



# IRISH EMIGRATION REPRESENTED IN ART

**Art and the Great Hunger exhibition, Quinnipiac  
University**

# JUNIOR CYCLE HISTORY: LEARNING OUTCOMES

## **Strand one: the nature of history**

L0 1.6 Debate the usefulness and limitations of different types of sources of historical evidence, such as written, visual, aural, oral and tactile evidence

## **Strand two: the history of Ireland**

L0 2.7 Describe the impact of famine and emigration on Irish society and how the Irish Diaspora contributed to historical developments in other parts of the world

# IRISH EMIGRATION REPRESENTED IN ART: LEARNING INTENTIONS

1. To identify the reasons for emigration from Ireland in the 1800s
2. To extract historical knowledge from a piece of art depicting Irish emigration
3. To evaluate the usefulness of visual art as a source for the historian

# 1. WHAT WERE THE REASONS FOR EMIGRATION FROM IRELAND IN THE 1800S?

## Group one

**Push factors:** Based on your knowledge of Ireland in the 1800s, why do you think so many people emigrated from Ireland after 1845?

## Group two

**Pull factors:** What attracted Irish people to emigrate to countries such as the USA after 1845?

## 2. TO EXTRACT HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE FROM A PIECE OF ART DEPICTING IRISH EMIGRATION

In your groups, study the following three pieces of art depicting Irish emigration.

Answer the questions that accompany each image.



# WILLIAM MAGRATH (1838-1918), *THE FAREWELL*, N.D.



1. Are there any details in this image which indicate why this woman is emigrating?
2. Does the artist capture the emotional experience of emigration? Explain your answer.

# JAMES BRENAN (1837-1907), *THE FINISHING TOUCH*, 1876



1. Can you figure out the destination of the person who is emigrating?

2. Identify which of the figures in the painting is the one emigrating.

3. Does this painting help the historian to identify the types of people who emigrated in the 1800s?

# JOHN BEHAN (B.1938), *FAMINE SHIP* (2000)

Study carefully this image and the information above. How is this image different from the previous two?

Examine the sculpture closely. What message do you think the artist is trying to convey about emigration?





# PLENARY: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Based on your study of these images, which piece of art do you think is the most useful for a historian studying emigration from Ireland in the 1800s?
- Which piece of art is the least useful? Explain your answer.
- Do you think visual art is a useful and/or reliable source for historians?

# EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Choose from one of the following activities:

- Imagine you are the man in the painting, *The Farewell*. Write a **diary entry** that the man might have written the night after the departure of the woman in the painting

**Or**

- Imagine you are the woman emigrating in *The Finishing Touch* and you have arrived in New York. Write a letter home describing the journey to America.