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Date _____

Languages and Religions of the U.K. and Ireland

Follow along as your teacher reads aloud the passage below. Then, re-read the passage with a partner. Underline any unfamiliar terms and write any questions you may have in the margins.

Ireland is also known as the Republic of Ireland. The United Kingdom includes England, Wales, Scotland, and northern Ireland. People in Ireland and the United Kingdom share similar landscapes and histories. But cultural differences have led to fierce conflicts between the two close countries for hundreds of years.

Both Ireland and the United Kingdom get plenty of rainfall and warming winds from the Atlantic Ocean. This keeps the island countries lush and green. Their rugged mountains include Scotland's Grampians and the Cambrians and Pennines in Wales and England. These mountains are better for hikers and sheep herders than farmers. So most of the cropland and pastureland in Ireland and the United Kingdom is in rolling lowland plains. Rivers such as the Shannon and the Thames drain these plains. Moors and spongy bogs cover much of the Scottish and Irish countryside, where trees are scarce. Here plants decompose into dense, brown peat. Peat was long used as fuel for cooking and heating homes.

English kings and queens tried to conquer their Celtic-speaking neighbors, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, for almost a thousand years. Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, along with Brittany in northwestern France, and the Isle of Man, managed to retain their ancient languages and way of life. These areas were able to do so, unlike England and the rest of northern Europe, even when conquered by the Romans and other invaders. Language was—and is—a powerful way of unifying people and helping them to resist outsiders. Much of the population adopted Christianity and the laws and customs of the Romans. Then they lived under the umbrella of English law and culture. Celtic speakers succeeded in keeping their mother tongues alive. Examples of Celtic languages include Gaelic, Cornish, and Welsh. Today, English is spoken virtually everywhere in the British Isles. Gaelic is used by only about one percent of Scots. The Welsh language persists in the place names of Wales. It is still spoken by about 600,000 people. Cornwall is a county on the southwestern coast of England. In Cornwall, there is a movement to revive Cornish. The movement hopes to create a standard written form of the language. Cornish has only about 3,500 speakers.

England had conquered Wales and was engaged in a struggle to control Scotland in the 1500s. But the English rulers were especially interested in conquering the Irish because of religious differences. King Henry VIII rejected Catholicism and turned England toward Protestantism in the 1530s. Afterward, the English battled Catholic enemies France and Spain for territories around the world. Ireland remained a loyal Catholic country. It rebelled repeatedly when Henry VIII and his daughter, Queen Elizabeth I, brought the country under English rule. Scottish and English Protestants colonized northern Ireland in the early 1600s. At the same time, England was competing with Spain and France to colonize North America. But the



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Irish natives resisted change. They retained their Catholic religion and native Celtic language and customs. However, the English were firmly in control of Ireland by the late 1600s. And Protestants were in the most powerful positions in the Catholic country. In 1801, the English empire was at the height of its power and declared that all of England, Scotland, and Wales were a "United Kingdom." But the Irish disagreed. In the mid-1800s, Ireland began a new movement for political independence, or "home rule."

By 1922, the southern, more Celtic part of the island became independent. Eventually it was named the Republic of Ireland. But fighting and bloodshed between Catholics and Protestants continued in northern Ireland. The majority of people there maintained strong cultural, religious, and family ties to England. A peace settlement was finally reached in 1998. Now Protestants and Catholics share power in the government of northern Ireland.