

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?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---