

The centenary of the Easter Rising



Easter 2016 – the Irish will be thinking of more than Easter eggs and bunnies in this centenary year of the Easter Rising.

One hundred years ago this Easter, a hopelessly outnumbered group of Irish pro-republicans took on the might of the British Empire in an attempt to end British rule in Ireland and establish a republic. The six-day war started on Easter Monday 24th April, and although it was short-lived, the Easter Rising became a defining moment in Irish history.

The rebels began their assault on the British in the early hours of Easter Monday with almost 2000 members of the Irish Volunteers and the Citizen Army taking over strongholds in Dublin. Their headquarters were in the General Post Office on Sackville Street (now called O'Connell Street), one of Dublin's main thoroughfares. After taking over the Post Office, the rebels raised the tricolour (the green, white and gold flag) and read the Proclamation of the Republic. The rebels also held positions in the Four Courts, the Jacob's biscuit factory, the South Dublin Union hospital complex, the Marrowbone Lane Distillery and one contingent were dug in on St Stephen's Green. Despite their concerted efforts, the rebels were unable to take over Dublin Castle, the stronghold of British rule in Ireland.

The British were taken by surprise by the uprising and their response on Easter Monday was uncoordinated. However, once the seriousness of the situation was understood, the British declared martial law in Ireland and more British troops were called for from England and from Belfast in the north of Ireland. As the rebels had failed to take over the ports or the railway stations, thousands of reinforcements were brought in with relative ease.

On Saturday 29th April, after six days of fighting, the rebels realized the situation was untenable without the loss of more civilian life and Pádraig Pearse, the leader, declared an unconditional surrender. Within two weeks of the surrender, almost all of the leaders had been executed by the British. The most prominent leader to escape execution was Éamon de Valera, who later went on to become president of the Republic of Ireland.

Although the Easter Rising had limited support amongst Irish people immediately afterwards (many civilians felt the rebels had been too violent), support for the rebels grew dramatically, particularly in response to the bloody British reaction.

In later years, some of the survivors of the Easter Rising became leaders of the independent Irish state; the Proclamation of the Republic text was taught in schools and the executed leaders were seen as martyrs by many Irish people. In 1966, the 50th anniversary of the rising, there were huge national celebrations.

So how will the centenary of the Easter Rising be celebrated? There will be specially produced musical performances, plays and photographic exhibitions. There will be parades and tributes, a 21-gun salute and a five-part epic TV serial. There is a new visitor centre in the General Post Office in O'Connell Street and there are shelves full of books written on the subject of the Easter Rising. Wherever you go in Ireland in this centenary year, the Easter Rising will not be far away.

If you would like to read more (in English and Irish) about the Easter Rising centenary in 2016, then click [here](#).

And if you would like to use the centenary of the Irish Easter Rising as a topic in your lesson, then we have provided you with an activity at A2 level. You'll find it in the following **Teacher's notes** and on the **Worksheet**.

Teacher's notes

Easter Rising (level A2 upwards, 20+ mins)

- Make copies of the **Worksheet**, one for each student.
- If you have a map of Ireland, you could show the current situation: Ireland is a republic and Northern Ireland belongs to the United Kingdom.
- On the board write *Easter – 1916 - Ireland* and ask students if they have an idea what happened in Ireland at Easter 1916.
- Explain that at that time Ireland was ruled by the British. At Easter in 1916 a group of Irish rebels tried to claim independence from the British and make Ireland a republic. This centenary is a significant event for the Irish and so this year there are lots of commemorations (*Gedenkfeiern*).
- Ask students for ideas for commemorations (parades, music, theatre plays and so on) and write their ideas on the board.
- Give out the copies of the **Worksheet** and ask students to read the texts and answer the questions.
- Check whether any of the students' ideas are in the texts.
- Check answers together in class. **Key:** 1 b), d); 2 funny; 3 b); 4 b); 5 no

Worksheet



Irish Easter Rising Centenary

You are in Dublin this Easter. There are a lot of events to remember and celebrate the Easter Rising in 1916. Here are four of them. Read the four descriptions and then answer the questions below.

- a) **Rising:** Travel back in time to Easter 1916 - you can see photographs of people involved in the Easter Rising and the buildings of Dublin after the six days of fighting. You can also listen to audio recordings of people who were there in 1916.
- b) **Easter Sunday parade:** the President of Ireland will lay a wreath outside the General Post Office (the rebels' headquarters), and brass bands will play music. There will be a reading of the 1916 *Proclamation of the Republic* and this will be followed by a parade starting at St Stephen's Green.
- c) **1916 - A Country is Born:** A Cartoon History of the Easter Rising - 60 giant drawings and texts retelling the fascinating story of the Easter Rising with a light touch that will make you smile, by Irish artist Fergal McCarthy.
- d) **The Irish festival:** Irish musicians and dancers celebrate the music and dance of 100 years ago. You'll hear lots of traditional music and traditional instruments and you'll see plenty of skillful Irish dancing. A wonderful evening of entertainment.

Now answer these questions:

- 1 Where can you hear music?
- 2 Is Fergal McCarthy's exhibition sad or funny?
- 3 Where can you see the President of Ireland?
- 4 Which event takes place outside?
- 5 Will you hear modern music at The Irish festival?

Talk to your partner: Which event(s) would you like / would you not like to visit? And why?