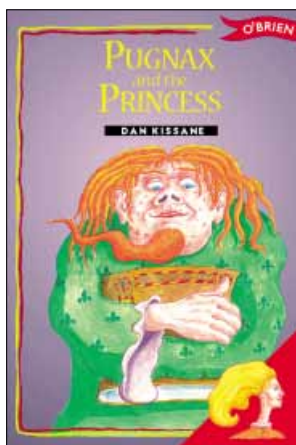


PUGNAX AND THE PRINCESS

by Dan Kissane

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Long, long ago, when stones could sing and rocks could dance, a farmer by the name of Cornelius O'Sullivan sent his only son, Agamemnon, out into the world to seek his fame and fortune. Not far from home, Agamemnon met Lucifer John McCracken – bone-setter, charm-maker, herb-gatherer, star-gazer and caster of spells – and, having helped the old wizard to outsmart his rival, Atin Bush, Agamemnon set off once more. On his travels he met a Fool, who was anything but a fool, the King of Wisdom, who was far from being wise, a Prince, who was neither handsome nor brave and a Princess who, while beautiful, kind and good, was also determined and courageous. On his quest to save Princess Ricolana from an arranged marriage to Prince Pugnax, Agamemnon struggles through the Swamps of Cloon, battling with midges, snakes and doctor-flies, proving that a brave heart, quick wit and good humour will always win fair lady.

LANGUAGE – ENGLISH

- ◆ Vocabulary development: eg. auspicious, profusion, imperious, disconcerting, pallid, albeit, reverie, retinue, mustering, foetid, engrossed.
- ◆ Oral language: Riddles and jokes, nonsense prose and verse. Do you agree with Pugnax that a riddle always end with a question mark? Read pp. 84–86 and, working in pairs, write your own riddle(s). When you have finished, see if the rest of the class can solve your riddle(s).
- ◆ Descriptive prose: Read pp. 102 and 127 where language is used to create a sense of place. Now write a paragraph similar in length, describing a favourite place or a place well-known to you.
- ◆ Word-games: Lucifer John 'much preferred the names he made up himself to the ones other people invented.' (p. 113) Working in pairs or in groups, invent your own names for real/imaginary objects/characters.
- ◆ Word-play: Fairy traditions, charms and incantations. Lucifer John and Atin Bush try to outdo one another with their spells and incantations (pp. 130–131). Consider the charms they needed (pp. 114–115) before writing the 'recipe' for a spell of your own. Remember to describe the effect your spell would have on your intended victim and say in what circumstances you might use this spell.
- ◆ Word-portraits: The author uses imaginative language to create memorable minor characters, eg. the gatekeeper with the weasel-like face (p.39) or Lucifer John's sister (pp. 106–108). See also the word-portrait of a deeply unpleasant character on pp. 63–64. Write your own portraits in words and ask your partner or friend to draw the image they see when they read your words. How well do the portraits match?
- ◆ Creative: Agamemnon asked the old Fool four questions (p.27). Do you think he made the most of this chance to ask questions? List the questions you might have asked had you been in his place.
- ◆ Creative: 'The advisers couldn't advise a river which way to run to find the sea, and the teachers couldn't teach a fish how to swim!' (p.30) List other things those advisers mightn't have been able to do.
- ◆ Discussion: 'A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees' (William Blake). See epigraph at the front of the book. What do you think William Blake might have meant? Do you agree with him?
- ◆ Aural: Ask your teacher or library to arrange a school or class visit by a local/national storyteller or seanchaí. If this is not possible, listen to storyteller Liz Weir's *Boom Chicka Boom* CD (0-86278-470-0) or to *The Boyne Valley book and tape of Irish Legends* (0-86278-140-P).

LANGUAGE – GAEILGE

- ◆ Names derived from the Irish language: Atin Bush from aiteann or 'whin'; Coil Wood from coill or 'wood'; Cnockaun from cnoc or 'hill'.

Logainmneacha eile: list other, local placenames derived from Irish language. Did your townland or area get its name from Irish and, if so, what does it mean in the original?

SESE – HISTORY

- ◆ The Ancient Greeks/Greek myth and legend: Homer's *Odyssey*. In Greek legend, Agamemnon was the king of Mycenae, brother of Menelaus, and leader of the Greeks at the siege of Troy. Find out more about this famous king and about the battle of Troy.
- ◆ Irish myth and legend: tales from *Rúraíocht/Fiannaíocht*. Read *Celtic Magic Tales* (0-86278-341-0) and *Celtic Tales of Enchantment* (0-86278-692-4) by Liam MacUistin.

SESE – SCIENCE

- ◆ Plant and animal life: Variety and characteristics of living things. 'The swamps of Cloon are full of snakes and spiders and frogs ...' (p.85). Find out more information about these and the 'other denizens of the swamps' (p.100), or about those woodland creatures going about their business 'in the fastness of the forest' (p.127).

SPHE

- ◆ Myself: Self-identity. 'The King considered himself to be very wise ...' (pp. 29–30). Explore the factors that influence self-image.
- ◆ Myself: Feelings and emotions. The memory of words spoken and the laughter they had provoked 'still brought the blood rushing to Atin Bush's face' (p.94). Effects of hurtful comment, dealing with criticism.
- ◆ Myself: Decision-making: Recognising and exploring the risks and consequences of making a particular decision. Agamemnon released the small white goat (p.101) and this had immediate consequences for him: when a new problem presented itself to him, he received help from this goat (p.104).
- ◆ Myself: Taking care of my body: Pugnax's decision to review lifestyle. 'I'm definitely not fit ... but as soon as this business is over and done with, I'll do something about that ...' (pp. 118–119).
- ◆ My friends and other people: appreciating the need for and importance of friendship and interacting with others. 'Let's just call each other by our names, as friends do ... for I am in sore need of a friend' (pp. 54–55).

VISUAL ARTS

- ◆ Drawing: looking and responding. This book was first published in 1995 and reprinted with a different title and different front cover illustration in 2001. Compare and contrast the two covers (see the *Pugnax and the Princess* page on www.obrien.ie). Why, do you think, did the illustrators interpret the same story in such different ways? Talk about your reactions to both illustrations.