

Why Did the Irish Come to America?

Using these word, fill in the blanks with the word that best completes the reading comprehension below.

lowest	taxes	exported	Wake	potato	fungus	Poor Law
passage	money	epidemics	Blue	landlords	evicted	tenant

Ever since King Henry VIII broke with the Catholic Church, the English tried to break the church's power by persecuting Catholics. In Ireland, they were stripped of their land, their right to vote, their right to an education and the right to practice their faith. As a result, by the 1800s, most of the good farmland in Ireland belonged to English _____ who had been given the confiscated Irish land by the English government. The Irish were hired by the landlords as _____ farmers. That is, they were allowed to rent a plot of land, but only if they agreed to also plant, tend and harvest the landlord's crops. On his rented plot of land, the tenant farmer could grow his own crops to sell so that he could pay the rent to the landlord, a tithe to the English church to which he didn't even belong and _____ to the government. What little was left he could sell to cloth and feed his own family.

As rents, tithes and taxes grew higher and higher, the tenant farmer was forced to grow a crop that would generate the most produce in the smallest area. It also had to require the least effort since most of his time was spent working the landlord's crops. The perfect crop for that was the _____. In no time at all, most Irish tenant farmers were totally dependant on the potato for all their needs.

In 1845 a _____ hit the potatoes in England and Ireland and destroyed a portion of the crop. Potatoes became scarce and their price went up. A few potatoes in Ireland managed to escape the fungus and they, along with other crops, were _____ to England for profit. In 1846, the fungus spread and destroyed almost all the potatoes in Ireland. The landlord's crops continued to be exported while the Irish began to starve. Without proper nourishment, the Irish became too weak to fight off disease and _____ of Typhus, Cholera and Dysentery began to infect thousands. The government was asked to provide aid, so they passed a _____. To pay for the Poor Law aid, taxes were raised on the landlords based on how many tenants they had. To avoid the taxes, the landlords either raised the rent on the tenants or _____ them to avoid the taxes altogether.

In some cases, the landlord's would pay the _____ to send their tenants to North America since a one-way ticket was cheaper than the tax. Further, it insured that the tenant was truly gone and not hanging around, stealing his cattle and crops. Those whose landlords simply evicted them, sold all their family possessions to buy their own ticket. They left their home, friends and family hoping to find a job somewhere that would allow them to survive and perhaps to send some _____ back to those they were forced to leave behind. Others promised to work off their passage money by signing a commitment for a number of years to work as an indentured servant. In any case, many took the 6 to 8 week voyage across the Atlantic to America and their mothers who remained knew they would never see their emigrant children again. The night before departing, family, friends and neighbors gathered to bid farewell. Those gatherings became known as 'The American _____'.

Once in America, the immigrant Irish didn't find it as easy as they had been told. Some enlisted in the army right off the boat to get the \$152. enlistment bonus, sent the money back home and marched off to put their life on the line for a country they didn't even know. Others found that Irish Catholics were not that welcome in mid-1800s America where nativist gangs, like the True _____ Americans and others, raided Irish neighborhoods and burned Catholic Churches and Convents. Many employment ads noted 'No Irish Need Apply' and the only jobs open to them were the _____ paying and most dangerous jobs that no one else wanted.

Despite this difficult start, the courage of the Irish soldiers in the Civil War and the charm of the Irish maids, gradually broke down the prejudice enough for the Irish to gradually become accepted as civil servants, policemen, fire men, union leaders and then politicians. Gradually the natural ability of the Irish not only made them American, but it made America a wee bit Irish.

