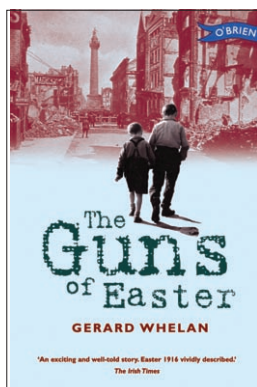


THE GUNS OF EASTER

by Gerard Whelan

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The Guns of Easter is the story of Jimmy Conway, a young boy from the Dublin slums caught up in the Easter Rising of 1916. While his father is away in France, fighting with the British army, Jimmy feels he must act as a provider for his mother and two younger sisters. His one-room tenement home is close to the city centre, and with the GPO in the hands of the Volunteers his family is deprived of the all-important Separation Allowance. Setting out to find food or money, Jimmy finds himself adrift in a nightmare version of the world he has known and must come to terms with a great deal before he returns home. On one level *The Guns of Easter* is a story of war, on another it is the tale of a young boy's brutal forced awakening to the complexities of the world and adult life.

LANGUAGE – ENGLISH

- ◆ Vocabulary extension: Provisional, faltering, impulsively, shards, revolutionary, beset, bustling.
- ◆ Descriptive writing: E.g., '... would follow a herd of cows ... if the cows were only marching' (p.28).
- ◆ Discussion: '... For this day at least, in the war that was for her the only one, she had won' (p.166). Examine Ma's perception of war and say if you agree with her summation, giving reasons.
- ◆ Discussion: 'Dreams make bad dinners' (p.14). Suggest other ways in which Ma might have expressed her feelings about idealism and reality.
- ◆ Creative: The Thinking Game (pp.31–32). Following Jimmy's instructions, focus on some familiar object and share the resulting thoughts with the class.
- ◆ Creative: Suggest some advice for Ella, whose ideas on child-rearing were inspired less by experience than by a desire to meddle (p.17).

SESE – HISTORY

- ◆ Local studies: Homes. Comparing and classifying a range of homes from a variety of periods. Examine the description of life in the tenements (pp.7–10, 18, 42) and compare with the homes of the rich (pp.10, 47), noting size, furniture and fittings, heat, light, sewerage and environs.
- ◆ Local studies: My locality through the ages. Examining a streetscape or famous building (e.g., Sackville St/O'Connell St, or Stephen's Green), becoming familiar with important events in its history, investigating origins and location, maps and photographs of site then and now, purpose of construction, elements which have changed and the reasons for change.
- ◆ Story: Stories from the lives of people in the past. Reading, discussing and recording contemporary accounts from the *Irish Times*, *Irish Independent* and *Freeman's Journal*,

available on microfilm in the National Library, Kildare St, Dublin. Becoming aware of the lives of women, men and children from different social, cultural and religious backgrounds, including the lives of 'ordinary' people.

- ◆ Eras of change and conflict: Life in the early-twentieth century. Becoming familiar with ways in which the everyday lives of people changed (Mr Meyer forced to move away, pp.34–35; Ella's marital problems, pp.16, 73, 148–152, separation money pp.12, 61); changes and conflicts in people's thoughts and beliefs (Paddy Doyle's decision to join up, pp.38–40, Jimmy's early infatuation with the army, and his gradual awareness of the realities and complexities of war, pp.21–24); the long-term effects of changes and conflicts (see *A Winter of Spies*, the sequel to *The Guns of Easter*, also published by The O'Brien Press).

- ◆ Politics, conflict and society: 1916 and the foundation of the State. Acquiring some knowledge of the personalities, events or developments of the time (pp.28, 53–55, 60); discussing and understanding the attitudes, beliefs, motivations of different individuals in the period. Discuss the attitude of the Dublin poor to the Rising (pp.53, 57, 61, 79–80), and the reasons for their lack of interest in the rebels' cause; discuss the ideals of the young Volunteer (p.83) and his attitude to the looting.
- ◆ Fieldwork: Visit the Road to Independence exhibition at the National Museum of Ireland, Kildare St, Dublin (Tel: 01-677 7444).

SESE – GEOGRAPHY

- ◆ Maps, globes and graphical skills: Using pictures, maps and models. Engaging in practical use of maps and photographs by tracing Jimmy's first journey from Abbey St to Stephen's Green and back (pp.66–76) and his second journey from Abbey St to Northumberland Rd (pp.91–143).

SPHE

- ◆ Myself: Growing and changing. Identifying the increasing personal and community responsibilities that are experienced in growing

from child to adult. Discuss Jimmy's sense of being the male provider as 'man of the house' (p.13), his belief that 'Ma had nobody else to depend on' (p.62).

- ◆ Myself: Feelings and emotions. Practising how to express and cope with various feelings in an appropriate manner – talking and discussing rather than prolonging a disagreement by remaining silent. Discuss Jimmy's reaction to Uncle Mick's news (pp.49–53).

- ◆ Myself: Safety and protection. Discussing risky situations, assessing how the risks may be avoided and the implications of taking risks. Sometimes taking a risk can be important for growing and developing, but on occasions the consequences can be dangerous or tragic. '... danger didn't seem to matter very much ... Jimmy's mind was made up' (p.90).

- ◆ Myself: Making decisions. Exploring and examining critically the factors and levels of thought that influence decisions and choices: Social constraints, values and beliefs and impulse. Examining the different reasons why Da, Uncle Mick and Paddy Doyle felt obliged to fight (pp.12–14, 38–42), and Jimmy's conflicting and changing opinions of their motivations.

- ◆ Myself and others: Myself and my family. Exploring what belonging to a family means: Being cared about (pp.27–29), caring for and supporting each other (pp.12, 38, 77); examining some factors that can affect family life: Material prosperity/poverty, illness, a change in lifestyle.

- ◆ Myself and others: Relating to others. Respecting the views, opinions and experiences of others and reflecting on these. Jimmy's perceptions are altered by the kindnesses he receives from unexpected quarters: The Northern Irish soldiers (pp.98–100), the tramp (pp.136–138) and he realises that he may have judged Ella too harshly (pp.73, 149–150).

- ◆ Read also: *Revolutionary Woman, My Fight for Ireland's Freedom* by Kathleen Clarke, and *Markievicz, the Rebel Countess* by Mary Moriarty and Catherine Sweeney.