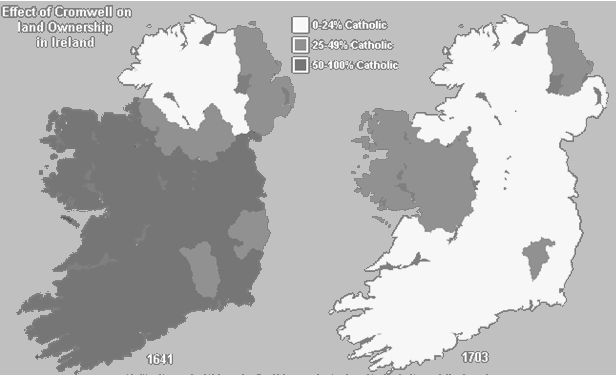
Name # Class Period Date

**Historical Case Study: Ireland**

**Focus Question:** When, if ever, is it ok to take up arms and fight for what you think is right?

Using the background information, analyze the content in the lyrics, poems, and documents below to answer the focus question. You must relate your answer to Ireland; however, you can bring in your own examples as well.

**Background information:** English influence in Ireland began in 1169 when Henry II sent troops and established a feudal system there. Under the Tudor kings of England, a conquest of Ireland put the entire island under English control. During the reign of James I, the Plantation System was established. This put English landlords in charge of Irish lands, and forced Irish citizens to pay for land that families had often been living on for centuries. Many times they couldn’t afford these new prices and were evicted from the land when they couldn’t afford to pay. When Oliver Cromwell was in power, he sent troops to Ireland in order to rid the country of Catholics, killing many and forcing many others off their lands (see map below). The native Irish population was pushed into poverty. After an Irish rebellion against the English crown in 1798, the English parliament extended its control by passing the Act of Union in 1800, which joined England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales under the single government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain. After that time, the Irish continued to lobby England for Home Rule, or the right to local self-government.

******

***(Note that Catholic ownership coincides with Native Irish populations)***

***The Fields of Athenry****:* “God gave us the potato blight; the English gave us the Famine.” –Irish Saying during the 1840s

Anthenry—Irish town in County Galway (western Ireland), where the Famine was harshest.

*'Six famished and ghastly skeletons to all appearances dead were huddled in a corner on some filthy straw. Their sole covering what seemed a ragged horse cloth. Their wretched legs hanging about naked above the knees. I approached with horror and found by a low moaning that they were still alive. They were in fever. Four children, a woman and what had once been a man... in a few minutes I was surrounded by at least two hundred such phantoms... Their demoniacal yells are still ringing in my ear and the horrible images are fixed upon my brain. My heart sickens at this recital.* ~Eyewitness at the Skibbereen poorhouse

*The ship…having on board a large number of emigrants chiefly of the lowest order, in the most destitute and debilitated condition. They are almost totally unprovided with clothing, without sufficient provisions, having consumed a great part of their scanty store while out, and scarcely with strength remaining to leave the hold. It reflects disgrace upon the regulations of the Government that creatures in this condition should be suffered to proceed to sea, with no other dependence against a long and enfeebling voyage than the kindness of persons whose treatment of their passengers, on an average, is hardly less brutal than that experienced from the masters of slave-ships.* ~Description of Irish emigrants to America, Cork Examiner, March 10, 1847

Trevelyan—Charles Trevelyan, a senior British civil servant in the administration of Ireland in Dublin Castle. During the Famine, he was in charge of administering relief, but his inactive attitude was believed to have made the Famine worse. He saw the Famine as a "mechanism for reducing surplus population".

*"The judgment of God sent the calamity to teach the Irish a lesson, that calamity must not be too much mitigated. …The real evil with which we have to contend is not the physical evil of the Famine, but the moral evil of the selfish, perverse and turbulent character of the people"*~Trevelyan

Botany Bay—the term for Australia when it served as a penal (prison) colony for Great Britain.Often Irish citizens who advocated for Home Rule would be deported, or exiled, here. Most of the convicts were thieves who had been convicted in the great cities of England. Only those sentenced in Ireland were likely to have been convicted of rural crimes. Simple larceny, or robbery, could mean transportation for seven years. Compound larceny - stealing goods worth more than a shilling (about $50 in today's money) - meant death by hanging.

*“We have to work from 14-18 hours a day, sometimes up to our knees in cold water, 'til we are ready to sink with fatigue.”* ~Convict in Australia

**Lyrics:**

By a lonely prison wall, I heard a young girl calling  
"Michael, they have taken you away,  
For you stole Trevelyan's corn,  
So the young might see the morn.  
Now a prison ship lies waiting in the bay."

Low lie the fields of Athenry  
Where once we watched the small free birds fly  
Our love was on the wing  
We had dreams and songs to sing  
It's so lonely round the fields of Athenry.

By a lonely prison wall, I heard a young man calling  
"Nothing matters, Mary, when you're free  
Against the famine and the crown,  
I rebelled, they cut me down.  
Now you must raise our child with dignity."

By a lonely harbor wall, she watched the last star fall  
As the prison ship sailed out against the sky  
For she lived to hope and pray for her love in Botany Bay  
It's so lonely round the fields of Athenry.

Name # Class Period Date

|  |
| --- |
| **The Fields of Athenry**  The Basics:   1. Where does the song take place? 2. What crime has the young man, Michael, in the song committed? Why did he do it? 3. What does Michael hope that Mary, his wife, will be free from? 4. What is Michael’s final punishment?   Going Deeper:   1. What specific population do you think Michael and Mary represent? Who do you think Trevelyan represents? 2. What do the Fields of Athenry represent? 3. Do you think the singer sympathizes with the English or with Michael & Mary? Why do you think so? (Think about who he might be, use evidence in the lyrics) 4. What do you think will happen to both Michael and Mary? 5. Connect the quotes from the reading to the song. |

***The Kerry Recruit***

This song recounts the story of a young Irishman from the county of Kerry who enlists in the Crimean War. The Crimean War was fought between the Russians and a coalition of British, French, and Ottoman forces. Although the war was successful for British forces, the fighting was fierce, bloody, and the conditions were poor. Irish regiments were often sent to the front line and experienced the worst conditions of the fighting. As you listen to the song, note how the young man’s attitude changes.

**Lyrics:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| One morning in March I was digging the land,  with me brogues on me feet and me spade in me hand  And says I to myself, such a pity to see,  such a fine strappin' lad footin' turf round Tralee | **Brogues**: a sturdy leather shoe good for working  **Turf**: A thick soil used as fuel in Ireland **Tralee**: A city in county Kerry |
|  |
| So I buttered me brogues, shook hands with me spade,  then went off to the fair like a dashing young blade  When up comes a sergeant he asks me to list,  “'Arra, sergeant a gra, stick a bob in me fist” | **“left behind my work tools”**  **List**: enlist  **a gra:** I agree **bob**: King’s shilling, payment for joining |
|  |
| Well the first thing they gave me it was a red coat,  with a wide strap of leather to tie round me throat  They gave me a queer thing ­ I asked what was that,  and they told me it was a cockade for me hat | **Describes parts of the British uniform**  **Cockade**: badge showing support of Britain |
|  |
| The next thing they gave me they called it a gun,  with powder and shot and a place for me thumb  Well first she spat fire and then she spat smoke,  she gave a great leap and me shoulder near broke | **Irish farmers lived secluded lives and probably had never used a gun before.** |
|  | |
| Well the first place they sent me was down by the quay,  on board of a warship bound for the Crimea  Three sticks in the middle all rolled round with sheets,  Faith, she walked on the water without any feet | **Quay**: dock  Again, the young man had probably never seen a warship before and describes it as best he can  **“three sticks…”:** the masts |
|  | |
| When at Balaclava we landed quite soon,  both cold, wet and hungry we lay on the ground  Next morning for action the bugle did call,  and we had a hot breakfast of powder and ball | **Battle of Balaclava**: 25 October 1854  **The British Light Brigade was nearly completely destroyed** |
|  | |
| Well we fought at the Alma, likewise Inkermann,  and the Russians they whaled us at the Redan  In scalin' the walls there meself lost an eye,  and a big Russian bullet ran off with me thigh | **Alma, Inkermann**: two more battles of the war  **Battle of Redan** |
|  | |
| 'Twas there we lay bleeding stretched on the cold ground,  both heads, legs and arms were all scattered around  I thought of me mam and me cleaveens were nigh,  sure they'd bury me decent and raise a loud cry | **Mam**: mom **cleaveens**: family |
|  | |
| Well a doctor was called and he soon staunched me blood,  and he gave me a fine leg made of wood  They gave me a medal and ten pence a day,  contented with Sheelagh, I'll live on half pay | **Medical care was indecent during the Crimean War**  **Sheelagh**: his lover or wife |

|  |
| --- |
| **The Kerry Recruit**   1. What does the song imply life was like for farmers in Ireland? 2. Why did the Kerryman want to leave home and join the army? Do you think this is a good reason? Explain your answer. 3. What happened to him during the Battle of Redan? 4. How was he compensated after the battle? Was this fair, why or why not? 5. Describe what you think his life might be like after he gets back to Kerry. Will be able to do what he was doing before he went to war? What evidence in the song lead you to this idea? |

***The Green Fields of France***

This song tells the story of a man who comes across the gravestone of a solider named Willie McBride, an Irishman who fought for the English during World War I. Although the English promised the Irish Home Rule if they enlisted and fought for the British army, they did not keep their word. There were more Irish deaths than any other nationality in the British army during the war, as they were often the ones sent to the front lines.

**Lyrics**

Well how do you do, young William McBride

Do you mind if I sit here down by your grave side?

A rest for awhile in the warm summer sun,

I've been walking all day and I'm nearly done.

And I see by your gravestone that you were only 19

when you joined the great fallen in 1916.

Well, I hope you died well and I hope you died clean

Or, William McBride, was it slow and obscene?

CHORUS:

Did they beat the drum slowly?

Did they sound the pipes lowly?

Did they sound the death march as they lowered you down?

Did the band play 'The Last Post' in chorus?

Did the pipes play 'The Flowers o' the Forest'?

And did you leave er’ a wife or a sweetheart behind?

In some faithful heart is your memory enshrined?

And though you died back in 1916

To that faithful heart are you forever 19?

Or are you a stranger without even a name

Enclosed in forever behind a glasspane

In an old photograph torn and tattered and stained

And fading to yellow in a brown leather frame?

Well, the sun now it shines on these green fields of France,

The warm summer breeze makes the red poppies dance.

And look how the sun shines from under the clouds

There’s no gas, no barbed wire, no guns firing now.

But here in this graveyard it is still No Man's Land

And the countless white crosses stand mute in the sand

To man's blind indifference to his fellow man

And a whole generation that was butchered and downed.

Now Young Willie McBride, I can’t help wonder why

Do those who lie here know why that they died?

Did they believe them when they answered the call?

Did they really believe them that this war would end war?

For the suffering, the sorrow, some the glory, the pain -

The killing and dying - it was all done in vain.

For young, Willie McBride, it all happened again

And again, and again, and again, and again.

**An Irish Airman Foresees His Death by W.B. Yeats**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| I know that I shall meet my fate Somewhere among the clouds above; Those that I fight I do not hate, Those that I guard I do not love; My country is Kiltartan Cross, My countrymen Kiltartan's poor, No likely end could bring them loss Or leave them happier than before. Nor law, nor duty bade me fight, Nor public men, nor cheering crowds, A lonely impulse of delight Drove to this tumult in the clouds; I balanced all, brought all to mind, The years to come seemed waste of breath, A waste of breath the years behind In balance with this life, this death. | **“those I fight”**: The Germans  **“those I guard”**: The English  **Kiltartan**: township in Irish county Galway  **“likely end”:** outcome  **Bade:** forced or persuaded  **Impulse**: quick decision, desire  **Tumult**: Confusion, chaos, instability |

|  |
| --- |
| **The Green Fields of France**   1. Compare the song to the poem by Irish author William Butler Yeats. In a few sentences, describe the similar the themes in the song and the poem. Be sure to give specific examples from each to support your answer. 2. Imagine you were Irish during WWI. How would this treatment of the British make you feel? |

***Proclamation of the Irish Republic, issued Easter 1916***

POBLACHT NA h-EIREANN

THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF THEIRISH REPUBLIC

TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND

Irishmen and Irishwomen:

In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.

Having organized and trained her manhood through her secret revolutionary organization, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and through her open military organizations, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, having patiently perfected her discipline, having resolutely waited for the right moment to reveal itself, she now seizes that moment, and, supported by her exiled children in America and by gallant allies in Europe, but relying in the first on her own strength, she strikes in full confidence of victory.

We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible. The long usurpation of that right by a foreign people and government has not extinguished the right, nor can it ever be extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish people. In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty; six times during the past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms. Standing on that fundamental right and again asserting it in arms in the face of the world, we hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a Sovereign Independent State. And we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades-in-arms to the cause of its freedom, of its welfare, and of its exaltation among the nations.

The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irish woman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities of all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided a minority in the past.

Until our arms have brought the opportune moment for the establishment of a permanent National Government, representative of the whole people of Ireland and elected by the suffrages of all her men and women, the Provision Government, hereby constituted, will administer the civil and military affairs of the Republic in trust for the people.

We place the cause of the Irish Republic under the protection of the Most High God, Whose blessing we invoke upon our arms, and we pray that no one who serves that cause will dishonour it by cowardice, inhumanity, or rapine. In this supreme hour the Irish nation must, by its valour and discipline and by the readiness of its children to sacrifice themselves for the common good, prove itself worthy of the august destiny to which it is called.

Signed on behalf of the Provisional Government,

THOMAS J. CLARKE

SEAN MAC DIERMADA

THOMAS MACDONAGH

P.H. PEARSE

EAMONN CEANNT

JAMES CONNOLLY

JOSEPH PLUNKETT

***Come Out Ye Black & Tans***

This is an Irish rebel song written by Dominic Behan as a tribute to his father Stephen. The lyrics are rich with references to the history of Irish nationalism and the activities of the British Army throughout the world. The song ties Irish nationalism to the struggles of other peoples against the British Empire across the world. After the Easter Rising of 1916, the Irish entered into a War of Independence. This was primarily a guerrilla war fought between the I.R.A. and the British Government and its forces in Ireland. A treaty was signed in 1921 and established the Irish Free State, the first self-government in Ireland since the conquest of Henry II in the Middle Ages. However, violence continued in the countryside and Northern Ireland between two Irish political factions over disagreement with the treaty, called the Irish Civil War.

The specific context of the song is a dispute between Irish republican and loyalist neighbors in inner-city Dublin in the 1920s. The song is not only an indication of the bitterness that Dubliners felt for the way they were treated by the Free State after freedom was attained, but it an indication that the bitterness caused by the Irish War of Independence endured in Dublin for many years, just as those of the Irish Civil War endured in the countryside.

**Lyrics**

I was born on a [Dublin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dublin) street where the Loyals drums did beat, **Loyals**: English or Irish English loyalists

And the loving English feet walked all over us;

Oh and nearly every night, when me Da would come home tight,

He'd invite the neighbours out with this fine chorus:

**CHORUS**

Oh, come out you Black and Tans; **Black & Tans**: Nickname of the English soldiers

Come out and fight me like a man;

Show your wife how you won medals [down in Flanders](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Front_%28World_War_I%29); **Flanders**: Reference to WWI

Oh and how the [I.R.A.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_Republican_Army) made you run like hell away

From the green and lovely lanes in [Killeshandra](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Killeshandra). [**Killeshandra**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Killeshandra)**:** Irish town that may have been the location of one of the I.R.A operations during the

Come, let us hear you tell War of Independence

How you slandered great [Parnell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Stewart_Parnell),

When you thought him well and truly persecuted, [**Parnell**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Stewart_Parnell)**:** Irish politician, supported an Irish

Where are the sneers and jeers republic, accused of crimes based on forged letters

That you loudly let us hear,

When the leaders of sixteen were executed. **Leaders of sixteen:** Easter Rising of 1916

**CHORUS**

Come, tell us how you slew **VerseTwo** mocks the British colonial wars

[Themol' Arabs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraqi_revolt_against_the_British) two by two; fought in the Middle East (**Arabs**) & Africa (**Zulus**)

[Like the Zulus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-Zulu_War), they had spears and bows and arrows;

How bravely faced one,

With your sixteen pounder gun,

And you frightened them ol’ natives to their marrow.

**CHORUS**

Now the time is coming fast

And I think those days are here,

When those English Johnny’s heels will run before us;

And, if there be a need,

Then our kids will say "Godspeed!" **Godspeed:** Good-bye

With a verse or two of singing this fine chorus.

**CHORUS**

|  |
| --- |
| **Proclamation of the Irish Republic, issued Easter 1916**   1. Who is this document written for? 2. What secret group is the leader of this uprising? 3. What rights does this document guarantee? 4. What is the tone of this document? How does it make you feel? 5. Write a response from the English government to this document. (It should NOT be longer than this space…write small if you need to) |
| **Come Out Ye Black and Tans**   1. How is this song similar or different from the other songs so far? 2. How does this song compare with the nationalist sentiment evident in the 1916 Proclamation? |

**The Troubles**

During the Irish War of Independence, the Northern Irish town of Derry (or Londonderry) was rocked by violence, partly prompted by the guerilla war raging between the Irish Republican Army and British forces, but also influenced by economic and social pressures. By mid-1920 there was severe sectarian rioting in the city. Many lives were lost, and in addition many Catholics and Protestants were expelled from their homes during this communal unrest. During a period known as The Troubles, the city became a focal point for the Irish Civil Rights movement. The city became militarized and barricades were constructed. British soldiers were installed in the city to try to keep the peace. It came to a head on January 30, 1972, in an incident known as Bloody Sunday. During a Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association march, shots rang out and 26 civil-rights protesters and bystanders were shot by soldiers of the British Army. 13 young men—seven of whom were teens—died immediately or soon after. Two protesters were also injured when they were run down by army vehicles. Five of those wounded were shot in the back. No one knowsif the protesters or the soldiers fired first.

Read the lyrics below and study the images of murals painted on buildings in Derry. Use these to answer the questions.

***The Town I Loved So Well***

*In my memory I will always see  
the town that I have loved so well  
Where our school played ball by the gasyard wall  
and we laughed through the smoke and the smell  
Going home in the rain, running up the dark lane  
past the jail and down behind the fountain  
Those were happy days in so many, many ways  
in the town I loved so well  
  
In the early morning the shirt factory horn  
called women from Creggan, the Moor and the Bog  
While the men on the dole played a mother's role,  
fed the children and then trained the dogs  
And when times got tough there was just about enough  
But they saw it through without complaining  
For deep inside was a burning pride  
in the town I loved so well  
  
There was music there in the Derry air  
like a language that we all could understand  
I remember the day when I earned my first pay  
And I played in a small pick-up band  
There I spent my youth and to tell you the truth  
I was sad to leave it all behind me  
For I learned about life and I'd found a wife  
in the town I loved so well  
  
But when I returned how my eyes have burned  
to see how a town could be brought to its knees  
By the armoured cars and the bombed out bars  
and the gas that hangs on to every breeze  
Now the army's installed by that old gasyard wall  
and the damned barbed wire gets higher and higher  
With their tanks and their guns,*

*oh my God, what have they done  
to the town I loved so well  
  
Now the music's gone but they carry on  
For their spirit's been bruised, never broken  
They will not forget but their hearts are set  
on tomorrow and peace once again  
For what's done is done and what's won is won  
and what's lost is lost and gone forever  
I can only pray for a bright, brand new day  
in the town I loved so well*



Based on a photography taken on Bloody Sunday of Father Edward Daly, waving a blood-stained white handkerchief as he escorts a mortally-wounded protester to safety during the event.



|  |
| --- |
| **The Troubles**   1. What emotions are most prevalent in this song? 2. How has the town of Derry changed according to the lyrics? 3. Examine the pictures. What message do they tell? 4. In the space below, draw a mural to represent something that you are passionate about. This could be a political platform, a global issue, etc. The topic is completely open to whatever you want it to be about…however, don’t forget that this is a ***public school*** assignment that ***I will see***…so make it at least semi-appropriate to this environment |

**New IRA sent bombs to army recruitment centres, Met confirms**

[Henry McDonald](http://www.theguardian.com/profile/henrymcdonald), [Ireland](http://www.theguardian.com/world/ireland) correspondent; [The Guardian](http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian), Monday 17 February 2014 16.12 EST

The republican terror alliance known as the new IRA has said it was responsible for a series of parcel bombs sent to army recruitment offices across England.



Army careers office in Canterbury, Kent, where one of the suspected explosive devices was found. Photo: Gareth Fuller/PA

Scotland Yard has confirmed that the new IRA used a recognized codeword in claiming responsibility for sending the suspect packages to military careers offices in Oxford, Brighton, Canterbury and the Queensmere shopping centre in Slough last week.

Earlier the terror group had sent similar packets to Aldershort, Reading and the RAF careers office in Chatham, Kent. A number of the packages had Dublin postmarks on them and were thought to contain low grade explosives.

The shopping centre at Queensmere was temporarily evacuated, while cordons were placed close to all the offices where packages have been found. Ministry of Defence bomb disposal units were also called in to deal with the devices.

In a coded statement to Belfast newspaper, The Irish News, the terror group said: "The IRA claims responsibility for the explosive devices that were sent to British armed forces recruitment centres in England. Attacks will continue when and where the IRA see fit."

The parcel bombs mark a fresh phase in the new IRA's armed campaign by targeting mainland Britain. Dissident republican organisations have not struck in England for almost a decade.

There have been a series of arrests made among all three anti-process republican groups – the new IRA, the Continuity IRA and OglaighnahEireann [translation: soldiers of Ireland, a splinter group of the IRA] – over the past 12 months and security forces on both sides of the Irish border have thwarted at least half a dozen attempts to transport bombs and mortar devices into Belfast and Derry .

A spokesperson for Scotland Yard said: "We are aware of the claim of responsibility for the devices that were sent to Army recruitment centres in England last week.

"The claim was received on Saturday 15 February by a Northern Irish media outlet using a recognisedcodeword. The claim was allegedly made on behalf of the 'IRA'.

Northern Ireland's deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness condemned those on the republican side still wedded to violence. He said pipe bombs and letter bombs were an "attack on the peace process".

McGuinness, Sinn Fein's [an Irish republican political party in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The name is Irish for "ourselves" or "we ourselves", founded in 1905 by Arthur Griffith, it took its current form in 1970 after a split within the party. The party in its present form has historically been associated with the Provisional IRA.] chief negotiator during the peace process, wrote on Twitter: "Those responsible belong to the past. Their futile acts must be condemned."

Sending parcel and letter bombs is an old tactic that goes back to the Provisional IRA's terror campaigns of the early 1970s. In the first phase of PIRA's "armed struggle" the organisation posted suspect devices in parcels to a range of targets including 10 Downing Street as well as senior military and [police](http://www.theguardian.com/uk/police) officers.

The new IRA was formed in the summer of 2012 by the merger of the Real IRA, an armed vigilante group known as Republican Action Against Drugs and independent armed republican units in Co.Tyrone. They released a statement to the Guardian confirming that they were now to be known as the IRA and vowed to continue "armed struggle" against the [Northern Ireland](http://www.theguardian.com/uk/northernireland) state and the British government, and its armed forces.

Critics of Sinn Fein's political strategy who are deemed "political dissidents" have been trying recently to persuade the armed groups to give up their campaigns. In January, former IRA hunger striker Gerard Hodgins warned the dissidents that Britain had its "eyes and ears" on their organisations through technical surveillance and informants on a 24/7 basis.

Detective Superintendent Stan Gilmour of the South East Counter Terrorism Unit (Sectu), last week said the contents of the packages sent to army recruitment offices were "suspicious in nature" and would be forensically examined. But he added: "Even if the contents are determined to be a viable device, they pose a very low-level threat and are unlikely to cause significant harm or damage."

Advice has been sent to the Royal Mail and to the Ministry of Defence to ensure that staff ''remain vigilant'', he added.

**These new IRA parcel bombs suggest an exasperating tenacity**

[Malachi O'Doherty](http://www.theguardian.com/profile/malachiodoherty); [theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com/), Thursday 20 February 2014 08.19 EST

The bombs that failed to explode in English targets last week reveal the tactical limitations of the lingering terrorist network

Usually it is as well to attribute some tactical intelligence to an enemy, just in case. With Irish republican groups, which have for centuries now been bringing bombs to London and other parts of England, this isn't always easy.

Sending a parcel bomb to an army base, even if it goes off, is not appreciably going to affect the balance of forces between the last standing factions of the IRA and what they prefer to call the British war machine. So the first assumption must be that [those bombs intercepted in recent weeks](http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/feb/17/new-ira-sent-bombs-army-recruitment-centres-britain) were not military strikes in the ordinary sense. They were more akin to acts of protest, or armed propaganda, as the Provos described their campaign. In that respect, they were in character with the slaughter of Lee Rigby. The objective was not to weaken the British army – how could they? – but to advertise a cause in a dramatic way.

The more pertinent question is how well the parcel bombs functioned as advertisements for the cause of militant republicanism. In the early 1970s, the Provisional IRA worked out that a bomb in London gets more attention in the media than a bomb in Belfast. So the Price sisters, [Dolours](http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/jan/24/old-bailey-bomber-dolours-price) and [Marian](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/mar/13/gender.uk), and [Gerry Kelly](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jul/22/old-bailey-bomber-marian-price-charged) and their team took bombs to the Old Bailey and other London sites and got caught. That is also what often happened to IRA bomb teams in the 1940s, when Brendan Behan's bloody investment in Ireland's cause at least earned him the material for Borstal Boy.

And IRA members were less likely to risk imprisonment in England than in Northern Ireland, where they would at least be slopping out among friends. Faced with that reality, the IRA technicians devised the parcel bomb, a weapon that could be delivered by the Post Office. The first of these was sent by [Shane Paul O'Doherty](http://www.derryjournal.com/news/local-news/i-met-hain-shane-paul-1-3471608) (not, to my knowledge, a relation) as recounted in his own memoir The Volunteer.

But a parcel bomb, serving as an attention grabber, has to do two things. First, it has to shock a lot of people, and not just with a big bang: it has to make headlines and get talked about in the media. It wouldn't have taken an [Alastair Campbell](http://www.alastaircampbell.org/) to work out that there was little point in competing with the floods for the front pages. Britain, the historic enemy, inconveniently had other things on its mind. The story was not going to be a big one – unless the bombs went off, of course.

Which is part of the other thing a bomb has to do. It has to destroy itself, even if it fails to destroy anything else. Otherwise it's just a little parcel of forensic evidence. So, judged by these objectives, to get attention and obliterate the evidence, the parcel bomb campaign hasn't provided the daunting proof of tactical intelligence that might make the country sit up and wonder what to do about [the new IRA](http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/jul/26/ira-northern-ireland-dissident-republican-groups1). And that is in keeping with most of what the remnants of the IRA have been up to; they have been busy in Northern Ireland with bombings and vigilante shootings, but they get caught and their bombs get intercepted. The police are succeeding against them, so far.

But there is another message in these bombs, despite their failure. It is that nearly 150 years after the Fenians bombed Clerkenwell and killed 12 people, there are still Irish republicans who want to bomb on, however hopelessly, if only to keep a militant tradition alive.

And there will be many in England, old enough to remember past explosions, whose response to the new bombs will have been a tired resignation to the familiar. Who now would bet that, in another 150 years even, there won't be future generations of Irish republicans sending bombs to London? What the new IRA has done is remind us of the exasperating tenacity of their grievance.

|  |
| --- |
| **Modern Ireland**   1. What impression do you have from the news accounts of the riots in 1997? Does anything about them surprise you? 2. According to the newspaper articles, how has the I.R.A. changed since the 1920s? 3. What is one main idea you can pull from these articles? 4. Describe the evolution of the British relationship with Ireland, using specific lyrics, quotes, and references as examples. |

Now that you’ve finished your analysis, return to the **Focus Question**: When, if ever, is it ok to take up arms and fight for what you think is right? Remember, to relate your answer to Ireland; however, you may also use your own examples as well.