

Ireland 1841

The Story of a Sack of Wheat



I am a sack of wheat. I was sown and weeded and reaped and threshed and put in a sack by the McCarthy family in Castleross in the west of Ireland.



I'm Moira McCarthy. Our family have spent all the year growing wheat to pay the rent. I've just carried a sack to Matthew Nolan. He paid me ten shillings (50p). Five more sacks and our rent is paid.

Who is making the profit ? Use the evidence and decide!



My name is Margaret Harris. I am a matchbox maker. I work at home with family in a two room house in the East End. I have just been shopping and had to pay a shilling (5p) for a loaf of bread. That is nearly a day's wages.

The Story of a Sack of Wheat

This activity was developed in 1983 by Emma Thornton and Stuart Scott as part of pack on the history of Ireland for the Inner London Education Authority. The printed pack is no longer available, but there is now a lot of evidence available on the internet. This fiction or rather 'faction' was not designed to replace real evidence, but designed to encourage pupils to develop their skills of questioning material by providing an easier prequel. Please let us know if anything is now either inaccurate or whether our evidence needs some rebalancing.

This activity looks at the economics of wheat growing in Ireland at the time of the famine. The characters involved are organised as an "Introduce Me" activity. Take a look at our Holes activity <www.collaborativelearning.org/holes.pdf> for an explanation of how to organise this so that you end up with a group of four to work on the maths and the discussion about fairness in making money. Each group will have a different composition which means that there will still be a need for further collaboration to sort out all the profit information. Could you feed back ways in which you organised this and we'll do the same when we next teach it.

Webaddress: www.collaborativelearning.org/sackofwheat.pdf

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COLLABORATIVE LEARNING PROJECT

Project Director: Stuart Scott

We support a network of teaching professionals to develop and disseminate accessible talk-for-learning activities in all subject areas and for all ages.

17, Barford Street, Islington, London N1 0QB UK Phone: 0044 (0)20 7226 8885

Website: <http://www.collaborativelearning.org>

BRIEF SUMMARY OF BASIC PRINCIPLES BEHIND OUR TEACHING ACTIVITIES:

The project is a teacher network, and a non-profit making educational trust. Our main aim is to develop and disseminate classroom tested examples of effective group strategies that promote talk across all phases and subjects. We hope they will inspire you to develop and use similar strategies in other topics and curriculum areas. We want to encourage you to change them and adapt them to your classroom and students. We run teacher workshops, swapshops and conferences throughout the European Union. The project posts online many activities in all subject areas. An online newsletter is also updated regularly.

*These activities are influenced by current thinking about the role of language in learning. They are designed to help children learn through talk and active learning in small groups. They work best in non selective classes where children in need of language or learning support are integrated. They are well suited for the development of speaking and listening . They provide teachers opportunities for assessment of speaking and listening.

*They support differentiation by placing a high value on what children can offer to each other on a particular topic, and also give children the chance to respect each other's views and formulate shared opinions which they can disseminate to peers. By helping them to take ideas and abstract concepts, discuss, paraphrase and move them about physically, they help to develop thinking skills.

*They give children the opportunity to participate in their own words and language in their own time without pressure. Many activities can be tried out in pupils' first languages and afterwards in English. A growing number of activities are available in more than one language, not translated, but mixed, so that you may need more than one language to complete the activity.

*They encourage study skills in context, and should therefore be used with a range of appropriate information books which are preferably within reach in the classroom.

*They are generally adaptable over a wide age range because children can bring their own knowledge to an activity and refer to books at an appropriate level. The activities work like catalysts.

*All project activities were planned and developed by teachers working together, and the main reason they are disseminated is to encourage teachers to work more effectively with each other inside and outside the classroom. They have made it possible for mainstream and language and learning support teachers to share an equal role in curriculum delivery. They should be adapted to local conditions. In order to help us keep pace with curriculum changes, please send any new or revised activities back to the project, so that we can add them to our lists of materials.

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I am a sack of wheat. I was sown and weeded and reaped and threshed and put in a sack by the McCarthy family in Castleross in the west of Ireland.

Profit

The peasant family grows, reaps and threshes the wheat. They sell the sack for

The middleman buys the sack forand sells it for.....

The cornmerchant buys it forand sells it for.....

The shipper buys it forand sells it for.....

The warehouse owner buys it forand sells it for.....

The miller buys it for and sells it for.....

The baker buys it formakes loaves and sells them for



My profit is



My profit is



My profit is



My profit is



My profit is



My profit is



My profit is

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I'm Moira McCarthy. Our family have spent all the year growing wheat to pay the rent. I've just carried a sack to Matthew Nolan. He paid me ten shillings (50p). Five more sacks and our rent is paid.

Matthew Nolan - that's me! I suppose you'd call me a middleman but I grow my own wheat too. I've just managed to collect some of my tenants' wheat. Getting it off some of them was hard. Now I'm taking it to Cork to get a good price.



My name is Patrick Deasy. I'm well known hereabouts as one of Cork's finest corn merchants. I've just bought some cart loads of wheat that has come in from Castleross. I paid a pound a sack.



I run a shipping line in Cork. I own the Daisy and the Susan. I've just bought some wheat for the English market at Deasy's. He's charging one pound ten shillings (£1.50) a sack nowadays.



My name is Christopher Bryan. I have a grain warehouse in Bristol. The shippers are bringing in the new season's wheat from Ireland. Last week I paid two pounds and ten shillings (£2.50) for a sack and can sell it to the millers for three pounds and ten shillings (£3.50)



I'm Jacob Miller. Well, it's obvious what my trade is. I buy wheat in Bristol, grind it into flour in my new roller mill and send it by the new railway to London. I get a good price from the bakers there.



I am Kate Jones. I've got a small family bakery in East London. I buy my flour directly from the millers at £5 a sack. I don't know where it comes from but it makes good bread. I can make 200 two pound loaves which I can sell at a shilling (5p) each.



My name is Margaret Harris. I am a matchbox maker. I work at home with family in a two room house in the East End. I have just been shopping and had to pay a shilling (5p) for a loaf of bread. That is nearly a day's wages.

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The family spend a lot of time growing the wheat. It has to be weeded every week. Often there is not enough to pay the rent, but you work just as hard whatever the harvest. We can't afford to eat bread. There isn't a flour mill for miles.



Buying wheat is not easy. You take a lot of risks with some of the stuff these middlemen bring. If you aren't careful you get a load of weevils or mould. I have to pay wages to my carters and watchmen.

Everyone knows how dangerous the Irish Channel is. Last month an emigrant ship was wrecked off St David's Head. I take a lot of risks and have to pay high insurance. It is also hard to find honest crew.



I have to work very hard to get the rent out of my tenants. Many are lazy and bad payers. Some of them never produce enough wheat and then make a lot of trouble when I throw them out.



At the moment Irish wheat is selling well, but last year the price dropped and I was left with a warehouse full. I have got a lot of money tied up there and could lose it overnight.



Wages keep going up. I have to pay more and more to get my millstones dressed. Sometimes the wheat is not good enough for the London bakers, so I have to sell it cheap to the railway contractors to feed their Irish navvies.



Baking bread is hard work. My family and I work all night kneading and shaping loaves. Then I am busy all day in the shop. Wood and coal for the ovens is expensive in London.

All these people are giving the reasons why they deserve their profit.

Which people work hard and deserve their profit?

Which people work hard and don't get a fair share of the profit?

Which people make a lot of profit but don't work very hard for it?