

The past in my place: using the 1926 census to investigate my local area

Junior Cycle History	Strand One: The Nature of History • Developing historical consciousness • Working with evidence
Junior Cycle History Learning Outcomes	Students should be able to 1.3 appreciate their cultural inheritance through recognising historically significant places and buildings and discussing why historical personalities, events and issues are commemorated 1.6 debate the usefulness and limitations of different types of primary and secondary sources of historical evidence, such as written, visual, aural, oral and tactile evidence; and appreciate the contribution of archaeology and new technology to historical enquiry 1.8 investigate a repository of historical evidence such as a museum, library, heritage centre, digital or other archive or exhibition
Learning Intentions	To be able to: • Investigate the 1926 census as a digital archive to find information about a street or townland in their local area • Collate the data gathered to draw conclusions about life in that street or townland in 1926 • Recognise links between the 1926 census and the present-day place — a building still standing, a family name, or something remembered locally • Debate the usefulness and limitations of the census as a source, and consider what other types of source could add



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Success Criteria	• I can navigate to the correct census return for a local street or townland using the National Archives online records. • I can gather my assigned data (households, birthplaces, Irish speakers or occupations) accurately from the return. • I can work with my group to write a short account of life in the street or townland using our combined data. • I can identify at least one building, name or feature from the 1926 return that still exists or is remembered in the area today. • I can give one strength and one limitation of the census as a source, and name one other type of source that could tell us something the census cannot.
Resources	<u>National Archives of Ireland online census records</u> <u>1926 Census – Learning Resource document</u> <u>The 1926 Census Guidance Note for Teachers</u> <u>Scoilnet Maps</u> Internet access Access to digital devices

Lesson Activities	At the start of any lesson using census records, teachers should make students aware of sensitivities around the personal nature of the data being used. This particularly applies to this lesson, where students may have connections to the street/townland under investigation; students may recognise family names, neighbours' families, or their own address, and some residents recorded will have descendants living locally today. See <i>The 1926 Census Guidance Note for Teachers</i>. Repeat this reminder aloud when the task is set. Starter: Check in with students' prior knowledge of what a census is. Students may have knowledge of participating in a census. 1. Teacher gives a brief overview of what a census is, and of the 1926 census in particular as the first census of the Irish Free State. The document 1926 Census – Learning Resource will be helpful here. 2. In advance, the teacher identifies a suitable local street or townland and its District Electoral Division (DED), and test-runs the search, checking the return has enough households to divide across a group of four, and that the birthplace and Irish-language fields are legible and filled in. 3. Organise students into groups of four. Ask students to navigate to the census section of the National Archives website, input the year 1926 and the name of the DED. Assign different research tasks to each student in the group: • Student 1 counts the households in the street/townland and works out the average number of people per household. • Student 2 counts the people born in a county other than the local one, and adds anyone born outside Ireland. • Student 3 counts the number of people in the street/townland who can speak Irish and expresses this as a percentage. • Student 4 makes a list of the occupations of the residents of the street/townland. As students work, teachers should circulate to help with any occupation titles or entries that are unclear, abbreviated or unfamiliar – these should be recorded as written, and queried, not guessed. 4. The group comes together to write a short account of life in the street/townland from their combined findings. To move from four separate answers to a conclusion, prompt them: Taken together, what do the occupations, birthplaces and levels of Irish suggest the community is like? What kind of place does the data paint? 5. Turning from the data to the place itself, students use an online map or street-view (and any local knowledge in the room) to consider: • Does the street or townland still exist under the same name? • Are any 1926 buildings still standing? • Is anyone or anything connected to the area commemorated today (e.g. a plaque, a monument, a street or building name)? • Why might some people, places or events be remembered while others leave no visible trace? This connects the 1926 residents to the present-day place and asks students what their own locality chooses to remember.
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Plenary	Students participate in a class discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of census records as a source of evidence. • How are census records useful to historians? • What are their weaknesses or limits? What can the census <i>not</i> tell you that another kind of source (a photograph, a map, an oral memory, the building itself) could? • This census is digitised and online. How does that change who can use it, and how easily?
Differentiation	Some of the activities in this lesson involve mathematical calculations that some students may find challenging. Assign Student 4's task, which requires no calculation, to students who find maths challenging; the tasks of students 1 and 3 involve the most calculation. Stronger students may research a second local street or area from the same census for comparison, or follow up one building or family name from the return using another source.