

Run For The Hills

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Teaching Guide

By Peter Heaney

RATIONALE & THEMES

When the foxes in Glensinna are joined by foxes from a sinister breeding farm, they see the destabilizing effect on the eco-system and the havoc caused when an alien species escapes into the countryside.

Unable to co-exist with man they must flee. Leaving their valley to pursue an odyssey, they encounter the pervasive and deadly influence of man in all its guises.

Accepting responsibility for some of the farmed foxes, they attempt to equip them with the skills they need to survive in the wild, in the process deepening their own understanding of the cycles of nature and the interdependence of the creatures that exist there.

The themes explored are:

- Courage
- Resourcefulness
- Survival
- Selflessness
- Friendship
- Loyalty
- Animal farming
- Human impact on the environment
- Co-existence

SUMMARY

The arrival of three peculiar farmed foxes with curiously coloured furs causes disquiet for the foxes in Glensinna, prompting the old fox Sage Brush to lead an odyssey in search of answers.

Accompanying them, the farmed foxes seize the opportunity to wonder at the diversity of nature, in the process acquiring the skills they need to survive in the wild.

Lead by the blind Sage Brush, the foxes encounter a diverse range of characters, discovering the danger mankind poses for them, his intolerance of any survival other than his own and the extent of his influence

on the environment as he attempts to shape it to suit his own needs.

Taught by the experience of their odyssey that survival lies within themselves and their ability to co-operate and adapt, they return to the Valley of the White Fox renewed, to take their part in the cycle of growth and new life again.

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.

The guide has been sectioned into three sections to facilitate the thrust of the story.

Section 1 Shee Night Pages 9 - 76

SUMMARY

The cycle of survival for the foxes living in Glensinna is thrown into confusion when Vicky encounters a strange white fox during a hunting trip. Her mate Black Tip at first unconvinced, is forced to accept her account when he too encounters not one but three of the peculiar creatures, foxes, yet their coats are strangely hued and their manner unconcerned with the need for caution that every fox processes.

Calling on the wisdom of Sage Brush, they discover that the creatures are farmed foxes who reveal the terrifying detail of their lives and the mystery of their escape.

Calling a council within the circle of beeches, Sage Brush presents the farmed foxes and their predicament to the other Glensinna foxes.

The reception is muted with personal

survival dictating that the strangers must fend for themselves.

Determined not to abandon the farmed foxes, Sage Brush leads them as part of a small group to seek safety out of Glensinna in search of the Hills of the Long Low Cloud.

Unaware that the trapper is trailing them, they are guided by the Great Running Fox constellation, navigating the dangers they face and equipping the newcomers with the skills and knowledge of survival as they go.

Hunting, shelter and above all caution guide them as the farmed foxes listen, watch and assimilate skills that they never imagined they were capable of developing.

Moving stealthily through the countryside, directed by Sage Brush, the shriek of the vixens in the night air stirs an old superstition of the Shee for one farm, the elderly couple retreating to the safety of their farm and allowing the foxes untroubled access to the chickens.

In the morning the trapper visits and chides their superstition before continuing his pursuit.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (Read pp13-14):** When Vicky snatches the carcass from the garden the owners pursue her with guns and deadly intent. What harm had she caused and why did they see her as different from their dogs? What does the owner's reaction reveal about their tolerance for wild species as opposed to domestic ones?
- (Read pp24-25):** Vicky is surprised to learn that the farmed foxes have no names and so names them herself. Why are names important? What do they mean for the way you see yourself and how would this be different if you didn't have a name? When we name a pet, what are we saying about our relationship

with it?

- (**Read pp37-38 & pp 83-84**): The Glensinna foxes are suspicious of the newcomers and fear they are a threat. Later, Old Sage Brush tells the other foxes, 'It doesn't matter if the paws are black or white, so long as they can catch a mouse.' What does he mean by that? Why is the unusual often seen as a threat? Should they be expected to help the outsiders? Would we behave differently in a similar situation?
- (**Read pp26-27**): When Bluebell describes the paw hanging from the trapper's neck; Hop-Along realizes that it is his. Why did the trapper wear such a trophy? What was he saying about himself? What did it reveal about his attitude towards animals?

ACTIVITIES

1. Glenn an tSionnaigh (Read p9)

The history of Glensinna is rich from its name and the legends of the foxes.

Failte Ireland wants to erect a sign at the entrance of the glen to provide information for tourists.

Design the sign, adding the information and content it should include along with a suitable image or design.

2. Animal Rights (Read p23)

The white fox describes the nightmare of the fox farm.

Do we have any responsibility for the animals we share the planet with or are we entitled to treat them as we like?

What can the animals be used for and what should they not be used for?

Work in small groups to create an 8-point **Bill of Rights** for animals describing how every animal should be treated. Include any explanations you think necessary.

3. Space (Read p29)

The farmed foxes are forced to live in a very restricted space.

During a morning break, use a large hoop on the playground to represent the space you have available to you to play.

Now try to enjoy yourself and take your exercise without leaving the hoop.

Write a cinquain or haiku poem to describe your experience.

writeshop.com/writing-a-cinquain-poem/
www.poetry4kids.com/lessons/how-to-write-a-haiku/

4. T.D. (Read pp33 & 245-246)

An animal rights group has raided the fox farm releasing the animals into the local environment. This has created severe problems for the local eco-system.

A more effective protest might have used the government agencies.

Write a letter to your local T.D. (MLA) explaining your views on fox farming and ask them to investigate the conditions on any farms in your area.

5. Leaving (Read p41)

As evening falls and the sky darkens, Black Tip leads the foxes over the ridge of the hill and out of the glen.

For a brief moment the foxes are silhouetted against the darkening sky.

O'Brien Press thought that this might be a powerful illustration for the story.

Create the silhouette picture to show the foxes leaving. How would you show any differences between the foxes?

6. The Plough (Read pp47-48)

The great Running Fox is the asterism we know as the Plough.

For thousands of years animals and man have used it to guide them.

Use your imagination to create the legend behind the name that the foxes have given to it.

www.constellation-guide.com/big-dipper/

Flithengibbers:

(Read pp69 & 83)

Black Tip curses the magpies using the fox name for them. It is a rude word. Bluebell is intrigued and asks him if the foxes have names for every animal.

He explains that if an animal is a nuisance, it usually has a long name with hard sounds but if it is a friend then the name will be short with soft sounds.

To explain he gives a short list with of 4 of each.

Create the list he gave her.

Section 2 Taste of Sweetness Pages 77 - 160

SUMMARY

Knowing that the price of their feast will be search and pursuit, the foxes move quickly beyond the woods to the hills beyond.

Rescuing and returning a young badger to its sett, Fang earns the gratitude of the mother badger and shelter for the others, sharing the sett to recover, hunt and absorb the lessons of the experience.

Investigating the smell he has come to fear, Fang realizes that Snowflake has been caught in the trapper's net; leaving the sett to follow him, she paid the price for her inattention.

Fang, can only watch and return to report the distressing news to Sage Brush.

Tracking the trapper to a farmstead, Fang and Black Tip find Snowflake trapped in a wire cage. Seizing their opportunity when the trapper leaves, they attempt to release the clasp with their teeth. The wire proves beyond their strength and Black Tip must enlist the strength of the badger's jaw to spring the cage open.

Thanking the badger, Black Tip returns to the sett while Fang and Snowflake declare their decision to seek their own destiny and depart together, their first hunt successfully providing them with a meal of magpie.

Realizing that the trapper knows their location, the foxes patiently wait in the sett until the geese return to cover the fields and reveal any traps. However the trapper has been clever with his traps and without the sharpness of Hop-Along they would all have been caught.

Locating, then springing each of the traps, he slowly leads them to safety before explaining that he and She-La must end their odyssey and return to Glensinna.

The depleted band of foxes continues. Hop-Along has his own plans for the trapper, luring him onto one of his own traps and recovering the fox paw he wore around his neck, the paw that Hop-Along lost to one of his traps years before.

Continuing their journey, they renew their friendship with Whiskers the otter and see the devastation caused by the voracity of the escaped minks before Sage Brush manipulates their appetites and restores the balance.

Hunting and scavenging they continue while Bluebell develops a yearning for the sweet taste of honey that Vickey has described.

Finding a pod of hives, they shepherd a herd of goats through them to topple them, in the process disrupting a mounted fox hunt and in the stinging melee of angry bees escape with their taste buds sweetened and satisfied.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (**Read p99**): Fang seems more inclined to believe in the existence of the Great White Fox in times of trouble. Why are we more likely to believe in superstitions when times are difficult and not when things are going well? Why are we happy to dismiss superstitions when we feel confident yet seek their support when danger threatens?
- (**Read p119**): The trapper is annoyed that the white fox has escaped and determines to hunt her and the others down. What feelings are driving him? The foxes are of little value to him and he can't eat them so why does he hunt them? Is it a civilized instinct that is driving him?
- (**Read p133**): The released mink have created havoc and imbalance within the eco-system. How do you think that the 'balance' of nature is maintained? Is it important and do we need to think about it too? How could our behavior be responsible for upsetting the balance?
- (**Read pp140-143**): It is the nature of the mink to be vicious and Sage Brush uses this trait to force the grey squirrels out of the area and ease the pressure for the otter and the red squirrels. Was he right to interfere in this way? Should he have left nature decide? Is this different from the effect man has on habitats when he claims land for food and houses.

ACTIVITIES

1. Paws to Think (Read pp83-84)

Sage Brush comments that the colour of the paw is irrelevant as long as it has the necessary skill to catch a mouse. Sometimes we think that a person might not be as capable of doing a particular job because they may be a girl or they may be older or even the colour of their skin might be different from ours. Do you think that this is a reasonable way to think about the skills that a person might contribute?

Choose five occupations that you think are important and create a table of skills and training that you think a person might need to do the job successfully. Which skills do you think are common to all the jobs?

Can you imagine that you had the skills to do your favourite job but were prevented from doing this job because of either your gender / age / where you lived or your skin colour? How might you feel? Do you think this could happen today in Ireland?

Could you create a poster to promote the idea that every occupation should be available to everyone if they have the skills

needed for the job? what images and text do you think would be the most powerful for your message?

The following sites might be useful for you to use:

www.un.org/en/letsfightracism/classroom.shtml

kidsactivitiesblog.com/24727/multicultural-education-activities

www.lessonplaney.com/search?keywords=ageism

2. Promises (Read pp100-103)

Trapped in the cage, Snowflake is comforted by Fang as they wait for Black Tip to return with the badger.

They use the time to plan their future together if Snowflake can be freed.

Use your imagination to describe what they said, how they felt and the plans that they made.

Create the conversation they might have had.

3. Cacophony (Read p104)

The magpies are extremely agitated. The foxes have seized their leader and they have retreated to the hedge to argue, protest and complain loudly to each other.

None of them is listening to anyone else, they are all screeching at once.

What are they shouting?

Could you create a 30 second audio clip of how it might have sounded?

4. Amusing! Amazing (Read p110)

Crouching in the depths of the badger sett, safe from the trapper, Bluebell and Nightshade listen in wonder as the others take turns to tell tales of their adventures.

Later they share their favourite stories, one is amusing and the other amazing.

Use your imagination to create a short version of each of the stories you think they might have selected.

5. Clang (Read p118)

As Hop-Along disables the traps, each snaps shut with a vicious clang and Bluebell and Nightshade tremble with a nightmare image of imagined pain and terror.

Create a 5 line poem to describe their terror, each line beginning with the word 'CLANG' and then describing a separate fear or pain.

6. Gin Traps (Read p120)

The Gin Trap is a vicious, illegal device that causes excruciating pain to any animal it traps.

The Animal Rights organization has announced a poster competition to raise public awareness over their continued use.

Use your imagination to create a powerful A4 sized poster to inform the public about their effect.

Think carefully about the images and text you will need.

7. Waste (Read pp151-152)

Compared to the fox, humans seem to waste almost as much food as they eat. The foxes are astonished at the waste.

In small groups, research information from both home and local supermarkets to discover how much food we throw away and write a short report on what you find.

How does food waste in Ireland compare to other countries. The following sites might be useful.

www.stopfoodwaste.ie/food-we-waste/how-much-we-waste/

www.lovefoodhatewaste.com/node/236

www.fao.org/save-food/resources/keyfindings/en/

8. The Hunt (Read pp159-160)

The hunt has been disrupted, some of the riders and animals were injured and the owner of the beehives has written a letter of complaint to the hunt secretary.

The hunt chairman has to gather all the evidence he can about what happened and write an incident report for the Garda Superintendent to prevent their license being revoked.

Work in small groups to help him compile the report. What evidence should he gather? Should he include the letter of complaint?

Section 3 Nature's Cycle Pages 161 - 252

SUMMARY

Travelling ever onwards the foxes reach a fenced demesne and decide to rest for the night. However, Bluebell and Nightshade succumb to their curiosity and decide to explore.

They spot the fox who had rescued them from the howling dogs, feeding from a huge carcass and eagerly join him. Vickey watches

with growing alarm when the roar of a lion confirms that they have entered the lair of the giant cats in a safari park.

Using every resource and turn of speed, Vickey and the others take refuge in a disused earth to wait until the lion loses interest.

In the meantime, an elephant crashes through the park in an outburst of frustration, creating the diversion they need to escape.

Running Fox has decided to join them as they scavenge through the territory of the urban foxes.

Avoiding a volley of shots, they regroup and realize that Nightshade has not returned.

Running Fox and Black Tip return to search for her and discover that Ratwiddle has been hit and Nightshade has found him, seemingly communicating with him in a strange non-verbal way.

The urban foxes are reluctant to help them having been deskilled from surviving on scraps from man without crossing the tolerance threshold that would see them hunted.

Persuaded to adopt a reluctant urban cub to teach him the skills of survival, Running Fox leads them to an earth where they can find the briars needed to help Ratwiddle recover.

The journey is tortuous and Nightshade has to use the special communication she has with Ratwiddle to encourage him to keep going.

The briar leaves help him to recover slowly and Bluebell takes the opportunity to impress Running Fox with her hunting skills while Black Tip finds the urban cub a very reluctant pupil.

Stalking a group of duck hunters, Black Tip is unable to restrain him when he mistakes a decoy for a duck and races off with it to the amusement of the hunters, never to be seen again.

When Ratwiddle recovers, Nightshade decides to stay with him while the others set out to return to Glensinna, their odyssey complete and the foxes secure in their survival.

Spring has arrived and the foxes take advantage of the distraction of the mating rituals to hunt and feast at will as they return.

One last challenge remains when they discover the fine net of a trapper. Listening as they describe the habits of the trapper, Sage Brush helps them devise a plan that lures the trapper into a clump of poisonous weeds.

Outwitted he flees in a frenzy of blistering, itching discomfort, leaving the foxes free to enjoy the glen in peace.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read p162):** The foxes roam freely and the idea of owning land is difficult for them to understand. They don't own the air they breathe so don't understand why they should own the land. They share both. What does owning land mean and why is it so important for us to own things? How is our understanding different?
- **(Read pp196-197):** The urban foxes rely on man to feed them and so have become deskilled in hunting for their own food. This is a change in their natural behavior. Should we stop feeding wild animals? Is feeding birds forcing them to rely on us too much? How should we engage with the animals we share the countryside with?
- **(Read pp204-205):** Black Tip is unable to hear the communication between Ratwiddle and Nightshade, so is reluctant to accept that it took place. Why are we loath to believe anything that we can't see or hear? Do some people have an additional sense that allows them to see things differently? How might this sense operate?

(Read pp211): Bluebell has been successful hunting a pheasant and is particularly pleased that she was able to demonstrate her skill in front of Running Fox. Why do we try to impress others in this way? Why is an audience important and how does it affect the way we feel when we achieve something? What does our need to impress others say about us?

(Read p242): The weeds have stung the breeder and his skin has blistered painfully. The foxes have no sympathy and feel that he has got what he deserved. Are they correct to feel this way? Is it ever right to take pleasure in someone else's misfortune no matter how deserved it was?

ACTIVITIES

1. Lion Thoughts (Read p172)

Trembling as they cower from the lion, the foxes are grateful to have the safety of the earth to protect them.

Plucking up courage Nightshade creeps closer to the entrance and lies down quietly to try to pick up the lion's thoughts and communicate with him.

She is amazed at what she hears. The lion responds without realizing that he is

speaking to anyone other than himself.

Write the dialogue for their conversation.

2. The Urban Fox (Read pp190-199)

The urban foxes rely on the tolerance of man to survive and the wild foxes are astonished at their attitudes and lack of skill.

Create a difference / similarity table to compare both types of fox and explain how their habitat and way of life might have shaped their attitudes and skills.

3. Ways of the Wild (Read p207)

While Black Tip is exasperated with Boney's lack of either interest or attention, Vickey decides to try to engage him with a different approach.

She tells him that there are really only three pieces of advice that he must remember and makes up a funny rhyme to help him to remember them.

Work in small groups to decide the core pieces of advice she chose and the rhyme she constructed to teach them.

4. The Three Foxes (Read p216)

Sage Brush's advice is always cryptic, however his advice about the three foxes is easy for them to understand.

Later Vickey decides to build a story for her cubs around Sage Brush's axiom to encourage them not to be lazy, but to use their cunning to it best advantage.

She chooses foxes she knows for each of the characters.

Who will she use and how will the story develop?

Write the story she created.

5. Blue on Blue (Read pp224-225)

As Running Fox watches Bluebell wander through the bluebell glade, the different shades of blue are striking and complementary. She wonders at the beauty of what she sees.

Reproduce the image of the blue fox strolling among the blue flowers.

6. The Connoisseur (Read pp230-231)

Frogs are a completely new taste sensation for Bluebell. She compares them to the taste of the peewit and warbler eggs and wonders at all the different and exciting tastes she has experienced since she escaped.

To amuse herself she creates a food guide for everything she has eaten, using the most descriptive adjectives she can think of and then awards each taste one, two or three stars.

Write the reviews she created.

www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Food-Review

www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/food

Class Project

One of the major themes from the book is the farming of animals for their pelts.

The effect on the environment is often insidious both in the fashion industry and the food production industry.

A general and wide investigation titled 'FARMED OR FREE RANGE' has the potential to highlight some of the less well known facts about our food production and the conditions of the animals that serve it.

Specific strands might include:

Food we eat

Clothes we wear

Where our food is sourced

Scandals in the food industry.

The following sites might provide useful investigation:

www.walesonline.co.uk/news/local-news/10-food-scandals-shocked-world-2495678

www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/design/foodtech/socialenvironmentalissuesrev2.shtml

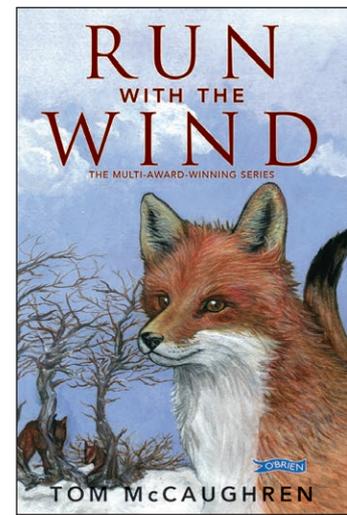
www.ecowatch.com/fast-fashion-is-the-second-dirtiest-industry-in-the-world-next-to-big--1882083445.html

(Good Internet use in the class requires that any research I supervised or the sites monitored beforehand)

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.



***Run With The Wind* is the first book about the foxes of Glensinna**

Winner: Reading Association of Ireland Book Award

Winner: Bisto Book of the Decade.

'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