

## EPISODE 4 – THE SEARCH



### SUMMARY

The children are driven by hunger to seek food in the soup-kitchen. Later they come upon the body of a dead man and though horrified they respect the dead and say a prayer for him. They travel on, at times hungry, despondent and exhausted. Peggy is attacked by dogs and becomes feverish. Michael goes to the workhouse to get food but to no avail. He bleeds a cow and cooks the blood. Peggy recovers and eventually they reach Castletaggart and meet the great-aunts who, though poor themselves, accept them as part of the family. Eily has mixed emotions as she thinks back to the little thatched cottage and happier times.

### BEFORE VIEWING

Ask the pupils to focus on the roles the children adopt. Is there boys' and girls' work, or do they cross over?

### AFTER VIEWING

Summarise the episode and suggest that the pupils complete the character sketch begun in Worksheet No. 1. Ask them to write their last journal entry entitled: 'Journey's End'. Now they can assemble their four entries and a cover (see Worksheet No. 19).

### WORKSHEET ACTIVITIES TABLE – AT A GLANCE

W/SHEET NO.	TITLE	ENGLISH	HISTORY	SPHE / PSHE	ART/MEDIA STUDIES	MUSIC
19	Cover Design				Book covers	
20	Boys' Work and Girls' Work	Letter writing, reading, discussing	Research working conditions	Gender stereotyping		
21	Soup-kitchens	Debate	Studying evidence/oblique sources	Proselytising /nutrition		
22	Death	Newspaper report	Contemporary accounts of starvation		Illustration for article	
23	Famine in Sudan, 1998		Deaths from famine - then and now	Current affairs		
24	Famine Song	Study of lyrics	Source material			Song
25	Endings	Creative writing/empathy				
26	Famine Quiz					

## COVER DESIGN

### HOW OTHERS SEE IT

On this page you can see actual covers from translations of *Under the Hawthorn Tree*. You can find more on [www.obrien.ie/covergallery](http://www.obrien.ie/covergallery)

1 You are to design the cover of a new edition of *Under the Hawthorn Tree*. You will need to think about the following:

- What the story is about
- What the children look like and what they wear
- Which details you want on the cover
- What colour scheme suits the story.

2 Do some rough designs for your cover. Now select the best, improve on it and do a finished cover. Use it as a cover for your journal.

3 Hold a class or group discussion about the covers produced and compare with the covers from translations of *Under the Hawthorn Tree* reproduced on this page.

German



Japanese



Dutch



Arabic



Mexico



French



Danish



## BOYS' WORK AND GIRLS' WORK?

Before their mother leaves, she gives each of the children a function. This is what she said:

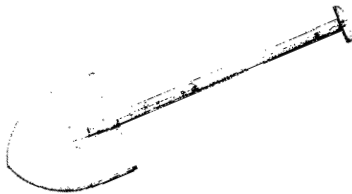
**To Eily: 'You must take my place'**

**To Michael: 'The man of the house'**

**To Peggy: 'My baby'.**

1 Look at the chart opposite and list what each of the children actually did in the circumstances listed in the left-hand column.

2 Their mother's expectation was that Michael would be the *hunter*, Eily the *carer* and Peggy the *object of affection*. Did they each fulfil that function or did they go beyond that stereotype? Discuss your findings and share your opinions with your classmates.



Life was harsh for all poor children during these times. If the O'Driscolls had been living in a large town or city, circumstances might have forced them to work:

- ❖ as servants in big houses
- ❖ down mines
- ❖ in factories
- ❖ making nails
- ❖ sweeping chimneys
- ❖ making ribbons.

3 Research what conditions would have been like for you if you had to work at one of these jobs. Write a letter to Queen Victoria complaining about these conditions and suggesting improvements.

### WHAT THE CHILDREN ACTUALLY DID

EVENT	EILY	MICHAEL	PEGGY
Catching and cooking the rabbit			
Being attacked by dogs			
Peggy's fever			
Bleeding the cow			
The thunderstorm			
Robbing the orchard			

## SOUP-KITCHENS

When the Government abandoned Public Works Schemes, public soup-kitchens were set up by government agencies and also by private institutions and by religious groups. In 1847 over 3 million people were receiving food. The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) were especially notable for their generosity and courage in the face of sickness and fever. Other soup-kitchens were set up by over-zealous Protestant groups who demanded that people should abandon their Catholic faith in return for food. Those who converted were nicknamed 'Soupers'.



*Quaker soup-kitchen,  
Cork*

### ORAL SOURCES

*The Donegans, Ballintoy, Co. Antrim, in 1856*

There was a soup-kitchen run by people named McKinnan in the townland of Cloughcur. They called them the 'Brockan-men'. It was porridge they would give if you would change your religion. At the time there was a lot of youngsters and these big people, the gentry, would take them to some place and give them food. The children would bless themselves before they would ate; and these ones would have their hands tied behind their backs so's they couldn't bless themselves. That happened round here as far as I heard.

*Seán Ó Domhnaill, b.1873, Scairt na nGleobhrán, Ballylooby, Cahir, Co. Tipperary*

Souperism was practised in the south-east of our parish so the tradition has it; and in the Ballybacon parish which is adjacent. To speak of a person as a 'Souper' in our district was tantamount to the greatest taunt and insult.

*Lughaidh Ó Maollumhlaigh, Edgeworthstown, Co. Longford*

Soup was given out by Protestant families who tried to get the people who took it to turn Protestant. Some did so.



*A queue for soup*

### CLASS DEBATE

**It was wrong to convert to get food.**

## DEATH

The children came upon the body of a man who died of disease or starvation at the side of the road. Out of respect for the dead, they said a prayer and marked the spot with a simple cross.

During the famine many died in the same way without family, priest or coffin.

Here are some accounts of the devastation caused by the famine.

### ORAL SOURCES

*Felix Kernan, b.1859, a farmer, Drumakill, Castleblayney, Co. Monaghan*

When the potato crop failed no other food was available and the people perished by the hundreds of thousands, along the roadside, in the ditches, in the fields from hunger and cold, and what was even worse – the famine fever. The strongest men were reduced to mere skeletons and they could be met daily with the clothes hanging on them like ghosts.

The grandmother of the present writer often told me of her experiences when a girl of seventeen in those awful days. Her people had a little country shop and those customers who called on any particular day seldom or ever returned to the shop. She said it was usual to see corpses lying by the roadside with pieces of grass or leaves in their mouths and their faces stained with the juice of the plants which they were chewing to try and satisfy the hunger.

On one occasion a mother came in with a baby in her arms. The poor little thing was gaunt and thin and kept whining for something to eat. The mother would persist in putting its lips to her breasts which were milkless in order to stop it crying. A drink of milk was given to the baby and its mother and later the same day the mother was seen dead by the roadside with the baby still alive in her arms.

On another occasion a man called at the shop to buy a pound of meal to make porridge for his family of six. This small quantity of meal was boiled in a great deal of water to make more bulk but the thin gruel only hastened the end of the poor starving creatures and the next day four of them were dead in a neighbouring field.

*John D. O'Leary, Lynedaowne, Rathmore, Co. Kerry*

When I was a small boy I heard an old man talk of the Famine period. He said his mother sent him out to invite in a man that she saw leaning against a wall in Millstreet town. When he spoke the man did not answer. When he touched him he was dead.

When my grandmother (d.1894) was going to mass at Rathmore she saw a man lying dead on a heap of stones on the roadside. A young girl named Cotter is said to have died rather than accept help from the Soupers.

*Dáithí Ó Ceanntabhail, national teacher, Croom, Co. Limerick*

The deaths in my native place were many and horrible. The poor famine-stricken people were found by the wayside, emaciated corpses, partly green from eating docks and nettles and partly blue from the cholera and dysentery.



*Tomás Ó Ceallaigh, b.1860, a farmer, Caherea, Ennis, Co. Clare*

There was a labouring man in Caherea, his name was Cusack. He was found lying up against a wall dead in the morning. There was another man in Decomade and his name was Tom Hadlock. He was 18 years. He died of starvation. He was taken to Clondegad graveyard. They heard the noise in the coffin. They opened it and took him out and he lived to be an old man.



Select one of the extracts above. Make your own sketch based on that extract and below it write a contemporary report of the incident for the *Illustrated London News*. The year is 1847.

## FAMINE IN SUDAN, 1998

### Ireland 1848 – Sudan 1998



#### NEWSPAPER EXTRACT – *The Irish Times*, 2 June 1998

##### *Paul Cullen reports on a visit to Bahr El Ghazal province in southern Sudan*

We were halfway to the village of Malual Baai when we came across two women digging by the side of the road. The older woman, Aguek, explained what they were doing: 'The ants, they store away the grass seed under the ground, we know that. So we dig up their nest, and find the food.'

They had walked an hour from Malual Baai to get here at 6am and had collected about two cupfuls of seed by the time we arrived. Aguek explained that they would later crush this, remove the chaff, and then boil it to make a sort of soup.

'We have been eating wild foods but some of these are finished,' she explained, sipping some discoloured water from a gourd by her side.

Everywhere in this flat savannah where nothing grows, people said they had been living for months on a diet of wild fruits, leaves and little else.

#### CLASS DISCUSSIONS

1 Based on the report above, how do you think the famine in the Sudan compares with the Irish famine?

2 Under the following topics, discuss the similarities and differences between Ireland in the last century and Sudan today: History, Religion, Area, Population, Language, Export, Land Ownership, Causes of Famine, Effects of Famine.

#### SUDAN FACTS

Area	2,376,000 Sq. Km. (largest in Africa)
Population	26.1 million (1994)
Head of State	General Omar al-Bashir
Capital	Khartoum, population 4 million
Language	Arabic, English, Local languages/dialects
Currency	Sudanese pound, \$£90:US\$1
GNP per capita	US\$230 (Ireland's is US\$16,061)
Exports	cotton, nuts, dates, gum arabic, sugar cane, sesame seed
Foreign Debt	US\$21.5bn

#### HISTORY

Sudan is divided into two cultures, a Muslim north and a Christian south. It has a rich and ancient culture dating from 2300BC and has been under Arab rule since AD671. In 1899 it became part of the British Empire, then became independent in 1955. Civil war between the wealthier north and the poorer south followed for seventeen years.

In 1969 Colonel Jaafar el-Nimiery took power in a coup and ruled until 1985 when General al-Bashir took over. In 1983 civil war broke out again between the SPLA (Sudan People's Liberation Army) and government forces. Since then Sudan's economy has fallen apart.

Weather has not helped, and droughts and famine have occurred regularly since 1984.

#### CURRENT FOOD CRISIS

**Prolonged fighting and drought in Bahr El Gazal, Nuba and Equatoria provinces have left thousands of people homeless and without food. Food stores are gone, seed crops have made it impossible to buy food. Over 350,000 people are in danger of starving. If no crop is sown, Sudan will be ravaged by famine and these people will die.**

Further information from:

Concern, Camden Street, Dublin 2

Oxfam, 274 Banbury Road, Oxford, OX2 7DZ

Trocaire, 169 Booterstown Avenue, Blackrock, Co. Dublin

or other organisations you may know of.



# FAMINE SONG

## Skibbereen

Oh, fa-ther dear, I oft-times hear you talk of E-rin's de-arest. Her joy-ty scene and val-ley green, her moon-lit meads and wild. They say it is a pret-ty place where a prince might dwell. Then why did you a-fore-fore-fore The rea-son to me tell.

*Oh, son, I loved our native land with energy and pride,  
Until a blight came on the land and sheep and cattle died,  
The rent and taxes were to pay, I could not them redeem,  
And that's the cruel reason why I left old Skibbereen.*

*It's well I do remember that bleak December day.  
The landlord and the sheriff came to drive us all away.  
They set the roof on fire with their demon yellow spleen,  
And that's another reason why I left old Skibbereen.*

*Your mother, too, God rest her soul, fell on the snowy ground.  
She fainted in her anguish, seeing the desolation round.  
She never rose, but passed away from life to mortal dream,  
And found a quiet grave, my boy, in dear old Skibbereen.*

*It's well I do remember the year of forty-eight,  
When I arose with Erin's boys to fight against the fate,  
I was hunted through the mountains for a traitor to the queen,  
And that's another reason why I left old Skibbereen.*

*Oh, father dear, the day may come when vengeance loud will call,  
And we will rise with Erin's boys and rally one and all.  
I'll be the man to lead the van beneath our flag of green,  
When loud and high we'll raise the cry: 'Remember Skibbereen'.*

Read the song and answer the questions.

- 1 There are two voices in this song. Identify them. Which verses belong to which character?
- 2 Is the son's view of Ireland realistic?
- 3 Describe the circumstances surrounding the father's

departure from Skibbereen (key words: blight, rent, eviction, death).

- 4 What do you think happened to the son following the mother's death?
- 5 What do you think the cry 'Remember Skibbereen' meant to the son?



## ENDINGS

**1** Do you find the ending of the book and film satisfactory?  
Give reasons for your answer.

**2** What do you think happened to the parents?

**3** What might have happened if the great-aunts had rejected the children or been dead?

**4** Do you think the children changed during the journey? Say how and why.

**5** Do you think the changes will be permanent?

**6** The final image is of Bridget's grave under the hawthorn tree with Mary Kate watching over it. What does that final scene make you think about?

### WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

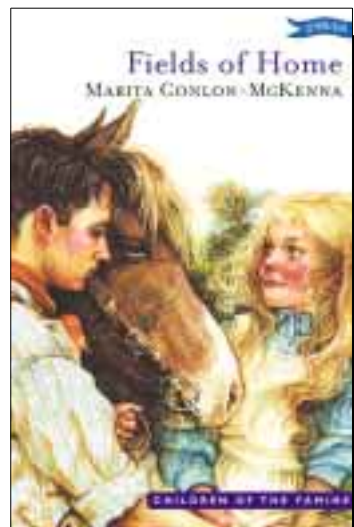
**7** Project the characters forward in time to the year 1866. Where are they now, twenty years on? Enter your suggestions on the chart below.

Where are they now?

Eily	
Michael	
Peggy	
Mary Kate	
Margaret (mother)	
John (father)	

### THE FUTURE FOR EILY, MICHAEL, PEGGY

These two books are sequels to *Under the Hawthorn Tree*. Read how the author imagined the future lives of Eily, Michael and Peggy in the following years.



Compare your guesses about the children's future lives with the stories told in these books.



## FAMINE QUIZ

- 1 In which decade of which century did the Great Famine occur?
- 2 What caused the famine?
- 3 What were weather conditions like that summer?
- 4 Why did the people not eat grain?
- 5 Why did they not buy food?
- 6 What did the Government import to feed the people?
- 7 What work was carried out under the Public Relief Schemes?
- 8 Where did the destitute go for food and shelter?
- 9 What diseases did the starving people contract?
- 10 What did the landlords do to help?
- 11 What were the free food distribution centres called?
- 12 To where did people emigrate?
- 13 How many people emigrated?
- 14 How many died?
- 15 What ended the famine?

*Check your answers on pages 151-153 of Under the Hawthorn Tree.*

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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*Emigration after the famine*