

into the west



Adapted by Greg Banks • From the film *Into the West*
Written by Jim Sheridan

Synopsis

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Recommended for
everyone age 8
and older
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Ally, Fin, and their family used to live on the road, travelling with a band of fellow nomads. The kids' Pa decided that life on the move was too dangerous and difficult after their mother passed away giving birth to Fin. The family then settled in a dilapidated section of Dublin and Pa turned to drinking to forget about his lost wife.

One day the children's Grandpa, a traveller himself, shows up on their doorstep with a white horse named Tir Na n'Og, after the mystical land under the sea.

Determined to keep their magical new friend, the children try to hide the horse in their fourteenth-floor apartment. Unappreciative of the smell and noise coming from the family's apartment, their neighbors call the authorities to complain. The police take the horse away to be sold at auction. Desperate to give the kids some little bit of happiness, Pa sells his only possession of value, a telescope, only to find that the horse has already been sold to a show jumping stable. Ally and Fin run away to the stable and steal back their horse. They decide to head west, where they think they will find freedom and possibility, where their future will be better.

After days of evading the police, who chase them through Dublin, Tir Na n'Og guides the children to the beach where she came from, where their Pa can finally catch up to them, and where they can all learn that losing someone you love doesn't mean you have to forget them.

Resource List

FOR CHILDREN

Fair, Brown and Trembling: An Irish Cinderella Story

Jude Daly

The Pirate Queen

Emily Arnold McCully

Brave Margaret: An Irish Adventure

Robert San Souci

Child of Faerie, Child of Earth

Jane Yolen

SPOTLIGHT

The Moorchild

Eloise Jarvis McGraw

Young Moql has been brought up as one of the Folk, small people who live in caverns beneath the moors. When the Folk find out she is of mixed parentage, however, she becomes an outcast and is blamed for the recent misfortune in their village. Her quest to understand who she really is makes compelling reading.

FOR ADULTS

Druids, Gods and Heroes from Celtic Mythology

Anne Ross

SPOTLIGHT

The Names Upon the Harp: Irish Myth and Legend

Marie Heaney

Meet the bold heroes and dastardly villains whose tales have been told by bards and storytellers in Ireland for centuries. The nine stories in this thrilling collection represent the three cycles of Irish literature: the Mythological, the Ulster, and the Fenian. Glorious illustrations, source notes, and a pronunciation guide for the stories add depth and drama.

AUDIO-VISUAL RESOURCES

Celtic Feet: Irish Dancing with Colin Dunne

Video distributed by Acorn Media

The Secret of Roan Inish

Film by John Sayles

WEB RESOURCES

www.luminarium.org/mythology/ireland

Irish mythology, literature, and folklore.

<http://www.smartlink.net/~tag/>

Teen Age Grief Inc., the site for this non-profit that provides expertise in providing grief support to bereaved teens.



Writing Through Action

by Greg Banks



Being a writer has crept up on me, almost without my noticing. I have been an actor and a theatre director now for about twenty-five years, being in and making theatre for every kind of audience you can imagine: on the streets, on beaches, in bars, schools, village halls, arts centres, small theatres and massive ones, and all over the world, from Singapore to the Arctic Circle...

... and now I am a writer as well. So here I am sitting in my study in front of the computer screen, sun streaming through the window, typing away at another script. It surprises and excites me. However, there are as many different sorts of writers as there are people, and I am not a writer who can lock myself away in a tiny room and create a masterpiece. I prefer to write with a group of actors, I like lots of feedback as I write; it probably

drives my family mad. I will read scenes to people and try scenes out myself in the safety of my study.

Even when I have completed a final draft of the script, I always expect it to change quite a lot in rehearsal. *Into the West* starts with the sea crashing onto the shore; this image came out of watching the actors doing a physical warm-up exercise, it didn't exist in my draft script. I think, because I have been an actor, I have a strong sense of what it will be like to perform the words I write. It's always important for me to think about what the audience will see, not just what they will hear. I never ever write something I wouldn't enjoy watching myself.

Writing for a young audience is a very immediate experience—get to a scene that doesn't work and they will definitely not sit politely through it; it's like someone turns a switch and everyone gets restless and impatient until that moment has passed. When I write I am always aware of who I am telling the story to, and I don't believe in hiding the truth from an audience whatever their age. Young people observe and live in the real world, the same world that we all live in, a world that is sometimes difficult to understand, where it is sometimes difficult to be understood, and I don't want to shortchange them in their search for understanding, or in the exercise of their boundless imaginations. I try and write for the quiet voices, the ones we don't always hear or listen to, to try and show other possibilities, to offer choices.

My work for young people is often more controversial and challenging, both in content and form, than my adult work, because a younger audience is more willing to accept a new approach; for them everything is still an exploration, the world is still relatively new, ripe for reinvention.

Watching a young audience enter a theatre, buzzing with excitement, eager to be challenged, with very few preconceptions about what is about to happen in front of them, is an incredibly uplifting experience. If they leave in the same state, I feel I have done my job.

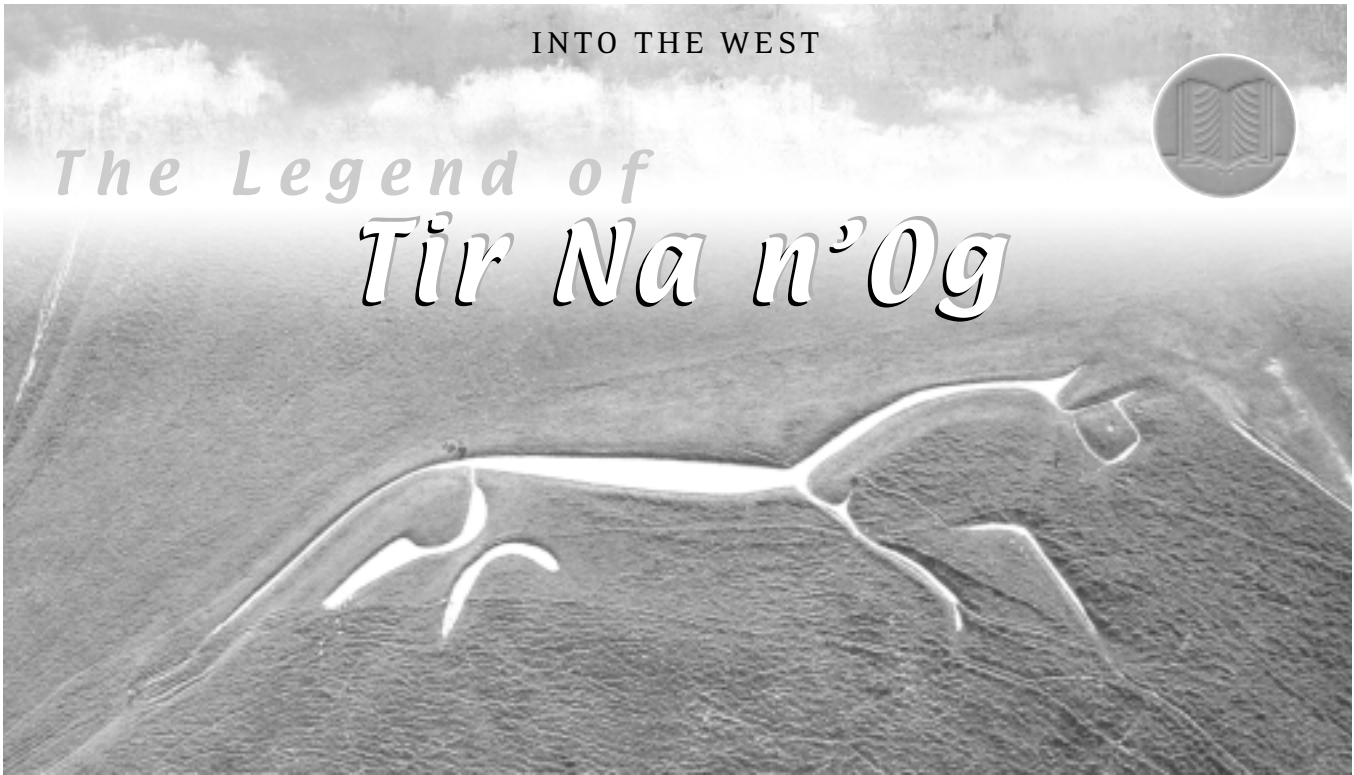
Activity

- Mr. Banks likes writing for young audiences because they are a truthful and challenging audience. After seeing the play at SCT ask your students to write a review of the production.

Did the script keep them interested? Did it tell all the important parts of the story in a way that made sense? Was there something that seemed to be missing? Did they believe the characters would talk and act the way they did on stage?



The Legend of Tir Na n'Og



This Irish river is shaped like the white horse Tir Na n'Og. White often symbolizes mystical powers in Ireland. From the book: Heroes of the Dawn by Duncan Baird Publishers.

Tir Na n'Og (pronounced *Teer-nah-nog*) is a name from Irish *legend* (a traditional story or myth) that means "Land of the Young." In Ireland's rich world of fairies, Tir Na n'Og is the mystical Land of Eternal Youth. It is believed to lie under the sea off Ireland's west coast. No one knows where the legend comes from, but it was almost certainly kept alive by the *bards* (wandering musicians or poets) or travelling storytellers who have long been an important part of Irish heritage.



The lake Tir Na n'Og, where Niamh and Oisín lived together.

In *Into the West*, Grandpa tells his two grandchildren the story of Oisín (pronounced *Aw-shin*), one of the best-known stories about the land of Tir Na n'Og. Irish *gypsies* (people who wander the land) would have told stories like the tale of Tir Na n'Og as they sat around a fire.

The Story of Oisín

Oisín, a celebrated warrior king, falls in love with a fairy princess—Niamh (pronounced *Nee-ah-v*) of the Golden Hair—and goes away with her to the undersea kingdom of Tir Na n'Og, where it is always summer and no one grows old.

Oisín and Niamh are happy, but he misses his home and friends and asks to return for a visit. Niamh sets him on a white horse and tells him that he will be safe so long as he stays in the saddle. But when Oisín reaches home, his family is dead, his castle is in ruins, and his people are unhappy.

Then he sees a group of people struggling to move a huge rock. Oisín rides to help them, but he slips off the horse and falls to the ground. While the horrified people watch, Oisín lies shivering and trembling as his hair and fingernails grow long and his skin turns gray and crumbles. One thousand years have passed while he has been in Tir Na n'Og and, back on human soil, Oisín must grow older and older till there is nothing left of him but dust.

The people try to catch the white horse but can't because it is a magical creature. It gallops back to the sea and Tir Na n'Og, where Niamh sees the empty saddle and realizes Oisín is dead.

Activity

- What are some other legends that you know? Have you heard any legends that have come from other countries? Does your family have any family legends? Try writing your own family legend using the members of your family as the characters.



EALRs

READING—analyze
WRITING—write for a purpose, learn writing process
SOCIAL STUDIES—analyze and synthesize
ARTS—reason and problem solve, communicate



watch, Look, Listen



In SCT's production only one musician will play all of the music that you hear.

Greg Banks, the writer and director of *Into the West*, is part of a professional theatre company in England called Travelling Light. It is a theatre that develops new work for young audiences and travels with these plays all over the world. In 1995, Greg and a group of actors and designers watched the Irish movie *Into the West* and adapted, or rewrote, it for the stage. Greg believes, "We have become used to the sophistication of television and the big screen,

with their big budgets, stars, rapid editing, and special effects. We have lost touch with the humanity of the storytellers, who have also disappeared with other, more traditional, ways of life. Our challenge is to tell this story, with only three actors, [one] musician and a simple set."

Greg began the adaptation by reducing the story down to the basic elements of **character**, **plot**, and **environment**. After this, he and his actors worked for many months *improvising* (making up) scenes. They then cut down the text until only the words most important to the story were left.

When you're watching the play:

LOOK FOR:

Three actors transforming into 63 different characters. The actors have to change from one character to another very quickly and sometimes they play things other than people. How do they use their bodies and voices to become each person or thing they're playing?

LISTEN FOR:

The various instruments the musician plays. How is the live music and created sound used to help tell the story?

DEFINITIONS

CHARACTER—who is in the story
PLOT—what happens in the story
ENVIRONMENT—where the story takes place

Look for different clues, like clothing or posture, to tell you who each performer is portraying.

Activity

• CHANGING CHARACTERS

After you've seen the play, use your body and voice to change characters in a scene, like the actors did in the play. Use the scene when different people pass by Ally as she is begging on the streets.

- As a whole class, make a list of different sorts of characters, such as a teacher, clown, thief, dancer, policeman, etc.
- Stand in your own space in the room.
- Choose one character from the list. What would he or she say or do in reaction to Ally's begging? Practice a few movements and phrases or sentences that you think would fit your character.
- Choose one thing that your character would say to Ally that would illustrate his/her personality and feelings toward Ally. Use your whole body and voice to be convincing.
- Do the same for two more characters. You now have three characters: A, B and C.
- Get into groups of three. As one person plays Ally begging, the other two pass by her, each time playing their different characters and saying their lines. Switch until everyone has had a chance to be Ally.
- Each group now presents their scene to the rest of the class. Discuss what each actor did to effectively show his/her different characters.



EALRs

READING—analyze
COMMUNICATION—listen and observe, communicate clearly, work in a group, evaluate
ARTS—reason and problem solve, communicate, connect





The Cowboy Way

Oh, to be a cowboy! To ride the high lonesome trail, to strum a guitar with good friends and to sleep at night under a million stars by the crackle of a campfire.

In *Into the West* Ally and Fin enjoy a lifestyle similar to that of the cowboy, where a home on the range means freedom and adventure. But their real adventure begins once their horse, Tir Na n'Og, is taken away. After finally finding her, they leave Dublin and head West, the home of so many cowboy tales. Many believe that heading west is what freedom is all about. It is a road of exploration and better

tomorrows. It is often said that travellers have gone west in search of answers. Ally and Fin are hoping that the West will bring them happiness and a sense of security.

In the U.S. the cowboy idea is largely a myth. It contains the reality of life on the range, but the myth also stretches far beyond the facts. The cowboy myth in America was fueled by the many travelling Wild West shows. In reality, cowboys were originally men who were underpaid and overworked, living wherever cattle were raised. Cowboys lived and worked beyond the security of towns and the comforts of

home. Most cowboys took pride in their lifestyle. Sometimes authorities and city folk took another view; in the U.S. cowboys were seen as wild and dangerous. Yet, they came to symbolize values that the whole nation admired: independence, courage, and rugged individualism.

Not all cowboys were men, some were women. Throughout the American Wild West there were cowgirls who worked the range and took part in cattle drives. Many were the wives and daughters of ranch owners. A few even owned their own ranches. Their work required courage and endurance, which they believed made them different from other women.

Whether on the plains or only in myth, there will always be cowboys. And, like Ally and Fin, there is a little bit of the cowboy in us all.



The Code of the West

1. Never pass anyone on the trail without saying 'Howdy.'
2. Don't wave at a person on a horse. It might spook the horse. (A nod is the proper greeting.)
3. A cowboy always helps someone in need, even a stranger or an enemy.
4. Never try on another person's cowboy hat.
5. Don't sit with your back to the door.

Activity

- Draw a picture of the place you would like to go in search of adventure. Is it Outer Space? The Australian Outback? The Arctic? What is it about this place that makes you think of adventure? Now, draw yourself in the picture.



EALRs

READING—analyze
 COMMUNICATION—communicate clearly
 SOCIAL STUDIES—analyze and synthesize
 ARTS—communicate



IRISH TRAVELLERS: *Poets and Outcasts*



Gypsy (short for Egyptian) cultures have roamed throughout Europe since the 14th century. They migrate in caravans, live off of the land, and trade in the towns they visit along the way. The Irish Travellers, while similar in lifestyle to gypsy clans, are a different migrating people who speak *Shelta*, an Irish language. They are believed to have descended from an ancient class of wandering poets. According to the Gypsy Lore Society, Irish Travellers may also have banded together at different times of social or economic upheaval in Ireland, including the various potato famines of the 19th century.

For centuries, Irish Travellers were well known as metal workers, specifically as *tinkers*. This word is derived from the Irish word for tinsmith, *tincheard*. As the items diminished in modern society, the term became derogatory, indicating a shiftless beggar or thief.

Some Irish would prefer that Travellers adopt an urban, settled lifestyle. Many travelling families face prejudice, violence, and harassment as they move about in their caravans. Without acceptable park areas to stay in, the caravans are often made to “move on” by an enforced police escort.

The Irish Association of Social Workers has long documented that the Travellers’ life expectancy is half that of settled people. Their children are four times more likely to suffer serious health defects and are three times more likely to be hospitalized or die in the first year of life. Without a permanent address, there is little government assistance for food, health care, or formalized education. Yet, the Travellers, placing themselves at risk, cling to their heritage and way of life despite being treated as social outcasts.



The Travellers move about in wagon caravans that they often build themselves.

Something more compelling keeps these families adrift; they remain the enduring poets of Ireland’s landscape. *Into the West* touches on the challenges faced by these people in contemporary society, but it also celebrates the continuity of their culture: modern nomads rooted in centuries of tradition.

THE EVICTION – BASED ON A TRUE STORY

It is a starry, warm night and very quiet. Mrs. Evans is wide-awake next to her sleeping husband and four-year-old son, Tommy, also fast asleep. This is the end of the caravan of three [wagons], nestled together in the corner of a farmer’s field.



The farmer gives them a jug of fresh, warm milk every morning. He’s quite happy to have a few Travellers so long as they’re no bother and don’t leave a mess. Tonight Mrs. Evans can’t sleep for two reasons. The police called today telling them they must pack up and leave the area. This is a very bad time to be forced to move on as Mrs. Evans has just given birth to a tiny baby girl born two months too early. All she wants is for her baby Katrina to get strong enough to come out of the hospital and join the family.

It’s two o’clock in the morning. Suddenly, the dogs bark, blue lights flash through the window, there’s shouting and a huge thudding that shakes the whole caravan and nearly breaks the door. Children start to cry. Everyone is frightened and then angry as the police demand that all the caravans get off the farmer’s land now. The farmer is arguing with one of the policemen. But the policeman says, “I’m just doing my job. Local people don’t like them being here.” All the Travellers leave with no time or daylight to clean up behind them. They don’t know where to go. Nowhere feels safe.

—Source: Travelling Light’s *Into the West* Study guide, 1998

Discussion

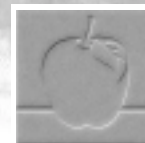
- Is there a group of people that you know of that the majority of society looks down upon? How are they different from the rest of society? How are they the same? Can you think of a group of people that travel around and don’t have settled homes, like the Travellers? How do people treat them? Are people afraid of them? Do people think they are glamorous? Would you rather travel around the world or settle down in one home? What do you think you would miss out on by making your choice?



COMMUNICATION—listen and observe

EALRS

SOCIAL STUDIES—analyze and synthesize, investigate



Children and Grief

In *Into the West*, Ally and Fin, two young children, must deal with the death of their mother. Their father, devastated by the loss of his wife, doesn't know what to do for his children to help them grieve. So, they are all left with questions they can't answer and feelings they don't quite understand.

Death is a natural and basic part of life. Often when a young person loses someone important in his/her life adults do not know what to do with, or how to help, these children. The most vital thing to remember is that the child's feelings need to be addressed in some way.

Children cope with grief in many ways. Drugs, alcohol, and violence are some common unhealthy outlets kids choose. The California-based nonprofit group Teen Age Grief, Inc. (TAG) reports that "the vast majority of teens in drug rehab or jail have suffered the loss of someone significant in their lives." It is up to the adults in the child's life to equip them with healthy tools to deal with their grief.

Often the instincts of children who use negative coping mechanisms are right on target; they just need someone to steer them in a positive direction. For example, anger and violence are normal when a child



wants to strike out in pain and confusion. TAG teaches that "Anger is a very human response, but with that response comes the responsibility not to hurt ourselves or others." TAG lets children know of other, more positive, channels such as writing the deceased a letter, or drawing a picture of a favorite memory with the loved-one.

Similarly, when children who experience such loss turn to drugs or alcohol they are trying to numb the pain. They need someone to take them in hand and give them positive tools. They need someone to tell them that, although the pain is intense, it will fade with time.

"Your job is to let them know pain is part of living and that it does [diminish]," says M. Nan Jobson LCSW, a social worker in Florida. "Give them the feeling that death and loss are universal, which of course they are."

How Can You Help a Child Face Loss?

Don't be afraid to talk to children about death. They will have questions about all aspects of it—from if there is a heaven to where they should sit at the funeral. Be honest with them. But don't feel that you should give them more information than they ask for; if you foster an open atmosphere, they will feel comfortable asking about those things that are troubling them.

Some very important coping mechanisms for children and adults alike are: talking about the loss with a friend, family member, or teacher; getting the feelings out by crying, writing, drawing, etc.; or getting help from a professional therapist or counselor.

The death of a loved-one is hard on everyone. Let children know that it is okay to feel sad, angry, or afraid; that the pain will lessen in time; and there are positive things they can do to help ease it along the way.

Activity

- Have your students write the obituary of one of the characters in the play. What should people know about that character's life and what kind of person he or she was?

Then have your class write their own obituaries. What would they want people to remember about their lives? What are some things that they hope to accomplish in their lives that they may not have done yet?



EALRs

WRITING—write for a purpose
ARTS—connect
HEALTH AND FITNESS—maintain a healthy life, analyze and evaluate the impact of real-life influences