Challenge Four

Waterways Ireland
Uiscebhealaí Éireann Watterweys Airlann

Nature Navvies Programme



www.learning.waterwaysireland.org



Nature Navvies Challenge Four:
Ireland's First Motorways - History

Resources

Waterways Ireland map, shovel, sheets of coloured card

Introduction

Having read "Crazy Canal Cycle" write the year 1756 onto the whiteboard. Ask the children to guess why this was an important year in relation to Ireland's waterways. Explain to them that this was the year that the building of the Grand Canal started. The Grand Canal runs parallel to the Royal Canal. They operated as rival canals.

Body of Lesson

Ask the children to list seasons why the canal was built over 250 years ago. They may recall that in "Crazy Canal Cycle" Lucas explains to Lottie that canals were constructed to allow barges (flat bottomed boats which could be towed and carried people and goods) to transport goods throughout the country.

Show the children the map of Ireland outlining the waterways. Ask the children to locate the waterway nearest to their school.

Now examine the route of the Grand Canal. Point out that it cuts right across the country. It was like Ireland's first motorway and was a means for barges to transport goods throughout the country. Ask the children to give examples of goods that may have been transported (turf, whiskey, Guinness, bricks...).

How were the canals built? Discuss the role of the navvies noting the physical work they had to carry out because of lack of machinery. Take the children outdoors with the shovel. Allow them to become navvies. Give each child a turn of attempting to dig a hole and experience the difficult job the navvies had.

On returning to the classroom discuss the difficulties that the navvies may have encountered. The main difficulty was trying to dig through a country that was not flat. To overcome this problem locks were required on the canal to move barges through the huge steps needed to allow the canal to become a complete inland waterway in Ireland's bumpy countryside.

Show the children the video which shows the workings of a lock. https://www.waterwaysireland.org/how-locks-work

Where does the water in the canal come from and how does it stays put? Explain to them that canal were lined with puddle clay which made it in impermeable/waterproof. Water is fed into the canals from springs, lakes and reservoirs.

The canals took approximately 50 years to complete and for many years they were a hive of activity. In 1853 passenger boats were withdrawn as steam trains were invented. Ask the children why people chose steam trains instead of boats to travel on. What happened on the canals as a result of the steam trains? Discuss the decline of the canal as a means of transport. Discuss the increase in biodiversity along canals and the present use of canals as a source of leisure.

Activity



Place the children into groups of 5.

Distribute 5 sheets of A4 card to each group. Ask each group to create a timeline for the Grand Canal using the following time intervals. Illustrate each time interval.

1. Construction begins on the Grand Canal 1756
2. A hive activity for transporting good across the country 1804
3. Introduction of steam trains 1853
4. Traffic slows down on the canals 1910
5. Canal is used for leisure today