



Connecting with the past through newspaper archives



Schools in Ireland now have free access to digitised newspaper archives



Did you ever wonder how newspapers reported the sinking of the Titanic in April 1912? Or how much a house cost in Dublin back in 1950? Schools in Ireland can now research and answer these questions first hand though a range of newspaper archives that are free to access in schools.

The *Irish Times* digital archive has been available to schools for free for some years now through the Schools Broadband Network – and is also available free in public libraries – but in the last year Scoilnet has licensed the use of the Irish Newspaper Archive which brings a further 60 plus national and local titles into the classroom, including the *Irish Independent*, *Irish Press*, *Irish Examiner* and *Belfast Newsletter*. These newspapers provide a unique view into Ireland's past and are a rich source of primary source material covering hundreds of years of Irish and European history.

Using the archive in class

The primary school curriculum places an emphasis on the use of documentary and visual evidence as a central methodology. Developing the investigative skills of working as an historian are critical in enabling pupils to achieve a balance in acquiring knowledge on the one hand while simultaneously developing skills and attitudes. Pupils' engagement with newspaper archives serve to develop these skills by encouraging pupils to use evidence, understand cause and effect,

use synthesis and communication and to develop empathy.

The accidental discovery of an ageing and yellowing newspaper during a house clear-out can bring people back to a different place and time. Digitised newspaper archives can have the same impact and can bring history to life in class. Here are a few practical suggestions for getting started with newspaper archives in a classroom:

- Explore what happened on a key date in a pupil's life, e.g. birthday or the birthday of a parent or grandparent. What was the weather like that day and what was popular on TV?
- Examine how transport, communications and clothes have changed over time. Advertisements reflect popular culture and the range of items and services on offer and are a vital source of information about a society at a particular time.
- Compare and contrast property prices or food prices over time. Give the pupils a sum of money to spend say 40, 50 and 60 years ago and see how the value of money changes over time.
- Probe what life was like in Ireland during World War II. Children should become familiar with key terms, like blackout, gas mask, rationing, etc while also getting a feel for the major events of the war.

Throughout the activities, children could work co-operatively in groups while

searching within specific date ranges and within specific newspapers. Groups could prepare reports on their findings and report back to the class.

Local studies

The SESE curriculum puts an emphasis on locality and the regional newspapers within the Irish Newspaper Archive provide the perfect place to explore how a specific locality has changed over time. Indeed, all of the suggested activities listed above could be undertaken in the prism of the pupils' local newspapers.

History is about the real lives of people based on documentary evidence. Newspapers give insights into what were important issues for people living at the time and are useful for reminding pupils of the variety of opinions held by different people and communities.

Scoilnet contains ready-made lesson activities for teachers to use in their class. Many of these activities are self-contained and while they pull from archived news stories they do not always require access to the live archive.

www.scoilnet.ie/scoilnet/tools-for-teachers/

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