Irish Traveller Culture and Heritage

An Education Resource Pack for Teachers



Designed by the National Traveller Mens Forum

Contents

About the Resource Pack Designer 3
Understanding the Irish Traveller Community 4
History and identity 4
Language 4
Religion and spirituality 5
Culture, traditions and shared values 5
Identity, pride and belonging 6
Moving beyond stereotypes 6
A note for schools 7
Resource Introduction 7
Websites & Online Resources 8
Using the flag in schools 9
Videos & YouTube 11
Traveller Culture and History: A School Perspective 11
A Short History of Irish Travellers 11
Oein DeBhairduin: Why the Moon Travels 11
Books Created for and BY Traveller Children 12
Books for Older Students 16
Creative & Cultural Resources 18
A Resource for Teachers 19
Recommended classroom viewing 19
Traditional Trades 23
Positive Traveller Role Models 38
Meet Traveller Role Models 38
Extra Resources or areas of information for Teachers 41
Reference List 42
Government, curriculum and education publications 42
Traveller organisations and online educational resources 42
Films, documentaries and video resources 44
Traveller language, traditional crafts and cultural heritage 45
Traveller art, music and positive role models 45

Traveller Culture & Education Resource Pack

A resource for schools working with Traveller students: From learning about Travellers to learning with Traveller voices

When choosing resources about Traveller culture, consider who created the resource, whose voice is represented, and how Travellers are being portrayed. Whenever possible, choose resources that are created by Traveller people or developed in partnership with Traveller communities.

Traveller culture should not only appear in the classroom when discussing discrimination, disadvantage or history. Traveller identity, culture, language, achievements, creativity, family and community should have a positive place in everyday education. The aim is not simply to teach non-Traveller students *about* Travellers. It is also to ensure that Traveller students can see their identity, culture and community reflected positively in their school environment.

About the Resource Pack Designer

My name is Ruth Sheridan Cregg, and I am a qualified post-primary teacher, researcher and board member of the National Traveller Men's Forum (NTMF).

I hold a Bachelor's Degree in Business, Accounting and Education from Mary Immaculate College and a Master's Degree in Equality Studies from University College Dublin. I am currently a PhD researcher at Maynooth University, where I am a recipient of the John and Pat Hume Doctoral Scholarship. My research, *Mettle in the Margins: Co-creating Educational Journeys with Traveller Students and Teachers*, explores the educational experiences of Traveller students, with a particular focus on belonging, engagement and educational equality.

As both an educator and a member of the NTMF Board, I developed this resource pack to support teachers in building their knowledge and understanding of Irish Traveller history, culture, traditions and identity. My hope is that it will provide practical and accessible resources that encourage culturally responsive teaching, challenge stereotypes and help create classrooms where Traveller students feel recognised, respected and valued.

I hope you enjoy this resource pack, to help us build on it further please contact **Ruth at** **ntravmf@gmail.com** or Ruth.sheridancregg@mu.ie

Understanding the Irish Traveller Community

Irish Travellers are an indigenous ethnic minority with a long and shared history in Ireland. Traveller identity is rooted in a distinctive culture, history, language, traditions, values and sense of community. The Irish State formally recognised Irish Travellers as an ethnic minority on 1 March 2017, following many years of advocacy by Traveller organisations and community activists. There were 32,949 people who identified as Irish Travellers in Census 2022, representing approximately 0.6% of the population. Travellers live throughout Ireland, with communities and families also living in Britain, America, Canada and elsewhere.

Traveller culture is a living and evolving culture. While there are shared traditions and values, there is also considerable diversity between families, generations and individuals. Not every Traveller will practise every tradition, and schools should avoid assuming that one experience represents all Traveller families.

History and identity

For generations, mobility and nomadism have been important aspects of Traveller life. Travelling traditionally provided opportunities for work, trade, family connection and social interaction. Traditional occupations included trading, horse dealing, tinsmithing, seasonal work and other forms of self-employment. Although many Travellers today live permanently or semi-permanently in one location, nomadism remains an important part of Traveller history and cultural identity. Approximately 2,000 Irish Travellers still traveller for part of the year. Traveller organisations emphasise that the loss of opportunities to travel should not be understood as the disappearance of Traveller culture. Traveller identity continues through family, community, language, traditions, values and cultural practices. Family and kinship have traditionally played a particularly important role within Traveller society. Extended family networks can provide practical, social and emotional support and are an important part of community life. However, as with any community, family experiences and relationships vary considerably.

Language

Irish Travellers have their own traditional language, commonly known as Cant, Gammon or Shelta. Different families and communities may use different terms for the language, and there are also differences in vocabulary and dialect.

Cant/Gammon is an important part of Traveller cultural heritage. It has traditionally been passed down orally through generations and contains words with links to Irish, English and other linguistic influences. The National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage recognises Cant/Gammon as an important element of Irish Traveller cultural heritage. The language is particularly important because it carries history, identity, humour, knowledge and connection between generations. Some forms of the traditional language are at risk of being lost, making opportunities to recognise and celebrate it particularly valuable.

For schools, even a small acknowledgement of Traveller language can send a powerful message: *Traveller culture and knowledge belong in the classroom***.**

Religion and spirituality

Religion has also been an important part of many Traveller families' lives and traditions. Many Irish Travellers identify as Roman Catholic, reflecting the strong influence of Catholicism within Irish Traveller history and family life. Religious traditions, including prayer, attendance at Mass, religious celebrations and pilgrimage, have been important to many families. However, it is important not to assume that every Traveller is Catholic or religious. As with the wider population, Traveller families have different religious beliefs and some have no religion. Schools should therefore approach religion with the same respect for individual choice that they would extend to any other community. Asking families rather than making assumptions is particularly important.

Culture, traditions and shared values

Irish Traveller culture is expressed through many aspects of everyday life, including:

- **Family and kinship**: strong relationships between extended family members and generations.
- **Community and belonging**: a strong sense of connection to Traveller community and identity.
- **Oral tradition**: stories, language, knowledge and traditions passed between generations.
- **Music and storytelling**: important ways of sharing experiences, history and identity.
- **Horses and horse culture**: horses have a long-standing cultural and historical significance for many Traveller families.
- **Traditional crafts and trades**: including tinsmithing and other forms of traditional work and craft.
- **Mobility and nomadism**: historically central to Traveller life and continuing to hold cultural significance.
- **Self-employment and adaptability**: traditional Traveller economic life has included trading, markets and a range of independent occupations.
- **Respect for family and elders**: knowledge and experience have traditionally been valued across generations.
- **Celebrations and gatherings**: opportunities for family, community and cultural connection.

These traditions should not be presented as a checklist of what it means to be a Traveller. Traveller culture is diverse, contemporary and changing, and young Travellers may express their identity in very different ways.

Identity, pride and belonging

For Traveller children and young people, being able to see their culture represented positively in school can contribute to a sense of belonging, identity and pride. The Department of Education's Traveller and Roma Education Strategy 2024–2030 specifically identifies the teaching of Traveller culture and history through the curriculum as an important action. The strategy recognises the importance of creating educational environments where Traveller identity and culture are respected and where Traveller students can experience belonging.

This means that learning about Traveller culture should not be limited to a special occasion or a single lesson. Schools can consider how Traveller history, culture and contemporary experiences are represented across the curriculum and wider school environment.

Moving beyond stereotypes

It is important that learning about Irish Travellers does not reproduce stereotypes. Travellers are not a homogenous group. Traveller families differ in their religious beliefs, occupations, accommodation, mobility, family circumstances, educational experiences and cultural practices. Some traditions remain very strong, while others have changed or adapted over time. Schools should also recognise that Traveller culture has sometimes been discussed through a deficit lens, focusing on disadvantage while overlooking the strengths, resilience, knowledge and cultural richness within the community.

A culturally responsive approach asks a different question:

How can our school recognise, respect and value Traveller identity, culture and knowledge?

This involves listening to Traveller students and families, working with Traveller organisations, challenging anti-Traveller racism and creating opportunities for Traveller voices to be heard. The current National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II identifies tackling racism and discrimination, culturally appropriate public services and full participation in social, cultural and economic life as key priorities.

A note for schools

When working with Traveller students and families, do not assume, ask, listen and build relationships. A school does not need to become an expert in Traveller culture overnight. Small, meaningful actions can make a difference: learning some Traveller history, recognising Shelta/Cant/Gammon, using culturally respectful resources, celebrating Traveller achievements, displaying positive representations of Traveller identity and ensuring that Traveller students can see themselves reflected in the life of the school. Most importantly, Traveller students should not be expected to speak for or represent the whole Traveller community.

Traveller culture is not simply something for schools to teach about. It is something that can be recognised, respected and valued as part of the diversity of Irish society.

Resource Introduction

Every young person deserves to see themselves, their culture and their community reflected positively in their education.

This resource pack brings together websites, videos, books, teaching materials and other resources that can help schools learn about, recognise and celebrate Irish Traveller culture, history, language, identity and contribution to Irish society. The resources have been selected to help schools move beyond simply learning *about* Travellers and towards creating an educational environment where Traveller students can see themselves reflected, valued and respected.

The pack includes resources created by Traveller organisations, Traveller writers and artists, educational organisations, children and young people, and other organisations working alongside the Traveller community. Where possible, we have prioritised resources that centre Traveller voices and experiences. Resources can be used across a range of subjects and settings, including English, Gaeilge, History, Geography, SPHE, Wellbeing, CSPE, Art, Music and intercultural education.

This is a starting point rather than a complete collection, this resource pack will continue to evolve with the community that it represents. Traveller culture is diverse and continually evolving, and no single resource can represent every Traveller's experience.

Websites & Online Resources

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment: Traveller Culture & History

The NCCA Traveller Culture and History Research Report provides teachers with an accessible introduction to Traveller history, culture, language, traditions, contributions and contemporary experiences. There is also a short film, ***"Traveller Culture and History: A School Perspective,"*** featuring teachers, students and school leaders discussing how Traveller culture and history can be incorporated into school life and the curriculum.

NCCA / Curriculum Online – Traveller Culture & History

Scoilnet: Irish Traveller Collection

Scoilnet has a dedicated post-primary collection on Irish Travellers. It includes activities and resources designed to help students explore Traveller culture and history and develop respect and appreciation for cultural diversity.

Scoilnet – Irish Traveller Resources

Yellow Flag Programme

The Yellow Flag Programme has a substantial collection of intercultural learning resources relating to Traveller culture. These include fact sheets, books, videos, documentaries and classroom resources. Its collection includes resources such as Traveller Culture and Heritage, Coppers and Brass, Inspiring Traveller Women, Inspiring Traveller Men, Traveller Writer Series, and Challenging the Myths about Travellers.

Yellow Flag – Intercultural Learning Resources

National Traveller Men's Forum : Traveller Ethnicity Flag



The Traveller Ethnicity Flag is a community-led symbol created to promote recognition, pride and respect for Irish Traveller culture and identity. The flag was designed and commissioned by the National Traveller Men's Forum (NTMF). The NTMF is a national organisation working to support and empower Traveller men, families and communities, while promoting Traveller culture, equality, education, health and community development.

The design of the Traveller Ethnicity Flag was developed through consultation with Traveller people and Traveller organisations. Four in-person consultations were held in Cork, Derry, Sligo and Athlone, giving members of the Traveller community opportunities to share their views about the design, meaning and use of the flag. Feedback was also welcomed in writing and through submissions. The design was reviewed and developed in response to this engagement. The process reflects an important principle: symbols representing Traveller identity should be developed with Traveller people, rather than simply for them.

National Traveller Men's Forum Website : https://www.ntmf.ie/

Using the flag in schools

The Traveller Ethnicity Flag can be purchased on the national Traveller Men's Forum website above. It is a meaningful way for schools to recognise and celebrate Traveller identity, culture and heritage. Displaying the flag, where appropriate, can help communicate that Traveller culture has a place within the school community and that Traveller students' identities are valued and respected.

Schools might use the flag as part of:

- Traveller Culture and History activities
- classroom discussions about identity and belonging
- displays celebrating Traveller culture
- inclusion and diversity initiatives
- lessons exploring Irish culture and heritage

- events recognising Traveller ethnicity and culture
- conversations with students about equality, respect and belonging

The flag can also provide an opportunity to move beyond simply *learning about* Travellers and towards creating school environments where Traveller students can see their culture, history and identity represented and respected. For more information about the National Traveller Men's Forum and the Traveller Ethnicity Flag, schools can contact the organisation directly on ntravmf@gmail.com or through their website above.

Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre

A key source of information about Traveller rights, culture, equality, education, health and community development.

Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre

Irish Traveller Movement

The Irish Traveller Movement provides information, resources and advocacy relating to Traveller rights, equality, culture and participation.

Irish Traveller Movement

Involve: Traveller Culture and Identity Project

This is particularly useful for schools wanting to deepen their understanding of Traveller culture and identity. The Traveller Culture and Identity Project (TCIP) provides training materials covering:

- Irish Traveller history
- Irish Traveller culture
- Irish Travellers today

The materials are available in both video and PDF formats.

Involve – Traveller Culture and Identity Project

Videos & YouTube

Traveller Culture and History: A School Perspective

A short NCCA film showing how schools are incorporating Traveller culture and history into teaching and learning. It includes the perspectives of teachers, students and school leaders.

A Short History of Irish Travellers

The Cork Traveller Women's Network produced an animation introducing the history and culture of Irish Travellers. It is specifically highlighted as a resource for educating people about Traveller history and culture. This can be found on You Tube.

Oein DeBhairduin: Why the Moon Travels

Oein DeBhairduin is an Irish Traveller writer and storyteller. There is a recording of him reading from *Why the Moon Travels*, a collection rooted in Irish Traveller oral tradition. This can be found on You Tube on Children's Books Ireland.

Books Created for and BY Traveller Children

Traveller children are not only people to learn about, they are authors, artists, storytellers and creators of knowledge. Kids' Own Publishing has a particularly strong collection of books created with Traveller children and young people.

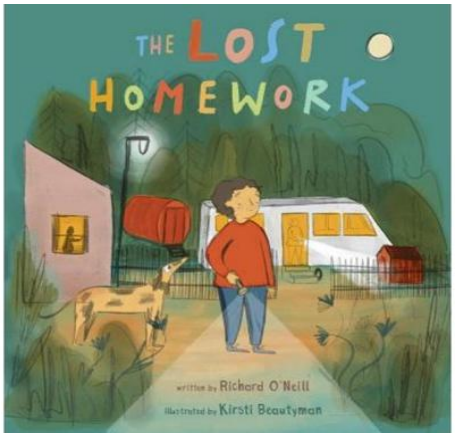
The **Grow Up Strong** project, for example, was created with Traveller children and explores culture, identity, confidence and resilience.

Kids' Own – Traveller Culture Collection

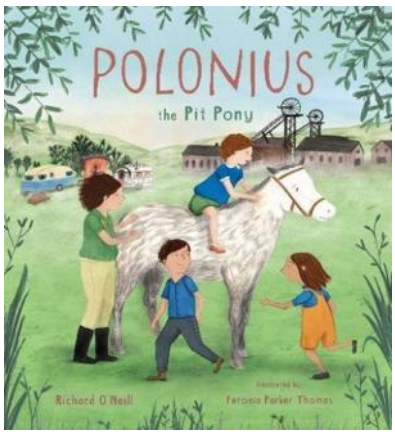
For schools, these resources can help children and teachers develop a more positive and nuanced understanding of Roma and Traveller identities, cultures, families and experiences. They provide an important alternative to representations that focus primarily on disadvantage or stereotypes, instead allowing young people to share what matters to them in their own words and through their own creativity.

Books for Schools

Ages 5–12



***The Lost Homework*, Richard O'Neill**
A children's story by Traveller storyteller Richard O'Neill.

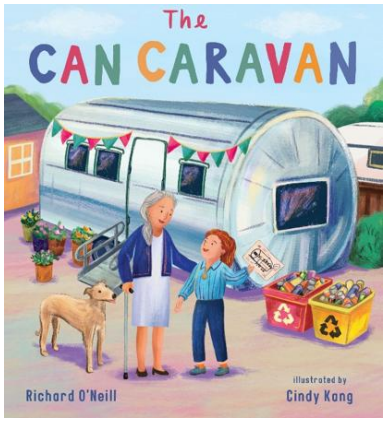


***Polonius the Pit Pony*, Richard O'Neill**
Another title from Richard O'Neill's Traveller-related children's work.

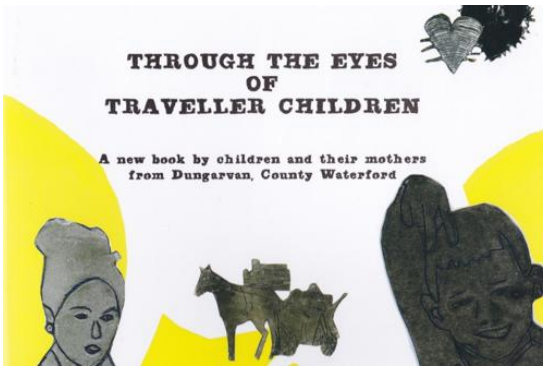


***Ossiri and the Bala Mengro,* Richard O'Neill**

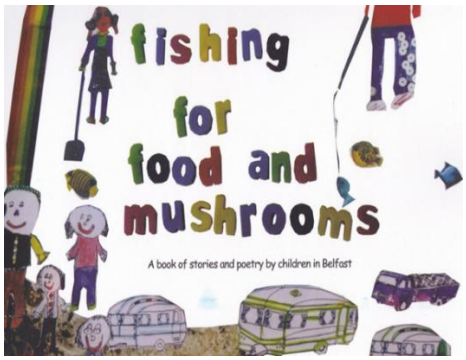
This story follows a Traveller girl who makes her own musical instrument and encounters an ogre. Rooted in Romani storytelling, this colourful picture book celebrates creativity, resourcefulness and Travelling cultures.



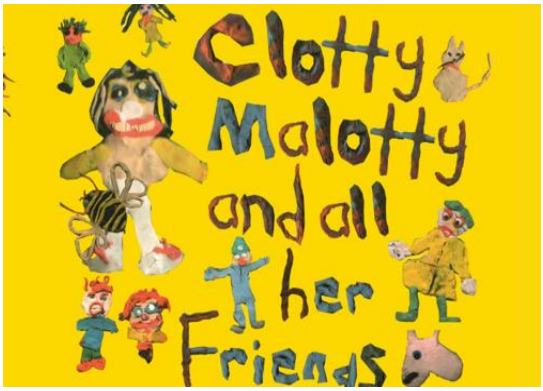
***The Can Caravan,* Richard O'Neill**
A colourful and engaging resource that can help children explore Traveller life, creativity, storytelling and traditional skills. Through an accessible story, it offers an opportunity to introduce Traveller culture in a positive and engaging way.



Through the Eyes of Traveller Children
Created with Traveller children from Dungarvan, this book shares their experiences, stories and hopes for the future. It was developed through creative workshops with Traveller children and their parents.

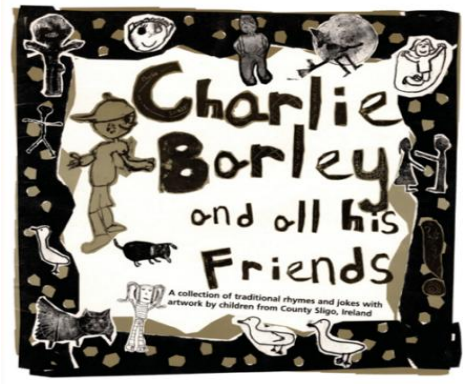


***Fishing for Food and Mushrooms*, Stories and Poetry by Children of Belfast**
Fishing for Food and Mushrooms is a collection of stories and poetry created by children in Belfast. It provides an opportunity for children to encounter the world through the eyes, experiences and imaginations of young people themselves.



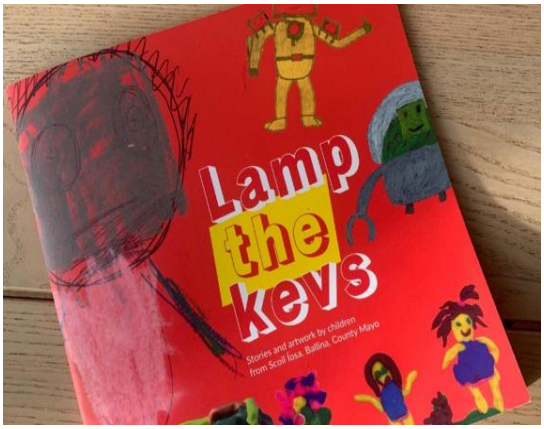
Clotty Malotty and All Her Friends, **Rhymes and Artwork by Children from Finglas**

Clotty Malotty and All Her Friends is a collection of rhymes accompanied by artwork created by children from Finglas, County Dublin. The book provides an opportunity for children to see their own communities, creativity and voices reflected in a published resource.



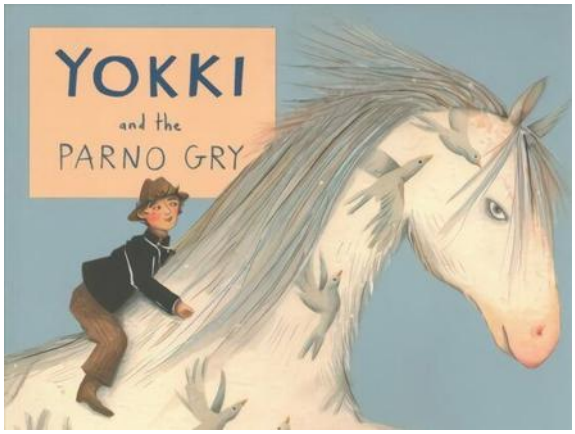
Charlie Barley and All of His Friends, **Traditional Rhymes and Jokes from County Sligo**

Charlie Barley and All of His Friends is a collection of traditional rhymes and jokes, accompanied by artwork from children in County Sligo. The resource provides an engaging way for children to encounter traditional forms of storytelling, humour and creative expression rooted in community life.



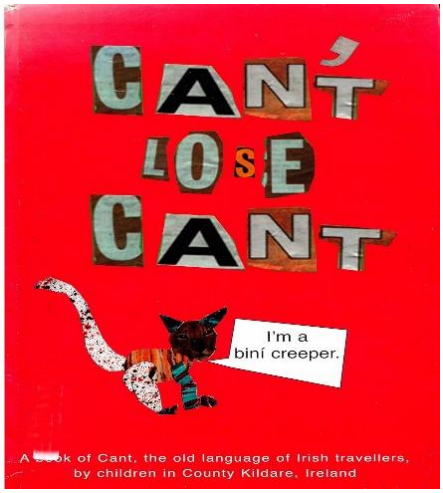
Lamp the Kevs, **Stories and Artwork from Children in Ballina, Co. Mayo**

Lamp the Kev is a story accompanied by artwork created by children in Ballina, County Mayo. The resource offers children an opportunity to see local stories, creativity and community experiences represented through the work of young people themselves.



Yoki and the Prano Gry, **Richard O'Neill**

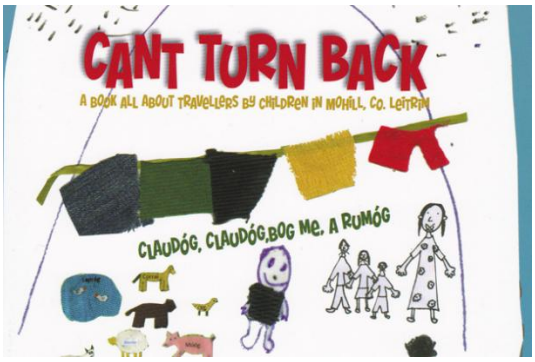
Yoki and the Prano Gry by Eimer O'Neill is a valuable resource for schools seeking to introduce Traveller culture and storytelling in an engaging and accessible way. The book provides an opportunity for children to encounter Traveller culture through story, supporting positive representation and helping to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions.



Can't Lose Cant
This is an especially valuable resource for introducing students to Cant, the traditional language of Irish Travellers. It was created by Traveller and settled children in County Kildare and explores Traveller language through children's drawings and illustrations.



***This Giant Tent,* Mary Branley**
This is a particularly lovely resource because it was created with Traveller children. The book brings together artwork and stories created by children in Ballina following their engagement with the National Museum of Ireland's *Travellers' Journey / Mincéir Misli'd* exhibition.



***Can't Turn Back* , Traveller Children's Voices**
Can't Turn Back is a valuable resource for schools because it gives Traveller children an opportunity to share their own experiences, perspectives and voices. Created by Traveller children in Moyhill, Co. Leitrim, the book provides an authentic starting point for learning about Traveller identity, culture and lived experience.



***The Real Us* and *Grow Up Strong,* Stories and Voices of Roma and Traveller Children and Young People**
The Real Us and *Grow Up Strong* are collections created by Roma and Traveller children and young people, providing an opportunity for their voices, experiences and perspectives to be heard directly.

Cant is Cool

An online resource booklet available to download for free was created by Navan Traveller Workshop

Link to free download: Layout 1

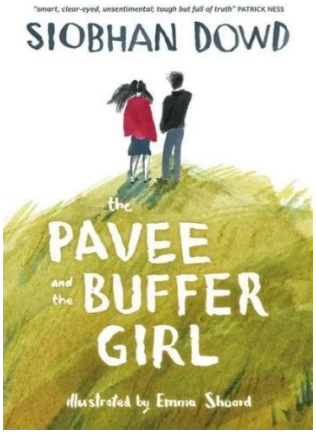


***I'm Not allowed To Play with You Anymore,* Cassie Marie McDonagh**

A children's book about bullying at school and its effects on the Gypsy and Traveller community. The author of this book is a member of the Travelling Community.

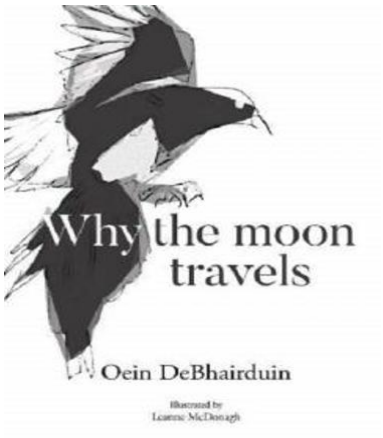
Link to free download: "I'm not allowed to play with you anymore" (SEPT 17) | The Traveller Movement

Books for Older Students



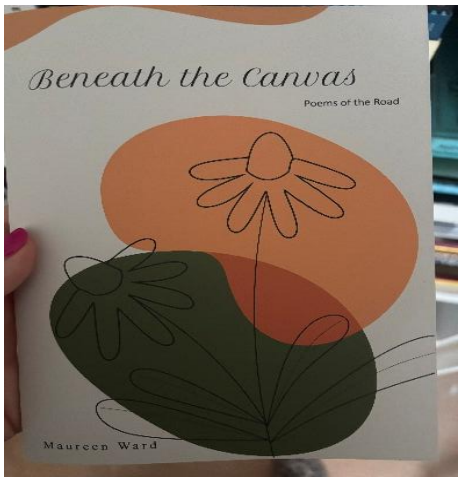
The Pavee and the Buffer Girl, Siobhan Dowd

A useful fiction resource for exploring Traveller identity, friendship, schooling and relationships between Traveller and non-Traveller communities. It tells the story of Jim, a young Traveller boy, his experiences at the "Buffer" school and his developing friendships.



Why the Moon Travels, Oein DeBhairduin

A collection of stories rooted in the oral tradition of the Irish Traveller community. This would be particularly valuable for exploring oral tradition, storytelling, Traveller language, family stories, folklore, identity and Irish cultural heritage.



Beneath the Canvas, **Maureen Ward,**
(Director of Minceir Whiden.)
Maureen is a Traveller women born on the road and a passionate activist for her community. This book is a collection of poems inspired by her childhood by the roadside and life as a Traveller woman.

Creative & Cultural Resources

The Walking People

The National Traveller Men's Forum have an renowned exhibition called "The Walking People" which details the life of traditional Irish Travellers from their ancestry, nomadic homes, traditional trades and many crafts, this is a one stop shop for understanding Traveller culture.

For more information see www.ntmf.ie or contact ntravmf@gmail.com

Traveller Artists

Francesca Huthchinson: Mincéir Artist. Sharing my stories and capturing my culture through Fine Art

Leanne McDonagh: a Cork-based Traveller visual artist and graduate of Crawford College of Art and Design. Much of her work explores Traveller identity, family, kinship, discrimination and everyday Traveller life from within the community. Her work has appeared in IMMA, the Hugh Lane, the Glucksman and other galleries. She also illustrated Oein DeBhairduin's *Why the Moon Travels*.

Paddy Collins: a self-taught Traveller painter whose work frequently depicts traditional Traveller life, including wagons, horses, campfires, nature and family life. His work was included in the *Bafushia* exhibition at the Hugh Lane Gallery in 2025

Chloe McDonagh: a Traveller graphic designer and multimedia artist from Offaly. Her work explores Traveller identity, representation and mental health. She has exhibited at venues including the National Museum of Ireland, The Model in Sligo and the Hugh Lane. Her permanent artwork *Together* was installed at IADT in 2026.

Frank McCarthy: a Traveller visual artist and printmaker from Limerick. He has also worked in community arts and developed projects with young Traveller people, including *Paint Punch*, which combined boxing and visual art.

David McDonagh: a photographer, filmmaker and writer. His work uses photography and film as forms of storytelling and has been exhibited in Sligo, Axis Ballymun and internationally.

Moll McDonagh: a Traveller textile artist associated with traditional Traveller crafts, including beady pockets and paper flowers. These forms are particularly useful if you want your school resources to recognise Traveller women's artistic heritage as well as contemporary gallery art.

William Cauley: a contemporary artist of Traveller heritage whose work was included alongside Chloe McDonagh, David McDonagh, Frank McCarthy, Leanne McDonagh and Paddy Collins in the major *Bafushia* Traveller art exhibition at Dublin's Hugh Lane Gallery.

A Resource for Teachers

Traveller music should not only be introduced during Traveller Pride Week or as part of a historical lesson. It can be incorporated naturally into Music, English, History, CSPE, SPHE, Wellbeing and Transition Year.

Teachers might invite students to listen to a traditional Traveller song and a contemporary Traveller artist, explore how songs preserve family and community histories, examine the importance of oral tradition, or discuss how music can communicate identity and belonging. Comparing artists such as Pecker Dunne and Willzee, or Mickey Dunne and Niamh Dunne, can also help students understand that culture is something that is both inherited and continually recreated. For teachers wishing to explore further, the Pavee Point Traveller Artists Directory contains Traveller singers, musicians, writers, actors, visual artists and other creatives from around Ireland. The National Traveller Men's Forum website has an education section with all areas of this booklet detailed and expanded further on.

Recommended classroom viewing

The 2026 TG4 documentary ***Ag Taisteal Siar: The Legacy of Irish Traveller Music***. It specifically examines the history and continuing development of Traveller music and includes contemporary Traveller musicians alongside discussion of earlier figures including Pecker Dunne and Johnny Doran.

Read about Ag Taisteal Siar on RTÉ/TG4

Music

Coppers and Brass is identified by the Yellow Flag Programme as a music documentary exploring the contribution of Irish Travellers to traditional Irish music.

Some well-known Traveller Musicians:

- Pecker Dunne
- The Fureys
- Deoraí
- The Dunne Brothers
- Thomas McCarthy
- Johnny Doran
- John Doherty
- Steo Wall
- Niamh Dunne
- Sharyn Ward
- Willzee

Traveller Music and Musicians

A Living Musical Tradition

Music, song and storytelling have long held an important place within Irish Traveller culture. Songs, stories and tunes have been shared within families and passed from one generation to the next through oral tradition. Traveller musicians have made significant contributions to Irish traditional music while also creating new music that reflects contemporary Traveller identity and experience. Today, Traveller musicians work across many genres, including traditional Irish music, folk, country, singer-songwriter music, hip-hop and spoken word.

The 2026 TG4 documentary ***Ag Taisteal Siar*** explores this musical heritage and its continuing development, bringing together musicians including Kathleen Keenan, Sarah Dunne, Sharyn Ward, Niamh Dunne and Steo Wall while remembering earlier musicians such as Pecker Dunne and Johnny Doran.

Thomas McCarthy: Traditional Singer and Storyteller

Thomas McCarthy is a traditional Traveller singer and storyteller originally from Birr, Co. Offaly. He learned many of his songs from his mother, Mary McCarthy, demonstrating the importance of family and oral tradition in passing Traveller songs between generations. He has performed throughout Ireland, Britain, Europe and the United States and received a **TG4 Gradam Ceoil award in 2019**. He has also worked on the films *Songs of the Open Road* and *Songlines*, which document Traveller song traditions.

For the classroom: Thomas's work is particularly useful when exploring oral history, storytelling and how cultural knowledge can be passed from one generation to another.

Learn more about Thomas McCarthy – Pavee Point

Mickey Dunne: Uilleann Piper, Fiddler and Singer

Mickey Dunne comes from the renowned Dunne Traveller musical family of Limerick. He is an uilleann piper, fiddle player, singer, composer, teacher and traditional pipe maker. Pavee Point describes him as one of Ireland's influential uilleann pipers, particularly known for his distinctive open style of piping. He has performed internationally and has received the University of Limerick President's Medal.

For the classroom: Mickey's work can introduce pupils to the uilleann pipes and explore how musical skills and traditions are carried within families.

Learn more about Mickey Dunne – Pavee Point

Niamh Dunne: Fiddle Player, Singer and Songwriter

Niamh Dunne is a fiddle player, singer and songwriter from the Dunne musical family. She is a member of **Beoga** and has also performed with the Karan Casey Band, the Ulster Orchestra and the RTÉ Concert Orchestra. Her solo album *Tides* combines traditional influences with original songwriting exploring family, history, women's experiences and personal identity.

For the classroom: Niamh is a particularly useful example for showing students how traditional culture can inspire new and contemporary music.

Explore Niamh Dunne's work – Pavee Point

Paddy Keenan: Uilleann Piper

Paddy Keenan is an internationally recognised uilleann piper who grew up in Ballyfermot, Dublin, in a musical Traveller family. His family performed as *The Pavees*, and Paddy later became a founding member of the influential traditional Irish group *The Bothy Band* during the 1970s. He continues to perform internationally and to promote Traveller musical heritage.

For the classroom: Listening to Paddy Keenan provides an opportunity to explore Traveller influence within the wider story of Irish traditional music.

Learn about Paddy Keenan – Pavee Point

Pecker Dunne: Singer, Songwriter and Musician

Patrick **"**Pecker" Dunne was a celebrated Traveller singer, songwriter and musician. Born in Castlebar in 1932, he travelled and performed around Ireland at fairs, Fleadhanna Ceoil, sporting events and other gatherings before becoming part of Ireland's folk music scene. He played banjo, mandolin and fiddle and wrote songs reflecting Traveller experiences and life on the road.

His song **"***Sullivan's John"* became particularly well known and provides an interesting starting point for discussing representations of Traveller life within Irish folk music.

For the classroom: RTÉ Archives has preserved a 1985 *Late Late Show* performance by Pecker Dunne, making this an especially accessible historical classroom resource.

Watch Pecker Dunne in the RTÉ Archives

Stephen Dunne: Musician and Singer

Stephen Dunne is the son of Pecker Dunne and plays banjo and guitar. He performs traditional and ballad music and works to continue his father's musical tradition. He is also involved in the *Pecker Dunne Festival* in Wexford and has performed at events including the Fleadh Ceoil, TradFest and Traveller Pride events.

For the classroom: Pecker and Stephen Dunne can be explored together to demonstrate how musical traditions can move between generations within Traveller families.

Learn about Stephen Dunne – Pavee Point

Sharyn Ward: Singer and Songwriter

Sharyn Ward is a Traveller singer-songwriter from Dublin who reached the final of *Ireland's Got Talent* in 2019. Alongside folk music, she has written original songs including "This Auld Camp Here" **and** "Where Have All the Travelling People Gone?" Her music provides opportunities to hear Traveller experiences represented through contemporary song.

For the classroom: Sharyn's songs could be used to begin conversations about cultural change, identity, place, belonging and Traveller history.

Discover Sharyn Ward – Pavee Point

Steo Wall: Singer, Songwriter and Musician

Steo Wall is a singer-songwriter and musician originally from Dublin and now based in Clare. His work brings together Irish folk traditions with contemporary songwriting. His albums include *Where I'm From* and *Street Wisdom for Lost Souls*, and his song **"Glory Days"** was nominated for an RTÉ Radio 1 Folk Award in 2024. He has also worked with TradFest to increase visibility for Traveller traditional music through the **Pavee Club**.

For the classroom: Steo's music is useful for challenging the idea that Traveller culture belongs only to the past. It demonstrates how culture develops and changes while remaining connected to identity and heritage.

Explore Steo Wall – Pavee Point

Willzee : Rap and Spoken Word

Willzee is a Limerick-based Traveller hip-hop artist, spoken-word performer and writer. His work brings Traveller voices and experiences into contemporary music and performance. His album *Kuti'Gris* was released in 2022, and he received the Music, Arts and Culture Award at the 2022 Irish Traveller Pride Awards. He has also worked with young people and Traveller groups to promote creativity.

For the classroom: Willzee is an important inclusion because he shows young people that Traveller artistic expression is not confined to traditional music. Traveller musicians are creating rap, hip-hop and spoken word as well as maintaining older traditions.

Discover Willzee – Pavee Point

PJ Mongan: Singer, Guitarist and Music Educator

PJ Mongan is a Galway-based Traveller musician and singer who performs popular, folk, country and Traveller songs. He plays guitar and has a particular interest in Traveller song traditions. He also works with Music Generation Galway City, teaching music to young people, including young Travellers, and received a Music Traveller Pride Award in 2024 alongside Francis Ward.

For the classroom: PJ's work provides a useful connection between cultural representation and education, showing Traveller young people that members of their own community are also musicians, teachers and creative mentors.

Learn about PJ Mongan – Pavee Point

Traditional Trades

- Tin smithing
- Hawking
- Horse trading
- Beady Pockets
- Paper Flowers

James Collins: Tinsmith
James learned tin smithing from his father and continues the traditional process of shaping and riveting metal by hand. What makes his story especially valuable educationally is that he is now teaching the skill to younger Travellers, so students can see cultural transmission actually taking place. Traveller tin smithing itself is included on Ireland's National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage. National Inventory of Carbon Emissions

John Corcoran & Maureen Ward: Paper-flower makers
John learned paper-flower making from his mother. Traditionally the craft was strongly associated with Traveller women, making his story particularly interesting: he recalls learning it as a young boy because his mother promised that if he helped make the flowers, he could drive the horse and cart when they went to sell them. CONTENTdm

Annmarie McDonagh, Jane Ward, Nora Mongan and Maureen Ward: Beady-pocket makers
Jane and Nora have worked with younger Traveller women in Galway to revive beady-pocket making. Maureen Ward a well-known Traveller activist is regularly seen wearing the Traditional Traveller garb and other pieces handmade to represent Traveller pride and Culture. Pupils can see Traveller women actively reclaiming and passing on the craft today. Creative Ireland Programme

Bounce Back Recycling and Upcycling: the traditional Traveller economy reimagined
This is perhaps one of the strongest contemporary examples for students. Recycling and reuse have long formed part of Traveller economic activity. Today, Traveller-led enterprises in Galway are applying that tradition within the modern circular economy through mattress recycling, furniture repair and upcycling. The Irish Times

Traveller culture is not something that belongs only to the past.
Many traditional Traveller skills developed from creativity, independence, mobility and the ability to repair, reuse, trade and make what was needed. Some traditions have almost disappeared, while others have changed and adapted. Today, Traveller craftspeople, entrepreneurs and community organisations are working to protect these skills and pass them to younger generations. This is especially timely because Ireland's *Traveller Heritage Strategy launched in 2026* highlighted the need to protect skills including tin smithing, paper-flower making, beady pockets and sewing, and to ensure that younger Travellers have opportunities to learn them.

RESOURCE CARD 1

Tin smithing





What is Tin smithing?

Tin smithing is one of the traditional crafts most closely associated with Irish Traveller culture. Traveller tinsmiths worked with sheets of tin, using small anvils, hammers, rivets and specialist tools to create everyday objects such as:

- buckets and cans
- mugs and drinking cups
- pots and saucepans
- jugs
- lanterns and candleholders
- children's toys
- tin whistles



Because relatively few tools were required, a tinsmith could carry his equipment while travelling and work wherever the family stopped. Tin smithing was also an important connection between Traveller and settled communities. Traveller tinsmiths made new household items and repaired objects for families and farmers, sometimes receiving food or other goods in exchange rather than money. Ireland's National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage recognises Traveller Tin smithing as an important traditional craft. National Inventory of Carbon Emissions

Keeping the tradition alive: James Collins

James Collins is a Traveller master tinsmith who learned the craft through his family. In 2025, he led an eight-week tin smithing programme with Balbriggan Traveller Project, teaching younger Travellers how to cut, shape and work with tin and copper. Creative Ireland described James at that time as the only known practising traditional Traveller tinsmith active in Ireland, showing just how important efforts to pass on the skill have become. Creative Ireland Programme

Did you know?

Traveller tinsmiths developed their own specialised vocabulary for tools and stages of the tin smithing process. Tools include the stake, hatchet stake, scutcher and marking sticks. National Inventory of Carbon Emissions

Classroom activity

Design a Traveller tin object.

Ask students to look at traditional tin cups, buckets and lanterns. Have them sketch an object a Traveller tinsmith might have made and consider:

- Who would use it?
- What would it be used for?
- Why would it need to be strong, lightweight and portable?

RESOURCE CARD 2

Paper Flowers



What are Traveller paper flowers?

Paper-flower making is a traditional craft particularly associated with Traveller women. Using coloured paper and simple materials, women created decorative flowers which could be sold from door to door, at markets and fairs. The flowers were particularly popular around Christmas and were also bought to decorate churches. Paper flowers were beautiful, but they were also part of the Traveller economy. The money earned from selling them helped families purchase food, clothing and other necessities.

Keeping the tradition alive: John Corcoran



John Corcoran, a Traveller man from Galway, learned paper-flower making from his mother. John has told the story of learning the craft when he was young: his mother encouraged him to help make flowers by promising that he could drive the horse and cart when they travelled to sell them. His work was documented as part of Galway Traveller Movement's Reimagining Life on the Road project, helping preserve knowledge

of this traditional skill. Paper-flower making continues to feature in Traveller cultural programmes and demonstrations, including a Traveller culture event at Ballinasloe Fair in 2024. Creative Ireland Programme

Watch this you tube video where john speaks of the process and heritage of this art : Paper Flowers

Did you know?

Traditional Traveller paper flowers were not simply decorations. Making and selling them was an important source of income for some Traveller families.

Classroom activity

Make a paper flower.

Students can create their own paper flower while discussing:

- Why were crafts that could be made with inexpensive, portable materials particularly useful within a nomadic economy?

Students could then create a classroom display titled:

Skills Passed Through Generations

RESOURCE CARD 3

Beady Pockets



What is a beady pocket?

The beady pocket is an important part of Traveller women's cultural heritage. These handmade pockets were worn around the waist and were both practical and deeply personal. They could be decorated with:

- Buttons
- Ribbons
- Embroidery
- Beads
- Medals
- pieces of jewellery
- small keepsakes.

Buttons and other items were sometimes exchanged between relatives and friends and then sewn onto a pocket. This meant that individual pieces could carry memories of people, relationships, places and events.

Keeping the tradition alive: Annemarie McDonagh, Jane Ward, Nora Mongan and Maureen Ward

Traveller textile artists Jane Ward, Nora Mongan and Maureen Ward have been actively passing this tradition to younger generations. In 2024 Jane and Nora led beady-pocket workshops with young Traveller women in Galway as part of the Misleór Festival of Nomadic Cultures. Participants created their own pockets and contributed to a much larger collaborative Misleór Beady Pocket. Creative Ireland Programme

This is a particularly strong example of a Traveller cultural tradition being reclaimed and recreated rather than simply preserved in a museum.

Check out: The Beady Pocket Project | National Museum of Ireland

Watch a You Tube clip of Annemarie McDonagh making a beady pocket: BEADY POCKETS



Maureen Ward wearing some of the items she has handmade to represent Traveller culture and pride in her community.

Did you know?

A button on a beady pocket might have represented a particular friend or family member. A pocket could therefore become almost like a family history told through objects rather than words.

Classroom activity

My Memory Pocket

Students do not need to recreate a traditional Traveller beady pocket.

Instead, ask each student to design a paper "memory pocket" containing symbols representing:

- family
- friendship
- an important place
- an important memory
- something they would like to pass to another generation.

This can open a discussion about memory, identity and belonging.

RESOURCE CARD 4

Horses, Horse Keeping and Horse Trading

Why are horses important in Traveller culture?

Horses have had a particularly important place within Irish Traveller life. Historically, horses made a nomadic way of life possible by pulling wagons and carts. They were also part of the Traveller economy through breeding, buying, selling and trading.

Knowledge about horses, feeding, handling, breaking, breeding, judging and trading them, was often learned within families and passed from one generation to another.

Horse ownership continues to be important within parts of the Traveller community today. Research describes Travellers continuing to keep, breed and sell horses, with horse knowledge forming an important connection between generations.

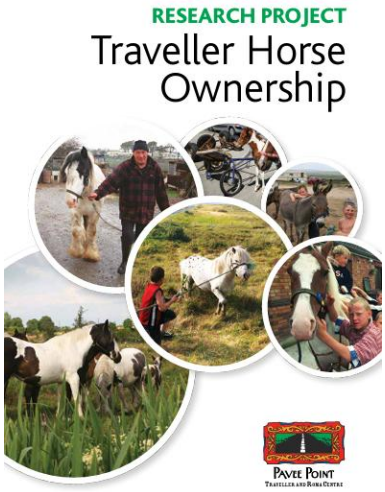
A living tradition

Unlike tin smithing, horse culture is not represented by just one surviving practitioner. There are Traveller horse owners and families throughout Ireland continuing this tradition. Pavee Point's research describes Traveller horse ownership as a living element of Traveller identity and highlights the contribution of Traveller breeders and horse owners to Ireland's wider equine culture.

Ballinasloe Horse Fair is also historically and culturally significant for many Traveller families and remains an important meeting place associated with horse culture.

Ballinasloe Horse Fair is also historically and culturally significant for many Traveller families and remains an important meeting place associated with horse culture.

Read about Horse Ownership in the Traveller Community: Horses-Research-Report-28pp-WEB.pdf



Did you know?

The Irish Cob, with its distinctive feathering around the legs and often coloured coat, has particularly strong associations with Traveller horse culture. Pavee Point notes the role of the Traveller community in developing the breed.

Classroom activity

Knowledge you cannot learn from a book

Ask students:

What knowledge would someone need to care for and trade horses successfully?

Create a class list:

- understanding animal behaviour
- feeding
- grooming
- breeding
- recognising illness
- handling horses safely
- assessing age and condition
- negotiating and trading.

Discuss how practical knowledge can be just as complex as knowledge learned through formal education.

RESOURCE CARD 5

Barrel-Top Wagons and Wagon Craft



What is a barrel-top wagon?

The barrel-top wagon is one of the most recognisable visual symbols associated with Traveller heritage.

Wagons required several different skills, including:

- woodworking
- metalworking
- construction
- painting
- decoration
- restoration.

Their interiors were designed carefully because a relatively small space needed to function as a family home.

Wagons could also be highly decorative, with painted:

- scrolls
- flowers
- horses
- horseshoes

- birds
- geometric patterns.

Keeping the tradition alive: Johnny Murphy

Johnny Murphy, a Traveller from New Ross, Co. Wexford, has been documented building traditional barrel-top wagons by hand. He explained that he wanted to make a wagon so that his children and grandchildren could understand the history of their culture. He constructed his wagon himself over a period of months and spoke about wanting to pass the craft to younger generations. Johnny also featured in the Creative Ireland short documentary *Wagon Wheels*, which explored efforts to preserve barrel-top wagon craft and decorative painting. Creative Ireland Programme

Did you know?

A barrel-top wagon was not simply a mode of transport. It was a home, and its design had to use a very small amount of space intelligently.

Classroom activity

Design a barrel-top wagon

Give students an outline of a wagon and ask them to design its decoration. Then ask them to imagine they must live in the wagon.

Where would they put:

- beds?
- cooking equipment?
- clothes?
- food?
- personal belongings?

This can lead into discussions about design, mobility, home and cultural identity.

RESOURCE CARD 6

Recycling, Reuse and the Traveller Economy

Is recycling really a traditional Traveller livelihood?

Long before terms such as sustainability, reuse and the circular economy became common, collecting, repairing, reusing and trading materials formed part of the traditional Traveller economy. Traveller families collected materials and objects that still had value, repaired items and traded goods rather than simply treating them as waste. That tradition has some striking connections with today's environmental movement.

Keeping the tradition alive: Bounce Back Recycling

One of the strongest modern examples is Bounce Back Recycling, a social enterprise established by Galway Traveller Movement. Bounce Back dismantles unwanted mattresses and furniture so materials can be recovered instead of being sent to landfill or incineration. It also provides employment and progression opportunities for people facing barriers to employment. The enterprise won the Enterprise and Employment Award at the 2026 Traveller Pride Awards. In 2026, Keith McDonagh was identified as Bounce Back Recycling Manager, while Jane Ward managed Bounce Back Upcycling. Galway Advertiser

This makes Bounce Back particularly useful for your students because it connects traditional Traveller economic practices with a modern environmental industry.

Did you know?

Mattresses are taken apart so that materials such as metal, textiles and foam can be separated and recovered, instead of the entire mattress becoming waste. Bounce Back Recycling

Classroom activity

Traveller tradition meets the circular economy

Ask students to research the meaning of “circular economy.”

Then give them an everyday item, for example:

- a chair
- bicycle
- phone

- mattress
- piece of clothing.

Ask:

- Could it be repaired?
- Could part of it be reused?
- Could it be sold to somebody else?
- Could its materials be recycled?
- What happens if we simply throw it away?

Finish by asking:

Are some practices that we now describe as “sustainable” actually very old ways of living?

Connecting the Six Traditions

A nice final page for this section could bring all six together:

What do these traditions have in common?

Tin smithing • Paper Flowers • Beady Pockets • Horses • Wagons • Recycling

Although they are very different, we can see some common themes running through them:

- Skill: knowledge was developed over many years.
- Family: skills were often learned from parents, grandparents and other relatives.
- Mobility: many skills could travel with a family.
- Independence: self-employment and trading allowed families to create their own livelihoods.
- Creativity: ordinary materials could be transformed into useful or beautiful objects.
- Reuse: repairing, reusing and making the most of available materials was central to many traditional activities.
- Oral learning: skills were often learned by watching, listening and doing rather than through books or classrooms.
- Cultural pride: today, maintaining these practices can be a way of protecting and celebrating Traveller identity.

A question for students

What knowledge and skills exist in your own family that you would like to see passed on to the next generation?

Traveller Homes & Nomadism

Irish Traveller Homes and Nomadic Heritage

Nomadism is an important part of Irish Traveller history and identity. Travelling enabled families to maintain relationships, practise trades and attend fairs and gatherings. Homes reflected this way of life, combining practical design, skilled craftsmanship and the ability to move between places.

Barrel-top wagons

Horse-drawn barrel-top wagons are a familiar symbol of Traveller heritage. Their curved roofs sheltered compact living spaces, with beds and storage carefully arranged inside. Painted decoration expressed craftsmanship and family pride. Some families used tents alongside their wagons to provide additional sleeping space.





Roadside tents

Many Traveller families lived in roadside tents, including before wagons became more widely available. Often called *bender tents*, these shelters used flexible branches, such as hazel, bent into a framework and covered with canvas or other protective material. They could be dismantled and carried when families moved on. Building, maintaining and organising these homes required practical knowledge passed between generations.



Modern caravans and trailers

Over time, many families began using motor-towed caravans and mobile homes, often referred to within the community as *trailers*. These provided different ways to organise family living while maintaining connections with nomadic traditions. Today, Travellers live in a range of accommodation, including caravans, mobile homes and houses.

Traveller identity does not depend on living in a particular type of home or travelling throughout the year. Nomadic heritage remains meaningful for many families, including those who now live permanently in one place.



Positive Traveller Role Models

Schools need resources that show Traveller young people achieving, creating, leading and contributing, rather than resources that only focus on disadvantage.

Meet Traveller Role Models

with people from:

- Education
- Sport
- Music
- Art
- Politics
- Business
- Community development
- Activism
- Literature
- Health
- Research

This is not an exhaustive list, it is but a few of the talented members of the traveller community and a brief snapshot of a travellers accomplishment in each area of life.

Area	Person	Contribution to highlight in school
Education	**Owen Ward**	A qualified teacher and advocate for access to higher education. He helped establish University of Sanctuary scholarships at NUI Galway and became the first Irish Traveller elected to a university governing authority in Ireland. His story opens discussion about different routes into education. (Irish Universities Association)
Sport	**John Joe Nevin**	The Mullingar Traveller boxer won a silver medal for Ireland at the London 2012 Olympic Games. His sporting achievements provide opportunities to explore training, skill, commitment and representing Ireland internationally. (Team Ireland)
Music	**Thomas McCarthy**	A Traveller singer and storyteller who shares songs passed down through generations. His work with the Irish Traditional Music Archive helps preserve Traveller songs and recognise their contribution to Ireland's musical heritage. (Irish Traveller, Singer, Storyteller)
Art	**Leanne McDonagh**	A visual artist whose work draws on her experiences as a Traveller woman. She also illustrated *Why the Moon Travels*. Her work offers a starting point for exploring

Area	Person	Contribution to highlight in school
		identity, memory, representation and visual storytelling. (Leanne McDonagh Art)
Politics	**Eileen Flynn**	Became the first Traveller to serve in the Oireachtas in 2020 and the first Traveller elected to the Seanad in 2025. Her achievements can introduce discussions about democratic participation, representation and making decisions that affect communities. (rte.ie)
Business and enterprise	**Christine Collins**	A Traveller beautician featured in *Norah's Traveller Academy*, which supported Traveller women developing their businesses. Her work with Norah Casey on the Beoir beauty range offers a documented example of enterprise, vocational skills and product development. (The Irish Times)
Community development	**Brigid Quilligan**	A Traveller community leader whose work has included leading the Irish Traveller Movement and the Kerry Travellers Health and Community Development Project. UCC awarded her an honorary doctorate recognising her leadership and contribution to equality. (University College Cork)
Activism	**Nan Joyce**	A pioneering Traveller rights campaigner who stood in the 1982 general election. Her campaigning and public voice helped inspire subsequent generations of Traveller activists. She offers a historical example of courage, collective action and participation in public life. (Pavee Point)
Literature and storytelling	**Oein DeBhairduin**	Author of *Why the Moon Travels* and *The Slug and the Snail*. His writing celebrates Traveller oral storytelling, while his museum work contributes to preserving Traveller culture. His books connect literacy with cultural knowledge and imagination. (Skein)
Literature and theatre	**Dr Rosaleen McDonagh**	A Traveller writer, playwright and activist, and author of *Unsettled* and *Contentious Spaces*. Her work creates space for Traveller experiences in literature and public discussion. Teachers can select age-appropriate material to explore voice, identity and creative expression. (oide.ie)
Health and wellbeing	**Dr Thomas McCann**	A Traveller counsellor and psychotherapist who founded the Traveller Counselling Service. His work demonstrates

Area	Person	Contribution to highlight in school
		leadership in developing culturally appropriate mental health support and offers an example of careers centred on listening, care and community wellbeing. (rte.ie)
Research	**Dr Sindy Joyce**	A Traveller sociologist, researcher and lecturer in Traveller Studies at the University of Limerick. Her research brings Traveller experiences into academic knowledge and public debate. Her work can help students explore research, asking questions and whose perspectives shape knowledge. (University of Limerick)
Business and funeral services	**Ian McDonagh**	A young Galway man who became Ireland's first Traveller funeral director and embalmer. His career combines specialist training, care for bereaved families and respect for Traveller traditions, showing young people the range of professional pathways open to them. (The Irish Times)

Extra Resources or areas of information for Teachers

The NCCA's research report is a good starting point, but I'd encourage teachers to avoid treating one document as representing *all* Traveller experiences.

The NCCA itself notes that its report is an overview and does not cover every aspect of Traveller culture and history.

- Traveller Ethnicity Flag: National Traveller Mens Forum
- NCCA: Traveller Culture & History
- Yellow Flag Programme
- Pavee Point
- Irish Traveller Movement
- Involve: Traveller Culture and Identity Project
- Scoilnet: Irish Traveller Collection
- Kids' Own Traveller Culture Collection
- Department of Education Traveller and Roma Education Strategy 2024–2030

Department of Education – Traveller and Roma Education Strategy 2024–2030

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Yellow Flag Programme. (n.d.). Inspiring Traveller women and men [Educational resources]. https://yellowflag.ie/intercultural-learning/

Children's books, storytelling and Traveller literature

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