

Truth or Blarney?

Part 1

Below are 30 trivia questions related to Ireland, the Irish, and St. Patrick's Day. Some of the answers include extra information to prompt discussions.

1. "Sweet Gypsy Rose Lee" is a popular Irish song.

Blarney. The actual song title is "Sweet Rosie O'Grady."

2. Over 40% of all American presidents have had some Irish ancestry.

Truth. Presidents with Irish ancestry include Andrew Jackson, James Polk, James Buchanan, Andrew Johnson, Ulysses S. Grant, Chester A. Arthur, Grover Cleveland, Benjamin Harrison, William McKinley, Teddy Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, Woodrow Wilson, Warren G. Harding, Harry S. Truman, John F. Kennedy, Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama.

3. Edward Lear popularized haiku poetry.

Blarney. He popularized the limerick. Edward Lear published many of his limericks in *A Book of Nonsense* in 1846.

4. Ireland was the first country in Europe to grow potatoes on a large scale.

Truth. There was a potato famine in Ireland from 1848 to 1852. Many people emigrated from Ireland during that time.

5. It is customary to eat corned beef and cabbage on March 17.

Truth

6. The true Irish spelling of Patrick is *Pádraig*.

Truth. It derives from Latin, meaning "nobly born."

7. Shamrock shakes have been popular in Ireland this time of year since the early 1900s.

Blarney. Shamrock shakes are green, mint-flavored milkshakes that first appeared in the 1970s at the U.S. fast food chain McDonald's.

8. The author of *Ulysses*, James Joyce, was born in Dublin, Ireland.

Truth. He also wrote the popular book *Finnegans Wake*.

9. Irish actor Peter O'Toole won the Academy Award for Best Actor for his work in the 1962 movie *Lawrence of Arabia*.

Blarney. While he was nominated for the role, he did not win it.



10. In Irish mythology, Tír-Na-nÓg is a place where nothing ages or dies and everyone is happy.
- Truth.** According to the legend, a few days in the mystical Tír-Na-nÓg would be the equivalent of several years in Ireland.
11. “When Irish Eyes Are Smiling” is a traditional Irish folk song.
- Blarney.** It was actually written for a Broadway show called *The Isle o’ Dreams* in 1913. It was a flop and ran for only 32 performances, from January 27 to February 22, 1913.
12. Bram Stoker, author of *Dracula*, was an Irishman.
- Truth.** Stoker wrote a total of 12 novels as well as numerous short stories, several works of non-fiction, and a large number of articles that were published in newspapers and magazines.
13. “St. Patty’s Day” with two *t*’s is correct, while “St. Paddy’s Day” with two *d*’s is incorrect.
- Blarney.** This actually can upset some true Irishmen. *Patty* is an abbreviated woman’s name, and this is not fitting for the male saint who is being celebrated. There is even a website called Paddynotpatty.com that was set up to explain the distinction.
14. The feast of St. Patrick is in honor of Christianity coming to Ireland in the 5th century.
- Blarney.** It was the fifth century.
15. It is widely believed that the circle on the Celtic cross represents the pagan sun god.
- Truth.** Though some debate this, one belief is that St. Patrick himself added the circle to the cross. Others believe it symbolizes eternal life or was simply designed this way to strengthen the construction of the cross.
16. One line from the chorus of the popular song “It’s a Long Way to Tipperary” is “It’s a long way to Tipperary, but my home lies there.”
- Blarney.** The song states “my heart lies there” not “my home lies there.”
17. The Irish scientist Robert Boyle made great contributions in the field of chemistry and physics.
- Truth.** He is sometimes referred to as the “Father of Chemistry.”
18. The 1947 movie *My Wild Irish Rose* was a semi-biographical account of Chauncey Olcott, the Irish singer.
- Truth.** It was also a musical.
19. Belfast is one of the largest cities in Ireland.
- Blarney.** Belfast isn’t in Ireland. It’s the capital of Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom, not the country of Ireland.
20. Irish is the first official language of the Republic of Ireland. The second is English.
- Truth.** Despite this, English is the language more commonly used when speaking. Irish (known as Gaelic in some other countries) is, however, taught in school.

21. Legend states that the reason there are no rats in Ireland is because St. Patrick banished them from the island.

Blarney. The legend was about snakes not rats. Scientists have reason to believe there have not been snakes in Ireland for thousands of years.

22. Irish actress Maureen O’Hara starred in the 1941 movie *How Green Was My Valley*, about an Irish family struggling to make ends meet on a farm.

Blarney. *How Green Was My Valley* is about a Welsh family of coal miners.

23. *Éirinn go Brách* (pronounced *AIR in go bra*) is a phrase in Irish (Gaelic) that expresses your devotion to Ireland.

Truth. An Anglican version of this phrase is spelled *Erin go Bragh*.

24. The legal name of Trinity College Dublin is “The Provost, Fellows, Foundation Scholars and the other members of Board, of the College of the Holy and Undivided Trinity of Queen Elizabeth near Dublin.”

Truth. This name was listed on the original charter issued by Queen Elizabeth I in 1592.

25. Irishman George Bernard Shaw won the 1925 Nobel Peace Prize.

Blarney. He was a playwright and won the prize for literature. He is famous for having written the play *Pygmalion*, which was later made into a movie that won an Oscar.

26. The Academy Award-winning actor Sean Connery is Irish.

Blarney. He was born in Fountainbridge, Scotland.

27. In the 1990s, *Riverdance* became a popular show incorporating chiefly Irish music and dance.

Truth. In fact, the 20th Anniversary World Tour was recently showcased.

28. In 1759, Arthur Guinness signed a 9,000-year lease on a broken-down brewery where they still make the famous Irish beer today.

Truth. St. James Gate is no longer the dilapidated place Mr. Guinness started with, as renovations have made it state of the art.

29. The Irish flag is three colors, from left to right: green, white, and red.

Blarney. That’s the Italian flag. The Irish flag is green, white, and orange.

30. The Irish play a game of Gaelic football that combines aspects of soccer, rugby, and hurling all in one sport.

Truth. The game is a native Irish sport.
