

Introduction

Download the LearnEnglish Themes podcast. You'll find more information on this page:
<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-podcasts-themes.htm>

This support pack contains the following materials:

- The article that you can listen to in the podcast
- An optional comprehension activity based on the article
- Links to other activities on the LearnEnglish website on this theme (Ireland).

Read the article**Saint Patrick's Day**

by Dave Collett

St. Patrick is the patron saint and national apostle of Ireland. He was born in the fourth century and is famous for bringing Christianity into Ireland. St. Patrick's Day is a very well known Irish national holiday, which is celebrated not only in Ireland but all around the world. It falls on the 17th of March.

History of St. Patrick

St. Patrick was born to wealthy parents in the late fourth century. Until the age of 16, he thought of himself as a pagan. He was kidnapped and sold as a slave at this age by Irish marauders. It was during this capture that he turned to God.

He managed to escape after being a slave for six years and then studied in a monastery in Gaul for 12 years. This was when he knew that his 'calling' was to try and convert all the pagans in Ireland to Christianity.

St. Patrick went around Ireland founding monasteries and successfully converting the people to Christianity. The Celtic Druids were very unhappy with him and tried to arrest him several times but he always managed to escape. After 30 years of being a missionary in Ireland, he finally settled down in a place called County Down. He died on the 17th of March, AD 461.

Legend and Folklore

Shamrocks, leprechauns and the Blarney Stone are associated with St. Patrick's Day. Shamrocks are three-leaved clovers found growing in patches on grass. You are thought to be lucky if you find a four-leaved clover, so do keep it if you ever come across one!

Leprechauns are little Irish fairies, and they are thought to work as shoe-makers for other fairies. The Irish say that if a leprechaun is caught by a

human, he will reveal where he hides his pot of gold. On this day, pictures of shamrocks and leprechauns are hung everywhere. Some people even dress up as leprechauns complete with their big green hats!

The village of Blarney is situated northwest of the Irish city of Cork. Blarney comes from the Irish word 'An blarna', meaning the plain. Blarney Castle is a very famous castle in this village and is 90 feet tall. The world famous Blarney Stone is on the top story. It is said that if one kisses this stone, one will be given the gift of eloquence, meaning to have beautiful speaking abilities. Nowadays, the word blarney means the ability to influence and coax with fair words and soft speech without offending.



Legend also says that St. Patrick could raise people from the dead. He is well-known for driving the snakes out of Ireland, although many people dispute how true this is! Another great story was how he used the shamrock, with its three leaves, to explain the Holy Trinity (the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost) to his followers.

What Do People Do on St. Patrick's Day?

St. Patrick's Day is celebrated world-wide with people dancing and singing in Irish pubs, watching the St. Patrick's Day parade, drinking 'green' beer, wearing green clothes and just generally having a good time. Children in Ireland have a tradition of pinching their friends who don't wear green on this day!

Traditional Food and Drink on St. Patrick's Day

Bacon and cabbage is what most people have on this day. Another popular dish is Irish soda bread and potato pancakes. Irish pub owners go crazy on this day, putting green food colouring into their beers and traditional Irish Guinness Stout is a sell out in all Irish pubs! People also drink lots of Irish coffee, which is made with warm whiskey, sugar, coffee and topped off with cream. Sounds delicious? It is!

Irish Proverbs

The Irish have many proverbs but here are some favourites.

- Better the coldness of a friend than the sweetness of an enemy.
- Be nice to them on the way up. You might meet them all on the way down.
- Let your anger set with the sun and not rise again with it.

Irish Humour

The Irish are famous for their jokes and good nature. Here's an example:

Definition of an Irish husband:

He hasn't kissed his wife in 20 years but he will kill any man who does!

Now that you know almost everything about St. Patrick's Day, go out on March the 17th and enjoy yourselves! Why not try and spot a leprechaun or two to find your pot of gold...?

Whatever it may be, don't forget to wear green on this special day!

After reading

Exercise 1

Decide if each of the following 8 questions is True or False.

1. Before the Fourth Century the people of Ireland knew a lot about Christianity.
2. St. Patrick is famous for introducing Christianity to Ireland.
3. St. Patrick was a slave all his life.
4. Four-leaved clovers are very easy to find.
5. The Irish believe that leprechauns like to catch humans and steal their money.
6. People kiss the Blarney stone because they believe it will help them become beautiful speakers.
7. Irish coffee is made with alcohol.
8. On St. Patrick's Day people usually dress in green.

More activities on this topic

You'll find links to all the following activities connected to the theme of Ireland at:

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-themes-ireland.htm>

- **Word game: Ireland.** Do this jigsaw puzzle and find out about different things associated with Ireland.
- **Poem: An Irish Airman Foresees His Death.** This poem graphically illustrates how it felt to be an Irishman fighting for the Allies,
- **Trivia:** Everything you (n)ever wanted to know about Ireland.
- There is also an Ireland-related cartoon, a poll and some carefully selected external links.

Answers to comprehension activity: 1. False (F); 2. True (T); 3. F; 4. F; 5. F; 6. T; 7. T; 8. T