



Giving a voice to the past

Scoilnet Threads provides schools with an online space to share their local history projects – scoilnet.ie/threads

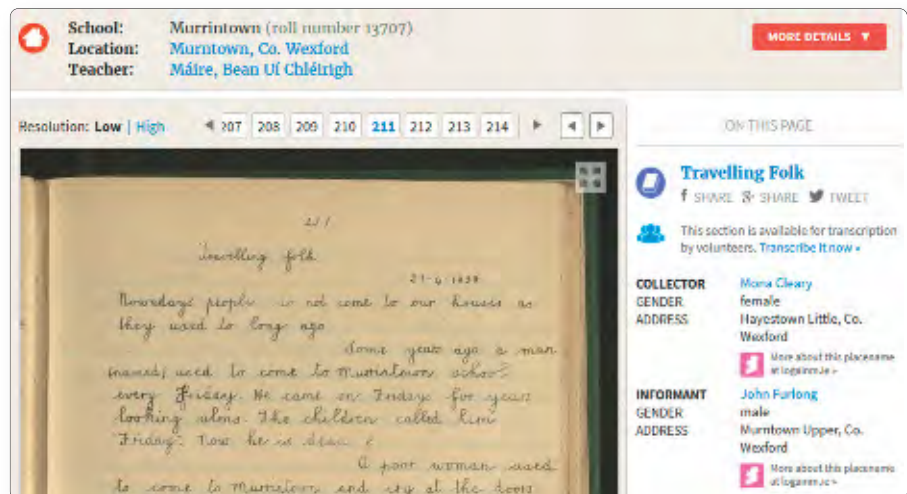
Irish people love to talk and everyone has a story to tell. The oral tradition, or Béaloideas, has always been very strong in our culture – as expressed eloquently in Irish folklore and through the Irish literary tradition. Collecting such stories forms an important role in creating a fabric of history. Telling history, though, is not just about recounting the story of famous and powerful people but also about giving a voice to the everyday memories of ordinary people in every corner of the country.

Scoilnet's new *Threads* initiative www.scoilnet.ie/threads is aimed at providing an online space for schools to store and share their pupils' oral history projects. It is all about encouraging students to become active oral historians and to engage in the collection of stories and history in their locality by gathering living people's testimony about their experiences and memories.

The idea for *Threads* has been inspired by the Schools Collection or the Bailiúchán na Scol project undertaken in the 1930s by the Irish Folklore Commission who collaborated with the Department of Education and the Irish National Teachers' Organisation. The project saw almost 50,000 school children collect and document folklore and local tradition, with approximately 740,000 pages compiled by pupils in around 5,000 primary schools between 1937 and 1939.

The entire collection is being digitised and available on the duchas.ie website. From the screen caption above, the school, collector and informant are all named and, as you will see from the neatness of the handwriting, it is reasonable to expect that a lot of emphasis was put on this at the time and the collection was seen as important for the school.

In a sense *Threads* has taken the idea behind the 1930s initiative and has applied 21st century technology to it. The pupils who contributed to the Schools



Collection had pen and paper to record the folklore they gathered, while the pupils of today can enhance their research through a variety of digital and other means, and present their findings using a multitude of different formats – digital text, sound, video, animations and combinations of some or all of these formats.

Threads has a potentially broad application to the curriculum – while it is primarily history-centred for obvious reasons – it could also be used for project work covering aspects of 'locality' across many subjects, e.g. SESE, geography where the active exploration of all environments is a key characteristic of the curriculum. The 'Threads in the Curriculum' page on the website will help teachers frame the project in the curriculum for their classes.

The *Threads* website has three main sections around which there is detailed guidance:

- **Plan:** Choosing the topic; finding sources; connecting with the 1930s Schools Collection.
- **Do:** Researching the background; setting questions; doing an interview.
- **Submit:** Selecting a template; entering details; tagging your locality.

Once a project or story has been written,

the teacher can decide to upload it themselves or they can decide to allow the students to upload. In either case, the teacher must sign on with their Scoilnet account and, if they wish to add students they can do this from their own dashboard. Students will not be able to put a story live, though, until it is approved by the teacher.

A support video introducing the initiative was created and shown during summer courses run by PDST Technology in Education. It can be viewed at www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie/threads

Remember, everyone has a story to tell!

Acknowledgments

The idea for *Threads* was the inspiration of Seán Gallagher (teaching principal at Attymass NS in Co Mayo and former deputy director in the PDST). Further early-stage conceptual support given by: Professor Fionnuala Waldron, Brian Ruane and Peter Whelan (DCU Institute of Education); Críostóir Mac Cárthaigh (archivist at the UCD School of Irish, Celtic Studies and Folklore) and Kevin McCarthy (senior inspector of post-primary history at the DES).

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PDST Technology in Education Autumn online courses

Short online courses on ICT in teaching, learning and assessment are available via TeacherCPD.ie this autumn. All that's needed is a (free) personal Scoilnet account to enrol. Many courses are suitable for 'additional hours' (Croke Park hours), subject to school approval.

