

# Infant Lesson Plan 5 – The History of Cheese

## Objective:

To help pupils understand the history of cheese in Ireland.

Duration: 30 minutes (approximately).

## Curricular Links:

SESE (History) → Story → Stories from the lives of people in the past

## Word of the Day

**Bán Biad:** A special term in Irish meaning *White Meats*, used to describe all the dairy foods that Irish people used to eat.

## Classroom Discussion

Ask pupils the following:

Can they remember what happens to milk to make it become cheese? (Refer to Lesson Plan 4, 'Cheese Up Your Life').

## Activity

- Read to the pupils the History of Cheese and talk about what life would have been like for the boys and girls living in Ireland then.

### History of Cheese

- Ireland is famous for rain, grass and cows, and combining rain, grass and cows gives you milk!
- Before Irish people had potatoes, they kept big herds of cows guarded by boys or *buachaillí* (cow boys) and they ate lots of milky things.
- Milking was the girls' work and they made milky drinks like yogurts, curds and soft cheeses.
- Irish people ate so many milk and cheese products that they had a special word for all this food; they called it 'white meats', *bán biad*.
- Before refrigerators, people had to change their milk into a food that would keep for a long time so this is why cheese was invented.
- Cheese is simply milk that keeps for a long time!
- So milk is magic because it's good when it's fresh but it can also be transformed into tasty, creamy, hard cheeses.
- Cheese is one of Ireland's oldest foods and it's more than 1000 years old.
- One story of ancient Ireland says that Queen Medb was killed by a piece of hard cheese that was hurled at her by a warrior from his sling.
- When potatoes came to Ireland, the people started to use their milk for making butter, which they could sell at markets.
- Slowly cheese disappeared and only wealthy people in big houses carried on making cheese.
- In the early 1900s, Irish farmers started making small amounts of cheese again, especially Cheddar.
- In the 1970s many factories started making a variety of different cheeses. Some people also started making cheese at home again.
- Today you can find almost 100 varieties of Irish cheese – all delicious and all a piece of milk magic.



## Did you know?

Cheddar cheese is part of the 'milk, yogurt and cheese' food group in the Food Pyramid (refer to Lesson Plan 1, 'Healthy Eating'). Three servings are recommended per day from this food group for children aged 5 - 8 years, with five daily servings recommended for those aged 9 - 18 years. Examples of a serving include **200ml of milk, 125g of yogurt or a 25g piece of Cheddar cheese.**

Cheddar cheese provides many important nutrients such as **calcium, protein, phosphorus and vitamin B12.**

## Class Activity

After discussing the History of Cheese, explain to the class that they are going to play a miming game.

- Make some space in the classroom or hall and get the class to stand facing you.
- When you call out 'buachaillí' all the pupils in the class will mime mixing the milk in the churn to make cheese.
- When you call out 'milking girls' all the pupils in the class will mime milking the cow to get milk.
- When you call out 'cheese' the whole class will sit on the floor.
- The last one to sit down is out.

## Extension Activities

1. Look at the pictures of different animals that produce milk. Check that the children can recognise and name all these animals (cows, camels, buffalo, sheep, goats, horses, deer).
2. Read the children the story of Queen Medb and how she was killed when she was hit with a piece of hard cheese by a warrior.
3. Find out how cheese is made (Lesson Plan 4, 'Cheese Up Your Life').
4. Find out how yogurt is made.

## Bring it Home

*How are your pupils getting involved?*

See the website for suggested ways of encouraging your pupils to take home what they have learned about their local dairy and how milk is produced. As a homework exercise, you can ask your pupils to:

1. Look in their fridge and find out what dairy company their milk, cheese and yogurt comes from and try to find out how long they have been producing dairy products for.
2. Talk to their parents about dairy products when they were young – what kind of packaging did they come in and how does it differ to today?
3. See if they can source an old milk bottle that milk used to be delivered in for the rest of the class to see.