

Orla and the Wild Hunt

AUTHOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Primary



SYNOPSIS

Orla and her brother go to stay with their gran in Ireland. Grieving the death of their mum, the children revel in the comfort of their grandmother's house and her magical storytelling. But soon after they arrive, Gran vanishes. Helped by a local boy—and a peculiar creature found in the garden shed—they set out to find her. Shadowed by a shapeshifting darkness known as the Wild Hunt, the children—and especially Orla—must put their sadness behind them if they're to rescue their beloved gran.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anna is an award-winning poet and filmmaker. She has an MA in Writing for Young People from Bath Spa University and was one of 'fifteen leading U.K. poets' commissioned for Bristol Festival of Ideas 2016. Her environmental-action short film 'Never Land' starred Keeley Hawes, John Nettles and Marcus Brigstocke and won 'best narrative' at the Women in Film and Television's 2018 showcase. Anna co-founded the website makeaplace.net. She loves travel, adventures and stories.

THEMES

- Myths and legends
- Ireland and its history
- Grief and bereavement
- Healing from trauma
- Sibling relationships
- Adventure and magic

STUDY NOTES

- *Orla and the Wild Hunt* is heavily inspired by Irish mythology. As a class, discuss and write down the mythological aspects of the novel—for example: the fae, giants, merrows or the wild hunt itself. How many can you identify?
 - Then, separate into small groups. Each group should be assigned one of these Irish mythical creatures or topics to research, in the school library and/or online. Each group should create a presentation—utilising as many creative media as possible including images, music and quotations from key texts—about their assigned Irish mythology topic. Present your findings to the class and create a class display of all this material.
- Anna Houghton says the ideas for this book were drawn from her own childhood, particularly the stories told to her

by her granny—‘This story has been inspired, in part, by my own Granny Ireland’s tales.’ Now, it’s time for you to draw inspiration from your own past. Choose a moment, person or place that is special to you. On a large piece of paper or card, write down the key words that occur to you when you think of this moment, person or place in a word cloud. You can use all different colours of ink for your word cloud. Write the most important words larger and/or decorate them.

- Next, use the word cloud as inspiration for a piece of poetry—try to use all five senses (touch, sound, taste, smell and vision) in your piece. Don’t worry if it doesn’t rhyme or fit a formal structure—you may use ‘free verse’ too. Share your poem with the class and explain the inspiration behind it.
- *Orla and the Wild Hunt* is, at heart, a classic quest story in which the characters must complete a perilous series of challenges across great distances to reach their goal of Dagda’s Harp. Your first task is to map out where the characters in *Orla and the Wild Hunt* travel and what troubles they encounter during the story. Create a flow chart at the front of the class to represent this. What would you say are the big moments/turning points of the story?
- Imagine you are an author trying to come up with your next book. It’s going to be a quest story, just like *Orla and the Wild Hunt*—but before you can start writing, you need to map out the characters’ journey and the obstacles they will face. Draw a map featuring five main locations. The first location of the map is ‘home’ and the last place is ‘destination’—what is it your characters are seeking? Whatever it is, write and/or draw it in the destination. Now, you should pick at least three major obstacles faced by the characters on their quest. You may draw inspiration from *Orla and the Wild Hunt*, from Irish or other mythologies, from your favourite books, TV shows or movies, or simply from your own imagination! Illustrate your map carefully and talk the class through your quest story.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do you think *Orla and the Wild Hunt* says about grief, particularly in relation to the wild hunt?
- What did you think of Orla as a character? Is she likeable? Does she change throughout the book?
- How would you characterise the relationship between Orla and Apollo?
- What do you think happens after the story has ended? Do you feel there’s room for a sequel?
- What was the biggest surprise for you in the story?
- Which of the Irish mythological aspects had you heard about already—and which were new and unexpected?