Teacher Resource Sheet

Two views of country schools

What this lesson is for

Children learn that a boy's memory and a government record each show country schools differently because of who made them, for whom and why. Sorting real evidence first lets the class name what each source can and cannot tell.

In the curriculum (NCCA Primary SEE, 2025)

Stage 4, My locality: Identity and heritage. History: investigate the history of their school within the broader context of educational developments in Ireland.

Before the lesson

- Print one activity sheet for each child; it comes with the lesson.

How the lesson runs

1. Look and wonder	4 min	4. Write it in your copy	4 min
2. Read and learn	8 min	5. What can't it tell us?	10 min
3. Sort the evidence	15 min	6. What we learned	5 min
Then the activity sheet, at the children's desks			about 14 min

Teaching tips

- Read two or three rows of the record aloud first so children hear how it sounds.
- Collect answers from the copybook lines before starting the board discussion.
- Keep the sorted cards in view during the discussion of what each source cannot tell.
- Stop the discussion after ten minutes even mid-answer to allow time for the summary.

What to watch for

- Calling a card a fact because it comes from an old record: point to the judging word, such as wretched or good, and ask whose opinion it is.
- Forgetting to give a reason when dragging a card: ask why after every drop and invite agreement from the room.
- Writing long answers in the copybook: keep to finishing the three given lines.
- **A common wrong idea:** “If two sources are about the same place, the true one is the one with numbers.” Say both can be useful and both have limits. Numbers show pay, buildings and totals; a memory can show feelings and a single day. Ask what each maker needed to notice.

Help and stretch

- Support: start with a card that has a number in it, then one with a feeling word in it.
- Extension: ask whether Catherine Dumont on the list could be the Mrs Dumont in the memory and what would still be unsure.
- Support: read the sources on the activity sheet aloud for any child who needs it.

Lesson 1

If you are short of time

Use fewer sort cards and shorten the limits talk. Keep the copy lines and the class finding before the wrap.

Background for you

Before national schools, many Irish children paid a master to teach them in barns, cabins or other borrowed rooms. William Carleton later wrote a life story that includes his first days near Clogher around 1800. In 1824 local clergy filled a government form listing schools in each parish for King and Parliament: place, teacher, pay or free, income, building and pupil numbers, not how a day felt.

County Tyrone is on the island of Ireland and part of the United Kingdom today. The two sources also differ in date: Carleton looks back more than sixty years to about 1800; the record is a snapshot of 1824 and does not list a school at Towney. We do not know how far every remembered detail matches the time, or what teachers and families thought.

Key words

source	something left from the past we can still use
memory	a person's story of their own past, often written years later
record	facts written down to keep track of things, such as a list made for government
perspective	where somebody stood, which shapes what they noticed

Children will ask

Is the memory true if he wrote it so long after? It can be true about feelings and people he knew, but after sixty years some details may be fuzzy or missing. We check it against other sources and still say what we do not know.

Why did schools meet in barns? Masters often had no school building of their own. A barn or cabin was cheap shelter. Some places only ran in the summer when a room or teacher was free.

Handle with care

Clogher and County Tyrone sit on the island of Ireland and in the United Kingdom today. Accept Irish or British wording from a child; never correct it. Pay schools and poor buildings show hard conditions: state the fact, do not dwell, and do not ask any child to speak for their family.

Activity sheet answers

1. Who tells us? Who tells us this? Circle Devoy, the inspector, or both.
Started school at six: Devoy. Short sight and seeming slow: Devoy. Rooms need light and air: inspector. Master's pay about thirty-one pounds: inspector. There was a schoolmaster: both. Boys went to Kill: both.

2. Limits Write one thing Devoy's memory cannot tell us, and one thing the inspector's report cannot tell us.
A good answer names a real gap. Example: Devoy cannot tell the master's 1868 pay or whether rooms had enough light. The inspector cannot tell how a boy felt on his first day or why short sight hid his ability.