

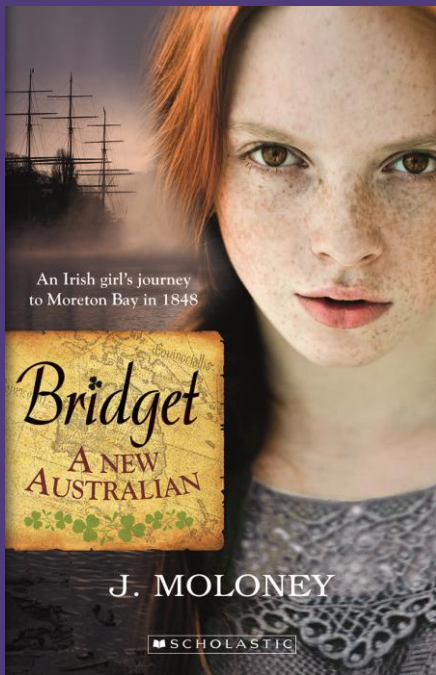
Teachers' Notes

Bridget

A New Australian

Written by J. Moloney

Teachers' Notes by Rae Carlyle



OMNIBUS BOOKS

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Previous publications

James Moloney
How to Talk to a Frill-neck Liard
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A New Australian series

Kerenza Rosanne Hawke
Sian Rhian Morgan
Frieda Marianne Musgrove

Contents

Introduction.....	2
About the Author	2
Activities	3

Introduction

Times have been difficult for 11-year-old Bridget and her family. Since her father died a month ago, the family has been struggling to survive on the meagre wages that Bridget's 16-year-old sister earns as a housemaid. The potatoes have gone black and rotted in the fields, and without the money that her father brought in by digging roads for the government, the family is facing starvation. And then things get worse. The tenant farmers are all being evicted so that the landlord can graze sheep. The house that Bridget's father built is torn down, and her family is forced to leave the only home they have ever known.

Without transport or money, it is a long slow walk to the city to try to find somewhere to stay, and a way to earn money. But many families in Ireland are in the same situation as Bridget's, and in the end the workhouse is the only place they can go. Conditions are brutal and disease rife, but all hope is not lost. The government has started a scheme to send young women to work in the Australian colonies, and Bridget's two older sisters are eligible, and so apply. The family, however, has more suffering ahead. Just as word comes that Hannah and Maeve have been accepted for emigration, Hannah succumbs to disease and dies. Bridget's mother is heartbroken. Determined to save her surviving children, she lies to the authorities. She says that it was Bridget who died so that Bridget can take Hannah's place and have the chance at a new life in a new land. *Bridget* tells the story of Bridget's voyage to the other side of the world, and the challenges that she and her sister Maeve face in this new and strange land. It is a tale of courage and determination, of hardship and of fear, and paints a vivid picture of a slice of Australian history as seen by a young girl who has already suffered much in her life, yet never gives up hope that she can change her life for the better in this new land.

About the Author

James Moloney has written more than 40 books, from light-hearted adventure stories to fantasy and young adult novels. Some, such as *A Bridge to Wiseman's Cove* and *Swashbuckler*, have won literary awards both in Australia and overseas, but James derives his greatest satisfaction from the many letters and emails he has received from enthusiastic readers. James lives in Brisbane where he writes every day in a specially built shed in his backyard.

Activities

English

In any novel, the time and place in which the story takes place influence the reader's understanding of the characters, their world view, and why they choose to act as they do. For an author to tell a character's story, he or she also has to tell the reader about where the character is, and what is happening in the world around them. This is called establishing the setting and the period. How characters think, feel, and react to events is as much a result of the culture and time in which they live as it is of their personality.

- Where and when is *Bridget* set? List the different places where the action of the story takes place. Note the larger setting such as country, the more local setting such as city, and the immediate setting such as the specific house.
- How does the author establish the setting at the start of the story? How do they establish the different settings throughout the rest of the novel as Bridget and her family move around?
- How are the descriptions presented (e.g. is it first-person narration to reader, authorial narration, or through dialogue between characters)?
- Why do you think the author has chosen to establish the setting and scene in this manner?
- What is the impact of choosing to use this method rather than a different one – how does it influence the narrative flow and reader understanding?
- Make a list containing five facts about Bridget and her life that we learn about through interactions and dialogue between characters, and five facts that we learn about through Bridget telling the reader directly. For each fact write a brief comment as to why you think the author chose this method for this item.
- Why do you think the author chooses to have so much of the action at the start of the novel take place in Ireland?
 - What is the value to the reader?
 - How does the Irish segment help the reader understand Bridget and her experiences in Australia?

- If the author had chosen to open the novel with Bridget and Maeve arriving in Australia, how would this have changed our understanding of Bridget's life and her decisions?

Bridget has a predominantly chronologically linear narrative structure. This means that for the most part, we find out about events as they are happening, and in the order in which they actually occur. Some things though the reader finds out about when Bridget remembers events from the past, and explains them to the reader.

- What are some of the benefits to having a straightforward chronologically linear structure to a story?
- What are some of the benefits to using flashbacks, or non-chronological narrative structures?
- When might an author choose to use one rather than the other, and why?
- Identify two different passages where Bridget describes an event that is important to the story; one where it is happening as she describes it, and one where she describes a past event. Write a brief paragraph giving reasons why the author might have chosen to do things this way for these two scenes. Remember to think about such things as suspense, plot complications, perspective, viewpoint, and the roles and purposes of minor characters within a novel.

The resolution of a novel is the ending, where problems are either solved or recognised as insurmountable, and where the author ties off all the loose ends of the plot and lets the reader know how things finish, as well as giving some idea of what is likely to happen to the characters in the future. The resolution of *Bridget* is in a different format from the rest of the novel.

- What is the format of the resolution of *Bridget*?
- Why might the author have chosen to use this format to end his novel?
- Write a brief passage describing the ending of the story, and what you think influenced the author's choice to write it in that format. Discuss the positive and negatives of using such a format, and what the impact on the story as a whole is.

The novel is written in the first person, with Bridget's viewpoint being the one that the reader is presented with. Readers have to base their understanding of other characters'

opinions and ideas on their conversations and actions, but characters do not get the chance to explain their motives directly to the reader in their own words.

- How does viewpoint influence a reader's interpretation of events?
- Which characters do we empathise most with, and why?
- Choose a character in the novel that you think has a strong opinion about Bridget. Write a letter from the character to a friend or family member of theirs, describing Bridget and the events that occurred. For example: a letter from Mrs Joyner describing meeting Bridget, and Bridget rescuing the horse; a letter from Mrs Driscoll describing the problems she had with Bridget and Maeve; a letter from the Judge describing Bridget's appearance in court. Remember to include the character's opinions, beliefs, and understanding of events, and try to present their feelings about what has happened in as sympathetic a fashion as possible – you want the reader to empathise with your chosen character!

Bridget is Irish, and uses several words in the novel that aren't in common use in Australia these days. These words include *poteen*, *cottier*, *eejit*, and *colleen*.

- Write down what you think these words might mean.
- Research what the actual meaning of these words is. You can ask someone who is from Ireland, or search on the internet.
- Compare your guess to the actual meaning.
- Can you think of any words or phrases that we use in Australian English today that come from Irish/Irish English?

History and Geography

- Research the Irish Potato Famine. Write about your findings, being sure to include information about:
 - What happened.
 - Where it happened.
 - When it happened.
 - What some of the effects of the Potato Famine on Ireland, and on the rest of the world were.
 - What historians think caused the potato disease, and how it spread.

- Why it was so devastating for the potato crop to fail in Ireland, and less so in other countries. (Hint: Bridget talks of a stew being called 'Irish Stew' because it has potatoes in it.)
- As a class discuss:
 - Why the Potato Famine resulted in so many Irish emigrating to other countries. Re-read chapters 1 to 4, and use the events in there as a starting point for your discussion.
 - Where the Irish emigrants went. Hypothesise as to which countries might have had the most Irish immigrate to them, and why. Research online and see if your hypotheses were correct. Present your findings to the class as a poster or powerpoint presentation.
 - As a class mark on a world map the paths the Irish refugees took, and the countries they ended up in.
- Nelligan is Bridget's surname. It is also the name of a town in NSW. Find Nelligen on a map of Australia. Discuss why it might be called Nelligen.
- There is a list of the 100 most common Irish Surnames in 1891 at <http://www.irishgenealogical.org/page/igsi-links-100-most-common-surnames>
- Do a place-name treasure hunt. Divide your state into different regions, and in small groups see how many of the names on the list you can find in the Australian place-names of your region. Look at suburbs and roads as well as cities, and remember that spelling might be different, and that the name might have 'ville' 'ton' 'town' etc after it. For example 'Kellyville' in Sydney is related to Kelly, and 'Bourke' in central NSW is related to 'Burke'.
- Share your findings with the class.
- Write a brief passage explaining why you think there are place-names in Australia with an Irish origin.
- Bridget travelled across Ireland to Dublin, then to England, and then by boat to Australia. Using the information in the story, in small groups or pairs mark Bridget's journey from western Ireland to her final home north of Brisbane on a world map. Some of the places that she travelled through are mentioned by name, such as Sydney, Plymouth and Dublin, but others are not named. When a place is described, but not mentioned by name, you will have to deduce the general area based on the information given in the story. Present your map to the class along with your reasons for marking places that are not mentioned by name.

Creative Activities

- On page 67 Bridget sings 'The Last Rose of Summer' as the ship is leaving for Australia, and the other girls all join in with her. Research Irish songs from the same era, and choose one to learn and perform as a class at assembly or for another class.
- Individually or in small groups, write a song about having to leave your home in Australia and travel to the other side of the world. What would you miss most? What are some of the plants/animals/places/activities that are considered to be iconically Australian? How would you feel about having to leave forever? Include these things, thoughts, and feelings in your lyrics, and either choose an old colonial tune to set your words to, or compose a tune of your own.
- On page 55 Bridget tastes soda bread for the first time.
 - Bake a loaf of soda bread and compare its taste and texture to regular yeast bread. Basic bread recipes can be found at <http://www.taste.com.au/recipes/13469/irish+soda+bread> (soda bread) and <http://www.taste.com.au/recipes/10857/basic+white+bread> (white yeast bread). Which bread was easier to make? How long did each different type of bread take to prepare and cook? Why might someone choose to make soda bread rather than yeast bread?
 - As a class, gather data on who preferred the soda bread, and who preferred the yeast loaf. Present your bread-making experience in a class wall display or poster. Include pictures of the different loaves, a discussion of the taste comparison, information on the different ways bread can be eaten, and the results of your preference survey as either a chart or graph.
 - Research different types of bread from around the world. Write a summary of your research findings that discusses what types of bread are common in various parts of the world, how they are cooked, and why that type of bread is popular in that specific culture or place. Make a poster or powerpoint presentation about bread from around the world.
- On page 112 the girls see Australia for the first time, and notice that the foliage is a different green from the plants in Ireland. Using watercolour paints or watercolour

pencils, create a two-panel painting. For the first panel use colours commonly seen in the Irish countryside and for the second panel use colours from the Australian countryside. You can either paint a landscape, or create an abstract scene. You may want to do an image search on the internet for Irish and British scenery before you start, or look for photos in books about Ireland in the library. Write a brief commentary under your artwork that describes your colour choices and decisions.

- As a class make a chart showing the geographical and linguistic origins of class members' names. You can focus on first names, surnames, or both. Create a wall display which includes both a map and a graph to present your findings.

- Bridget and the other girls had to learn to write using a wet finger to make marks on a table, because they had nothing else to use. If you had no access to pens, pencils, or paper, what could you use to write with?
 - Take a walk around the school grounds and local area, and see what natural resources you can locate nearby that could be used to write with. In pairs or small groups make a list of as many different possibilities as you can think of. Collect some of your resources and test them out in the classroom. Which of your ideas was the best, and which ones didn't work very well at all? Present your findings to the class.
 - Research various writing materials that have been used throughout history. Look at such things as quill pens, slates, wax or clay tablets, etc. Recreate and experiment with as many of these methods as you feasibly can. As a class make a display presenting your findings and discussing the different methods and materials.