

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month

Irish Traveller Assembly Script

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June is Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month. Gypsies, Roma and Travellers all share a nomadic tradition of Travelling People. Gypsies, Roma and Travellers have not always been accepted by the community that are not Travellers. They have also experienced a long history of racism and have often been treated like outsiders. The groups of Travelling People are: English Gypsies, Roma from Eastern Europe, Irish Travellers, Occupational Travellers (People who work on circuses and fairgrounds), New Travellers and people who live on boats.

Q. What does the wheel signify?

A. The wheel image signifies the nomadic tradition of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. Also in the past, Gypsies, Roma and Travellers lived and travelled in horse drawn wagons and more recently in trailers (caravans).

This assembly is all about Irish Travellers.

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Irish Travellers originally came from Ireland, but as there are very few written records, as very often Travellers themselves did not go to school and learn to read and write as they were always moving. Travellers go to school today many of their parents and grandparents may not have had the same opportunity. It is very hard to be certain about their history. They sometimes call themselves Pavees. What we do know is that they have been part of life in Ireland for centuries, and as long ago as 800 years Irish Travellers were travelling through the Irish countryside in wagons, working for themselves making pots and pans to sell or trade with local settled people. History records the word 'tinker' appears going back as long ago as 800 years. This word comes from the word Tinceard which means tincraft and it suggests that at this time there was clearly a group of Travelling crafts people who made and mended pots and pans and who played an important role in Irish history.

We also know that about 150 years ago many Irish Travellers decided to come to Britain due to lack of work, and also a food shortage (Potato famine)

In the last 40 years people have tended to travel less as there are fewer opportunities to earn money like this, and also less places where families could stop temporarily.

Irish Travellers still live in caravans and travel round for work, and for family gatherings, although many Irish Travellers today live in houses, although they often travel backwards and forwards to Ireland to visit family and friends.

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All Irish Travellers you'll meet will speak English. However, between themselves some will speak a secret language called Shelta (also called Gammon or Cant). Shelta is not a written language. This is why spelling the words is often confusing, because different people may spell the same word in different ways.

Q. Why would a Traveller want to speak a secret language?

A. To keep them safe from those that threaten them, and also as a sense of community.

Shelta has some Gaelic origins, and it was used by poets a long time ago. It also has similar words to those used by English Gypsies.

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There are many Irish Traveller traditions. We will look at a couple of them. A common tradition among many Gypsies and Travellers is about spending money on expensive china glass and jewellery. So if you were to visit an Irish Traveller home you would probably find some of the Crown Derby china on display like the china in the picture. This is a good way of storing money without needing to use a bank it also shows other people that you were wealthy. In times of hardship, things could be sold to get money.

All Irish Travellers are Catholics and are very religious. Some families have lots of statues and pictures. (See slide). They go to church regularly. Baptisms, first communions, confirmations and marriages are times of great celebrations and family gatherings. Many Irish Travellers also make pilgrimages to religious sites such as Lourdes in France.

St. Patrick's Day, is a popular celebration for many Irish people including Travellers. It is on 26th. March every year. You may have celebrated this day in your school.

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Horse trading has always been important for Irish Travellers and Gypsies. There are many Summer horse fairs in Britain and Ireland. Irish Travellers love to go these big horse fairs to meet family and friends and buy and sell all sorts of things not just horses.

The most famous horse fairs are at Appleby in Cumbria, and Stow on the Wold in Gloucestershire. Each place has one fair a year. There is a famous horse fair in Ireland called Balinasloe.

Some Traveller children who are only 6 or 7 own and trade horses at the fairs. The horses race up and down, this give the Travellers a chance to show off their skills and so horse buyers can see how good the horses are before they buy them!

The pictures are from Appleby Fair. The horses are washed in the river, so they look clean before they are sold. Many Irish Travellers that still own old painted wagons take them to Appleby and other fairs to show them and to re connect with the travelling tradition of the old days.

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This song is about being out in the countryside and close to nature. Many Gypsies and Travellers like to be outdoors, and have a closeness to nature. Listen to the words and think about all the beautiful things in nature that you really like.