

Irish Weather Lore and Traditions

'There's a grand stretch in the evenings!' – There's no doubt about it, Irish people love to talk about the weather. It is said that in Ireland we can experience all four seasons in one day! Our changeable climate makes it a constant topic of conversation. Weather forecasting is important to everyone as it helps us to make plans in our daily lives. We often consider the weather when we are making decisions, such as what clothes to wear, if it is advisable to walk to school or go in the car or if a trip to the beach is a good or bad idea.



While the weather is of interest to everyone, some people have more of a vested interest in weather prediction than others. Farmers, sailors and fishermen are just a few examples of people who are particularly concerned with the weather as it impacts their livelihoods. Nowadays weather forecast updates are easily accessible throughout the day on the television, radio and internet. Satellite technology means that they are available at the click of a button on mobile devices. The Irish Meteorological Service, also known as Met Éireann, even provide a detailed forecast especially for farmers which is known as 'the farming forecast'.

Before meteorological technology existed however, people relied on signs in nature to help to predict the weather. By observing patterns in the natural world, they were able to make certain predictions about the weather. Many of these predictions were told down through the generations and this weather lore is still told today. These sayings often rhyme in order to make them easier to remember as they were passed on by word of mouth. These rhymes sometimes have different variations due to different dialects, translations or misinterpretations over the years.



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Most of us have heard some variation of the saying 'Red sky at night, shepherd's delight. Red sky in the morning, shepherd's warning'. Phrases such as this one may not always be accurate but they do carry some meaning. In this instance, a red sky at night can be a sign of high pressure coming which means the weather will be good. When there is a red sky in the morning, it can mean that the good weather has passed and a period of low pressure is dawning, bringing with it some bad weather.

There is a traditional proverb which originated in England that states that the weather on 15th July, St. Swithin's Day, affects the weather for the forty days which follow. The proverb reads - 'St. Swithin's Day if thou dost rain, for forty days it will remain, St. Swithin's Day if thou be fair, for forty days 'twill rain nae mare'.

The story goes that St. Swithin, a bishop, requested to be buried outdoors so that the rain could fall on his grave. Later, his body was moved and buried indoors and a terrible storm arose. To this day, you may hear older people hope for dry weather on 15th July!

Even though advancements in weather prediction mean that traditional proverbs and sayings are no longer relied upon, many people still take an interest in them and their meaning. You might hear people comment that rain is on the way when a herd of cows are seen



huddled together sitting down in a field or when spiders are making their webs in a sheltered spot. Michael Gallagher, a postman and amateur weather forecaster from Co. Donegal became well known across Ireland in recent years for his weather predictions based on observing animals and plants in the Bluestack Mountain range, near where he lives. In 2010, he predicted that Ireland would experience a period of severe cold weather and his prediction was correct in what became known as 'The Big Freeze of 2010'.

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There is one weather tradition which is still commonly adhered to in Ireland the night before a wedding. The family of the bride often put the Child of Prague, a Catholic statue, outside their home for the night before the wedding in the hope it will bring good weather on the wedding day. While this may not be the most reliable technique, it's all in the name of fun and tradition.

Questions

1. Give three examples of why weather forecasting is important in our daily lives.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

2. Farmers, sailors and fishermen are affected by the weather. Name three other occupations affected by weather.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3. Give the two names for the Irish weather information service provider.

1. _____
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4. According to the rhyme, why does a red sky at night bring 'delight'?

5. Explain, in your own words, St. Swithin's proverb.

6. What was the name given to the cold spell of weather predicted by Michael Gallagher in 2010?

7. Ask an older member of your family what traditional weather lore, rhymes or traditions they know of.

8. Why, in your opinion, do you think Irish people are so interested in the weather?

9. Explain the following words. Use your dictionary.

Livelihood _____

Meteorological _____

Amateur _____

Lore _____

Answers

1. Give three examples of why weather forecasting is important in our daily lives.

Pupil's own answers, possible inclusions: to know how to dress appropriately, to plan for safe travelling, for the growth of crops.

2. Farmers, sailors and fishermen are affected by the weather. Name three other occupations affected by weather.

Pupil's own answers, possible inclusions: builders, firefighters, the postal service, electricians, lifeguards, pilots, rescue services.

3. Give the two names for the Irish weather information service provider.

1. The Irish Meteorological Service

2. Mét Éireann

4. According to the rhyme, why does a red sky at night bring 'delight'?

A red sky at night means a period of high pressure is coming, bringing good weather with it.

5. Explain, in your own words, St. Swithin's proverb.

St. Swithin's proverb states that if it rains on the 15th July it will continue to rain for the next 40 days but if it is dry on 15th July it will be dry for the next 40 days.

6. What was the name given to the cold spell of weather predicted by Michael Gallagher in 2010?

This cold period of weather was known as 'The Big Freeze of 2010'.

7. Ask an older member of your family what traditional weather lore, rhymes or traditions they know of.

Pupil's own responses.

8. Why, in your opinion, do you think Irish people are so interested in the weather?

Pupil's own responses, potential answers: In Ireland we have a changeable climate which means we experience lots of different weather conditions, making it a topic of interest. / In Ireland we rely on farming and fishing as two main industries which are weather dependent, this means people take an interest in the weather and how it is affecting food production. / As a small island, we are dependent on the weather for travel to other countries.

9. Explain the following words. Use your dictionary.

Livelihood – a means of earning what is needed to live.

Meteorological – the atmospheric conditions and weather of an area.

Amateur – a person who engages in an activity for pleasure rather than for financial benefit or professional reasons.

Lore – a body of traditional and anecdotal knowledge on a given subject.

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huddled together sitting down in a field or when spiders are making their webs in a sheltered spot. Michael Gallagher, a postman and amateur weather forecaster from Co. Donegal became well known across Ireland in recent years for his weather predictions based on observing animals and plants in the Bluestack Mountain range, near where he lives. In 2010, he predicted that Ireland would experience a period of severe cold weather and his prediction was correct in what became known as 'The Big Freeze of 2010'.

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4. Why do weather proverbs often rhyme?

5. When is St. Swithin's Day?

6. What was the name given to the cold spell of weather predicted by Michael Gallagher in 2010?

7. Ask an older member of your family what traditional weather lore, rhymes or traditions they know of.

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Weather proverbs often rhyme to help people to remember them as they were passed down by word of mouth.

5. When is St. Swithin's Day?

St. Swithin's Day falls on 15th July.

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