

### 13.9 Demography of the Great Irish Famine

Source: New York State Great Irish Famine Curriculum

**Background:** No one knows exactly how many people died in Ireland's great Famine of 1845-52, but in a population of more than eight million people, the death count reached at least one million. Another million and a half people emigrated. This human disaster occurred within the jurisdiction of Great Britain, the richest and most industrially advanced empire in the world at that time. According to one "the potato blight was an ecological disaster that struck Ireland when it was particularly vulnerable. But what transformed the blight into a famine was the failure of the British government, along with landlords and merchants, to meet the challenge and implement effective action." Conditions in Ireland became so bad during the potato famine that according to one report:



**An extended Iris family being evicted.**

"Most of the dead were buried in fields or along the roads. The corpse was frequently wrapped with straw ropes and buried in this way without a coffin . . . Tombstones were not erected as it was difficult to find men with the strength to make the graves . . . Bodies actually lay unburied by hedges for rats soon devoured the flesh and only the skeleton remained. During the famine people died from a variety of causes, though relatively few from actual starvation. Most were felled by relapsing fever, typhus, dysentery, and cholera. Their vulnerability to these diseases made worse by hunger, inadequate shelter, overcrowding in workhouses, and hard labor on work relief projects.

#### Questions

1. What happens to the population of Ireland from 1841-1851?
2. In your opinion, why does this trend continue after 1851?
3. What was the worst year for mortality during the Great Irish Famine?
4. In your opinion, why did mortality remain so high inn the following years?
5. What year did evictions peak?
6. In your opinion, what is the connection, if any, between population demographics, evictions and reported deaths?

Population of Ireland,	1841-1871
1841	8,175,000
1851	6,552,000
1861	5,799,000
1871	4,412,000

Number of Families	Evicted, 1847-1851
1847	6,026
1848	9,657
1849	16,686
1850	19,949
1851	13,197

Reported Deaths in Ireland,	1843-1852
1843	70,499
1844	75,055
1845	86,900
1846	122,899
1847	249,335
1848	208,252
1849	240,797
1850	164,093
1851	96,798
1852	80,112