**You will teach the class about “The Troubles,” the period of conflict in Ireland. You will teach the class the section that your group has been assigned. In order to do this, you must pick the portions that need to be taught, the most salient (important, prominent) parts.**

**For each section, underline the parts that your group feels are important to our understanding of the section. Then, in your groups, answer each of the questions at the bottom of your section.**

**#1**

**“The Troubles “**

The Troubles refers to a violent thirty-year conflict framed by a civil rights march in Londonderry on 5 October 1968 and the the Good Friday Agreement on 10 April 1998. At the heart of the conflict lay the constitutional status of Northern Ireland.

The goal of the unionist and overwhelmingly Protestant majority was to remain part of the United Kingdom. The goal of the nationalist and republican, almost exclusively Catholic, minority was to become part of the Republic of Ireland.

This was a territorial conflict, not a religious one. At its heart lay two mutually exclusive visions of national identity and national belonging. The principal difference between 1968 and 1998 is that the people and organisations pursuing these rival futures eventually resolved to do so through peaceful and democratic means. This ascendancy of politics over violence was not easily achieved.

During the Troubles, the scale of the killings perpetrated by all sides - republican and loyalist paramilitaries and the security forces - eventually exceeded 3,600. As many as 50,000 people were physically maimed or injured, with countless others psychologically damaged by the conflict, a legacy that continues to shape the post-1998 period.

**#2**

**Direct rule returns**

In 1968, the Northern Ireland parliament had been dominated by unionists for over fifty years. Its attempts to solve social and political ills, such as institutional discrimination against Catholics, were too slow for nationalists and republicans and too quick for many unionists. This gave rise to growing tension and violence between the two communities.

The mounting scale of the disorder led successive UK governments to intervene. In 1969, the situation was so grave that [British troops were sent to help restore order](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/august/14/newsid_4075000/4075437.stm). By 1972, things had deteriorated so badly that [the British government suspended the Northern Ireland parliament and imposed direct rule from London](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p016kl03).

Relegated to the margins of UK politics for half a century, Northern Ireland had suddenly reclaimed centre stage.

**Question:**

*What were the sources of “growing tension” between the Unionists and the Nationalists?*

*What was the British solution to this tension?*

**#3**

**The 'long war'**

At this time, the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) - the main republican paramilitary organisation in Northern Ireland - was uninterested in any solution short of British withdrawal and Irish unification. The 'Provisionals' had split from the 'Official IRA' in 1969 and are subsequently referred to here as the IRA.

For them, the 'long war' was the only option. This strategy had been gaining traction since [the introduction of internment](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p016dx31) (imprisonment without trial) in 1971 and the killing of 13 people by the Parachute Regiment on [Bloody Sunday](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/bloody_sunday) the following year.

When secret talks with the UK government in 1972 collapsed, the IRA leadership resolved to erode the British presence in Northern Ireland through a war of attrition.

For their part, the major loyalist paramilitary organisations of the [Ulster Defence Association (UDA)](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/8442746.stm) and the [Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF)](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-11313364) had resolved to use violence to resist republican paramilitaries and to oppose Irish unification.

It was against this backdrop of soaring violence and increasingly entrenched positions that moves to find a lasting solution began.

**Questions:**

*What was the IRA position on resolving the matter of unification under British rule?*

*Were they on the same page as the loyalists in Ireland?*

**#4**

**Sunningdale's frosty reception**

Direct rule by British ministers was viewed as a short-term measure and a process designed to restore self-government to Northern Ireland was soon underway. The first major attempt was [the 1973 Sunningdale Agreement](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/december/9/newsid_2536000/2536767.stm), which provided for both a devolved, power-sharing administration and a role for the Irish government in the internal affairs of Northern Ireland - the so-called 'Irish dimension'.

Together with the UK and Irish governments, just three Northern Ireland political parties participated in the Sunningdale talks - the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), the nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) and the centre-ground Alliance Party. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) was wholly opposed to Sunningdale and did not participate. Representatives of the 'extremes' - loyalist and republican paramilitaries - were not invited.

[Sunningdale's political institutions collapsed in early 1974, toppled by the Ulster Workers Council (UWC) strike](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p016l0gn), a near-insurrection spearheaded by a coalition of unionists and loyalists that effectively brought Northern Ireland to a standstill.

Although Sunningdale was ultimately a failure, it contained the seeds of the much more intricate and successful [Good Friday Agreement](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/april/10/newsid_2450000/2450823.stm) twenty five years later.

**Question:**

*How did the British try and include Northern Ireland in the forming of their government?*

*Were all political parties present at the Sunningdale Talks? And why do you think the “extremes” were not invited?*

*What was the importance of the 1973 Sunningdale Agreement, even though it ultimately failed?*

**#5**

**The Anglo-Irish Agreement**

As the cycle of violence escalated post-Sunningdale, further efforts were made by successive UK governments to devise a political settlement, but only one acceptable to those parties it considered "legitimate" and non-violent.

[The Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA) in 1985](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/november/15/newsid_2539000/2539849.stm) was a serious attempt to achieve a political accord that resolved the "Irish question". It gave the Irish government an advisory role in the affairs of Northern Ireland and determined there would be no change in Northern Ireland's constitutional status - no Irish unification in other words - without the consent of its people. Nonetheless, the treaty broadly alienated the unionist community, which opposed Irish involvement and rejected the proposal for a devolved, power-sharing government. Among the major parties in Northern Ireland, only the SDLP and Alliance Party supported the AIA.

Sinn Fein, the "political wing" of the IRA, was as vociferously opposed to the agreement as unionists. The party had grown in prominence and influence since [republican hunger striker Bobby Sands](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/events/republican_hunger_strikes_maze#p00hhdr9) was elected a member of parliament on a wave of popular support shortly before he died in 1981. It had shown Sinn Fein the power of political engagement and led to the adoption of a strategy known as "the armalite and the ballot box" in which the IRA would continue the "armed struggle" while Sinn Fein contested Northern Ireland elections.

Crucially, when the IRA announced a ceasefire in 1994, mainstream republican leaders had recognized that the 'long war' was unwinnable. (Equally, the British Army had come to the view that the conflict could not be won solely by military means.) Sinn Fein's commitment to politics and the electoral process enabled it to enter negotiations designed to end the Troubles and restore self-government to Northern Ireland.

**Question:**

*What was Sinn Fein? What was their impact on the politics of Northern Ireland?*

*What thoughts did unionists, loyalists, and the IRA have on the Anglo-Irish Agreement?*

**#6**

**Peace process**

Cross-party talks began in earnest in 1996. In almost all quarters, a combination of political realism and war-weariness cleared the path to negotiation. Importantly, President of the United States Bill Clinton took an active personal role, appointing veteran US senator George Mitchell as chair of the talks process that concluded in the Good Friday Agreement.

Negotiating with Sinn Fein was unpalatable for many unionists and loyalists. The UUP, under leader David Trimble, agreed to participate only if those they regarded as terrorists were committed to exclusively peaceful and democratic means. Representatives of loyalist paramilitaries also agreed to take part. By contrast, Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) viewed the whole process as unacceptable. They abandoned the talks and opposed the subsequent agreement, but still took their seats in the Northern Ireland Assembly that resulted.

Nevertheless, the Good Friday Agreement marked a seismic shift in Northern Ireland's political landscape. The UUP and SDLP agreed to accept power-sharing, including with former paramilitaries who were committed to the peace process.

All signatories to the agreement endorsed the "consent principle". This meant that any change in Northern Ireland's constitutional status - Irish unification - would happen only if popular majorities voted in favour in separate referendums held at the same time on both sides of the border.

**Questions:**

*Why do you think that “political realism” and “war-weariness” would have an impact on parties and their willingness to negotiate?*

*How did the “Good Friday Agreement” help shift (change) the political landscape (or how political decisions are made) of Northern Ireland?*