

## ‘What happened at Portadown in 1641?’

<b>Learning Objectives</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>Success Criteria</b>
*Closely read primary documents *Examine Evidence *Interpret Evidence	*The Plantations *The 1641 Rebellion *17 <sup>th</sup> Century Economy and Society	*Organising and evaluating information and data *Discussed and debated

### **Introduction to the historical context to Portadown**

The atrocity at Portadown was the most notorious incident that occurred during the 1641 rebellion and the resultant Confederate Wars. Many deponents heard stories about Portadown, where numbers killed varied from 68 to 300.

Although the leaders of the 1641 rebellion wished to avoid violent conflict, as the rebellion began to spread through Armagh, Cavan, Fermanagh and Monaghan, members of the lower social orders joined the movement. Many of these shared the same financial and religious grievances that the leaders had rebelled against. Their anger and resentment about the plantations was more keenly felt. They began to attack settlers in their localities. Some of the attacks were opportunistic robberies. Many deponents described being ‘despoiled’ of their money and valuables. Others were tortured to confess the whereabouts of their savings.

Other attacks were more vicious. Settlers were murdered allegedly for their faith, and Catholics began to attack symbols of the Protestant faith such as the bible. Due to the outbreak of popular violence many settlers fled to Dublin (where they subsequently gave evidence before the deposition commission). Those who could not make the journey fled to nearby forts or castles. Others were taken prisoner. Manus O’Cahan, one of the rebel commanders in Co. Armagh, imprisoned roughly 100 people at Loughall. In early November O’Cahan promised to convey the prisoners to safety in England. As the 100 prisoners were marched through Portadown they were cast over the bridge into the River Bann. Those who tried to swim to safety were allegedly shot or beaten.

### **Lesson Road Map**

1. Hand out the images of the massacre at Portadown. Ask the students to try and describe what is happening in the pictures. Briefly discuss the scene being portrayed.
2. Give each group the three documents with guiding questions.
3. Using the guiding questions ask the students to work out ‘What actually happened at Portadown?’
4. The whole class discussion should focus on how different the answers to the questions are – demonstrating how difficult it is to deal with witness statements. The enduring point should be that we still don’t really know exactly how many people died at Portadown. This piece of history is still contested.