



Deadly! Irish History - The Normans

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Teaching Guide

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Filled with fascinating facts, funny cartoons and hands-on crafting activities, this book tells the story of the Normans and the Ireland they inhabited nearly a thousand years ago. Children will be tickled by the irreverent story-telling and cartoon-peppered pages. They'll also find much to learn about the history of Ireland and the people who lived in it all those years ago.

This teaching guide is designed to stimulate young readers and inspire them to explore their history through a range of suggested activities including debate, design, research skills, extended writing and other elements of the curriculum. There are also several activities that invite children to examine what's left of the Norman settlements today, and look at the inequality between the different levels of society in modern Ireland.

Section One: Meet the Normans pp6–21

SUMMARY

In this section we find out who the Normans were and why they came to Ireland. We're told the story of how the king of Leinster invited Normans into the country and a little bit about medieval global politics.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read pp6–7.** What makes a good castle? What are the top three features you think every castle should have? Why do you think this?
- **Read pp10–12.** Have you heard of any of these fortified structures before? Have you ever visited one? What was it like? What top three features do you think a good fortified structure should have? Why do you think this?
- **Read p15.** We're told the whole story of Dervorgilla and how the Normans came

to Ireland. What do you think of this story? Do you think it was fair to punish Diarmuid fourteen years after the event? Why do you think this? What would you have done if you were Diarmuid? Why?

- **Read p16.** Here, we find out about Strongbow. Is this a name you've heard before? What do you know about him? Do a little research and add another two facts to the sheet.
- **Read pp17–19.** We find out the real story behind Diarmuid losing his throne. Do you have any sympathy with him? Why?
- **Read p20.** Here, we find out about the papal taxes. What do you know about tax? What do you think it is used for? Do you think this is a good thing? If you were in charge of taxes in Ireland, what would you spend the money on? Why?

ACTIVITIES

1. LOCAL ATTRACTIONS

Are there any castles near where you live? Do some research into the history of your local castle and create a fact sheet informing visitors about it. Include information on its history: when was it built, who used to live there, what are the key architectural features? Try to include things that could be interesting – are there any gory stories associated with the castle? Any famous figures who lived there? Any ghost stories?

2. DESCRIBING A CASTLE

Have you ever been to a castle? What was it like? Imagine you are visiting when it was at its busiest (this could be hundreds of years ago!). What do you think it was like? Imagine the sights, sounds and smells. Write a description of the inside of the castle.

Remember, the best descriptive writing gives the whole picture: what we can see, hear, taste, touch, smell. Try to move through the castle as well – not too far, as this is

description rather than a story, but enough to give your reader the full picture.

3. MAPPING HISTORY

On pp10–12, we're shown all the different types of settlements our ancestors lived in. Create a map of your county and plot any of these structures you can find out about. If there aren't any in your county, you can include neighbouring counties. Choose one or two and find out some facts to add to your map.

4. RESEARCHING ROLLO

On p13, we're told about the Viking leader Rollo. What can you find out about him? With a partner, research Rollo and create a very short interview with him. Ask him questions to find out what sort of man he was. What motivated him? What did he achieve? Write out your questions and Rollo's answers.

5. COME TO IRELAND

On p14, we're told of the time when the Normans turned their attention to Ireland. What do you think would have been so attractive about Ireland at the time? In small groups, decide on the top four reasons why the Normans chose to come to Ireland. Create an advertising brochure that persuades them to set up home here. Think about using persuasive language in your text.

6. NEWS REPORT

On pp17–19, we're told the story of how the Normans came to Ireland. Imagine you are a news reporter at the time. The Normans are on their way. Create a news report that tells the story of who's coming and why. Try to include some interviews with key witnesses – maybe Diarmuid, a Norman and a local Irish person who is worried about these fierce soldiers coming to their land. Don't forget to give it a clever headline!

Section Two: Daily Life pp22–57

SUMMARY

This section includes chapters on the everyday lives of the Normans. We find out about the positioning of Norman castles and the way Normans and the Irish at the time would have dressed. We are told how they earned a living through a range of different professions (some more desirable than others!) and how they would have had access to a range of exotic items such as silk and spices.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read p22.** The Normans built wooden forts in strategic locations. What do you think makes a good location for a fort? What key geographical features should be there? Why do you think this? Is there anywhere near where you live that you think would be a good location for a fort? Why do you think this?
- **Read p39.** Gerald of Wales outlines some pretty strange notions about the Irish. Do you recognise any of these stereotypes? Why do you think people use stereotypes?
- **Read p43.** Look at the two typical hairstyles. Do they look familiar? Which would you prefer and why? Do you think it would be allowed at school? If not, why not? Why do you think schools have hairstyle policies?
- **Read p44.** The Irish woman has a range of basic toiletries. If you had to choose your three essential toiletries, what would they be and why?
- **Read p52.** In Norman times, people would trade silks, spices and sugar. What other things do you think they might have tried to trade? If you were a trader at the time, what would you have traded? Why? Explain to a partner.
- **Read pp53–55.** The author lists five different professions and explains them in detail. Which do you think you would have liked to be? Why? Explain your thoughts.
- **Read pp56–57.** We find out about another eight castles here. Which is your favourite? What features does it have that you find interesting? Why?

ACTIVITIES

1. BUILDING DIARY

On pp22–27, we're given step-by-step details of how a castle is created. It was a

very big project and could take years to complete. Imagine you are a lord who has ordered a new castle to be built. Write a diary that explains the different stages of construction. Try to make it entertaining – maybe some things go wrong! Maybe some of the workmen aren't up to the task! Your diary should begin with deciding on the right location and end with sitting down for your first-ever feast in your new dining hall.

2. CASTLE DESIGN

On pp32–35, you've constructed your own castle, but you've only really built the exterior walls. If you could build your perfect castle in medieval Ireland, what would you have inside it? Create a plan for your perfect castle, labelling each room. Think about how you'll entertain guests, how you'll keep the rooms warm, and how you'll spend your spare time.

3. CASTLE GUIDEBOOK

On pp40–41, we're introduced to our first eight Irish castles. Choose one and do more research on it. Create a full guidebook, including facts about the castle's history and any ghost stories or other interesting tales. Find some pictures to make it look as attractive as possible.

4. A DAY IN THE LIFE

Find out more about the typical activities of either a Norman nobleman or lady. What sorts of things did they spend their days doing? Write a day-in-the-life piece that starts with them waking up and getting dressed and ends when they go to bed. Do you think they enjoyed themselves? What sorts of thoughts and worries do you think they might have had? Include all this information.

5. HELP WANTED

On pp49–50, we find out about some of the jobs that existed in Norman times. How different are they from jobs today? Choose two modern occupations and write a job description that a Norman could understand. Remember, if it's something to do with computing you'll have to describe what a computer is and how the internet works in a way they could understand!

6. DOOR SIGNS

On p51, we see examples of four different signs for four different businesses. Imagine you have been asked to build one for the following occupations:

- an accountant
- a lawyer

- an IT consultant
- a nail salon

What would they look like? Design a sign for each and write a paragraph explaining your thought process.

Section Three: War, Law and Order pp58–81

SUMMARY

In these chapters, we're given lots of information on the sorts of weaponry available to both the Irish and the Normans. There are several interactive crafting activities in this section. We also find out more about the laws of the time and how they were used to control the population.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read pp59–61.** Which weapon do you think would have been the most useful? Why do you think this? Are there any other weapons you think a Norman knight could have used?
- **Read p71.** What do you think about the list of weapons the Irish would have used? Why do you think it says 'against a fully armoured Norman knight on horseback, they might as well have just been throwing stones'? What other ways do you think they could have fought against Norman cavalry?
- **Read p74.** Why do you think the laws in *The Statutes of Kilkenny* existed? Can you think of any other laws that might have been included? Why do you think they were so keen to stop the Normans and Irish from mixing?
- **Read p75.** The ancient Irish believed that when they died, they returned to the Earth in a new body. Some cultures believe we can even return as an animal after we die. If you could be an animal, which would you be and why?
- **Read pp77–79.** What do you think about these different punishments, such as the stocks, a fine and the pillory? If you had to choose to receive one of these punishments, which would it be and why?

ACTIVITIES

1. SENT AWAY TO FIGHT

On p58, we find out that noble boys were sent away to begin combat training at the age of seven. What do you think about this? Do you think this is too young to leave home? Why do you think this? Write a letter

to the local lord to persuade him that his son should be allowed to train at home – and that there might be better things he could learn. Try to use at least three persuasive techniques, such as rhetorical questions, facts and statistics, emotive language, rule of three, imperatives or shock tactics in your writing.

2. TOUR THE CASTLE

Choose one of the castles we've learned about so far. Do some detailed research on what's inside and create a script for a short tour of the castle. Include important facts, interesting stories and anything else you think your guests might find entertaining.

3. BALLAD

Ballads are narrative poems that tell the story of a figure from history. They are written in verses of four lines, with the first and third lines and the second and fourth lines rhyming. Each line has roughly the same number of syllables to keep the rhythm even. In pairs, look up some sample ballads and then write one about the story of Henry Tyrel (see p81).

Section Four: Health and Diet pp82–99

SUMMARY

The typical Norman diet is shown here in some detail, including recipes for strange dishes. There's also a lot of information about how people kept healthy – and what happened when they fell ill. Medieval medicine could be quite brutal, and some of the more exciting, gory details are illustrated in these chapters.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read p82.** What do you think about the types of food the Normans had at their feasts? Does any of it appeal to you? Why? What sorts of food would you have at your feast? Which do you think is healthier?
- **Read p83.** We find out that the executed king was sliced up and the parts sent to the corners of the kingdom. Why do you think this was? What does it tell us about people at that time? Why do you think this?
- **Read pp90–92.** Why do you think the 'doctor' asked for the patient's star sign? Why do you think star signs were popular in Norman times – and remain popular today? What do you think about the different beliefs the Normans had about

the way the body worked?

- **Read p93.** What are the key differences between barber surgeons and healing ladies? Which do you think was most effective? Why? Who do you think was more respected?
- **Read p95.** What do you think of trepanation? Why? Do you think we have any medical procedures today that people in the future might find barbaric? Why do you think this?
- **Read p97.** Do you think the carters were brave or stupid? Why do you think they did such a dangerous job? What sorts of similar dangerous jobs exist in the modern world? Why do you think people do them? Do you think this is fair?

ACTIVITIES

1. HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW?

On p85, there is an interesting description of how people at this time were self-sufficient, with their own vegetable patches and their own animals to produce cheese and butter. Do you think this is a good idea for modern times? Why do you think this? What sorts of things could we grow to become more self-sufficient? How would this benefit the environment?

Create your own 'self-sufficiency plan' to grow one or more foods that you could eat regularly at home.

Extension: Create a 'Guide to Self-Sufficiency in Modern Ireland' with at least six top tips on how people can become more self-sufficient. It doesn't just have to be about food – think about mending clothes, making furniture, recycling and reusing things around the home.

2. RECIPE CARD

On pp86–88, we have a couple of recipe cards for traditional meals. Would you like to cook any of these? Why not? Think about some dishes that are common in homes in Ireland today. Choose two and research how they're made. They don't have to be traditional – if you think pizzas or curries might be more popular, choose those! Create a recipe card explaining how to cook the meal, or channel your inner Gordon Ramsay and create a video where you make the dish and explain the process.

3. READ MY STARS

On p90, the 'doctor' asks his patient for his star sign before deciding how to treat him. Star signs were seen as very important in Norman times, and many people still believe

in them today. Create a horoscope for the next week, based around your star sign and those of your family members.

Extension: Research how horoscopes and the signs of the zodiac were used in medieval medicine. Create a short presentation to explain your findings.

4. PLAGUE

On p97, we're given some information about the bubonic plague. What do you know about it already? In small groups, research the plague – look at how it started and how it travelled across the world.

Imagine you are doing a news report midway through the plague. What sorts of things would you say to your audience? How would you try and give information without frightening people too much? Who would you choose to interview? In groups, either script or perform this news report.

5. CASTLE ADVENTURES

We are given information on eight more castles on pp98–99. Choose one of these castles and write a story based there. The story doesn't have to be set in medieval Ireland – it could be set in the present day in the ruins of the castle. Or you could use all the things you've learned so far and incorporate them into a story about Normans in Ireland. Aim to write between 400 and 1,000 words.

Start by identifying your main character: Who are they? What motivates them? What is the problem they are facing (this will be the plot of your story) and how will they tackle it? Most good stories have a plot where it seems like the hero has succeeded only for another problem to present itself. Try to aim for this in your story too.

Section Five: Fun and Leisure pp100–119

SUMMARY

These chapters describe the sorts of things both Norman and Irish people did for entertainment, with facts on games and other leisure activities. There's also a graphic comic piece on the lives of different young people in Norman Ireland.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read pp101–103.** Do any of these games seem familiar? Why do you think this? Which one would you like to play most? Why?

- **Read p104.** Which of these jester roles would you most like to do? Why? Do you think people would still find these jesters funny today? Why do you think this?
- **Read p105.** What do these tourney games tell us about the Normans' views on entertainment? Why do you think this? Do you think any of these games are similar to modern games? Which ones?
- **Read pp109–111.** What are your first impressions of Isobel? Do you feel any sympathy for her? Why do you think this?
- **Read p112.** Fionntán is amazed by the castle. Why do you think he is so in awe? Have you ever had a sensation like this? What happened? How did it make you feel?
- **Read p117.** Which of the three would you most like to be? Why? Why do you think there was such inequality? What do you think could have been done to change this? What examples of inequality can you think of in modern life? How can we combat it?
- **Read p119.** Some of these castles are still in use today. What uses do you think a castle could have in modern Ireland? Why do you think this? What do you think is the best way to use a castle? Why do you think this?

ACTIVITIES

1. GAMING, NORMAN STYLE

Some of the games explained on p100 seem very old-fashioned – and a bit disgusting! What sort of games do you play? Do you think your games are very different to those in olden times? Why do you think this?

In small groups, create a simple game that doesn't need too many pieces and can be played by anyone. (Remember that in Norman times, a lot of children didn't go to school so wouldn't have known how to read or write.) Draw up the game and a list of rules so that another group in your class could play it. Why not ask the adults at home or your grandparents for some ideas?

2. COMEDIANS

Read through p104 again. Why do you think jesters were so popular? What do you think the modern version is? Write up a job description for a modern jester in the style of the book.

3. FREEZE FRAME

Read p111. What do you think of the encounter between Hugh and the cook? In small groups, freeze frame three scenes from the encounter. Think about how each character feels and reflect this in body language and facial expressions.

4. PERSONAL HYGIENE

Read p113. What do you think of Isobel's attitude to the two boys? Why is personal hygiene so important? Create a list of five key things teenagers should do to ensure good personal hygiene.

Section Six: Seamus the Sinister Swordsman pp120–144

SUMMARY

This section contains the story of Seamus the Sinister Swordsman, a brave Irishman who helps restore justice in his local kingdom. There's also information on the lasting legacy of the Normans and the castles they left behind.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read p120.** Which of these archaeological artifacts do you find the most interesting and why? What sorts of objects do you think would best tell the story of modern life to future civilisations?
- **Read p122.** King Conn says that 'we must do all we can to help those less fortunate than ourselves'. What does he mean by this? What do you think of this statement? Why? What can we do in our everyday lives to help others?
- **Read p124.** Lady Maeve tells Seamus that he's braver than all the other men put together. What does she mean by this? Do you agree? What do you think bravery is? Why do you think this?
- **Read p131.** What do you think of this punishment? Do you think this would have happened? Why do you think this? What punishment would you have given?
- **Read p135.** Look at the list of names. Do you recognise any? Why do you think so many still exist? Why do you think family names are so important?

ACTIVITIES

1. BOG FINDINGS

The list of archaeological artifacts on p120 is quite extensive. Many ancient items have been found, wonderfully preserved, in Irish bogs. What sorts of things have been found? In pairs, create a fact sheet about the two most interesting things that have been found in Ireland by archaeologists.

2. LADY MAEVE

Read through pp121–131. What are your impressions of Lady Maeve? Choose two or three adjectives to describe her personality. Then choose a short quote from the text that best illustrates each adjective. Write two or three paragraphs about her personality, explaining how each quote proves each adjective.

3. PERSONAL CASTLE

Choose a local castle from the map on p138. Does it have many of the features listed on pp132–133? Research the castle and list the sorts of features the castle contains and a bit of information about these features.

4. TIMELINE

Look at the timeline on pp139–141. Which events do you think were the most important? Choose five and draw your own timeline with these events. Be prepared to explain your choice.

Extension: Write a persuasive speech on why your choice of events are the most important.

Also by John Farrelly

For more hilarious history in John Farrelly's **Deadly! Irish History** series, see obrien.ie/childrens/deadly-irish-history

