

# Enjoying Irish literature in secondary schools

Further details: [http://iisresource.org/good\\_read.aspx](http://iisresource.org/good_read.aspx)

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**'Thank you for the wonderful way in which you are helping us to help teachers. I hope we can develop the ideas and materials from 'Ireland in Schools' as an example of how productive it can be to take a particular culture or community as a starting point for reading the world through words.'**  
NES, Key Stage 3

How has this unit of work helped you understand what Documentary Drama is?  
'Before we did not know what documentary drama was but now we know that the way documentary drama is presented makes the audience think. All the techniques are easy but we learned how to use them with factual evidence.'  
Yr 10 student, Rock Ferry HS

Give a brief description of your final performance, and how it went.  
'We used potatoes as a symbol of the famine and we had strange music playing. We moved round in strange patterns and we had candles and things. I think our performance went very well, and we all had a part that was equal. I found the play very enjoyable and I thought it went well. I tried hard but I could have tried harder and achieved the grades that I wanted.'  
Yr 10 student, Rock Ferry HS

**'I was very impressed by the materials you sent ... they represented good educational practice and offered possible lines of study, particularly in English, which we are currently trying to encourage.'**  
QCA

# 1. New Irish writing for children & young adults

Irish drama and poetry have long graced the curriculum in schools in Britain, particularly at GCSE and A-level, and continue to do so. Now, however, new Irish writers are producing a wide range of fiction for children and young adults.

Delivering - & enriching - National Strategies

In pilot schemes run by 'Ireland in Schools' (IiS), Irish texts are helping teachers to meet and go beyond the requirements of government strategies. They enriched the National Literacy Strategy at Key Stages 1 & 2 and are now doing the same for secondary English.

Teaching schemes

Teaching schemes on Irish texts are included on the IiS CD-ROM E01 along with other resources for English, Drama and Literacy for Key Stage 3 to A-level. All schemes have been developed by practising teachers and proved in the classroom.

Broad appeal

The success of these schemes lies in the excellence of the teaching and in the range and quality of Irish children's literature - myths & legends, historical novels, fantasy and contemporary realism. There are books and stories to suit all ages and abilities, allowing all to participate in a common project. All can enjoy reading books which are suited to their individual interests and abilities.

Fantasy - for boys

Pilot schools have had their share of reluctant readers among the boys, but they all respond to tales of fantasy by Irish authors, such as Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl*.

Myths & legends

The combination of the heroic and the magical, and the feistiness of Irish heroines, appeals across gender and age and ability ranges. Among the illustrated collections, the favourite is Sionbhe Lally's lavish *Favourite Irish Fairy Tales*.



Liam Mac Uistin's *Celtic Magic Tales* shows 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.

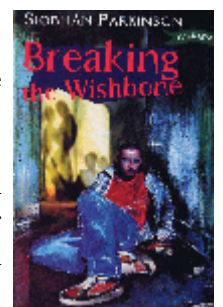
Historical novels

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. Very popular is *Under the Hawthorn Tree* by Marita Conlon-McKenna, 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. A Channel 4 film of the book helps to ease the way for reluctant or slower readers.

Contemporary realism

More writers are now portraying a vision of the country in which their young readers are themselves growing up, free from the 'Oirish' stereotyping.

Some of this remains 'middle-class literature', featuring at least one working parent, with aspirations to education and a positive social ideology for teenagers to rebel against.<sup>1</sup> Other novels, though, address less comfortable aspects, 'the growing underbelly', of modern Irish society.<sup>2</sup>



1 Such as Marilyn Taylor's 'Jackie trilogy', Jane Mitchell's *When Stars Stop Spinning* and Eoin Colfer's *Benny and Omar* and *Benny and Babe*.

2 Such as 'the new not-working class' (Siobhán Parkinson's *Breaking the Wishbone*), foster families (Parkinson's *The Moon King (E31)*), dysfunctional families (Marita Conlon McKenna, *No Goodbye*), prejudice against gypsies (Conlon McKenna, *The Blue Horse*) and political violence (Mark O'Sullivan, *Silent Stones*).



## 2. Award-winning Irish authors for Key Stage 3

*White Lies* by O'Sullivan, Mark, Wolfhound Press, 0-86327-592-3

This rollercoaster of the stormy relationship between two seventeen-year-olds is told by each character in turnabout chapters by Nance, black and adopted, and OD, a school drop-out with attitude.



Nance journeys into the past to discover her roots and identity only to find the truth is nearer home. OD dropped out of school at sixteen, works on a job creation scheme on a building site and has an attitude. Unable to get on with his washed-up, alcoholic trumpet-playing father, he becomes embroiled in shady dealings, his best friend Beano gets into drugs, and he falls out with Nance.

Living their lives on the edge of adulthood, they have to face up to choices and the truth behind white lies.

Mark O'Sullivan is, perhaps, the most gifted of writers for young people in Ireland.

<p>Nance</p> <p>I suppose you could call it delayed shock. It had been two weeks since I'd found the photo, and my life had gone on as normal. At least, that's how it must have seemed to OD, my boyfriend, and to everyone else. But inside I'd gone numb. I couldn't think, I couldn't study. I felt nothing. And then I cracked.</p> <p>The child in the photo was me. I was certain of it. My brown skin, the tight black curls, something about the eyes. I don't know how long I spent there, gaping at the photo, before I put it back exactly where I found it; but, to this day, I can remember every detail of it. The impossibly blue sky, the lush green trees in the background, the bright colours of their clothes. There were five adults in the photo.... The strange thing ... was that not one of them were smiling except the woman who held me. This convinced me even more she really was my natural mother.</p>	<p>OD</p> <p>When you think things can't get any worse, that's when you can be sure they will. Call it OD's Law if you like - Disaster plus X (the unknown, the future, the next minute) equals Double Disaster. That afternoon, as I left Jimmy in his fantasy world where money didn't matter, I was lower than zero. Then I shot down the minus scale.</p> <p>I was at the gate before I copped Seanie's puke-green Popemobile parked near Beano's house. I couldn't make sense of the scene. It was like seeing a hearse outside a disco or something off-the-wall like that. Seanie wasn't looking in my direction but staring worriedly at the passenger seat. Next thing I saw Nance's head appear. I didn't wait to see her face. I staggered back towards the house like I was going home after a night at the Galtee Lounge. I went out the back way by the lane behind our house.</p> <p>My heart was banging out a mad beat somewhere between reggae, rap and house. The lyrics went something like 'It doesn't matter', or 'So what', but they didn't fit the rhythm. At the same time, someone must have been sticking pins into a little effigy of me because my knee was peppered with stinging jabs.</p>
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Also by Mark O'Sullivan

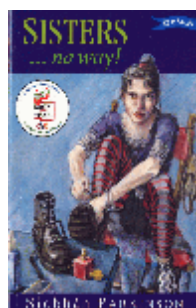
*Silent Stones*, Wolfhound Press, 0-86327-722-5

A gripping, thought-provoking and moving story of two teenagers forced to come to terms with their families' pasts at Cloghercree in the Irish Midlands. Mayfly Blenthynne is there because her English New-Age traveller parents believe that the ancient standing stones will miraculously cure her dying mother. Robby Wade is there because, trapped between his embittered great-uncle and the shadow of his dead IRA father, he cannot escape. Matters come to a head when Cloghercree is invaded by the ruthless terrorist, Razor McCabe, on the run from the police.

*Sisters ... no way!* by Parkinson, Siobhán, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-495-6

A flipper - and brilliant - book, it deals with teenage life in an amusing and unusual way, using a dual diary format and two very different characters to expose very sensitive and personal problems common to young people, problems largely caused by adults.

Cindy does not want her dad to remarry after her mother's death - especially not the divorced mum of the prissy and utterly boring Ashling. Ashling, in turn, wants her mother to find a nice man, but does it have to be the widowed father of the noxious Cindy, arch-snob and ultra-opinionated? No way do these two want to become sisters and make their feelings clear in their diaries.



Ashling, Wednesday, 21 & 28 May

It happened again this evening. Mum was on the phone during my practising time. This time the other person rang her, though, so it's not her fault. I'm dying to know if it's the tall dark stranger. I hope so. Wouldn't it be great if Mum had a - I don't know how to put this - 'boyfriend' sounds too girlish, 'man' sounds too racy, 'partner' sounds too proprietorial, 'friend' sounds too coy. But maybe it was just somebody she got talking to outside the gallery. Maybe she was just telling him where the cloakroom was. Maybe they were just two people exchanging remarks on the street. But who is ringing her up? I just hope he's not married, that's all. Mum wouldn't dream of it if he is of course. I mean, I hope he's not married and pretending not to be....

Well! a great leap forward! Mum's going out tonight with Richard. Richard is her new gentleman caller. That's what she called him when she told us about him. It's a little joke, that, a reference to a play, I think. I don't know much about plays. Maths and science are more my line than English

She told us this morning at breakfast. I don't think she chose breakfast on purpose because it's a rushed meal and we have to leave first to catch the bus. I think she must have been working up to it for sometime.

Cindy, Friday, 23 May

It makes you wonder. I mean, Mum is not even two months dead, and there he is throwing himself at another woman. How could he be so callous? He can't have loved her at all. Or maybe he did just at the beginning. I mean, there's me, after all, so there must have been something there at one time. I was born six months after they were married. Mum used to joke about it, say I was a miracle baby. When I was small, I used to believe it, that I was really amazingly premature, but when I got older, I realised she was only joking, that she was pregnant when she got married. I used to be proud of that. I felt it proved my parents were unconventional and passionate. Now it makes me wonder. Maybe she pressurised him into marrying her. Maybe she even got pregnant on purpose so he'd have to marry her. Maybe she only wanted an Irish passport. (I haven't worked out why, though, that's still a bit obscure.)

I often wondered why I was an only child. I assumed it was something gynaecological. Mum used to have a terrible time with her periods, and when I was about ten she finally had a hysterectomy, so I thought that was it. But now I wonder. Maybe they had given up sleeping together. I mean, they always had a double bed, but you know what I mean, though now I come to think of it, Dad used to spend a lot of time in the spare room, even before she got sick. Maybe he's been a philanderer all along. The pig.

Also by Siobhán Parkinson

*Breaking the Wishbone*, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-635-5

This inventive exploration of how five homeless teenagers in a Dublin squat face the most harrowing situations with humour, courage and resilience takes the form of a 'documentary, if you like, heads to camera, as they piece their stories together'. For Johnner it's a bit like camping - for a while. Beano is manipulative, violent and controlling, out to score whatever and whenever he can. Caroline, overwhelmed by loss, is distant and confused. Samantha conjures up dreams to keep herself going. Curly is somewhat slow but honest and steady, trying hard to make the best of a bad lot.

*The Guns of Easter* by Whelan, Gerard, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-449-2

It is 1916 and Jimmy Conway, aged 12, from the Dublin slums, is caught up in the Easter Rising and finds his loyalties sorely tested.

While his father is away in France, fighting with the British army, his uncle Mick joins the Rising, fighting against the British army in Dublin, Jimmy feels he must be the provider for his mother and two younger sisters.

With the GPO in the hands of the Volunteers his family is deprived of the all-important Separation Allowance. Setting out to find food or money, Jimmy finds himself adrift in a nightmare version of the world he has known and must come to terms with a great deal before he returns home. On one level *The Guns of Easter* is a story of war, on another it is the tale of a young boy's brutal forced awakening to the complexities of the world and adult life.



Jimmy wished more than ever that Da could be here now. The fact that he wasn't made Jimmy the man of the house, and at twelve years of age Jimmy found that hard. The man of the house was supposed to know right from wrong, but Jimmy didn't always find this so simple. And then again even adults couldn't seem to agree on what was right and what wasn't. Uncle Mick, for instance, had been furious with Da for joining the army.

'How can he fight for the British?' Mick asked Ma when he heard the news. 'And for what? For their money.'

This was just after Da went away. A week before, Ma herself had been giving out to Da for signing up, but now she turned on Mick.

'There's food for the children now,' she said. 'That's what that money means to James. That's all that war means to him. He was never out playing soldiers like you and your Citizen Army friends.'

Mick looked insulted but Ma continued, anger in her voice now. 'It's all very well for you, Mick. You're single, and you have no-one to look after, barring yourself. You can afford dreams and high ideas. How long would your dreams last if they were all you had to bring home to a house full of hungry children? Dreams make bad dinners, Mick.'

Also by Gerard Whelan

*Dream Invader*, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-516-2

This is one of the scariest tales of 'good versus evil' ever written for children. The prize at stake is a little boy's life. Every night Saskia's cousin, Simon, wakes screaming and terrified in his new car-shaped bed, for the most horrific journeys are being undertaken in a green car by Simon and his tormentor, the Pooshipaw. The Pooshipaw orchestrates Simon's dreams. The further down the road they travelled, the more sick and frightening were the scenes at the roadside. With every dream Simon grew more afraid because at the end, the Pooshipaw warns Simon, 'dreams of you will be all your precious Mammy and Daddy have left'. Pooshipaw was not a nice man at all ....

### 3. Irish fiction recommended for Key Stage 3

#### Contemporary realism

- Colfer, Eoin, *Benny and Babe*, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-603-7\*
- Conlon-McKenna, Marita, *The Blue Horse*, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-305-4
- Conlon-McKenna, Marita, *No Goodbye*, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-362-3
- CONSIDINE, JUNE, *A VIEW FROM A BLIND BRIDGE*, Poolbeg Press, 1-85371-244-2
- FLEGG, AUBREY, *THE CINNAMON TREE. A NOVEL SET IN AFRICA*, O'Brien Press, 086278-657-6
- Friel, Maeve, *Charlie's Story*, Poolbeg Press, 1-83571-183-7
- Mitchell, Jane, *When Stars Stop Spinning*, Poolbeg Press, 1-85371-320-1
- Murphy, Frank, *Lockie and Dadge*, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-424-7\*
- O'SULLIVAN, MARK, *SILENT STONES*, Wolfhound Press, 0-86327-722-5
- O'SULLIVAN, MARK, *WHITE LIES*, Wolfhound Press, 0-86327-591-5
- PARKINSON, SIOBHÁN, *BREAKING THE WISHBONE*, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-635-5\*
- Parkinson, Siobhán, *Call of the Wales*, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-691-6\*
- Parkinson, Siobhán, *Four Kids, Three Cats, Two Cows, One Witch (maybe)*, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-515-4\*
- Parkinson, Siobhán, *Sisters ... No Way!*, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-495-6\*
- Parkinson, Siobhán, *The Moon King*, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-573-1\*
- TAYLOR, MARILYN, *COULD I LOVE A STRANGER?*, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-442-5\*
- Quinn, John, *The Summer of Lily and Esme*, Poolbeg Press, 1-85371-208-6

#### Fantasy

- Colfer, Eoin, *Artemis Fowl*, Viking, 0-67089-962-3
- Friel, Maeve, *Distant Voices*, Poolbeg Press, 1-85371-410-0
- Friel, Maeve, *The Deerstone*, Poolbeg Press, 1-85371-225-6
- Whelan, Gerard, *Dream Invader*, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-516-2\*

#### Historical

- Conlon-McKenna, Marita, *Safe Harbour*, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-422-0\*
- Conlon-McKenna, Marita, *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-206-6\*
- Conlon-McKenna, Marita, *Wildflower Girl*, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-283-X\*
- Conlon-McKenna, Marita, *Fields of Home*, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-509-X\*
- Flegg, Aubrey, *Katie's War*, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-525-1\*
- Llywelyn, Morgan, *Strongbow*, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-274-0\*
- O'Hara, Elizabeth, *The Hiring Fair*, Poolbeg Press, 1-85371-272-2
- O'HARA, ELIZABETH, *BLAEBERRY SUNDAY*, Poolbeg Press, 1-85371-360-0
- O'SULLIVAN, MARK, *MORE THAN A MATCH*, Wolfhound Press, 0-86327-496-X
- O'Sullivan, Mark, *Melody for Nora*, Wolfhound Press, 0-86327-425-0
- Parkinson, Siobhán, *Amelia*, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-352-6\*
- PARKINSON, SIOBHÁN, *NO PEACE FOR AMELIA*, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-378-X\*
- Whelan, Gerard, *The Guns of Easter*, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-449-2\*
- Whelan, Gerard, *A Winter of Spies*, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-525-1\*

#### Poetry

- Poets from the North of Ireland* edited by Frank Ormsby, Blackstaff Press, 0-85640-444-6
- The Book of Irish Verse: Irish Poetry from the Sixth Century to the Present* edited by John Montague, Bristol Park Books, 0-88486-192-9-X
- The Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry* edited by Paul Muldoon, Faber, 0-57113-761
- The Penguin Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry* edited by Peter Fallon & Derek Mahon, Penguin, 0-14058-609-1
- The Wolfhound Book of Irish Poems for Young People* edited by Quinn, Bridie & Cashman, Seamus, Wolfhound Press, 0-86327-002-6

\* Indicates a study guide has been published by The O'Brien Press, Ireland's largest publisher of children's books - see page 3 above.

Age ranges  
Titles printed in UPPER CASE indicate that the books are more likely to appeal to an older reader, aged, say 13-14. Others may be seen as likely to appeal to the 11-12 year-old. As these are, however, very much subjective matters, the only really useful recommendation is for teachers themselves to read the books and then decide on their possible appropriateness.

## 4. Smoothing the transition from Year 6 to Year 7

Nottingham County Council and 'Ireland in Schools' co-operated to show how Irish texts, fantasy and myths and legends, could prepare Year 6 children for secondary schools and give their new Year 7 tutors a better appreciation of their abilities.

The texts - good *versus* evil

*The Battle below Giltspur* by Cormac MacRaois, Wolfhound Press, 086327 356 4

The Year 6 scheme is based on one text - *The Battle below Giltspur*. Set in modern County Wicklow, Ireland, it 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.

When the ancient force of Bealtaine blows on May Day, and fuses life into the scarecrow near Niamh and Daire Durkan's home, Glasán isn't the only scarecrow to visit them. The Black One has also been awakened by the power of the Bealtaine winds. Niamh and Daire find themselves drawn into a dangerous attempt to destroy the evil powers of Greyfang and Deathtooth as the opening foreshadows:

*THE ROOKS OF GILTSPUR WOOD* were all of a flutter. They could not roost easily in their tall weather-beaten pines. They kept shuffling about on their horny claws, cawing and muttering to each other. Then they would suddenly leap into the air a frantic flapping of their ragged black wings and just as quickly turn and land again.

*Scrag* was angry. *Scrag*, the biggest, fiercest old rook was King of the Wood. For more years than any of them could count he had ruled his kingdom high on the south slope of Little Sugarloaf Mountain in County Wicklow. When *Scrag* was angry everyone was nervous.

Fast, tense and full of blood-curdling happenings, *The Battle below Giltspur* is a rivetting fantasy, a magical tale of power and revenge, blending high adventure and ancient Irish myth. MacRaois triumphantly avoids the pietism of many 'good-versus-evil' books by creating characters, real and supernatural, who move beyond mere allegory into forceful credibility, as myth crosses over to children's lives with most powerful results.

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

The Year 7 scheme is based on two texts *Celtic Magic Tales* by Liam Mac Uistin and *The Old Stories* by Kevin Crossley-Holland. Whereas the latter is well-known to teachers in English schools and needs no explanation, *Celtic Magic Tales* is not so widely known and used, despite being praised as 'a collection to stir any heart' and 'magical stuff and a perfect gift'.

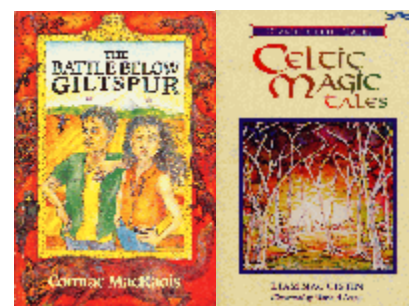
Of all the Celtic countries Ireland has preserved the richest store of stories from its Celtic past which was rich in mythology and belief in magic and the supernatural. In Ireland these stories were passed on in Gaelic from one generation to another and, later, with the coming of Christianity they were written down by monastic scribes.

In that other world magic can be used for good or evil. Magical powers are used to get people into and out of trouble, as in 'The quest for Aideen'. In other stories, involving Cuchulainn, heroes are at each other's throats or involved in humorous contests. Finally, the notion of love that brings tragedy to the lovers is one of the grander themes of traditional Gaelic storytelling, as in 'Deirdre and the sons of Usnach'. One of the earliest examples of tragic love in European literature, it is 'an epic story of bravery, loyalty and honour intermingled with jealousy, betrayal and death.'

Benefits

The bridging unit helped to

- safeguard and build on the gains made at Key Stage 2 through the National Literacy Strategy;
- improve continuity of teaching and learning from Year 6 to Year 7;
- provide early, tailored intervention to secure Level 4 for pupils still at Level 3, and those below;
- establish systematic and co-ordinated support for literacy across the curriculum;
- raise the threshold for entry at Key Stage 4 and subsequent results; and
- improve motivation for both teachers and pupils at Key Stage 3.



## 5. Delivering the Key Stage 3 strategy

To assist the introduction of the Key Stage 3 English strategy, 'Ireland in Schools' worked with Sue Hackman, then National Director for Key Stage 3 English, to provide exemplar material based on a contemporary Irish text. Leading literacy experts and experienced teachers devised detailed schemes of work for Year 7 and Year 8, each consisting of a text unit and a research unit.

The text: *Four Kids, Three Cats, Two Cows, One Witch (maybe)* by Siobhán Parkinson, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-515-4  
Four kids and a cat visit the mysterious, uninhabited Lady Island, in Famous Five style, complete with food, matches and First Aid kit. They are expecting some danger, but nothing prepares them for their encounter with the strange inhabitant of the island. The structure and style of the book are not unusual, taking the theme of a journey and each youngster tells a short, symbolic, story, revealing much about their lives, in the manner of Chaucer. What is unusual about the book is that the characters change after their story telling during what may be considered a fairly simple and safe outing. The children emerge more mature with their own personal foibles controlled.

The text units

The text units concentrate on the text and consist of fifteen lessons. Lessons 1-6 study *the author's development of setting, themes and characterisation*; lessons 7-13 study *the literary technique of developing an oral tale within a narrative in order to develop characterisation and the wider themes of the novel*; and lessons 14-15 encourage *speaking and writing critically about the novel and expressing an opinion, orally and in writing, on the book's relevance and appropriateness to a contemporary teenage audience*.

The research units

Each research unit consists of nine lessons, developing research skills on authors and Ireland, with an emphasis on ICT. Part one, author research, consists of four lessons for Year 7 and five lessons for Year 8: *researching an author, researching other authors independently and presenting findings about the authors*. Part two, Ireland research, comprises five lessons for Year 7 and four lessons for Year 8: *researching the cultural background of texts, researching an aspect of Irish culture and presentation (oral or written) of findings, particularly by writing web site material*.

Meeting Key Stage 3 English objectives

	Year 7		Year 8	
	Text unit	Research unit	Text unit	Research unit
Word level	3, 4, 14		1c, 1d, 7a, 7c, 11	11
Sentence level	1, 3, 8	1, 3, 13a	1, 2, 3, 7	1, 9
Reading	6, 7, 12, 14, 15	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10	4, 5, 6, 10	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 9
Writing	1, 2, 6, 8, 19	2, 11	1, 3, 6, 7, 17, 18	1, 10
Speaking & listening	2, 10	3, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12	1, 2, 9	1, 7, 11, 12

The author

Siobhán Parkinson lives in Dublin with her woodturner husband Roger Bennett and their son Matthew, her personal 15 year old proofreader. She also has connections with Loughrea, Co. Galway, and Letterkenny, Co. Donegal, where she was educated. Siobhán studied English literature and worked as an editor in the publishing and computer industries, and with a national research and development agency on housing and homelessness. She has recently completed a year as Writer in Residence in the Irish Writers' Centre, and is Writer in Residence in the Church of Ireland College of Education. Her primary interests are reading and writing. She also sings in a choir (but quietly, in case she is found out!).

Her first three books about town and country and a leprechaun were aimed at the 6-9 age group. With her fourth and fifth books *Amelia* and its sequel, *No Peace for Amelia*, Siobhán wrote for the older age group, 10 plus, relating the growing pains of a naive Quaker teenager in Dublin, faced first with family ruin and the big questions raised by the First World War and the 1916 Easter Rising. *Sisters ... No Way!* (1996) is a modern story of very reluctant step-sisters, written for the young teen market. A bestseller, it has been translated into French and Italian and was the overall winner of the Bisto Book of the Year Award in 1997, being praised as 'Irish teenage fiction at its most sophisticated'. *Four Kids, Three Cats, Two Cows, One Witch ... Maybe* (1997) won a Bisto Book of the Year Merit Award and was praised as 'one of the best Irish children's books we've ever had' by Ireland's leading authority on children's literature.



## 6. Links with History & citizenship

## 1916: Fighting for whom?

Why in 1916 did some Irishmen join the British army to fight against Germany, while others fought against the British and appealed for German aid during the Easter Rising? A widely-acclaimed Year 9 study unit uses two historical novels to explore the complex web of loyalties that united and divided Britain and Ireland in the early twentieth centuries: *The Guns of Easter* by Gerard Whelan and *No Peace for Amelia* by Siobhán Parkinson.

The historical novels

The novels have been chosen not only for their literary merit but also because the experience of 1916 is told through the eyes of two young people from very different backgrounds, Jimmy Conway, aged 12, a Catholic boy, and Amelia Pim, aged 15, a Quaker.

Jimmy Conway lives in the Dublin slums and is caught up in the Easter Rising. While his father is away in France, fighting with the British army, his uncle Mick joins the Rising, fighting against the British army in Dublin. Jimmy feels he must be the provider for his mother and two younger sisters. Setting out to find food or money, he finds himself adrift in a nightmare version of the world he has known, questioning old loyalties.	Amelia Pim, on the other hand, lives in a Quaker family in a well-off district of Dublin. One of her best friends is Mary-Ann Maloney, who works as cook-general. Amelia has a boyfriend called Frederick Goodbody, who volunteers to fight in World War I. Mary-Ann's elder brother, Patrick, is a member of the Irish Volunteers, an army who fight during the Easter Rising for independence from Britain.
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The study unit

A student workbook, with supporting teachers' notes, tries to adopt an integrated approach to the participation of Irish people in two very dramatic events in 1916 - the Easter Rising and fighting on the Western Front. To deliver the curriculum in history and citizenship and to develop literacy and thinking skills, it draws not only on the two historical novels but also on recent historical writings about the World War I years in Ireland.

Key question

The key 1916: Fighting for whom? considers why in 1916:

- did some Irish men and women fight against the British army, appealing for German aid, during the Easter Rising in Ireland, while*
- other Irishmen joined the British army to fight against Germany.*

Time required

The workbook consists of 12 forty-minute lessons if both the stories (Jimmy's and Amelia's) are studied. Since the stories are very different, the use of both stories will draw out more issues and perspectives. However, if time is limited, the workbook can be used with only one of the stories. This reduces the number of lessons to 9: lessons 1-5 and 9-12 in the case of Jimmy's story; lessons 1-2 and 6-12 in the case of Amelia's story.

New perspectives on the Irish experience of World War I

Conventionally, the historiography of early twentieth-century Ireland has been dominated by accounts of often violent conflict between nationalism and unionism; by the clash of soldiers fighting for one side or the other. However, the Irish soldiers of World War I and of the immediately following years were more than diametrically opposed contending groups. While they fought against each other in 1916 and after, and certainly their differences, above all else, were emphasised during those years, there were common factors and impulses which made those Irish people act as they did.

The National Curriculum - thinking skills & citizenship

The workbook meets key requirements for History and the new English Strategy at Key Stage 3. At the same time, because of the diversity of Irish responses to events in 1916 and starkness of the issues raised, the workbook also develops thinking skills and addresses issues of citizenship.

For the former, it encourages students (a) to form and evaluate their own opinions on the issues raised by war and conflict and the way in which such events are remembered and (b) to consider how the skills they have developed may be applied to other circumstances.

For citizenship, the workbook gives students the opportunity (a) to understand the diversity of political and religious beliefs held by people in the past; (b) to examine moral and political dilemmas; and (c) to develop moral and political judgements of their own.

## 7. English & drama at Key Stage 4 & beyond

'The troubles' and contemporary Irish poetry

English & history at GCSE & Key Stage 3

Five poems dealing with 'the troubles' have been selected to

- help students develop an imaginative insight into recent events in Northern Ireland; and
- suggest a way of using scarce resources and time in schools by encouraging English and History teachers to work together in teaching key areas of the curriculum.

The unit consists of a brief introduction, an anthology of five poems of different levels of accessibility by four contemporary Irish poets, a series of activities for students, and examples of students' responses. Both the poems to be studied and the activities to be undertaken can be varied to suit the time available and the ability of students.

As the examples of students' work show, the poems have been successfully tested with GCSE and Key Stage 3 classes, enhancing students' understanding and enjoyment of poetry while at the same time giving them some insight into the nature of the various conflicts and tensions that go to make up the modern 'Irish question'. Particularly gratifying is the work of students who usually wrote half a page but became expansive when responding to the poems.<sup>3</sup>

'a British Army Soldier  
with a rifle and a radio ...'

Enemy Encounter by Padraic Fiacc

This poem symbolises all the fighting going on in Ireland with all the bombings and shootings as the separation of Ireland continues. This division in Northern Ireland is historical as shown in stanza 1 "A wall divides the wet land, planted in the past". Stanza 3 says "A soldier's gun trained on me - teaches nothing new".

Crossing the Irish Sea - literary traditions in poetry

English & English Literature at GCSE

'Crossing the Irish Sea' is a teaching resource on contemporary Irish poetry for the coursework elements of GCSE SEG English 2400P, 2400M and 2400X and English Literature 2495R, 2495T and 2495X.

The unit consists of a brief introduction, an anthology of thirty-one poems of different levels of accessibility by a range of Irish - and English - poets, an activity booklet for students, and examples of students' work.

The themes addressed include home & family, local area & community, Ireland's culture, different cultures in Ireland, history & Irish culture, religion & Irish culture, language & Irish culture, emigration & exile, the uncertainties of Irish poetry, and literary traditions in English & Irish poetry (the elegy and father & son).

Again, the examples of students' work underline the success of the unit in promoting both an appreciation and enjoyment of poetry and knowledge and understanding of the rich diversity of the island of Ireland and its peoples.<sup>4</sup>

'I was a nuisance, tripping, falling/Yapping always. But today/It is my father who keeps stumbling/behind me, and will not go away.' Follower by Seamus Heaney

"Follower" is about a boy (the poet) who follows his father around their farm, admiring the way he ploughs and how hard he works. He makes it sound as though he annoyed his father by following him about. The poem is written with a sort of droning beat, which goes nicely with the father's plodding as he ploughs the fields, but it is now the father who follows his son, as he is now old and weak and requires the help and support of his son to get by. This links nicely with Wordsworth's claim that the child is the father to the man because now the child is acting like a father to the man.

*Cal & A Modest Proposal*

GCSE English (NEAB)

This is a teaching resource for NEAB (AQA) English Syllabus 1111 and English Literature Syllabus 1112, enabling students to meet the requirements of the syllabuses and the National Curriculum to respond to two significant texts, one before 1900, the other after 1900, while at the same time developing knowledge and understanding of the rich diversity of Irish literature.

The unit consists of a note for teachers; a brief introduction for students, setting out the key questions; a series of tasks on *Cal*, culminating in a speaking and listening assignment (a courtroom drama - 'The Crown v Mc Cluskey'); a series of tasks on *A Modest Proposal*, concluding with an original writing assignment on shooting beggars and turning them into dog

<sup>3</sup> The poems and the exercises may be used when students are studying 'Conflict in Ireland' as the Modern World Study, part of GCSE History (SHP). Alternatively, the poems and exercises may be used at Key Stage 3 as a way of preparing students for learning about Northern Ireland at GCSE.

<sup>4</sup> The study unit addresses the coursework elements of *SEG GCSE English Literature Syllabus 2495*, enabling students to demonstrate both 'an understanding of literary tradition' and an 'appreciation of social and historical influences and cultural contexts' and also to 'explore relationships and comparisons between texts'. For *English 2400*, students will be able to make a written response to 'at least one author published before 1900 from those specified in paragraph 1(d) of the reading programme of study' and to 'one major author with a well-established critical reputation whose work was published after 1900'. The Unit fulfils the NC requirements at Key Stage 4 (English).

food; and a framework for an assignment comparing *Cal/Mc Claverty* and *A Modest Proposal/Swift*.<sup>5</sup>

Drama, citizenship & the Irish Famine 1845-1852

GCSE Drama (NEAB, SEG, MEG)

The aims of this unit of work are fourfold:

- to explore the role that Drama can play in the delivery of 'the essential elements' of education for citizenship;
- to test the value of Irish material, in this instance documents, cartoons and poetry relating to the Irish potato famine of 1845-1852, as a stimulus for drama;
- to heighten pupils' understanding and awareness of Ireland and its relationship with Britain; and
- to explore the dramatic convention of 'Documentary Drama', its aims, techniques and styles.

However, its primary purpose is to teach students about dramatic convention and instil in them an awareness and ability that will lead to their passing GCSE Drama. The unit was used successfully with Year 10, but could work equally well with year 9. The tasks set are simple. It is hoped that any teacher, regardless of subject specialism, will feel confident to deliver the scheme of work.

<p>Task 2 Split the class up into groups of no more than five.</p> <p>Give each group a copy of headings one, two and three from the historical background, namely 'Disease and Starvation', 'The People and the Potato' and 'The Potato as Food'.</p> <p>Each group is to be given one of the following sections to explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>victims/killer diseases, using sources 1-3;</li><li>the spread of disease, using sources 4-5;</li><li>the population of Ireland and pressure on land, using sources 6-7;</li></ul>	<p>landowners, landlords, farmers and labourers, using source 8; varied Irish countryside and the chicken or egg; and all the information on 'The Potato as Food', using sources 9-11.</p> <p>As in the first task, the group is to decide on the important aspects of these sections. However, this time they are to concentrate not just on communicating the facts, but also on trying to create something of the mood, feelings and atmosphere that the information conveys.</p> <p>Each group then has to create and rehearse a performance in which they use focus techniques, to draw the attention of the audience to the relevant information.</p>	<p>In order to create something a little more thought provoking, and add challenge to the task, the framework of the performance is to be set in the situation of a child's game.</p> <p>So, for example, the game is 'ring a roses', the group using information about the increase in population. They start with two people in the ring, and steadily increase the numbers. They use information instead of the traditional words. They use focus in a variety of ways to draw the attention of the audience to relevant information.</p> <p>By doing this, students become aware of a stylised way of creating performances so that they become abstract and thought provoking.</p>
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The citizenship outcomes for task 2 include:

- contributing to group discussion on matters of general significance to this topic and presenting the outcomes to a wider audience;
- using imagination when considering the experiences of others and expressing different viewpoints; and
- understanding something about the economic interdependence of the day.

Irish inspirations: stimuli & structures for creating original drama

GCE Drama & Theatre Studies at AS & A-level (AQA)

This is a teaching resource for AQA GCE Drama and Theatre Studies, AS (5530 - unit 1) and A-level (6530 - unit 4).<sup>6</sup>

A workpack, the unit encourages students to create original drama, while at the same time developing knowledge and understanding of the rich diversity of Irish literature.

It consists of warm up exercises, models of good practice and a wide range of stimulus material, drawing largely on Irish materials, ranging from ancient myths and legends to the poetry of Seamus Heaney and the recollections of children who grew up in the present troubles in Northern Ireland.

Group practicals in drama can be precarious affairs. 'Irish inspirations' is intended to make the process stimulating and enjoyable for students and teachers. It is not meant to be didactic but seeks to provide a stimulus to story-telling which is the essence of effective drama.

The unit places this Irish material in a wider context and always provides 'practitioner links', particularly to the teachings of Bertolt Brecht (who may be studied at A-level) and Konstantin Stanislavski (who may be studied at AS-level).

The 'black' Irish and the defeat of the Spanish Armada

In 1588 what remained of the Armada escaped around the North of Scotland and the West of Ireland but suffered many losses on the way. Of those whose ships foundered in storms, many survivors were washed up on the shores of Ireland. There they met with a hostile reception. Some were robbed and put to death by local peasants or by their English rulers. However, stories prevail to this day of Spanish sailors who survived and made their home amongst the local Irish population, marrying local women. In many places along Ireland's West Coast local people attribute their dark hair and skin to their partly Spanish ancestry.

Areas to explore

Having read this story, what areas might you explore with your group?

The attitude of local communities towards strangers in their midst.

How would your attitude towards the Spaniards be changed if you were governed by people whom you did not accept? Might you try to curry favour with the authorities by handing over the survivors of the shipwrecks?

A witness describes one of the Spanish survivors:

*'He was dressed in black raised velvet with broad gold lace and died in the grey Irish waters wearing a doublet and breeches of white satin, with russet silk stockings. There came striding out of the waves sixteen persons alive with their chains of gold.'*

from *The Great O'Neill*, a biography of Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone, 1550-1616 by Sean O'Faolain

If you were a member of the Spanish nobility, how would your social class colour your view of the local people? If you were one of the inhabitants what would you think of the new arrival?

How could you represent the experience of an outsider arriving in a foreign country?

*(Refer if you want to the extract from Brian Friel's *Translations* from earlier in the pack.)*

What common ground might you find with the local inhabitants?

What has been the experience of people who have settled in your area in more recent times? They may have come from another country or from a different part of Britain.

<sup>5</sup> The tasks and assignment help to deliver the coursework element of the NEAB syllabuses, 'wide reading' and the following assessment objectives: read with insight and engagement; make appropriate reference to texts; develop and sustain interpretation of texts; select material appropriate to purpose; collate material from different sources; make cross-references; comment on and understand linguistic and structural devices; and comment on ways language varies and changes.

The assignment fulfils the criteria of responding to at least two texts, one a complete work of prose fiction published before 1900 and written by an author prescribed as 'English in the National Curriculum' and one a text by an author with a well established critical reputation whose works were published after 1900. This twentieth century text must be of sufficient substance and quality to merit serious study. The study unit fulfils attainment targets 1-3 of the English NC Key Stage 4.

<sup>6</sup> It meets the requirements for the practicals in terms of aims, assessment objectives, knowledge and understanding, dramatic and theatrical skills and a range of other issues relating to key skills and wider spiritual, moral, ethical, social and cultural concerns.