

Name _____

Date _____

Irish Lace

Irish lace is world-famous for its intricate designs, which are created from very simple patterns. Although lace-making today is a big business—large factories now roll off yards of the fabric in just minutes—the manufacture of Irish lace had relatively humble origins. In the beginning, its production was nothing more than a cottage industry.

In the 1800s Ireland was a land divided between the rich and the poor. Many families in Ireland lived in small cottages on little plots of land called crofts. Wealthy Irish lords owned this land, and the families who lived there (called tenant farmers) produced crops for them. The family usually grew its own food on the land not used for producing crops for the land owner. Most of the tenant farmers were very poor with little money for necessities.



Struggling with a lack of land and rocky soil, tenant farmers eventually found a reliable crop to grow: potatoes. Potatoes became the primary staple found on the crofts. But when the potato blight swept across the country between 1845 and 1851, massive crops were destroyed and thousands starved.

During this difficult time, relief for some Irish families came from an unexpected place. Many of the Catholic nuns in Ireland were familiar with how to make Venetian lace. Since Irish women had been producing rough cloth for their families for generations, the nuns realized their lace-making skills presented an opportunity to help save people from the famine. They created schools to teach many girls and women how to produce the fine crochet that has come to be known as "Irish lace." The wealthier Irish families that could afford to buy the lace earned the nickname "lace curtain Irish."

The designs of the lace were made up of detailed patterns that were developed by individual families. To preserve the originality of each family's designs, the patterns were closely guarded secrets passed from mother to daughter. The details of the patterns were kept so secret, in fact, that many of them were lost as the families either died or fled the poverty for other lands.

Eventually, the crochet schools established by the nuns in the 1850s and 1860s disappeared as fashions changed and the demand for Irish lace declined. The introduction of factory production also changed the industry; mass production of lace is now the norm.

In the 1880s, however, there was a brief revival of the cottage lace industry, and this time period produced most of the samples that are now family heirlooms or museum pieces.

1) Based on its use in paragraph 1, it can be understood that **humble** belongs to which of the following word groups?

- A. unassuming, modest, ordinary
- B. bashful, shy, meek
- C. poor, deprived, meager
- D. crude, rough, raw

2) The main purpose of this passage is to

- A. explain how Irish lace is made
- B. trace the decline of handmade Irish lace
- C. present the effects of the potato famine on Irish crafts
- D. provide a background on Irish lace production

3) According to the passage, Irish women stopped making lace because

- I. demand for it decreased
- II. it went out of fashion
- III. many families had fled Ireland

- A. I only
- B. I and II only
- C. II and III only
- D. I, II, and III

4) As used in the final paragraph, which is the best SYNONYM for **revival**?

- A. rebirth
- B. remembrance
- C. reduction
- D. renovation

5) Based on the information in the passage, the reader can infer that the 19th century potato blight

- A. caused the Irish to adopt the Catholic faith
- B. led to improved farming techniques
- C. was responsible for a deadly famine
- D. undermined the Irish lace industry

6) Based on inferences you can make from the passage, what is a cottage industry? Why was Irish lace once considered a cottage industry?

Answers and Explanations

1) A

Core Standard: **Craft and Structure**

humble (*adjective*): low in rank, importance or level; modest.

In paragraph 1, the author writes, “Although lace-making today is a big business—large factories now roll off yards of the fabric in just minutes—the manufacture of Irish lace had relatively humble origins. In the beginning, its production was nothing more than a cottage industry.” From this information we can infer that something *humble* is in contrast to something large and grand like a “big business.” Since the production of Irish lace in the beginning “was nothing more than a cottage industry,” we can understand that the humble beginnings of this industry were small and common, not big and grand. Something that is small and common could also be described as *unassuming*, *modest*, and *ordinary*. This means that **(A)** is correct.

Although a humble person might be shy, it does not make sense to describe the origins of an industry as *bashful*, *shy*, and *mEEK*. These words describe people, not industries. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect.

While the Irish people who began the lace-making industry were mostly poor, it is incorrect to say that the beginnings of the industry were *poor*, *deprived*, and *meager*. On the contrary, the industry, though humble, made money for the families who produced the lace. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect.

Crude, *rough*, and *raw* are all words that have a negative connotation. The word humble, however, does not have a negative connotation. Something humble may be small and ordinary, but it is not necessarily inferior. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

2) D

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

In order to identify the author’s purpose, we need to examine the main ideas of each paragraph. Paragraph 1 identifies Irish lace-making as a “typical cottage industry.” Paragraphs 2 and 3 give background information about the economic circumstances of Irish tenant farmers. Paragraph 4 explains how nuns taught Irish women to make lace so they could earn enough money to save their families from starvation. Paragraph 5 describes the secrecy of the lace designs. Paragraph 6 explains why the lace cottage industry declined. Paragraph 7 notes that most lace pieces which are “family heirlooms or museum pieces” come from the brief revival of Irish lace decades later. Through these various topics we learn what Irish lace is, how and why it developed, and why it declined.

Since the passage provides a general overview of the history of the Irish lace industry, we can conclude that the primary purpose of the passage is to provide a brief background on Irish lace production. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

Although paragraph 4 indicates that Irish lace is made from “fine crochet,” there is no other information in the passage about how it is made. Since this is only one detail in the passage, explaining how Irish lace is made cannot be the primary purpose. This means **(A)** is incorrect.

Paragraph 6 describes the decline of Irish lace, but that is only one brief part of the passage, so it cannot represent the author's primary purpose. This makes **(B)** incorrect.

While paragraph 3 identifies the potato famine as a cause of the Irish lace industry, the passage does not mention effects of the famine on any other Irish crafts. Also, this topic is only one brief part of the passage. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect.

3) B

Core Standard: **Key Ideas and Details**

In paragraph 6, the author writes, "The crochet schools established by the nuns in the 1850s and 1860s disappeared as...the demand for the cottage lace declined." From this information we can understand that because the demand for lace decreased, Irish women stopped making lace. This supports **option (I)**.

In paragraph 6, the author also claims that the crochet schools "disappeared as fashions changed." From this information we can understand that Irish women stopped making lace in part because it went out of fashion. This support **option (II)**.

In paragraph 5, we learn that "the details of the patterns were kept so secret, in fact, that many of them were lost as the families either died or fled the poverty for other lands." This tells us that the patterns were lost because many families fled Ireland, but it does not suggest that women stopped making lace because families had fled. This eliminates **option (III)**. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

4) A

Core Standard: **Craft and Structure**

revival (*noun*): an instance of something becoming popular, active, or important again; resurgence; reawakening.

In paragraph 6 we learn that "the crochet schools established by the nuns in the 1850s and 1860s disappeared." Then, in paragraph 7, the author states, "In the 1880s, however, there was a brief revival of the cottage lace industry, and this time period produced most of the samples that are now family heirlooms or museum pieces." From this information, we can infer that the schools disappeared after the 1860s, but two decades later, in the 1880s, lace was made again for a brief time. We know that lace was being made again then because that "time period produced most of the samples" of Irish lace that we have now. This means we can conclude that the cottage lace industry briefly was active and popular again, so *revival* must mean something becoming active again. This means *rebirth*, or an instance of rising again, is the best synonym. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

Remembrance means a memory. Because Irish lace was being made again, the industry was more than just a memory. It was active once more. This makes **(B)** incorrect.

Reduction means the decrease or lessening of something. The Irish lace industry was not decreasing in the 1880s—it actually began again. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect.

Renovation means restoration to a good condition or made new again. The word "renovation" is

almost always used to refer to a concrete thing, like a house or a piece of furniture, rather than an abstract concept like an industry. Although the industry did start up again in the 1880s, it was not technically made new again. Therefore **(D)** is not the best answer choice.

5) C

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

Paragraph 3 says: "But when the potato blight swept across the country between 1845 and 1851, massive crops were destroyed and thousands starved." Paragraph 4 describes this time as a "famine." Therefore, the reader can tell that the potato blight led to a deadly famine. Choice **(C)** is correct.

The passage does not provide any evidence to support choices **(A)**, **(B)** or **(D)**. Therefore they are incorrect.