Leabharlann Náisiúnta na hÉireann
National Library of Ireland

Small Lives - Photographs of Irish Childhood 1880 -1970
Primary School History Workshop

Teacher's notes
Can't make it to our Small Lives exhibition? This lesson plan brings the exhibition to your class. Provided are photographs from our collection as well as a worksheet which encourages children to develop observational and enquiry skills by looking for clues in the photographs about the past. There additional suggestions for sessions to develop the lesson plan further in your classroom.

This workshop may be modified and reproduced for use in the classroom only.

Aim: To introduce children to the idea of history as detective work by looking for clues in the photographs about the lives of children in the past

Materials: Worksheets, photographs (printed out) Computer with access to Flickr (optional) Magnifying glasses (optional)

SESE History
- Working as an Historian
- Time and Chronology
- Using Evidence
- Continuity and change over time
- Life, Society, Work and Culture

Learning Outcomes
- The development of enquiry and observational skills through close examination of the photographs
- Making comparisons, and identifying similarities and differences between their lives and how children lived in the past
- The encouragement of creativity through art and writing

Background to the Photographs

Photograph 1
This is a wealthy family on their holidays in Dunmore East, Co. Waterford. They are posing with their toys, a boat, a doll and fishing nets. The lady in the photograph is probably a nanny. The boys are wearing smocks (a type of apron) which keeps their clothes clean. There is a pony and trap waiting to bring them down to the beach. The thatched cottage in the background is probably a holiday home. Only wealthy families could afford to go on holidays at this time.

Photograph 2
This is a photograph of a young boy with a donkey and baskets. The boy has come from a day working on the bog, footing and collecting turf. It was typical for all members of the family to work on the farm. Donkeys were often used on farms, especially for heavy work like carrying baskets of turf. Turf was essential for farming families, as it provided fuel for cooking, heating and light. If you look closely at the boy, you can see his clothes are made up of patches though he is wearing a pair of boots unlike many of the children in our exhibition. Farming families could rarely afford the time or the money to go on holidays.

Photograph 3
This is a photograph of a Delle la Salle school in Waterford in 1910. The school was an all boy school and was run by the Delle la Salle Brothers. This is a well furnished classroom for the times, with educational posters around the classroom and an organ. There is no evidence of how the room was heated and the light came from the large windows. The desks are heavy and would have been nailed to the floor making them difficult to move. There are over 40 students in the class. Students are wearing their best clothes for this photograph. One of the teachers (both are priests) is holding a whip! Corporal punishment was acceptable at the time.

Photograph 4
This is a photograph of a girls' gym class. It is set in the gym hall with plenty of gym equipment such as the horse and the parallel bars. The girls are wearing a typical PE uniform of the time, a long sleeved dress, buttoned up to the neck and long stockings. They are performing their daily exercises, which is similar to a military drill. The teacher would perform the exercise and the students would copy. They often called out a chant or numbers to keep rhythm.

Other Sessions ideas

Detective Skills

Look up the catalogue of the NLI and try and find photographs of your own county http://catalogue.nli.ie/ (Type in the name of the county and tick the “show digitised items only” box)

Family History

Get children to bring in family or old photographs. Encourage them to investigate the photograph and look for clues:
The following questions will help them

- Who do you think is in this photograph?
- Where do you think it was taken?
- When do you think was it taken?
- Who do you think took this photograph?
- Why do they think this photograph was taken?

Archive project

At the National Library we always write a caption for our photographs. This is a short paragraph explaining what is happening in the photograph. Get the children to write captions for their photographs. Here they have to describe what the photograph is about in a 150 words

A school project

The class could do a study on the history of their own school to find out how the school has changed over the years.

- Go to a local/school library to find records and photographs
- Interview an adult/teachers on what school was like back in their day

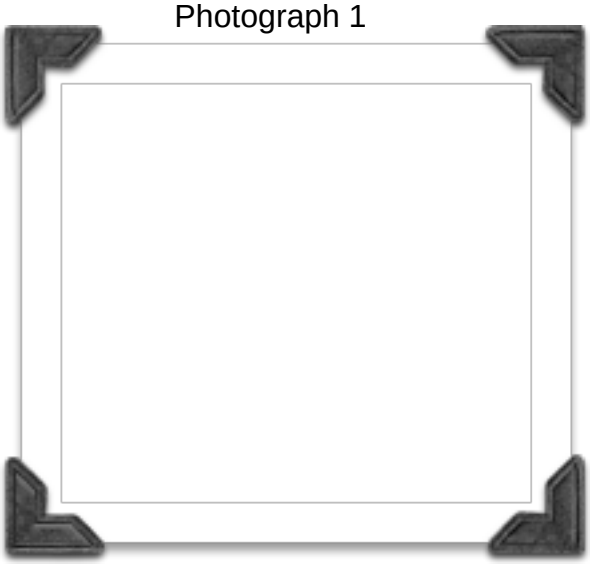
Small Lives Worksheet

Be a History detective and find clues (evidence) about the past lives of children by investigating these photographs

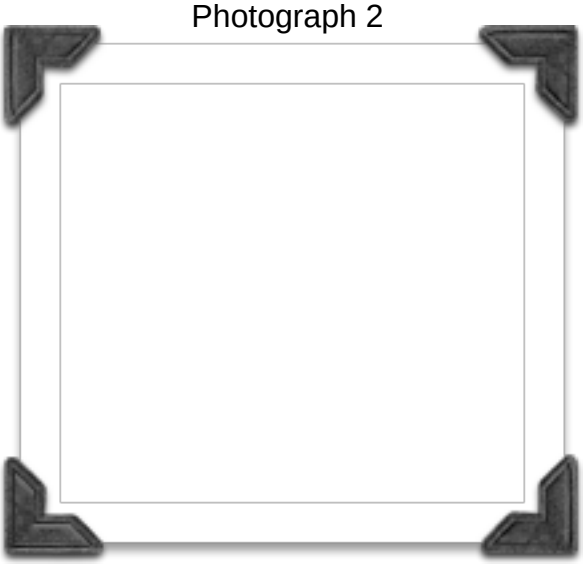
Rich and Poor

Describe or draw one person in each photograph

Photograph 1

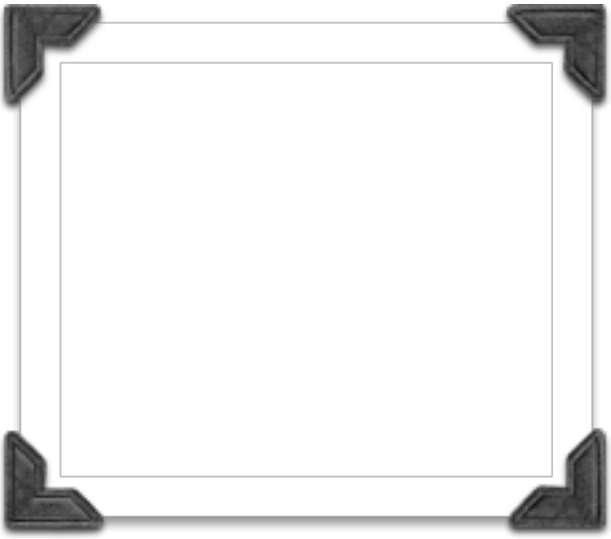


Photograph 2

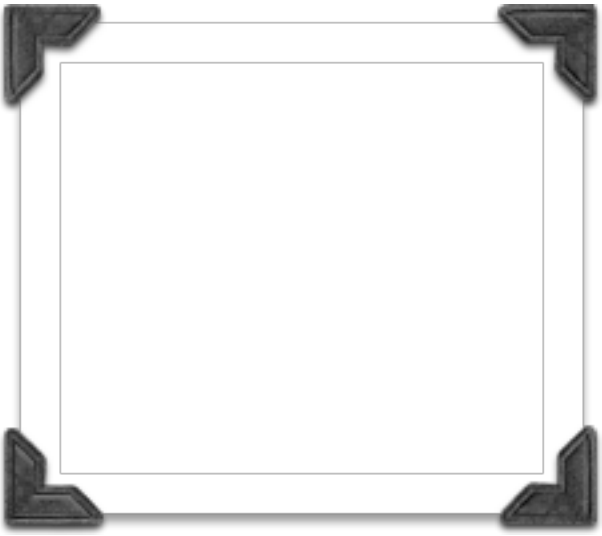


Draw one of the objects in each photograph

Photograph1



Photograph 2



What would the objects be used for?

Photograph 1

Photograph 2

There is an animal in both photographs: what is the animal being used for?

Photograph 1

Photograph 2

Were the photographs taken on a farm, by the sea, in a city?

Photograph 1

Photograph 2

Choose one photograph and imagine it is part of a comic
What would happen next e.g. where did the children go, what did they do?
Draw the scene!

Imagine you went back into the past and had to live the life of one of the children in the photographs. Who would you choose and why? Write your answer on a separate sheet.

School in the Past

Photograph 3

Can you find: an organ
Any evidence of heating
Any evidence of lighting
Any evidence of the subjects they study

How many children are in the class?

One of the teachers is holding a cup of tea
a piece of chalk
a whip

Can you explain why the windows are so big?

Now look around your own class room and make a list of things that are different and the same

SAME	DIFFERENT

Photograph 4

What equipment can you see in the hall?

What class is being taught? Circle the one you think it is
Dance
PE
Drama

Describe the uniform being worn by the girls in three words

-
-
-

What sports do you play at school?

Imagine you are a student in one of the photographs, make a diary entry of what your day at school was like from all the evidence you have gathered.

I spy on flickr

Look up the Small Lives exhibition on
http://www.flickr.com/photos/yournlireland/sets/72157627374350195/

Play a game of “I spy”. This helps develop the observational skills of the children.

- I spy someone who works on a farm
- I spy a toy doll
- I spy 8 girls in a row
- I spy a game that looks like “ring a ring a rosie”
- I spy “St Patrick”
- I spy a way of travelling with three wheels

I spy someone who might live here:

Who might work here:

Photograph 1

Photograph 2

Photograph 3

Photograph 4