

1908 – PASSAGE TO AMERICA

Aged
10-12

ADDITIONAL SESSION

This is an additional session to complement the “1908 – Passage to America” scheme included in *Step by Step Together*. It can be added between Session 2 and Session 3 of the original scheme, but can also be used on its own to explore the similarities and differences between the modern Irish classroom and school in 1908.

MATERIALS REQUIRED:

- Paper and pencils for each pupil
- Chalk
- Prop or item of clothing to indicate when you are in role as the teacher
- Merit Cards

Many thanks to the editors of “SLATES UP!” for their kind permission to reproduce the Merit Cards on Page 4. “SLATES UP!” is published by CICE Publications and is available through www.cice.ie/AboutCICE/CICEPublications.aspx

Step 1

Explain to the class that you are going to explore what school would have been like in Ireland in the early 1900s. What do they imagine school would have been like for pupils back then? Would it have been exactly the same? What differences would they imagine? During your discussion, include the following information about the school they are about to bring to life:

- The boys and girls sit in separate parts of the classroom.
- They sit on hard wooden benches and must always sit up straight.
- They use a slate and chalk to write on.
- They must do a great deal of learning by rote.
- There is a semi-circle marked on the floor in front of the board. When the teacher asks them to answer questions, do their times-tables or spellings, they have to go and stand with their toes on the line of the semi-circle.
- Every day the girls must spend some time on their sewing while the boys do extra arithmetic or reading.
- The classroom is heated by a peat stove.
- Each pupil brings some bread or milk for lunch and some peat for the fire. Sometimes they bring some potatoes, bread or peat for the teacher.

Step 2

Explain that your room is going to become a classroom from the early 1900's. Indicate where the peat stove is and draw the large, chalk semi-circle on the floor in front of the blackboard. Are there any other changes that you need to make to your room? Tell the class that you are going to work in role as a teacher from the early 1900s. Explain that you will be very formal and will expect them to be very respectful and polite.

Ask the class to leave the room and to enter, when called, in two formal lines (one line for the girls and one for the boys). Repeat the activity until they can do it in a silent, organised manner. Tell them to stand behind their chairs until you give them permission to sit. Go around and inspect each pupil for his / her neatness and tidiness, paying particular attention to any untidy hair, clothing etc.



Step 3

In role as the teacher, hand out paper and pencils to each pupil and explain that they must use these 'chalks and slates' for a dictation exercise. Narrate a short passage from a textbook, poem or story suited to the period, and ask the class to write down exactly what you say. Remind them to be careful with their spellings.

Follow this activity with an oral test of times-tables, spelling and the names of the rivers and mountains of Ireland. You can ask individuals or groups of pupils to stand at the front of the room (with their toes touching the semi-circle on the floor) when they answer questions. Give out merit cards when pupils answer correctly.

Step 4

In role, tell the class that their next lesson is music. Sing the scale 'Do, Re, Mi, Fa, So, La, Ti, Do' and ask pupils to copy you exactly.

Step 5

In role, explain that the next lesson is needlework for the girls and reading for the boys. Divide the class, asking the girls to proceed with their sewing and asking the boys to choose a book to read. Once the pupils have begun to mime these activities, come out of role as the teacher and ask them how they feel about the activity they have to do. Would they prefer to do what the other half of the class is doing? What does it feel like to have no choice? Why do they think the teacher assigned those particular tasks to the girls and boys?

After a group discussion, ask them to mime their activity again and show how they feel. You may have to adapt this activity to suit the gender breakdown of your class.

Step 6

In role as the teacher, tell the class that you received a letter from the School Inspector, stating that the school has passed its recent inspection. However, he has a warning for those girls who want to become teachers. He says that they will have to improve their sewing skills. No matter how good they are at reading and arithmetic, they will never be able to become teachers if their sewing is untidy and messy.

In role, ask any pupil who wishes to become a teacher to put up his / her hand. Go to each of these pupils to inspect their handwriting and sewing. Remember to express disappointment with their efforts, if they are not up to a high standard.

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Step 7

Out of role, explain that the class is going to 'hot seat' (question in role) the pupils who wish to become teachers. What questions could you ask these pupils to find out how they are feeling about their tests and exams? Do they think they will be successful and become teachers?

Ask the pupils who want to become teachers to stay in role and answer the questions asked by the rest of the class.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY:

- On a white or black board, draw 2 columns. Ask the class to list *what* pupils learned in primary school in 1908 and *how* they learned it. Write down their ideas in one column. In the other column, write down *what* the class think they learn in school today and *how* they learn it.

Using the 2 columns, discuss the similarities and differences between the modern classroom and the 1908 classroom.



MERIT CARDS

MERIT

~~~~~  
A tree is known by its fruits.  
~~~~~

One.

MERIT

~~~~~  
Good words are good, good deeds  
are better.  
~~~~~

One.

MERIT

~~~~~  
Be a peace maker, never a peace  
breaker.  
~~~~~

One.

MERIT

~~~~~  
A good name is better than a girdle  
of gold.  
~~~~~

One.

MERIT

~~~~~  
He is not brave who dares not be  
good.  
~~~~~

One.

MERIT

~~~~~  
The just man is steady to his  
purpose.  
~~~~~

One.

MERIT

~~~~~  
Fall not out with a friend for a trifle.  
~~~~~

One.

MERIT

~~~~~  
After a bad crop, begin to sow very  
soon.  
~~~~~

One.