

ACTIVITIES

1. Learning about Turlough O'Carolan.
2. Discussing the harping tradition in Ireland.
3. Looking at pictures.

Background Information

The Irish Harp has its own tradition and history that's goes back at least a thousand years.

It is the official symbol of Ireland. It can be seen on our coins, Guinness, passports and official documents.

The Brian Boru harp from the 14th or 15th centuries is on display in Trinity College, Dublin.

In Irish history, bard harpers made a living by travelling around the country playing for the nobles and important people in the castles and big houses. In return, they were given lodgings and food. They would compose pieces of music for them and name them after them.

Turlough O'Carolan:

One of the most famous harpers in Irish history is Turlough O'Carolan. He was born in 1670 in Co. Meath and his father is thought to have been either a blacksmith or a farmer. His family moved to Co. Roscommon when Turlough was fourteen years old when his father found employment with a wealthy family there.

Turlough went blind at the age of eighteen when he was struck by smallpox. The wife of his father's employer helped him to receive an education an to learn how to play the harp. She gave him a harp, some money and a horse and he began to work as a harper. For forty-five years he travelled around the country composing tunes for his patrons. He is not thought to have been a skilful at playing the instrument, famous instead for his many musical compositions. Harpists and other musicians all over the world today still frequently play his pieces!

There are festivals in Ireland dedicated to Turlough O'Carolan: *Nobber Harp Festival, International Harp Festival in Co. Louth, Granard Traditional Harp Festival* and more!

End:

Listen to famous pieces composed by Turlough O'Carolan!

Recommendations: *Eleanor Plunkett, Planxty Irwin, O'Carolan's Concerto.*

Now go online and listen to various harpers! The following harpists frequently play O'Carolan pieces:

*Micheal Rooney, Gráinne Hambly, Máire Ní Chathasaigh, Cormac de Barra, Michelle Mulcahy, Laoise Kelly, Gráinne Yeats, Derek Bell, Liadán.*

QUESTIONS

1. What is a 'bard harper'?
2. In what year was Turlough born?
3. What happened to him when he was 18 years old?
4. How did he make his living?
5. Do you like his pieces of music?
6. Do you think people liked his music at the time?

