

That's Interesting!



A worksheet for adults to practise reading, writing, spelling and numbers.

Irish myths and legends



A myth or a legend is a story that has been passed down from generation to generation for hundreds of years. In the early times the stories were never written down but instead were told by the fireside. Over the years, changes were very often made to these stories so we can never be sure if the legends or myths are true or not.

Ireland has a long tradition of great story tellers who have passed on wonderful stories of bravery, sadness, magic and mystery. Here we will have a look at some of the oldest legends from Ireland's past.

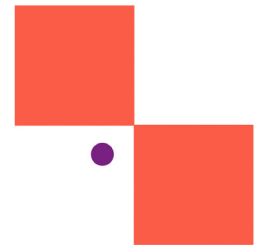
Children of Lir

Many hundreds of years ago in Ireland, a king, called Lir, married the daughter of another king. Her name was Aoibh (Eve). They were very happy and had four children, a daughter called Fionnuala and three sons, Aodh (Hugh), Conn and Fiacra.

Sadly, Aoibh died when the children were still very young. Lir was heartbroken and the other king advised him to marry again. He married a woman named Aoife who was his first wife's sister. She was not very nice and became very jealous of Lir's love for his children.

One day she ordered a servant to kill the children, when he refused she used her own magic to turn the four children into swans. The magic spell declared that they would remain as swans until Ireland became a Christian country.





The four children spent 900 years as swans on three different lakes around Ireland. They were still able to speak and sing as humans and it is said that their singing could be heard by people travelling close to the lakes.

Lir, their father, was so upset that he left his home and camped near the lake to be near his children until his death. When the other king heard what Aoife had done, he cast a spell on her and she became a ghost that lives in the sky, that could only be heard crying during a storm.

After 900 years Saint Patrick came to Ireland and Ireland became a Christian country. When a bell from a nearby church rang, the four swans turned back into humans. However, they had become so old that they died almost immediately. They were all buried beside each other along with their parents.

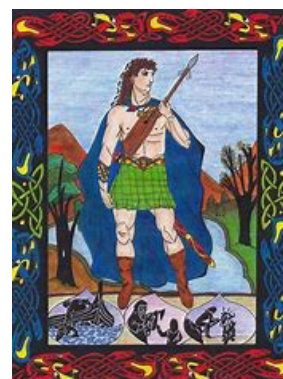


The story of the Children of Lir has become one of the most popular legends in Ireland. Songs and stories of this tragic event have been written by many over the years. A statue of the children of Lir can be seen at the garden of Remembrance in Dublin.

Fionn Mac Cumhail (Finn McCool)

Fionn Mac Cumhail was a hunter and a soldier who was said to have lived in Ireland many hundreds of years ago. He was brave, strong and wise, and he was leader of an army of warriors who travelled around Ireland at the time, called The Fianna.

There are very many myths about Fionn. The first story tells us how he became so wise. He was sent to live with a wise old poet named Finneagas who lived near the River Boyne. Finneagas told Fionn about the Salmon of Knowledge. For many years he had been trying to catch this salmon who was said to have all the wisdom in the world. He believed that the first person to eat this fish would then have all this wisdom.



As luck would have it, Finneagas caught the salmon of knowledge. Overjoyed, he began to cook the fish over an open fire. He asked Fionn to keep an eye on the fish but warned him not to eat it.

As the salmon was cooking, a blister appeared on its skin. Fionn burst the blister and some of the fish stuck to his finger. Having burnt his finger, Fionn then put his finger in his mouth and ate a piece of the fish. All the wisdom from the salmon then passed to Fionn.



Another legend states that years later Fionn's wife, when pregnant with their child, was turned into a deer by a local witch. Fionn spent many months searching for her and eventually found her dead and beside her, was a young deer, that immediately turned back into a human. He was Fionn's son, Oisín, who himself became a great soldier.

The Land of Tír na nÓg

Oisín, Fionn's son, was brave and strong like his father and became the leader of the army known as The Fianna. It is said that one day when they were out hunting, a white horse appeared.



The rider of the horse was a beautiful woman who said her name was Niamh. Oisín fell madly in love.

The woman said she was from the Land of Tír na nÓg, which means the Land of the Young. She explained that no one grows old in this land. Oisín decided that he would leave Ireland and all his family to go with this woman. His father, Fionn, tried to change his mind as he knew he would never see his son again.

Oisín and Niamh were very happy for a long time in their new land. However, Oisín began to feel home sick. He asked Niamh about going back to Ireland for a visit. She explained that although it seemed that he had only left home three years ago it was in fact three hundred years since he left and that he would see many changes in Ireland.

She also warned him that if he went back to Ireland, he must stay on his horse and not set foot on Irish soil or he could never return to Tír na nÓg. Oisín agreed and left for Ireland on horseback. When he arrived, he was sad to see that all his family and friends were dead for many years. Ireland had changed so much.

As he rode around he spotted a group of men trying to move a large rock. He went over to help. He knew he could not get off the horse so he leaned across to push the stone. However, he lost his balance and fell from the horse. Immediately, he turned into a very old man and died soon after.

Deirdre of the Sorrows

Deirdre was most beautiful woman to ever live in this land. The king of Ulster, Conor, wanted to marry her but she was in love with a younger man.



She and her young husband ran away to Scotland where they lived happily for many years. However, the king invited them back and promised that he had forgiven them and that no harm would be done to them.

However, no sooner had they come back than the king ordered his soldiers to kill Deirdre's husband and his brothers and he kidnapped Deirdre. Heartbroken after her husband's death and with no intention of marrying the king, Deirdre threw herself from a moving carriage, down a rocky hill and was killed.

She and her lover were buried side by side. Two trees grew on their graves and it is said the branches from each tree grew around each other until they were wrapped together. Deirdre became known as Deirdre of the Sorrows in Irish legend. One of our large Irish navy ships is named after her, The L. E. Deirdre.



Cú Chulainn

Another legend tells the story of another hero in Ireland many hundreds of years ago. When he was born he was given the name of Setanta. From an early age he was a fast runner and a skilled athlete and played hurling.

It was said he could hit the ball, run ahead and still catch the ball before it hit the ground. Soon his skill and strength were heard about by the king and he asked him to join his army.



The blacksmith who made the swords and weapons for the king's soldiers was a man called Culann. One day he invited the whole army to his house for a feast. When they were all in his house, Culann let out his fierce hound to guard the house while they were eating.

However, he had forgotten that Setanta had not yet arrived. When he arrived at Culann's gate, the hound ran at him to attack, Setanta had only his hurley and ball. So, he hit the ball, it landed in the mouth of the hound and choked him and the hound dropped dead. Culann was very sad. Setanta promised that from that day on he would guard his house in place of the hound. From then on, he became known as Cú Chulainn which in Irish means The Hound of Culann.

Irish leprechauns

Many legends that have been passed down over the years tell us strange and magical tales of Irish fairies, the most popular of these being the Irish leprechauns.

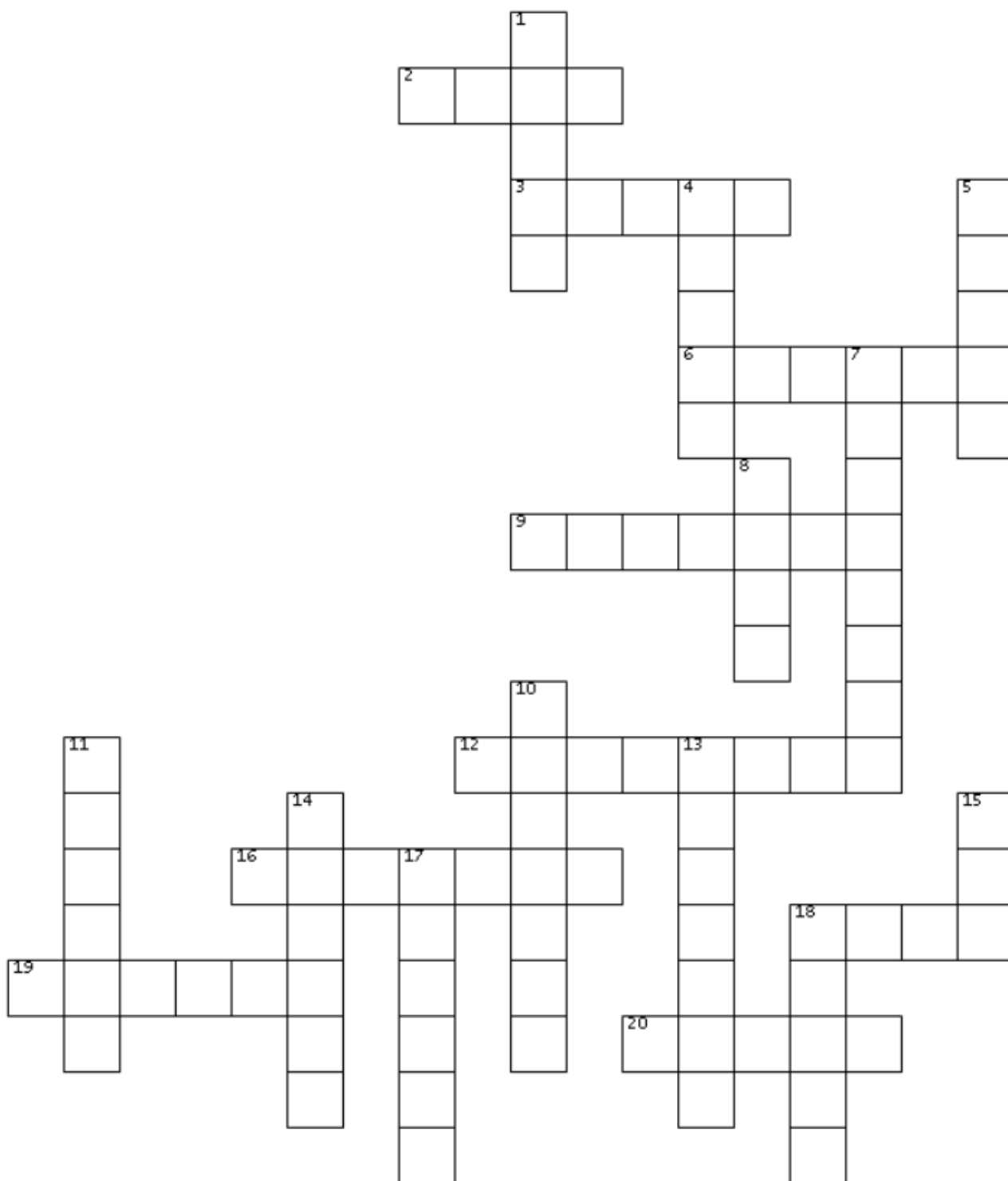


They were said to be small little men with red hair and beards who had pots of gold hidden in secret locations. They were smart and quick and impossible to catch but if you did manage to catch one he had to grant you three wishes to let him go. The Leprechaun has become a symbol of Ireland especially around Saint Patricks Day when some people like to dress up as a leprechaun.

Saint Patrick's Day Crossword



The answers are all things Irish (clues are on the next page).



Clues

Across

2. Irish dinner, Irish _____



3. Smallest county in Ireland

6. Famous Irish boxer, Katie _____



9. Bacon and _____



12. Symbol of Ireland



16. Black _____



18. Lead singer with the Irish band U2

19. Paul _____ Irish actor

20. This colour is always associated with Ireland



Down

1. Book of _____, oldest book in the world can be seen in Trinity College



4. Mr _____



5. County known as the Kingdom

7. This county are the All Ireland senior Hurling champions of 2023

8. A musical instrument, symbol of Ireland



10. Longest river in Ireland, River _____

11. Rock of _____ in Tipperary

13. Galtee _____, a breakfast favourite



14. Used in popular Irish game



15. Largest post office in Ireland

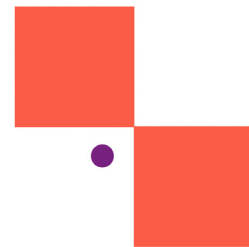


17. Current senior football All Ireland champions 2023

18. Irish Soda _____

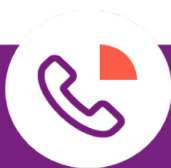


Notes



Further help is available

If you need help with these worksheets, or with reading, writing, maths or digital skills, you can contact the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA).



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