



## Northern Europe

### GEOGRAPHY

### A Dublin Adventure

*Ireland is known for its writers, and one of its greatest is James Joyce (1882–1941). In this excerpt from one of his short stories, Joyce gives us a view of Ireland’s largest city, Dublin, in the early 1900s. The story is about two well-to-do Irish boys who skip school for an adventure in the working-class part of town.*

We walked along the North Strand Road til we came to the Vitriol Works [factory] and then turned to the right along the Wharf Road. Mahoney began to play the Indian as soon as we were out of public sight. He chased a crowd of ragged girls, brandishing his unloaded catapult [slingshot] and, when two ragged boys began, out of chivalry [protection of the girls], to fling stones at us, he proposed that we should charge them. I objected that the boys were too small, and so we walked on, the ragged troop screaming after us “*Swaddlers! Swaddlers!*” thinking that we were Protestants because Mahoney, who was dark-complexioned wore the silver badge of a cricket club in his cap. . . .

We came then near the river. We spent a long time walking about the noisy streets flanked by high stone walls, watching the workings of cranes and engines and often being shouted at for our immobility [lack of movement] by the drivers of groaning carts. It was noon when we reached the quays [docks] and, as all the labourers seemed to be eating their lunches, we bought two big currant buns and sat down to eat them on some metal piping beside the river. We pleased ourselves with the spectacle of Dublin’s commerce—the barges signalled from far away by their curls of woolly smoke, the brown fishing fleet beyond Ringsend, the big white sailing vessel which was being discharged on the opposite quay. Mahoney said it would be right skit [fun] to run away to sea on one of those big ships, and even I, looking at the high masts, saw, or imagined, the geography which had been scantily dosed [taught] to me at school gradually taking substance under my eyes. School and home seemed to recede from us and their influences upon us seemed to wane [become less].

We crossed the Liffey [a river that empties into Dublin Bay] in the ferryboat. . . . When we landed we watched the discharging [leaving] of the graceful three-master which we had observed from the other quay. Some bystander said that she was a Norwegian vessel. I went to the stern and tried to decipher the legend [name] upon it but, failing to do so, I came back and examined the foreign sailors to see had any of them green eyes, for I had some confused notion . . . The sailors’ eyes were blue, and grey, and even black. The only sailor whose eyes could have been called green was a tall man who amused the crowd on the quay by calling out cheerfully every time the planks fell: “All right! All right!”

When we were tired of this sight we wandered slowly into Ringsend. The day had grown sultry [hot], and in the windows of the grocers' shops musty biscuits lay bleaching. We bought some biscuits and chocolate, which we ate sedulously [eagerly] as we wandered through the squalid [run down] streets where the families of the fishermen live. We could find no dairy and so we went into a huckster's shop [retail store] and bought a bottle of raspberry lemonade each. Refreshed by this, Mahoney chased a cat down a lane, but the cat escaped into a wide field. We both felt rather tired, and when we reached the field we made at once for a sloping bank. . . .

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Excerpt (retitled "A Dublin Adventure") from *Dubliners* by James Joyce. Published by G. Richards, London, 1914.

**Understanding What You Read** After you have finished reading the selection, answer the following questions.

1. From this description of Dublin, what kinds of activities were important to the city's economy in the early 1900s?

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2. What evidence from the reading suggests that the two main characters in the story were in the working-class part of town?

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3. Think about Ireland's history in the early 1900s. Why would Mahoney's cricket club badge have caused the children to think he was Protestant? What clues does this incident provide about the dominant religion in Ireland?

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**Activity**

Using the descriptions in the reading, create a pencil sketch of a typical street scene in Dublin in the early 1900s.