

EPISODE 2 – ON THEIR OWN



SUMMARY

Margaret goes to the village to exchange a dress and shawl for some food. The village is devastated by famine, houses boarded up, whole families dead or emigrated, people starving. She learns that the roadworks are about 20 miles away and hopes that her husband John might be there. Meanwhile, the children entertain themselves by performing a play about their great-aunts, Lena and Nano, about whom their mother has often told them stories. An old woman and her son call to the house but Michael's quick thinking sends them away. Margaret returns with food but shortly afterwards leaves the family to try to find John.

BEFORE VIEWING

Ask the pupils to remember to focus on the character they are shadowing and whose journal they are keeping. In particular, ask them to note their character's behaviour:

- during their play
- when they are frightened
- when they are faced with great loss.

AFTER VIEWING

With the pupils, summarise the episode using the summary above to guide your questioning. Ask them to write the journal entry entitled 'The day Mother went away'.

WORKSHEET ACTIVITIES TABLE – AT A GLANCE

W/SHEET NO.	TITLE	MEDIA STUDIES	ENGLISH	HISTORY	SPHE / PSHE
8	Home Alone/Follies		Dictionary research	Buildings/artefacts	Parenting
9	Lost Languages		Influences on language/dialects	Celtic languages	Terms of endearment
10	Saying Goodbye	Creating a drama Writing a screenplay			
11	Before and After the Famine/Film Episodes	Identify film episodes	Group discussion	Famine destruction	
12	Public Relief Works		Historical record	Oral sources	

HOME ALONE

This is the advice Margaret O'Driscoll gave her children before she went to the village:

- Keep the fire going
- Get some water in
- Stay indoors
- Keep the door on the latch

1 Give the reasons behind each piece of advice.

2 What advice would your mother give you if you were home alone? Give reasons for each piece of advice.



CIRCLE TIME

3 Form a circle in the classroom. Each person in turn is given the opportunity to speak on the topic:

Home Alone.

Move clockwise around the circle.

The speaker holds a ruler, and only the person with the ruler may speak. You may recount your own experiences or offer opinions.

FOLLIES

As part of the Public Relief Scheme some landlords had 'follies' built on their lands. According to the Oxford English Dictionary a folly is 'a building erected for no definite purpose; a costly structure apparently built for fantastic reasons, or a useless and generally foolish building erected in the grounds of a wealthy eccentric'.

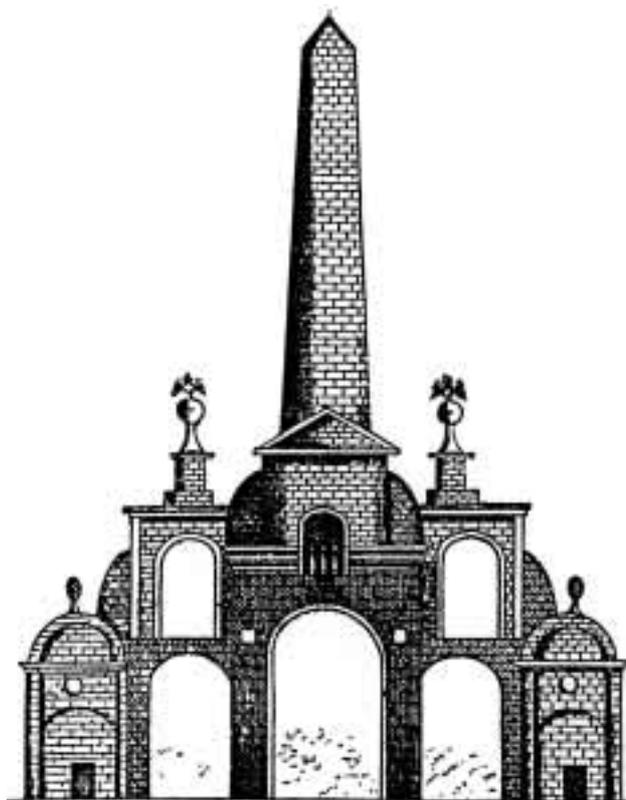
A folly could be a **grotto**, an **obelisk**, a **column**, a **sham castle**, a **gazebo**, a **hermitage**, a **tower**, a **temple**, a **gate**, a **lodge** or a **bridge**. Many were eccentric in design.

Here is an illustration of Connolly's Folly in Co. Kildare. It was erected by Mrs. Connolly, widow of William Connolly who was Speaker in the Irish House of Commons in the early eighteenth century. It is an obelisk 70 feet high, designed by German-born Richard Castle who came to Ireland in 1729. Castle put a narrow staircase in the piers of the Connolly Folly so that a person could climb up as high as the highest archway where fantastic views could be had of counties Kildare and Dublin.

Follies were sometimes built for the sole purpose of creating employment.

4 Design your own folly and give details of building materials, dimensions and location.

5 This folly has been called both the ugliest building in Ireland and the one real piece of architecture in Ireland! What do you think?



LOST LANGUAGES

Margaret uses many terms of affection when talking to her children,
some in the Irish language.

A stór: darling (pronounced: 'a store')

A ghile: beloved (pronounced 'a gillah')

- 1 What might an adult call you, other than your first name, if they were feeling affectionate towards you?
- 2 Brainstorm the subject with your classmates and fill in the wall of endearment words below.
How many community/minority languages are used by members of your class?
- 3 Display your findings on a class chart.



Three indigenous languages have died out in Great Britain and Ireland during the past 225 years: Cornish (c.1775), Norn, the Norse language of Shetland (c.1880) and Manx (1974).

Four ancient indigenous minority languages remain: Welsh, Irish, Scots Gaelic and Channel Island French.

- 4 Do you know any family where any one of these four languages is the normal language of the home?
- 5 Suggest reasons why these languages are in decline.
- 6 Identify and list concerns about the fact that some languages have died out and others are in decline.
- 7 What do you think can be done to save them?
- 8 In the nineteenth century parents often supported the National Schools policy to promote English, as you can see in the extract opposite. Why did the father behave like this? Why was the punishment administered at school? Discuss.

THE TALLY STICK

'The children gathered round to have a look at the stranger, and one of them, a little boy about eight years of age, addressed a short sentence in Irish to his sister but, meeting the father's eye, he immediately covered back, having, to all appearance, committed some heinous fault. The man called the child to him, said nothing, but drawing forth from its dress a little stick, commonly called a scoreen or tally, which was suspended by a string round the neck, put an additional notch in it with his penknife. Upon our enquiring into the cause of this proceeding, we were told that it was done to prevent the child speaking Irish; for every time he attempted to do so a new nick was put in his tally, and when these amounted to a certain number, summary punishment was inflicted on him by the schoolmaster.'

Sir William Wilde, 1853

SAYING GOODBYE

Here is an extract from the screenplay by the Young Irish Film Makers.

It was adapted from Marita Conlon-McKenna's book.

I Divide into groups of four and act out these two scenes.

Outside the house the children are playing. Margaret comes up the lane. She stops and watches her children at play. We see her face as she watches. The children play in slow motion. She is storing up this memory to sustain her on the road. Then she moves forward and calls each by name.

Margaret: Eily! Michael! Peggy! Come inside.

She walks straight through the garden and into the house. Eily and Michael look at each other and follow her in. Peggy runs after them.

CUT TO

Inside the house. The children troop in and look at Margaret. She is moving around the house packing some food into a bag. The children look at each other again.

Eily: Mammy ... Is anything wrong?

Margaret: I am going to find your father.

The children are shocked.

Michael: Isn't Daddy coming home?

Margaret: I don't know. It's been over four weeks now and no word. I have to go to the works and find out what has happened. He may be sick.

Eily: How long will you be away?

Margaret: It will be like the time I went to the village, but it may take a day or two.

Eily: Oh Mammy, a day or two?

Margaret: We have nothing left to trade or sell, the little food we have will run out soon ... How will we survive without help?

Michael: Mammy, please don't go!

Margaret: Please don't make it any harder for me. I have to do this.

Michael: Sorry, Mammy.

Peggy is looking from Eily to Michael to try and understand what is going on.

Margaret: There is enough to eat. Dan and Kitty will

keep an eye on you.

Eily: Don't worry about us, Mammy. We'll be good. Just bring back Daddy to us.

She grabs her heavy shawl. She hugs each one in turn.

Margaret: Eily, you must take my place now. Michael, the man of the house and Peggy, my baby ... God keep you safe.

Peggy won't let her go. As Margaret tries to leave, Peggy is screaming and holding on to her. Eily and Michael finally manage to drag her off. They have to hold her by the waist and Margaret leaves and walks off down the lane. They are alone.

FADE OUT



2 How does this extract from the screenplay differ from the same scene in the book? (See pages 41 and 42.)

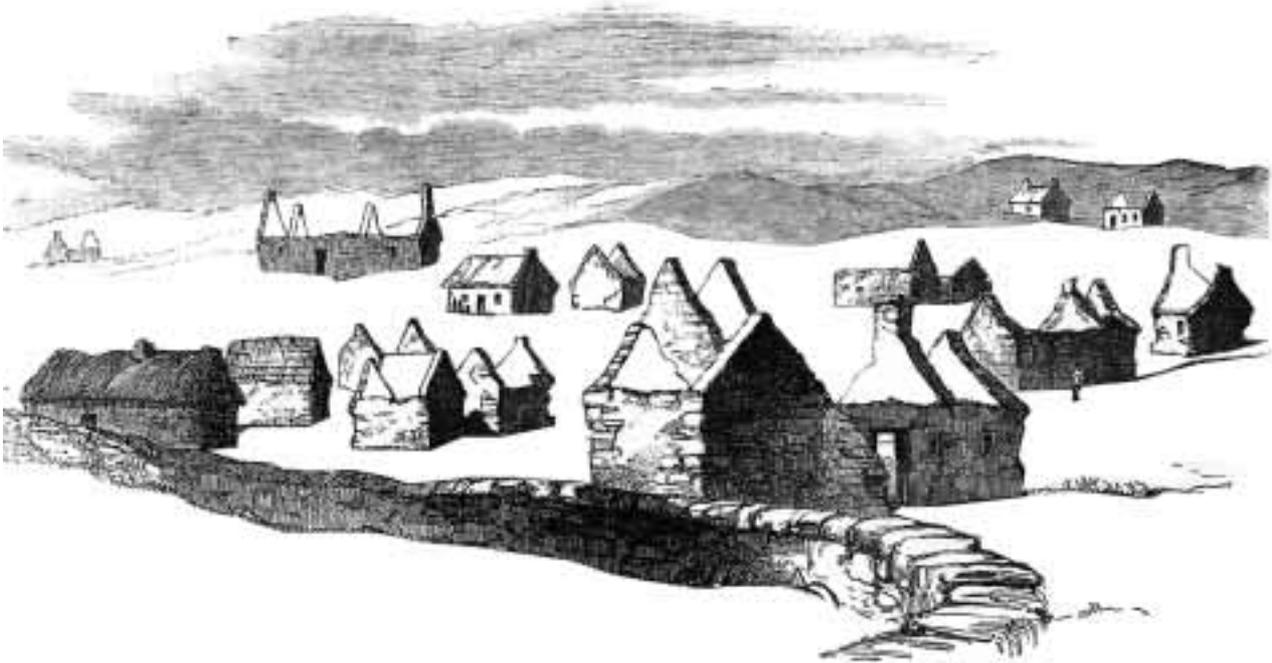
3 Do you think Margaret is irresponsible for leaving the children on their own? Give reasons for your answer.

4 In the book, find the sequence where the children meet up with Joseph T. Lucey (the beginning of the second paragraph on page 78 to 'Kineen it was then' on page 79). Write the screenplay for this sequence.

BEFORE AND AFTER THE FAMINE

Read pages 34 and 36-37. They provide a stark contrast between days of relative prosperity before the famine and the devastation of the mid-1840s.

1 Restore the drawing of the village below to its pre-famine condition. Add people, animals etc.



FILM EPISODES

2 Which events in the story are portrayed in these stills from the film?



1

2

3

4 Discussion: Compare and contrast the feelings of the characters in the three scenes.



PUBLIC RELIEF WORKS 1846

- Government employment schemes were set up to enable starving people to buy food. This was in keeping with the ideas of the time that food should not be given free as this would encourage idleness and would interfere with the normal channels of trade.
- From October 1846 landlords were allowed to sponsor improvements on their own properties. This had the added bonus for the landlords of ensuring that their tenants could pay their rent on time and in cash.
- By the spring of 1847, 750,000 people were engaged in Public Relief Works. That same year the Government withdrew funding from the scheme, declaring it a waste of money.

ORAL SOURCES

Pádraig Ó Seaghda, Fearann tSeáin, Castlegregory, Co. Kerry

The principal local relief scheme was the building of boundary walls on the mountains. The men employed were the able-bodied poor of the parish and the pay was fourpence a day, the men to find their own food. As I write I can see nine or ten miles of dry stone wall on the face of Binn Ós Gaoith. These run up to a height of 2,000 feet on the mountain side and enclose land which is not worth 4d. an acre.

John O'Reilly, a farmer, Glenville, Co. Cork, who heard it from his father, 1826-1906

The government grant for the relief scheme '46-47 was, we are told, £100,000. This was to relieve suffering humanity but the greater part was used up by clerks and commissioners. It was mainly the opening up of new roads through waste places and never used afterwards. I have estimated the amount of roadway as twelve and a half miles but it was more, as in travelling near where these roads were made, I find that branches from here and there lead to nowhere. When the poor starving men heard the 'good' news of a big sum of money being spent on works, they left the farmers in the lurch and applied for jobs. The result was that the farmer was not able to till his lands as heretofore, and the result was that the farmers became poor themselves.

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

Under the heading of local relief schemes comes the case of one of the landlords, Lord George Quinn, owner of the townland of Ballymorris. At the Government's request he employed a staff of from between 15 to 20 men. They were employed in different ways, some being engaged in the erection of three large two-storied houses in different parts of the parish, all in prominent positions. For example, one was built on high ground in Ballymorris overlooking the Shannon; another facing the railway and the third almost right on the summit of Cratloe Hills, the idea being to

show what was being done to relieve the conditions of some of the tenants at least. Other parts of the property were drained and fenced, in one case a farm of considerable size in those days had no less than 27 gates here and there through it. It was not all charity however as four percent was added to the rent.

Brigid Keane, Ennel View Terrace, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath

The 'whip-up', as they called the ganger, watched them all the time while he walked around cracking his whip. If a man showed any slackness or weakness at all he was knocked off at once. There was always plenty of men waiting around to get work. There might be a hundred men sitting on the boundary to see if any man would drop out. If the labourer was not able to do a certain amount of work every day, he was knocked out of employment. Some men had to walk four or five miles daily to their work, or even farther.



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

Several local relief schemes were organised during the famine. New roads were made and fields and bogs drained. Churches and bridges were also built.

Michael Gorman, b.1868, Doontrusk, Carrowbeg, Westport, Co. Mayo

Subscriptions were made up all over England and Scotland and in other countries and it was estimated that the amount collected would give £5 to every family in Ireland. Many families got none of it. Relief works were started but no-one was allowed to work except those who had cards saying they were entitled to do so, and officials, gangers, timekeepers etc., got most of the money.

1 What work was carried out by the Relief Works? Make a list.

CLASS DISCUSSION

2 Who benefited most from the Relief Works: the poor? the landlord? others?