Learn and Talk III
Trial Lesson 1

How The Irish Lost Their Words
Preview

Words

1. lean /liːn/ [verb]
to bend or move from a vertical position

2. whiskers /ˈwɪskə(r)s/ [noun-plural]
the hair growing on a man’s face, especially on his cheeks and chin

3. drain /dreɪn/ [verb]
to make something empty or dry by removing all the liquid from it

4. goings-on /ˌɡəʊɪŋz ˈɒn/ [noun-plural]
activities or events that are strange, surprising or dishonest

5. displace /dɪsˈpleɪs/ [verb]
to take the place of somebody/something

Expressions

rolled into one
pass on
come to a close
I always knew my Uncle Peter was ready for a story when he leaned back in his bar stool. He would push away his half-drunk beer, wipe his whiskers, and begin by saying “C’mere ‘till I tell you.” By the time his beer was drained, half the pub would be leaning in to listen and laugh.

Many Irish people have memories such as mine, listening to stories in pubs or living rooms told by aunts and uncles or friends. But they are just that – memories. Now in Ireland, storytelling is seen as an experience from the past.
The story of Irish storytelling’s decline is very much the story of the seanchaí—Ireland’s original storytellers. Travelling from village to village to tell tales, they were reporters, entertainers and historians rolled into one. They recorded and passed on local history, and – crucially for Ireland’s rural communities – were a link to local goings-on. But by the 1950s, the tradition of listening to the seanchaí was starting to disappear. Ultimately, radio and then television displaced the storyteller. There just wasn’t the audience for them anymore. Today, with everything from the local news to the latest movie available at the press of a button on your phone, the seanchai’s 1,000-year story looks set to come to a close.
Discussion

1. According to the article, what tradition did Irish people have? When and why did this tradition disappear?

2. Do you have any tradition which used to be popular but has disappeared in your hometown? Do you want it back?

3. Some people think that storytelling is not as attractive as mass media, and they’re fine with it disappearing. Can you figure out some ways to help storytelling become more interesting and make a comeback?
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See you next lesson!