

THE FIGHT FOR PLOVER HILL



by Eilís Dillon

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Old Dan Flaherty's farm was on Plover Hill long before it became an island. When a dam was built at one end of the valley, the river rose higher and higher until it spilled over, covering the steep, stony road that led to the farm. Old Dan's grandson John could still see the path, clear and white, when he went out in the boat with his father. Neighbours thought that it wasn't right for Old Dan to live all alone on the island. They thought he should sell the farm, but the old man wouldn't leave his home. So John was sent to live on the island and, when the farm work was done, the two spent their time watching the many wild animals that lived there. Then one of the villagers announced that he was going to bring people over in boats to shoot on Plover Hill. John thought of many plans to outwit the man, but only a long-lost map could prove their rights of ownership.

LANGUAGE – ENGLISH

- ◆ Similes: e.g. 'His eyes were as hard as limestone pebbles after rain' (p.62); 'writing a word as long as a snake' (p.86); 'ran like a redshank' (p.50).
- ◆ Proverbs: e.g. 'Two wrongs don't make a right' (p.78). Examine this and other well-known sayings and discuss the truth or otherwise expressed.
- ◆ Character profile: Mr Kelly describes John's grandfather as 'a very wise man' on hearing that he says 'it takes a learned man to outwit a lawyer' (p.89). Draw a picture of Old Dan and write a list of his other qualities.
- ◆ Creative: 'John wished he were as tall as a pine tree and had eight heads, like the giant in a story he had just read' (p.50). Imagine you are that giant, and write a story about the meeting between you and Tom Connolly **or** write the story from Tom Connolly's point of view, as he spotted the giant shortly after he had fired the shot that startled the bird.
- ◆ Creative: 'John thought of many plans for outwitting Connolly and Mr Kennedy' (p.77), but Old Dan said that they were wrong. Can you think of more practical ways John might have outwitted the two?
- ◆ Discussion: John believed that the intentions of the man who tied his boat to a tree-stump at the water's edge must be questionable, as 'an honest man would tie up at the landing stage' (p.48). Do you agree with this observation? Suggest other, possibly more obvious, types of behaviour that would suggest dishonourable intentions.
- ◆ Discussion: Shortly after the gun had gone off, John seized it and threw it in the lake with a 'huge, comfortable, satisfying splash' (p.53). In his position, what might you have done? Do you think he was right to do as he did? Would Mr Connolly have been within his rights to complain to the authorities about the loss of his gun? Discuss the possible consequences of John's action.

SESE – GEOGRAPHY

- ◆ Human environments: people and communities. How people help each other and depend on one another. The people of Clooney called on John's mother expressing their concern that Old Dan was living on his own (p.14), and that John himself wasn't

- receiving an adequate education (p.28). Examine these expressions of community interest in the welfare of their neighbours.
- ◆ Human environments: people at work. Explore the role of the farmer (pp. 18–22, 25), and investigate the contribution of farming to the economy of the country. Examine also the importance to the community of the teacher (pp. 36, 89) and the carpenter (p.8).
- ◆ Environmental awareness and care: identifying the interrelationships of living and non-living elements of local and other environments. Recognising how the actions of people may have an impact on environments: 'little animals of different kinds', whose homes had been flooded out by the new lake, made their homes on Plover Hill. Discuss the positive and adverse effects of man-made structures such as the new dam (pp. 10–11), which provided electricity for the community but which isolated Old Dan's farm.
- ◆ Field projects: for details on the Sligo Field Fences Project, see p.16, *InTouch* magazine, March 2001. Suggested activities listed. For details and suggested activities on study of a local stream, see pp. 27–28, *InTouch* magazine, June 2000. Copies of *InTouch* are available through INTO Head Office, Parnell Square, Dublin 1.

SESE – HISTORY

- ◆ Local studies: my family. Examining changes and examples of continuity in the lives of parents and grandparents – in clothes, foods, built and natural environments and in communications, roads and transport. Make a list of all the changes experienced by John's grandfather and compare and contrast these with those experienced by an elderly relative in your own family.
- ◆ Local studies: my school. Examine carefully all references to education and schooling throughout the book (pp. 25, 27, 30, 32–33,

- 86). Attempt to reconstruct a school day in the classroom of Mr Kelly. Ask elderly relatives or family friends for memories of their schooldays and try to obtain old textbooks, handwriting copies and other artefacts.
- ◆ Life, society, work and culture in the past: life in Ireland since the 1950s. Becoming familiar with aspects of the lives of these people. Children might examine homes (pp. 10, 33, 72), farming, foods and cooking (pp. 18–20, 22–23) and schooling (pp. 25, 27, 30, 32–33, 86). For information about stone walls, thatched cottages and a traditional way of life, and for suggested arts and crafts activities, see *Everything Irish* by AnnMarie O'Grady (ISBN 0-86278-557-X).

SESE – SCIENCE

- ◆ Plant and animal life: variety and characteristics of living things. Observing and exploring ways in which plant and animal behaviour is influenced by, or adapted to, environmental conditions (see pp. 9–10, 38–45, 56, 73). Discussing simple food chains (see pp. 18–21, 57).
- ◆ Energy and forces: magnetism and electricity. Learning about electrical energy (see pp. 10–11).

SPHE

- ◆ Myself: safety issues. Examining how accidents are caused; identifying ways in which some of these can be prevented and the appropriate action to be taken if an emergency occurs: discuss the possible consequences of John's taking the boat without permission (pp. 83–84). (For information on the Childsafe Campaign by the National Agriculture Safety Task Force, contact (01) 6147030. Video, booklet and factsheet available.)
- ◆ Myself and others: myself and my family. Exploring how belonging to a family means that family members love, protect, provide and care for each other (see pp. 18, 28). Comparing and contrasting lifestyles of families in urban and rural areas, and in different cultures within and outside Ireland.
- ◆ Myself and the wider world: local and wider communities. Recognising how each person has an individual and a communal responsibility to the community: being a good neighbour (see pp. 14, 28).

