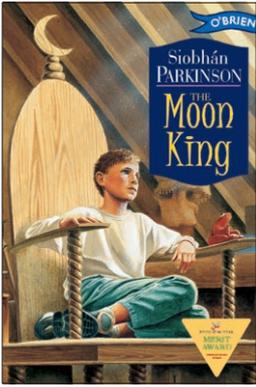


THE MOON KING

by Siobhán Parkinson

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Ricky is nervous. As he waits with his social worker to be introduced to his new foster-family, he hears the shouts of children and wishes he could scuttle away like the spider he notices on the wall. The house is too big, too tall, too crowded. But over time, Ricky begins to relax and to help around the house, his patient and wise foster-parents encouraging and supporting him. He makes a real friend in Rosheen. When he discovers the Moon Chair in the disused attic, he can temporarily abandon his fears of the abusive Ed and forget the bullying Helen, in this chair he becomes the Moon King. But as Rosheen's concern and affection for him increases, the insecure Helen feels ever more threatened and Ricky takes the fateful decision to run away. Forced now to confront the result of her bullying, Helen joins with Rosheen in the frantic search for Ricky. Meanwhile, out on the streets, with only his beloved toy, Froggo, for company, Ricky reviews his situation and the lure of the Moon Chair proves irresistible. When he decides to return home, Ricky proves that he really is the Moon King.

LANGUAGE – ENGLISH

- ◆ Vocabulary extension: Illicit, stratosphere, resonating, inducement, erratically, fusty.
- ◆ Descriptive writing: E.g. 'pale hair all fluffed out ... like a dandelion clock' (p.12), 'dense black gashes, intersected and smeared by screaming red and murky mustard stripes' (p.85), '... nobbles and crevices were like butterscotch under his fingers' (p.66).
- ◆ Discussion: Ricky is glad to be home and pleased to be reunited with Rosheen, but what does the future hold for him? Discuss the possibilities and reach a consensus on what the next year might have in store for Ricky.
- ◆ Discussion: 'Books, everywhere books. Do they read them? Who does? Why do they?' (p.27). Ricky has a difficulty with language that might make the world of books seem alien. What might his feelings have been on seeing so many books scattered all over the house?
- ◆ Discussion: We learn that Ricky has been abused, but this information is introduced gradually throughout the book. Discuss the effectiveness or otherwise of phrases such as 'Don't like families' (p.11), '... before Ed and everything' (p.27) and '... with Ed there and everything ...' (p.78). What do these phrases tell us about Ricky's home life?
- ◆ Creative: Household noises, e.g., 'Ding-dong, said the house' (p.10), 'Flap-flap said the door' (p.15), 'Bdong, bdong, bdong,' said the radio- set solemnly' (p.36). How effective are the words used? Write descriptive words/phrases that convey sound for other household objects.
- ◆ Creative: Mammy Kelly is a 'comfortable woman, like a well-stuffed sofa in a dress' (p.11). Consider how you might be best described in terms of furniture and write a sentence or two. Write some examples of furniture that might describe your friends/parents/teacher. Read these aloud to the class.
- ◆ Creative: 'I wouldn't believe the Lord's Prayer out of your mouth ... You wouldn't know the truth from a ... superannuated wombat!' (p.148). Rosheen uses words creatively to denounce Helen. Think of other imaginative ways to call someone a liar or a bully

or a braggart, without actually insulting them.

- ◆ Creative: Lipstick Woman, Santy-man and Spiderboy are names Ricky gives to himself and others. What do these names tell us about the people? Think of affectionate names that emphasise some personality trait or aspect of appearance of your friends.
- ◆ Story: The Banshee. Read Ch. 7 and Ch. 8 of *Jimmy and the Banshee* by Dan Kissane and compare the woman Jimmy met on the bridge with Rosheen's expectations of a banshee (p.19). See if you can find other stories about banshees in your local or school library.

SESE – GEOGRAPHY

- ◆ Human environments: People at work. Mrs O'Loughlin is a social worker and Mammy Kelly is a foster-mother, both are employed by the local Health Board to care for children from 'dysfunctional' homes. Discuss the importance of the Health services to the local community and to the families involved, and suggest any improvements that might be made.
- ◆ Maps, globes and graphical skills: Read carefully the description of Ricky's journey through the town (pp.142–145, 154–156) and those of the searches made by Tomo (pp.128–131) and the girls (pp.157–159). Using these descriptions draw a town plan.

SPHE

- ◆ Myself: Self-identity. Mammy Kelly and Tomo are described by Helen as 'the best foster-parents in the county' (p.171). How do they show that they respect and foster the individuality of the children in their care? Why is it so significant that Ricky uses the word 'I' in the last line? What does this tell us about his self-image and development as a character?
- ◆ Myself: Ricky has little self-confidence, is scared of the dark and of noises and thinks of himself as Spiderboy: 'Spider scuts out one crack, into another crack ... Shoulders hunched' (p.10). At home 'he had nearly always been in trouble' (p.26) and he is afraid of making mistakes. Discuss how Rosheen boosted Ricky's confidence by allowing him to help with the pigeons. In what other ways did the people in Mammy Kelly's help Ricky to develop self-confidence?

- ◆ Myself: Knowing about my body. Recognising some disabilities and how they can affect some people's lives. Ricky had aphasia, a disorder of the central nervous system affecting his ability to communicate. Mammy Kelly and the social worker also use the term 'dyslexia' when discussing Ricky (p.14). How have these disabilities affected Ricky? Find out what you can about aphasia and dyslexia by consulting a dictionary or encyclopaedia, or by contacting the Association for Children with Language Difficulties [ACLD] (Tel: 01-679 0276).
- ◆ Myself: Growing and changing. Ricky needed individual space because he was unused to living in a family situation where people shouted 'so they could be heard over the din' (p.26). Consider his reactions to his bedroom, 'so much unoccupied space in this crazy, higgledy-piggledy, overstuffed house' (p.41). Why might space and privacy have been especially important to Ricky?
- ◆ Myself: Safety and protection. Ricky put himself in great danger when he ran away from home. When an apparently friendly stranger offered him a meal he accepted, although he 'knew you weren't meant to go anywhere with strangers' (p.145). Discuss this situation. Was he wise to accept the meal? Was he wise to give the man the slip? Did he minimise the potential danger to himself by running away from the stranger and into a department store?
- ◆ Myself: Helen hadn't known that 'decisions could change things, if you acted on them' (p.153). Read the conversation between Rosheen and Helen. How was she helped in her choice to 'act friendly' by Rosheen?
- ◆ Myself and others: Myself and my family. Ricky had been placed in foster-care because his mother was unable to care for him. Discuss Ricky's confused emotions when he thinks of Ed's physical abuse (pp.78, 85, 93, 96, 105) and the kindness he sometimes received from Ed (pp.140–141). Helen was also confused and jealous about her place in her family and she discusses her feelings with Rosheen (p.151). Discuss Helen's feelings of resentment. How might these feelings have contributed to her bullying of Ricky? Discuss how feelings of insecurity can affect one's treatment of others.