

Activity Book for Schools 11

Symbols of Ireland



A symbol is something that represents another thing – for example, a shamrock stands for Ireland. If you see a shamrock in the exhibition, it will mean that the people who use the symbol have an attachment to Ireland. Such symbols help people to feel that they belong to a group or to a country. Symbols can motivate people to act, encourage their loyalty and instill in them a sense of pride.

My Name:

Symbols are not just about the past. Today we use symbols all the time – they appeal to our emotions and stand for ideas, whether they are used in popular culture or in an official context.

Explore the displays in *Soldiers and Chiefs* to:

- find symbols used by armies
- think about modern symbols used to represent Ireland



Enter the first room after the introduction space.

For classroom discussion after the museum visit, your teacher has *Teachers' Notes* with answers to the questions in this book.

Symbols in 'The British Garrison in Ireland'

1 Symbols in the Stokes Tapestry – Stop at the large display in the middle of the room.

In addition to the various scenes of garrison life, the Stokes Tapestry contains several kinds of symbols.

Put a tick beside these symbols of Ireland when you find them on the tapestry.

- ☐ wolfhound
- ☐ shamrocks
- ☐ Irish tricolour flag
- ☐ harp
- ☐ the colour green
- ☐ Hibernia



Do you know what the colours of the tricolour flag symbolise?

Green

White

Orange

Ancient Symbols

- Medieval bards used the Harp to accompany the performance of epic poetry. The instrument became the symbol of Ireland's cultural heritage.
- According to legend, St. Patrick used a Shamrock, a three-leaved plant, as a teaching aid to explain the Christian idea of the Holy Trinity to the pagan Irish – a shamrock is also used as a symbol of Ireland.
- Wolfhound - In ancient times Gaelic chieftains used this native dog of Ireland to hunt wolves, an important and high-status activity.
- *Hibernia* is the Roman name for the female representation of the island of Ireland and Erin is the Celtic form.

Some symbols on the tapestry show Ireland joined with Britain. List three examples that show this idea. These combined symbols are not used today because Ireland regained its independence in 1922.



Enter the next room.

Symbols in 'Warfare in Ireland'

2

Smashed to Pieces – Stop at the first display on the wall after the 'Warfare in Ireland' panel at the doorway.

Look for the chair in a picture of a landscape and for the full-sized model of that chair.

What was the Tullyhogue chair and what did it symbolise?



Why did the English break the chair?

Can you think of a modern example where a group destroyed a symbolic monument to make a political point?



Leave through the doorway, walk past the row of helmets and enter the next room.

Symbols in 'The Wild Geese'

3 An Irish Symbol of Victory – Turn right after the doorway and stop at the first display case.

This large and tattered regimental flag is an important symbol of Dillon's Irish Regiment in the French Army and of its role in winning the Battle of Fontenoy.

You can find out how this regiment made a difference by watching the six-minute presentation of the battle.

You can learn some of the history of this regiment by reading the panels.

Examine the real flag and the small picture of the full flag. What do these parts of the flag stand for?

Central Cross



Harp with Crown

Hints:

- This flag contains symbols for many ideas, including religion, country and regiment.
- The red and black squares are the colours of Dillon's Irish Regiment.

'In Hoc Signo Vinces' is a Latin motto for Christian warriors. It means 'In this sign conquer' (the sign is the cross).



Go to the end of this room.

Symbols in 'Irish in the American Civil War'

4

Irish Symbols in American Armies – Before you enter the next room, stop at the panel to the left of the doorway.

This room shows the Irish regiments of the opposing armies (Union and Confederate) during the American Civil War in the 19th century. Despite taking different sides in this war, Irish-American soldiers used similar Irish symbols on their flags to show their pride in being Irish.

Regimental flags or standards told the soldiers the location of their commander during a battle. Find pictures with the flags carried by these four Irish regiments – look on the panels and in the display cases:

- Irish Brigade (on the first panel 'Irish in the American Civil War')
- 10th Tennessee (in a painting reproduced in the display case 'Irish Soldiers in the Confederate Army'; and the real flag is on the wall)
- 17th Wisconsin Infantry (on the panel 'Irish in the Union Army - Proclaiming an Irish Identity')
- 37th New York Volunteer Infantry (on the panel 'Irish in the Union Army - Proclaiming an Irish Identity')

Identify the symbol that is on all of the flags.



Which symbol is on only two of the flags?

Which symbol is on only one flag?

A Temporary Symbol

During the Battle of Fredericksburg, the Irish Brigade was temporarily without its flags. Instead, they used another symbol. Their commander ordered them to wear a sprig of boxwood (an evergreen plant with small green leaves) to show that they belonged to the Irish Brigade.

Look at the picture of the Irish Brigade to see the boxwood in their caps.

5

The Fenian Rebels – Move to the next display along the wall beside the last panel from activity 4.

Beside the panel called 'The Irish Invade Canada' you will find a uniform jacket worn by a group of Irish rebels.

They chose a dark green for their uniform and used shamrocks on the buttons to symbolise Ireland. Look closely at the buttons, however, to find a different Irish symbol, used here for the first time ever.

What is this new symbol?



Enter the next room, turn right and then go through into the big space.

Symbols in 'Irish in the British Service'

6 Irish Symbols outside Ireland – Cross the room to the end wall and stop at the display in the middle of that wall.

All the badges shown on the panel 'The Imperial Irish' belonged to 'Irish' Regiments formed outside Ireland.

Identify a symbol of Canada on one of these badges. _____

Do you think all the soldiers who wore these symbols would have had Irish ancestors?

Examine the uniform worn by the Irish Regiment of Canada (on the left) and make a list of as many Irish symbols as you can find.

_____	_____
_____	_____



Leave this room and stop on the far end of the bridge.

7 Soaring Symbols – Before you enter the next room, stop at the panel that describes the jet aeroplane.

Find the symbol of Ireland on the Irish Air Corps de Havilland Vampire jet trainer aircraft. What symbol of Ireland uses these colours?

Symbols in '1916 – The Easter Rising'

8

Decipher the Flag – After the large gun on wheels, turn left and stop at the display in the middle of the wall facing you.

This flag (or ensign) from the gunboat 'Helga' is in the display beside 'The Crisis at Home', 'War in the Streets'. The flag has British and Irish symbols on it.

Imagine a Dutch ship meeting another ship flying this flag. What country would the Dutch sailors assume the ship belonged to?

Look for the Irish cross on the Helga's flag.



An Irish symbol was added to the Union Jack when Ireland was united with Great Britain in 1801. The cross of St. Patrick, a red diagonal cross on a white background, was added to the crosses of St. George (England) and St. Andrew (Scotland).

9

A New Flag – Turn around and stop at the green flag in the middle of the room.

Look at the words on the flag and at the information on the label.

Why is this flag an important symbol for Irish people?



Are there any familiar Irish symbols on the flag?

Why are the British officers in the photograph gathered around this flag? Why do they hold it upside down?

When did the British return this flag to Ireland?

Symbols in 'The First World War'

10 Three Irish Divisions – Cross the room to the opposite side and stop at the displays in this area.

You will find these symbols on two background briefings (pull-out panels) and on a wall panel.



Draw a line to connect the name of each Irish Division to its symbol.

10th (Irish) Division



16th (Irish) Division



36th (Ulster) Division



What do you think each symbol represents?

Hand



Bar

Shamrock

Symbols in 'The Irish Wars'

11 Symbolic Leaders – Turn right after the silhouettes and two life-sized figures. Stop at the display in the corner.

At the end of this room you will find the display 'Lost Leaders' containing the uniforms worn by Michael Collins and Liam Lynch. Both leaders, from different sides, used the same symbols on their uniforms.

Look at the buttons and belt of each uniform to identify the symbol.

Why did they use the same symbol?

Sometimes, groups with differing philosophies use the same symbol but with a different meaning.



Leave this room and go down the stairs.

Symbols in 'Claiming the Future'

12 Symbolic Words – Turn left at the bottom of the stairs and stop at the display in the middle of the wall.

Language can be a symbol too. The new Irish Defence Forces used the Irish language for drills even though many soldiers did not speak it.

Listen to the instructions for the soldiers' foot drill. **What do you think the words mean?**

Right, left



Sit down



Soldiers in the new Irish Defence Forces had gone to school when Britain ruled Ireland and the schools could not teach Irish. National Schools began to teach Irish when Ireland became independent in 1922.

Symbols in 'Defending the Peace' and 'The Future'

13 Subtle Symbols – Walk past the stairs and enter the large open area. Turn left and stop near the end of the curved wall.

In the 1920s and 1930s it was important for the soldiers to look Irish rather than English. As time passed and uniforms became more practical, Irish symbols have become less obvious on all categories of uniform, except dress uniform.

Look for and identify the Irish symbols on the uniforms for these three soldiers:

Soldier using a mine detector
(in front of white vehicle)

Woman soldier in the Lebanon
(in display case)

Soldier in 'The Future' display case

Why do you think the symbols of the United Nations are more prominent on these uniforms than the symbols of Ireland?



Symbols, Culture and Politics

If you were to wear a symbol of Ireland, what would it be? To help you decide, think about what you have learned from your exploration of symbols in *Soldiers and Chiefs ...*

- How do the symbols used by armies in the past compare to those we use today?
- Think about some modern symbols that represent Ireland. Some are used in advertising, sports, and the performing arts. Others are 'official' and appear on currency and government buildings and documents.
- Are there any symbols of Ireland that you expected to find – but did not find – as part of the military vocabulary? Celtic knots and crosses, round towers, harps, wolfhounds, the colour green and shamrocks are all traditional symbols of Ireland, but not all of them were used as military symbols.
- Do you think that today traditional symbols should continue to represent Ireland, or should we look for new symbols to stand for this country in the 21st century? Are there any modern equivalents to the ancient symbols of Ireland?

Now describe, or draw a picture of, the symbol of Ireland that you would wear:

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Want to know more?

For more information on exhibitions and education programmes, contact the Education and Outreach Department of the National Museum of Ireland.

Tel: 01 648 6453 **Fax:** 01 679 1025 **email:** bookings@museum.ie

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National Museum of Ireland, Dublin. 2009

Cover image: Divisional badge of 16th Irish Division, British Army, First World War, National Museum of Ireland

