

IRELAND: A NATION OF STORYTELLERS

NAME: _____

Read the text and match the words to the definitions.

IRELAND

A nation of storytellers

Hardly any country can claim to have a richer storytelling tradition than Ireland. This is the result of a mixture of many people – the Celts, the Vikings, the Normans and the English – who came to the island at various times and all left a bit of their culture behind.

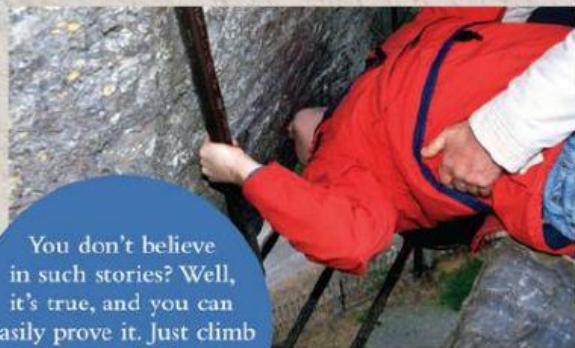
In the Celtic tradition of spoken storytelling, singers and poets called bards were extremely important people. There was no written language tradition in those days, so bards had to memorise the stories, poems and songs to be able to perform them live. Good storytellers knew hundreds of stories **by heart**. The stories were the only **record** of important events, and people appreciated them: they were the best entertainment available.

This tradition has been influential for more than 2,000 years and, in many ways, it's still alive today. Stories have been handed down from generation to generation, with very little change. Storytellers used to move from village to village. Wherever they appeared, they were warmly welcomed, and people gave them food and shelter for the night.

The Irish love of stories can be felt all over the country. In many places, older people still remember the *céili* (pronounced 'kaylee' and meaning 'get-together'), in which people would meet in a house, sit near the fire, tell stories, sing songs, dance and play music. Interestingly, in recent years, there have been successful attempts to revive this tradition, and some of the most popular contemporary storytellers are very young.



The elegant way talented storytellers use language is called 'the gift of the gab'. If you want to get the gift of the gab, you have to go to Blarney Castle in Cork, in the south of the island. You have to climb to the top of the castle, lie down and bend over backwards to kiss the Stone of Eloquence. And, of course, there's a story to explain this. It tells of an Irish King who rescued a woman when she fell into a river. The woman was so grateful that she **cast a spell** over him. She gave him the ability to speak so well that he could persuade people to do whatever he wanted. But, for the spell to work, he had to kiss a particular stone on top of Blarney Castle. This is what he did, and it worked. So whoever kisses the Blarney Stone will get the same gift.



You don't believe in such stories? Well, it's true, and you can easily prove it. Just climb to the top of Blarney Castle and kiss that stone ...

1	knew ... by heart		passed (from older people to younger people)
2	record		change the position of your body so your head is nearer the floor
3	appreciated		were able to say from memory
4	handed down		bring back to life
5	shelter		document
6	revive		said words that had magical powers
7	bend over		gave value or importance to
8	cast a spell		a safe place to stay