

Student Discussion Booklet

Northern Ireland: Living with the Troubles

22 March – 29 September 2024
IWM North



© Rolls Press/Popperfoto via Getty Images

This booklet contains student discussion questions for the *Northern Ireland: Living with the Troubles* exhibition at the Imperial War Museums North.

Just as there are multiple perspectives to this conflict, there are no right or wrong answers to these questions. They are intended to stimulate thinking on the topics you encounter in this exhibition and demonstrate the complicated and nuanced issues that come with reflecting on this conflict. You can consider these discussion topics alone, with a partner or as a whole class discussion with your teacher.

If you wish to write down your thoughts or responses to these questions, there is a space provided on each page.

Please be advised that this timeline is not intended to detail every event which led to the Troubles. It aims to provide context for the *Northern Ireland: Living with the Troubles* exhibition by highlighting some of the key moments which laid the foundation for the later conflict.



1600s

In 1603, the English defeated an Irish alliance of chiefs and gained control of the whole of Ireland.

Plantations run by Scottish and English Protestants were established in the region to put down rebellion. Over the decades the Protestant community became the majority in Ulster. This community later supported William of Orange's claim to the British throne against the Catholic James II. James II was beaten at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690,

and finally defeated at the Battle of Aughrim in 1691.

1700s

Due to systematic resettlement and land seizure, by 1703 90% of the land in Ireland was owned by Anglo-Irish nobility. The early years of the 1700s also marked the introduction of the Penal Laws, which severely restricted the rights and opportunities of Irish Catholics. This period of growing Protestant power was labelled the Protestant Ascendency. In response to this, by the end of the century a nationalist movement was growing amongst the Irish population, inspired by events in France and the USA.

1800s

On 1st January 1801, the Act of Union abolished the Irish parliament and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland was formally created. The first half of the 1800s saw mass evictions of Irish tenant farmers, protests and rising poverty levels in Ireland. Between 1845-1848 the Potato Famine decimated

the population. Due to the British government sending inadequate aid while also continuing to export meat and grain from Ireland, over 1 million people are believed to have died from starvation.

1886–1912

Throughout the late 1800s and into the early 1900s efforts were made to reverse parts of the Act of Union and establish Home Rule in Ireland. The first and second Home Rule bills were defeated but the third was passed in 1912. However, the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 meant the change was never enforced. Protestant communities voiced their strong opposition to Home Rule and the Ulster Volunteer Force, a militia of over 100,000 men, was raised to resist it, by force if necessary.



1916

In April 1916, Irish republican volunteers in Dublin staged an uprising against British rule. Hundreds of people died and many more were injured in the fighting which lasted five days. This event came to be known as the Easter Rising.



1918–21

Sinn Fein, a republican party, came to power and declared Ireland independent from Britain. This declaration led to the outbreak of the Anglo-Irish war fought between the newly formed IRA and the British Army. Eventually, a treaty was signed and Partition was established to create the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland.



1922–23

A civil war was fought over conditions stipulated in the treaty which had ended the Anglo-Irish war. The Pro-Treaty forces won, with British backing. This led to the confirming of the border between the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland.



1960s

Inspired by protests in the USA, a civil rights movement began in the 1960s

to tackle issues of inequality and discrimination within Northern Irish society. Marches continued despite the ban on them by the Northern Ireland Government.



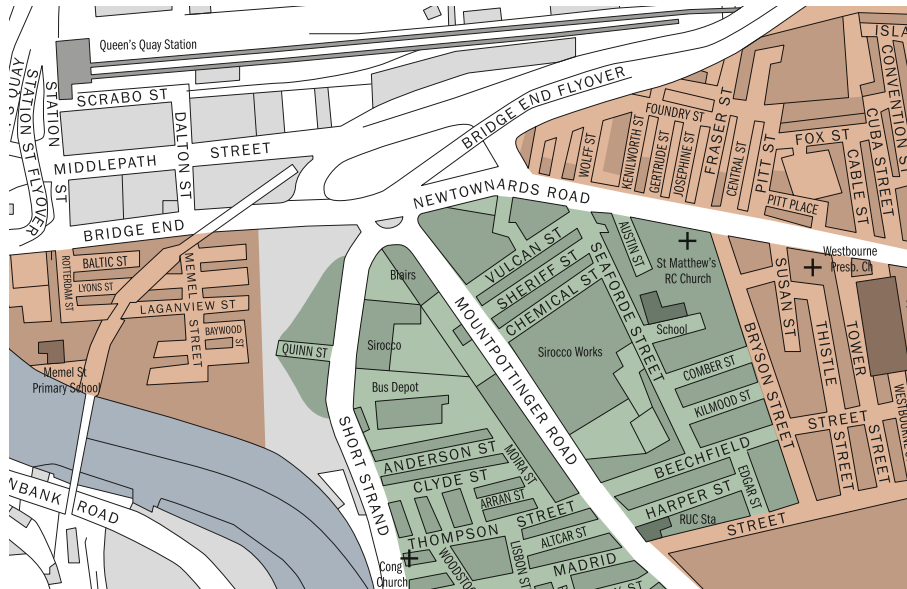
1968

The Royal Ulster Constabulary attacked a civil rights protest march in Derry/Londonderry. Anger and outrage intensified in response.

1969

The Apprentice Boys march incited the nationalist community of the Bogside in Derry/Londonderry. The escalating violence led to the British Army being deployed to Northern Ireland. This marked the beginning of the Troubles.

ZONE 1: THE NIGHT OF 27-28 JUNE 1970



Discussion points...

Take a moment to look at the map and listen to the audio testimonies of two people who witnessed this event.

1. What differences do you notice about the two recollections of the events? Why do you think their accounts differ?
2. How do you think it would have felt to live in a community with such clear divisions?
3. How might the divisions shown on the map have affected how people lived and interacted with each other in this area?

Your thoughts...

The heightened violence of the 1970s and 1980s

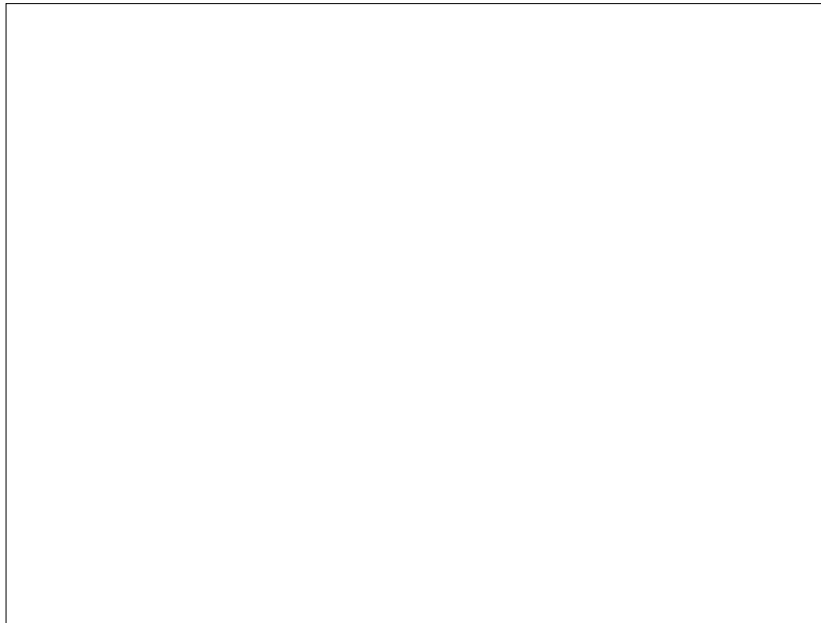
Discussion points...

As you walk around this zone, consider how every object and photo can be interpreted in multiple ways and will evoke different reactions based on an individual's own history.

Find an object that resonates with you.

Which object did you choose?

What is its story?



Why have you chosen this object?



How does seeing this object make you feel?



Based on what you have learned about the different groups involved in this conflict, how do you think each of those groups would view the object you have chosen?



The everyday experience for those affected by the Troubles

Discussion points...

1. Walking around the space, what evidence can you see of how the conflict affected the everyday life of ordinary people?
2. How do you think it felt to live under these conditions?
3. How do you think an individual's personal beliefs might have shaped how they viewed the everyday experiences they had during the Troubles?



Your thoughts...

The legacy of the conflict

Discussion points...

1. In what way do you think the Troubles still affect those who lived through them?
2. Why might the Troubles still feel relevant to those born in Northern Ireland after the Troubles ended?
3. Why is it so important to discuss the Troubles?
4. Why do you think the curator chose to include multiple perspectives in this exhibition?
5. Has there been anything you have seen, heard or read in this exhibition which challenged a preconceived idea you had?

Your thoughts...



Seamus Heaney was born in Northern Ireland in 1939. Brought up in a Catholic household, his early years were spent living a rural life in County Derry before later moving

to the Republic of Ireland. When discussing the Troubles in an interview in 1974, Heaney stated that the divisions of the conflict were deeply rooted in Northern Ireland society and its citizens long before the Troubles began.

Storm on the Island was published in 1966 as part of his first collection of poems. The topics of nature and rural life appear regularly in his poetry and are often used to reflect his experience of growing up during the Troubles. This poem equates the Troubles to a 'storm' that rages around the narrator's home. The narrator starts off appearing somewhat arrogant in their sense of preparedness for the situation, but by the end a questioning uncertainty has crept into their narrative.

STORM ON THE ISLAND

We are prepared: we build our houses squat,
Sink walls in rock and roof them with good slate.
This wizened earth has never troubled us
With hay, so, as you see, there are no stacks
Or stooks that can be lost. Nor are there trees
Which might prove company when it blows full
Blast: you know what I mean – leaves and branches
Can raise a tragic chorus in a gale
So that you listen to the thing you fear
Forgetting that it pummels your house too.
But there are no trees, no natural shelter.
You might think that the sea is company,
Exploding comfortably down on the cliffs
But no: when it begins, the flung spray hits
The very windows, spits like a tame cat
Turned savage. We just sit tight while wind dives
And strafes invisibly. Space is a salvo,
We are bombarded with the empty air.
Strange, it is a huge nothing that we fear.

Seamus Heaney

Discussion points...

Take a moment to read through the poem.

1. Underline a line or phrase from the poem and choose an object in the exhibition which you feel relates to it. Which phrase and object did you choose and why?
2. In this exhibition you have seen and heard multiple perspectives, and you have seen how there is no one way to interpret the events that unfolded during the Troubles. What insight might the final line of this poem, '*Strange, it is a huge nothing that we fear*', give into Heaney's own interpretation of the Troubles?
3. Has the exhibition you have seen today changed how you interpret this poem?

Your thoughts...