



# Run With The Wind

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## Teaching Guide

By Peter Heaney

### RATIONALE & THEMES

Surrounded by enemies and facing the extinction of his species, Black Tip, a dog fox, is prompted to leave the Valley of the White Fox in the depths of winter to search for the secrets of survival.

Together with an assorted band of companions and lead by the blind fox, Old Sage Brush, they travel North, guided by the Great Running Fox in the Sky, the constellation we know as the Plough.

Facing and overcoming the dangers they encounter on their odyssey, they eventually return, with their own skills honed to a spring that now holds promise for their survival.

Themes explored include:

- Courage
- Resourcefulness
- Hope
- Selflessness
- Friendship
- Loyalty
- Cruelty
- Human impact on the environment
- Co-existence

### SUMMARY

Fearing the obliteration of his species from the relentless encroaching presence of mankind, the dog fox Black Tip seeks the wisdom of Old Sage Brush, a blind and aged veteran of many encounters.

Together they gather a small assorted following of dogs and vixens and set off north to learn the secrets of survival.

Facing many dangers on the way, they are forced to develop and rely on an intuitive, wily and resourceful instinct in themselves, that they had been unaware of, in order to grow as a team and survive.

Their journey takes them into the heart of man's territory, where they learn one of the reasons for the savagery of his relentless

assault on them and observe the impact he has had on the environment.

Forced to cut their journey short and return, as spring and the vixens' cubbing instinct grows more insistent, they are deflated at their apparent failure to find the secrets of survival.

However, on their return to their valley, they begin to realise that their adventure has taught them that the secrets lie within themselves as they face the future, confident that their new-found resources will sustain them in their battle for survival.

### APPROACH

The range and focus of the themes concerning the plight of the foxes and commenting on the environmental impact of man suggest that a small-group approach would be more effective to facilitate discussion and investigation.

This guide has been sectioned into three modules to facilitate the thrust of the story.

## Section 1 Old Sage Brush returns Pages 10–65

### SUMMARY

Winter holds the valley in a bitter grip, making foraging difficult for Black Tip, the young dog fox. Danger is all around, in the form of man and his dogs that seem determined to hunt the foxes to extinction.

Rescuing Vickey, a vixen, and then fighting Fang for the right to be her mate, the three foxes decide to join forces to protect themselves from the onslaught of man.

Vickey recalls an ancient legend that predicts the secret of survival will be discovered in their valley, the land of Sinna. Black Tip sets off to find Old Sage Brush, a veteran of many seasons, hoping to persuade him to lead them.

Old Sage Brush accepts their invitation to lead them, and when Vickey reveals that he is blind, Fang and Black Tip offer to be his sight and strength as they set off to discover the secrets of survival.

When Vickey and Fang have fully recovered, a meeting is held to discover the extent of their support among the fox population in the valley.

Disappointed that only two others agree to join them, Old Sage Brush leads them north to follow the constellation of the Great Running Fox.

Their group has attracted a reluctant additional member, Skulking Dog, who follows them. When his behavior threatens to visit the wrath of man on them all, Old Sage Brush takes control and delivers the first lesson on stealth, cunning and teamwork.

Approaching a battery hen farm, he engineers a strategy that forces them to hunt as a team, securing enough food for everyone without arousing the suspicions of the hatchery workers, thus allowing them to rest and recover before moving to the next lesson.

### DISCUSSION POINTS

- (Read p20):** Vickey is pleased that Black Tip has won but sorry that Fang had to lose. Black Tip is puzzled, knowing that in any contest someone always loses. Do you think that survival has to be about winning or losing? Could there be another way?
- (Read p32):** Black Tip has to be careful not to be seen by the shooters, whose hunting has thinned the game available on the hillside. The shooters continue to hunt despite an abundance of food in their shops. Can we justify hunting creatures we don't need for food?
- (Read p40):** Black Tip shares his belief that things will be better in the next life. Who do you think teaches us that things

will improve in the next life and why do you think it is really taught? Would it not be better to try to improve things for everyone in this life?

- **(Read p65):** The Little Brown Hen is discontented; her behavior driven by her belief that the 'grass is greener' on the other side. This discontent has deadly consequences for the other hens that follow her. How does this type of discontented character trait drive all creature behaviour? Is it a positive or negative trait do you think?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. Creatures, Great and Small (Read p9)

The original for the name of the valley where the foxes live is Gaelic and means the Valley of the White Fox.

Many places in Ireland have names that were originally Gaelic names associated with animals.

Create a tourist leaflet describing three place names from your area that are connected with Gaelic names for animals.

You will need to write an explanation, description and include an illustration.

### 2. Advice (Read p35)

Old Sage Brush uses a maxim to share his first piece of advice with the others. Vickey is very impressed by what he says and thinks that whenever she has her own den she would like it written as an inspirational poster hanging on her wall to remind her of his wisdom. Can you create the poster for her?

### 3. I'm Impressed (Read p36)

Old Sage Brush scolds Fang and Black Tip for fighting over Vickey, but then recalls that he did the same when he was younger.

It is natural for creatures to try to impress each other in order to attract a mate.

Could you work in small groups to make two short lists, one for males and one for females, to show how **WE** try to impress and make ourselves attractive to each other?

Rank the top three strategies and explain your choices.

### 4. The Beech Foxes (Read p44)

The author has created a powerful image of the foxes sitting within a circle of beech trees, the moonlight bathing them in an eerie glow.

The team at O'Brien Press wants to use this image as an illustration for the book covers, but are unsure what style to use.

Create two illustrations, one in silhouette and the other in colour as examples.

### 5. Star Map (Read p47)

The Plough is an important constellation because we use it to identify the North Star, helping us to find direction before compasses or GPS systems were invented.

Choose three other constellations and create a short fact sheet for each, with an illustration and directions on how to locate them in the sky.

[kidskonnnect.com/science/stars-constellations/](http://kidskonnnect.com/science/stars-constellations/)

[www.ducksters.com/science/physics/constellations.php](http://www.ducksters.com/science/physics/constellations.php)

### 6. Foxes (Read p54)

The farmer is furious at the damage caused by Skulking Dog to his chicken run.

That evening, in his diary, he records the event and his own irritation at not being able to shoot the fox as he fled.

Recreate his diary page. How do you think he expressed his annoyance?

## Section 2 Man Pages 66–126

### SUMMARY

Allowing time for the lesson of the hatchery hunt to be absorbed – that cunning is the best asset the foxes have – Old Sage Brush leads them back to Beech Paw to rest. He explains how he was blinded, and tells them how he learned to listen to advice and develop his cunning.

In a dream, Hop-along gets the opportunity to exercise his cunning and bests the giant hare Lepus, earning Sage Brush's admiration. Wakening from his dream, he realises that their association with him is beginning to develop their own resourcefulness.

Survival is difficult, as they have to contend with the ever-present threat of man and his range of tricks, with Skulking Dog only just managing to avoid death from a particularly nasty trick.

Preparing to return to Beech Paw, Sage Brush cautions that they are in the land of the Howling Dogs. They meet a local fox, who warns them that a hunt is imminent and that a captured fox is to be released on the hunt day for the sport of the dogs and the hunters.

Having the disturbing experience of seeing his distorted reflection in some solar panels in the grounds of the deserted mansion, Skulking Dog devises a plan to rescue the captured vixen.

With the help of the local fox, they manage to lead the released vixen through the hedge surrounding the panels and then watch with satisfaction as the dogs bound the hedge and scatter at the sudden reflections, the sunlight dazzling the horses, who throw their riders.

Returning to the group, Sage Brush is overwhelmed to discover that the vixen is his daughter Sinnéad, who he thought had been killed.

Sinnéad's story of her capture, mistreatment and eventual escape thrills them and she decides to join them in the search for the secrets of survival.

Taking respite in a valley where the foxes have been gassed to extinction, they meet an otter that reveals that the greed of a mink in raiding the pheasant farm provoked the brutal retaliation from the farmers.

Discovering that the mink has returned, and fearing a similar reprisal, the foxes and the otter decide to pool their resources, devising a plan that ensures the mink's capture and a banquet of pheasant for themselves.

### DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read pp71-72):** The foxes can see no men; however, the evidence of their presence is clearly visible. Do you think that our effect on the environment is generally positive? How could we begin to ease the worst effects of our environmental footprint?
- **(Read p94):** Sometimes, rural folk dismiss criticism of fox hunting as city people's misunderstanding of the fox as vermin and having to be controlled. How would you argue against this logic and convince them that it is unjustified?
- **(Read pp99-100):** The other foxes listen in horror to Sinnéad's description of her treatment to entertain her captors. Why do we see it as entertainment to visit a circus or zoo and watch creatures perform tricks that are unnatural for them? What does this say about how we see the other creatures who share our world?
- **(Read pp117-118):** The mink's greed is causing problems for the otter and the foxes and will eventually lead to his own downfall. What lesson do you think the author is trying to share here? How would you recognise a similar character trait in humans?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. Sionnach (Read p71)

The foxes are curious about Sionnach, the Great White Fox, but Sage Brush chooses to remain mysterious about what he knows.

Use your imagination to create a short biography of Sionnach, including a portrait illustration, to share the important facts about him or her.

### 2. Lepus (Read pp76–77)

Against the odds, Hop-along manages to thwart Lepus by using cunning.

His leap to take a bite from the moon has fooled all the hares, and so the legend of Hop-along began.

The story is still told today among all the wild hares in Ireland.

Create a version of it in comic illustration format, using no more than six frames and include a short commentary and dialogue with each of the frames.

Do you know what an eclipse of the moon is, and what causes it?

### 3. Trapping Foxes (Read p84)

Skulking Dog is lucky to have escaped the latest attempt to kill him.

Recovering, the foxes decide to pool their experiences of the devices they know that man uses.

They make a list of them and Vickey, who has a phenomenal memory, agrees to remember the list.

Create her memory list.

[www.wikihow.com/Catch-a-Fox](http://www.wikihow.com/Catch-a-Fox)  
[www.bbcwildlife.org.uk/node/3031](http://www.bbcwildlife.org.uk/node/3031)

### 4. Sage Brush Says (Read p93)

Sage Brush uses pithy maxims from his experience and observation of nature to inspire and support the others; his latest is used to encourage Skulking Dog.

How many of his sayings can you find in the story?

Compile the best five into a short anthology and include an explanation and illustration.

### 5. The Mansion Hunt (Read pp94–95)

The Mansion House Hunt is a disaster, with the dogs' behaviour disrupting the horses and some of the riders being thrown. No one is quite sure how it happened.

Imagine that you are a reporter for *The Glensinna Independent* and you were on the hunt as well. Could you write a 'Fact & Opinion' piece for the paper?

### 6. Spring (Read p104)

The foxes are experts at recognising the signs that spring is approaching, as their existence depends on this skill.

Make a list of the natural signs that spring is approaching.

Compose a cinquain poem to celebrate the arrival of spring.

[www.poetry4kids.com/blog/lessons/how-to-write-a-cinquain-poem/](http://www.poetry4kids.com/blog/lessons/how-to-write-a-cinquain-poem/)  
[youtube.com/watch?v=nONd5Ny8V\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nONd5Ny8V_w)  
[www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson\\_images/lesson43/RWT016-1.PDF](http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson43/RWT016-1.PDF)

### 7. Sage Brush's Vision (Read pp107–108)

Sage Brush has a terrible vision, in which he witnesses the horror of the final moments that the foxes in the den experienced before the cyanide gas poisoned them. He is able to share their terror and hear their cries.

Write a short description of his vision, starting at the point where they realise they are trapped and finishing with the final sigh as the last fox dies.

### 8. How did this happen to me (Read pp124–125)

Curled around the top of the pole and snarling viciously at the dogs, the mink tries to understand why he has been caught.

Talking to himself, he examines each of his actions carefully to try to discover his mistake.

Create the dialogue he had with himself. Do you think he realised that his own greed caused his downfall?

[youtube.com/watch?v=yDSajphlyNQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDSajphlyNQ)  
[www.bbc.co.uk/learning/schoolradio/subjects/english/aesops\\_fables/17-24/goose\\_golden\\_eggs](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learning/schoolradio/subjects/english/aesops_fables/17-24/goose_golden_eggs)  
[www.taleswithmorals.com/aesop-fable-the-goose-with-the-golden-eggs.htm](http://www.taleswithmorals.com/aesop-fable-the-goose-with-the-golden-eggs.htm)

Realising that the dogs have picked up their scent, Black Tip persuades the vixens to flee with Sage Brush as he, Fang and Skulking Dog prepare for a final stand.

As the fight swings in favour of the dogs, the vixens burst from the gorse in a fury to drive off the pack. Safe for now, they nurse their wounds and continue.

Their star map hidden by clouds, the foxes are unaware that their path is taking them into the heart of man's territory.

Disorientated, they meet Scavenger, a scruffy urban fox, whose curiosity prompts him to offer to be their guide in the heartland of man.

Following his lead, they cross the Grand Canal, experiencing peace in the grounds of Áras an Uachtaráin. They wonder at the Land of the Giant Ginger Cats and have an opportunity to hunt and feast untroubled in the garden of exotic wildfowl.

Rested, recovered and fed, Scavenger leads them safely out of man's territory again, pausing to reveal to them in a fashion fur shop window display, the reason for man's desire to hunt them.

Sage Brush reminds them that the danger of the dog pack still lies between them and home. Though disheartened not to have found the Great White Fox, each of them is willing to sacrifice themselves to save the others. Sage Brush dismisses this talk and urges them to use their cunning to devise a plan.

The final leg of their journey is a whirl of tactical intuition as Black Tip and Fang apply the skills they have learned to rescue Vickey and draw the dog pack onto a farmer's gun, ending their threat.

Safe in Glensinna, they realize that they have indeed acquired the secrets of survival and as Sage Brush disappears into the late Spring snow, Vickey and Black Tip watch their new cubs and marvel at what their adventure has taught them.

## DISCUSSION POINTS

- (Read p131): Black Tip has been caught in a trap and is slowly and painfully choking. Is this type of trap a humane way to catch animals? Can it be possible to describe any trap as humane? Do you think it really matters whether the trap is humane or not?
- (Read p155): Scavenger makes the observation that man wastes more than he needs. Do you think that his comment is accurate or fair? What does it say about how we use our environment? How would you argue against the remark?

## Section 3 The Great White Fox Pages 127–205

### SUMMARY

Returning to Beech Paw, Black Tip is snared in a choking trap. Freed by Fang, they discover that the traps have been laid again to catch a pack of dogs that are killing sheep.



- (**Read p187**): Many of the animals the foxes meet along the way seem to be intent on killing them. Each creature seems to possess a '**killer instinct**' when faced with a stranger. Why do you think that creatures have this irrational aggressive instinct? Do we have it as well? How do we display the trait?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. We Need to Go Back (Read pp141–142)

The vixens burst snarling from the gorse to break the attack of the dog pack and chase them off.

Just before it happened, there had been a very hurried discussion to decide what they should do.

Whose idea was the rescue, and what do you think was said?

Recreate the discussion they had before they decided to return to help.

### 2. Untidy (Read pp149–150)

The foxes are revolted by the smells of man's presence. They consider him to be an untidy creature and a nuisance neighbour who pollutes the environment.

If the foxes were able to write a letter to man, detailing their complaints, what might they say?

How could they describe man's influence on their existence?

Help them to compose the letter, choosing five specific concerns and adding examples to reinforce the arguments.

### 3. Animal Rights (Read p152)

When they reach Áras an Uachtaráin, Scavenger explains that it is a very special place for Man, where he talks of Freedoms and Rights that everyone should share.

Vickey begins to imagine how Rights for animals would improve things for the foxes, and she and Sage Brush compile a list of five basic Rights that they think every animal should have.

Working in small groups, recreate their list and explain why each Right is included.

### 4. The Zoo (Read pp156–157)

Scavenger has enthralled the foxes with his descriptions of some of the animals in the zoo.

Since the foxes have never seen any of these animals, he must describe them in terms of animals they are already familiar with.

As the zoo holds many other creatures, how do you think he might describe crocodiles, zebras or hippos?

Choose five creatures not mentioned in the story and create descriptions for the foxes, giving details on size, sounds and how they move.

### 5. You are Lucky (Read p162)

As he tugs at the fence, Skulking Dog attracts the attention of the lion.

Mustering his courage, the fox comments on how lucky the lion is to have his food supplied and not to have to hunt for it. The lion however disagrees, and says that he would rather have the fox's life and be free.

Write the dialogue they have, each trying to convince the other how fortunate they think

their situation to be compared to their own.

### 6. Fox Fur (Read p170)

When the foxes see the assortment of fox fur coats and wraps, they are horrified.

Afterwards, Vickey comments to Sage Brush that she would love to create a poster for the window to show the true cost of a fox fur coat.

Can you help her to create the poster?

[www.peta.org/features/nine-shocking-fur-facts/](http://www.peta.org/features/nine-shocking-fur-facts/)

### 7. The Great White Fox (Read pp199–200)

As Sage Brush recalls their adventures, he wishes that he could write them in the way that Aesop did, each story teaching a moral or lesson for future generations of foxes.

In small groups, select five of their adventures and create a book of stories in the style of Aesop for him.

[www.aesopfables.com/aesopsel.html](http://www.aesopfables.com/aesopsel.html)  
[youtube.com/watch?v=Ah5ICg7hBTU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ah5ICg7hBTU)

### 8. Spring (Read pp201–202)

Spring has arrived at Beech Paw and the foxes are enjoying the symphony of new life that Nature is creating.

Create a short film clip using pictures you have either created or sourced, and add a suitable audio track to share your wonder of the beauty of Nature in the spring.

You can use iMovie or windows Media Player.

## About the author, Tom McCaughren



Tom McCaughren travelled the world as a journalist with The Irish Times and RTE. He has written sixteen books for children and young adults. His books have been translated into fourteen languages including German, Swedish, Japanese, Korean, French, Dutch, Danish and Latvian.

## Reviews of Run With The Wind

'Animal lovers of nine and up will adore this just as the generation before did'

**Irish Times**

'stunning new cover illustration by Bex Atkinson ... Readers eight-plus, especially those reared on Dahl's The Fantastic Mr Fox are likely to become hooked quickly on this series'

**Evening Echo**

'superb descriptions of the countryside and an evident love for these wily creatures make for an exceptional read about the natural world'

**parentsintouch.co.uk**

'A wildlife winner for all ages'

**Sunday Independent**