




Exploring Waterford's Magdalene Heritage

An activity and resource
pack for Senior Cycle
students and their
teachers



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WATERFORD

MEMORIES PROJECT

WWW.WATERFORDMEMORIES.COM

Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme
2017–2022



Comhairle Cathrach
& Contae Phort Láirge
Waterford City
& County Council



Waterford Institute of Technology

INSTITIÚID TEICNEOLAÍOCHTA PHORT LÁIRGE



OUR AIM

The activities in this pack are designed to start a difficult conversation about the history of the former Magdalene Laundry in Waterford. To structure our conversation, this pack is divided into four parts or themes: setting the space, reflecting on history, physical sites of history, and responding to history. Each theme is guided by core questions and encourages you to engage with key concepts. The activities in each section are designed as opportunities for you to discuss, consider, question, reflect on and respond to the experience of women in the Waterford Laundry.



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Reflecting on History

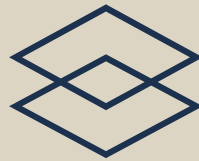
PART THREE
Physical Sites of History

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Responding to History

SETTING THE SPACE



**This section
invites you to**



consider how you can contribute to
large and small group discussions in
a way that creates a safe and
respectful environment where all
voices are heard equally.



HOW DO WE HAVE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS?

Think about what it means to feel safe in your classroom, and what you need to do to help other students feel secure and supported. Let's start by creating a community agreement for the classroom.

In a class like this, there will be a lot of heavy emotions, some difficult and some enjoyable. Talking about human rights violations and historical abuse is challenging for many reasons, which we will consider.

But listening to the stories of the women who were in the Magdalene Laundries, and voicing our own reactions and thoughts, can help us understand this difficult past and begin to heal.

To begin this challenging conversation, let's create community agreements.

What would make this group a good space for learning?

Talk about the question in pairs or small groups, write your comments on pieces of paper and group them together on the classroom wall.


What will make this a safe and respectful place for us to work in?

What does respect mean to you? Safety? Confidentiality?

Go through the posts and check for clarification. How can these ideas be turned into practical ways of working?

Take, for example, "it's alright to disagree". How would this work practically? You could add "... by challenging what a person says, not attacking the person themselves."

DISPLAY THE FINAL COMMUNITY AGREEMENT IN THE CLASSROOM

A photograph of a historic stone building with ivy, a modern glass extension, and a blue sky with clouds.

PART TWO

REFLECTING ON HISTORY



**This section
invites you to:**

Reflect on the
everyday, working
lives of women and
children in the laundry
by considering the
historical context of
the Magdalene
Laundries.

Listen to a survivor's
story.

IRELAND'S MAGDALENE LAUNDRIES

Magdalene Laundries were institutions attached to Convents where women, called "penitents," performed laundry work and other for-profit tasks. The Laundries were originally philanthropic but became increasingly punitive after 1922.

These women were denied freedom of movement; never paid for their labour; and their daily routines focused on prayer, silence, and work.

From 1922 Ireland's Magdalene institutions were operated by four religious orders: The Sisters of Mercy; The Sisters of Our Lady of Charity (of Refuge); The Sisters of Charity; and The Good Shepherd Sisters.

Because the Religious Orders will not release their records, no one knows how many women entered the Laundries; how many women are still alive; nor how many died within the Laundries.

Evidence from State archives and the State's 2013 report proves that the State supported the laundries while failing to inspect and regulate.

INDEPENDENT STUDY TASKS



READ - Introduction chapter of Prof James Smith's (2008) *Ireland's Magdalene Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment*.
Manchester, UK: MUP.



READ - Sebanne, N. (2018). Ireland's Silences: the Magdalene Laundries. Retrieved from:
https://booksandideas.net/IMG/pdf/eng_sebbane_magdalene_sisters.pdf.



WATCH - Ireland's Hidden Bodies, Hidden Secrets ("Our World," BBC News Channel, 5 October 2014).

AS YOU ARE READING/WATCHING...

Consider:

What is this reading about? What are the main ideas and facts presented? Why are these ideas relevant or important? From whose perspective is this text written?

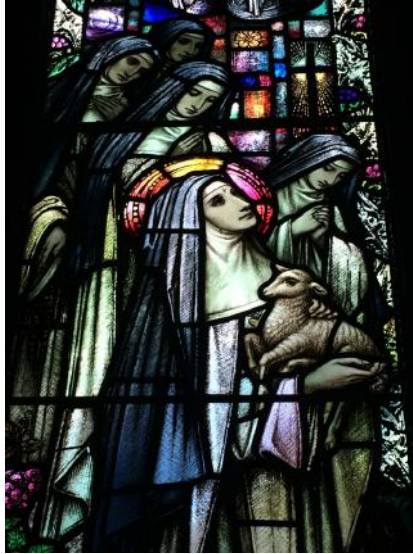
Circle or underline key words or concepts.

Put a question mark by words or concepts you don't understand or need more explanation.

Summarise key historical events and ideas.

Note your reactions to what you are reading or viewing.

DISCUSSION



Based on these tasks, explore the following questions in small groups:

Why were women and children confined to the Magdalene Laundries?

In what ways were people controlled within these institutions?

Discuss with your classmates and teacher other questions you have about this part of Irish society and history.

A woman wearing a dark headscarf is shown in profile, looking towards the right. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a bookshelf or a similar setting. The overall tone is somber and reflective.

SURVIVOR TESTIMONY

One of the most powerful ways to help you understand what life was like in the Magdalene Laundries is through survivor testimony. Survivor testimony are firsthand accounts from people who lived through these institutions.

These powerful voices can be examined in many different ways, including literature and art, video testimony, or live performance.

Survivors' stories can help us understand what we learn from historians and secondary sources by offering a unique perspective on the challenging, traumatic, and unjust situations individuals were forced to endure.

Each survivor's story is unique. The experiences of survivors depend on a wide range of variables, such as how and why they were brought to the Laundry, how old they were at the time, how long they spent in the institutions, and their family context.



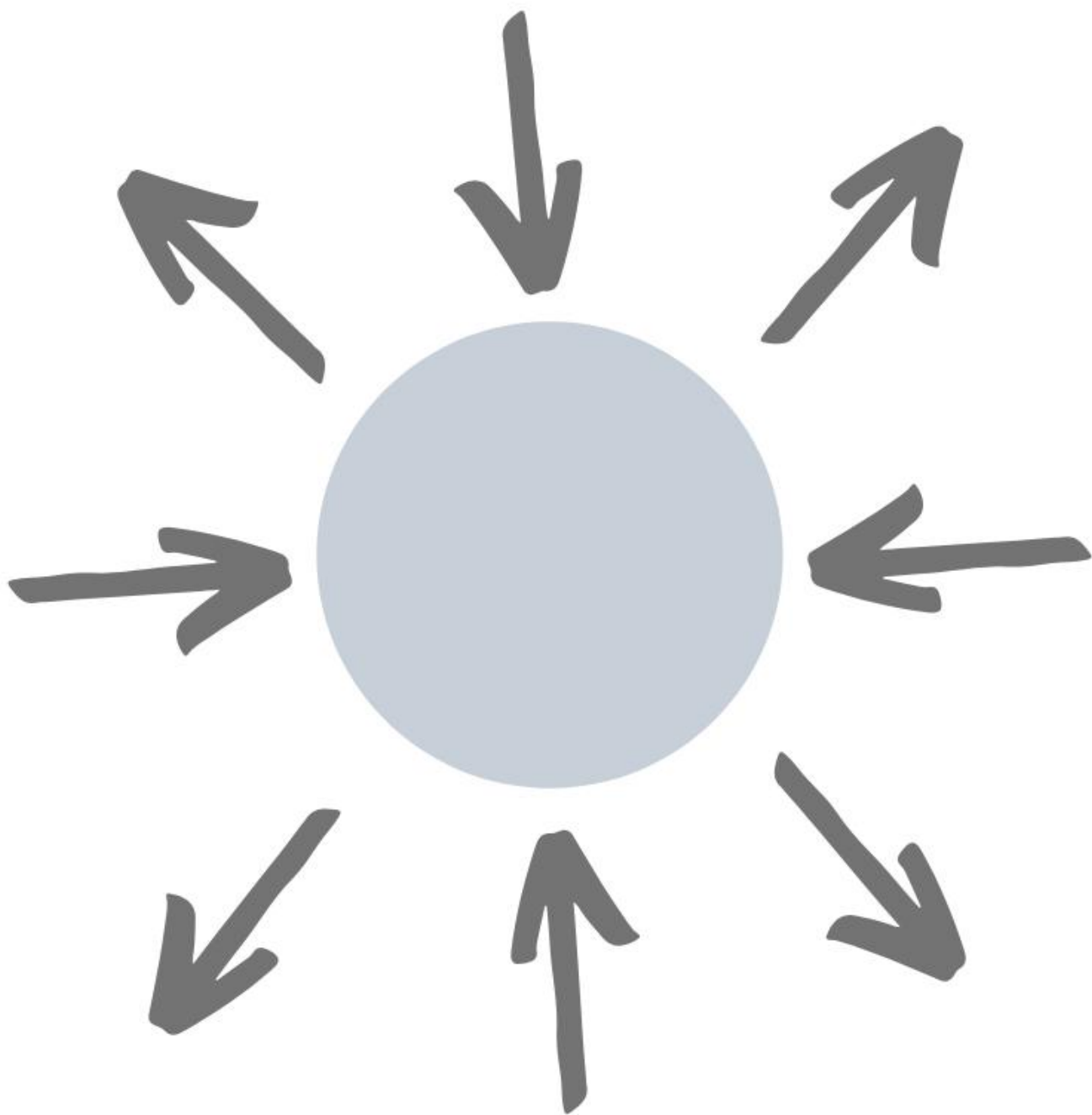
ACTIVITY: IDENTITY CHART

Identity charts can help you identify and consider the factors that affect us as people, communities, and nations.

Sharing your identity charts with classmates can help build community in your classroom.

Print out the chart on the next page and write your name in the middle. List factors that make up your identity on the arrows pointing out from the centre. List labels that others place on you on the arrows pointing into the centre.

Is there overlap between the two sets of arrows?



SURVIVOR TESTIMONY



Before having the opportunity to bear witness to survivor testimony, think about what you are about to experience by completing the following 3 tasks:

Let's prepare

1. WRITING PROMPTS

Individually write brief notes on the following: Why do you think these survivors have chosen to tell their stories to the world? What do they expect you and others to learn from such stories? Is it important to be sensitive to others' stories? Why or why not?

2. POETRY

Read Jessica Traynor's 'An Education in Silence'.
Read the poem aloud, at least twice. Underline words or phrases that stand out as you read. Share one of the words or phrases you underlined with the class.

As a class, consider what does this poem mean to you?
What questions does it raise for you?

3. SONG

In 1994, Joni Mitchell recorded 'The Magdalene Laundries'. Click on the link to hear the recording and follow along with the lyrics. It is important to note that there are some factual inaccuracies in the lyrics - can you identify any?



Martha

6.5 mins



Maureen

6.5 mins



Elizabeth

6.5 mins

After viewing

1. FACTUAL QUESTIONS

What events are being described?
Where are they happening? Who is involved?

2. INFERENTIAL QUESTIONS

How does this story contribute to your understanding of
the Magdalene Laundries?
How has the experience of the Laundries affected the
survivor's life?
What does this story reveal about human behaviour?

3. UNIVERSAL QUESTIONS

Is it possible to truly understand the experience of a
survivor?
What limits our understanding of the Magdalene
Laundries?



PHYSICAL SITES
OF HISTORY
PART THREE



THIS SECTION INVITES YOU TO:

Consider the relationship between history, architecture and life in the laundry by using visual literacy skills to analyse historical photographs.

HISTORY

and architecture

James Smith (2007) describes Ireland's "architecture of containment" as a system, which removed troublesome women from society by placing them in institutions like Magdalene Laundries.

The outer architecture of a building can be seen as a way of representing people's fears about who is contained in these institutions. This can frame how we think about the Magdalene women and can help us begin to understand one way in which the Irish State, Catholic Church, and society stigmatised these women.

The girls and women in the Laundries were monitored and watched constantly. This surveillance was part of the social control of the "penitents" and was reinforced by the structure of the buildings and religious symbols throughout.

When we think about institutional power (the Church and the State, for example) it is also important to consider how the physical site operated to create and enforce a sense of containment.



Think back to your previous discussions about life in the laundry. How do you think architecture, surveillance, and social control were interlinked in the Magdalene Laundries?

Activity: Becoming a Photo Detective



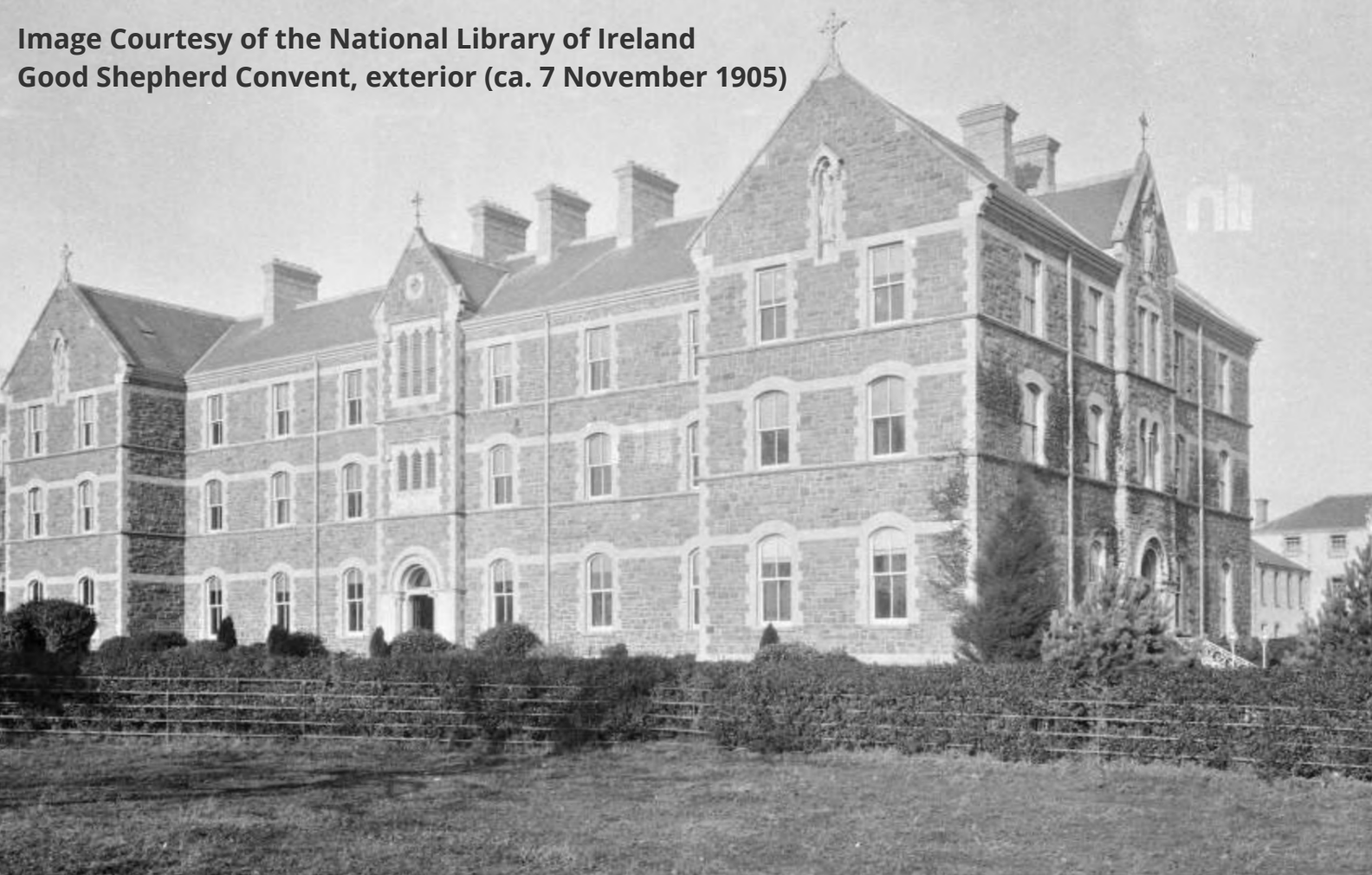
Photographs can shape our perceptions - and our misconceptions - of people and places and shape how we view the world.

Keeping in mind what you have learned about architecture its relationship to containment in the Magdalene Laundries, consider the following two historical images from the National Library of Ireland.

Look deeply at the picture for a long time. Observe shapes, colours, textures, the position of people and/or objects, etc.

Begin by writing down what you see, without making any interpretation about what the picture is trying to say.

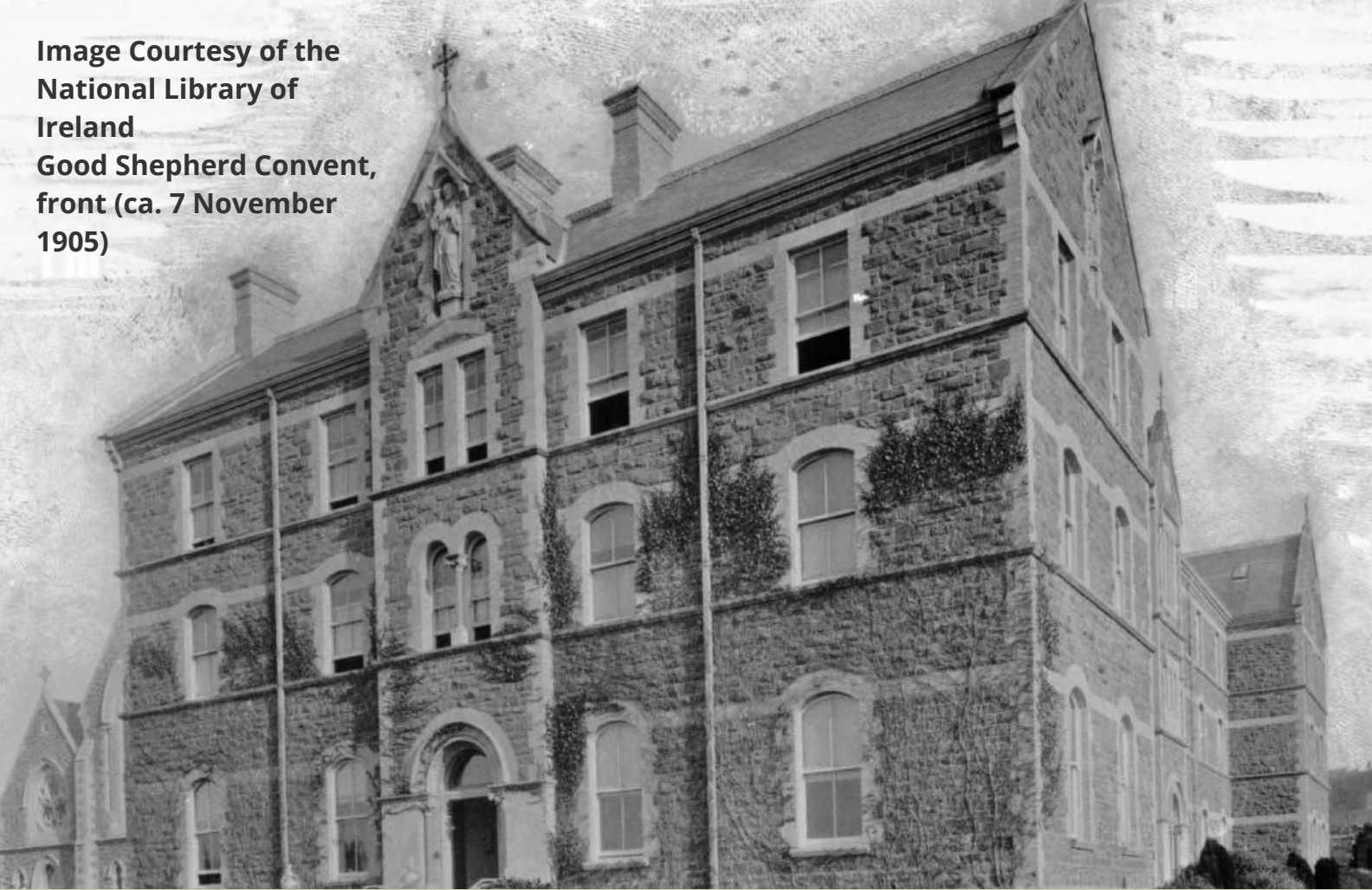
Image Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland
Good Shepherd Convent, exterior (ca. 7 November 1905)



WHAT CAN THESE
PICTURES TELL US
ABOUT THE
MAGDALENE
LAUNDRIES?

Image Courtesy of the
National Library of
Ireland

Good Shepherd Convent,
front (ca. 7 November
1905)



WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE
ABOUT THESE PICTURES THAT
YOU WOULD NEED TO HAVE
ANSWERED
SO YOU CAN
INTERPRET THEM?



Image Courtesy of the Waterford Memories Project (hallway linking the Industrial School, Chapel, and Convent in the former Waterford Laundry)

WHAT CAN THESE
PICTURES TELL US
ABOUT LIFE IN THE
MAGDALENE
LAUNDRIES?

Background?
Objects?
Space?



Image Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland
Good Shepherd Convent, Waterford ca. 1901-1954

WHAT CAN THESE
PICTURES TELL US
ABOUT LIFE IN THE
MAGDALENE
LAUNDRIES?

Background?
Objects?
Clothing?
Gestures (actions)?
Expression?

VISUAL LITERACY

Knowing how to critically examine an image helps to encourage our visual literacy skills. It is important to examine all information we are given, to engage with the information, and to ask questions.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

Who and what is in each photograph?

What is happening in each photograph?

When do you think that each photograph was taken?

Are the photos natural or posed?

What do you think happened before and after each photograph was taken?

Why do you think these photographs were taken? What do they tell you?

What might be happening outside each photograph?

Is there anything in any of these photographs that shows humour? Sadness?

What do you think life is like for the people pictured?

If you looked inside some of the buildings, what do you think you would see?

What are some of the feelings you had as you looked at each photograph?

PART FOUR

RESPONDING TO HISTORY



The background of the image is a close-up of a wooden railing or staircase banister. It features multiple horizontal sections with intricate, repeating scrollwork carvings. The wood is a warm, medium-brown tone, showing some signs of age and wear. The railing is set against a dark, possibly stone or brick, wall. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the wood and the depth of the carvings.

THIS SECTION INVITES YOU TO:

Consider how we
make space to
understand and learn
from the history of the
Magdalene Laundries
now through history,
politics, and the arts.



HOW CAN SOCIETY RESPOND?

There are multiple ways to respond to this history on local, national and international platforms, from activism through the arts to political activism.

The following pages provide information on two such projects, When Silence Falls and Justice for Magdalenes Research, with activities to support your discussion and reflections on how we respond to survivors' experiences in contemporary Ireland.

This section also invites you to reflect on your rights under UN legislation and consider the human rights violations experienced by girls and women who lived and worked in the Laundries.



Arts and activism

Artistic responses to the history of the Magdalene Laundries, such as the songs and poetry you have already experienced, emerged during the 1990s. Click on each box below to read about other examples of art installations, films, and performances.

Patricia Burke Brogan (1994) 'Eclipsed': read about audience reception to the play.

Evelyn Glynn (2007) 'Breaking the Rule of Silence'

ANU Productions (2011) 'Laundry'

Alison Lowry (2019) '(A)Dressing our Hidden Truths'

When Silence Falls: Investigating Literary and Bodily Memory at the Waterford Laundry

On 22 October 2016, survivors of the Waterford Laundry and the public were invited to attend a one-day event that acknowledged the history of the Laundries and Industrial Schools in the South-East of Ireland. The event took place in the former site of St Mary's Good Shepherd Laundry and St. Dominic's Industrial School in Waterford city, now the College Street Campus of Waterford Institute of Technology.

Funded by the Irish Research Council and convened by the Waterford Memories Project as part of the Waterford Imagine Arts Festival, the event comprised thirteen simultaneous live art performances, survivor oral history testimonies, talks, screenings, and installations. Survivor testimony and archival research combined with workshops practice that investigated the physical site of the building (see photographs in Section Three) informed the live art performances, some of which you can see in this section. Theatre studies and visual art students and staff devised and performed a series of live art performances, curated by artist Dr. Áine Phillips.

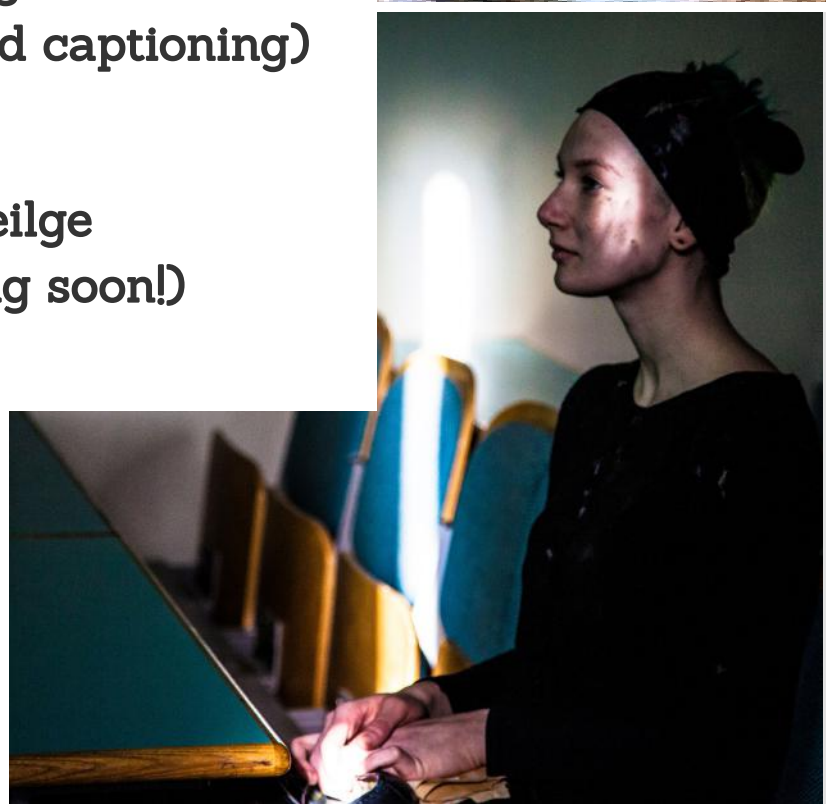
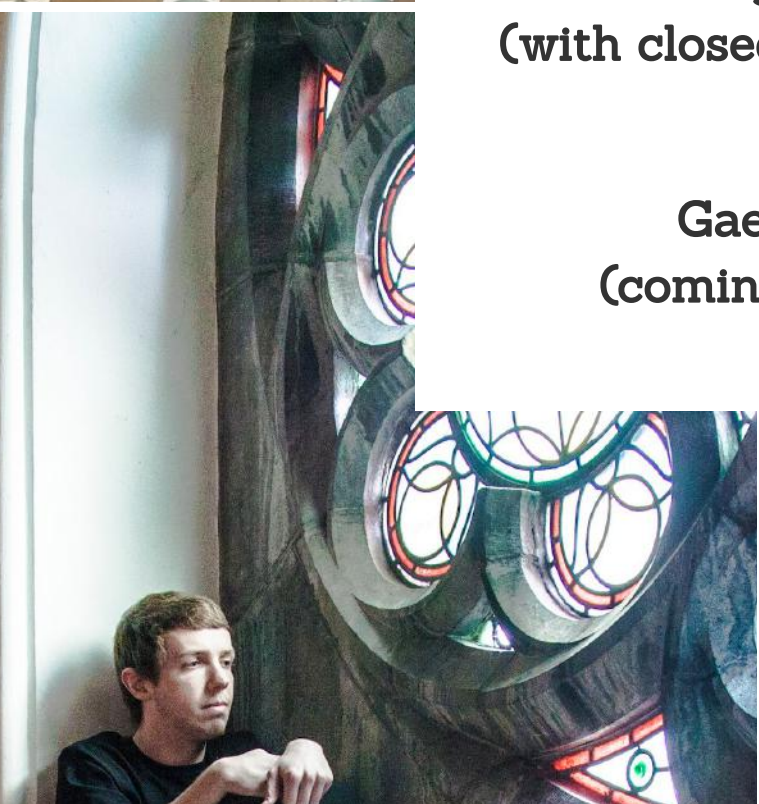
The event lasted five hours during which time the audience was invited to carve out their own journey, which took them from the front gates of the building, to the interior garden, to various locations inside the chapel space and convent corridors, to the former St. Dominick's Industrial School.



WATCH: ANIMATING PLACE

**English
(with closed captioning)**

**Gaeilge
(coming soon!)**





These performance photographs explore aspects of life in the laundry.

In groups, discuss your interpretations of each image. Create a list of the symbols and themes explored in the images.

Thinking about your rights

Activity: Ranking your rights

Divide into small groups. Each group needs one copy of the word list on the opposite page. As a group, rank the words in descending order with the first word being the most important, and so on. When you have concluded this task, share your list with the class.



Activity: Who decides?

WATCH this introductory video about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

READ this summary of the Convention.

THINK about who decides which rights are important in your life?

Nationality

Family

Education

Religion

Culture

**Voluntary
organisations**

Social

Sport

Environment

**Health
services**

Work

Government

From Rights to Responsibilities

Small group task:

Now that you have thought about life at the time, what rights were women and girls in the Laundry denied?

How could their needs have been met?

Who was/is responsible for their needs then,
and now?

Create a list that records your answers to these questions and share with the class.

Whole group task

Display all the lists on the classroom walls and look for common themes using the barometer tool (see the appendices).

UNIVERSAL THEMES HUMAN RIGHTS & JUSTICE

How does your previous discussion about the Laundries relate to these universal themes?

Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each statement?

Punishing perpetrators for wrongdoing is necessary to achieve justice.

Offenders should suffer for the crimes they have committed.

Justice is best achieved when the perpetrators repair the harm they have caused.

After a community has been through a time of conflict or violence, it is better for everyone to move on and forget the crimes or hardships of the past.

An eye for an eye leaves everybody blind.

**How do the ideas in this exercise relate to
your past, present and future?**



Complete the following statements:

What I just read makes me think
about _____ (event from the past)
because _____.

What I just read makes me think
about _____ (event from today
related to my own community or nation)
because _____.

What I just read makes me wonder about
the future because _____.

POLITICS AND THE JUSTICE FOR MAGDALENES CAMPAIGN

Justice for Magdalenes was originally formed in 2003 by three adoption rights activists: Mari Steed, Angela Murphy and Claire McGettrick. In 2009, JFM launched a political campaign to achieve an official apology from the Irish State and to establish a compensation scheme for Magdalene survivors. These aims were successfully achieved by 2013, marking the end of the political campaign.

Read about JFMR's political campaign

1

JFMR's
OFFICIAL
WEBSITE

O'Rourke, M. & Smith, J. (2016).
Ireland's Magdalene laundries:
Confronting a history not yet in the
past. In A. Hayes & M. Meagher
(Eds.), A century of progress? Irish
women reflect. Dublin: Arlen House.

2



3

JFMR's
Research
Archive

Pictured: Mari Steed, Claire McGettrick,
Katherine O'Donnell, & Maeve O'Rourke of
JFMR

ARCHIVE TASK

Search the JFMR archive and choose a document to analyse

1. What type of document is it (e.g., photograph, newspaper article, etc.)?
Who wrote it? When and where was it produced? Who is the intended audience?
2. What is the content of the document?
What are the main points? Why did the author write it? Support your claims with evidence from the document.
3. What was happening in Irish history at the time this document was produced?
4. Why is this document important?
What have you learned from it that you would not learn from another data source from this time? What other historical evidence will you use to help you understand the Magdalene Laundries?



DISCUSSION TOPICS

Why is justice important?

Can justice be achieved after large scale violations like the Magdalene Laundries?

Who was/is responsible for the human rights violations experienced in the Laundries?

Who should be held accountable and how?

WATCH - Dr Maeve O'Rourke: Why apologise today for 'historic' abuse?

The background of the slide is a photograph of a church interior. It features a large, ornate stained glass window at the top center, flanked by white columns. The floor is covered in a red carpet, and there are music stands and a piano visible in the lower part of the image.

TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

After large scale human rights violations many questions are unresolved as perpetrators, survivors, and society exist with a difficult and contested history. It can be difficult to make amends and decide how to hold those responsible accountable and how to repair society.

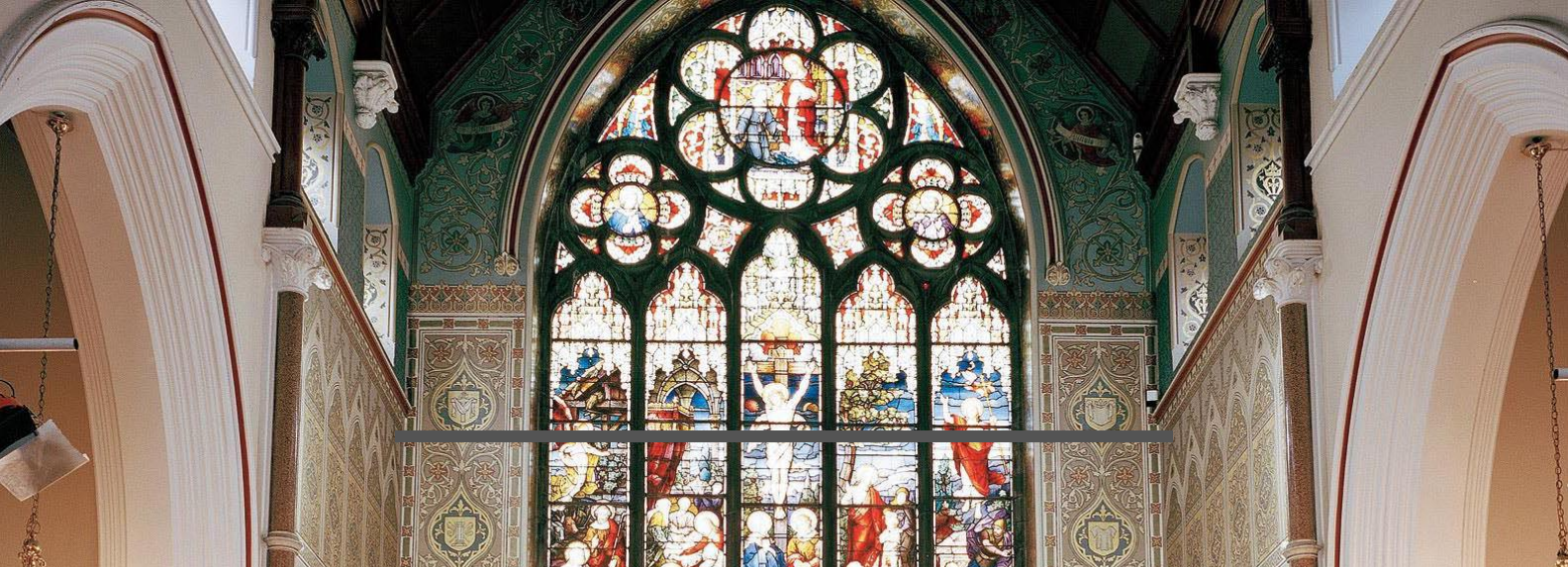
Transitional justice refers to a wide variety of actions a society can take as they transition from a time of injustice, which does not repeat these actions, to a better future, which allows victims to heal.

What are some effective ways for Ireland to account for the past and move forward?

How should society identify the goals and needs for the future?

Who should decide the process for accountability and social reconstruction?

WATCH: What is Transitional Justice?



TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE & REDUCING HARM

Can you brainstorm some examples of human rights violations today?
Consider interventions or actions which might interrupt these violations or reduce the harm in the relationship.

What is the role of commemoration in transitional justice and reducing harm?

COMMEMORATION

In small groups, search online for examples of commemoration activities and memorials in response to human rights violations. Discuss how these activities might help us understand and/or respond to the Magdalene Laundries in Ireland.

Briefly present your group's findings to the whole class.

DISCUSSION

How does learning about how the Government supported the Magdalene Laundries teach us about how power systems work in society?

How should we remember the past? What impact do memorials and monuments have on the way we think about history?

What parts of the history of the Laundries are most important for us to remember today?

How can we ensure that this history is not forgotten?
How can we meaningfully commemorate the survivors' experiences in the Magdalene Laundries today?

ACTIVITY: CREATE A MEMORIAL

While there are many different ways of commemorating, this activity invites you to design a memorial to commemorate the Magdalene laundries.

Memorial Plan:

What message do you want the memorial to convey?

Who is the audience for the memorial?

How will the memorial communicate your ideas?

From which materials will the memorial be constructed, and what imagery or words will it display?

Create a sketch or model of your memorial.

Further readings

Fischer, C. (2016). "Gender, Nation, and the Politics of Shame: Magdalen Laundries and the Institutionalization of Feminine Transgression in Modern Ireland. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 41(4), 821-43.

O'Donnell K. (2018). *Academics Becoming Activists: Reflections on Some Ethical Issues of the Justice for Magdalenes Campaign*. In P. Villar-Argáiz (Ed), *Irishness on the Margins: New Directions in Irish and Irish American Literature*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

O'Mahoney, J. (2018). *Advocacy and the Magdalene Laundries: Towards a psychology of social change*. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, DOI: 10.1080/14780887.2017.1416803.

O'Mahoney, J., Bowman-Grieve, L., Torn, A. (2019). *Ireland's Magdalene Laundries and the psychological architecture of surveillance*. In A. Mackay & S. Flynn (Eds.), *Surveillance, Architecture and Control*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

O'Rourke, M. (2016). 'The Justice for Magdalenes Campaign'. In S. Egan (Ed.), *Implementing International Human Rights: Perspectives from Ireland*. London: Bloomsbury.

Sebanne, N. (2015). *Justice for Magdalenes: From Advocacy Support Group to Human Rights Issues*. *Études Irlandaises*, 40(1): 185-197.

With special thanks

to all of the survivors of the Magdalene
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your stories with us.

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survivors who were featured or
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Martha
Maureen

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APPENDICES

TEACHING SUPPORTS



Exit Cards

Exit cards can be used at the end of each activity or classroom session. Students are asked to respond to questions or prompts on a piece of paper that will be submitted to the teacher before the end of class.

These cards can help the teacher to both assess students' understanding of the material and to and monitor students' emotions and responses.

PROMPT EXAMPLES

List three things you learned in class today.

What questions, ideas, and feelings did this lesson raise for you?

What was your favorite moment of class? Why? What was your least favorite part of class? Why?

Evaluate your participation in class today. What did you do well? What would you like to do differently next time?

Barometer

The barometer exercise can be used to monitor students' interpretation, attitudes, and responses to material.

1. Clear a wide space in the classroom, and place signs stating "Strongly Agree" and "Strongly Disagree" at opposite ends of the space.
2. Remind students of the classroom contract to be respectful of each other.
3. Ask students to stand at a place along the continuum that represents their opinion.
4. Ask students to explain why they have chosen to stand in that location. Encourage students to keep an open mind and allow them to move locations if they choose to do so after hearing other classmates' statements.
5. Debrief with a class discussion.

This exercise can also be completed with Post-Its instead of asking students to physically stand in their desired spot.

Symbolic response activity

In response to any document, image, video clip, or other resource in this pack, invite students to respond to the material by asking them to follow these steps:

Think about the major themes, ideas, or emotions in what you've just read/watched and select one big idea that you'd like to focus on.

Choose a colour that you think best represents that idea or emotion.

Choose a symbol that you think best represents that idea or emotion.

Choose an image that you think best represents that idea or emotion.

Group discussion can reflect on the patterns, similarities, and differences in students' responses.

SIT Activity

In response to any document, image, video clip, or other resource in this pack, invite students to respond to the material by asking them to follow these steps with this quick activity.

Think about what you have just read/watched and write down:

- One S-surprising fact or idea
- One I-nteresting fact or idea
- One T-roubling fact or idea

Allow students to debrief their SIT responses through class discussion, or in pairs. Responses can also be collected to monitor how students are understanding and feeling about class material.