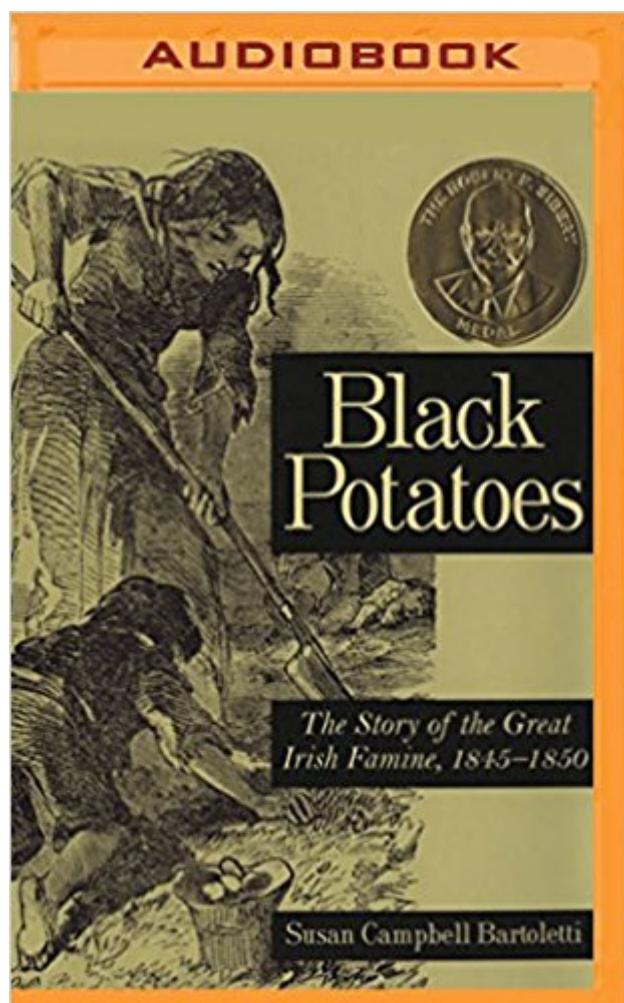


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# Black Potatoes: The Story Of The Great Irish Famine, 1845-1850



## Synopsis

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 tells the story of children and adults who suffered from starvation, disease, and the loss of family and friends, as well as those who died. *Black Potatoes* is the story of the heroes among the Irish people and how they held on to hope.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 - 17 years

Grade Level: 4 - 6

## Customer Reviews

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, CT  
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*\*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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I read this book out of curiosity, as some of my family were Irish. I was amazed at the amount of hunger and starvation that occurred due to the potato famine. I was shocked at how little the Irish people received from the UK To know that there was food in that country and how many died anyway is shocking. Oh for the mighty profit, we were willing to watch thousand and thousand starve. Shame on us all.

One of the great tragedies of the 19th century. An estimated one million dead and two million

displaced. Sadly, this book reveals that it didn't really have to happen, and least not to the degree that it did. This book was written for teen readers allegedly, which may explain why it is heavy with fact but rather light on detail. Nonetheless, it is interesting and entertaining with many interesting illustrations. You could finish this in a day if you were so inclined

I am a high school student who did a research project on the Potato Famine. Although I am not a big fan of non-fiction books, I really enjoyed reading *Black Potatoes: The Story of the Great Irish Famine* because it gave thoughtful insight on how the Irish people suffered from the British government's neglect from 1845-1850. It was intriguing to see how Bartoletti was able to incorporate stories passed down to the descendants of those who had lived through the Irish Potato Famine. Although it would have been helpful to have been given the effect it had on those of the upper class, it gave very adequate perspectives of those in the poverty-stricken areas of Ireland. Reading this book for hours on end made me feel as if I had been living through the famine myself, that is, excluding the feeling of starvation. Being a very descriptive book, the majority of it was quite sad, but some disturbing details included those who had been buried alive. One of the most touching parts was reading about the half-naked women who had suffered through the cold attempting to pick leftover turnips for their starving children who devoured them raw. Bartoletti sufficiently states that this famine could have been prevented because as Ireland continued to export goods, their own people were dying of starvation by the millions. In all, I highly recommend *Black Potatoes: The Story of the Great Irish Famine* to those studying world history because it is very informative and easy to understand.

Read this out loud to my boys and we all loved it. The writing is terrific to tell a true historic story without it seeming textbook. My boys learned so much and not just facts, but thinking about our relationships to one another, the cyclone of situation and its far reaching effects. Very compelling for so many reasons. Highly recommended.

This was very good. It saddens me to see the suffering the Irish endured. You could feel their pain as people died of starvation. Parents dying and children had to become adults helping their siblings with whatever scraps of turnip leaves they found to eat even if it was not fit to eat. Yet still children died. Worth reading. Read this in one day hard to put down.

From the moment I got it I was addicted. I started reading it when I laid down to sleep in the morning

since I work the night shift. I lost out on two hours of sleep before I finally decided I had to put it down and get some sleep. Very well written and informative. I like that the author also went into a discussion about the prior history between Ireland and Britain. I am a lot more understanding of the IRA after reading this book (not that I condone what they do today, I am just saying I get some of the reasoning). Understanding the Irish potato famine is why I bought this book and it does a very good job of explaining what happened without going into useless details that could have made it a 5 or 600 page book.

Today's society tends to think of history as within the last few years, so this book gives a picture of an earlier time of great devastation and a story of survival. The book of Black Potatoes gives a great insight how a virus caused the destruction of a vital food crop for the Irish and how the British government treated the people of Ireland. I felt sorry for the poor, starving people, but I wondered why they did not grow other vegetables along with the potatoes so they did not have to starve. They grew grains for the landowners but the question of why other crops for themselves was never answered. For a government to allow citizens to starve because of crop failure is hard to understand. I am very happy that now we have scientists readily available to find the cause of a virus infestation before a great calamity results. Apparently, they did not have the means during the time of Black Potatoes. I purchased the book to allow my home-schooled granddaughters a look at a former time in history. History must be taught so the former mistakes of mankind will not be repeated. Unfortunately, that isn't necessarily so.

Good book...great overview of the Famine. With amazing time period scetched from various sources including newspapers of the time period.

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