

3rd Place, Prose, Grades 10-12

***The Irish Ounce*—Noa Ní Aoláin Gross**

Few things in my life have been constant, with the exception of the Irish remedy for any problem under the sun. In the world there exist many stereotypes about Irish people: they all live in thatched cottages where the nearest Wi-Fi signal is across the pond in Britain; they survive on a diet of potatoes (garnished with potato shavings); and, obviously, they're all three foot something leprechauns with obnoxiously red hair and garishly green top hats, just to name a few.

What annoys me the most about all these stereotypes is not that they exist, but rather that the real stereotype that every single Irish person in existence conforms to (according to my very scientific poll of the family WhatsApp) is tea. Simple as that: tea. Because the thing is, regardless of who you are and what's going on in your life, if you're within earshot of an Irish person and mention that you're stressed, whether they know you or not, they will promptly materialize by your side with a steaming cuppa. (After writing that, I think we can, maybe, revisit the leprechaun theory).

Never offer to do the dishes in an Irish household because someone will bring all the half-finished cups that have been strewn across the house. (The minute a cup gets below ideal temperature, the most reasonable thing to do is leave it half-finished and make a new one.) And while you're at it, don't get a group of Irish people into a debate about how to properly make tea. You'll never escape.

The crucial point is, regardless of what specific form it takes, tea will be made. As far as I'm aware, whether you're the president dealing with a situation of mutually assured destruction or you're a moody teenager trying your hardest to make everyone's day worse for no apparent reason, the best solution in both cases is tea. The only difference is how much.

Enter the Irish ounce. The first measurement of its kind, the Irish ounce once and for all provides a means to clearly convey how much tea is needed for a given scenario to fix the situation. To calculate the answer, a number of factors come into play: time of day (24-hour time), severity of the situation (scale of one to ten), age of person in question, status as a tea drinker (habitual vs. rare occurrence), and finally, whether or not Irish tea is on hand (never offer an Irish person anything except Irish tea for your own safety).

Living abroad is no excuse. For the past two years, my mother has requested and received Costco-sized shipments of Barry's Irish tea for her birthday. All of these considerations will come into play to create a mathematical formula which will answer the question for any Irish person who can't just "eyeball it," exactly how many cups of tea need to be made to improve the current situation (or if multiple cups aren't an option, how many tea bags need to be crammed into one cup, though, fair warning, option two could result in criminal investigations and court dates).

The final equation comes out in the form of *if* the person is a rare tea drinker, divide the final answer by two. The equation takes into account a number of factors. First, since the time input is in 24-hour form, dividing by time accounts for the fact that as day progresses to evening, drinking less tea is recommended, since caffeine can cause lack of sleep.

Another clarification, the tea bags used must not only be Irish, but also black tea (caffeinated). Using anything else, except for a baby, is unacceptable and public ostracization will ensue immediately. The equation also accounts for the fact that age has a direct relationship with an individual's capacity to drink more tea (both time- and quantity-wise).

Finally, as severity increases, the amount of tea required to remedy the situation likewise increases. The only question that remains is: If there is no tea on hand, what equivalent

measurements can be used? To note the obvious, that is a doomsday situation. In a world where both tea bag purses and mini kettles exist, allowing such a tragic event to take place, even hypothetically, should at the very least be grounds to dismiss Irish citizenship. Nonetheless, if some global catastrophe has disrupted the tea supply chain, each cup of tea recommended by the equation is equal to four ounces of chocolate, $\frac{1}{5}$ of a hearty fish and chips meal, ten minutes playing with animals, or 1.5 cups of hot cocoa (and no stinginess on the toppings, whipped cream to the top with cinnamon or marshmallows).

The most important thing to realize about the Irish ounce is that it addresses more than just how to type digits into a calculator and be sure, scientifically, that you can improve a situation. My Irish family has been through quite the journey, from my mother living in Belfast as an Irish woman during the Troubles, to my grandfather working tirelessly to make ends meet. The one thing that was always true was that, when they needed it, my family knew there would be someone at home to make a piping cuppa that could heat and calm the soul. Irish tea isn't just about having a tasty drink. It's about realizing that in situations, even when they feel daunting and unconquerable, there will be people behind you with their kettles already steaming to help along the way.

Noa Ní Aoláin Gross is in 12th grade at St. Paul Academy. When not taking photos or jotting down ideas in her writer's notebook, she loves hiking, backpacking (generally being outdoors when it's not 20 below outside), volunteering at her synagogue, and playing sports with friends.