

ASSEMBLY SPEAKER NOTES

From Conflict to Peace - The Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement - 25 Years On Assembly Speaker Notes

This presentation is for use in secondary level school assemblies to mark the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement which ended the conflict in Northern Ireland. It is accompanied by a 7-minute video which gives an overview of the conflict and the peace process that brought it to an end, plus details about what the Agreement did and the results of it.

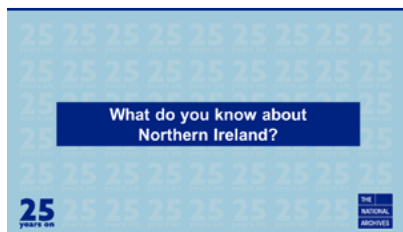
The total presentation should take around 15-20 minutes depending on the amount of time allowed for discussion at the beginning about what students know already about Northern Ireland and the Agreement.

There are additional resources designed to embed knowledge about the Agreement and support student discussion about how it successfully brought an end to the violence and established a new era of peace in Northern Ireland.



Slide 1 - From Conflict to Peace

Use this slide as an introduction to students to make them aware that April 10th 2023 marks the 25th anniversary of the signing of a very significant agreement but do not yet give details about the conflict or peace process.



Slide 2 - What do you know about Northern Ireland?

Ask students what they know already about Northern Ireland. Do they have any family or friends there? Have they ever visited? Have they seen Northern Ireland on TV, Film or Social Media? Are they aware of the history of Northern Ireland?

For schools in Northern Ireland, you may wish to adapt this slide and ask students how they feel about Northern Ireland? What do they enjoy, feel proud about, dislike about Northern Ireland? Do they have any family or friends outside of Northern Ireland and if so what do they say about the country?



Slide 3 - Welcome to Northern Ireland

This provides some basic geographical and political information about Northern Ireland to help students understand that while it is geographically a part of the island of Ireland it is one of the 4 countries that make up the United Kingdom – hence the U.K.'s full title is The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

- In 2021 it has a population of 1.9 million people.
- The capital is the city of Belfast.
- Northern Ireland has its own devolved government and elected Assembly that makes laws and runs the country on a day-to-day basis. The government is a coalition formed from representatives of the two historic communities in Northern Ireland.
- The most common language spoken is English, but some people learn and can speak Irish and a few can speak Ulster Scots.

Northern Ireland is small but mighty...

It is famous for...

- John Dunlop inventing pneumatic tyres
- Building the Titanic
- Being the set of Game of Thrones
- Inspiring C.S.Lewis to write The Chronicles of Narnia
- Fathering three American Presidents (and being related to seven more)
- Having Lough Neagh, the largest lake in the U.K. and Ireland
- Having a causeway built by giants!



Slide 4 - Northern Ireland is small but mighty

This shows some of the important achievements of Northern Ireland including:

- John Dunlop (who was Scottish but lived in Belfast) inventing the pneumatic (or inflatable) tyre. These are now used on every motor vehicle, bicycle and scooter in the world.
- The Titanic was built in Belfast in 1909-1912 by Harland and Wolff.
- It provides the set for the fantasy TV series Game of Thrones
- It inspired C.S.Lewis to write The Chronicles of Narnia
- Three American Presidents had fathers born here (Andrew Jackson, James Buchanan and Chester Arthur) and seven others have family from here.
- Lough Neagh is the largest lake in the whole of the U.K. and Ireland. It is 160 square miles (392 square km) or about the size of the city of Sheffield, and bigger than Edinburgh, Dublin or Cardiff.
- The Giant's Causeway was supposedly built by the giant Fionn mac Cumhaill (Finn MacCool) but in fact it was formed 60 million years ago (just after T. rex was alive) from 40,000 hexagonal (6 sided) basalt columns.

A brief history...

Northern Ireland was established in 1921.

- It remained part of the U.K. when the rest of Ireland became an independent country in 1922.
- Its two historic communities hold different religious and political beliefs.
- Unionists are often Protestant and want to remain a part of the U.K.
- Nationalists are often Catholic and want to unite with the rest of Ireland to be a single country.



Slide 5 - A Brief History

This provides a very brief background to the establishment of Northern Ireland and how it separated from the rest of Ireland. The Unionists wished Ireland to remain with the U.K., but Irish Nationalists wanted Ireland to become an independent country. In 1921 Ireland was partitioned and Northern Ireland remained with the U.K. when the rest of Ireland became independent. However, a significant minority of people in Northern Ireland (Nationalists) opposed partition based on differing religious and political beliefs. This led to division and growing tension between the two historic communities.

- Unionists are often Protestant and wish Northern Ireland to remain a part of the U.K.
- Nationalists are often Catholic and wish Northern Ireland to unite with the rest of Ireland to be a single country.

(A more detailed background to the History of Ireland and Northern Ireland is provided in additional slides in the accompanying Discussion Activity Pack).

What do you know about
The Belfast or Good Friday
Agreement?

25
years on

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Slide 6 - What do you know about The Belfast or Good Friday Agreement?

Have students (in Northern Ireland or elsewhere) ever heard of the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement? Do they know what it did or why it is so important? Have they heard about it in recent news reports or discussions? Emphasise that it is a very significant Agreement for everyone in Northern Ireland and for people in the U.K. and Ireland. The rest of this assembly, including the video that will be shown, will help them to understand this significance and there will be further opportunity for discussion in follow-on class activity.

Good Friday – April 10th 1998

A pair of Agreements were reached in Belfast, the capital of Northern Ireland, between the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and the Taoiseach of Ireland, and between a range of parties and civil society organisations.

- What were these Agreements?
- Why were they so important?



Slide 7 - Good Friday, April 10th 1998

This shows the signing of the British-Irish Agreement 25 years ago, in Belfast, which is the capital of Northern Ireland. The Agreement was signed by Tony Blair, who was the Prime Minister of the U.K., and Bertie Ahern, who was the Taoiseach (pronounced Tee-shahk) on 10th April, which was the Friday before Easter, so the Agreement is referred to as either the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement (or sometimes both). A second part of the agreement was also signed by them and a range of parties and civil society organisations. This assembly is about that Agreement and why it is so important.

Northern Ireland before the Agreement

Before the Agreement was signed there had been a terrible conflict in Northern Ireland for 30 years from the late 1960s to 1998. This was known as 'The Troubles'.

- There was a lot of mistrust and fear.
- Soldiers patrolled the streets.
- Groups from both sides, called paramilitaries, used violence.
- Many people were killed and much damage was done.
- There were many efforts to bring about peace but these were unsuccessful.



Slide 8 - Northern Ireland before the Agreement

In the 30 years before the Agreement was signed there had been a period of conflict in Northern Ireland that was called "The Troubles". Violence between the two historic communities grew and armed groups known as paramilitaries attacked each other and members of the police and army. Groups such as the Irish Republican Army, the IRA, wanted to force Northern Ireland to become united with the rest of Ireland, while those such as the Ulster Volunteer Force, the UVF, fought for it to remain part of the U.K. Many people were killed, communities attacked and businesses continually damaged. Paramilitaries even sometimes attacked members of their own communities. Attempts to stop the fighting and find a peaceful solution were unsuccessful.

The search for peace

In 1985 the governments of the U.K. and Ireland held talks to try and start a process to bring about peace.

- An agreement was signed at Hillsborough Castle in Northern Ireland.
- This promoted further co-operation between the two countries and between Ireland and Northern Ireland.
- It also stated that any change in Northern Ireland's status as part of the U.K. would require the consent, or agreement, of a majority of its people.



Slide 9 - The Search for Peace

In 1985 talks were held between the governments of the U.K. and Ireland to try and find a peaceful solution. The Anglo-Irish Agreement was agreed at Hillsborough Castle in Northern Ireland which promoted further co-operation between the two countries. It also made it clear that, for as long as a majority of its people wanted, Northern Ireland would remain part of the U.K. The idea of consent, or the agreement of the people, would become a key part of future agreements.

The principle of consent

In 1993 a Joint Declaration between the two governments was announced at Downing Street in London on the principle of consent.

- This recognised that the desires of Unionists to remain part of the U.K. and of Nationalists to create a united Ireland are both legitimate wishes.
- It also confirmed that any change in Northern Ireland's status would require the agreement of both a majority of people in Northern Ireland and a majority of people in Ireland.



Slide 10 - The principle of consent

The idea of consent was expressed strongly again in another agreement in 1993. The Downing Street Declaration recognised that the desires of Unionists to remain part of the U.K., and of Nationalists to create a united Ireland, are both legitimate. It also confirmed that Northern Ireland would only become part of Ireland if both a majority of people in Northern Ireland and a majority of people in Ireland agreed to this. Recognising that change could only happen if both populations agreed to it was an important step towards the final Agreement.

The challenge of securing peace

Despite these agreements the violence continued. Finding a solution to end it and bring lasting peace was not easy.

- Brave decisions would need to be made.
- Enemies would have to meet and agree to compromise.
- Old laws would have to be changed and new ones made.
- Communities would have to work together to make peace a reality.



Slide 11 - The challenge of securing peace

However, despite the agreements between the two governments, violence continued in Northern Ireland and peace seemed to be as distant as ever. The challenge in securing a peace agreement was huge and would require bold steps and brave decisions by many people on both sides of the divide. It would require the support and encouragement of political, religious and community leaders from other countries too, including America as well as those in Ireland, the U.K. and Northern Ireland itself. The European Union also played a role, especially in providing funding after peace was achieved.

Would the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement end conflict and bring peace?



Slide 12 - The search for peace

The signing of the Agreement was a huge step, but it would require much more work and the support of many people if it were to bring lasting peace. Could the Agreement succeed?



Slide 13 - Video

Runs for 7 minutes

You can find the video on our YouTube channel here:

<https://youtu.be/VQXBpt5RrY>

25 years of working together for peace

Northern Ireland has been transformed over the past 25 years.

- It is a vibrant, exciting country full of beauty and creativity.
- Its two historic communities live and work closely together in many areas.
- Violence is extremely rare but challenges remain.
- However the people of Northern Ireland know that the rewards of peace are greater than the challenges.



Slide 14 - 25 years of working together for peace

We can see that the Agreement was a huge success and over time has brought about a transformation in Northern Ireland.

The economy has grown as countries have invested and people have come to visit as tourists and to study. The arts and creative industries have flourished, and science and technology are also key areas. There remain challenges and sometimes violence occurs but thankfully it is very rare as the people of Northern Ireland know from their own experience that rewards of peace are greater than any of the challenges which they may encounter. They also have the support of the wider communities of nations in the U.K. and Ireland.

What can we learn about peace-making from the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement?

25 years on

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Slide 15 - What can we learn about peace-making from the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement?

We have seen what The Belfast or Good Friday Agreement is and why it remains so important 25 years after it was signed. Many countries around the world look to Northern Ireland as an example of how to bring peace from conflict. You will have the opportunity to discover more and discuss how the Agreement addressed the causes of that conflict in a follow-on session in your own classes. You will also have the chance to develop your own campaign to mark the 25th anniversary of this Agreement.

25 years on

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