Teacher Resource Sheet

Does it matter?

What this lesson is for

Children learn four tests historians use to judge whether a change mattered, then place five Irish changes and defend each with a test. Ranking comes after the method so judgement rests on evidence, not gut feeling.

In the curriculum (NCCA Primary SEE, 2025)

Stage 4, The island of Ireland: Identity and heritage. History: explore significant developments and/or conflicts in different eras of Irish history such as during the Neolithic Period, Bronze and Iron Ages, the Early Christian Period, Medieval Period, Early Modern Period and Modern Ireland.

Before the lesson

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

How the lesson runs

1. Look and wonder	5 min	4. Write it in your copy	5 min
2. Read and learn	11 min	5. What can't five facts tell us?	7 min
3. Place the changes	15 min	6. What we learned	5 min
Then the activity sheet, at the children's desks			about 12 min

Teaching tips

- Step through the slides on the board, pausing on each of the four tests for one child to say it back before you move on.
- Work one change at a time on the opinion line and take a show of hands before calling a child up.
- Leave the four tests visible on the board through the copybook moment and walk the room to read a few answers over shoulders.
- Collect two or three copybook judgements before asking the class to agree one working answer.

What to watch for

- Children may name a change without naming a test; prompt them to choose one of the four tests.
- Children may give thin answers with no reason; encourage them to use the short fact on the board.
- Some may want to debate all five changes deeply; focus on three well-defended placements instead.
- **A common wrong idea:** “There is one correct order of how much each change mattered.” Say plainly that the line is a judgement, not a quiz key. Praise the test and the reason from the fact. Two different places can both be well argued.

Help and stretch

- Support: Keep the four tests visible on the board during the placement activity and the copybook moment.
- Extension: Ask children to suggest a current change in Ireland that a historian might test in the future.
- Support: Use the sentence starters on the board for the paragraph writing.

Lesson 1

If you are short of time

Place only three changes on the line with full defences. Keep the copybook moment and the closing finding.

Background for you

Historians cannot tell every story, so they judge significance: how much a change mattered, to whom and why. Four common tests ask how many lives it changed, how long it lasted, whether it is still remembered, and what it reveals about life at the time. None of the five changes has a single correct place on the line. Two children can place the same change differently and both use evidence well if each names a test and a reason from the fact.

The five board facts are starting points only. Rural electrification from 1946 transformed daily work and evenings over decades. Irish television began in 1961. Free secondary education from 1967 opened schooling beyond those who could pay. Ireland joined the EEC in 1973. Mary Robinson became the first woman President in 1990. Short facts cannot show how a change felt, who was left out, or local argument.

Key words

significance	how much a change mattered, to whom and why
evidence	facts or clues we use to back a claim
test	a question we use to judge if a change mattered
change	something that made life different from before

Children will ask

Which change mattered most? There is no single right answer. What matters is naming a test and using the short fact. Historians disagree too when they ask different questions.

Were people poor before electricity? Many country homes had hard work without electric light or machines. We should not say everyone was poor. The fact is about power reaching rural houses.

Handle with care

Free schooling and rural life may touch family memory of money or opportunity. State facts calmly. Do not ask any child to speak for their family's past. Accept different views of which change mattered.

Activity sheet answers

1. Write Choose the change you think mattered least of the five. Use one of these tests while you write: how many lives it changed; how long the change lasted; whether it is still remembered; what it reveals about life at the time. Write a short paragraph that names the change, says why it mattered less than the others, and names the test you used.

Good answer names one of the five, why it mattered less, which heading test, and why that test fits. Example: first night of Irish television; fewer everyday lives changed than free secondary school; test: how many lives it changed.

2. Match Four children each gave a reason for where they put a change on the line. Which test did each one use? Draw a line from each test to the reason that uses it.

How many lives did it change?: Thousands more children could stay on at school without paying fees. How long did the change last?: Irish television is still on every day, more than sixty years later. Is it still remembered today?: Children still learn about the first woman President in school. What does it reveal about life at the time?: Before electricity came, a farm kitchen was lit by an oil lamp after dark.