



Strand | The Island of Ireland

Strand Unit: Identity and heritage	
Stage	3 (Third and fourth classes)
Subject	History
Learning Outcome	<i>Through appropriately playful and engaging learning experiences children should be able to research aspects of the story of their locality and the island of Ireland, including significant events, people, customs and the origins of place names.</i>
Relevant Key Competencies	CL – Being a communicator and using language AC – Being an active learner C – Being creative
Topic: <i>Life in Norman Ireland</i>	<i>Life in Norman Ireland was a time of great change, when new people, ideas and ways of living arrived on the island. The Normans introduced castles, towns and new farming methods, leaving behind a legacy that can still be seen in Ireland today.</i>

Why is learning about this topic important?	What will this look like in the classroom?
<p>Learning about <i>Life in Norman Ireland</i> helps children explore one of the most important changes in Irish history. When the Normans arrived in the 12th century, they brought new ways of living, building, farming, and governing that had a lasting effect on Ireland.</p> <p>Children investigate how the Normans built castles and towns, introduced new farming methods, and influenced family names and place names that are still familiar today. They explore how life was different for people living in a Norman castle compared to an Irish village, and consider what everyday life—such as food, clothes, games, and customs—was like at the time.</p> <p>Children have opportunities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discover how invasion and settlement shaped local communities and the Irish landscape • explore the contrast between Irish and Norman ways of life and recognise what changed and what stayed the same • connect local history to the national story by researching nearby castles, ruins, or Norman place names • develop curiosity and historical thinking through maps, artefacts, stories, and imaginative activities such as role play or model-making 	<p>Children have opportunities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explore and interpret different sources related to Norman Ireland (e.g., maps, drawings of castles, photographs of ruins, replicas of coins or artefacts) • investigate how the arrival of the Normans changed life in Ireland, considering buildings, farming, clothing, and towns • appreciate the influences of the Normans over time, such as family names, place names, and castle ruins in their local area • use creative methods such as model-making, drama, storytelling, or digital tools to show their understanding of Norman life and culture

Ideas for children working as historians

Concept	Ideas
Time and chronology	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Place the arrival of the Normans (1169) within a simple timeline of Irish history and understand that historical events happen in sequence (<i>e.g., marking the Norman arrival alongside other events such as the Viking settlements</i>) and use common words and phrases associated with time• Create a classroom wall display or digital timeline to track key developments such as the first motte-and-bailey castles, the building of stone keeps and the growth of Norman towns developing an increasing understanding of time and chronology• Link local history by plotting nearby Norman castles or ruins on the timeline to see how national and local stories connect
Cause and effect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore and discuss the reasons why the Normans came to Ireland (<i>e.g., alliances with Irish chieftains, opportunities for land and power</i>) and how this led to change in the short and long term• Investigate how the introduction of Norman castles, towns, farming methods, and laws affected the lives of Irish people at the time• Reflect on how Norman influence is still seen today (<i>e.g., family names with “Fitz-” or “De-”, place names, ruins</i>) showing how past causes have continuing effects
Change and continuity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Compare life in an Irish settlement before 1169 with life in a Norman town or castle afterwards (<i>e.g., clothes, food, farming tools, weapons, housing</i>)• Explore and discuss changes that occurred locally after the Normans arrived (<i>e.g., construction of a nearby castle, introduction of surnames, market towns</i>)• Examine aspects that have stayed the same over time, such as castle ruins still visible today, or traditional place names that remain in use

Skill	Ideas
Historical thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore how the arrival of the Normans changed Ireland and understand that groups of people can shape how a country develops • Consider how people's lives were different in Norman times (e.g., <i>living in a wooden or stone castle, working as a knight, a farmer, or a craftsman</i>) to build empathy and perspective • Recognise that different sources tell us different things about the past (e.g., <i>compare a modern photograph of a castle ruin with an artist's reconstruction, and discuss what each shows and what questions they raise</i>)
Chronological thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare different stages of Norman influence (e.g., <i>wooden motte-and-bailey castles giving way to stone castles; small settlements growing into larger towns</i>) • Situate Norman history within the broader sweep of Irish history (e.g., <i>recognising that Normans came after the Vikings</i>) • Notice patterns such as castles being built in strategic locations near rivers or coasts, recognising how these choices repeat across history
Using evidence and sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore images, maps, artefacts, or replicas (e.g., <i>coins, armour, tools, manuscripts</i>) to gather clues about daily life in Norman Ireland • Read or listen to simple accounts or stories about key Norman figures (e.g., <i>Strongbow, Aoife</i>) and discuss what these reveal about the time • Observe and handle models or digital recreations of castles/towns and reflect on what these show us about how people lived, worked, and defended themselves
Questioning and investigating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate their own questions about Norman life, such as: <i>"Why did the Normans build castles?"</i>, <i>"What was it like to live in a Norman town?"</i>, or <i>"Why do some surnames start with 'Fitz'?"</i> • Carry out a small class inquiry into a local castle, ruin, or Norman place name using maps, photographs, or community knowledge • Develop follow-up questions as they explore sources (e.g., <i>"Why were castles often built on hills?"</i> or <i>"What happened to Norman towns later in history?"</i>)

Ideas for children’s learning through the elements:

Inquiring	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pose their own historical questions such as “<i>Why did the Normans come to Ireland?</i>”, “<i>What was life like in a castle?</i>”, or “<i>How did the Normans change Ireland?</i>” Children brainstorm and record questions on a KWL chart (<i>What I Know, What I Want to know, What I Learned</i>). They could ask about battles, food, clothing, or why castles were so important, encouraging curiosity-led research• Explore a variety of historical sources, including images of castles, artefacts (e.g., <i>coins, armour, tools</i>) and artists’ reconstructions of towns. Children could be provided with photographs of real Norman castles, sketches of medieval armour, or museum artefacts. They could compare artists’ impressions with actual ruins to spot similarities or differences• Conduct simple local investigations, such as researching or visiting a Norman site nearby, or finding out about local place names with Norman links. (e.g., <i>they could map Norman castles in their county</i>)
Communicating	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create timelines or visual displays showing key events (e.g., <i>Norman arrival in 1169, building of motte-and-bailey castles, growth of towns</i>). Children might work in groups to design a wall timeline, adding pictures or short captions. They could even use string or arrows to connect events to local sites or long-term changes• Take part in a role-play or short drama as Norman knights, Irish chieftains, or townspeople, presenting different perspectives on events (e.g., <i>act out a day in a Norman market town, highlighting different roles and social classes</i>).• Create and present a short “travel guide” or poster for a Norman castle or town, explaining what visitors might see or do there. This could include drawings of the keep, moat, or marketplace, alongside “fun facts” for tourists. It encourages children to explain history in accessible ways, like young tour guides
Understanding and connecting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Compare life in a Norman castle or town with their own lives today looking at aspects such as food, clothing, housing, defence, community (e.g., <i>create a ‘Venn diagram’ illustrating ‘then’, ‘now’ and what is common to the past and present</i>). This helps them see both contrasts and continuities• Reflect on how the Normans influenced Ireland, noticing changes that remain today (e.g., <i>surnames beginning with “Fitz”, ruins of castles, place names</i>). Children can research surnames in their class or community, linking them back to Norman settlers. They might also explore why many Irish towns grew around Norman castles• Explore how the arrival of the Normans links to broader themes such as community, identity and cultural change over time• This could involve discussing how the Normans introduced new farming methods, trade networks and laws, and what this meant for Irish identity, allowing children to see history as a story of change and continuity, not just isolated events

Ideas for teaching:

Pedagogical approach	Ideas
Story	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share stories or legends connected to Norman Ireland (e.g., <i>Strongbow and Aoife, life in a castle</i>) to bring the period alive and provide a personal angle• Use storytelling to introduce different perspectives – e.g., <i>the viewpoint of a Norman knight, an Irish chieftain, or a child living in a Norman town</i>• Invite children to create their own short, illustrated story, diary entry, or comic strip imagining “a day in the life” of someone in Norman Ireland
Place-based learning and fieldwork outdoors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organise a visit (or <i>virtually explore</i>) a local Norman site such as a motte-and-bailey castle, stone castle, town wall to observe features of Norman architecture• Use maps and aerial photographs to locate where Normans settled in Ireland and discuss why these sites were chosen (e.g., <i>rivers, fertile land, defence</i>)• Encourage children to sketch or photograph features from the visit and reflect on how the landscape influenced daily life
Inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Begin with children’s own questions about Norman life: “<i>What was it like to live in a castle?</i>” “<i>Why did the Normans build towns?</i>”• Explore sources such as images of coins, tools, castles, or reconstructed Norman towns to find answers• Guide small-group investigations into themes such as food, clothing, defence, or trade, with each group sharing findings back to the class

Ideas for integration:

Subject	Learning Outcome	Ideas
Geography	<p>Strand: <i>My locality</i></p> <p>Examine the common economic activities of people in the locality, such as food and farming, forestry, fishing, industry, services, tourism, recreation, etc., exploring how these have changed over time</p>	<p>Children use maps and sources to find Norman settlement sites in Ireland, examine the economic activities these settlements supported (<i>farming, markets, trade, services</i>), and explore how those activities have changed over time</p> <p>Children are provided with maps and aerial photographs showing Norman castles, motte-and-bailey sites, and towns and locate these sites on maps. Drawing on sources (<i>text descriptions, illustrations, artefacts</i>) that tell about Norman farming, trade, markets, crafts, and services (<i>in castle towns</i>), children could derive information about what economic activities were common in Norman settlements (<i>e.g. farming, markets, craftspeople</i>) and compare with economic activities in the locality today</p>
Mathematics	<p>Strand: <i>Data and Chance</i></p> <p>Collect, display and critically analyse data in a range of ways for various purposes</p>	<p>Children investigate the dimensions of Norman castles and compare them to modern structures</p> <p>Using scale drawings or models of a Norman castle, children estimate the height of walls, width of moats, or length of a keep. They measure scaled representations (<i>e.g., 1 cm = 1 m</i>) with rulers/tape measures to calculate real-life dimensions and extend outdoors: (<i>e.g., children measure out the footprint of a Norman motte-and-bailey or stone castle in the playground/field to visualise scale</i>)</p>
Science (STEM)	<p>Strand: <i>Energy and Forces</i></p> <p>investigate and describe how forces can cause simple machines to operate. Using fair testing, investigate how forces can cause objects to move, stop and change speed, direction or shape</p>	<p>Children study and investigate how drawbridges, gates, or catapults in Norman castles used levers, pulleys, and simple machines</p> <p>They will build small models to see how these machines work</p>

Ideas for assessment:

Assessment method	Ideas
Teacher observation	<p>Children engage in role-play of life in a Norman market during which teachers may observe participation, collaboration, use of historical vocabulary (e.g., “<i>motte-and-bailey</i>”, “<i>lord</i>”, “<i>tenant</i>”), and ability to connect past and present</p> <p>Teacher notes may inform follow-up lessons, such as reinforcing key vocabulary or supporting inquiry skills</p>
Peer and self-assessment	<p>Children work in pairs to review each other’s Norman castle sketches or models, using a simple checklist (e.g., “<i>Does it include features such as towers, arrow slits, drawbridge?</i>”). They give one positive comment and one suggestion for improvement</p> <p>Children reflect on their own work by writing a short note on what they enjoyed and what they found challenging about the task and these reflections may be used by the teacher to inform planning for follow-up learning experiences</p>
Portfolios	<p>Children collect evidence of their learning across the unit (e.g., <i>drawings of castles, short written reflections, maps marking Norman sites, creative writing about life in a Norman town</i>). The portfolio shows progression and variety of learning</p> <p>Teachers may review the portfolio to identify areas where further support or challenge is needed (e.g., <i>historical detail vs. creative expression</i>)</p>

Progression

Progression in Social and Environmental Education involves the gradual development and extension of key concepts and the skills of working as a historian and geographer, enabling children to question, investigate and interpret the world around them - past and present - with increasing depth and confidence. Please note that more detailed, specific guidance on progression within Social and Environmental Education will follow in due course.

In the case of the concept of '*Cause and effect*', children's learning across the four stages could be described as follows:

"Cause and effect" involves developing an understanding that events in the past can have multiple causes and effects



The child:

begins to recognise that things in the past were different from today

recognises that changes in how people lived happened because of new inventions or discoveries

provides an explanation of developments and discoveries have affected people's lives

investigates how social and environmental changes have led to developments and discoveries that have had an impact on people's lives, providing justification for their opinion on whether such changes have been positive or negative

In the case of the skill of '*historical thinking*', children's learning across the four stages could be described as follows:

'Historical thinking' involves examining and interpreting evidence from the past to understand, question and create historical narratives.



The child:

finds out about past and present events in their own lives, and in those of their families and others

gathers and examines a wider range of historical sources to make simple observations about the past

asks questions about artefacts and sources to gain a deeper understanding about the past

asks questions about artefacts and critiques pieces of evidence to elicit information and insights about the past

Ideas for resources

School texts

Children's History Books on the Normans (*age-appropriate histories of Norman Ireland, including castle life, battles, and daily life*)

Historical Fiction books (*e.g., stories set in Norman times that allow students to explore life from a first-person perspective*)

Picture Books and Illustrated Guides (*e.g., visual depictions of Norman castles, towns, clothing, and everyday life*)

Medieval Manuscripts and Illustrations (*e.g., simplified images of Norman castles, knights, or villages, etc.*)

Photographs or replicas of tools, weapons, or household items from Norman Ireland

Maps from the period (*e.g., maps showing Norman settlements and castles in Ireland*)

Model building kits or craft materials (*for making motte-and-bailey castles, shields, or Norman clothing*)

Simple Machines (*e.g., blocks, pulleys, and levers to demonstrate how drawbridges or catapults worked*)

Costumes/dress up materials (*e.g., capes, hats, or cardboard shields for roleplay activities*)

Videos and Documentaries (*e.g. age-appropriate films on Norman Ireland, castles, and daily life*)

Visits to Castles or Historical Sites or virtual/interactive tours (*e.g., nearby Norman castles, ruins, or museums and online tours*)

School assemblies/plays