



Storm Weaver

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Teaching Guide

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RATIONALE & THEMES

Storm Weaver is the thrilling sequel to *A Cage of Roots*, drawing Ayla and her friends Finny, Benvy and Sean back to their subterranean nightmare to complete a quest.

Driven by loyalty to Ayla, her friends follow her through time and the crumbling realm of the Red Root King to the ancient land of Fal to face many challenges.

The themes explored are:

- Courage
- Friendship
- Loyalty
- Determination
- Identity
- Integrity
- Trust
- Self-awareness

SUMMARY

Having escaped the Red Root kingdom as it collapsed around them, Finny, Sean and Benvy are persuaded by Ayla to follow her back into the underground vaults, unsure what their quest is, but determined not to abandon her.

Seeking to find and extinguish the evil Queen Maeve, Ayla leads them through the swirls of time.

As Maeve flees to the Ireland of ancient Fal, it becomes clear that Ayla is being led rather than making her own decisions.

All the characters are drawn into the vortex of a final battle for supremacy between men and the Danann.

Defeated, Nuada, the Danann king, vows revenge. Fleeing, he plunges through a time portal to emerge into the Ireland that Finny and the others call home.

APPROACH

Essentially this is a fantasy adventure. It is fast-paced, credible and will capture the imagination of any child who reads it.

The activities can either be used for small group or individual response.

The plot is colourful and visual, lending itself to graphic interpretation.

The guide is divided into 3 sections to complement the development of the story.

Section 1 The Red Root Halls Pages 9-72

SUMMARY

Ayla leads her friends Finny, Benvy and Sean back through the collapsing chaos of the Red Root King's nightmare halls under the pretext of rescuing the goblin-girls.

Driven by a powerful force, Ayla shocks her friends when she dismisses a rescue attempt for Sean, who has been separated from the group. She insists on pressing on, leaving Sean to find his own way to rejoin them.

Memories from her underground imprisonment flood Ayla's thoughts, and when she uses her new powers to create an electric spark to light a torch, Benvy's and Finny's concern for her deepens.

Alone and terrified, Sean manages to scramble to safety just as the floor beneath collapses, only to find himself tumbling helplessly through a narrow fissure before rolling to a stop in an unknown cave.

Unaware of their son's plight, Sean's parents have gone to the pub where they discover that the school trip has been a ruse and that their child is missing. Upset by the ramblings of magical portents by Podge Boylan, a local drunk, they rush home to contact the Garda.

Haunted by guilt at abandoning Sean, Finny and Benvy follow a now-obsessed Ayla through the collapsing columns of the Red Root King's halls, to discover a mound of inert goblin-girls, their life force stolen by Maeve to effect her escape.

Ayla confesses her mission is to seek and destroy the queen and that nothing will be allowed to stand in the way of this.

Sean manages to find his way back to the others, bringing with him slabs of toad meat that he took from the abandoned kitchens.

In the Sheridan house, the Garda is trying to make sense of what he is hearing about the missing children.

A piercing scream is heard underground and Ayla rushes to the source, hoping to find Queen Maeve.

Sprinting through the halls and descending an enormous staircase, the friends find a goblin-girl cowering in a sand pit, being stalked by four giant toads as they close in for the kill.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (Read p15):** Shock has forced Ayla to see herself as a collage of different people. This sensation is common. Think of the person you are when you are at home or with your friends or by yourself. Is each personality exactly the same? How can you identify and then encourage the 'real' you?
- (Read p47):** Friendship ties holding them together have begun to unravel as Ayla becomes more distant and less concerned with Sean's welfare. Is she right to ignore Sean's plight, focusing on what she thinks is the greater danger? Is friendship always important or are there times when it can be a distraction?
- (Read pp51-53):** Benvy is close to despair, being overwhelmed by what she has witnessed, when Sean's reappearance and reassurance rescues her. Why do you think that her view has suddenly changed from despair to hope? Their situation has not changed, but her view of it has. Why do you think this has happened?
- (Read p60):** Sean attributes his survival to luck. Do you think that there is such a force as luck or fate? Do you think that

we are being watched and controlled or do events happen by chance?

- **(Read p33):** Time is an important theme in the story. It seems that time itself is flexible. A day in Fal is different to a day in Ireland. What do you understand by time? Why does it seem to pass more quickly or slowly depending on what you are doing?

ACTIVITIES

1. Ayla's Eyes (Read pp14-15)

Ayla has been transformed by her experiences and that change is now reflected in her eyes.

Use a sheet of A4 paper to draw an image of what you think her eyes looked like and what the others might have seen in them.

2. Saying & Thinking (Read pp22-23)

Reaching through the crevice to touch fingers, Sean and Benvy try to reassure each other.

The story records what they said. However, do you think that their thoughts were as confident?

Using different coloured pencils, one for words and the other for thoughts, recreate their conversation, showing not only what they said but also what they were thinking.

3. Nightmare (Read p27)

Ayla remembers the nightmare of her experience in the mouth of the giant toad.

Describe a frightening nightmare that you have had.

4. The Scream (Read p31)

Sean has to call on every resource he has to survive the collapsing floor, screaming his defiance at the dust and darkness.

Create a 30-second sound clip that could be used to paint a picture of this scene.

You can use some of the sites below for effects. You can also download a useful sound-editing program from the third link.

soundbible.com/tags-scream.html

www.soundsnap.com/tags/falling

www.audacityteam.org/download/

5. Repulsive (Read p62)

In order to survive, they are forced to eat a meal of rancid repulsive toad flesh.

Can you describe a time when you had to eat something that you found sickening?

How would you describe the sensations of smell, chewing and then swallowing? Describe your feelings as you tried to eat.

6. Report (Read p67)

When the Garda leaves the Sheridans' home

and returns to the station, he reads through his notes and attempts to write his report for the sergeant, including adding in his own deduction or analysis of what he has heard.

Recreate both his notes and his report.

Section 2 Seeking Maeve Pages 73-154

SUMMARY

Puzzled at Ayla's lack of concern for the goblin's plight, Benvy, supported by Sean initiates a rescue, using their magical weapons to butcher the toads.

Ayla dispatches the final toad and together with the others hums the chant that restores the goblin to the girl she once was, plucking a life thread from each of them to revive her. The exertion stuns them and when they have recovered the goblin-child has fled.

Confused by her growing power and sense of purpose, Ayla asks her friends to trust her, promising to get them home while issuing a warning that the outcome of their quest will determine if there will be a home to go to.

Sean's mum decides to visit Podge Boylan to see if he knows anything. He shows her glowing spirals on ancient stones in the woods and warns that disaster is approaching.

Ayla has the sense of another voice inside her head urging her on. The friends find themselves plunging helter-skelter to the shore of an iridescent lake in a strangely inverted world where a fierce hailstorm threatens to pulverize them.

Untouched by the storm, Ayla beckons them forward and they discover that when they hold her hand they too are shielded from the storm.

Realising that the surface of the lake divides their world from another, they begin their submersion. Benvy spies the goblin-girl and releasing her grip from Ayla faces the fury of the hailstorm to rescue her.

Struggling to return to the lake with the goblin-girl, Benvy realizes that Ayla has returned to help her as the fury subsides and they sink through the surface of the lake to emerge into the ancient Ireland of Fal.

Fal is a land of danger and different dimensions. The goblin-girl goes missing again and they are forced to flee from a pack of huge wolves. Crouched for safety behind a giant statue, they can hear whistling noises. Daring to look, they find the goblin-girl standing among the bodies of dead wolves.

Fear and frustration provoke argument and accusation among them all, ending in sullen silence as they drift into sleep. Finny wakens to

darkness and discovers that Ayla has left. He sets off in pursuit, leaving the others behind.

In the bowels of St Augustin's School, the principal, Fr Shanlon, sits alone considering events. Revealing himself as Cathbad, a Druid, he seeks the council of his kind before deciding how to act.

Sean and Benvy set off, relying on the instincts of the goblin-child to forage and find their way.

Following Ayla at a distance, Finny realizes that she is being stalked and rushes to her defence, only to have to be rescued himself by Ayla from a strutting Fal boy-warrior who has been sent out to escort them.

Collecting Podge, Sean's mother visits the Sheedy farm, the epicentre of strange phenomena. Podge recalls that she too was involved in an abduction attempt at that spot and reveals that his own daughter had disappeared there many years before. Creeping through the choked outhouses, they catch a glimpse of Fr Shanlon before he extinguishes their torch and disappears into the darkness.

Benvy, Sean and the goblin-girl have reached a place of huge column stones, where, out of the mist, the warrior Goll emerges. Sean has met him before.

Goll tries to explain that they are in danger. The stones are Danann boundaries and they are now being targeted by the gatekeeper.

A horned warrior astride a huge bull bursts from the mist charging towards them. A sudden thunderclap stuns the bull, swatting it to one side before their rescuer, a tall bald priest, spirits them away to safety.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read pp118-119):** The group has argued and harsh things have been said, prompting each of them to retreat to silence. Why do people choose silence as a response after an argument? Do you think Benvy and Finny might have come to blows? Why do people sometimes say things they later regret during an argument? How can we prevent this?
- **(Read p125):** Fr Shanlon is Cathbad the Druid and can move easily between the worlds of today and ancient Fal. Why do you think this type of fantasy is so appealing? Can you explain why some people might find the notion of parallel worlds so attractive?
- **(Read p145):** Podge reminds Sean's mum that the old ways still thrive. In the past many people believed in fairies. Do the old ways still have any power? How and with what have we replaced our belief in fairies? Why do you think that we need to

have things to believe in?

- **(Read p149):** Sean met Goll at an earlier point in his life-path. He recognises Goll, but Goll will not know Sean until much later. Time travel would cause many such problems, eg could you travel into the future to attend your own funeral or travel back to meet your parents before you were born? Do you think time travel **is** possible? What might happen to your life-path if you were able to change events? Might it be possible that some events have already been changed?
- **(Read p78):** Benvy and Sean rush to help the goblin-child without thinking of their own safety. Is this brave of them or irresponsible? Why do we expect people to put themselves in danger to help others in an emergency? When do you think we should keep ourselves safe and when should we risk danger to help someone?

ACTIVITIES

1. The Toad (Read p76)

Benvy hurls her javelin. It screams an arc through the air and slams into one of the giant toads. The impact was very dramatic.

Use a comic-book illustration style to recreate the scene showing the fury of the impact as well as the expressions on the faces of those who witnessed it.

2. T'is a Gift (Read p82)

The goblin-child is restored when each of the group contributes a little of their own life force as a gift to her.

We give and receive gifts. Some of these gifts are life changing.

What is the most valuable gift that you have to give to someone?

Describe a gift that you received that changed how you thought about things.

Should every gift be something that you can touch? What other types of gifts are there?

3. The Hovel (Read p87-89)

Sean's mum is unimpressed by Podge's home. She wonders how an estate agent would present his house in a sales brochure.

Create an advertisement for Podge's house and describe it in glowing terms, presenting 5 of the faults as desirable features.

4. Super Powers (Read p91-92)

Emerging from the lake and the terrifying hailstorm, her friends begin to question Ayla and how she acquired her powers, but she is unable to provide any answers.

If you could have a 'super power', which one

would you choose and how would you use it?

5. Signals (Read pp129-130)

The goblin-girl is unable to talk to Benvy or Sean and they must rely on signals to communicate with her.

Choose 7 basic communication commands and decide what hand signals they could use.

You could use drawings and emoticons on a simple card, to explain what they mean.

6. I Remember (Read p76)

Podge's question reawakens a vivid memory for Mary Sheridan of her escape from the goblins when she was a child.

She recalls every tiny detail of smell, taste, touch, sight and fear.

Write a short paragraph to describe her memory.

7. Magic (Read pp147-154)

Magic shimmers and flashes through the story. Where could you find the magic of Ireland today?

Work in small groups to describe and illustrate 5 examples of where you think the magic of Ireland is at work.

lovindublin.com/best-of/33-pictures-prove-ireland-most-beautiful-country-world
www.irishcentral.com/culture/travel/irishcentrals-top-10-sites-in-ireland-41098302-237788301.html
www.flightcentre.ca/blog/10-reasons-why-youll-fall-in-love-with-ireland/

Section 3 The Danann Return Pages 155-253

SUMMARY

Led by Lorcan, Ayla and Finny are unsure of their destination. Finny is barely able to tolerate Lorcan's swagger and is angry when Ayla becomes friends with him.

Benvy and Sean explain all that has happened. They realize who Cathbad is as he leads them towards Tara and the court of the High King, Brú.

Lorcan leads Ayla and Finny along barren coastal paths under the watchful eyes of a wheeling hawk. Entering a bay of sea arches, they are forced to dodge the swooping hawk. When they look up again they find a tall, hooded woman blocking their path. She commands them to follow her.

As they journey, Cathbad explains why Ayla is being drawn under Maeve's sorcery. Questioning Ida, the goblin-girl, Cathbad discovers a startling connection to their

home in Kilnabracka.

The hooded woman leads Ayla's group to the Danann citadel. There, she is welcomed and escorted to meet their god, while the hooded woman ushers Finny out of the citadel. He watches Lorcan defeat a huge Danann opponent in a street game.

The Danann king, Nuada, leads Ayla through the halls to an iridescent pool where she faces the Dagda, their god.

Struggling to keep control of her own being, she asks about Maeve, and then watches in horror as the twisted bramble shape of Maeve, her mother, emerges from the shadows to greet her.

Preparing for the final leg of their journey, Sean and Benvy rush to defend Ida from two huge hounds, only to see Cathbad welcome the dogs and reassure them that the dogs will be their escort to Tara.

The High King welcomes them and informs them that his spy reports that the Danann have Ayla and are preparing for war. Ayla is to lead the Danann army.

After a night's rest, they are surprised when Ida begins to talk and tell her story.

Finny cannot believe what he is seeing as Ayla addresses the Danann as their leader. Lorcan explains that she is now under the control of Maeve and has called the Danann to war against the men of Fal.

Both armies converge on the Plains of Muirthemne, where their fate will be decided. Sean, Benvy and Ida are riding with Brú. There is a surprise in store as Ayla's giant 'uncles', the sons of Cormac, Fergus and Lann, join the forces. The High King, Brú, and the men of Fal must fight for their survival.

Among the Danann warriors, Finny watches Ayla conjure a storm. The great battle commences.

Finny saves Ayla from Lorcan.

Maeve's spells whip a tangle of roots to grip and crush all of her enemies.

Sean and Benvy see that Lann is about to fall to a Danann blade. His brother, Taig, who has been riding with the Danann saves him.

Lann's opponent transforms to a hawk just as Benvy hurls her spear. The hooded warrior falls dead and Taig cries out for his lost love.

Sean uses his magic hammer to pulverize Maeve's lethal roots, freeing his friends, while Taig hurls Benvy's spear through Maeve, freeing Ayla from her evil control.

While Ida revives Finny, Cathbad restores Ayla, draining his own life essence to save her.

Defeated, the Danann flee the field with the captured Brú and his wife Etain and

when King Nuada is cornered among the Ogham columns he vows revenge before disappearing into the mists.

Mary Sheridan informs the Garda of her concerns as the media investigate strange phenomena at the ancient sites.

Garda Kelly, investigating the site where the children disappeared, sees the stones begin to glow. Then the mound erupts as a Danann warrior steps through the swirling mists into Ireland.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read p158):** Lorcan makes a great effort to show off and impress. Why is he doing this? Is he trying to intimidate Finny or impress Ayla? Look for clues in how he interacts with each of them.
- **(Read p205):** Cathbad implies that the land of Fal is a more brutal place than Ireland today. Do you think that he is correct? Is our world less brutal and dangerous now than it was? What examples could you use to argue or agree with him?
- **(Read p215):** When Lorcan announces that a knife can be more effective than an army, he means that he is prepared to be an assassin. Should wars be fought in a particular way, with armies facing each other? Is it justified to fight your enemy from a distance, either by bombings, missiles or assassinations? Should you always give your enemy an equal chance?
- **(Read pp217-218):** As he watches the army march, Sean realizes that some of the warriors are children; indeed he is a child himself. Even today children are involved in some conflicts. Do you believe children should fight in wars? Would it be easier for a child to kill someone?
www.hrw.org/topic/childrens-rights/child-soldiers
- **(Read p224):** Benvy and the others know what will happen to the Sons of Cormac in their future. Benvy foretells Lann's death, yet his only concern is that it will be honourable. Is it a good idea to know your future?
- **(Read pp241-244):** The evil of Maeve and the Danann have been defeated. Good has won this time. Why does Good often win in stories? Is this the real situation or is it simply reassuring for us to think this way?

ACTIVITIES

1. Fat with Rain (Read p161)

The author uses lyrical language to describe the weather, reporting 'cotton ball clouds fat with rain'. Normally a weather report is factual and bland, without similes.

Find a weather report on Met Éireann and then transform it using similes and interesting adjectives into a more lyrical description.

www.met.ie/forecasts/

2. Amadán (Read p163)

Finny understands the word Lorcan has used and realizes that this word has stood the test of time and is still used today as an insult.

Why can some words survive better than others? What type of words might be more likely to survive over time?

Create a list of 10 Irish words you think have survived since ancient times and say why you think they have survived.

www.smartling.com/blog/the-50-most-beautiful-words-in-the-irish-language/

nuacht1.com/ogham/

www.ancientscripts.com/ogham.html

3. The Danann (Read p175)

Little is really known about the Danann.

Using the information you have gathered so far, create a short illustrated biography for them; explain who they were, where they came from, their powers, culture and ambitions.

You will have to use your imagination a lot.

www.irishcentral.com/roots/ancestry/The-Tuatha-De-Danann-Were-they-Irish-gods-or-aliens-PHOTOS.html

4. Back to the Future (Read p175)

The characters in the story are able to move freely through time. The time distances are great so there is little opportunity for them to meet a younger version of themselves.

If you could go back in time and change one event from your own past, perhaps by giving advice or support, what would you change and what effect might it have on your life now?

5. The Dagda (Read p195)

The face of the Dagda forms in the waterfall. It is very dramatic. Using a single pastel shade and dark drawing paper, can you recreate the face that Ayla saw?

6. Who am I? (Read p209)

Ayla is the child of a human mother and a Danann father so she has traits from both races.

Each of you has qualities from both your parents and their families.

Draw a simple outline of yourself and on the left of the page list the characteristics you believe that you have inherited from your dad and his family and on the other side do the same for your mum and her family.

7. Ayla (Read p212)

Finny's skin prickles as he listens to Ayla make her speech to the assembled Danann. It wasn't the effects he saw but rather the power of her words.

In just 10 sentences, she electrified the warriors, turning them into a baying army, eager for battle.

What did she say? What rewards did she promise? What fears did she awaken?

Can you recreate her speech? You could perform it as well for the class.

8. Death's Song (Read p230)

Finny realizes that Death is the only true victor on the battlefield, snatching lives from both sides without any favourites.

As he struggles to stay alive, he imagines that he hears Death shriek her song above the din of the battle.

One chant seems to echo in his head repeating itself again and again.

Compose the verse you think he imagined.

9. My Gift to you (Read p245)

Cathbad has restored Ayla by sharing his life force with her.

If you could restore or benefit someone by sharing one of your qualities with them, which quality would you share and what effect would you expect it to have?

10. The Sequel (Read pp252-253)

The author has almost completed the next book in this series and it will follow on from what has just happened in *Storm Weaver*, beginning with the Danann warrior emerging into 21st century Ireland.

The O'Brien Press need a short paragraph to add to the inside cover of this book to encourage people to buy the next book in the series.

Your paragraph will need to give an exciting detail of what will happen next, the characters involved and how they will deal with the situation, without revealing all of the storyline.

Write the paragraph for them describing what you think will happen in the next story.



A Cage of Roots

The first book about Ayla and her friends.

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