

# Senior 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

## Words 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.

**Rennet:** This enzyme is a natural extract from the stomach of a calf. It causes the curd to form during cheese production.

## Classroom Discussion

Ask pupils the following:

- What happens to milk to make it become cheese? (Refer to Lesson Plan 4, 'Cheese Up Your Life').
- How do you think cheese was invented?
- What would you like to learn about the History of Cheese? (Record their responses on the whiteboard or flipchart).

## History of Cheese

### Before the Potato (c. 500–1600)

Ireland is famous for rain, grass and cows, and combining rain, grass and cows gives you milk. Before the potato was introduced to Ireland, people ate lots of milky products such as yogurts, curds, and soft cheeses. Farmers kept big herds of cows often guarded by boys or *Buachaillí* (cow boys). In summer, it was the girls' job to do all the milking.

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*. In the days before *refrigerators*, shops or markets, people had to transform their milk into a food that would keep over the cold winter months, and 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, making it one of Ireland's oldest foods – more than 1000 years old!

In fact, 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.

### A Changing Ireland (1600s)

When potatoes came to Ireland, people ate less cheese and instead they used their milk for making butter, which they could sell at the market. Slowly, cheese disappeared and it was mostly wealthy people in big houses that made cheese like cream cheese and curd cheese, often adding lemon, sugar and spices.

### Cheese today

As sales in butter started to fall in the early 1900s, cheese-making became popular 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.



## Activity

### History of Cheese

Ask the pupils to read the cloze procedure about the History of Cheese and fill in the blanks with the correct words from the list. (Cloze procedure attached at the end of the lesson plan).

### 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 information in the cloze procedure divide the class into groups and ask them to think of a short improvisation or drama about what life would have been like for the boys and girls in Ireland back then. Give the groups some examples of key characters that might help them develop their drama:

Buachaillí  
Cows  
Landlord

Milking girls  
Sheep

## Extension Activities

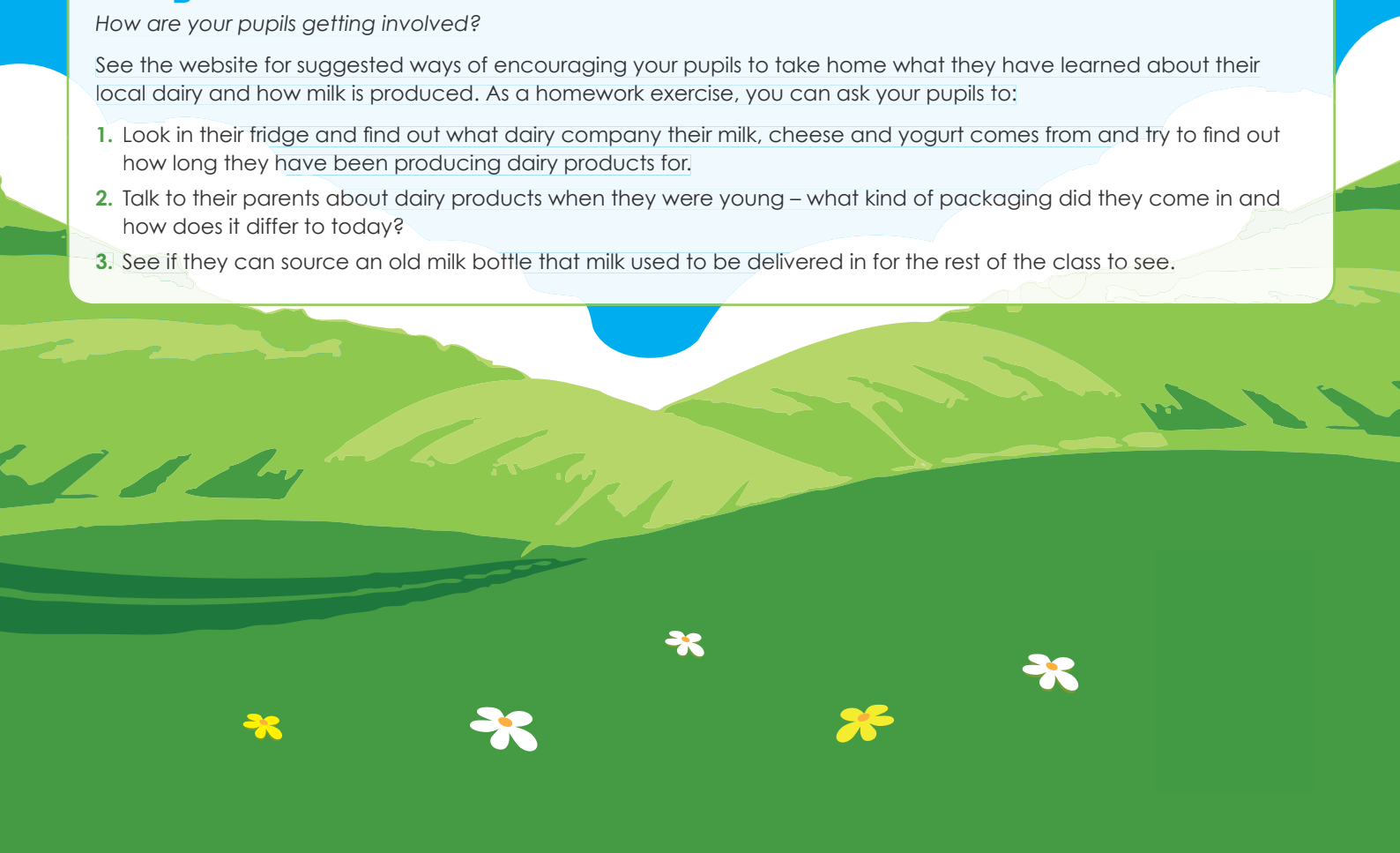
1. Give the children the name of a well-known cheese produced in Ireland and ask them to do some research on the internet about the company, where they started and how long they have been making cheese.
2. Read the pupils the story of Queen Medb and how she was killed when she was hit with a piece of 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.



## History of Cheese

Buachaillí	refrigerators
cheese	market
varieties	warrior

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