



Black Potatoes: The Story of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-1850

By Susan Campbell Bartoletti

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In 1845, a disaster struck Ireland. Overnight, a mysterious blight attacked the potato crops, turning the potatoes black and destroying the only real food of nearly six million people.

Over the next five years, the blight attacked again and again. These years are known today as the Great Irish Famine, a time when one million people died from starvation and disease and two million more fled their homeland. Black Potatoes is the compelling story of men, women, and children who defied landlords and searched empty fields for scraps of harvested vegetables and edible weeds to eat, who walked several miles each day to hard-labor jobs for meager wages and to reach soup kitchens, and who committed crimes just to be sent to jail, where they were assured of a meal. It's the story of children and adults who suffered from starvation, disease, and the loss of family and friends, as well as those who died. Illustrated with black and white engravings, it's also the story of the heroes among the Irish people and how they held on to hope.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Gr 6 Up-In the 1800s, potatoes were the staple food and source of income for the Irish. When blight struck the crop in 1845, they faced not only economic deprivation, but also starvation. Laborers sold their possessions for a few meals. Families unable to obtain enough food for their families had to choose who would eat, who would enter the workhouse, and who had to scrape by as best they could. Relief efforts by the English were meager and insufficient, particularly as the famine continued in Ireland for five years. More than one million people died in a five year span. Another two million emigrated to America, Canada, Australia, and other countries, extending the economic and political impact of the Irish potato famine. Bartoletti discusses both the political climate and historical events in her book (Houghton Mifflin, 2001), and intertwines them with personal accounts of individuals who lived through this time period. Traditional poetry and prose are woven throughout this volume, brought to life by narrator Graeme Malcolm, whose Irish lilt adds authenticity to the recording. A fine addition to middle and high school libraries.-Amanda Rollins, Northwest Village School, Plainville, CTα(c) Copyright 2013. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Gr. 6-12. Through the voices of the Irish people, Bartoletti tells the history of the Great Irish Famine of the late 1840s. Eyewitness accounts and memories combine with devastating facts: one million died from starvation and disease; two million emigrated; the famine could have been avoided; the legacy was a bitter resentment against the English, who owned most of Ireland. The year-by-year political history is occasionally heavy going; but, as she did in *Growing Up in Coal Country* (1996), a *Booklist* Editors' Choice, Bartoletti humanizes the big events by bringing the reader up close to the lives of ordinary people. There are heartbreaking accounts of evictions, of the Irish starving while food is exported to England, and of deaths in the coffin ships that took the desperate to North America. The text is broken up with many black-and-white drawings from newspapers of the time, and a long final essay includes information about books, primary sources, library collections, and Web sites that readers can turn to for school reports and for research into their own family histories. It's a wonder there are so few nonfiction books about this subject for young people. *Hazel Rochman*
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Review

"Bartoletti humanizes the big events by bringing the readers up close to the lives of ordinary people."
Booklist, ALA, Starred Review

"Bartoletti incorporates period pen-and-ink sketches and poetry laying bare the fragility, injustice, and stratification of Irish peasant society. . . . Fascinating historical reading." —School Library Journal, starred review School Library Journal, Starred

Users Review

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