

2010 English Speech | Sample Answer

You are participating in a public speaking competition for second-level students. Write a speech, that can be serious or amusing or both, in which you describe what you see as the essential elements of the Irish character.

Good evening Adjudicators, fellow speakers, Ladies and Gentlemen. It gives me great pleasure to be here with you today as part of the Tullamore College Public Speaking team. My name is Ellen and I will be discussing the elements and traits that make us, quintessentially, Irish.

The Irish. A mix of ego, stubbornness, great charm and, most importantly, wit. However, it was only when I was away from home for the first time, that I truly discovered what it meant to be Irish. Our unique mannerisms and traditions simply cannot be found anywhere else. My first trip that I took without my parents was in 2018, when I travelled with two other Irish students to Salzburg, Austria. We were, as many Irish people would say, green. Not green with envy, no, green as in we had no idea what we were doing!

We were waving to people at pedestrian crossings, thanking bus drivers and risking our lives by occasionally jaywalking. (We quickly realised that Austrian drivers are maniacs and do not wait for the lights to fully turn green!) The neon colours of GAA half-zips and O'Neill's shorts lit up the petite streets of the sleepy old town of Salzburg. Locals simply did not respond to "well" or "what's the craic!" Our teachers in the German school were fascinated by our eagerness to please and our ability to be "happy out." Even at that young age, I recognised that we stood out. I found that I didn't really know how to feel about my Irishness, was it too much? The short answer, no.

Something which has always amused me, is the Irish communities abroad. You could walk into an airport anywhere in the world and the chances of there being an Irish pub is very high. Every country has its own little population of tea drinking, potato eating and Penney's wearing people. We always seem to find one another, whether it is through someone we know back home (we always know someone who knows someone, who is related to us...) or often just by

pure coincidence. I always wondered why anyone would want to leave Ireland just to go to another version in a different country. Perhaps it's the longing for home that draws the ex-pats to the Irish pubs or centres, places that they wouldn't cross the road to visit if they were still at home. We order boxes of Tayto cheese and onion crisps online, when we'd probably be eating Walker's if we hadn't left. The sporty among us would stay up until all hours, possibly in a different time zone, in order to watch GAA matches on the television. Why? Because we are Irish and we're always together, even when we're apart.

"Will you have a cup of tea? Ah, you will! Go on, you will!" Nobody makes tea quite like we do, do they? I've watched grown men cringe at a video that went viral recently, of a woman making tea. She put cold water and milk in the microwave, before taking it out and adding the teabag. The woman in question was American (need I say any more?) and she amassed hundreds of thousands of hate comments online from Irish people alone. In fact, the Irish are the heaviest tea drinkers per capita in the world, averaging four to six cups per day with many people drinking even more. Tea is one of our sacred customs, a tradition that is not to be messed with. It is the answer to all problems. Crash your car? Have a cup of tea. You start to think, maybe the damage isn't as bad as I thought? The power of those magic little leaves. I am reminded every time of the resemblance that the character of Mrs. Doyle from 'Father Ted' bears to each and every Irish mother out there. Should you be invited into an Irish household, you can be sure that as soon as you cross the threshold, you'll be offered tea as an icebreaker. And once you've finished that cup, you will be offered more tea, and the cycle continues. Grannies are great for keeping the tea coming, at all hours of the day and night.

Another thing Irish Grannies are great for, is lighting candles at Mass. It is the reassurance that you need going into a test, that Granny (and hopefully God) has you covered. I firmly believe that the churches across Ireland could make a profit every year from candle sales alone. My Granny has been lighting candles for my Leaving Cert since September 2015!

Funerals. Most people hate them and understandably so. Not the Irish though! Oh no, funerals are prominent social events. We enjoy funerals more than weddings; simply because we don't have to bring a present, we can sit where we like and with who we like, and we have no idea if it will last an hour or a week. Those iconic triangular salad sandwiches, or do you prefer ham and cheese? As morbid as this sounds, it's true. Only in Ireland, would a man record a voice message

of himself saying “Let me out!” and have it played at his funeral. Funerals don’t just begin and end at the church. It usually starts with a wake, followed by a procession, the ceremony at the church and finally a party of some sort. We meet up with friends and distant family that we haven't seen in years! I honestly admire how much we enjoy funerals. It’s not because the person is dead (which is very sad don’t get me wrong) but the fact that we are celebrating their life in the best way we know.

To conclude, I believe that we have many essential traits. Some good and some bad, but essential nonetheless. We are held in high regard around the world for our good humour and politeness, unlike many other nationalities. You could travel to the ends of the Earth and I guarantee that you would meet an Irish person. We are a community, not just in Ireland, but in every corner of the world. Thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen, for your attention. I hope you enjoy the rest of your evening.