



A black and white engraving of a woman and two children standing on a rocky ground. The woman is wearing a long, tattered shawl and a simple skirt, holding a small child. A second child stands beside her. The scene conveys a sense of poverty and suffering.

HERITAGES OF HUNGER LEARNING PROGRAMME

INTRODUCTION



HERITAGES OF HUNGER LEARNING PROGRAMME

This learning programme is a product of the Heritages of Hunger research project, funded by the Dutch Research Council NWO.

Heritages of Hunger investigates the enduring legacies and heritage of historical European famines to foster mutual understanding among communities by creating awareness of shared pasts.

Across six thematic modules, this resource introduces learners to key aspects of famine and its legacies: the causes and political contexts of hunger, its social and political impacts, responses to food crisis, and the ways famine is – or isn't – remembered today.

This learning programme is based on the findings and materials developed during the Heritages of Hunger project. The European focus of the project has defined the scope of this resource, though instructive examples from other past and present famines have also been included.

HOW TO USE THIS LEARNING PROGRAMME

The Heritages of Hunger Learning Programme offers six modules (12 lessons) which can be delivered either in their totality as part of an extended learning programme, or as discrete standalone lessons, or series of lessons, in any combination.

Each lesson is designed to be deliverable in a single session, but offers flexibility for in-depth focus, discussion and activity that allows for longer consideration and exploration of key

Neither the project nor this learning programme are exhaustive: not all famines that occurred in Europe's recent past have been included, nor is every aspect of each famine covered. But while the case studies offered here mainly focus on Europe, the themes it covers are widely applicable. Above all, this resource aims to show that the experience of famine is something that goes beyond national borders and national histories. Its impacts can both cross borders or be more localised.

With this resource, we aim to create awareness about famine: its causes, its effects, and its memory. By offering historical knowledge, we moreover hope to inspire users to take action against the enduring threat and occurrence of famine and food insecurity in today's world.

The Learning Programme is structured as follows:

» MODULE ONE: WHAT IS FAMINE?

This is a single lesson Module that looks at the core concept of famine and how it has been experienced through a series of key case studies.

» MODULE TWO: HAVE'S AND HAVE NOT'S

Module Two: Have's and Have Not's: This is a three lesson module that looks at how famine has tended to impact the most vulnerable in society most significantly, using a wide range of case studies from a diverse historical and geographical range.

» MODULE THREE: FOOD & NUTRITION

Module Three: Food & Nutrition: This two lesson module looks at the impact of famine on those affected and how they are forced to adapt what they eat and how they may access food.

» MODULE FOUR: AID, RELIEF AND PHILANTHROPY

This two lesson module looks at how Governments, third parties and the international community has responded to famine across a range of case studies from around the world and across history.

» MODULE FIVE: MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT

This two lesson module explores the impact of famine in terms of the movement of people away from famine areas, both internally within an affected country, and externally in the form of emigration and refugees.

» MODULE SIX: MEMORY & COMMEMORATION

This two lesson module examines the ways in which famines have been remembered by different nations and communities, drawing on a range of case studies to explore how memory of famine can be political and a powerful tool for national identity.



LESSON ONE: WHAT IS FAMINE?

LESSON DESCRIPTION

This lesson will help inform students about the various causes of famine, serving as an introduction to famine history in select countries across the world. The lesson will look at common themes in how different famines have occurred and enable students to understand their complexities, drawing comparisons between different crises. The lesson will incorporate case studies and discussion of the following famines:

- » [The Great Irish Famine \(1845-1852\)](#)
- » [The Great Bengal Famine \(1943\)](#)
- » [The Nigerian Famine \(1967-1970\)](#)
- » [The Ethiopian Famine \(1983-1985\)](#)
- » [The German Famine of 1914](#)
- » [The Dutch Hunger Winter \(1944-45\)](#)
- » [The Ukrainian Holodomor \(1932-33\)](#)
- » [The Finnish Great Years of Hunger \(1866-68\)](#)

LESSON INTENTIONS

- ✓ To understand what is meant by the term famine.
- ✓ To discuss how and why famine has occurred in different countries.

Understand some of the main conditions that have led to famine.

LESSON OUTCOMES

- ✓ Demonstrate a broad understanding of famine and recognise some of the complexities in defining what a famine is.
- ✓ Be able to list a number of conditions that may lead to famine.



USEFUL ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- [Global Famine Case Studies](#)
- [Online Heritages of Hunger Repository](#)
- [Online Heritages of Hunger Exhibition](#)

Additional study stimulus to that included in the module can be found here:

- [The Great Frost \(Ireland 1740-41\)](#)
- [The Greek Famine \(1941-44\)](#)



CAUSES OF FAMINE

▶ SOME OF THE UNDERLYING FACTORS WHICH CAN LEAD TO FAMINE

NATURAL

Famines have plagued human societies throughout history, causing immeasurable suffering and loss of life. These devastating events often result from a complex interplay of various factors, generally rooted in natural, economic, political, and social conditions. Understanding the causes of historical famines is crucial for preventing future occurrences and mitigating their impact. In this lesson, we will delve into some of the primary causes of historic famines.

DEFINITION:

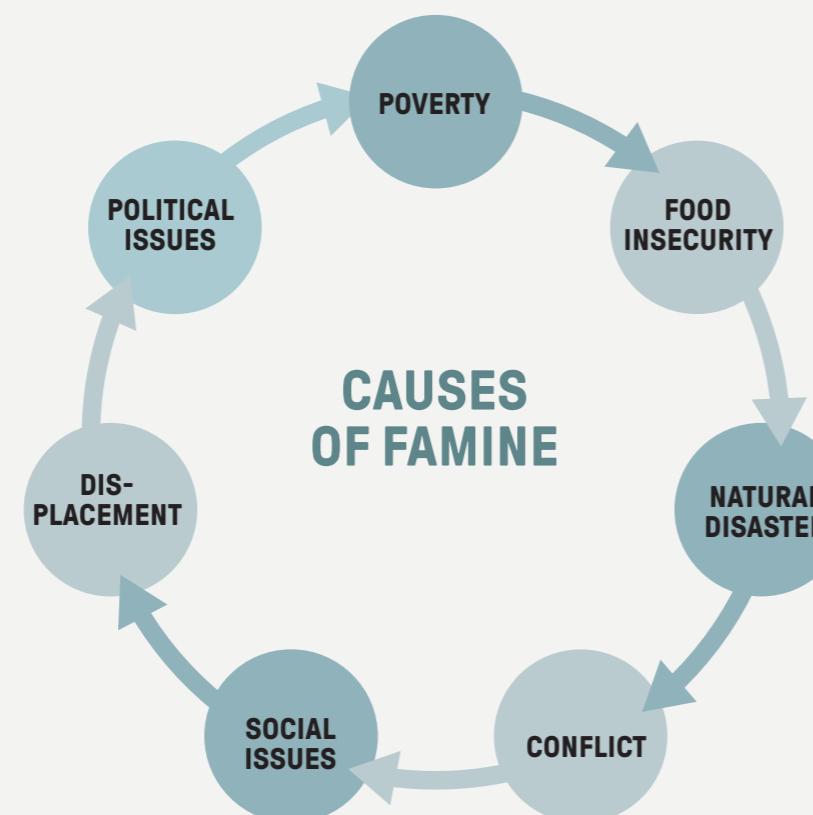
Famine is a situation in which a substantial proportion of the population of a country or region are unable to access adequate food, resulting in widespread acute malnutrition and loss of life by starvation and disease.

UN Refugee Agency



In the past, famines have stemmed from a combination of factors, such as conflict, displacement, chronic poverty, food insecurity, natural disasters, or other political and social issues.

Wars and conflict are usually the primary drivers of famine as they lead to forced displacement, disrupt people's traditional ways of accessing food and income, hinder humanitarian access, and push economies into a long-term decline. Natural disasters - such as droughts, flooding and cyclones - and the effects of climate change can also lead to famine, endangering agriculture and livestock activities in regions where the majority of the population live off the land.



Climate and Weather:

One of the most significant natural factors contributing to famines are adverse climate conditions. Prolonged periods of drought, extreme heat, or unseasonable rainfall can lead to crop failures and reduced agricultural yields. For example, the Dust Bowl in the United States during the 1930s resulted from a combination of drought and poor land management practices.



Crop disease has also been a significant causal factor in famine - including the Great Irish Famine of 1845-52. Pesticides have made crop disease preventable in the modern era, but access to them requires resources that may not always be available to those without money or influence.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Highland_Potato_Famine#/media/File:Phytophthora_infestans-effects.jpg

DISCUSSION POINT

To what extent do you feel that famines are man made?



Image: Mount Tambora Credit: Wikimedia

Natural disasters, such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and tsunamis can destroy crops, disrupt food distribution, and displace populations. The 1815 eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia led to the “Year Without a Summer” in 1816, causing widespread crop failures and famine in Europe and North America.



In 1845 the potato famine in the Netherlands and Flanders was a natural disaster that blighted potato crops and demonstrated the destructive impact that crop failure can have:

On 20 September 1845, The Buck's Gazette published an article on the ‘general failure of the potato crop’ across Europe, due to a ‘parasitical fungus’ that like a ‘plague spreads itself in every direction’. Countries in which the crops were badly affected, the article states, are ‘Belgium, Holland, France’, while ‘Ireland, which it was hoped would escape, is now it appears, likely to participate in the calamity [...] the potato crisis, combined with failed wheat harvests and very cold winters, led to high food prices and increased poverty among the Dutch population. Between 1845 and 1847, excess mortality was between 22% and 32% [...] Newspapers reported several food riots that broke out in Delft in 1845 (Van der Wiel, 1991) and in other larger Dutch cities in 1847 (Paping and Tassenaar, 2007: 165–167). In Groningen, five people were killed in these skirmishes (Oprechte Haarlemsche Courant, 6 July 1847).

Source: Corporaal, M., & Jensen, L. (2024). Famine and ‘hongersnood’ as transnational memory: Literary legacies of the 1840s food crises in Ireland and the Netherlands. *Memory Studies*, 0(0).

SOME OF THE UNDERLYING FACTORS WHICH CAN LEAD TO FAMINE

ECONOMIC

Market Failures

Economic factors, such as supply and demand imbalances, can trigger famines. When food prices rise beyond the means of the poor, access to food becomes limited. The Great Bengal Famine in 1943 was made worse by market failures and hoarding, caused by Government price controls on rice which made it less profitable for farmers to sell. The price was reduced by the Government to help people afford it, but many farmers were unable to make a living selling at the Government price, so they stockpiled it in the hope of achieving a better price when the price controls were relaxed.



Image: Great Bengal Famine 1943
Credit: Wikimedia



Resource Allocation:

Unequal distribution of resources, such as land and wealth, can lead to food scarcity for marginalised populations. In many historic famines, elites or colonial powers often controlled the majority of fertile land, leaving peasants with poor land that produces poorer quality food.

Image: Calcutta 1943 Credit: BBC



> SOME OF THE UNDERLYING FACTORS WHICH CAN LEAD TO FAMINE

POLITICAL

Government Policies:

Political decisions can significantly contribute to famines. For example, the Soviet Union's policies during the Holodomor in the early 1930s, including forced collectivization and grain confiscation, played a central role in causing mass starvation as the Government exerted control over access to food.



Lack of Infrastructure:

Insufficient infrastructure, including transportation and storage facilities, can impede the distribution of food during times of crisis. This was a significant factor in the Bengal Famine of 1943.



Image: Great Bengal Famine 1943 Credit: Wikimedia



Conflict and War:

Wars and armed conflicts disrupt food production, distribution, and access. Civilians often bear the brunt of these disruptions, leading to widespread famine. The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) and the Ethiopian Civil War (1983-1985) both resulted in devastating famines.



Social Inequality:

Social structures that perpetuate inequality can leave marginalised groups vulnerable to famine. Caste systems in India, for example, have historically limited the access of lower-caste populations to food and resources.

Image: Google Arts

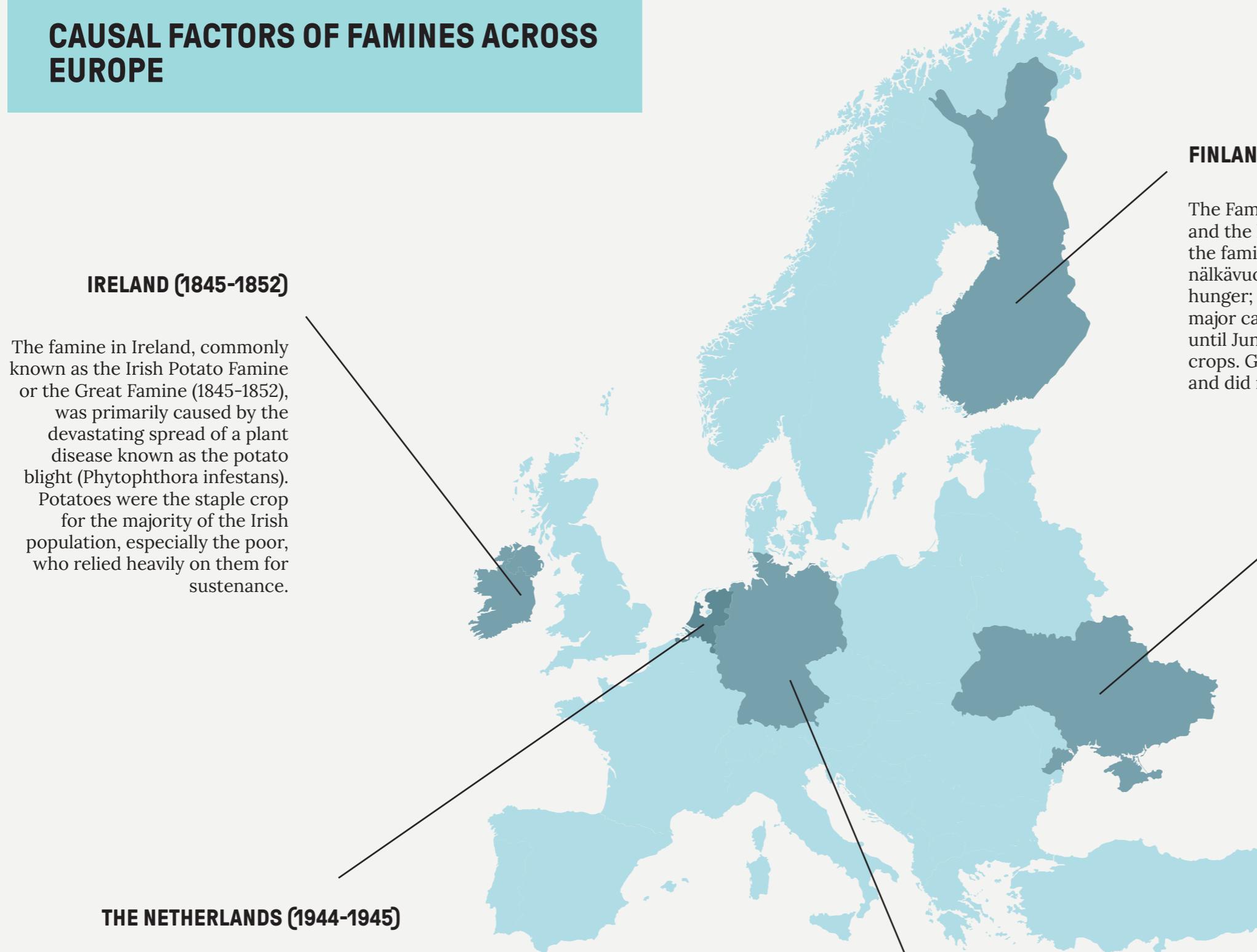
Image: Starvation was a result of the Nigerian Civil War for many civilians Credit: Wikimedia

> SOME OF THE UNDERLYING FACTORS WHICH CAN LEAD TO FAMINE

SOCIAL



CAUSAL FACTORS OF FAMINES ACROSS EUROPE



THE NETHERLANDS (1944-1945)

The Dutch Famine of 1944-1945, also known as the "Hunger Winter," was primarily caused by the disruption of food distribution during World War II. The German occupation of the Netherlands led to a severe food shortage as supplies dwindled and transportation networks broke down. The Allies' strategic bombing campaigns further hindered access to food, particularly in the west of the country.

GERMANY (1914-1918)

Famine in Germany during World War I was marked by a combination of economic difficulties and wartime conditions. During World War I, the blockade of Germany by the British Royal Navy severely restricted imports of food and fertiliser, resulting in food shortages of up to 30%, and this was compounded by the diversion of some agricultural production to the War Economy - with workers required to create munitions, uniforms and equipment instead of growing food.

UKRAINE (1932-1933)

The Holodomor, a devastating famine that occurred in Ukraine from 1932 to 1933, had complex causes primarily rooted in Soviet policies. Joseph Stalin's forced collectivisation of agriculture and grain requisitioning campaigns in Ukraine played a central role. The government's aggressive ways of obtaining grain, combined with harsh penalties for those who resisted, resulted in the confiscation of food from Ukrainian farmers.

FINLAND (1866-1868)

The Famine of 1866-1868 was the last famine in Finland, and the last major famine in Northern Europe. In Finland, the famine is known as "the great hunger years", or suuret nälkävuodet. About 8.5% of the entire population died of hunger; in the hardest-hit areas it was up to 20%. The major cause of the famine was heavy frost from January until June and from September, which destroyed the crops. Government policies, however, restricted relief and did not help to alleviate the overall distress.



OPTIONAL LEARNING TASKS



DIGITAL ACTIVITIES



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



DIGITAL INFOGRAPHIC CREATION

Students use online tools like Canva or Piktochart to create infographics explaining the causes and impacts of a specific historical famine. They should include statistics, images, and brief explanations of the famine's context.



CAUSE-AND-EFFECT CHAIN

In small groups, students create large paper-based cause-and-effect chains for a specific famine. They use sticky notes to show how different factors (natural, economic, political, social) interconnect and lead to famine conditions.



FAMINE PREVENTION POSTER CAMPAIGN

Students design and create posters that highlight strategies for preventing famines. They should focus on addressing the underlying causes discussed in the lesson, such as improving infrastructure, promoting sustainable agriculture, or developing early warning systems.



ROLE-PLAY DEBATE: SIMULATION

Students are assigned roles representing different stakeholders in a famine scenario (e.g., farmers, government officials, aid workers, economists). They debate potential solutions and policies to address the famine, considering various perspectives and interests.

Credits

This learning resource was co-developed by the Heritages of Hunger research consortium and Nerve Centre Derry

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MODULE 6: MEMORY & COMMEMORATION

> LESSON ONE: COMMEMORATING FAMINES

> LESSON DESCRIPTION

This lesson will look at the commemoration of famines in communities across the world, using comparison study to establish similarities and differences in collective memory. This lesson will incorporate case studies and discussion of the following famines:

- » The Ukrainian Holodomor (1932-33)
- » The Spanish Hunger Years (1939-52)
- » The Finnish Great Years of Hunger (1866-68)
- » The Great Irish Famine (1845-1852)
- » The Dutch Hunger Winter (1944-45)
- » The Highland Potato Famine (1846-56)

> LESSON INTENTIONS

- ✓ Understand how memory has been used in different communities to acknowledge and give meaning to famines.
- ✓ Discuss similarities in language and imagery in commemoration, and why famine memory is seen as more important in some countries.

> LESSON OUTCOMES

- ✓ Be able to describe the role of famines in collective memory and how memory is used by different stakeholders.
- ✓ Describe the reasons why famine memory is more important in some societies than others.



INTRODUCTION

Famines can have a devastating effect on entire communities and populations. Throughout history famine has shaped national stories and identities, prompted large-scale migrations and population shifts, and caused the death and displacement of innocent people in significant numbers.

Because famine has been such a powerful force, and because it is seen as something that particularly impacts the poorest and most vulnerable in society over a prolonged period of suffering, commemoration and memorialisation of famine can be both an important part of a nation or region's history and identity, and a potent political act.

HOW AND WHY WE REMEMBER

Around the world, famines are commemorated in different ways by different communities, and sometimes not really formally commemorated at all. The ways in which these events are remembered now can reveal something about the society today and how its history has been recorded, and by whom.



USEFUL ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

[Global Famine Case Studies](#)

[Online Heritages of Hunger Repository](#)

[Online Heritages of Hunger Exhibition](#)

CASE STUDY

THE UKRAINIAN HOLODOMOR (1932-33)



Credit - to be inserted here.

The Holodomor, a man-made famine in Soviet Ukraine from 1932 to 1933, has been commemorated in various meaningful ways to honour the millions who perished.

In Ukraine, a national remembrance day is observed annually on the fourth Saturday of November, with ceremonies and moments of silence.

Globally, memorials and monuments have been erected in cities such as Kyiv (Ukraine), Washington D.C. (United States), and Edmonton (Canada) to acknowledge the tragedy and educate future generations. Additionally, museums and exhibitions offer historical insights and personal stories about the famine. These commemorative efforts aim to preserve the memory of the Holodomor and promote awareness of its impact and the atrocities of the Stalin regime worldwide.

The Holodomor Memorial, Washington
In 2011, after an international competition, Ukrainian-American architect Larysa Kurylas' design was chosen for the Holodomor Memorial. The six-foot-tall bronze sculpture rests on a slightly raised granite plinth. There is a granite bench that allows visitors to sit and contemplate the event.

Kurylas' describes her design of a wheat field as "dynamic." "It changes from high relief on the left edge to deep negative relief on the right, reflecting the transition from a record harvest to a horrible deficit." As the wheat recedes the words "Holodomor 1932-1933" emerges out of the wall in greater and greater relief.



CASE STUDY

THE FINNISH GREAT YEARS OF HUNGER (1866-68)



The Finnish Famine of 1866–1868, one of the last major famines in Europe, is commemorated through historical research and cultural remembrance.

In Finland, public awareness is primarily maintained via academic studies and a number of monuments erected by local communities that were affected by famine.

For a long time the hunger years were not part of museum exhibitions. The Finnish independence movement had long framed the famine as a sign of the endurance of the Finnish people in times of hardships, but it was not given further significance in national narratives.

More recently, however, attention has been drawn to the failure of Johan Vilhelm Snelman's government to look adequately after the starving population.

The travelling exhibition Nälkä! (2029–20) reflects on broader themes of social justice and humanitarian responses to the 1866–68 crisis. And in 2024 the Wertas Labour Museum incorporated a new panel on the hunger years in its exhibition on the history of the working class from the 19th century to the present day.

Credit - to be inserted here.



Poster, La Hambruna Silenciada. Courtesy Miguel Ángel del Arco Blanco.



CASE STUDY

THE SPANISH HUNGER YEARS (1939-52)

The Spanish Famine, particularly the hardships endured during the post-civil war period from 1939 to the early 1950s, is commemorated through various cultural and educational initiatives.

However, this has only happened relatively recently, with the passing of the 'Democratic Memory Law' in 2022 to ensure that the legacies of General Franco's dictatorship were publicly examined and commemorated.

Since then exhibitions such as 'La hambruna Silenciada' (The Silenced Famine), and educational programs have highlighted the challenges and resilience of those affected by the famine, promoting awareness among younger generations.

Commemorations often include documentaries and books that delve into personal narratives and historical analyses, preserving memories of the years of severe austerity.

Additionally, local events and discussions honour the hardship endured by communities, ensuring that the impact of the famine remains a part of Spain's collective memory, fostering empathy and historical understanding.



CASE STUDY

THE GREAT IRISH FAMINE (1845-1852)

The Great Irish Famine (1845-1852) is widely commemorated in both Ireland and internationally.

Commemorations of the Irish Famine are observed through various means, reflecting on the tragedy's impact on Ireland and the global Irish diaspora. Monuments and memorials are erected worldwide, including the National Famine Memorial in County Mayo and sculptures in Dublin and New York City.

Annual remembrance events are held, such as Ireland's National Famine Commemoration Day - held on the third Sunday in May each year, which includes wreath-laying ceremonies, prayers, and educational activities.

Significantly, these commemorations make connections to ongoing global crises, drawing analogies and parallels.

For example, during the 2020 Famine commemoration at St Stephen's Green in Dublin, Minister Josephine Madigan compared the bravery of the doctors and nurses who risked their own lives by looking after famine victims with contagious diseases with the heroism of medical staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. And in 2024 Minister Simon Harris referred to Ireland's famine past in order to criticise food blockades in Gaza.

Museums and cultural institutions in Ireland regularly host exhibitions to educate the public about the famine's history. Additionally, there is a National Famine museum in the Irish village of Strokestown. Literature, music, and films frequently explore the famine's themes, ensuring the memory and lessons endure across generations.

Great Famine heritage is also inherently transnational. Because of Ireland's many diasporic communities that are rooted in Famine emigration history, there are also many monuments in Australia, Britain, the US and Canada, amongst others. One example is Rowan Gillespie's "Arrival", a group of statues which can be found at Toronto's waterfront.

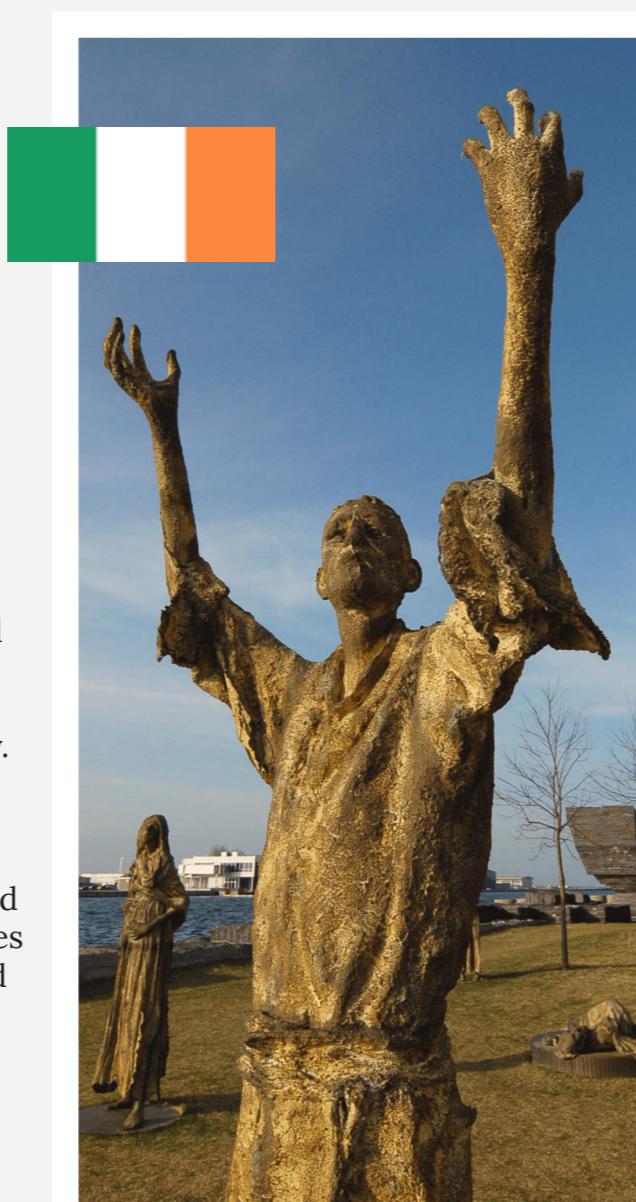


Image: Werftas Labour Museum.
Courtesy Anne Lahtinen.

It must be noted, however, that the Holocaust and the Dutch Resistance take up a dominant position in Dutch memories of WWII, with the famine relegated behind them in importance, which probably explains why there is no national famine monument in the Netherlands.



MEMORY & POLITICS

The case studies above show us that how we remember and commemorate famine is very often a political decision that can see the importance of famine commemoration change over time.

Where the suffering has been imposed by an external force or nation, the suffering of famine can be celebrated as a kind of national martyrdom and evidence of national oppression.

Where famine has been the result of internal issues or power, or part of a wider conquest that has succeeded, then commemoration is generally more nuanced - with notions of suffering reduced; commemoration being localised rather than taking place at the national level; other causal factors for the famine highlighted; or even an absence of official commemoration entirely.



CASE STUDY

THE DUTCH HUNGER WINTER (1944-45)

The Dutch Famine, known as the "Hunger Winter," occurred during 1944-1945 in Nazi-occupied Netherlands, leading to severe food shortages and thousands of deaths.

Commemorations emphasise the resilience and suffering endured by the Dutch people. Each year, on May 4th, the Netherlands observes National Remembrance Day to honour victims of war, including those from the famine. A nationally broadcast ceremony features two minutes of silence at 8 PM, speeches, and wreath-laying.

> HYPERLOCAL COMMEMORATIONS

Hyperlocal famine commemoration refers to very specific, localised memorials or remembrances of famine events. While many famine commemorations tend to be national or regional in scale, there are indeed examples of more localised commemorations.

Here are a few instances:



1

DOOLOUGH VALLEY, IRELAND

This site in County Mayo holds an annual famine walk to commemorate a specific tragic event during the Great Famine. In 1849, several hundred starving people walked through the valley to seek aid, with many dying along the way. The walk retraces their steps as a form of remembrance.

POINT OF SLEAT, ISLE OF SKYE, SCOTLAND

There's a small stone memorial here commemorating the local victims of the Highland Potato Famine (1846-1856). It's a very specific, localised remembrance in a remote area where many inhabitants fell victim to starvation. Monuments to the Highland Potato famine are local initiatives, and its bleak history has not been integrated in the narratives presented by national museums, in the Lowlands.

2



3

HOLODOMOR MEMORIALS IN UKRAINIAN VILLAGES

While the Holodomor (1932-1933) is commemorated nationally in Ukraine, many small villages have their own local memorials, often listing names of local victims or featuring symbols specific to that community's experience.



These hyperlocal commemorations often provide a more intimate and personal connection to historical famine events. They allow communities to remember their specific losses and experiences, which might be overlooked in larger, more generalised memorials. Such commemorations can play an important role in preserving local history and fostering community identity.

> GENDERED COMMEMORATIONS

Gendered famine commemoration is an important aspect of remembering historical famines, as it highlights the different experiences and impacts of famines on men and women. The role of women in famine has often been portrayed as one of victimhood, designed to provoke a heightened sense of empathy or outrage from audiences.

1

ROWAN GILLESPIE'S MIGRANT SCULPTURES" IN TORONTO

This memorial to migrants from the Great Irish Famine features sculptures of emaciated men, women, and children. Notably, it includes a sculpture of a pregnant woman, highlighting the particular vulnerability of expectant mothers during the famine.

2

"THE IRISH FAMINE MEMORIAL" IN SYDNEY AUSTRALIA:

This artistic installation by Hossein and Angela Valamanesh pays homage to the young women who came from the workhouses of Ireland to Australia between 1848 and 1850 on a special emigration scheme which saw over 4000 young Irish women sent to Australia to flee the famine.

3

HOLODOMOR VICTIMS' MEMORIAL IN KYIV, UKRAINE:

While not exclusively gendered, this memorial includes a statue of a young girl holding ears of wheat, symbolising the innocence of child victims and the role of women in Ukrainian agricultural society.

4

"MOTHER OF THE OCCUPATION PERIOD" IN ATHENS, GREECE

This bronze statue, made by Costas Valsamis (1908-2003), commemorates the many deaths from starvation during the years of the Occupation in Athens (1941-44). The emaciated woman, collapsing with famine, is unable to suckle her infant. Here the mother figure symbolises the want of the entire population.





* These gendered commemorations serve several important purposes:

1. They highlight the different ways famines affected men and women.
2. They often emphasise the role of women in caring for families during crises.
3. They bring attention to specific vulnerabilities, such as those of pregnant women or nursing mothers.
4. They can challenge traditional historical narratives that may have overlooked women's experiences.

It's worth noting that while these examples exist, many famine commemorations still tend to be gender-neutral or focus more on general suffering rather than specific gendered experiences. Where gendered commemoration has taken place, it has often been to evoke an empathetic response to the suffering of women.

LEARNING EXERCISE

Learning Exercise: Look up the gendered memorials listed above. When you see the images do you feel that they help to serve the purposes outlined here? Say why you think each memorial does, or does not, serve these purposes.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, famine memory can be a significant element in contemporary politics, either by its presence or its absence. Looking at how a particular famine is commemorated today invariably tells us at least as much about the contemporary politics of that place as it does about the actual history of the famine.



OPTIONAL LEARNING TASKS



DIGITAL ACTIVITIES:



INTERACTIVE TIMELINE

Create a digital timeline using a tool like TimelineJS, where students add events, images, and short descriptions of different famine commemorations around the world.



VIRTUAL MUSEUM

Use Google Slides or a similar tool to have students create a virtual museum exhibit about a specific famine and its commemoration. They can include images, text, and even embedded videos.



SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

Social Media Campaign: Have students design a social media campaign to raise awareness about a historical famine and its modern-day commemoration. They can create mock posts for platforms like Instagram or Twitter.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES:



MEMORY BOX

Students create a physical "memory box" containing items that represent different aspects of a famine and its commemoration. They can present these to the class, explaining the significance of each item.



ROLE-PLAY DEBATE

Organise a classroom debate where students take on roles of different stakeholders (e.g., government officials, survivors, historians) discussing how a particular famine should be commemorated.



FAMINE MEMORIAL DESIGN

Famine Memorial Design: In small groups, students design and create a scale model or detailed drawing of a famine memorial, explaining the symbolism and choices in their design.



> LESSON TWO: CONTEMPORARY CRISES

> LESSON DESCRIPTION

This lesson will explore contemporary and ongoing famine issues in Gaza & Sub-Saharan Africa, including drawing comparisons between historic crises and the ongoing significance of famine memory in the public consciousness. The lesson will also explore the role of heritage projects in commemorating and marking the past. This lesson will incorporate case studies and discussion of the following famines:

- » The Gaza Famine (2023-Present)
- » Contemporary Famine in Sub-Saharan Africa

- + The Ukrainian Holodomor (1932-33)
 The Spanish Hunger Years (1939-52)
 The Finnish Great Years of Hunger (1866-68)
 The Great Irish Famine (1845-1852);
 The Dutch Hunger Winter (1944-45)
 The Highland Potato Famine (1846-56)

> LESSON INTENTIONS

- ✓ To discuss connections between contemporary and historic famines.
- ✓ Understand the importance of ongoing commemoration in different parts of the world.

> USEFUL ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- [Global Famine Case Studies](#)
- [Online Heritages of Hunger Repository](#)
- [Online Heritages of Hunger Exhibition](#)

> INTRODUCTION

Famine isn't history.

In the twenty-first century, where food production is heavily mechanised, globalised and highly efficient, famine is still a significant issue in many parts of the world.



Across the world over thirty million people are either experiencing famine or at risk of famine, despite the abundance and over-supply of food in many parts of the globe. These people are largely in sub-Saharan Africa, but famine is also found elsewhere.



GAZA



The ongoing famine in Gaza is primarily a result of the Israel-Hamas conflict that escalated in October 2023. The immediate causes include:

Blockade and restricted aid

Israel's tight control over borders has severely limited food and supplies entering Gaza.

Infrastructure destruction

Bombing has damaged water systems, farms, and food distribution networks.

Displacement

Many Gazans have been forced from their homes, disrupting food access and livelihoods.

Image: Destruction in Gaza Credit: Wikimedia Commons

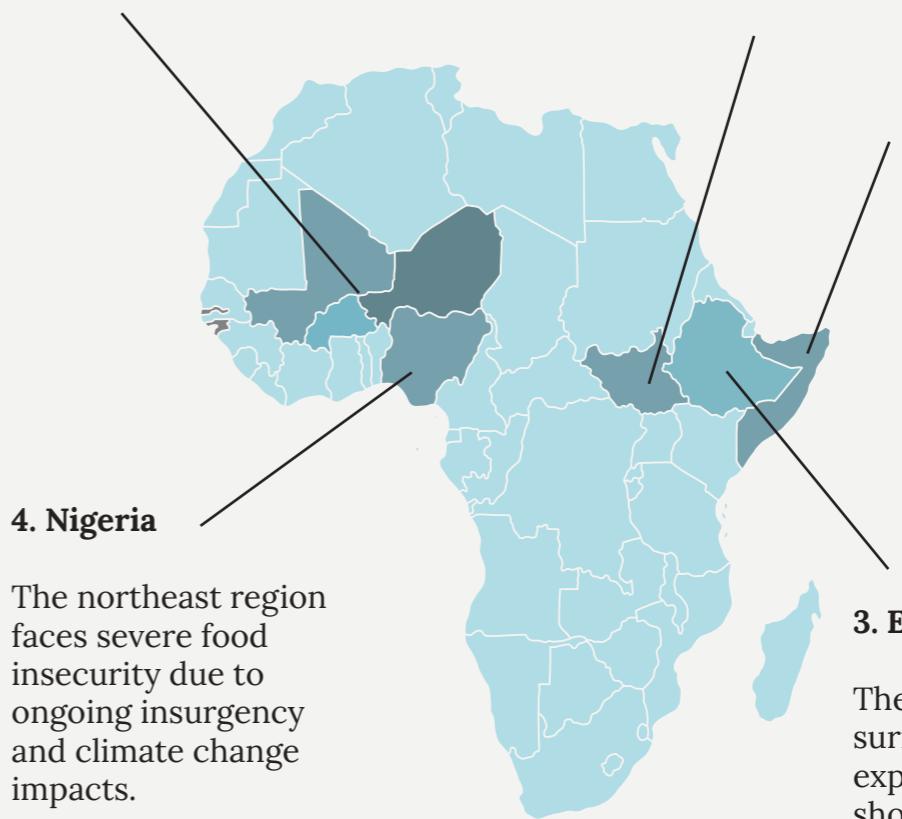
The effects of this famine are severe:

- > Widespread malnutrition, particularly affecting children and vulnerable populations.
- > Increased mortality rates due to starvation and related illnesses.
- > Societal breakdown as people struggle to secure basic necessities.
- > Long-term health consequences for survivors, including stunted growth in children.
- > Potential for increased conflict and desperation among the population.

This situation has sparked international concern and calls for immediate humanitarian intervention.

5. Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger

The Sahel region is experiencing a food crisis exacerbated by conflict and climate change.



4. Nigeria

The northeast region faces severe food insecurity due to ongoing insurgency and climate change impacts.

2. Somalia

Drought, conflict, and economic challenges have pushed millions to the brink of famine.

3. Ethiopia

The Tigray region and surrounding areas are experiencing acute food shortages due to conflict and environmental factors.

Some of these situations display the characteristics of earlier famines through time and others underline the fact that while the specific issues may change, and technology has revolutionised food supply chains & production – famine is now almost always inexcusable, preventable, and addressable if the will exists at the national or international level.



SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

1. South Sudan

Ongoing conflict and climate shocks have led to widespread hunger, with some regions experiencing famine-like conditions.



> LEARNING FROM THE PAST

The existence of contemporary famine underlines the importance of learning from and being informed by the past experience of famine around the world. There are many parallels between the contemporary experience of famine and previous famine experiences.

CAUSES OF FAMINE PAST AND PRESENT

> PAST

- > Crop Failures
- > Limited Transportation
- > Colonialism
- > Market Failures
- > Political Ideologies
- > Warfare

> PRESENT

- > Climate Change
- > Conflict And War
- > Economic Instability
- > Population Displacement
- > Poverty
- > Political Instability

Understanding the causes of famine is crucial for prevention and mitigation.

In 2024 Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister), Simon Harris illustrated the parallels between past and present famines in Ireland and Gaza, highlighting the political nature, and preventability of the situation in Gaza today.

'The Famine left an indelible mark, shaping who we are and guiding our commitments to justice – as well as our determination to help those in the greatest of need.'

'As a nation, it is repellent to our psyche to witness famine unfolding in Gaza as a tool of war. Israel needs to step back and ensure the unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid. This is the clear demand of Ireland, the international community and international law.'

<https://www.gov.ie/en/speech/cd9e0-speech-by-taoiseach-simon-harris-at-the-national-famine-commemoration-edgeworthstown-county-longford-on-sunday-19-may-2024/>



LEARNING EXERCISE

This learning exercise compares historical famines with current food crises.

- ✓ Working in pairs, students will research **one historical famine** (e.g., Irish Potato Famine, Ukrainian Holodomor; Dutch Hunger Winter etc) and **one current crisis** (e.g., Gaza, Yemen, South Sudan etc), analysing causes, impacts, and relief efforts.
- ✓ Students then **analyse** similarities, differences, and lessons learned between their chosen events.
- ✓ Finally, each pair **prepares a 5-minute presentation** to the class, followed by a brief Q&A. Several pairs are selected to present their findings, depending on the time available.
- ✓ The lesson concludes with a **class discussion** on common themes and reflections on preventing food crises.



FAMINE RELIEF

There is a developed global network of famine relief agencies and interventions that work to alleviate the effects of famine and suffering around the world, and a wider awareness of the issue of famine than there has ever been before, but the problem persists in spite of their efforts to demonstrate that famine can be prevented and remedied.

You can learn more about some of the different famine relief agencies and their work in Module Four.

[Hyperlink to be inserted here.](#)



Image: Unicef
Credit: Wikimedia Commons



> CONCLUSION

Famine has been a feature of human existence throughout history. We need food and nutrition to survive, so controlling production and access to food has always been a position of power and influence that has been open to pressure and abuse and vulnerable to environmental and political forces.



Image: Famine is likely to remain an issue in the future Credit: UNICEF



Despite the production and distribution of food being cheaper and more efficient than ever before, famine is still an issue for millions of people around the world.



We have greater awareness of famine, and the most advanced tools and strategies to address it, but it persists as a global issue and is likely to do so for the foreseeable future.

> OPTIONAL LEARNING TASKS



DIGITAL ACTIVITIES:



DATA VISUALIZATION

Using tools like Canva or Piktochart, have students create infographics comparing historical famines with current food crises, highlighting similarities and differences.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES:



FAMINE RELIEF SIMULATION:

Set up a classroom simulation where students take on roles in a famine relief operation, making decisions about resource allocation and addressing various challenges.



PODCAST EPISODE

Students create a short podcast episode discussing a contemporary famine crisis, its historical context, and potential solutions.



AWARENESS CAMPAIGN POSTERS

Students create physical posters to raise awareness about a current famine crisis, incorporating historical context and calls to action. These can be displayed in the classroom or school hallways.

Credits

This learning resource was co-developed by the Heritages of Hunger research consortium and Nerve Centre Derry

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