

Teachers' Notes

Audience:

The aim of this pack is to explain the 1916 Rising to children aged 11 to 14.

Scope:

The 1916 Rising is a pivotal event in the foundation of our country. However its social, military and political complexity could potentially make it a very difficult event for young students to understand. For this reason the pack is heavily illustrated throughout. The illustrations speak for themselves and are sourced from South Dublin Libraries' digital archive. They have been chosen to include rarely-seen images that should be of great interest to students and teachers alike. As with the previous schools packs, the descriptions of the events leading up to the Rising and the aftermath have again been written with consideration for the age group, with easily-understood concepts and language.

The approach is one which shows no bias towards either side in the conflict. This will enable pupils to form their own views on a period that is presented from an objective viewpoint.

Topics for Discussion

Causes: Ask for a show of hands to see how many pupils, if they had lived at the time, would have been happy with the status quo in Ireland prior to 1916 (that Home Rule would have been delivered), and how many would have believed in armed struggle against British rule in Ireland.

Tease out the reasons why and open up a discussion between individuals or groups. Suggested topics for discussion would be whether the British were mistaken in allowing so many arms to be imported by Unionists and afterwards by Republicans.

Were there reasons for this? Maybe to have armed forces ready and armed in the event of a German invasion? How would pupils react if today they saw men marching in the city centre with rifles?

Opportunity for Revolution: Compare the approach of Patrick Pearse who was a believer in "Blood Sacrifice" with that of Eoin MacNeill who proposed waiting. Ask pupils to use these quotes to get into the minds of both men:

Pearse stated in 1915 when discussing the First World War "It is good for the world that such things [war] should be done. The old heart of the earth needed to be warmed with the red wine of the battlefields... millions of lives given gladly for love of country."

MacNeill, in a memo for a meeting of Irish Volunteer Staff, March 1916 stated: "under present conditions I am definitely opposed to any proposal that may come forward involving insurrection. ...any such proposal at this time and under these circumstances would make me false to my country besides involving me in the guilt of murder."

The Proclamation: Read out the text of the Proclamation – perhaps in simplified language – and ask the class if the Ireland of today bears any similarity to that described in the original document. Where has modern Ireland succeeded in the fulfilling the aims contained in the document? Where has it failed?

Destruction: Was it necessary for the British authorities to destroy the centre of Dublin? Was there another way that might have been less destructive?

The Surrender: After the surrender of Pearse, the rebels were rounded up and paraded through the streets of a destroyed Dublin on their way to prison. They were mocked and jeered and bystanders threw rocks at them. Ask the class to pretend they are a rebel writing a letter to a relative from prison recalling all of the events from the taking over of the GPO until the surrender and imprisonment. Describe the sounds, smells, feelings and sights of the day. Compare the emotions at the start of the Rising to those when the rebels were marched to prison.

Executions: Ask the class whether the seven signatories of the proclamation deserved to be shot. Listen to the answers and then inform the class that during the First World War 306 soldiers in the British army were shot by firing squad for showing “cowardice in the face of the enemy”. In the light of that fact, is it less surprising the signatories and other rebels were shot? A discussion could start about how times have changed for the better now that the death sentence is no longer carried out in many countries including Britain and Ireland.

The Public Mood Changes: Ask your pupils if they had lived through this period of Irish history would the executions and arrests of 1916 have encouraged or discouraged them from taking up arms to fight for Ireland? Why?

Another war in Ireland: What are the views of pupils about partition? Given the fact that partition meant the most Loyalist six counties of the north were kept as part of Britain, was there any alternative? Would Loyalists have started an armed campaign in southern Ireland if the whole island got independence?