

Name: _____

A person living in Ireland during the Great Famine

Read this (fictional) account and answer the questions on this page and the next.

My name is Seán and I am a survivor of the Great Famine in Ireland.

I grew up in the countryside in County Galway. My family were **cottiers**, meaning we rented a small farm from a rich **landlord**. We lived on potatoes because they were cheap and easy to grow. We sold other crops to pay the **rent** so that we would not be **evicted**.

The Blight came in **1845**. The Blight was a disease that spread in the potatoes. Suddenly, we had nothing to eat. My family and I survived that year thanks to **Indian corn** that was sent by the British government. But then the British politicians started complaining that we should solve our own problems. So there was no more corn.

We survived by eating at **soup kitchens** run by a religious group called the **Quakers**. I had to get a job with the **public works** building roads. I got money but the hard labour only made me even hungrier. So what was the point of that?

The Blight would come every year, and more of my neighbours and family would die. The hunger would make them weak, then diseases such as **typhus** and **yellow fever** would finish them off. Whole villages were deserted. The worst year was **Black '47**.

Finally, like millions of other people, me and my family **emigrated**. That means we left Ireland. We decided to go to America because there were jobs there. The voyage by sea took **six weeks** and many of the people in the ship died of diseases. Their bodies were thrown off the side of the vessel. It's no wonder we call them **coffin ships**.

I heard that the famine ended in **1852**. It is 1860 now and thousands of Irish people are still arriving in the United States. Clearly, the situation is still terrible in Ireland. Here in America, many people hate us because we're Irish. The work is hard and city life is very strange for me. But at least we can put food on the table.

1. What was a cottier?

2. What happens if a cottier doesn't pay the rent?

3. When did the Blight come?

4. Who sent the Indian corn?

5. Why did they stop sending the Indian corn?

6. Who ran the soup kitchens?

7. What was the main problem with public works?

8. What two diseases are mentioned in the text?

9. What is emigration?

10. Why were the vessels called coffin ships?

