand that famine may not always be caused by food scarcity.
- ✓ Understand how power, agency and class can influence the availability of food across diverse communities and individuals.



Irish landlord
begging for rent
- Image Credit 1



USEFUL ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- » [Global Famine Case Studies](#)
- » [Online Heritages of Hunger Repository](#)
- » [Online Heritages of Hunger Exhibition](#)

Additional study stimulus to that included in the module can be found here:

- » [Scottish example of landlord evictions](#)
- » [Bread costing 15 a loaf in Greek, shows power dynamics of money](#)
- » [Starvation used as punishment in Auschwitz](#)
- » [British Blockade of Germany in WW 1](#)

INTRODUCTION

Famine is not simply about a lack of food. There are a number of factors which determine how a lack of food is experienced by different people across society. In Lesson One we explored how characteristics such as wealth, power, geography, gender and age can all affect how a famine is experienced.

In this lesson we will develop some of these ideas, with a focus on how power and social class are often key factors in how famine develops and impacts those affected.

'Power and social class' really refers to the level of influence and agency that a group or community may have - the extent to which it is able to control its own direction, and the extent to which it may have to rely on the direction of other people or communities.

With regard to famine, this may mean the level of control that a community has over access to food - either through the ability to buy it, to produce it, to transport it or to store it. The less control you have over these factors, the more vulnerable you are to food scarcity and famine.

DISCUSSION POINT

Who do you think is likely to suffer most in society in times of famine?





THE GREAT IRISH FAMINE (1845-1852)



An ejection in Ireland (A Tear and Prayer for Erin) - Image Credit 2

In the case of the Irish Famine, social class was a key factor, with the landlord system a key element in controlling access to food and security.

Landlords had owned most of the land in Ireland since the English invasions of the seventeenth century, with many Irish people living as tenant farmers by the time of the famine, paying rent to landlords for their homes and land. Ongoing poverty meant that many tenants were already in debt to their landlords by the time the famine came in the 1840s and were at constant risk of eviction from their homes and land.

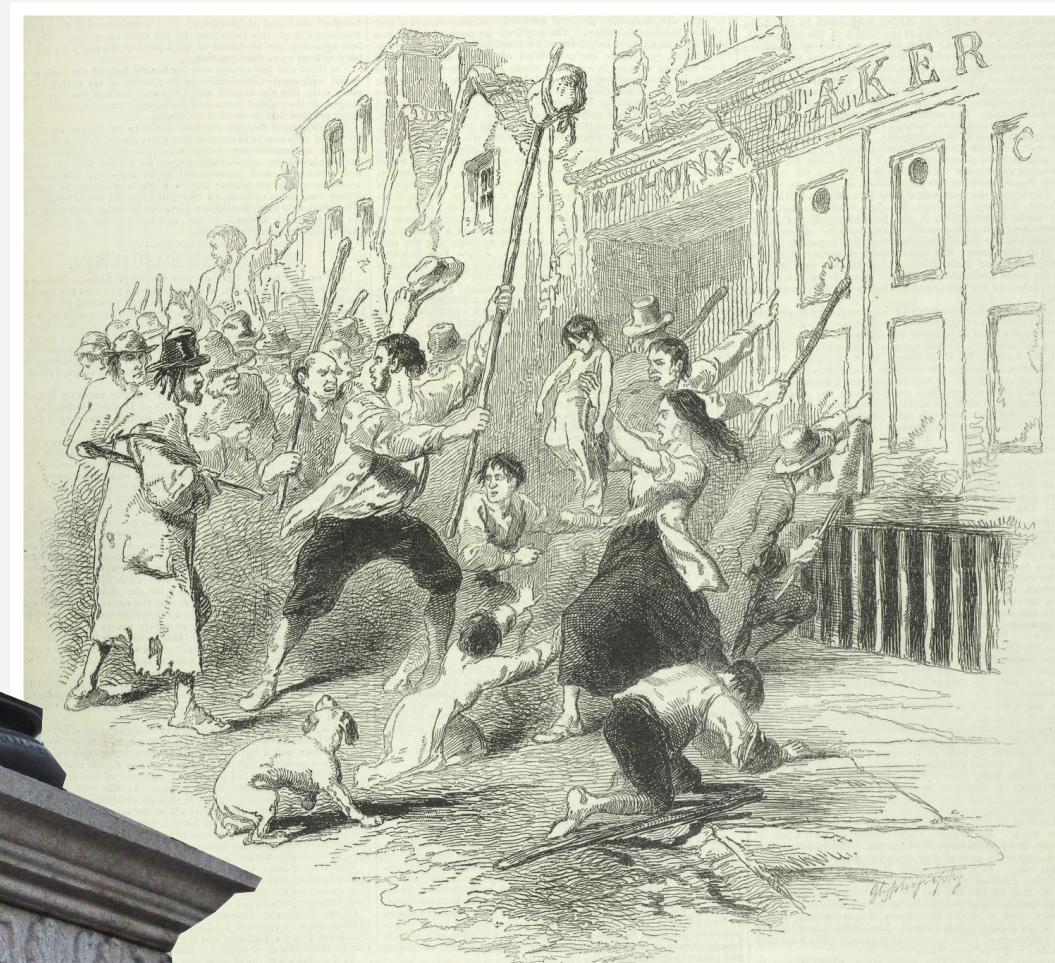
This gave landlords some control over the supply of what food was available for those on their lands, and any food that was provided from elsewhere was likely to be distributed largely under their approval. If you were in debt to your landlord then you were often less likely to be able to access food.



Additionally, arrears in the payment of rent meant that many tenant farmers were evicted from their homes by order of their landlords. As a result, families often faced both hunger and homelessness.

Over a million people died in the famine, and many more emigrated to escape, while several landlords were murdered by those angered at their role in the death of so many of their tenants.

Not all landlords were so cruel towards their tenants; there were also many who went out of their way to provide food and relief for the people on their estate, even if they incurred high debts for this.



Food riot outside bakery in Dungarvan - Image Credit 3

A statue of Lord Palmerston in London - he evicted over 2000 families on his estate in Ireland - Image Credit 4

FAMINE AS A LEVER OF POWER

The worst famines of the 20th century, including the deadliest famine in China (1959–1961) with an estimated 30 million victims, happened under totalitarian rule. These regimes often have total control over their population, enforce harsh rules, suppress people's freedom, engage in corrupt practices, isolate themselves internationally, and operate without transparency – all factors which may make a famine more likely and more severe.

The dynamic of power and social class in famine has further implications that go beyond the question of simply who suffers the most. The power dynamic also means that famine can be used as a tool by the wealthy and powerful to control or punish the poor, or those who are seen as enemies by the State.



8000000 Victims of Hunger in Ukraine
– Image Credit 5



In times of famine, food can be used by the powerful to reward or punish those who have no control over access to it and offers a powerful means of ensuring compliance.

We will keep out the Kulaks –
propaganda poster
– Image Credit 6



Victims of Hunger in Ukraine
– Image Credit 7

CASE STUDY

THE UKRAINIAN HOLODOMOR (1932-33)

The Holodomor, the Ukrainian Famine of 1932–33, saw Stalin's Soviet Regime effectively starve millions of Ukrainians for refusing to comply with the Soviet model of collectivised farming. In this way, Stalin's power over food and access to food for Ukrainians was used to punish those who did not do what the Soviet leadership was demanding. Almost four million Ukrainians died in the famine. There has been ongoing debate about whether the famine should be seen as Stalin's deliberate attempt to exterminate the Ukrainian people. Today, the Holodomor is recognised as a genocide by many countries, including Ukraine, Canada, and the US, as well as the European Parliament.

“

“In the late 1920s, as it pursued its policy of forced collectivization of agriculture, the Soviet regime launched a campaign against the most successful peasant farmers. The authorities labeled them “kulaks” and demonized and dehumanized them as parasites -- class enemies who needed to be wiped off the face of the earth. Over time, the label “kulak” could be used to persecute anyone suspected of anti-Soviet attitudes. Some half a million so-called kulaks and their families were deported from Ukraine to labor camps, many dying along the way. Others were simply executed.”

Marta Baziuk, Holodomor Research and Education Consortium

DISCUSSION POINT

How might the historic experience of the Holodomor shape Ukrainian attitudes to Russia today?

FAMINE AS A REINFORCER OF INEQUALITY

Famine can also have the effect of reinforcing inequality and prejudice against the poor and the powerless.

Famine is very often about access to food, rather than the general availability of food in itself. This can mean that those who are not as badly impacted by the famine, and those who are not affected at all, have often felt a sense of superiority to those who are suffering.

This perception of superiority has been evidenced in many cases in characterisations of those suffering from famine as being lazy or undeserving, and effectively responsible for the devastating situations in which they find themselves.

These responses can help to reinforce divisions within a society and can be used as a tool by ruling elites to ensure disunity between those that they govern.

CASE STUDY

THE IRISH AND FINNISH FAMINES



THE IRISH FRANKENSTEIN.
"The fearful and blood-stained monster... yet was it not my Master, to the very extent that it was my Creation?... Had I not breathed into it my own spirit?... (Extract from the Works of C. S. Lewis, M.P.)"



Punch Magazine
Cartoons 19th
Century
- Image Credit 8/9

In the Irish Famine there were persistent attempts to demonise the victims of the famine as being in some way responsible for their own fate because of their own poverty, laziness, or even their reliance on the potato as a main foodstuff. The Irish were often depicted as primitive and even monkey-like in the cartoons of the English magazine Punch, stereotypes that were rooted in British colonial ideologies.



In Finland's Great Famine of 1856-68 many of the victims were portrayed as vagrants and beggars by the Finnish ruling classes, with Robert Wilhelm Ekman's 'Beggar Family on the Road' becoming an iconic stereotype of the suffering poor, who were depicted as homeless and reliant on others to help them. The helplessness of many of the starving in rural areas was an eyesore to the Finnish government under J.V. Snellman, which tried to promote self-reliance and a market-driven economy.

Beggar family on the road
- Image Credit 10

DISCUSSION POINT

Why might those the powerful and influential seek to blame victims of famine for their own suffering?

CONCLUSION

Class and power can be significant factors in famine, with the ruling classes able to exploit food shortages as a tool to control, reward and punish those with less power and influence.

Because famine is usually not about an absolute lack of food, those with control are often able to offer some access to food to those that they wish to, and this can give opportunities to increase their control and power within that society, nation or region.



OPTIONAL LEARNING TASKS



DIGITAL ACTIVITIES



SOCIAL MEDIA SIMULATION

Have students create mock social media profiles for historical figures from different social classes during a famine, posting updates about their experiences.



DIGITAL INFOGRAPHIC

Use tools like Canva or Piktochart to have students create infographics explaining the relationship between power, social class, and famine.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



FAMINE SIMULATION GAME

Create a classroom-wide simulation where students are assigned different social classes and must navigate a famine scenario, making decisions based on their status.



POLITICAL CARTOON ANALYSIS

Provide students with historical political cartoons related to famines and have them analyse how power and class are depicted.



“POWER PYRAMID” ACTIVITY

Have students create a visual representation of social classes during a famine, discussing how each level might be affected differently.



Image Credits

Image Credit 1

John Gordon Thomson, 1880
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Irish_landlord_begging_for_rent.jpg#/media/File:Irish_landlord_begging_for_rent.jpg

Image Credit 2

Robert George Kelly, 1848
https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_image_view/53

Image Credit 3

British Library, 1846
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/britishlibrary/12459233983>

Image Credit 4

Prioryman, 2015
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statue_of_Lord_Palmerston,_Parliament_Square#/media/File:Palmerston_statue_Parliament_Square.jpg

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Ukrainian Youth Union, 1948
https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_image_view/218

Image Credit 6

Unknown, 1930
https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_image_view/188

Image Credit 7

Zofia Nalepińska-Bojczuk, 1935
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holodomor#/media/File:Famine_in_Ukraine.jpg

Image Credit 8

John Tennial, 1882
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Punch_Anti-Irish_propaganda_\(1882\)_Irish_Frankenstein.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Punch_Anti-Irish_propaganda_(1882)_Irish_Frankenstein.jpg)

Image Credit 9

William Newman, 1845
<https://viewsofthefamine.wordpress.com/punch/the-real-potato-blight-of-ireland/>

Image Credit 10

Robert Wilhelm Ekman, 1860
https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_image_view/187

LESSON THREE: RESPONSIBILITY

LESSON DESCRIPTION

This lesson will explore the complexity behind assigning responsibility for famine. Through exploring diverse case studies, students will understand how accountability for famine has been assigned through history and gain an insight into the difficulties in doing so. The lesson will incorporate case studies and discussion of the following famines:

- » The Finnish Hunger Years (1866-68)
- » The Great Irish Famine (1845-1852)
- » The Greek Famine (1941-44)

LESSON INTENTIONS

- ✓ Identify and discuss common factors in accountability for famine histories across different countries.
- ✓ Understand the reasons for those affected by famine to seek accountability for their situation.

LESSON OUTCOMES

- ✓ Be able to explain the complexities in assigning responsibility for famine.
- ✓ Describe how different societies have found this process difficult.



USEFUL ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- » [Global Famine Case Studies](#)
 - » [Online Heritages of Hunger Repository](#)
 - » [Online Heritages of Hunger Exhibition](#)
- Additional study stimulus to that included in the module can be found here:
- » [Famine in Czechoslovakia and Norway](#)
 - » [Children's book from Spain from after the Francoist War](#)



Statue of Stalin
- Image Credit 1

INTRODUCTION

Because famine can cause such devastation at a large scale, figuring out who is to blame for the crisis can be highly contentious.

As we have seen, famine is usually centred around access to food, rather than an absolute shortage of food in any given country or region. If a crop fails, a war breaks out, or a market collapses then it can be potentially devastating to the food supply, but it is the response to the issue that determines whether or not that devastation will actually materialise.

For this reason, famine is often highly politicised and deciding who is ultimately responsible for a famine can become very complicated, with many different parties blaming each other for key elements of the situation.



THE FINNISH HUNGER YEARS (1866-68)



Illustrated wooden memorials placed on the "Hunger Moor" / "Isthmus of the Sixteen", Finland
- Image Credit 2

In 1867, the latest in a line of crop failures plunged much of Finland into famine. The crop failure added to financial pressures that many Finnish peasants were enduring and led to a period of devastation that claimed almost 300,000 lives (around 8.5% of the total Finnish population).

Unlike many other famines of the time, Finland's could not be blamed on a colonial or external Government policy – Finland had been autonomous and self-governing for over fifty years prior to the famine, although it was a Grand Duchy within the Russian Empire.

With no external forces to be blamed, the Finnish elites placed the primary responsibility for the famine onto nature and the weather, and the secondary responsibility onto the general helplessness of the rural peasant class – who they saw as unable to look after themselves effectively and unable to prevent themselves from becoming victims of famine.

The role of the government in seeking to reduce the effects of weather and crop failure was sidelined in the discussion of causes of the famine, with the efforts made to feed the poor instead highlighted, and the Finnish famine was afterwards downplayed in the narratives of the country's national history.

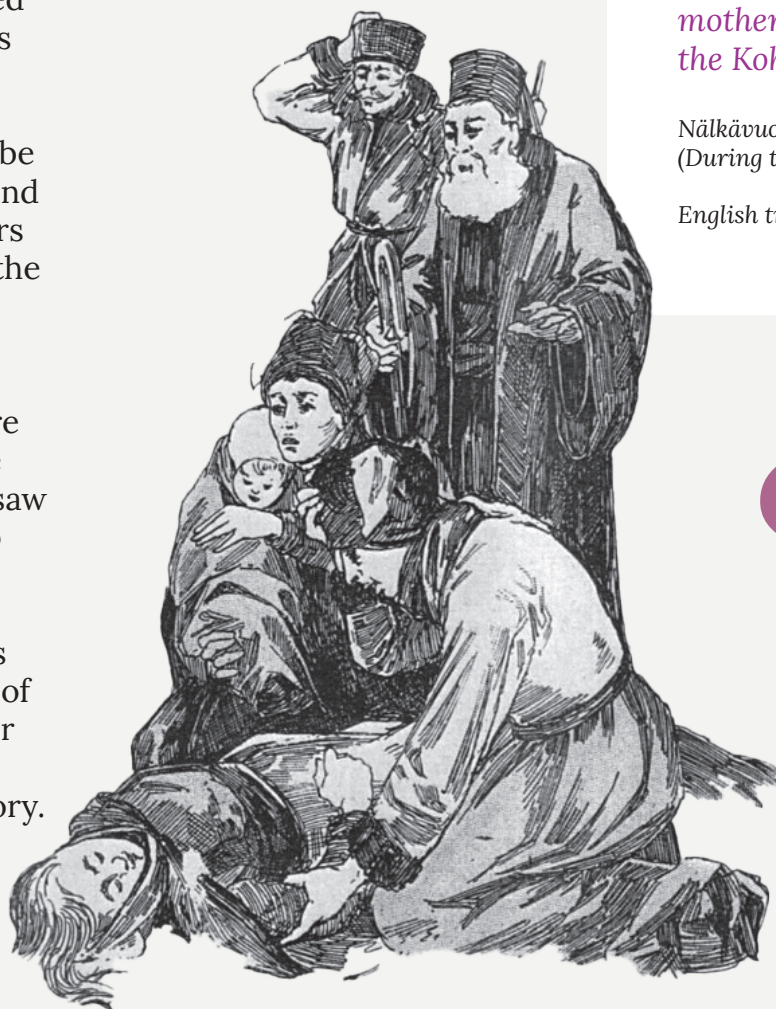


Illustration of Finnish Famine
- Image Credit 3

“

“You see, at mid-winter the master of Kohiseva House came to inform Perttu that there was no longer any surplus in the charity coffers to give to anyone in Kuohatti. The guardian of the poor-law board had announced at church that the state could not afford to spend money on just nothing, and that the people of Kuohatti had better work.” He had added: “They’re complaining for no reason. Kuohatti has good lands, especially the slash and burn-lands.”

“That’s how it is, poor Perttu,” pondered Kohiseva: “People in my own village are beginning to have nothing to give either. That’s how it is: there is suffering to be felt not only by you, but for us as well.”

“But a Karelian can take suffering,” thought Perttu whilst tossing the last handful of bark-flour into his dough, which after being baked did not seem to be holding together, as it held hardly a grain of rye to bind it. After a while he added: “If only one would dare to take some pine bark from the crown forests, or if they were even given a couple of cups of rye, there would be no talk of having nothing for a long time, and maybe after seeing some food the workforce would take action so that some work could actually be done.”

Kohiseva promised to have his wife bake as much hay-bread as possible, while they themselves still had hay with which to bake it. “And, of course, you can make do with bark-bread as well for now, as long as you have a sack at hand,” he added as he left.

Grateful for the promised help, Perttu shook Kohiseva’s hand much harder than usual and Tuomas, with his eyes glistening brightly with joy, whispered into his mother’s ear: “You’ll be healthy in no time now that we’re getting hay-bread from the Kohisevas.”

Nälkävuonna: karjalainen kertomus
(During the Year of Hunger (A Karelian Tale))

English translation by Andrew G. Newby.

DISCUSSION POINT

Why might the governing elites in Finland seek to blame victims of the famine for their fate?

THE GREEK FAMINE (1941-44)

The Greek Famine was the result of Germany and its Axis powers occupying the country as part of their war efforts.

The occupation had two clear impacts on the famine that followed. Germany and the Axis powers required food and resources to support their war effort and troops outside of Greece. This meant that Greek food and resources were seized and diverted outside of the country to feed the Axis armies and populations.

In addition to this, the Allied powers implemented a blockade of the country to prevent food and supplies being requisitioned by the occupying Axis leadership. This meant that critical supplies of food and relief were unable to reach the Greek people. Up to 300,000 Greeks then perished in the famine, despite the emergence of a 'black market' for food and essential provisions.

As the famine wrought havoc on Greece, the Allies blamed the Germans for their plundering of the nation's food supplies, but significant pressure came onto the Allies, with the blockade being blamed by the Axis powers, and by the Vatican, for the devastation and loss of life in the famine. Aid agencies expressed frustration that they were unable to deliver support due to the blockade.

Regardless of where the blame for the famine lay, the Allies lifted the blockade in 1942 and relief was rapidly felt in Greece, with the famine effectively ended.

Route 1. When I left the car, he said he was sorry he couldn't take me any farther."

Famine in Athens Kills 2,000 in Day; Bread \$15 a Loaf

By the Associated Press.

BERN, Switzerland, Jan. 28. —Famine conditions in Greece are so acute that 2,000 persons died in Athens alone in a single day and bread sells for \$15 a loaf, the Journal de Geneve reported today.

The paper quoted an anonymous letter dated December 9, 1941, from a writer in Greece as the source of its information.

"People of the streets all are like skeletons and on every corner people are lying down," the letter said. "The winter is especially intense and there is no wood."

"Only the richest can afford available food, with bread selling at \$15 a loaf."

Sum Japanese raid today west coast to two ship it was ann Some ca as a result region of Island betw Guinea.

"There i enemy air. Indies co were dropp places cau age. Here east of Bor and machi Reportin Papen, Bor Strait, the "there is r

News article about mortality, winter and inflation in Athens during the Axis occupation in WWII
- Image Credit 4



Nazis at the Parthenon in Athens
- Image Credit 5

DISCUSSION POINT

How does the Greek Famine show us that trying to apportion blame for famine can be complicated and too simplistic an approach?

THE GREAT IRISH FAMINE (1845-1852)

Landlord addresses tenants in Monaghan
- Image Credit 6



The Irish Famine of the nineteenth century was principally caused by the failure of the potato crop over successive years. The blight that afflicted the potato meant that the principal source of food and nutrition for the majority of the Irish population was in short supply and led to a catastrophic famine that claimed almost a million lives.

However, whilst the failure of the potato crop may have triggered the famine, much of the blame for its severity and impact has been placed upon Ireland's colonial relationship with England.

Irish land was very often owned by British or Anglo-Irish Landlords and for many years had been exporting corn, meat and other foodstuffs to Great Britain to help feed the population there. When the famine began these exports continued and the British government came to adopt a laissez-faire (hands off) approach to helping Ireland – insisting that landlords were still paid rents. This policy was compounded by a common view among the British ruling classes that high Catholic birth-rates and the supposedly lazy nature of the Irish people made them responsible for their own fate in the famine.

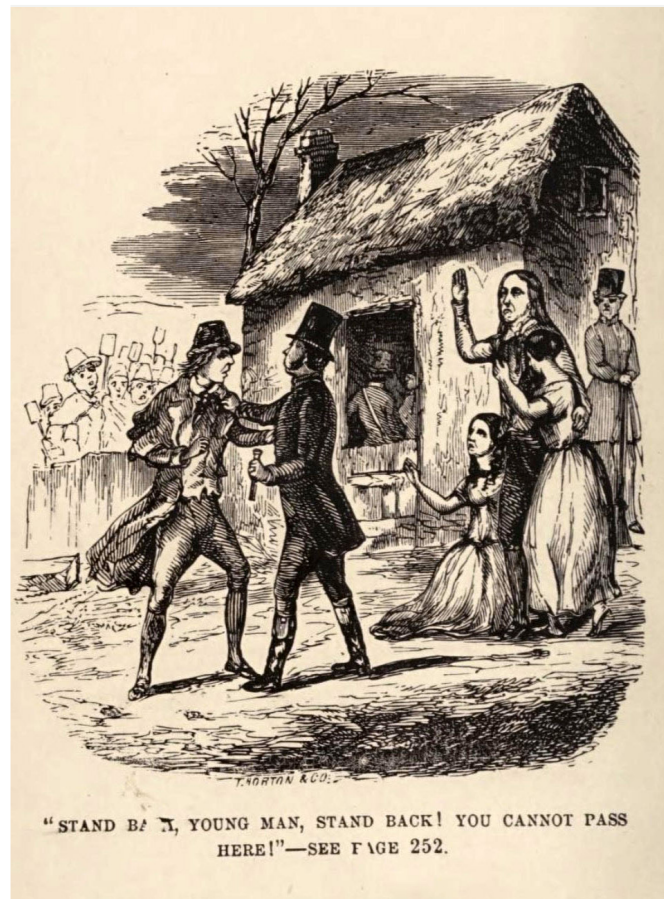
This notion that the British made the Irish famine worse became central to the Irish national historical narrative, and stories that corn was shipped out of Ireland while the Irish were starving often feature in stories about the catastrophe.



Irish famine imagery
- Image Credit 7

This framing of the Great Famine as the result of deliberate policies by the British to decrease Ireland's population became more commonplace due to the writings of Irish nationalist John Mitchel (1815–1875), such as *Jail Journal* (1854). Exiled from his country for his involvement in the Young Ireland rebellion of 1848, Mitchel blamed the British for the Famine as a way to plead for Home Rule (Irish independence).

This narrative of British guilt still occupies a key place in the Irish psyche and identity today.



Landlordism depicted in the Irish Famine
- Image Credit 8

DISCUSSION POINT

What does the Irish Famine teach us about how a tragedy such as a famine can be used to shape the national identity?

TASK

Find at least three examples of how both the Irish and Finnish Famines have been commemorated. What are the similarities and differences in how they have been treated? What might this tell us about how they have been remembered in national history?

Create a poster commemorating the Greek Famine from an Axis powers sympathisers viewpoint, and one from an Allied viewpoint. What message is each one seeking to convey?

OPTIONAL LEARNING TASKS

DIGITAL ACTIVITIES

DIGITAL CASE STUDY

Create a series of pen pics of famine protagonists, where students can explore different perspectives on who's responsible for a specific famine.

ONLINE DEBATE FORUM

Set up a moderated online forum where students can discuss and debate responsibility for famines in different historical contexts.

VIDEO ESSAY

Have students create short video essays, presenting their views on famine responsibility.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

MOCK TRIAL

Organize a classroom "trial" where different groups or individuals are accused of causing or exacerbating a famine, with students acting as prosecutors, defense attorneys, and jury.

HISTORICAL PRESS CONFERENCE

Have students role-play as historical figures holding a press conference about a famine, answering questions about their role and responsibilities.





Image Credits

Image Credit 1

Szeder László, 2007
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_statues_of_Joseph_Stalin#/media/File:D-DLG-Gundelfingen2.JPG

Image Credit 2

Louis Sparre, 1893
https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/sources/detail_image_view/196

Image Credit 3

Mme Fernande De Lysle, 1897
https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-19474-0_1/figures/4

Image Credit 4

Evening Star, 1942
https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_text_view/204

Image Credit 5

GFA 1941
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bundesarchiv_Bild_101I-165-0412-14A,_Griechenland,_v._Brauchitsch_auf_der_Akropolis.jpg

Image Credit 6

J.T. Trench
<https://roaringwaterjournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/trench-book-illustration.jpg>

Image Credit 7

Illustrated London News, 1849
https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_text_view/305

Image Credit 8

J Sadlier, 1852
https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_text_view/253

Credits

This learning resource was co-developed by the Heritages of Hunger research consortium and Nerve Centre Derry

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Some of the text has been adapted from the Heritages of Hunger virtual exhibition, <https://heritagesofhunger.org>, courtesy of Charley Boerman (University of Amsterdam) and Niels Arnbak. The visual styling of this learning programme has partly been inspired by the concept, design, and realisation of the exhibition, courtesy of HOAX Amsterdam.

With assistance from:

Miguel Ángel del Arco Blanco (University of Granada)
Matleena Billington (Kuopio Cultural History Museum)
Anne-Lise Bobeldijk (NIOD)
Charley Boerman (University of Amsterdam)
Marieke van Egeraat (Radboud University)
Laurence Gourievidis (Université Clermont Auvergne)
Violetta Hionidou (Newcastle University)
Lindsay Janssen (Radboud University)
William Jenkins (York University)
Lotte Jensen (Radboud University)
Jason King (Irish Heritage Trust)
Anne Lahtinen (The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas)
Deborah Madden (Lancaster University)
Jeremy Maron (Canadian Museum for Human Rights)
Emily Mark-FitzGerald (University College Dublin)
Mark McGowan (University of Toronto)
Anne van Mourik (NIOD)
Andrew G. Newby (University of Jyväskylä)
Gloria Román Ruiz (University of Granada)
Clara Vlessing (Radboud University)
Ingrid de Zwarte (Wageningen University and Research)

And the following organisations:

Canada Ireland Foundation
Centro Documental de la Memoria Historica
EuroClio
The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas
Holodomor Research and Education Consortium (HREC)
HOAX
Irish Heritage Trust
Kuopio Cultural History Museum
Museum Rotterdam
NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies
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Red Star Line Museum
Versetzmuseum
Wageningen University and Research

Funding

Heritages of Hunger: Societal Reflections on Past European Famines in Education, Commemoration and Musealisation is a collaboration between Radboud University, NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, and Wageningen University and Research. It is funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO) under grant agreement no. NWA.1160.18.197.



MODULE THREE: FOOD & NUTRITION



LESSON ONE: MARKET CONDITIONS AND EMERGENCY FOOD



LESSON DESCRIPTION

This lesson will detail how market conditions in a society have an impact on the development of famine. It will also highlight the types and prices of staple foods available before and during a hunger crisis, assessing the impact of famine on a person's livelihood. The lesson will incorporate case studies and discussion of the following famines:

- » **The Spanish Hunger Years (1939-52)**
- » **The Dutch Food Riots (1847)**
- » **The Finnish Great Hunger Years (1866-68)**



LESSON INTENTIONS

- ✓ Understand that famine can impact differently on different people and communities in the same country or region.
- ✓ Identify reasons why some communities may be more affected than others.



LESSON OUTCOMES

- ✓ Describe the significance of how societies facing famines adapted to new food conditions.
- ✓ Be able to explain the types of foods and food alternatives eaten during famines.



USEFUL ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

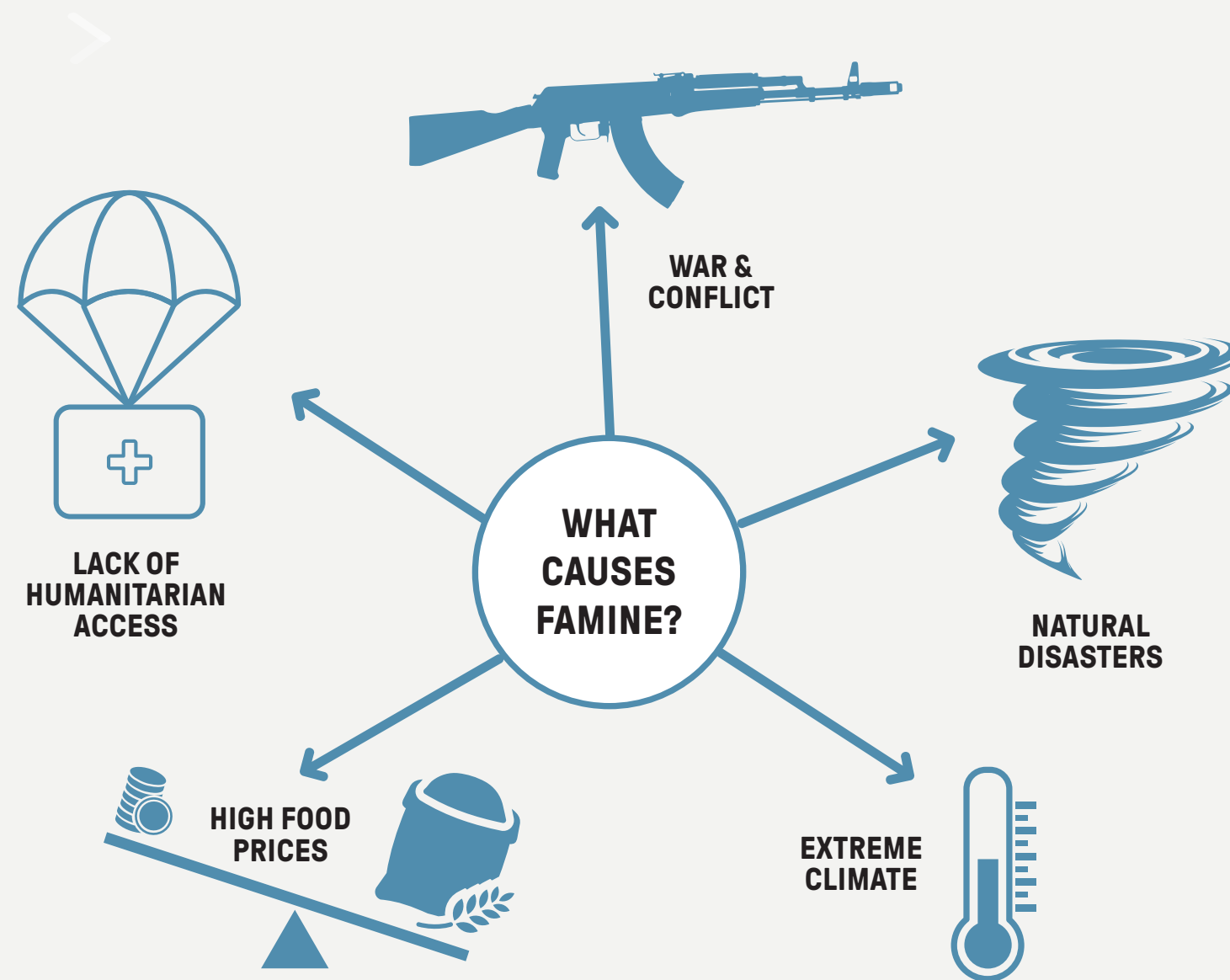
- > [Global Famine Case Studies](#)
- > [Online Heritages of Hunger Repository](#)
- > [Online Heritages of Hunger Exhibition](#)

Additional study stimulus to that included in the module can be found here:

- > [Greek famine recipes \(in Greek so mostly of interest to Greek teachers/ students\)](#)
- > [A food riot during the Irish famine of 1740-41](#)
- > [Ad encouraging Germans to collect acorns and chestnuts](#)
- > [A satirical approach to food scarcity in WW 1 Germany](#)

INTRODUCTION

The causes of famine can be many and varied. Natural disasters, climate, war, political regimes and mismanagement of resources have all been causal factors in famines across history and geography. However, these can be made worse by other issues which can have significant impacts on those most directly affected by the shortage of food.



MARKET CONDITIONS

Module One shows us that famine is very often not simply the shortage of food. But it is the political response to that shortage that can determine whether a famine develops and the severity and duration of that famine.

Market conditions are often a key element of that political response. Market conditions can refer to the ability of food to reach people as determined by access to the market; the availability of food; and the demand for food. Access and availability can be politically influenced, which in turn fuels demand. If food is not easily able to reach people, and its availability is reduced, then demand will increase. In this way market conditions can be critical.





CASE STUDY

THE SPANISH HUNGER YEARS (1939-52)



Photograph of a bakery in post-war Spain
- Image Credit 1

The Spanish Hunger Years saw an estimated 200,000 people die from starvation and malnutrition-related illness as the Second War, and then its legacy, gripped Europe.

The famine is now acknowledged to be the result of Spanish Leader General Franco's economic protectionist policies, known as Autarky. Through these policies Franco sought to create economic self-sufficiency for Spain, so that it would not be reliant on either imports or exports for its health, wealth and prosperity.

As a result, agriculture stagnated, as prices and wages fell dramatically, with a national economic crisis made worse by the effects of the war both in Spain and across Europe. The impact was catastrophic for many Spanish people. Compounded by a denial from the State that its policies were to blame, the effects of the famine were minimised in public discourse and underreported by both the Franco-controlled press and the medical establishment.

The Market conditions that the famine helped to create were then followed by a thriving 'black market' in food supplies within Spain, ensuring that the poorest and most vulnerable were disproportionately affected, and allowing those with resources or political connections to access food despite the famine.

DISCUSSION POINT

Can you think of any examples of how market conditions affect your access to food today, even when famine is not an issue?



HUNGER & DESPERATION

When people feel threatened by hunger, they can resort to desperate actions to secure food for themselves and their families.



'One young girl wrote that her father was so hungry he ate their dog. And it wasn't just animals. Approximately 1,500 Leningraders were arrested for cannibalism during this time.'

Alexis Peri writing on the Siege of Leningrad (Boston University, 2017)



CASE STUDY

THE DUTCH FOOD RIOTS OF 1847



British Soldiers bringing food relief to Dutch children
- Image Credit 2

In the mid-nineteenth century, much of Holland was impacted by a potato blight that plunged the country into a food crisis that saw the prices of basic foodstuffs triple – a situation that was even more severe for those small farmers who depended on the sale of surplus potatoes for their income.

With widespread discontent at the prices, and real fear for future access to food, public disorder and rioting broke out in several Dutch towns and cities. In Harlingen Port a ship being loaded with new potatoes for export sparked riots and in the city of Groningen the 'Bread Revolt' of June 1847 saw four civilians killed and thirteen wounded by soldiers, as the Government struggled to bring the situation under control.



As well as resorting to violence, the desperation brought on by famine can force people to make very difficult decisions about what to eat.

Humans can be very resilient and creative in finding sources of nutrition at times of famine and hunger, and history has shown us many ways in which people have tried to survive by eating a range of different unusual foods.

BARK BREAD

Bark bread was a common alternative during periods of food scarcity and famine in Finland, as well as in Sweden and Norway. It involved scraping bark from trees, drying it, and grinding it into a flour-like substance.

- Image Credit 3



Above: Grating sugar beets
- Image Credit 4

TULIP BULBS & SUGAR BEETS



Tulip bulbs for eating
- Image Credit 5

During the Hungerwinter in the Netherlands, severe food shortages led people to use unconventional food sources like tulip bulbs and sugar beets. The Dutch Nutrition Council distributed information and recipes on how to use these items for food.

EATING UNUSUAL ANIMALS AND CANNIBALISM



Rats for eating
- Image Credit 6

During severe and prolonged famines, desperate people turn to eating pets or animals not usually consumed as a last resort for survival. In extreme cases, instances of cannibalism have been documented. These acts, while uncommon and often culturally taboo, highlight the severe consequences of famine and the extreme measures that people can take when starving.

“

'I was seven years old, and I remember everything as if it were not long ago, in the village of Petrivka where I was born and grew up. There was a terrible famine in 1933; there were 520 households, and half of the village died from hunger. There were incidents of cannibalism. Parents died from hunger, and two brothers and a five-year old sister remained; they stabbed her to death and ate her. A mother and daughter ate her six year old brother & son. They were taken to the police and their fate is unknown...

*Letter written by Khurdei Oleksii (Aleksei) in 1989.
Part of the Maniak collection. Hosted by HREC.*



CONCLUSION

Throughout history, and right up to the present day, famines have had different impacts on different groups in society. Those that have the greatest access to power and resources are less likely to be seriously affected than those that do not.

On a more individual level, famine often impacts differently, with children, women, the elderly and the disabled at greatest risk of being most severely affected by famine.



OPTIONAL LEARNING TASKS

DIGITAL
ACTIVITIESCLASSROOM
ACTIVITIES

PRESENTATION

Create a multimedia presentation identifying the market conditions that contributed to a real-life famine.



ROLE-PLAY

Divide the class into groups representing different stakeholders (farmers, merchants, consumers, government officials) and have them act out scenarios related to changing food prices and availability.

FAMINE FOOD
RECIPE BOOK

Have students research and compile a physical recipe book of foods that people have resorted to eating during famines throughout history.



Image Credits

Image Credit 1

Editex (2016, bach., p. 352)
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00309230.2022.2039241#d1e574>

Image Credit 2

Midgley, 1944
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=24499155>

Image Credit 3

Bark Bread, 2024
https://heritagesofhunger.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/3_bark-bread-photograph-colour.jpeg

Image Credit 4

Johannes van Rhijn, 1945
https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_image_view/96

Image Credit 5

UMN 2016
<https://extension.umn.edu/how/planting-bulbs-tubers-and-rhizomes>

Image Credit 6

DBCLS 2021
https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:202101_Rat.svg



LESSON TWO: WOMEN & FAMINE

LESSON DESCRIPTION

This lesson will explore the role of women in famine history and their active role in the provision of relief and supplying food, as well as the ways in which they are portrayed as victims. It will look at case studies of the role of women in different societies and issues of agency, displacement and emigration. The lesson will incorporate case studies and discussion of the following famine:

» The Great Irish Famine (1845-1852)



LESSON INTENTIONS

- ✓ Identify the different roles played by women during famine.
- ✓ Understand the reasons why women may have been disproportionately affected by the effects of famine.



LESSON OUTCOMES

- ✓ Be aware of women's agency in supplying food and relief.



USEFUL ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- > [Global Famine Case Studies](#)
- > [Online Heritages of Hunger Repository](#)
- > [Online Heritages of Hunger Exhibition](#)

Additional study stimulus to that included in the module can be found here:

- > [Poem from Flanders criticising the rich who are unwilling to provide relief](#)
- > [Dutch monument of female courier, there are stories of women playing an important role as courier during the Dutch Hunger winter](#)
- > [Ad discouraging women from using the black market in the Spanish famine](#)
- > [Newspaper article about a women's protest in the Netherlands during the Hunger Winter](#)
- > [Image of a mother with starving children from Ukraine](#)



INTRODUCTION

Famines generally have a more severe impact on the **less powerful** and **more vulnerable groups** in society. This is not just limited to social class, geography and income – **gender** can often be a significant factor in the impact of famine.

> WOMEN & FAMINE

Famine tends to impact women disproportionately more than men due to a range of social, economic, and biological factors.

Culturally, women in many societies have been expected to eat last and least within the family structure, prioritizing the nutrition of men and children. This practice becomes especially detrimental during famines, leading to higher rates of malnutrition among women. Additionally, pregnant and nursing women have increased nutritional needs, making them more vulnerable to the effects of food shortages.



*The widow Connor and her dying child
(Great Irish Famine) - Image Credit 1*



*Two emaciated children
and their mother (the
Hungerwinter)
- Image Credit 2*

Economically, women still frequently have less access to resources, land ownership, and decision-making power. This limits their ability to secure food for themselves and their dependents during crises.

> EXPLOITATION



*A starving mother
and her children
(the Hungerwinter)
- Image Credit 3*

During food shortages, women may be forced to resort to measures such as selling sex or entering into early marriage to secure food, exposing them to additional health risks and exploitation. The increased workload of searching for food and water can also take a toll on women's health and well-being.

To compound this, women's lower social status in many societies may result in less access to emergency food aid and resources. Gender-based violence has been seen to increase during times of scarcity, further compromising women's safety and health.



*Mother of the occupation,
Greece. Costas Valsamis
Credit: Heritages of Hunger
Repository - Image Credit 4*

NUTRITIONAL INEQUALITY



A woman feeds her child in Yemen
- Image Credit 5

Women may also suffer because of the notion that children and men who are engaged in manual work have a greater need for nutrition and energy, which can see women coming last in the distribution of food.

Within many cultures it has often been regarded as a natural maternal act to sacrifice your own health and nutrition for your children, and this depiction of the selfless mother has been recurrent in famine throughout history.

In a similar vein, portrayals of famines have regularly focused on women and children as particular victims of famine, reinforcing a stereotype of female powerlessness and presenting them as needing to be saved by others.

DISCUSSION POINT

Why do you think that women may be more severely impacted by famine than men?



- Image Credit 6

CASE STUDY

WOMEN & THE IRISH FAMINE

The generally accepted narrative of women in the Irish Famine was, until relatively recently, that of victimhood, and much iconography of the Famine depicts women in this role, such as the illustration of Bridget O'Donnell and her children which was published in the Illustrated London News on 15 December 1849.

This engraving, made by Cork-born artist James Mahoney, is one of the most recognised images of the Great Irish Famine. Less well known, but even more moving, was the article that appeared alongside the image, which provided an interview with Bridget.

At the onset of the Famine, she and her husband rented over seven acres of land in County Clare, but they fell behind with the rent. They were evicted two months before Bridget gave birth—to a still-born child. Shortly afterwards, her thirteen-year-old son died, 'with want and with hunger'. It is not known what subsequently became of the O'Donnell family.

Bridget, like hundreds of thousands of other Irish women, became invisible, yet her story and her image had appeared in one of the most widely-circulated newspapers of the day.

More recent research has revealed that women had more agency than may have been thought. There are many instances of women being active in petitioning local landlords for food, rent relief and other assistance.

Various Ladies Associations and groups were established across the country amongst those that did have access to food and resources to provide help and famine relief wherever they were able to do so. In Cork a government official praised the work of one such group:

'There is a ladies' association, doing much good, at a great personal sacrifice and upon a very limited fund. These ladies visit the cabins where the worst cases of fever and sickness prevail, and by a judicious distribution of nourishment and clothing, have doubtless, under Providence, been instrumental in saving many lives.'

<https://www.rte.ie/history/famine-ireland/2020/0831/1162378-hidden-heroes-women-and-the-great-famine/>

It is clear that the role of women in famine is more complicated than the simple mother and victim narratives that have been commonly seen over time, but it is equally clear that women have not experienced famine in the same way as men, and this has been a repeated feature of famine across time and space.



OPTIONAL LEARNING TASKS



DIGITAL ACTIVITIES



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



DIGITAL TIMELINE CREATION

Have students create an interactive timeline using a tool like TimelineJS, highlighting the roles and experiences of women during various famines throughout history.



SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN SIMULATION

Have students create a mock social media campaign raising awareness about the disproportionate impact of famine on women, using a platform like Canva to design their posts.



HISTORICAL LETTER WRITING

Have students write letters from the perspective of fictional or historical women during different famines, describing their experiences and challenges.



DEBATE ON GENDER ROLES

Organize a classroom debate on why women might be more severely impacted by famine than men, encouraging students to consider various social, economic, and biological factors.



FAMINE RELIEF ORGANIZATION SIMULATION

Divide the class into groups and have them create and present plans for famine relief organizations that specifically address the needs of women during food crises.



Image Credits

Image Credit 1

Unknown, 1850
https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_image_view/54

Image Credit 2

Menno Huizinga, 1945
https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_image_view/62

Image Credit 3

Menno Huizinga, 1945
https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_image_view/81

Image Credit 4

Costas Valsemis, 1979
https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_memorialsite_view/36

Image Credit 5

Gender Concern International
<https://www.genderconcerns.org/news/famine-in-wartorn-Yemen-has-calamitous-effects-on-women-and-girls/>

Image Credit 6

Illustrated London News, 1849
https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Irish_potato_famine_Bridget_O%27Donnel.jpg

Credits

This learning resource was co-developed by the Heritages of Hunger research consortium and Nerve Centre Derry

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Some of the text has been adapted from the Heritages of Hunger virtual exhibition, <https://heritagesofhunger.org>, courtesy of Charley Boerman (University of Amsterdam) and Niels Arnbak. The visual styling of this learning programme has partly been inspired by the concept, design, and realisation of the exhibition, courtesy of HOAX Amsterdam.

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Jeremy Maron (Canadian Museum for Human Rights)
Emily Mark-FitzGerald (University College Dublin)
Mark McGowan (University of Toronto)
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Gloria Rom n Ruiz (University of Granada)
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Ingrid de Zwarte (Wageningen University and Research)

And the following organisations:

Canada Ireland Foundation
Centro Documental de la Memoria Historica
EuroClio
The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas
Holodomor Research and Education Consortium (HREC)
HOAX
Irish Heritage Trust
Kuopio Cultural History Museum
Museum Rotterdam
NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies
Radboud Pre-University College of Society
Radboud University
Red Star Line Museum
Versetzmuseum
Wageningen University and Research

Funding

Heritages of Hunger: Societal Reflections on Past European Famines in Education, Commemoration and Musealisation is a collaboration between Radboud University, NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, and Wageningen University and Research. It is funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO) under grant agreement no. NWA.1160.18.197.



MODULE 4: AID, RELIEF, AND PHILANTHROPY



LESSON ONE: RELIEF & PHILANTHROPY



LESSON DESCRIPTION

This lesson will examine some of the aid and relief efforts made during a range of famines, including the role of outside agencies and philanthropic organisations. It will explore the reasons and motivations behind these networks and why different countries were supported.

The lesson will incorporate case studies and discussion of the following famines:

- » **The Finnish Great Hunger Years (1866-68)**
- » **The Spanish Hunger Years (1939-52)**
- » **The Ethiopian Famine (1983-1985)**
- » **The Great Irish Famine (1845-1852)**



LESSON INTENTIONS

- ✓ Discuss the importance of official state aid and the work of outside agencies.
- ✓ Understand the role of international organisations in famine relief.
- ✓ Understand that the motivations for providing famine relief can be more complicated than simply helping people.



LESSON OUTCOMES

- ✓ To distinguish between official relief efforts, philanthropy and private charity.
- ✓ Describe the significance and motivations behind transnational relief.



USEFUL ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- > [Online Heritages of Hunger Repository](#)
- > [Online Heritages of Hunger Exhibition](#)

Additional study stimulus to that included in the module can be found here:

- > [Appeal for donations for relief in Ireland in an American newspaper](#)
- > [Irish workhouse relief video](#)
- > [Relief in Greece video with US commentary, might be interesting to analyse](#)
- > [Swedish red cross helping Dutch during Hunger winter](#)
- > [‘Black markets’ and Spain](#)



EXAMPLES

Two examples of such NGOs are included here below, but there are a wide range of others, often working in specific countries and regions – you can easily find locally relevant examples by searching online.

Established in 1961 as a United Nations initiative, the World Food Programme is the world’s largest humanitarian organization saving lives in emergencies and using food assistance to build a pathway to peace, stability and prosperity, for people recovering from conflict, disasters and the impact of climate change.



‘On any given day, WFP has 5,000 trucks, 20 ships and 152 aircraft on the move, delivering emergency assistance, relief and rehabilitation, development aid and special operations to people affected by conflict, droughts, floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, crop failures and other disasters. Two-thirds of our work is in conflict-affected countries, where people are three times more likely to be undernourished than those living in countries without conflict. When an emergency subsides, WFP helps rebuild lives and livelihoods by strengthening the resilience of people and communities.’

(www.wfp.org)

In recent years, the WFP has been active in providing famine relief in Sudan, Somalia and Gaza.



INTRODUCTION

Famine is often seen as a shared tragedy for a community – one that affects most people equally in a specific place and doesn’t discriminate in its impact – and victims of famine have traditionally attracted sympathy from others. They have regularly been regarded as innocent victims of circumstance and deserving of help and support to alleviate their suffering.

Famine relief often goes hand in hand with famine – for as long as there have been famines, there have been attempts to help. There are a number of charities and Non-Governmental Organisations today that are dedicated to helping victims of famine, and a number that have existed in the past in response to famine.

UN World food programme Volunteers
– Image Credit 1



There are a range of other charities and NGOs working across the world to tackle both the causes and consequences of famine. Key organisations include the International Red Cross; Concern Worldwide; Oxfam (which was established as a direct response to the Greek Famine of 1941-44); Action Against Hunger, as well as a range of formal Governmental interventions from key nations across the globe.

SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

The Society of Friends, or Quakers, is a British based loosely Christian charity that was a key source of support and relief during the Irish Famine of the nineteenth century and continues to work around famine relief today. Their work in Ireland was followed by similar support efforts in Finland in the 1850s as they were faced with a catastrophic famine, securing their reputation for practical compassionate assistance for those impacted by famine, regardless of their background or circumstances.



Quaker Logo

A Quaker run Soup Kitchen from the Irish Famine
- Image Credit 2



THE CORK SOCIETY OF FRIENDS' SOUP HOUSE.

GOVERNMENTAL RELIEF

As well as these NGO type interventions, governments themselves can play a key role in famine relief efforts within their own countries. It is a key responsibility of a functioning government to ensure that its citizens have access to healthy and affordable food, and famine can be a cause of international embarrassment to a government, as well as humanitarian concern.

However, governmental efforts at famine relief can be very problematic in that they may be politicised. This can determine the seriousness with which the famine is regarded or exactly where, and to what extent, relief may be provided.



Finnish Hunger painting
- Image Credit 3



CASE STUDY

THE FINNISH GREAT HUNGER YEARS (1866-68)

The Finnish famine of 1866-1868 saw a number of government efforts at relief, complicated by the fact that Finland was a 'Grand Duchy' of Russia – autonomous but ultimately under Russian control. These efforts included:

Emergency loans

The Senate (the government of the Grand Duchy) took loans from abroad and from the Bank of Finland to finance relief efforts.

Grain imports

Efforts were made to import grain from Russia and other countries to supplement the failed harvests.

Soup kitchens

In some areas, soup kitchens were established to provide food for the starving population.

Public works

The government initiated public works programs to provide employment and income for those affected by crop failures.

Tax relief

Some tax relief measures were implemented for the most affected areas.

Crop diversification

The government encouraged farmers to plant more robust crops like potatoes to reduce reliance on traditional grains.



The use of “famine” in Finland in an international context had started already in 1856, when British Quakers – horrified at what they saw as their countrymen’s unnecessary bombardment of Finland’s west coast during the Crimean War – visited Finland in order to see how they might repair the damage (both to Finland’s socio-economic infrastructure, and to Britain’s international reputation). The British Navy saw Finland, a part of the Russian Empire, as a perfectly legitimate target. The Quakers – reflecting wider British popular opinion – failed to understand the benefit of sinking small fishing boats, attacking grain stores and other non-military sites all along the coast from Oulu to Helsinki. Rumours of a poor harvest in 1856 prompted fears of what the Quaker visitors termed “famine” – the use of the word, they hoped, would resonate with the British public still shocked and ashamed of the events of the Great Irish Famine, less than a decade earlier. After the initial tour of 1856, a second Quaker trip to Finland took place in summer 1857, in order to see how the money raised could best be spent. As a part of this initiative, Wilson Sturge and George Baker visited Iisalmi on their way to Oulu in June 1857.

(Newby, 2014, p. 69; Newby, 2015, p. 112)
<https://katovuodet1860.wordpress.com/tag/quakers/>



Food distribution in Tampere, Finland
- Image Credit 4

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EFFORTS

Despite these efforts, the famine resulted in the deaths of approximately 150,000 people (about 8-9% of the population), indicating that the relief measures were not entirely effective. The government's response was often criticised as being too slow and inadequate, especially in the early stages of the crisis. Poor transportation infrastructure made it difficult to distribute aid effectively, particularly to remote rural areas. Finland's economy was not strong enough to fully cope with the crisis, and the government's resources were limited. Some officials adhered to liberal economic policies that discouraged extensive government intervention, limiting the scale of relief efforts.

While the Finnish government did make efforts to alleviate the famine, these efforts were generally considered insufficient to fully address the crisis. The scale of the disaster, combined with economic, ideological, and infrastructural limitations, hampered the effectiveness of the relief measures.



Food distribution in Spain
- Image Credit 5



CASE STUDY

THE SPANISH HUNGER YEARS (1939-52)

Spain's 'Hunger Years' in the 1940's saw a very mixed response from Franco's Government. General Franco's vision of a self-sufficient Spain was of a country not permitted to rely on imports or exports of food and other materials.

This policy was in significant part to blame for the famine, and the steps that were implemented by the Government to relieve the famine reflected a level of denial that things were as bad for people as they actually were.

The government introduced a strict rationing system for basic foodstuffs. However, this system was often inadequate and corrupt. Franco's regime pursued economic self-sufficiency (known as Autarky), which included attempts to increase domestic food production. However, these policies often made food shortages worse.

While officially illegal, the government often turned a blind eye to black market activities as a way for people to supplement their meagre rations. Initially, Franco's government was reluctant to accept international aid due to its isolationist policies. However, as the situation worsened, some aid was accepted, particularly from Argentina. The regime used propaganda to downplay the severity of the food shortages and to blame external factors.

Franco's government's response to the famine was generally ineffective and in many ways made the problem worse:

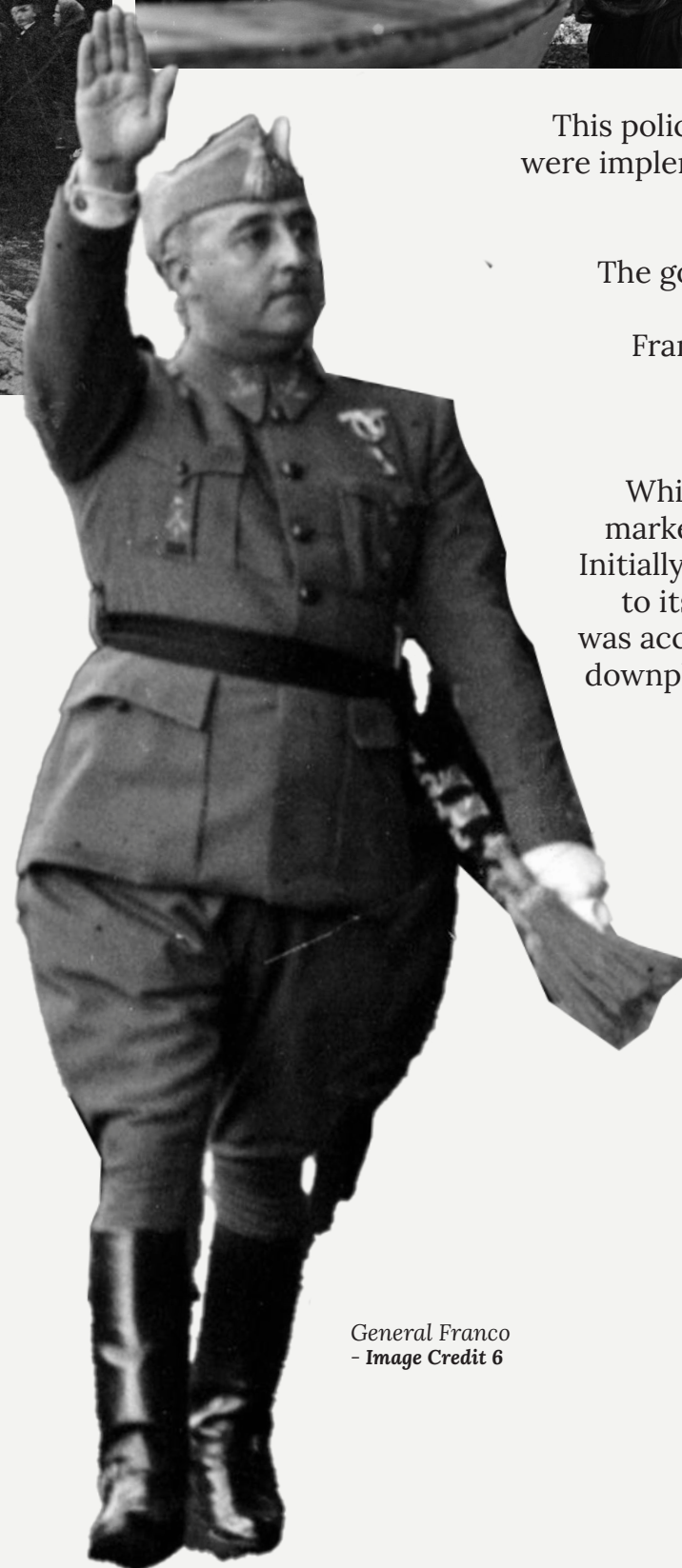
The autarky policies hampered economic recovery and food production.

Corruption and favouritism in the rationing system meant that many people, especially those seen as opponents of the regime, suffered disproportionately.

The reluctance to seek international help early on prolonged the suffering.

The famine eased gradually in the 1950s, more due to a slow economic recovery and a shift away from autarky policies than due to effective government intervention during the crisis years.

It is worth noting that information about this period was heavily censored under Franco's regime, and full details about the government's response and its effectiveness are still subject to historical research and debate.



General Franco
- Image Credit 6

Throughout history, famines have often been accompanied by famine relief, either from Governments, charities, NGO's, or a combination of them - working to help those affected by the consequences of food shortages.

However, it is important to consider the motivation of any of these groups or organisations in their work. Whilst genuine philanthropy - the desire to help and save life for purely humanitarian reasons - can be the key factor, there can also be political or social reasons for help to be offered, and it may have longer term implications for those that are helped.

RELIGIOUS PHILANTHROPY

Inspired by their faith, churches and other religious organisations are often important sources of aid during times of hunger. Through their international and local networks, they collect and distribute charity. While such help is generally unconditional, it is often used as a way of promoting the religion of the donating institution..



CASE STUDY

CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES IN ETHIOPIA (1980S)

During the Ethiopian famine of the 1980s, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) played a significant role in providing aid:

Food Distribution

CRS distributed food to millions of starving Ethiopians.

Medical Care

They set up emergency medical facilities to treat malnutrition and related illnesses.

Agricultural Support

CRS provided seeds and tools to help rebuild local agriculture.



CRS Aid
- Image Credit 7

While delivering this crucial aid, CRS also:

Incorporated prayer and religious services into aid distribution events.

Distributed Bibles and religious materials alongside food and medical supplies.

Used Christian imagery and messaging in their camps and facilities.

Encouraged local staff to share their faith with aid recipients.

This approach provided essential relief but also raised questions about the ethics of combining humanitarian aid with religious promotion in vulnerable communities.

FOOD FOR WORK

In 19th-century Europe, it was feared that charity would make people lazy, so governments required people to work in return for help. During famines, the poor could work at so-called 'relief works' in exchange for aid or (too little) money to buy food. Sadly, these often did more harm than good. People endured bad working and living conditions, got sick easily, and did not get enough food.

FINLAND



CASE STUDY



Construction of the
Taipale Channel
- Image Credit 8

In Finland, construction work on the new and larger Taipale channel began in December 1867 and lasted until 1871. Construction work was done during the Great Hunger Years. Soon word got around about the possibility to work and be paid in grain. Workers arrived from all over Finland. In January 1868, 600 men worked on the channel. Many had brought their families with them. Many had to live in pits dug into the ground. The primitive living conditions along with diseases led to increased deaths. Between April and May 1868 alone, 281 people were buried.



POLITICS OF RELIEF

Countries give help to build friendships with other nations. After World War II, humanitarian aid played a big role in early Cold War politics



CASE STUDY

POST WWII BERLIN

After World War II, Germany and Berlin were divided into zones – occupied by the United States, the Soviet Union, France, and Great Britain. To regulate the food distribution in the whole of Berlin, the Soviets instituted a blockade. Western media portrayed this as a plot for mass starvation, while the Airlift was represented as a way to prevent this supposed starvation. As such, the Airlift served political goals. By sending chocolate instead of bombs, Americans posed as friends of West Germany, ready to team up in the Cold War.



CONCLUSION

Famine relief has been critical in saving lives in many famine situations throughout history. Relief can come from official Government programmes, from charities and from NGO's and whilst it is intended to lessen the suffering caused by famine, it can also have other underlying motivations which need to be considered in terms of their longer term implications for those that are helped.

Berlin Airlift Memorial
- Image Credit 9/10



OPTIONAL LEARNING TASKS



DIGITAL ACTIVITIES



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



ONLINE RESEARCH PROJECT

Have students research a current famine relief effort by an NGO or government agency. They should create a digital presentation summarising the organisation's approach, challenges, and impact.



ROLE-PLAY

Divide the class into groups representing different stakeholders in a famine situation (e.g., local government, international NGOs, affected communities). Have them simulate a meeting to discuss and plan relief efforts.



CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

Students research a case study of a historical famine. In small groups, have them analyse the relief efforts, identifying strengths, weaknesses, and potential improvements.



INTERACTIVE TIMELINE

Using a free online timeline tool, ask students to create a chronological representation of major famine relief efforts throughout history, including key events, organisations involved, and outcomes.



POSTER CREATION

Ask students to design informative posters about different types of famine relief organisations, their methods, and impacts. Display these around the classroom for a gallery walk discussion.



Image Credits

Image Credit 1

WFP/Mohamed Galal 2024
[https://www.wfp.org/sites/default/files/
styles/media_embed/public/2024-12/
WFI960520%2020241126_SDN_
Mohamed-Galal_0483.jpg?itok=an3v2ams](https://www.wfp.org/sites/default/files/styles/media_embed/public/2024-12/WFI960520%2020241126_SDN_Mohamed-Galal_0483.jpg?itok=an3v2ams)

Image Credit 2

Illustrated London News, 1847
[https://www.rte.ie/history/famine-
ireland/2020/1116/1178533-a-labour-of-
love-the-contributions-of-the-society-of-
friends/](https://www.rte.ie/history/famine-ireland/2020/1116/1178533-a-labour-of-love-the-contributions-of-the-society-of-friends/)

Image Credit 3

Eero Jarnefelt, 1893
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/
File:Eero_J%C3%A4rnefelt_-_Under_
the_Yoke_\(Burning_the_Brushwood\)_-_
Google_Art_Project.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Eero_J%C3%A4rnefelt_-_Under_the_Yoke_(Burning_the_Brushwood)_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)

Image Credit 4

Unknown, 1868
[https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_image_
view/189](https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_image_view/189)

Image Credit 5

Hector G Barnes, date unknown
[https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_text_
view/162](https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_text_view/162)

Image Credit 6

Heinrich Hoffmann 1940
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meeting_
at_Hendaye#/media/File:Meeting_at_
Hendaye_\(en.wiki\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meeting_at_Hendaye#/media/File:Meeting_at_Hendaye_(en.wiki).jpg)

Image Credit 7

RS/Achuoth Deng
[https://portlanddiocese.org/sites/
default/files/styles/bp_featured_
image/public/2024-08/south_sudan.
jpg?h=c74750f6&itok=xspip4hl](https://portlanddiocese.org/sites/default/files/styles/bp_featured_image/public/2024-08/south_sudan.jpg?h=c74750f6&itok=xspip4hl)

Image Credit 8

Arnold Boos, 1868
[https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_image_
view/206](https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_image_view/206)

Image Credit 9

Eduard Ludwig, 1951
[https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_
memorialsite_view/24](https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_memorialsite_view/24)

Image Credit 10

German Stamp, 1956
[https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_artefact_
view/22](https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_artefact_view/22)

LESSON TWO: COMMUNITY SOLIDARITY

LESSON DESCRIPTION

This lesson will explore the actions of local communities during famine crises, including the solidarity and perseverance shown. Students will explore case studies and understand the ingenuity and actions taken within communities. The lesson will incorporate case studies and discussion of the following famines:

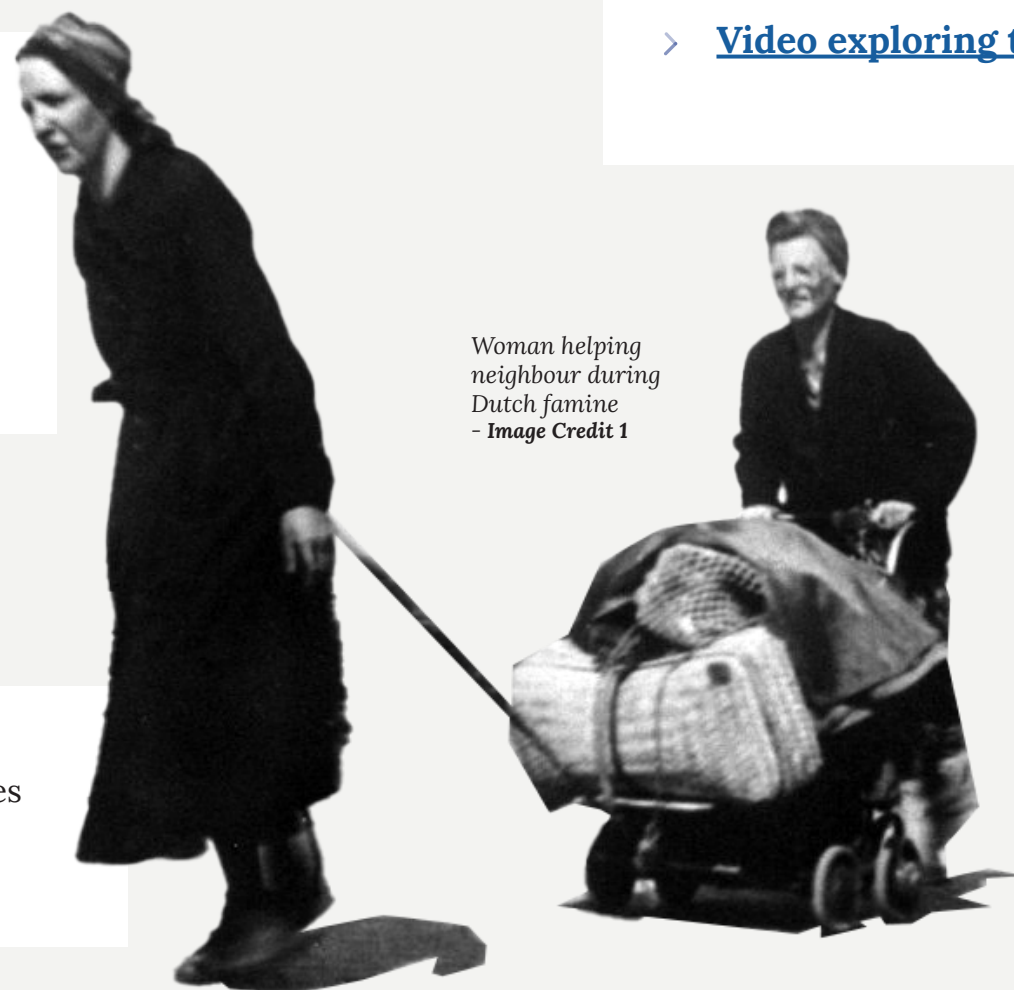
- » The Dutch Hunger Winter (1944-45)
- » The Greek famine (1941-1944)
- » The Great Irish Famine (1845-1852)

LESSON INTENTIONS

- ✓ Discuss why communities took action into their own hands.
- ✓ Understand the significance of local aid in supporting people.

LESSON OUTCOMES

- ✓ Be able to explain how and why communities rallied in support of one another.



Woman helping neighbour during Dutch famine
- Image Credit 1

USEFUL ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- > [Global Famine Case Studies](#)
- > [Online Heritages of Hunger Repository](#)
- > [Online Heritages of Hunger Exhibition](#)

Additional study stimulus to that included in the module can be found here:

- > [Example of local initiative of relief for children](#)
- > [Food droppings the Netherlands](#)
- > [Food droppings in Spain](#)
- > [Picture of soup kitchen for children in Greece during the war](#)
- > [Song on the support given by the Choctaw people to the Irish during the Irish Famine of the 19th century](#)
- > [Video exploring the Indigenous Canadian Aid to Ireland](#)

INTRODUCTION

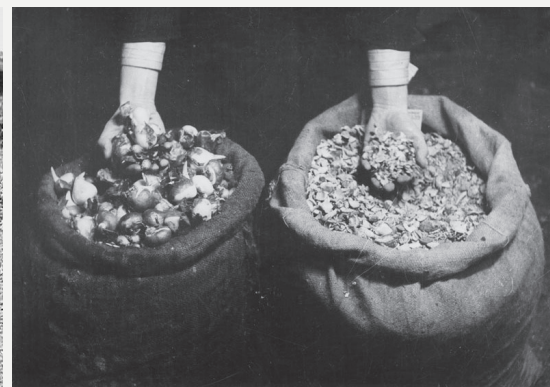
Whilst famine can provoke powerful reactions from governments, Charities, and NGOs in terms of their response and famine relief, famine can also have a significant unifying impact on the communities that are directly affected by them.

LOCAL SOLIDARITY

The desperation that starvation causes for people can be a catalyst for real ingenuity, perseverance, and solidarity as the struggle for nutrition and survival brings people together in a sense of a common mission. At times of such shared suffering there have been many examples of selfless charity and cooperation between people.

CASE STUDY

THE DUTCH HUNGER WINTER (1944-45)



Community picking
Beets
Sacks tulip bulbs
- Image Credit 2/3

Alternative food sources

People began eating tulip bulbs, sugar beets, and other unconventional food items. They developed recipes to make these more palatable and nutritious.

Urban farming

Many city dwellers converted parks, gardens, and even bombed-out buildings into small vegetable plots.

Fuel alternatives

With coal in short supply, people burned furniture, books, and even parts of their homes for heat and cooking fuel.

Bartering systems

Complex bartering networks emerged, allowing people to trade goods and services outside the official rationing system.

Secret radio

Despite the confiscation of radios by German forces, some Dutch people created hidden crystal radio sets to stay informed about the war's progress and potential relief efforts.

Food expeditions

Some people, often men, would embark on long bicycle journeys to rural areas to trade valuables for food with farmers.

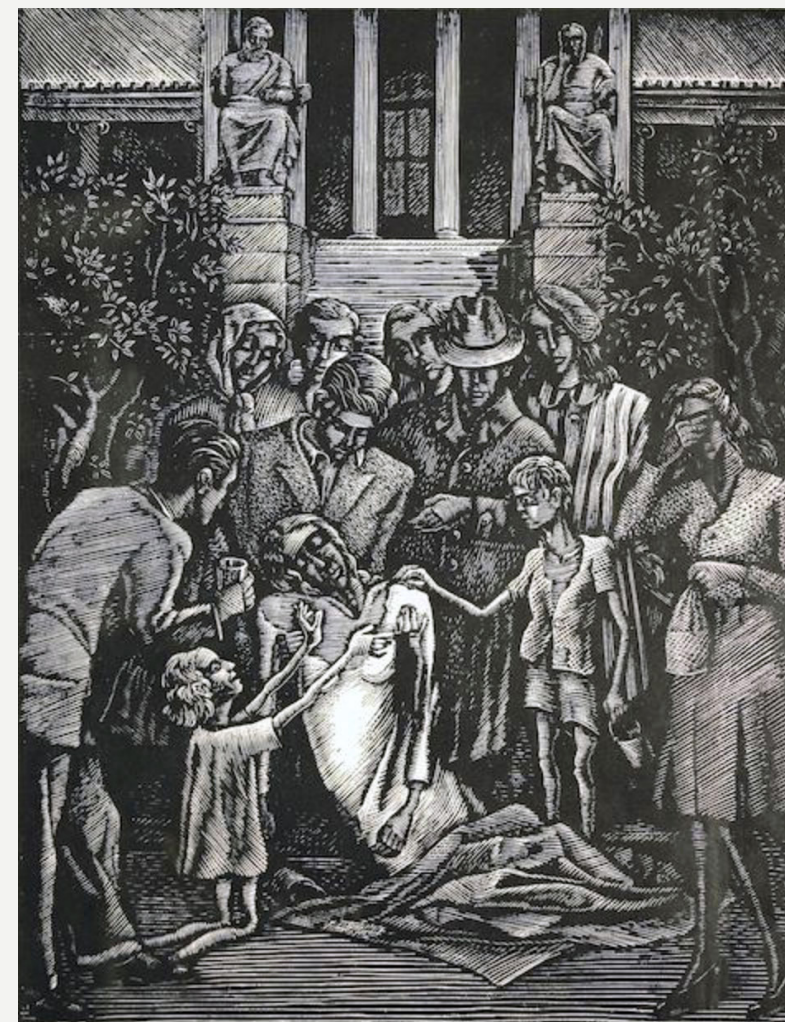
These examples demonstrate how extreme circumstances can drive people to find creative solutions for survival, often repurposing everyday items or skills in unexpected ways.

Famine is often not so much an issue of an absolute lack of food, but a lack of access to food. This can often be made worse by market forces or governmental actions and may lead the communities affected by famine to take action themselves to secure access to food - working outside official channels to highlight their situation or secure food.

CASE STUDY

THE GREEK FAMINE (1941-1944)

The Greek famine of 1941-1944, occurring during World War II and the Axis occupation of Greece, led to widespread starvation and the emergence of extensive 'black markets' as a survival mechanism. As official food distribution systems collapsed, underground networks arose to trade essential goods.



Athens, 1941
- Image Credit 4

'Black marketeers', known as "mavragorites," operated clandestinely to procure and sell food and other necessities. They often sourced items from rural areas, where some food was still being produced, and smuggled them into cities like Athens and Piraeus. These operations involved complex networks of farmers, transporters, and urban sellers, all working to evade occupation authorities.

The 'black market' became a double-edged sword. While it provided a lifeline for many, allowing access to food that was otherwise unavailable, it also led to extreme price inflation. Basic foodstuffs could cost hundreds of times their pre-war prices, forcing many to sell their possessions or resort to bartering to obtain sustenance.

The desperation of the population and the potential profits involved ensured the 'black market's' persistence. For many Greeks, participating in or purchasing from the black market became a necessary evil for survival.

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

At the emotional level, having allies who empathise and agitate on your behalf can be a powerful source of comfort at a time of great suffering. Knowing that your situation is understood outside of your community and that people are trying to help can give real hope in desperate situations.

CASE STUDY

INDIGENOUS CANADIAN SUPPORT & RELIEF FOR THE IRISH FAMINE

In 1847, representatives of the Indigenous Canadian Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee and Wendat, amongst other North American Indigenous peoples including the Choctaw Nation, sent financial aid to Ireland to help with relief efforts for the famine. The Aid was prompted by pleas from Ireland for help that were issued around the world.

The solidarity that existed between Ireland and the indigenous Peoples was in large part informed by a shared experience of colonial authority in their lands.

The aid that was provided from the Tribes came at a time when they were themselves suffering great hardship from economic collapse and the impact of settlers on their traditional lands. Despite their own dire situation, the tribes still felt it important to show their support for the Irish Famine people, with hunger and starvation a key part of the history of the First Nation Peoples.

The remarkable gesture of the Tribes is today remembered in both the Irish Famine Museum in Strokestown, Co. Roscommon and in Canada, and in gestures such as Philip Cote's Sacred Feathers painting - which pays tribute to the generosity of the Indigenous people in their famine relief efforts.

Sacred Feathers,
Philip Cote
- Image Credit 5



Choctaw Tribute
- Image Credit 7



THE BERLIN AIRLIFT

CASE STUDY

Berlin Airlift
- Image Credit 6



The Berlin Airlift, known as "Operation Vittles" to the Americans and "Operation Plainfare" to the British, was a remarkable logistical operation that took place from June 1948 to September 1949. It was initiated in response to the Soviet blockade of West Berlin, which cut off all land and water routes to the city, threatening its 2 million inhabitants with starvation.

The airlift's primary goal was to provide essential supplies, including food, fuel, and medicine, to the isolated population of West Berlin. At its peak, planes were landing every 30 seconds at Berlin's airports, delivering up to 13,000 tons of supplies daily. The operation not only prevented famine but also demonstrated the Western Allies' commitment to a free Berlin.

The airlift faced numerous challenges, including harsh weather conditions, limited airport capacity, and the need for constant aircraft maintenance. Despite these obstacles, it succeeded in delivering over 2.3 million tons of cargo over 277,000 flights.

The operation had far-reaching consequences beyond immediate famine relief. It boosted morale among West Berliners, strengthened the Western Allies' resolve in the face of Soviet pressure, and became a symbol of the Cold War struggle.

CONCLUSION

Famine can often be caused or made worse by the actions of the government or the powerful elites within a society. As a result, those affected by famine may feel that they need to take direct action themselves to end the famine and alleviate its impacts.

This can see local communities develop innovative solutions to their own problems and take their own action to secure food, either by working together at the local level, or reaching out to wider networks for help and support, and to raise awareness of their plight.



"It gives my soul and spirit a great feeling of warmth to know that my ancestors back in that difficult period were kind enough to send relief funds from their community to the Irish. I am very proud that my people were there reaching out across a great ocean to our Irish brethren."

Dr Duke Redbird, Anishinaabe Elder from (Ojibway) Saugeen First Nation (Ontario, Canada), Courtesy of the Honouring Indigenous Aid Project



OPTIONAL LEARNING TASKS



DIGITAL ACTIVITIES



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



DIGITAL STORYTELLING

Have students create a short digital story or video about a historical example of community solidarity during a famine, using images, text, and narration.



SIMULATION GAME

Create a classroom simulation of a community facing food scarcity. Divide students into family units and give them limited resources. Observe and discuss how they collaborate and share resources.



ARTEFACT ANALYSIS

Use the Heritage of Hunger repository to locate historical artefacts and memorials related to community solidarity during famines (e.g.letters and donations between peoples, commemorations). Have students analyse these in groups and present their findings to the class.



SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

Ask students to design a mock social media campaign to raise awareness about a current or historical famine, focusing on community-led initiatives and how others can support them.



CREATIVE WRITING

Ask students to write a short story or journal entry from the perspective of someone experiencing a famine, focusing on how their community comes together to support one another.



Image Credits

Image Credit 1
Nationaal Archief, 1944
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dutch_famine_of_1944%E2%80%931945#/media/File:Twee_deelnemers_aan_de_hongertochten_tijdens_de_hongerwinter.jpg

Image Credit 2
Amsterdam Tulip Museum 1945
https://amsterdamtulipmuseum.com/cdn/shop/articles/Were_bulbs_eaten_during_world_war_2_de1f3f5a-c88b-4092-a8ba-cb38c852d0b5.jpg?v=1508363087&width=600

Image Credit 3
Johannes van Rhijn, 1945
https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_image_view/95

Image Credit 4
Emmanoiul Zepos, 1945
https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_image_view/176

Image Credit 5
Philip Cote, 2024
<https://www.irishamerica.com/2024/06/bronze-shoes-and-moccasins/>

Image Credit 6
Alex Pentek, 2015
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meeting>
https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_memorialsite_view/69

Image Credit 7
Choctaw Nation 2022
<https://www.choctawnation.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/011922kindred-spirits.jpg>

Credits
This learning resource was co-developed by the Heritages of Hunger research consortium and Nerve Centre Derry

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Some of the text has been adapted from the Heritages of Hunger virtual exhibition, <https://heritagesofhunger.org>, courtesy of Charley Boerman (University of Amsterdam) and Niels Arnbak. The visual styling of this learning programme has partly been inspired by the concept, design, and realisation of the exhibition, courtesy of HOAX Amsterdam.

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Matleena Billington (Kuopio Cultural History Museum)
Anne-Lise Bobeldijk (NIOD)
Charley Boerman (University of Amsterdam)
Marieke van Egeraat (Radboud University)
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Lindsay Janssen (Radboud University)
William Jenkins (York University)
Lotte Jensen (Radboud University)
Jason King (Irish Heritage Trust)
Anne Lahtinen (The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas)
Deborah Madden (Lancaster University)
Jeremy Maron (Canadian Museum for Human Rights)
Emily Mark-FitzGerald (University College Dublin)
Mark McGowan (University of Toronto)
Anne van Mourik (NIOD)
Andrew G. Newby (University of Jyv skyl )
Gloria Rom n Ruiz (University of Granada)
Clara Vlessing (Radboud University)
Ingrid de Zwart  (Wageningen University and Research)

And the following organisations:
Canada Ireland Foundation
Centro Documental de la Memoria Historica
EuroClio
The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas
Holodomor Research and Education Consortium (HREC)
HOAX
Irish Heritage Trust
Kuopio Cultural History Museum
Museum Rotterdam
NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies
Radboud Pre-University College of Society
Radboud University
Red Star Line Museum
Versetzmuseum
Wageningen University and Research

Funding
Heritages of Hunger: Societal Reflections on Past European Famines in Education, Commemoration and Musealisation is a collaboration between Radboud University, NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, and Wageningen University and Research. It is funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO) under grant agreement no. NWA.1160.18.197.



MODULE 5: MIGRATION & DISPLACEMENT



LESSON ONE: INTERNAL & EXTERNAL MIGRATION



LESSON DESCRIPTION

This lesson will explore how famine impacts different communities in different ways and students will understand how different societies have been impacted as a result. The lesson will incorporate case studies and discussion of the following famines:

- » **The Greek Famine (1941-44)**
- » **The Ukrainian Holodomor (1932-33)**
- » **The Great Irish Famine (1845-1852)**
- » **The Dutch Hunger Winter (1944-45)**



LESSON INTENTIONS

- ✓ Understand that famine can impact differently on different people and communities in the same country or region.
- ✓ Identify reasons why some communities may be more affected than others.



LESSON OUTCOMES

- ✓ Describe how different communities might have experienced famine and with different levels of severity.
- ✓ Understand how famine can impact differently at an individual as well as a community level.

LESSON DESCRIPTION

This lesson will inform students about the displacement caused by famines and the impact of migration both internally within a country and externally to new societies. The lesson will incorporate case studies and discussion of the following famines:

- » **The Great Irish Famine (1845-1852)**
- » **The Dutch Hunger Winter (1944-45)**
- » **The Highland Potato Famine (1846-56)**
- » **The Yemen Famine (2016-Present)**

LESSON INTENTIONS

- ✓ Discuss the reasons for migration during times of hunger crisis.
- ✓ Understand the reasons behind host countries accepting people from new societies.

LESSON OUTCOMES

- ✓ To describe the relationship between food crisis and migration.

**USEFUL ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

- » [Global Famine Case Studies](#)
- » [Online Heritages of Hunger Repository](#)
- » [Online Heritages of Hunger Exhibition](#)

Additional study stimulus to that included in the module can be found here:

- » [Image of internal migration in the Holodomor](#)
- » [Image of a Kulak family having to leave their farm during the Holodomor](#)
- » [Fictional story set during the Great Famine Years, also available in English translation](#)
- » [Spanish article on the return of migrants, might be interesting to discuss and deepen class discussions](#)
- » [Internal migration Dutch potato famine](#)
- » [Song about Irish emigrants during the Great Famine](#)
- » [Short newspaper article on the Finnish famine: describing people wandering from place to place](#)

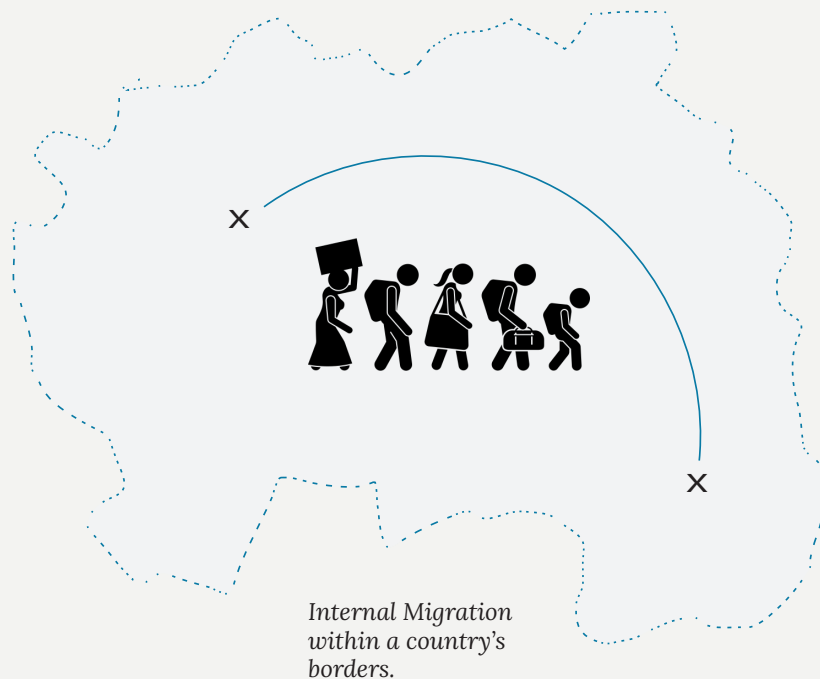
INTRODUCTION

The devastating impacts of famine mean that it has often been a powerful catalyst for both internal and external migrations of people as they seek to escape from famine-affected areas.

Such movements of people may then lead to the famine having much wider and long-lasting repercussions across a range of geographies and peoples that go much further than the initial famine area itself.



INTERNAL MIGRATION



Internal migration has often been a significant feature of famines through history as people desperately seek food and better living conditions but are keen to do so within their home nation, rather than leaving the country altogether.

In general, famine-induced migration typically involves rural populations moving to urban areas or regions less affected by food shortages. This can be for several different reasons:

Food scarcity

People migrate to areas where food is more readily available.

Economic opportunity

Famines often coincide with economic downturns, prompting people to seek work elsewhere.

Collapse of local support systems

As communities struggle, traditional support networks break down, forcing individuals to look elsewhere for help.

Government aid distribution

Sometimes, aid is concentrated in specific areas, drawing people to those locations.

These phenomena have been observed in various historical famines, including the Highland Potato Famine (1846-1856) and the The Dutch Hunger Winter (1944-45).

Skye Cottage
- Image Credit 1



The Scottish Potato Famine, also known as the Highland Potato Famine, led to significant internal migration. As the potato blight that also affected Ireland and Holland led to crop failure in Scotland, and other food sources became scarce, many Highlanders were forced to leave their homes, with their landlords generally unsympathetic to their plight. This migration took two main forms:

1. Rural to urban movement

Many Highlanders moved to lowland cities like Glasgow and Edinburgh in search of work and food.

2. Coastal migration

Some communities relocated to coastal areas where they could supplement their diet with fish and seafood.

This internal migration contributed to the urbanisation of Scotland and the depopulation of the Highlands, a demographic shift that had lasting cultural and economic impact on the country.

“

'It is no doubt an acceptable recompense to those who have taken a part in promoting the success the Highland and Island Emigration Society, to know that by their aid 3000 human beings, who, for the last five six years have been hopelessly struggling with misery, have been rescued from the suffering and the moral evils of such a condition, and have been placed, with their descendants for some generations, beyond the reach of want, as surely as anything in human affairs can be considered sure.'

Extract from 'Emigration from the Isle of Skye'

CASE STUDY

THE HIGHLAND POTATO FAMINE (1846-56)



CASE STUDY

THE DUTCH HUNGER WINTER (1944-45)



The Dutch Hunger Winter, occurring during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands in World War II, also triggered internal migration. As food became increasingly scarce in urban areas, particularly in the western Netherlands, people embarked on desperate journeys.

Movement to less affected regions: Some Dutch citizens moved from the worst-affected western provinces to the relatively better-off eastern and southern regions.

Movement of children: This dire period led to the evacuation of thousands of children from urban areas in the western part of the country, particularly around cities like Amsterdam and Rotterdam, to rural areas in the north and east. The objective was to protect them from the compounded threats of starvation, harsh winter conditions, and the dangers of ongoing wartime conflict.

Organised by resistance groups and Christian Churches, the evacuation efforts were vital for survival. Children were transported by trains, barges, and horse-drawn carts to foster homes in safer, agricultural regions where food was more accessible. Despite the harsh circumstances, these evacuations were generally successful in providing a lifeline for many children, illustrating the resilience and solidarity of the Dutch people during one of the darkest periods of their history.

Dutch Children
- Image Credit 2

These migrations were often temporary, with people returning to their homes after obtaining food. However, they highlight the extreme measures individuals were willing to take to survive.

In both cases, these internal migrations had lasting effects on the affected societies, influencing population distribution, urban development, and cultural identities. They serve as poignant examples of how famines can reshape the demographic landscape of a country, forcing people to abandon their homes and communities in the basic human quest for survival.

DISCUSSION POINT

Why might people be forced into internal migration in times of famine and emergency?



EXTERNAL MIGRATION

Famines have often forced populations to emigrate in search of survival and better living conditions. The devastating impact of a famine goes beyond immediate hunger, as it disrupts social, economic, and cultural systems, often leaving migration as a viable response for those affected.

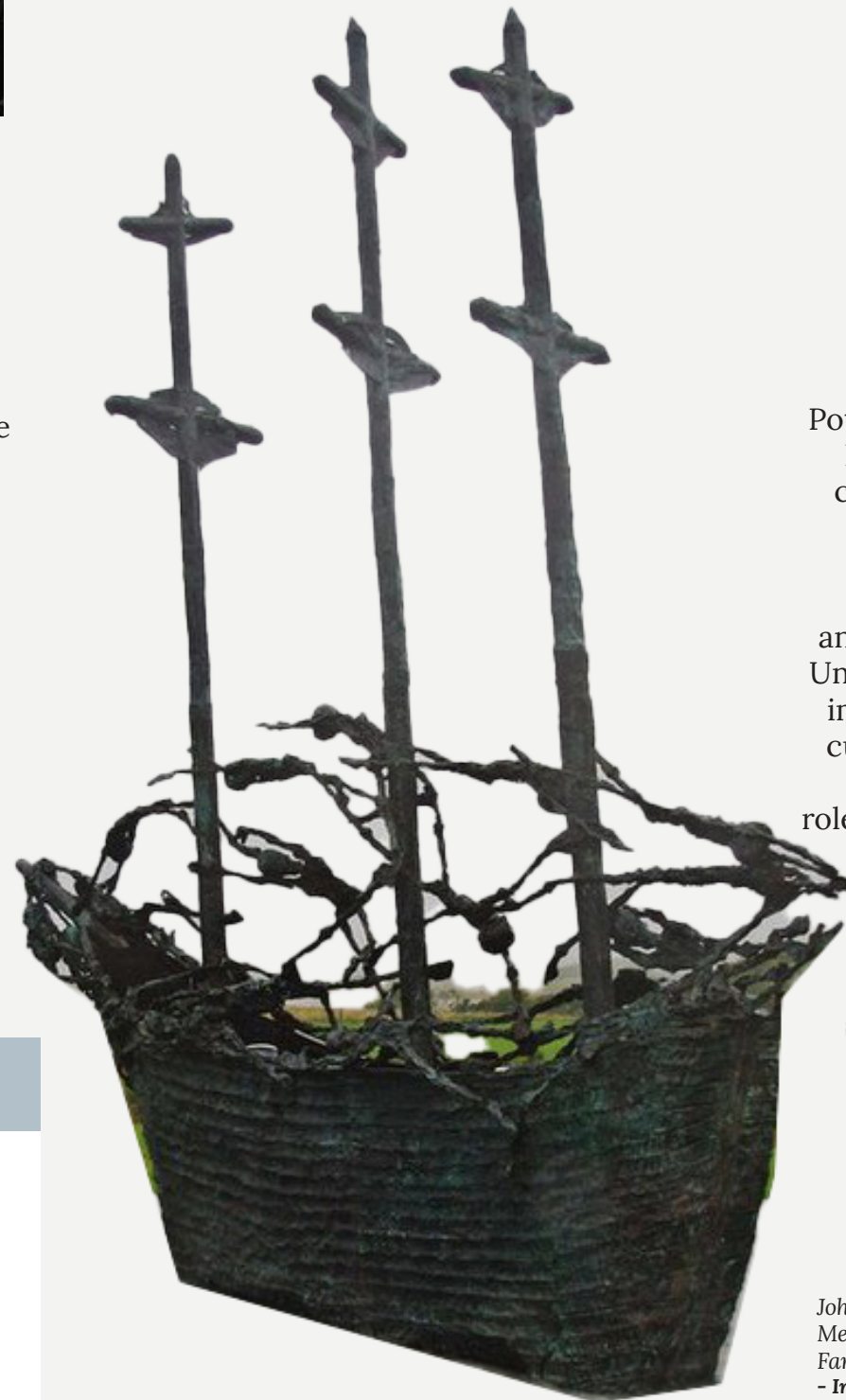
In desperation, people see no way of survival in their home nation and feel that they have no option other than to leave in order to ensure both their own and their family's lives and futures.



CASE STUDY

THE GREAT IRISH FAMINE (1845-1852)

One of the most poignant examples is the Irish Potato Famine, or the Great Famine, which struck Ireland between 1845 and 1852. The famine was caused by a potato disease known as late blight, which destroyed the staple crop. As a result, approximately one million people died, and another million emigrated to escape starvation and poverty. The Irish emigrated primarily to the United States, Canada, and Australia, significantly impacting the makeup of the population and the cultural landscapes of these nations. In America, for instance, Irish immigrants played a crucial role in shaping urban cultures and contributing to industrial growth.



John Behan's Coffin Ship Memorial to the Great Irish Famine / with detail
- Image Credit 3



CASE STUDY

THE YEMEN FAMINE (2016-PRESENT)

- Image Credit 4



Fast forward to the 21st century, and the ongoing famine in Yemen serves as a contemporary example. Yemen has faced severe food insecurity due to prolonged conflict, economic instability, and humanitarian blockades, leading to what the United Nations has described as the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Since the conflict began in 2014, with famine following in 2016, millions of Yemenis have been internally displaced, while others have sought refuge in neighbouring countries such as Saudi Arabia, Djibouti, and Somalia.

In both the Irish and Yemeni examples, emigration serves as a survival mechanism amidst staggering hardship. While the motivations for emigration often include the immediate need for food and safety, the search for long-term stability and opportunity are often also important.

These migrations prompted by famine underscore the intersection of environmental disasters and geopolitical factors, and highlight the resilience and adaptability of human societies in the face of life-threatening challenges. They also underscore the need for far-reaching international responses to aid affected regions and lessen the impact of such crises on global migration patterns.

DISCUSSION POINT

What might happen to people if migration is not an option in times of famine?



WHY COUNTRIES MAY BE WILLING TO ACCEPT MIGRANTS



- Image Credit 5

Countries may have been willing to accept immigrants escaping famine for a variety of reasons, including humanitarian, economic, social, and political factors:

Humanitarian Concerns

Many countries offer asylum and support to those fleeing dire situations like famine out of compassion and a sense of global responsibility. Humanitarian aid and accepting refugees reflect international commitments to human rights and welfare.

Economic Benefits

Immigrants can significantly contribute to a host country's economy by filling labour shortages, bringing diverse skills, and stimulating economic growth through entrepreneurship and increased demand for goods and services.

Cultural Enrichment

Immigrants bring cultural diversity, enriching the social fabric with new perspectives, traditions, and cuisines. This cultural exchange can enhance community experiences and promote social progress.

Political Strategy

For some countries, accepting refugees can enhance their international standing and strengthen diplomatic relationships. It aligns them with global policies and initiatives for human rights and may bring in support or alliances with countries and organisations backing the refugees.

Population Support

In regions with declining birthrates or ageing populations, immigrants can help maintain population levels and ensure a stable future consumer and tax base, supporting public services and social systems.

Moral and Ethical Obligations

Many countries are guided by moral and ethical principles rooted in religious, cultural, or national values that emphasise helping those in need, particularly during global crises like famines.

WE
ARE
ALL
IMMIGRANTS



- Image Credit 6



Migrant support protest London
- Image Credit 7

CONCLUSION

Overall, accepting immigrants escaping famine is often the result of a mix of altruistic intentions and pragmatic needs of the host nations, reflecting a common humanity and connected global community.

However, there have always been issues around acceptance of migrants for host countries too. The potential cost of supporting those escaping famine, the impact on services and infrastructure of hosting an increased population, the perception that national identity is being diluted, and competition for employment, can all be problematic in migration to another country.

DISCUSSION POINT

In what ways has immigration and emigration been experienced in your country or community? Has famine played a part in that migration?

OPTIONAL LEARNING TASKS

DIGITAL ACTIVITIES

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

DIGITAL TIMELINE

Using a timeline creation tool (e.g., TimelineJS), students create a visual timeline of a major famine-induced migration event, highlighting key dates, events, and the progression of the migration.

ROLE-PLAY DEBATE

Divide the class into groups representing different stakeholders (e.g., migrants, host country citizens, government officials). Have them debate the pros and cons of accepting migrants during a famine crisis.

MIGRATION JOURNEY MAPPING

Using a large world map or regional map, have students trace potential migration routes during a famine. They can use string or markers to show movement and discuss the challenges faced along these routes.

NEWSPAPER FRONT PAGE

Students create a physical newspaper front page reporting on a historical famine and its impact on migration. They can include headlines, articles, and images to convey the situation.



Image Credits

Image Credit 1

Unknown, 1853

https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_text_view/157

Image Credit 2

Menno Huizinga, 1945

https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/detail_image_view/76

Image Credit 3

John Behan, 1997

https://hunger.rich.ru.nl/media/memorialsite/behannationalfaminemorial_2.jpg

Image Credit 4

Mathieu Genon, 2008

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akhdam#/media/File:Akhdam_children_Taizz.jpg

Image Credit 5

Miguel Discart

<https://rapidtransition.org/stories/migrants-welcome-how-international-hospitality-in-a-warming-world-benefits-everyone/>

Image Credit 6

Alisdare1 2018

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:We_are_all_immigrants_-_Banner_at_the_anti-Trump_rally_in_London._%2832575834102%29.jpg

Image Credit 7

Alisdaire Hickson, 2012

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/alisdare/52759689824/in/album-72177720306894113>

LESSON TWO: REFUGEES IN NEW SOCIETIES

LESSON DESCRIPTION

This lesson will look at the impact of migration on refugees entering new countries and the difficulties they faced, and will also examine the perceptions of refugees in their new host societies. The lesson will incorporate case studies and discussion of the following famines:

- » **The Great Irish Famine (1845-1852)**
- » **The Greek Famine (1941-44)**
- » **The Somalian Refugee Crisis (1992-Present)**

LESSON INTENTIONS

- ✓ Discuss the reasons why people migrated to certain countries.
- ✓ Understand how new communities were met, with a particular emphasis on media coverage.

LESSON OUTCOMES

- ✓ To understand the difficulties faced by refugees on arriving in new societies.
- ✓ Describe the significance of how different refugees were treated.



USEFUL ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- > [Global Famine Case Studies](#)
- > [Online Heritages of Hunger Repository](#)
- > [Online Heritages of Hunger Exhibition](#)

Additional study stimulus to that included in the module can be found here:

- > [Anti-Irish attitudes in Liverpool](#)
- > [Graphic novel describing anti-Irish attitudes a refugee experiences in Canada](#)
- > [Picture of people waiting to leave during the Holodomor](#)
- > [Very short newspaper article from the New York Dispatch mentioning the emperor gave people permission to emigrate](#)

INTRODUCTION

As we have seen, refugees seeking to escape from famine and its effects have existed at many times throughout history. The need for food, the need for security and safety, and the effects of eviction can all drive people to leave their homes, and their homelands, in times of famine.

Whilst the human instinct for survival is a very powerful driver in leading people to emigrate or flee famine, such refugees or migrants have often faced great hardships as a result of their decision to leave.



WHERE TO GO?

Very often, those leaving a place can be drawn to a particular country or community for their escape. This may be because of practical reasons of geography or ease of travel, for cultural reasons because of a shared language or heritage, for religious reasons of a shared faith, or for other local factors.



- Image Credit 1

Irish immigrants crossed the Atlantic in what later came to be known as “coffin ships,” because of their often dangerous unhygienic and overcrowded conditions. Despite the difficult journey, the promise of work and a new life spurred the movement.

Upon arrival, many Irish settled in urban centres like New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, where they faced significant challenges such as discrimination and competition for low-wage labour. Nevertheless, their willingness to take on difficult jobs such as miners, builders and servants, often under harsh conditions, gradually established an Irish presence in these cities.

Over time, the Irish community contributed significantly to the economic and cultural development of the United States. They played roles in building infrastructure, joining labour movements, and integrating into the political landscape. The legacy of this emigration is substantial, as Irish Americans today continue to celebrate their rich heritage and the resilience of their ancestors.

A DIFFICULT JOURNEY?

Refugee journeys have traditionally been difficult and dangerous.

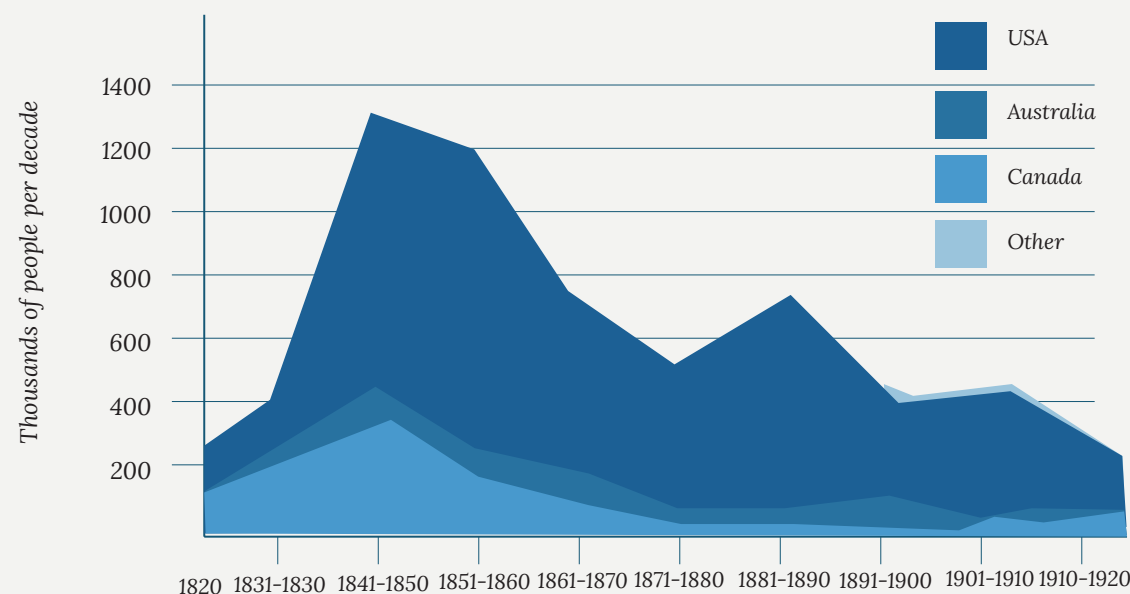
The desperation to escape famine, compounded by the poverty that often characterises famine victims, has repeatedly led, to people taking risks or being vulnerable to unscrupulous profiteers in their desire to get away.

It has not been uncommon for people to be so desperate to escape their famine, so weakened before they even start their journey, and so poorly treated, that they do not survive the journey to their destination.

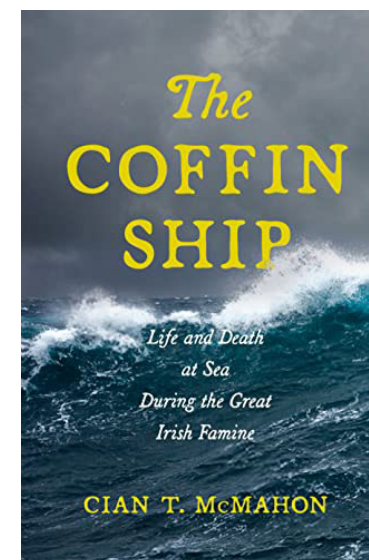
CASE STUDY

THE GREAT IRISH FAMINE (1845-1852)

DESTINATION OF OVERSEAS IRISH EMIGRANTS 1820-1920



The United States became a prominent destination for Irish emigration from the Famine of 1845-52 for a number of reasons. Geographically, it was the next country to be reached when departing the west coast of Ireland (though on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean); linguistically English was a shared language; culturally it was largely a Christian country with a high degree of European heritage; and economically it was perceived to offer greater opportunities.



Cian McMahon's exploration of the Irish exodus to Canada in 1847 provides a gripping narrative of the perilous journey faced by Irish emigrants fleeing the Great Famine. In his account, McMahon delves into the dire conditions aboard many of these ships, which were often overcrowded and unsanitary. This sometimes led to high mortality rates from disease and starvation. In 1847, the upper-class Stephen de Vere, son of a landlord, travelled steerage to Canada with a number of tenants to witness these conditions, and reported in an influential published letter on how passengers were “huddled together without air, wallowing in filth and breathing a fetid atmosphere, sick in body, dispirited in heart”.

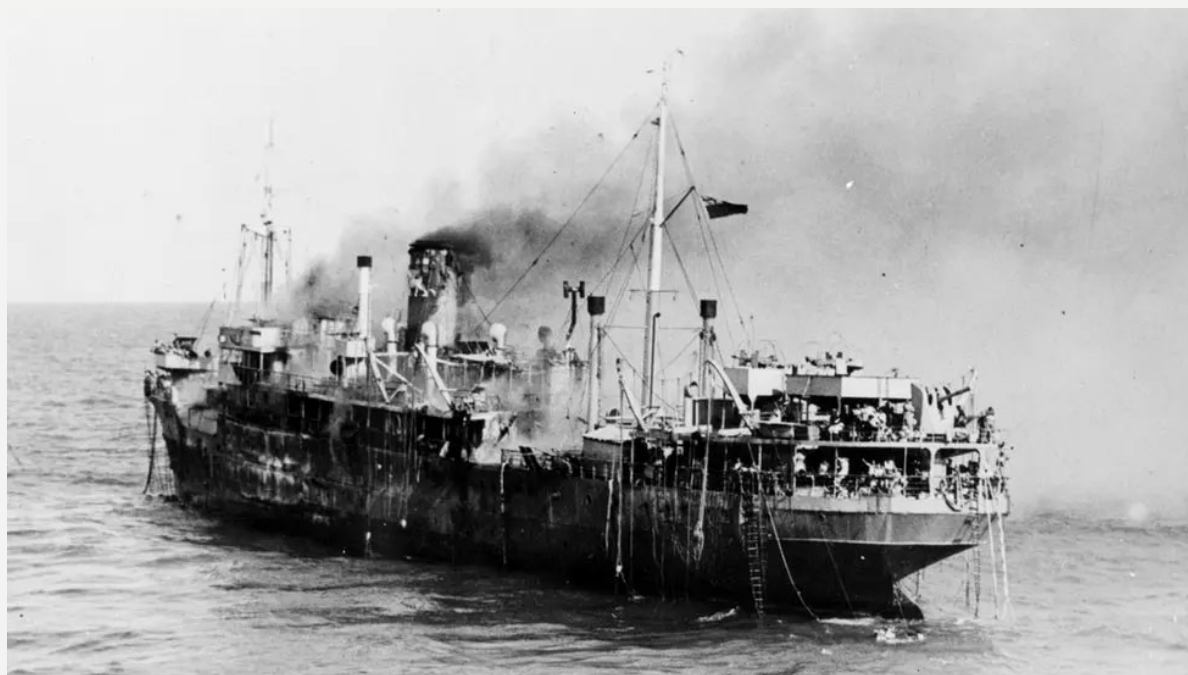
In the memory of the famine, these vessels came to be called ‘coffin ships’, though McMahon also shows that excessive mortality actually only occurred in a minority of cases.

On arrival in Canada, immigrants faced quarantine and often unwelcoming attitudes. McMahon's work pays homage to the enduring spirit of the Irish who braved horrible conditions to secure a future for their descendants, reshaping the demographic and cultural landscape of Canada.



CASE STUDY

THE GREEK FAMINE (1941-44)



- Image Credit 2

Even in more recent famine migrations conditions have often been perilous. In 1942, 500 Greek famine refugees were aboard a British vessel taking them to a camp in Gaza to escape the famine at home, when the overcrowded vessel caught fire, killing 33 passengers – including 14 children.

- Image Credit 3



A WARM WELCOME?

The arrival of refugees escaping famine can be challenging for the society that is absorbing them.



The new arrivals are often in need of help and support to recover from the effects of the famine and can be seen as a drain on resources in their host country, as well as destabilising the local culture by arriving in numbers, and with the potential to bring further friends and relatives to follow them once they settle in the new country.

In these circumstances, famine refugees have rarely enjoyed universally warm welcomes in their new homes, adding to the trauma that they may have already experienced.

THE SOMALI REFUGEE CRISIS



CASE STUDY



Somali migrants in Kenya
- Image Credit 4

The Somali Refugee Crisis, driven by famine, conflict, and drought, has been ongoing since the early 1990s, with a particularly severe impact in the 2011 famine. Thousands fled to neighbouring Kenya, seeking refuge primarily in the Dadaab refugee camp, one of the world's largest.

Despite Kenya's initial open-door policy and response to the humanitarian crisis, Somali refugees have frequently encountered hostility and discrimination. The influx strained local resources and led to increased tensions with host communities. Over time, fears about security, economic burden, and cultural differences fuelled negative perceptions of the refugees.

Government policies often reflected this hostility, leading to calls for the closure of refugee camps and pressure to repatriate Somalis, sometimes against international humanitarian principles. Refugees faced restricted movement, limited access to employment, and challenges in obtaining legal documentation, contributing to social marginalisation. This case highlights the complexities and challenges surrounding migration, integration, and the balance between national security concerns and humanitarian responsibilities.



CASE STUDY

THE GREAT IRISH FAMINE (1845-1852)

One notable instance of a country welcoming famine refugees occurred during the Great Irish Famine of 1845-1852. As we learned above, Canada, then a British colony, received and assisted a significant number of Irish immigrants fleeing starvation and disease.

In 1847, often called “Black ‘47” due to the famine’s peak intensity, around 100,000 Irish refugees arrived in Canada. Despite the challenges of dealing with such large numbers of arrivals, many Canadians showed remarkable compassion, though there was also sustained resistance to Irish immigration. The city of Toronto, with a population of only 20,000 at the time, took in 38,560 Irish famine refugees.

Canadian authorities and citizens mobilised to provide food, shelter, and medical care. Quarantine stations were established to manage disease outbreaks. Many Canadians opened their homes to the refugees, and communities worked together to help the newcomers integrate.

Though by no means universal, such welcoming responses demonstrated humanitarian principles in action and significantly shaped Canada’s demographic and cultural landscape.

Famine memorial in Toronto
- Image Credit 5



“

“By the 1880s, the Irish were the single largest non-French ethnic group in Canada, with Irish-born amounting to nearly 25% of the population. Despite the dire situation they had left in Ireland, many Irish Famine emigrants and their children achieved remarkable success in Canada.”

Dr Laura Smith, Canada Ireland Foundation

The Irish immigrants and their descendants became an integral part of Canadian society, contributing to the country’s development and diversity.

> CONCLUSION

The desire to escape famine and the human instinct to survive can be a catalyst for those affected to seek to leave and move to a place where they feel that they will be safer and can prosper.

The circumstances that lead to this decision, and the desperation to survive, can lead to some very dangerous journeys and, even if the journey is negotiated successfully, it may lead to a hostile or challenging reception from the new community. However, migrants can make a very positive impact on a new country, and have been significant in shaping many nationalities over history.

Famine has been a key driver of global and local migration over many years and continues to be so today.

DISCUSSION POINT

Why might accepting refugees be seen as challenging by some people? Do you think that your community offers a safe and welcoming environment for refugees? Give reasons for your answers.



OPTIONAL LEARNING TASKS



DIGITAL ACTIVITIES



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



DIGITAL STORYTELLING

Using a tool like Adobe Spark or Canva, students create a digital story from the perspective of a famine refugee, describing their journey and experiences in their new society.



SUITCASE ACTIVITY

Students are given a small box or paper “suitcase” and must decide what essential items they would pack if they were fleeing a famine. They then present and explain their choices to the class.



WELCOME PACKAGE DESIGN

In groups, students design a “welcome package” for refugees arriving in their community. This could include information booklets, maps, and lists of resources. They present their packages to the class.



HISTORICAL LETTER WRITING

Students write a letter from the perspective of either a famine refugee or a member of a host society, describing their experiences and feelings about the integration process. They can then exchange letters and respond to each other



Image Credits

Image Credit 1

Thomas Faed - Glasgow Life Museums
<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/the-last-of-the-clan-83914>

Image Credit 2

Imperial War Museum, 1945
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36499727>

Image Credit 3

UNHCR
<https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/un-refugee-chief-calls-concerted-action-defend-asylum-international-day-tolerance>

Image Credit 4

Ingrid Prestetun/NRC
<https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/un-refugee-chief-calls-concerted-action-defend-asylum-international-day-tolerance>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ireland_Park#/media/File:The_Migrants,_Rowan_Gillespie.jpg

Image Credit 5

Roger Kohn, 2016
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ireland_Park#/media/File:The_Migrants,_Rowan_Gillespie.jpg

Credits

This learning resource was co-developed by the Heritages of Hunger research consortium and Nerve Centre Derry

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Some of the text has been adapted from the Heritages of Hunger virtual exhibition, <https://heritagesofhunger.org>, courtesy of Charley Boerman (University of Amsterdam) and Niels Arnbak. The visual styling of this learning programme has partly been inspired by the concept, design, and realisation of the exhibition, courtesy of HOAX Amsterdam.

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Lindsay Janssen (Radboud University)
William Jenkins (York University)
Lotte Jensen (Radboud University)
Jason King (Irish Heritage Trust)
Anne Lahtinen (The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas)
Deborah Madden (Lancaster University)
Jeremy Maron (Canadian Museum for Human Rights)
Emily Mark-FitzGerald (University College Dublin)
Mark McGowan (University of Toronto)
Anne van Mourik (NIOD)
Andrew G. Newby (University of Jyv skyl )
Gloria Rom n Ruiz (University of Granada)
Clara Vlessing (Radboud University)
Ingrid de Zwarte (Wageningen University and Research)

And the following organisations:

Canada Ireland Foundation
Centro Documental de la Memoria Historica
EuroClio
The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas
Holodomor Research and Education Consortium (HREC)
HOAX
Irish Heritage Trust
Kuopio Cultural History Museum
Museum Rotterdam
NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies
Radboud Pre-University College of Society
Radboud University
Red Star Line Museum
Versetzmuseum
Wageningen University and Research

Funding

Heritages of Hunger: Societal Reflections on Past European Famines in Education, Commemoration and Musealisation is a collaboration between Radboud University, NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, and Wageningen University and Research. It is funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO) under grant agreement no. NWA.1160.18.197.



MODULE 6: MEMORY & COMMEMORATION



LESSON ONE: COMMEMORATING FAMINES



LESSON DESCRIPTION

This lesson will look at the commemoration of famines in communities across the world, using comparison study to establish similarities and differences in collective memory. This lesson will incorporate case studies and discussion of the following famines:

- » **The Ukrainian Holodomor (1932-33)**
- » **The Spanish Hunger Years (1939-52)**
- » **The Finnish Great Hunger Years (1866-68)**
- » **The Great Irish Famine (1845-1852)**
- » **The Dutch Hunger Winter (1944-45)**
- » **The Highland Potato Famine (1846-56)**



LESSON INTENTIONS

- ✓ Understand how memory has been used in different communities to acknowledge and give meaning to famines.
- ✓ Discuss similarities in language and imagery in commemoration, and why famine memory is seen as more important in some countries.



LESSON OUTCOMES

- ✓ Be able to describe the role of famines in collective memory and how memory is used by different stakeholders.
- ✓ Describe the reasons why famine memory is more important in some societies than others.

INTRODUCTION

Famines can have a devastating effect on entire communities and populations. Throughout history famine has shaped national stories and identities, prompted large-scale migrations and population shifts, and caused the death and displacement of innocent people in significant numbers.

Because famine has been such a powerful force, and because it is seen as something that particularly impacts the poorest and most vulnerable in society over an prolonged period of suffering, commemoration and memorialisation of famine can be both an important part of a nation or region's history and identity, and a potent political act.

HOW AND WHY WE REMEMBER

Around the world, famines are commemorated in different ways by different communities, and sometimes not really formally commemorated at all. The ways in which these events are remembered now can reveal something about the society today and how its history has been recorded, and by whom.

- Image Credit 1



USEFUL ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- > [Global Famine Case Studies](#)
- > [Online Heritages of Hunger Repository](#)
- > [Online Heritages of Hunger Exhibition](#)

Additional study stimulus to that included in the module can be found here:

- > [Hyperlocal memorial Finland](#)
- > [Gendered commemoration, Dutch Hunger Winter](#)
- > [Irish online commemoration exhibition from the perspective of Northern Irish Unionists](#)
- > [Commemorative artwork about the Leningrad Blockade](#)
- > [A poem commemorating the Potato Blight in the Netherlands in 1845](#)



CASE STUDY

THE UKRAINIAN HOLODOMOR (1932-33)



Holodomor Memorial to Victims of the Ukrainian Famine-Genocide of 1932-1933, Washington DC.
- Image Credit 2

The Holodomor, a man-made famine in Soviet Ukraine from 1932 to 1933, has been commemorated in various meaningful ways to honour the millions who perished.

In Ukraine, a national remembrance day is observed annually on the fourth Saturday of November, with ceremonies and moments of silence.

Globally, memorials and monuments have been erected in cities such as Kyiv (Ukraine), Washington D.C. (United States), and Edmonton (Canada) to acknowledge the tragedy and educate future generations. Additionally, museums and exhibitions offer historical insights and personal stories about the famine. These commemorative efforts aim to preserve the memory of the Holodomor and promote awareness of its impact and the atrocities of the Stalin regime worldwide.

The Holodomor Memorial, Washington In 2011, after an international competition, Ukrainian-American architect Larysa Kurylas' design was chosen for the Holodomor Memorial. The six-foot-tall bronze sculpture rests on a slightly raised granite plinth. There is a granite bench that allows visitors to sit and contemplate the event.

Kurylas' describes her design of a wheat field as "dynamic." "It changes from high relief on the left edge to deep negative relief on the right, reflecting the transition from a record harvest to a horrible deficit." As the wheat recedes the words "Holodomor 1932-1933" emerges out of the wall in greater and greater relief.



THE FINNISH HUNGER YEARS (1866-68)



Death's Walk by Magnus Enckell -
Image Credit 3

The Finnish Famine of 1866-1868, one of the last major famines in Europe, is commemorated through historical research and cultural remembrance. In Finland, public awareness is primarily maintained via academic studies and a number of monuments erected by local communities that were affected by famine.

For a long time the hunger years were not part of museum exhibitions. The Finnish independence movement had long framed the famine as a sign of the endurance of the Finnish people in times of hardships, but it was not given further significance in national narratives.

More recently, however, attention has been drawn to the failure of Johan Vilhelm Snelman's government to look adequately after the starving population.

The travelling exhibition Nälkä! (2019-20) reflects on broader themes of social justice and humanitarian responses to the 1866-68 crisis. And in 2024 the Wertas Labour Museum incorporated a new panel on the hunger years in its exhibition on the history of the working class from the 19th century to the present day.



- Image Credit 4

THE SPANISH HUNGER YEARS (1939-52)

The Spanish Famine, particularly the hardships endured during the post-civil war period from 1939 to the early 1950s, is commemorated through various cultural and educational initiatives.

However, this has only happened relatively recently, with the passing of the 'Democratic Memory Law' in 2022 to ensure that the legacies of General Franco's dictatorship were publicly examined and commemorated.

Since then exhibitions such as 'La Hambruna Silenciada' (The Silenced Famine), and educational programmes have highlighted the challenges and resilience of those affected by the famine, promoting awareness among younger generations. Commemorations often include documentaries and books that delve into personal narratives and historical analyses, preserving memories of the years of severe austerity.

Additionally, local events and discussions honour the hardship endured by communities, ensuring that the impact of the famine remains a part of Spain's collective memory, fostering empathy and historical understanding.



Poster, La Hambruna
Silenciada.
- Image Credit 5

CASE STUDY

THE GREAT IRISH FAMINE (1845-1852)

The Great Irish Famine (1845-1852) is widely commemorated in both Ireland and internationally.

Commemorations of the Irish Famine are observed through various means, reflecting on the tragedy's impact on Ireland and the global Irish diaspora. Monuments and memorials are erected worldwide, including the National Famine Memorial in County Mayo and sculptures in Dublin and New York City.

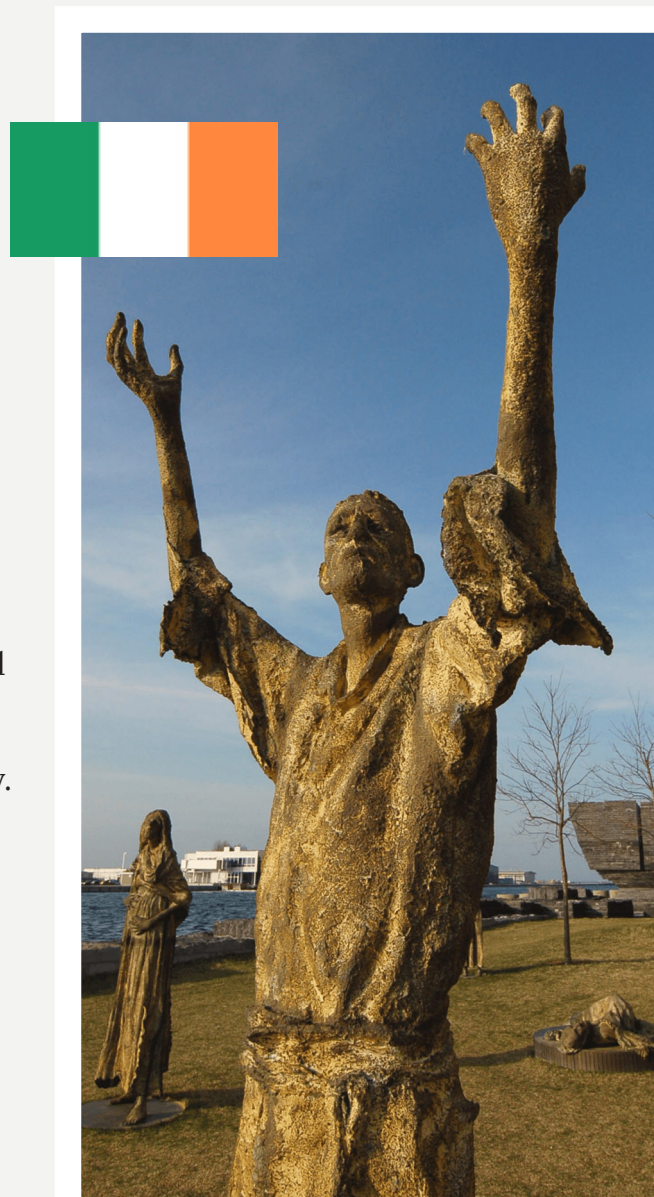
Annual remembrance events are held, such as Ireland's National Famine Commemoration Day - held on the third Sunday in May each year, which includes wreath-laying ceremonies, prayers, and educational activities.

Significantly, these commemorations make connections to ongoing global crises, drawing analogies and parallels.

For example, during the 2020 Famine commemoration at St Stephen's Green in Dublin, Minister Josepha Madigan compared the bravery of the doctors and nurses who risked their own lives by looking after famine victims with contagious diseases with the heroism of medical staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. And in 2024 Minister Simon Harris referred to Ireland's famine past in order to criticise food blockades in Gaza.

Museums and cultural institutions in Ireland regularly host exhibitions to educate the public about the famine's history. Additionally, there is a National Famine museum in the Irish village of Strokestown. Literature, music, and films frequently explore the famine's themes, ensuring the memory and lessons endure across generations.

Great Famine heritage is also inherently transnational. Because of Ireland's many diasporic communities that are rooted in Famine emigration history, there are also many monuments in Australia, Britain, the US and Canada, amongst others. One example is Rowan Gillespie's "Arrival", a group of statues which can be found at Toronto's waterfront.



- Image Credit 6

CASE STUDY

THE DUTCH HUNGER WINTER (1944-45)

The Dutch Famine, known as the "Hunger Winter," occurred during 1944-1945 in Nazi-occupied Netherlands, leading to severe food shortages and thousands of deaths.

Commemorations emphasise the resilience and suffering endured by the Dutch people. Each year, on May 4th, the Netherlands observes National Remembrance Day to honour victims of war, including those from the famine. A nationally broadcast ceremony features two minutes of silence at 8 PM, speeches, and wreath-laying.



Image: 9 year old boy , Amsterdam 1944 - Image Credit 7

It must be noted, however, that the Holocaust and the Dutch Resistance take up a dominant position in Dutch memories of WWII, with the famine relegated behind them in importance, which probably explains why there is no national famine monument in the Netherlands.

* MEMORY & POLITICS

The case studies above show us that how we remember and commemorate famine is very often a political decision that can see the importance of famine commemoration change over time.

Where the suffering has been imposed by an external force or nation, the suffering of famine can be celebrated as a kind of national martyrdom and evidence of national oppression.

Where famine has been the result of internal issues or power, or part of a wider conquest that has succeeded, then commemoration is generally more nuanced - with notions of suffering reduced; commemoration being localised rather than taking place at the national level; other causal factors for the famine highlighted; or even an absence of official commemoration entirely.



> HYPERLOCAL COMMEMORATIONS

Hyperlocal famine commemoration refers to very specific, localised memorials or remembrances of famine events. While many famine commemorations tend to be national or regional in scale, there are indeed examples of more localised commemorations.

Here are a few instances:



- Image Credit 8

1 DOOLOUGH VALLEY, IRELAND

This site in County Mayo holds an annual famine walk to commemorate a specific tragic event during the Great Famine. In 1849, several hundred starving people walked through the valley to seek aid, with many dying along the way. The walk retraces their steps as a form of remembrance.

2 POINT OF SLEAT, ISLE OF SKYE, SCOTLAND

There's a small stone memorial here commemorating the local victims of the Highland Potato Famine (1846-1856). It's a very specific, localised remembrance in a remote area where many inhabitants fell victim to starvation. Monuments to the Highland Potato famine are local initiatives, and its bleak history has not been integrated in the narratives presented by national museums, in the Lowlands.



- Image Credit 9

3 HOLODOMOR MEMORIALS IN UKRAINIAN VILLAGES

While the Holodomor (1932-1933) is commemorated nationally in Ukraine, many small villages have their own local memorials, often listing names of local victims or featuring symbols specific to that community's experience.

- Image Credit 10



These hyperlocal commemorations often provide a more intimate and personal connection to historical famine events. They allow communities to remember their specific losses and experiences, which might be overlooked in larger, more generalised memorials. Such commemorations can play an important role in preserving local history and fostering community identity.

> GENDERED COMMEMORATIONS

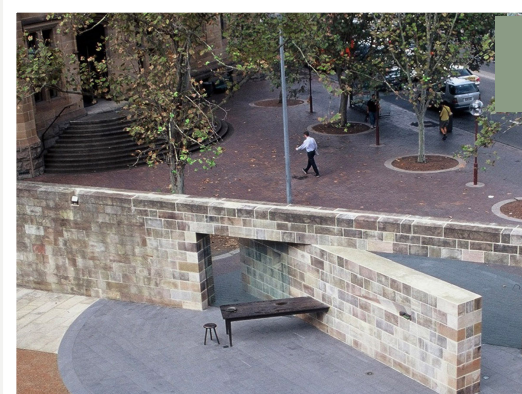
Gendered famine commemoration is an important aspect of remembering historical famines, as it highlights the different experiences and impacts of famines on men and women. The role of women in famine has often been portrayed as one of victimhood, designed to provoke a heightened sense of empathy or outrage from audiences.



1 ROWAN GILLESPIE'S MIGRANT SCULPTURES" IN TORONTO

This memorial to migrants from the Great Irish Famine features sculptures of emaciated men, women, and children. Notably, it includes a sculpture of a pregnant woman, highlighting the particular vulnerability of expectant mothers during the famine.

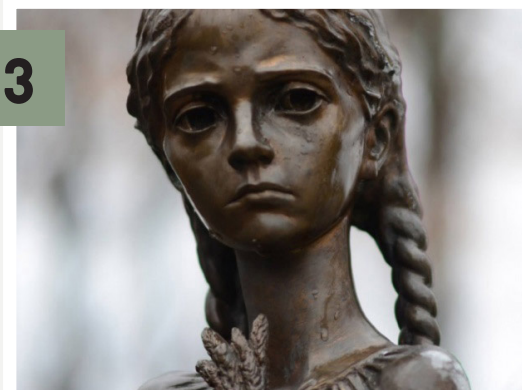
- Image Credit 11



2 "THE IRISH FAMINE MEMORIAL" IN SYDNEY AUSTRALIA:

This artistic installation by Hossein and Angela Valamanesh pays homage to the young women who came from the workhouses of Ireland to Australia between 1848 and 1850 on a special emigration scheme which saw over 4000 young Irish women sent to Australia to flee the famine.

- Image Credit 12



3 HOLODOMOR VICTIMS' MEMORIAL IN KYIV, UKRAINE:

While not exclusively gendered, this large memorial includes a statue of a young girl holding five stalks of grain. These refer to a notorious decree from 1932 that made the possession of food that was considered state property a crime punishable by long imprisonment or death.

- Image Credit 13



4 "MOTHER OF THE OCCUPATION PERIOD" IN ATHENS, GREECE

This bronze statue, made by Costas Valsamis (1908-2003), commemorates the many deaths from starvation during the years of the Occupation in Athens (1941-44). The emaciated woman, collapsed as a result of starvation, is unable to suckle her infant. Here the mother figure symbolises the want of the entire population.

- Image Credit 14

* These gendered commemorations serve several important purposes:

1. They highlight the different ways famines affected men and women.
2. They often emphasise the role of women in caring for families during crises.
3. They bring attention to specific vulnerabilities, such as those of pregnant women or nursing mothers.
4. They can challenge traditional historical narratives that may have overlooked women's experiences.

It is worth noting that while these examples exist, many famine commemorations still tend to be gender-neutral or focus more on general suffering rather than specific gendered experiences. Where gendered commemoration has taken place, it has often been to evoke an empathetic response to the suffering of women.

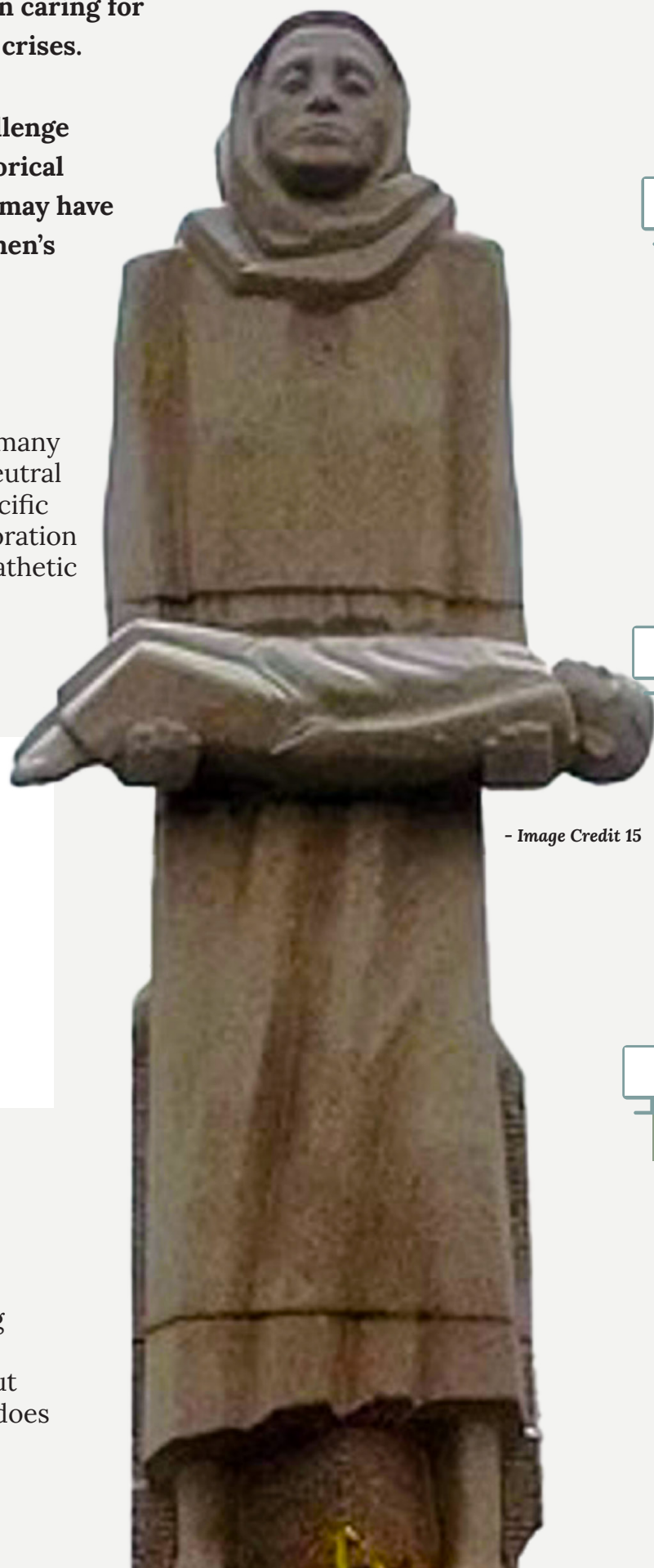


LEARNING EXERCISE

Look up the gendered memorials listed above. When you see the images do you feel that they help to serve the purposes outlined here? Say why you think each memorial does, or does not, serve these purposes.

* CONCLUSION

As we have seen, famine memory can be a significant element in contemporary politics, either by its presence or its absence. Looking at how a particular famine is commemorated today invariably tells us at least as much about the contemporary politics of that place as it does about the actual history of the famine.



- Image Credit 15



OPTIONAL LEARNING TASKS



DIGITAL ACTIVITIES



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



INTERACTIVE TIMELINE

Create a digital timeline using a tool like TimelineJS, where students add events, images, and short descriptions of different famine commemorations around the world.



MEMORY BOX

Students create a physical "memory box" containing items that represent different aspects of a famine and its commemoration. They can present these to the class, explaining the significance of each item.



VIRTUAL MUSEUM

Use Google Slides or a similar tool to have students create a virtual museum exhibit about a specific famine and its commemoration. They can include images, text, and even embedded videos.



ROLE-PLAY DEBATE

Organise a classroom debate where students take on roles of different stakeholders (e.g., government officials, survivors, historians) discussing how a particular famine should be commemorated.



SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

Have students design a social media campaign to raise awareness about a historical famine and its modern-day commemoration. They can create mock posts for platforms like Instagram or Twitter.



FAMINE MEMORIAL DESIGN

In small groups, students design and create a scale model or detailed drawing of a famine memorial, explaining the symbolism and choices in their design.



Image Credits

Image Credit 1

Ron Cogswell
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2018-05-02_The_Famine_Memorial_Dublin_%28Ireland%29_May_2018.jpg

Image Credit 2

Max Herz, 2015
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holodomor_Genocide_Memorial#/media/File:Field_of_Wheat_\(memorial\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holodomor_Genocide_Memorial#/media/File:Field_of_Wheat_(memorial).jpg)

Image Credit 3

Magnus Enckell, 1896
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Magnus_Enckell_Death%27s_walk_1896.jpg

Image Credit 4

Biblioteca Nacional de España 1937
<https://images.theconversation.com/files/492604/original/file-20221031-7897-pzv3r7.jpg?ixlib=rb-4.1.0&rect=168%2C161%2C3878%2C2816&q=45&auto=format&w=926&fit=clip>

Image Credit 5

Miguel Angel del Arco, 2022
<https://contemporanea.ugr.es/informacion/noticias/exposicion-itinerante>

Image Credit 6

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Image Credit 7

Unknown 1944
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Heather and the Highlands, 2024
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LESSON TWO: CONTEMPORARY CRISES

LESSON DESCRIPTION

This lesson will explore contemporary and ongoing famine issues in Gaza and Sub-Saharan Africa, including drawing comparisons between historic crises and the ongoing significance of famine memory in the public consciousness. The lesson will also explore the role of heritage projects in commemorating and marking the past. This lesson will incorporate case studies and discussion of the following famines:

- » The Gaza Famine (2023-Present)
- » Contemporary Famine in Sub-Saharan Africa
- » The Ukrainian Holodomor (1932-33)
- » The Spanish Hunger Years (1939-52)
- » The Finnish Hunger Years (1866-68)
- » The Great Irish Famine (1845-1852)
- » The Dutch Hunger Winter (1944-45)
- » The Highland Potato Famine (1846-56)

LESSON INTENTIONS

- ✓ To discuss connections between contemporary and historic famines.
- ✓ Understand the importance of ongoing commemoration in different parts of the world.

USEFUL ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

[Global Famine Case Studies](#)

[Online Heritages of Hunger Repository](#)

[Online Heritages of Hunger Exhibition](#)

LESSON OUTCOMES

- ✓ Describe the common language and imagery that recurs in famine memory and heritage across societies.
- ✓ Understand and make connections between historic famines and recent instances of food crisis.

INTRODUCTION

Famine isn't history.

In the twenty-first century, where food production is heavily mechanised, globalised and highly efficient, famine is still a significant issue in many parts of the world.



- Image Credit 2



- Image Credit 4



- Image Credit 3

Across the world over thirty million people are either experiencing famine or at risk of famine, despite the abundance and over-supply of food in many parts of the globe. These people are largely in sub-Saharan Africa, but famine is also found elsewhere.



- Image Credit 1



GAZA

Image: Destruction in Gaza
- Image Credit 5



The ongoing famine in Gaza is primarily a result of the Israel-Hamas conflict that escalated in October 2023. The immediate causes include:

Blockade and restricted aid

Israel's tight control over borders has severely limited food and supplies entering Gaza.

Infrastructure destruction

Bombing has damaged water systems, farms, and food distribution networks.

Displacement

Many Gazans have been forced from their homes, disrupting food access and livelihoods.

The effects of this famine are severe:

- Widespread malnutrition, particularly affecting children and vulnerable populations.
- Increased mortality rates due to starvation and related illnesses.
- Societal breakdown as people struggle to secure basic necessities.
- Long-term health consequences for survivors, including stunted growth in children.
- Potential for increased conflict and desperation among the population.

This situation has sparked international concern and calls for immediate humanitarian intervention.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

5. Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger

The Sahel region is experiencing a food crisis exacerbated by conflict and climate change.

1. South Sudan

Ongoing conflict and climate shocks have led to widespread hunger, with some regions experiencing famine-like conditions.

2. Somalia

Drought, conflict, and economic challenges have pushed millions to the brink of famine.

4. Nigeria

The northeast region faces severe food insecurity due to ongoing insurgency and climate change impacts.

3. Ethiopia

The Tigray region and surrounding areas are experiencing acute food shortages due to conflict and environmental factors.

These crises are characterised by high rates of malnutrition, particularly among children, displaced populations, and rural communities. International aid efforts are ongoing, but challenges in access and funding persist.

Some of these situations display the characteristics of earlier famines through time and others underline the fact that while the specific issues may change, and technology has revolutionised food supply chains and production – famine is now almost always inexcusable, preventable, and addressable if the will exists at the national or international level.

As history has shown, famine remains an issue of access to food rather than an absolute shortage of food.

> LEARNING FROM THE PAST

The existence of contemporary famine underlines the importance of learning from and being informed by the past experience of famine around the world. There are many parallels between the contemporary experience of famine and previous famine experiences.

CAUSES OF FAMINE PAST AND PRESENT

> PAST

- > Crop Failures
- > Limited Transportation
- > Colonialism
- > Market Failures
- > Political Ideologies
- > Warfare

> PRESENT

- > Climate Change
- > Conflict And War
- > Economic Instability
- > Population Displacement
- > Poverty
- > Political Instability

Understanding the causes of famine is crucial for prevention and mitigation.

In 2024 Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Simon Harris illustrated the parallels between past and present famines in Ireland and Gaza, highlighting the political nature, and preventability of the situation in Gaza today.



‘The Famine left an indelible mark, shaping who we are and guiding our commitments to justice – as well as our determination to help those in the greatest of need.’

As a nation, it is repellent to our psyche to witness famine unfolding in Gaza as a tool of war. Israel needs to step back and ensure the unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid. This is the clear demand of Ireland, the international community and international law.’

<https://www.gov.ie/en/speech/cd9e0-speech-by-taoiseach-simon-harris-at-the-national-famine-commemoration-edgeworthstown-county-longford-on-sunday-19-may-2024/>



LEARNING EXERCISE

This learning exercise compares historical famines with current food crises.

- ✓ Working in pairs, students will research **one historical famine** (e.g., Irish Potato Famine, Ukrainian Holodomor; Dutch Hunger Winter etc) and **one current crisis** (e.g., Gaza, Yemen, South Sudan etc), analysing causes, impacts, and relief efforts.
- ✓ Students then **analyse** similarities, differences, and lessons learned between their chosen events.
- ✓ Finally, each pair **prepares a 5-minute presentation** to the class, followed by a brief Q&A. Several pairs are selected to present their findings, depending on the time available.
- ✓ The lesson concludes with a **class discussion** on common themes and reflections on preventing food crises.

FAMINE RELIEF

There is a developed global network of famine relief agencies and interventions that work to alleviate the effects of famine and suffering around the world, and a wider awareness of the issue of famine than there has ever been before, but the problem persists in spite of their efforts to demonstrate that famine can be prevented and remedied.

You can learn more about some of the different famine relief agencies and their work in Module Four.



- Image Credit 7



- Image Credit 6



CONCLUSION

Famine has been a feature of human existence throughout history. We need food and nutrition to survive, so controlling production and access to food has always been a position of power and influence that has been open to pressure and abuse and vulnerable to environmental and political forces.



Image: Famine is likely to remain an issue in the future - Image Credit 8

- Despite the production and distribution of food being cheaper and more efficient than ever before, famine is still an issue for millions of people around the world.
- We have greater awareness of famine, and the most advanced tools and strategies to address it, but it persists as a global issue and is likely to do so for the foreseeable future.

OPTIONAL LEARNING TASKS

DIGITAL ACTIVITIES

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

DATA VISUALIZATION

Using tools like Canva or Piktochart, have students create infographics comparing historical famines with current food crises, highlighting similarities and differences.

FAMINE RELIEF SIMULATION

Set up a classroom simulation where students take on roles in a famine relief operation, making decisions about resource allocation and addressing various challenges.

PODCAST EPISODE

Students create a short podcast episode discussing a contemporary famine crisis, its historical context, and potential solutions.

AWARENESS CAMPAIGN POSTERS

Students create physical posters to raise awareness about a current famine crisis, incorporating historical context and calls to action. These can be displayed in the classroom or school hallways.



Image Credits

Image Credit 1

Claire Nevill/WFP 2022
<https://www.aljazeera.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/AP22174465630548.jpg?resize=770%2C513&quality=80>

Image Credit 2

FMSC, 2015
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Credits

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Some of the text has been adapted from the Heritages of Hunger virtual exhibition, <https://heritagesofhunger.org>, courtesy of Charley Boerman (University of Amsterdam) and Niels Arnbak. The visual styling of this learning programme has partly been inspired by the concept, design, and realisation of the exhibition, courtesy of HOAX Amsterdam.

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And the following organisations:

Canada Ireland Foundation
Centro Documental de la Memoria Historica
EuroClio
The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas
Holodomor Research and Education Consortium (HREC)
HOAX
Irish Heritage Trust
Kuopio Cultural History Museum
Museum Rotterdam
NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies
Radboud Pre-University College of Society
Radboud University
Red Star Line Museum
Versetzmuseum
Wageningen University and Research

Funding

Heritages of Hunger: Societal Reflections on Past European Famines in Education, Commemoration and Musealisation is a collaboration between Radboud University, NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, and Wageningen University and Research. It is funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO) under grant agreement no. NWA.1160.18.197.



KEY FAMINES AND PERIODS OF FOOD SHORTAGE DISCUSSED IN THE LEARNING PROGRAMME

» GREAT IRISH FAMINE (1845–52)

The Irish Famine, also known as the Great Famine or the Potato Famine, happened between 1845 and 1852. It mainly occurred because the potato crop failed across the country, which was the staple food of the Irish population. A disease called late blight destroyed the potato harvests for several years in a row, not just in Ireland, but also in Scotland, Flanders, the Netherlands and Germany. British colonial policies made things worse in Ireland, by increasing poverty and dependence on the potato crop prior to the famine, and by not providing sufficient relief during the crisis. As a result of the famine, about one million people died from hunger and sickness, and more than a million people emigrated from Ireland in search of survival and a better life elsewhere.

» FINNISH GREAT HUNGER YEARS (1866–68)

In Finland, a series of bad harvests due to poor weather led to the 'Great Years of Hunger' from 1866 to 1868. However, these followed a period of already ongoing food shortage. Crop failures led to a shortage of food supplies, particularly grains like rye, which was a staple in the Finnish diet. The government's slow response and insufficient relief measures resulted in the devastating famine. About 8–9% of the people in Finland at that time, estimated at around 150,000 in total, died from hunger and related illnesses.

» FOOD INSECURITY IN GERMANY 1914–1924

During and after World War I, Germany experienced food insecurity due to economic warfare, including a blockade. Agriculture suffered because there were not enough workers, animals for farming, land to grow crops, and coal for moving and processing food. On top of that, hyperinflation made money worth less, so buying basic things became really hard. All these problems combined led to hundreds of thousands of civilians dying from diseases related to hunger and malnutrition.

» UKRAINIAN HOLODOMOR (1932–33)

Due to agricultural reforms and economic policies implemented under Joseph Stalin, in 1932 there was famine in parts of the Soviet Union, including parts of Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan. In late 1932 and early 1933, policies specifically directed at Soviet Ukraine were put in place: unrealistically high food quotas, forced food requisitions and the restriction of (internal) movement, for example. As a result, the famine in Ukraine became much worse. Estimates of how many people died vary widely, but scholars generally agree that about 4 million people in Ukraine lost their lives due to starvation and related causes. The Holodomor has been recognized as a genocide by several states including Ukraine, Canada, the US, as well as the European Parliament.

» SPANISH HUNGER YEARS (1939–52)

After the civil war in Spain, from 1939 to 1952, there was a long period of hunger, hitting the poorest people in the south especially hard. The worst "hunger years" (1939–42 and 1946) were a real famine, comparable to those in other European contexts during the 19th and 20th century. Franco's dictatorship blamed it on the previous Republican government and damages from the civil war, along with Spain being isolated internationally and the occurrence of continuous drought. However, studies show the true cause was Franco's very strict economic policies that lasted a long time. The consequences for the impoverished population were malnutrition, starvation, disease and poor housing conditions. To survive, people came up with new ways to make food and sometimes did illegal things like black market trading, stealing, and smuggling.

» THE HIGHLAND POTATO FAMINE (1846–56)

The Highland Potato Famine struck Scotland from 1846 to 1856, devastating communities that relied heavily on potatoes as a staple food. The crisis was triggered by potato blight, the same disease that caused the Irish Famine, destroying successive potato crops across the Highlands and Islands.

The famine led to widespread starvation and destitution among Highland communities. It accelerated the Highland Clearances, with many landlords evicting tenants who could no longer pay rent. Around 1.7 million Scots emigrated during this period, primarily to North America and Australia. The crisis also marked the end of the traditional Highland clan system and crofting lifestyle, permanently transforming Highland society and culture.

» DUTCH 'HUNGER WINTER' (1944–45)

During the final months of World War II, the German-occupied western Netherlands went through a severe famine known as the 'Hunger Winter'. The famine resulted from several transportation and distribution difficulties linked to the Allied liberation of the southern Netherlands, including a national railway strike, a German embargo on inland shipping, severe fuel shortage and a heavy frost period. Over 20,000 people died during the famine.



» GREEK FAMINE (1941–44)

The famine in Greece during World War II was caused by a combination of factors. These include the occupation by Axis powers, disruption of food supplies, inflation, communication break-down and the Allied blockade that prevented food and resources from entering the country. The number of people who died during this famine is thought to be between 100,000 and 450,000.

» FOOD INSECURITY IN GERMANY (1945–49)

After World War II, Germany faced hunger and food insecurity mainly due to the widespread destruction of its infrastructure, farms, and cities during the war. The extensive Allied bombings and combat inflicted widespread destruction on the country, making it hard to produce and move food around. This situation caused hunger not only for people living in Germany but also for various groups on the move, such as displaced persons, refugees, individuals who fled the former eastern part of Germany, and former concentration camp prisoners.

» THE ETHIOPIAN FAMINE (1983-1985)

The Ethiopian famine of 1983–85 was a devastating humanitarian crisis that claimed an estimated 400,000 to 500,000 lives, primarily in the northern regions of Tigray and Wollo. The disaster resulted from a combination of severe drought and political factors, including the government's prioritization of military spending in civil conflicts and disruptive agricultural policies like forced collectivisation.

Beyond the massive death toll, the famine displaced millions into refugee camps and captured global attention through powerful media coverage. This sparked an unprecedented international response. The crisis left lasting impacts on Ethiopian society through widespread malnutrition, disrupted communities, and accelerated urbanization, while transforming how the world responds to humanitarian disasters.

» THE YEMEN FAMINE 2016-PRESENT

The Yemen famine, ongoing since 2016, represents one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. It emerged primarily due to the civil war between the Houthi rebels and the Saudi-led coalition supporting Yemen's government. The conflict has severely disrupted food supplies, destroyed infrastructure, and blocked humanitarian aid.

The crisis was intensified by port blockades, particularly at Hodeidah, which prevented essential food and medical supplies from reaching the population. Economic collapse, including currency devaluation and rising food prices, has further worsened the situation.

The effects have been catastrophic, with an estimated 375,000 deaths by the end of 2021. Millions face severe food insecurity, and children are particularly vulnerable, with widespread malnutrition causing stunted growth and development. The crisis has also led to outbreaks of diseases like cholera due to limited access to clean water and healthcare.



GLOSSARY OF KEY CONCEPTS, WORDS AND DEFINITIONS

AGENCY

Agency: An individual's capacity to act independently, make choices, and exert influence over their own life circumstances and social environment.

COMMEMORATION

Commemoration is the act of honoring and preserving the memory of significant events, people, or achievements through ceremonies, monuments, or other forms of public remembrance.

DISPLACEMENT

Displacement refers to the forced relocation of individuals or communities from their homes or native regions due to conflict, natural disasters, development projects, or persecution.

GENDERED

Gendered refers to how social and cultural expectations, roles, behaviors, or experiences are shaped and influenced by gender-based assumptions and societal norms.

HERITAGE

Heritage refers to the cultural, historical, and physical elements inherited from past generations, including traditions, customs, buildings, and artifacts that form a community's shared identity.

HYPERLOCAL

Hyperlocal refers to information, activities, or focus that is concentrated on an extremely specific geographic area, typically at the neighborhood or community level.

MEMORY

Memory in a cultural context refers to the collective recollection and sharing of historical events, traditions, and experiences passed down through generations within communities.

MEMORIALISATION

Memorialisation is the process of preserving and honoring memories of people, events, or experiences through physical monuments, rituals, ceremonies, or other forms of public remembrance.

MIGRATION

Migration is the movement of people, animals, or groups from one area or country to another, either temporarily or permanently, typically in search of better conditions.

PHILANTHROPY

Philanthropy is the practice of donating money, resources, or time to help improve the lives of others, typically through organised charitable giving and social initiatives. It may be led by individuals, religious groups, and non-governmental organisations, amongst others.

POWER

The ability to influence, control, or direct the behavior and circumstances of others through political, economic, or social means.

REFUGEE

A refugee is a person forced to flee their home country due to persecution, war, violence, or disasters, seeking safety and protection in another country.

SOCIAL CLASS

A person's position within a societal hierarchy based on economic status, education, occupation, and cultural capital that influences their opportunities and life experiences.

SOLIDARITY

Solidarity is the unity and mutual support between individuals or groups based on shared interests, goals, or circumstances, often expressed through collective action and mutual assistance.

