



Lesson  
Plan 2



# The Irish National Anthem: Origins, Symbolism and Status – An inquiry focus for senior students

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## Rationale

By the late 1920s an emerging Irish State searched existentially for an increasing sense of identity, through peaceful yet symbolic convictions. The goal was to mould a conspicuous and exalted set of symbols and traditions, distinct both nationally and internationally. Whilst the Harp and Tricolour were well established in State use by this point, there was no defined national anthem for state occasions. The national anthem of most modern countries enshrines its shared values, histories and identities which is synonymous with a nation. However, in the nascent Irish state it was not as clear, nor was it as shared. Britain's suzerainty for centuries had more recently endorsed the division of the state which stymied it from creating a distinct and contrasting culture and customs. Fresh from a bitter Civil War it is perhaps understandable that vacillation on the national anthem occurred. So how then was it that the Soldier's Song rose to prominence as the national anthem? The story of a 'Soldier's Song', its provenance, use and official adoption is a story worth researching and imparting upon students of History. The anthem's inception stirred controversy over its militaristic sentiments. Such sentiments which have been championed for decades by Republicans and Nationalists, admonished by Unionists and met with hesitation by modernists whose aim is reconciliation on the island.



Anthem: It brings the nation together on special occasions

Peader Kearney and Patrick Heeney, were responsible for the creation of a 'Soldier's Song' in circa 1910. The text of "The Soldier's Song" was published in 1912 in Irish Freedom, a radical newspaper run by Bulmer Hobson of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB). As the Independence movement grew "The Soldier's Song" became more widely known when it was adopted by the Irish Volunteers as

a marching song. At the end of Easter week, before the evacuation of the GPO, the garrison of Irish Volunteers, Irish Citizens Army and Cumann na mBan took a few moments to sing "A Soldier's Song". The song was frequently sung in the internment camps of the War of Independence and its aftermath. Liam O'Rinn translated the song into "Amhrán na bhFiann" and the Irish version was first published in

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1923. Some of those interned would join the Free State government who concomitantly struggled to find an appropriate and consistent anthem for state and international occasions, often rotating 'Let Erin Remember', 'God Save Ireland' and 'A Nation Once Again'. The minutes of an Executive Council meeting on 12th July 1926 indicate that a decision was then made to adopt "The Soldier's Song" as the official anthem. There was no formal announcement of this to the public at the time, this was merely for official use. Quite an ignominious beginning then.

This lesson is set for senior students who will focus on investigation, enhancing research skills, evaluating sources, analysing source provenance and using the Internet ethically. It may be assimilated into a Transition Year module or modified for senior students studying the Pursuit of Sovereignty and Partition. I have tried to allow for maximum flexibility to both teacher and learner. In our hands the future is shaped and the past understood.

## INITIAL ENQUIRY

### Comparison of a Soldier's Song and Amhrán na bhFiann

|  |  | Time Allocated (1 hour class)   |
|--|--|---|
| <b>Initial Stimulus</b>                            | Students discuss (Think-Pair-Share) their interpretation of this using only prior knowledge on National Anthem and a brief background by teacher<br>Share with students the lyrics of a Soldier's Song (Think-Pair-Share)  | 15 mins   |
| <b>Lesson Development</b>                          | Analysis of Irish and English of lyrics and meaning/implications<br>Students analyse sources on use of songs before anthem was selected<br>Teacher leads students in understanding diversity within anthem<br>Group/table evaluate data and offer historical judgements using questions from Effective Questioning.  | 30 mins   |
| <b>Lesson Conclusion</b>                           | Students write a brief reflection on what they learned from the lesson and interpret a new understanding of the adoption of Soldier's Song<br>Students offer one key sentence from their reflections to the class group  | 10 mins   |
| <b>Learning Intentions</b>                         | 1. Students understand the emergence of a need for a national anthem in the Irish Free State<br>2. Students assess impact of the anthem on the island of Ireland at the time<br>3. Students evaluate the consequences of the anthem on the tradition of Unionism on the island   |   |
| <b>Learning Outcomes</b>                           | 1. Students understand the role of P. Kearney and P. Heeney in the creation of the anthem<br>2. Students can assess the emergence of the Soldier's song using primary sources<br>3. Students evaluate the symbolism of the anthem's adoption<br>4. Students use Internet to research ethically   |   |
| <b>Success Criteria</b>                            | Students can use numerous sources to objectively evaluate the origins of the Irish national anthem, its consequences and the significance of it in shaping the Irish State and its importance on the identity of the nascent state   |   |
| <b>Differentiation</b>                             | Students will have access to IT, paper resources and visuals. Each area can be divided by teacher. Effective Questions can be targeted to challenge each learner in a different way. Each cohort can be tasked with answering a selected question and presenting conclusions based on historical references and sources.   |   |
| <b>Effective Questioning</b>                       | 1. What is the context of the need for a national anthem?<br>2. What were the main songs used before a national anthem was adopted?<br>3. What historical references are in each verse?<br>4. Why did it take so long to adopt an anthem for the free state?<br>5. How might those with unionist sympathies dislike the anthem?<br>6. What role did each of the following play in choosing "Amhrán na bhFiann" as the national anthem: religion, ethnic origins, culture and political aspiration?<br>7. What differences are there between the Irish and English versions?<br>8. How significant was the choice of "Amhrán na bhFiann" internationally?<br>9. What measures were put in place by the government to protect the Anthem in law?<br>10. How symbolic is Amhrán na bhFiann when compared to the Harp or Tricolour?<br>11. Beyond politics, how was Irish identity expressed through song? |   |
| <b>Literacy</b>                                    | Focusing on key words: Anthem, Significant, Nationalism, Culture, Ethnicity, Republican, Britain, Legislation, Government, State, Sovereign, Symbolism, Factor.  |   |
| <b>Student Reflection</b>                          | Students reflect on findings at the end of the lessons through discussion on symbolism of anthem   |   |
| <b>Links to JCT</b>                                | Strand 1 - The Nature of History: 1.1 – 1.11 are applicable<br>Strand 2 – The History of Ireland: 2.3, 2.4, 2.9, 2.10, 2.11  |   |
| <b>This lesson and module are conducive to JCT</b> | JCT Key Skills<br>• Staying Well<br>• Managing myself<br>• Being Literate<br>• Being Numerate<br>• Working with others<br>• Managing Information & Thinking<br>• Communication   | <b>JCT Statements of Learning</b><br>• SOL3: creates, appreciates and critically interprets a wide range of texts<br>• SOL6: appreciates and respects how diverse values, beliefs and traditions have contributed to the communities and culture in which she/he lives<br>• SOL8: values local, national and international heritage, understands the importance of the relationship between past and current events and the forces that drive change<br>• SOL15: recognises the potential uses of mathematical knowledge, skills and understanding in all areas of learning<br>• SOL17 devises and evaluates strategies for investigating and solving problems using mathematical knowledge, reasoning and skills<br>• SOL24 uses technology and digital media tools to learn, communicate, work and think collaboratively and creatively in a responsible and ethical manner |
| <b>Links to LC</b>                                 | Irish History Topic 3 – Pursuit of sovereignty and the impact of partition, 1912-1949<br>Research Study Report – Scope for investigation   |   |
| <b>RSR/CBA research</b>                            | Key personalities/events that may be useful for CBA 1 – The past in my place. Some key personalities/events for potential research are<br>• Peader Kearney and the IRB<br>• Patrick Heeney and 1916<br>• Thomas Moore and Let Erin Remember<br>• Liam Ó Rinn and "Amhrán na bhFiann"<br>• Symbols of the Irish Free State<br>• Musical traditions in Ireland 1920-2940<br>• Composers of the Irish Free State<br>• Republican prisoners of Frongoch<br>• Colonel Wilhelm Fritz Brase, the first Director of the Defence Forces School of Music   |   |
| <b>Continuing the lesson</b>                       | • Symbols of the Irish Free State<br>• Bunreacht na hEireann 1937<br>• Bulmer Hobson and the National Anthem<br>• Declaration of an Irish Republic<br>• 'God save the king' versus 'The soldier's song': the 1929 Trinity College national anthem dispute and the politics of the Irish Free State   |   |

## APPENDIX 1

### Useful Sources

- Sherry, Ruth, 'The story of the National Anthem', History Ireland, Issue 1 (Spring 1996), Volume 4, available at : <https://www.historyireland.com/the-story-of-the-national-anthem/>
- Department of the Taoiseach, 'The National Anthem', available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/52a628-the-national-anthem/>
- Houses of the Oireachtas, Seanad Public Consultation Committee Report on the Status, Treatment and Use of the National Anthem, June 2018, available at [https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/seanad\\_public\\_consultation\\_committee/reports/2018/2018-07-17\\_status-treatment-and-use-of-the-national-anthem\\_en.pdf](https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/seanad_public_consultation_committee/reports/2018/2018-07-17_status-treatment-and-use-of-the-national-anthem_en.pdf)
- The troubled History of the Irish National anthem, available at <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/ireland/articles/the-troubled-history-of-the-irish-national-anthem/>
- Irish Historical Studies, 'God save the king' versus 'The soldier's song': the 1929 Trinity College national anthem dispute and the politics of the Irish Free State' Cambridge Press, (March 2016).
- Zikmund, Joseph II, 'National anthems as political symbols' in Australian Journal of Politics and History, xv, no. 3 (1969), pp 73-4
- Burca, Pádraic de, 'The story of the soldier's song' in Fitz-Gerald, W.G. (ed.), The Voice of Ireland: a survey of the race and nation from all angles (Dublin, n.d.), pp 151-3
- Chief of Staff, note for discussion by Council of Defence, 18 Aug. 1927 (Military Archives of Ireland, Department of Defence (DD), 3/22518); extract from minutes of Council of Defence, 18 Aug. 1927
- Secretary of Department of External Affairs to T. A. Smiddy, Free State high commissioner in London, 4 Apr. 1930 (N.A.I., DFA, D 5085). For other complaints about the singing of 'God save the king' at the military jumping competition see The Leader, 18 Aug. 1928; The Nation, 17 Aug. 1929; The Star, 17 Aug. 1929; Honesty, 16 Aug. 1930.
- Irish Independent, 13 Aug. 1928; Fritz Brase (director of the Army School of Music) to Adjutant-General, Department of Defence, 4 Oct. 1928 (Military Archives of Ireland, DD, 3/22518)
- Mulhern, D., 'Symbols Used in Northern Ireland - Symbols Used by Both Traditions', available at <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/images/symbols/crosstrad.htm>