

Enjoying books & poetry in the Literacy Hour & beyond

Favourite Irish texts: Contemporary; Fantasy; Historical; Myths & legends; Poetry

Further details: http://iisresource.org/good_read.aspx



Cúchulainn stretched out his brawny arms and gripped the house.

He heaved and shoved, and grunted and groaned, and grunted and shoved, and heaved and groaned.

And just as he felt he must burst, the house began to move.

And Oona calmly swept the dust from under it as if the house was lifted up every day.

"This Finn must be mighty strong," muttered Cúchulainn.

Meanwhile Finn, hiding in the cradle, trembled and shook from head to foot.

"Thank you, dear man," said Oona.

"Now if you'll just fill the kettle from the spring, I'll make the tea."



'Irish literature has created a magical environment for our children.'

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1. Irish texts in the Literacy Hour - overview

Range & quality

The key to the success of the 'Ireland in Schools' English & literacy pathway in primary schools is the range and quality of Irish children's literature - myths & legends, historical novels, fantasy and contemporary realism - *see box below*.

Broad appeal

There are books and stories to suit all ages and abilities, allowing all to participate in a common project.

All can enjoy reading books suited to their individual interests and abilities.

Inclusiveness - high interest, low reading age

Many stories provide high interest material at a low reading age while also offering opportunities to address key grammatical features and extend spoken vocabulary.

Contemporary realism

Some writers are portraying a vision of the country in which their young readers are themselves growing up, free from the 'Oirish' stereotyping, with such works as *Christy's Dream* - owning horses on a Dublin housing estate and *Moon King* - the story of a child in care.

Fantasy - for boys

Schools working with 'Ireland in Schools' have their share of reluctant readers among boys, but they all respond to tales of fantasy by Irish authors, such as the fast-moving *The Battle below Giltspur* and the seriously weird *Cirque du Freak*.

Myths & legends

The combination of the heroic and the magical, and the feistiness of Irish heroines, appeal across gender and age and ability ranges.

Among the illustrated collections, the favourite is 'The Sea Woman' in Sionbhe Lally's lavish *Favourite Irish Fairy Tales*, stimulating much creative work in and beyond the Literacy Hour, particularly mood charts of the Sea Woman on returning to the sea and leaving her children.

Liam Mac Uistin's *Celtic Magic Tales* show

- magical powers getting people into and out of trouble - 'Quest for Aideen';
- heroes, like Cuchulainn, involved in deadly or humourous contests; and
- love bringing tragedy - 'Deirdre & the Sons of Usnach', an epic story of bravery, loyalty and honour mingled with jealousy, betrayal and death - an early example of tragic love in European literature.

Historical novels

Ireland's history - generally flashpoint periods when conflicting ideologies meet and when conflicting loyalties are tested - remains a focus of Irish writing for the young.

Under the Hawthorn Tree by Marita Conlon-McKenna is the first of an award-winning trilogy. It is a gripping story of love, loyalty and courage set in the devastation of the Irish Famine of the 1840s, when three children were left to fend for themselves.

Poetry

Selections from *The Wolfhound Book of Irish Poems* are equally successful in helping teachers meet the demands of the NLS at Key Stage 2, Years 5 & 6. Children warmed especially to 'The Painting' by Oscar Wilde, since 'the line "There stands a little ivory girl" made me think of a little ivory girl.'

2. Cross-curricular possibilities beyond the Literacy Hour

Enriching the curriculum - Reception

At Birkdale Primary School, Sefton, a four-week Literacy-based unit was slotted into the existing curriculum. It centred on the re-telling as a narrative poem of the legend of 'The Bodach of the Grey Coat', one of the most engaging of the many stories about the legendary giant and hero Finn MacCool, in which Finn enlists the help of a disguised Sea God to beat the King of Greece in a race for Finn's kingdom.

The poem and commentary not only embraced the forty-five words designated for Reception children but also addressed all the Stepping Stones and Early Learning Goals - *extract below*.

Communication, Language and Literacy	Knowledge and Understanding	Mathematical Development
<i>Continuous Provision</i> Writing Office - aids to writing common words. Big Table - Alphabet jigsaws. Fred the Bear.	<i>Continuous Provision</i> Tuff Spot - small world activities relating to the Bodach. Cut and Stick Table - Making model boats, as in the story. Use pictures of old boats from Ireland as stimulus. Provide paper for sails and sticks for masts. Playmobil Castle - build models of Finn's Castle and place in Tuffspot.	<i>Continuous Provision</i> Big Table - Puzzles, number and counting games. Stickle bricks, Tizzy's Toy box, Millie's Maths House.

Unlocking the curriculum - Years 5 & 6

Also at Birkdale Primary School, Irish children's literature and the Literacy Hour formed the hub for a ten-week cross-curricular unit for Years 5 & 6, in which the Foundation Subjects were the spokes.

English & literacy - the hub	Foundation Subjects - the spokes
Myths & Legends 'The Quest for Aideen', <i>Celtic Magic Tales</i> by Liam Mac Uistin, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-341-0 'The Giant's Causeway', <i>Irish Fairy Tales & Legends</i> by Una Leavy, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-482-4 'The Bodach of the Grey Coat', <i>ibid.</i> <i>Finn & The Fawn: Narrative Poem</i> by Neil Williams Historical novels <i>Under the Hawthorn Tree</i> by Marita Conlan-McKenna Contemporary novels <i>The Battle Below Giltspur</i> by Cormac MacRaois, Wolfhound Press, 0-86327-356-4 <i>The Moon King</i> by Siobhán Parkinson, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-573-1 <i>Cherokee</i> by Creina Mansfield, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-368-5 Poetry Wishes & Dreams, based on W B Yeats 'Had I the ...' Non-fiction Poster - Irish Tourism, the culmination of the ten weeks	Art/D&T Pen & Ink Designs Celtic Knots/Historic awareness - shape & form & use of colour/Step-by-step process Banner Design - 'Celtic Rotunda' 3D Art - Finn McCool the Legendary Giant Dance Celtic tales/Knot design/Folk songs Music Original music compositions inspired by Irish myths & legends Drama based on events from <i>Under the Hawthorn Tree</i> Created two authentic sets to perform within

At Waterloo Primary School, an eight-week cross-curricular unit was based on the Literacy Hour and a historical novel about the Irish Famine.

Under the Hawthorn Tree by Marita Conlan-McKenna (O'Brien Press, 0-86278-206-6) is the first of an award-winning trilogy, a gripping story of love, loyalty and courage set in the time when Ireland was devastated by the Great Famine of the 1840s. Dance was a key element in the scheme.

3. Favourite texts - Foundation to Key Stage 1

Myths & legends

Favourite Irish Fairy Tales by Lally, Soinbhe, Poolbeg Press, 1-85371-777-0

There are seven stories in this lavishly illustrated volume which creates magical worlds where magnificent heroes, beautiful maidens and evil villains abound. Many of the stories Soinbhe Lally 'heard from story tellers when I was a child. Others I found in books. To a child they are windows which open upon glowing landscapes of the imagination.'

The Story of Bran; The Sea Woman - the favourite among IiS schools; The Children of Lir (front cover); How Cúchulainn Got His Name; Oisín in the Land of Youth; The Brown Bull of Cooley; The Salmon of Wisdom.

Mrs McCool and the Giant Cúchulainn. An Irish Tale by Souhami, Jessica, Frances Lincoln, 0-71121-823-4

To prove he is the strongest giant in the world, Cúchulainn has to fight the huge Finn McCool. But Finn is SCARED. When he sucks his magic thumb, he can see Cúchulainn coming to get him. So he runs to his wife Oona. She just laughs and starts to bake some bread. Will Cúchulainn find Finn and SQUASH HIM FLAT AS A PANCAKE? Or can Oona save him ...?

Contemporary

All the Way from China by Boran, Pat, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-422-0

'My name is Tomi Wong.
I'm from Ningbo in China.
I'm your new pen-pal.'

How can Shelley Watters answer such an exciting letter? Her new life in Dublin seems so dull! If only she still lived an exciting life on the farm with her Dad! Maybe a few white lies would help ... But life is full of surprises and there's a big one in store for Shelley, when she meets Tomi only to discover that he, too, lives in Dublin. Among other things, this is an excellent introduction to writing a letter.

Valentine O'Byrne. Irish Dancer by Carville, Declan, Discovery Publications, 0-95382-221-4

Valentine dreamt of being an Irish dancer, but when the lady came to school to pick dancers, she hardly even noticed Valentine. Very disappointed, she walked back home with no twirls or spins. Then she had an idea - she would put on her own variety show and dance. This is an uplifting tale of determination and triumph over disappointment with more telling illustrations than text.

Granny MacGinty by Conlon-McKenna, Marita Orchard Picture Books, 1-84121-573-2

Granny MacGinty's family worry about her, an old lady living on her own. So they decide to buy her a pet for company, but finding the right one is not as easy as it seems. Granny says the dog, the parrot, the rabbit and the snail 'will have to go'. She loves the cat, however: 'Oh, my, oh, my little kitty cat!', said Granny, as they sat and sat, watching the evening sun go down together. This really is 'a humorous tale of family life, written in rollicking read-aloud prose with plenty to laugh about in the illustrations'.

Granny's Teeth by Dawson, Brianóg Brady, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-570-7

Granny is not happy. Where are her teeth? Granny's teeth are amazing, Danny thinks. So he put them in his school bag and had great fun with them at school. He sneaks them, broken, back into Granny's glass when he gets home. But, because Granny cannot chew, everybody has to eat mashed potatoes instead of the GIANT hamburger and chips in his favourite restaurant which Danny had been dreaming about.

Fireman Sinead! by Donovan, Anna, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-529-4

Sinead wants to be a fireman, but can she ever become one? Her dad is puzzled. He has never heard of a girl fireman but makes her a special ladder for practising. Her mother thinks she should become a nurse but makes a heavy doll for Sinead to rescue. Her friend Tom knows that girls can't be firemen. Sinead ignores them and practises and practises, getting people up in the middle of the night by shouting 'Fire!'. When a real fire happens Sinead gets a big - and pleasant - surprise.



An Chanáil by Fitzpatrick, Marie-Louise, An Gum, no ISBN

Written in Irish by a well-known author who illustrates her own books, this is a delightful tale about a young boy who lives by the side of a canal and looks at Dublin and the surrounding countryside along the canal's banks. A translation is available from IiS.

The Pig in the Pond by Waddell, Martin, Walker, 0-74454-391-6

Farmer Nelligan's pig was a pig who dared to be different. One scorchingly hot day, after watching the ducks and geese cooling themselves in the pond, she leaps in the water, causing panic and commotion. Farmer Nelligan surveys the scene and, with great ceremony, removes all his clothes and jumps into the pond himself! Convention having been broken, all the animals join the farmer and his daring pig cavorting in the water. Its simple text and repetition make it ideal for reading aloud and older reluctant readers.

4. Favourite texts - Key Stage 2

Contemporary

Christy's Dream by Binch, Caroline, Picture Mammoth, 0-74974-294-1

This is set in a real area of Dublin, Ballymun, where children look after their horses amid the tower block estates. Tellingly illustrated with meticulous watercolour paintings, it relates how Christy saves up his money to buy the horse that he so longs to own like other boys on his housing estate. Nobody can stop him making his dream come true - except his ma. What will she say when he brings his new horse home? *Christy's Dream* provides an excellent introduction to modern urban Ireland for children used to the Ireland of myths and legends.

The Five Hundred by Dillon, Eilís, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-262-7

When Luca finally bought the Fiat Five Hundred, Pierino was extremely proud and happy for his father, who could now easily transport goods to and from his market stall. However, Fiat Five Hundreds were stolen in Rome every day of the week and, before long, the car had vanished. Pierino refuses to accept that the car will not be recovered and, with the help of the neighbours and an observant Aunt Maria, follows the trail of the robbers along the whirling, downhill roads that lead to the strange cave in the valley.

Call of the Whales by Parkinson, Siobhán, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-691-6

This is a haunting coming-of-age novel. Tyke, who breathes, sleeps and dreams whales, gets a chance to do whaling in the icy wilderness of the Arctic with his father, an anthropologist. From his humdrum life in Dublin, Tyke steps into a world beyond his dreams, where he makes friends, has unforgettable adventures and learns the value of life and death. The author is at pains to point out

'I have deliberately told this story of Arctic life from the point of view of an Irish narrator. And this is all this novel is meant to be: an outsider's perspective on a rich and fascinating way of life in a place of great beauty.'

The Moon King by Parkinson, Siobhán, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-573-1

This award-winning novel is a sensitive and thought-provoking story dealing with the fears and hopes of a foster-child settling in with a new family. A young boy creates his own world to try to cope with his traumatic past. Away from his ineffectual mother and her abusive boyfriend, he is petrified and unable to speak until he discovers a special, secret place where he and his only friend, the soft toy Freddy, can be alone. There, in the Moon Chair, he escapes his fears and becomes the Moon King, holding court in an attic kingdom. Apart from addressing the problems facing foster-children, it has 'other universal themes' which would appeal to pupils in primary schools - the world of the imagination; friendship and love; jealousy and destructive tendencies; development of trust; gaining acceptance; childhood; and families.

Fantasy

The Battle Below Giltspur by MacRaois, Cormac, Wolfhound Press, 0-86327-356-4

At the foot of the Sugar Loaf Mountain in Co. Wicklow, Niamh, Daire, and the magical Glasán begin a fantastic adventure. The first of the Giltspur trilogy, it is set in modern Ireland and provides opportunities to work on the themes of mystery and fantasy, with real characters embarking upon a journey and mythical characters and powers appearing within a modern setting. Full of blood-curdling happenings, it is a rivetting fantasy, a magical tale of power and revenge, blending high adventure and ancient Irish myth.

The Lough Neagh Monster by McBratney, Sam, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-375-5

*'There are good monsters, and there are monsters who are downright pests.
Everybody knows that the Lough Ness monster is a downright pest.'*

Everyone knows of the Lough Ness monster, but very few had ever heard of Noblett, the one in Lough Neagh, until Nessie decided to pay her quieter cousin a visit. Nessie, whose idea of fun is to headbutt boats and frighten old age pensioners, had left her Scottish home when her antics caught the interest of journalists and scientists. However, the pupils of Ballymasculion School are not so easily outwitted, and Noblett finds himself protecting his cousin from their Ancient Reptile Trap and the dangerous yellow monsters as Nessie makes the most of her Irish holiday.

Charlie Harte and His Two-Wheeled Tiger by Murphy, Frank, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-532-4

Charlie Harte really wanted a bike. His family could not afford to buy one, so when he found a bike frame lying between two bins, he brought it home and visited the scrapyards until he had all the makings of a functioning bike. When the bike was finished, he named it Tiger and then discovered that he and his bike could communicate with each other. With Tiger's help, Charlie set up his own courier service, and all went well until bicycle thieves moved into the area. In the end, though, 'The Hair' and his accomplice were no match for Charlie Harte and his talking Tiger!

Cirque du Freak by Shan, Darren, Harper Collins, 0-00675-416-3

Darren Shan's first children's book is about something out of the ordinary, but set against the background of children's normal lives to chilling effect. The narrator and main character, Darren Shan, is a strange boy. He goes to a freak show with his friend, Steve. It's the gothic 'Cirque du Freak' where weird, half human/half animals appear and interact with the audience. Darren 'falls in love' with a tarantula and determines to steal the spider so that he can train it to perform amazing deeds. Soon, Darren and his friend Steve are caught up in a deadly trap.



Darren must make a bargain with the one person who can save him. But that person is not human and only deals in blood. Darren must become the vampire's assistant and a half-vampire himself in a bloody initiation ceremony. According to the author, 'It's not a book that sets out to be frightening for the sake of it. Dark things happen, but they happen for a reason, and there are definitely repercussions.'

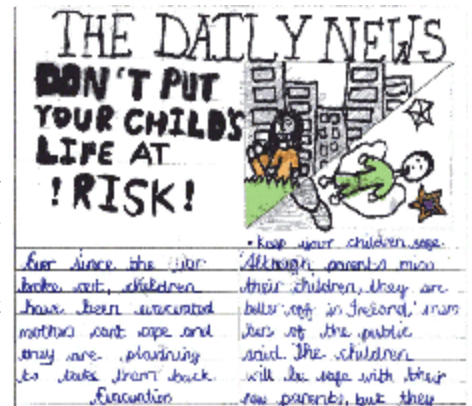
Historical

Under the Hawthorn Tree by Conlon-McKenna, Marita, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-206-6

This, the first of an award-winning trilogy, is a gripping story of love, loyalty and courage set in the time when Ireland was devastated by the Great Famine of the 1840s. Three children, Eily, Michael and Peggy, are left to fend for themselves. Starving and in danger of the dreaded workhouse, they escape in the hope of finding the great-aunts they have heard about in their mother's stories. With tremendous courage they set out on a journey that will test every reserve of strength, love and loyalty they possess. There are also a Channel 4 film of the book, available on video from 4 Learning, and a study guide (O'Brien Press, ISBN 0-86278-383-9) to both the book and the film.

Safe Harbour by Conlon-McKenna, Marita, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-422-0

In this exploration of the trauma of evacuation and the tensions between generations, Sophie and Hugh are left homeless when their house is bombed during the London Blitz. Their mother is seriously injured and their dad is away fighting, so the children are sent to their grandfather in Co. Wicklow, Ireland, which maintained its neutrality during World War Two. Sophie is scared - they had never met their grandfather but his letters cause such trouble in the house, and their dad never speaks of him. How will they live in a strange country, with a man who probably hates them - and will the family ever be together again? Hugh adapts quickly to his new surroundings but Sophie finds it difficult to communicate with her grandfather until they work together to save an injured German pilot.



Myths & legends

Favourite Irish Fairy Tales by Lally, Soinbhe, Poolbeg Press, 1-85371-777-0

See page 2 for further details of this lavishly illustrated volume which creates magical worlds where magnificent heroes, beautiful maidens and evil villains abound.

Celtic Magic Tales by Mac Uistin, Liam, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-341-0

The rich lore of magic from the ancient Celts fills these stories:

The Quest for Mir and Aideen

a touching love quest, one of the oldest and loveliest of the traditional stories, where magical powers get people in and out of trouble

The Fabulous Deeds of the Sons of Tuireann

one of the three stories known in Gaelic tradition as 'The Three Sorrows of Storytelling'.

Chuchulainn and the Feast of Bricriu

heroes of other tales, instead of being at one another's throats, are involved in humorous events connected with the contest for her hero's portion at the feast organised by the devious Bricriu.

Deirdre and the Sons of Usnach

love brings tragedy in this epic story of bravery, loyalty and honour intermingled with jealousy, betrayal and death.

Shak & the Beanstalk by O'Loughlin, Aishlinn, Wolfhound Press, 0-86327-574-5

When Shak, the blackbird, lands himself in trouble with the kingdom's most notorious crooks - that well-known housebreaker Goldie Locks and her less-than-bright brother Jack - he has to fly for his life, and ends up in a cloud country he never knew existed. That's where he meets Ark, a giant who dreams of being a stand-up comedian. Only problem is, he just isn't funny. But while Shak's trying to help Ark develop a sense of humour, Jack has got his family's cow-selling scam all wrong, and Ma Locks has thrown his magic beans away. The author, an Irish teenager, has re-told several other traditional tales in a similar style.

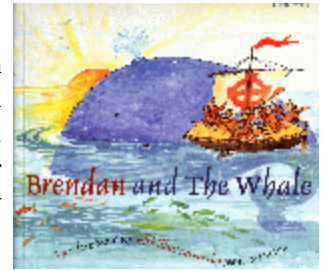


5. Favourite poems

Narrative poetry

Brendan and the Whale, by Mahoney, Clare, Veritas, 1-85390-645-X

This illustrated narrative poem tells of the remarkable voyage undertaken by St Brendan and his monks in search of the 'Land of Promise' in a boat 'that looked not unlike/A banana - with black leather skin.' The emphasis is on the encounter with the whale, but the island of sheep, the paradise of birds - 'spiritlings' with the purest white feathers, the monster killing the deadly beast, and the island of the 'fierce, fiery' Smiths are all enjoyably included.



The Smugglers of Mourne by Waddell, Martin, Longman, 0-58212-195-7

Martin Waddell uses a historical setting for a narrative poem almost in the ballad style with telling, almost chilling illustrations. Tom and Nancy dramatically evade capture by the spy Ranaghan and the Excise men, 'dark shapes in the night', sailing away forever from the Mountains of Mourne in 'the dark ship that was awaiting/to take them on board,/Tom and his brave Nancy Bell.' An excellent example of how to create drama and tension in a story, it also serves as an introduction to the beauty and mystery of the countryside in Northern Ireland.



Anthologies

A Giant Never Dies by Fitzmaurice, Gabriel, Poolbeg Press, 1-84223-009-3

By the author of *But Dad!*, this new collection of 47 poems 'takes us on another breathtaking roller-coaster ride'. It turns everyday experience to gold: from bursting pimples to eating boiled sweets, from being bitten by a bee to swapping books, from being a bug to one of the 'Back of the Bus Gang', from being bored to blowing bubbles in Boston Museum. Favourites in one pilot school were 'The Hidden Art' and 'Forty Shades of Green' with their lavatorial humour and 'A Giant Never Dies' about a hero of Gaelic sports who excelled in hurling and Gaelic football.



Moon Penny gathered by Meek, Bill, Ossian Publications, 0-94600-530-3

This remarkable collection ranges from tongue-twisters to traditional nursery rhymes, from skipping songs to zany bits of children's verse. There are 200 rhymes, complete with music and fully illustrated with old engravings and specially designed work by young Irish artists. Particularly popular with lower infants and juniors are the following which tell a good story:

'Aiken Drum', 'Bananas', 'Blow Blow Blow', 'Bobby Shaftoe', 'Fair Rosa', 'I Married A Wife', 'Lazy Mary', 'Proposal', 'Sir Roger', and 'St Patrick Was A Gentleman'.

Wolfhound Book of Irish Poems for Young People edited by Quinn, Bridie & Cashman, Seamus, Wolfhound Press, 0-86327-002-6

This anthology of some 150 poems by 63 poets, in print for over twenty years, is spaciouly presented and is firmly set in the Irish poetic tradition. The overall impact is 'peaceful and meditative, leaving powerful and memorable images in the mind'. Favourites include:

'Above' - *F.R. Higgins*; 'Beech Tree' - *Patrick Kavanagh*; 'Boy Bathing' - *Denis Devlin*; 'Boys' - *Winifred M Letts*; 'I Wish I Wish' - *Joseph Campbell*; 'Joe's No Saint' - *John D. Sheridan*; 'Kathleen Tyrrell' - *Elizabeth Fiske*; 'Les Silhouettes' - *Oscar Wilde*; 'The Blackbird by Belfast Lough' - *Frank O'Connor*; 'The Children of Lir' - *Katherine Tynan*; 'The Painting' - *Oscar Wilde*; 'The Scarecrow' - *H.L. Doak*; 'The Snare' - *James Stephens*; 'The Water Vole' - *D.J. O'Sullivan*; 'Years Later' - *Richard Murphy*.

MOON PENNY....



a collection of rhymes, songs and play-verse - 1910-201 and by children
gathered in Ireland by Bill Meek



A Child's Treasury of Irish Rhymes, compiled by Taylor, Alice, Ossian Publications, 0-94600-530-3

This collection of 26 rhymes took Alice Taylor 'back to my childhood: to the old farmhouse in rural Ireland ... to the school in the fields ... when my father recited rhymes that he had learned at school'. The charming and varied rhymes with subjects ranging from fairies to ballad singers really do 'enshrine within us a younger, more innocent edition of ourselves'.

The Poolbeg Book of Irish Poetry for Children collected by Traynor, Shaun, Poolbeg Press, 1-85371-726-6

This is another wide and startling collection of 93 Irish poems for children divided into three sections; 'From ancient Ireland' (6); 'From poets to the past' (54); and 'From poets of today' (33). It contains all the great names associated with Irish poetry: from the past - Oliver Goldsmith, Jonathan Swift; Lady Gregory, James Stephens, Patrick Kavanagh, WB Yeats; from the present - Seamus Heaney, Matthew Sweeney, Brendan Kennelly, Gabriel Fitzmaurice, Eavan Boland and more. The author tested the poems with nine- and ten-year olds in different schools:

'What I did was to give the class a copy of several poems and asked them to read the poems, copy them out and then illustrate them. No teacher assistance was given. The poems had to speak to the children on their own merits or not. Some of the drawings were very astute. There was a terrific one of Patrick Kavanagh standing on a hill top shouting, "I LOVE MONAGHAN". There was another of a priest (or clergyman) in Belfast hurrying down a street and children shouting after him, "DON'T BE A BIGOT!". Often the children's views were at odds with my own judgement and this made me consider my selections all the more carefully.'

