

# Mollie on the March

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## Teaching Guide

By Nicola Heaney

### RATIONALE & THEMES

The purpose of this guide is to help the reader to understand the themes of the novel, to explore the writer's techniques, and to develop empathy skills – all through a range of reading, writing, talking and listening activities, which pupils can complete either individually or in groups.

Key themes include:

- Friendship,
- Trust,
- Social Class,
- Women's rights and roles,
- Street politics,
- Principles.

### SUMMARY

Set in Dublin in the summer of 1912, the novel is a story told through a series of letters from Mollie Carberry, a 14-year-old suffragette, to her friend Frances, as she and her friend Nora prepare for a summer filled with 'fighting for the cause'. They encounter many obstacles along the way including Nora's insufferable cousin Grace, Mollie's awful brother Harry and an irritating little dog, called Barnaby. Everything comes to a head when Prime Minister Asquith visits Dublin, and Mollie and Nora are determined to take part in any demonstrations, despite the dangers of an angry public – not to mention their families finding out what they've been up to.

### APPROACH

This is a very enjoyable and entertaining read. Although the plot refers to a number of historical events, it is an engaging read with many opportunities for discussion. This guide has divided the story into three sections and the activities offer suggestions on developing the themes.

### Section 1: The Start of the Summer Holidays Pages 9–110

#### SUMMARY

The first letter is dated 21<sup>st</sup> June 1912 and Mollie's main concerns are about her upcoming school exams. She also explains how some suffragettes have been the focus of attention for breaking windows. Her second letter is also focused on school. With the exams now over, we hear about the politics amongst the girls at school and the rivalry based on examination results. As the summer holidays begin, her letters begin to focus more on her daily life and her adventures with her best friend Nora. Nora's terrible cousin Grace is to come and stay due to a family emergency, which causes much upset and the conflict between Grace and the girls. The two cousins clash regularly, with Mollie trying to act as the voice of reason. The local tennis club becomes a key backdrop in the novel as the characters visit a local tournament and find that Grace has a keen interest in the game. Mollie and Nora are amazed at the changes in Grace, especially as she seems to be a dog-whisperer, handling the irritating little Barnaby with ease. Mollie is an avid reader and spellbound by *Anne of Green Gables*, which she describes at length. In her last letter in this section, dated 8<sup>th</sup> July 1912, the girls visit the Phoenix Park, and a truce is drawn as they become more friendly over tea and cakes, but an argument over the suffrage movement causes Mollie and Nora to quarrel as Mollie finds herself acting as mediator between Nora and her cousin.

#### DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read pp 9–10):** What chores do you have to do around the house? Do you think it is important for children to help their parents in the house? Why do you think Mollie and Harry have different tasks at home? Is this fair?
- **(Read p23):** Mollie describes how horrible it is to see your enemies get humiliated. Is she right? Discuss a time when you have been surprised to find yourself feeling sympathy for someone you may have disliked? What happened? How did you feel?
- **(Read p28):** Mollie talks about Maggie's cousin who moved to America and never returned. Is there anyone in your family who emigrated? Where did they go? Do you ever speak to them? Discuss with a partner whether you think emigration is as isolating now as it was then. What technology can we use? Is it the same as speaking face-to-face?
- **(Read pp55–59):** How does Grace behave differently? Do you think it is because she 'wasn't thinking about impressing anyone'? Does this change your opinion of her?
- **(Read p75):** Mollie talks a lot about how books make her feel. Has a book ever had a really strong effect on you and made you feel really happy or sad? Discuss with your partner. Why do you think it affected you like this? Would you recommend the book to others?
- **(Read p86):** Nora and Mollie talk of sacrificing buns to hire a rowing boat to use for the suffragettes. What sacrifice would you be prepared to make to do something you loved or believed strongly in?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. USA ITINERARY

Frances's visit to the USA sounds very exciting. Imagine you are entering a competition to win a four-week trip to the USA. The rules of the competition are: choose 5 places you really want to visit and create a short tourist brochure for each, describing how brilliant the place is. Don't forget to include famous sights and some pictures that make the place look fantastic.

### 2. GRACE'S THOUGHTS

Read pages 39–43. What do you think Grace feels about the whole situation? Write a diary entry from Grace's point of view about your first day at your cousin Nora's house. Try to make it realistic to Grace's character.

### 3. SPORTS JOURNALIST

Read page 64. Grace is described as 'crouched like a tiger'. Why do you think the writer used this simile? What does this say about Grace? Does it make the game seem more exciting? Write a short 100–200-word article about a sports event. Use similes to describe how exciting the event is.

### 4. EUPHEMISM

Barnaby is described as an 'enthusiastic' dog, which is a euphemism for annoyingly over-excited. A euphemism is when we use a milder phrase to say something usually thought of as unpleasant. Another example is 'passed away' instead of 'died'. Can you think of five euphemisms we use today? Write a euphemism dictionary with the euphemism, the impolite phrase and why the euphemism is used.

### 5. TWO SIDES

Grace reveals she doesn't support the suffrage movement and, to keep the peace, Mollie and Nora don't argue with her. Imagine they could have spoken to her – what would they have said? Write a short speech from their point of view, trying to persuade Grace that the suffragettes are not just hooligans, but fighting for something important.

### 6. FEMALE SPORTS STARS

On page 83, the girls talk about the first lady tennis player. Do you know of any

other female sports stars? Do you think female sports are reported in the news as much as men? Why do you think this is? Do you think this is fair? Research some sports with both male and female stars. Write a speech that argues both why women in sport should be seen as equal to men and why some people think they are not equal and it shouldn't change.

## Section Two: Preparation for Asquith's Visit Pages 111–207

### SUMMARY

The main focus of this section is the upcoming visit to Dublin by Prime Minister Asquith. The first letter in this section is dated 9<sup>th</sup> July where Mollie details her and Nora's plans for the visit. They make the most of having Mollie's house to themselves by plotting slogans for placards and banners. Harry's friend Frank is due to arrive at Mollie's house to stay, much to Nora's amusement. Both girls are relieved that Grace has found another distraction in the form of little Barnaby, freeing them up to follow the cause and to meet with friends in the park. The girls attend a suffrage meeting in the Phoenix Park and find out more about the plans for Asquith's visit, much to the annoyance of Phyllis, Mollie's sister, who thinks she and Nora are too young and foolish to be involved. This leads to an argument the next day, where Mollie reveals her and Nora's secret – that they were involved in painting post-boxes for the cause the previous year. Phyllis's response surprises her and the frost between them begins to thaw, meaning that when Mabel arrives at their house, Mollie is invited to be involved in their suffragette plans. In the middle of all the excitement, Mollie has an embarrassing late-night encounter with Frank which causes a lot of awkwardness between them. She and Nora work on their disguises for the Asquith visit, but their preparations are almost uncovered by a nosy Grace.

## DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read pp117–118):** The girls discuss the best way to get the Prime Minister's attention. In pairs, discuss which of their ideas is best. How were young women supposed to behave at the time? Can you think of a better way for them to get their ideas across? How would someone do it today?
- **(Read p121):** Maggie quietly gives Mollie some advice. Do you think she supports what the girls are doing? Why do you think she doesn't tell them directly?
- **(Read p122):** What do we learn about the conditions within the prison? What are prisons like nowadays? Are they the same all over the world? Research prison conditions in the following countries: Norway, USA, Philippines and Ireland. Why do you think the conditions are different in these countries? Which do you think is the best type of prison system? Why do you think this? Why do you think we have prisons? Should prisons be for reform or for punishment?
- **(Read p130):** Mollie is worried that talking about Grace when she is not there is 'catty'. Do you agree? Why do you think we shouldn't talk about other people behind their backs? How might Grace feel if she found out what they were saying about her? How does this link with social media today?
- **(Read p154):** Phyllis tells Mollie not to break the law again because of the consequences. Is she right? Do you think it would be fair if their parents acted the way Phyllis fears? Are all laws the same or are there some that can be broken from time to time?
- **(Read p158):** Phyllis talks about having a 'soda water feeling'. Do you understand what she means? Have you ever had that feeling? What happened?
- **(Read p194):** What does Grace mean by 'fair play'? Do you think this is an important part of sport? Recently, soccer players have been accused of 'diving' – do you think this is fair play or is it just part of the game? Can you think of any sportspeople who could be accused of not playing fair? Should they be punished?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. SLOGAN

On pages 119–120, Mollie and Nora have a lot of trouble coming up with a catchy slogan for their banners. A slogan needs to be short, snappy and memorable. Write a four-line slogan to persuade people that woman should be given the vote. What inequalities exist today between men and women? Can you write a slogan advocating women's rights on this issue?

### 2. SIMILES

Mollie describes her brother as being as 'greedy as a gannet' on page 183. What qualities is she saying Harry has? What other similes can you create for someone who is always hungry or always eating? Can you write a short poem using your similes?

### 3. FRANK

We meet Frank on page 132. What are our first impressions? Write a couple of paragraphs describing what sort of boy he is, using quotes from the text to support your ideas. Don't forget that you are describing his personality, rather than his appearance.

### 4. GLOBAL SUFFRAGE

Mollie asks Frances what the suffrage movement was like in America at the time. Research the suffragette movement in the USA: were there a lot of people involved? Were there many demonstrations? Did people generally support the movement? What year were women given the vote? Write up a factual report using the questions as sub-headings. If you can find any interesting pictures, include those as well.

### 5. PHYLLIS'S LETTER

Imagine you are Phyllis. You are worried about your sister getting involved in the movement, even though you know she is very passionate about it. Write a letter to Mabel explaining your concerns and asking for advice on how to keep Mollie involved without putting anyone in danger.

### 6. CORSET

What exactly was a corset for? What is the history of the corset? Why did women stop wearing them? Imagine you are a woman

living in 1912. Write a letter to the editor of a national newspaper giving your views on why women should be allowed to stop wearing them, using persuasive language.

## Section 3: Asquith's Visit and the Aftermath Pages 208-350

### SUMMARY

This section opens on the day of the Prime Minister's visit to Dublin. The girls' plans are almost spoiled when Mollie's mother suggests they take Frank and Harry with them to the 'theatre'. Mollie is full of anticipation, but the day seems to drag very slowly so she helps out Maggie, the cook, to keep herself busy. Maggie has guessed that the girls are up to something, and she quietly voices her support.

Phyllis is anxious, but preparations go smoothly and Mollie and Nora set off in their disguises, looking like young ladies rather than two schoolgirls. The streets are very busy and the whole atmosphere is filled with tension and excitement. The girls make their way into an apartment on the Prime Minister's route, where they meet a number of other older suffragettes. Mollie and Nora try to keep attention away from themselves as the preparations are made to hang the banners and throw confetti.

As the Prime Minister's approaches, suddenly the police arrive, accusing the suffragettes of trying to cause trouble and injure the Prime Minister. In the commotion, the Prime Minister drives past and the ladies just manage to mount their protest. The police leave, advising the ladies to return home.

However, other suffrage protests have not been as peaceful, and the girls learn that someone has thrown an axe at Mr Asquith. The tension in the crowds has become unpleasant, and the girls struggle home. When they arrive at Mollie's house, Frank opens the door, surprised to see Mollie and Nora with such adult hairstyles. Mabel assumes charge of the situation, and Mollie and Nora manage to transform themselves back into their schoolgirl styles without Harry noticing. Despite the day's drama, Mollie and Nora are still determined to attend events for the cause.

The next day, the newspapers are filled with the story of the previous day's events and the headlines are not very complimentary of the suffragettes. Phyllis warns Mollie not to attend the meeting that afternoon, but Mollie meets Nora and the two of them disguise themselves again.

However, the crowds at the meeting are angry and aggressive and soon the police have to step in to protect the suffragettes speaking on the stage. Mollie and Nora manage to escape, but they stumble across a group of men trying to throw a suffragette into the river. To their horror, they realise it is Phyllis! Thanks to some quick thinking, the police arrive just in time and Phyllis is rescued, but as Mollie looks around the crowd, she realises that Grace is standing nearby and has witnessed the whole thing. A distraught Phyllis is escorted home by the others, where Harry announces his disgust at the suffrage movement over the breakfast table.

Terrified she will reveal their secret, the girls try to talk to Grace. She is too angry to speak to them but eventually admits she wasn't going to say anything because she was so disgusted by the men's behaviour. She leaves Nora's house, devastated at having to say goodbye to Barnaby, and Nora is surprised to find she isn't as happy as she'd thought she'd be at her cousin's departure. Nora advises Mollie to speak to Frank about their night-time encounter, which she does, easing any awkwardness between them.

In their attempt to keep Grace quiet, the girls had volunteered to help at the tennis club fête, and the last letter details how Grace's dog show almost ends in disaster.

Harry overhears the girls talking about the suffragette meeting and is horrified that his sisters are involved, but Frank and Grace manage to convince him to keep quiet. Frank tells a surprised Mollie that she was the one who persuaded him of the merits of the movement and she ends her last letter filled with hope that the suffrage movement will be a success.

### DISCUSSION POINTS

- (*read p225*): Mollie tells us that she doesn't think high heels are practical. Do you agree? Why do you think people still wear them? With a partner, discuss whether or not you think clothes should be practical or stylish. Can you think of any examples where

they are both? Why do you think so many people sacrifice comfort to look stylish?

- **(Read pp235–6):** The women ignore the police to make their protest. Do you think they did the right thing? Do you think Inspector Campbell fully disagreed with that they were doing? Why do you think this? Are there any clues in the text?
- **(Read pp261–2):** Mollie describes Harry as having the ‘manners of a pig’, but it seems like he might be trying to be friendly here. What do you think? Why do you think she assumes he is being rude? Do you ever argue with your siblings? What do you think Mollie could do to stop having so much conflict with her siblings?
- **(Read pp264–5):** Even though they have been warned that it could be dangerous, Mollie and Nora still go to the suffragette meeting. Do you think they are doing the right thing? What advice would you give them? Why do you think they still go even though the situation is dangerous?
- **(Read p281):** Why do you think Mollie’s parents would blame Phyllis? Do you think this would be right? Why? Have you ever been blamed for something someone else did? What happened?
- **(Read p306):** Is Grace right to be so mistrustful of Nora and Mollie? Can we blame her for her reaction? Do we feel any sympathy for her? Why?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. NEWS FLASH

Re-read page 215. What do we learn about the boat protest? How do you think it would have been reported in the evening news? In groups of four, create a news broadcast telling the story of what happened, including the main journalist and some eye-witnesses who are interviewed for their version of events. This should be between 2 and 4 minutes long.

### 2. FREEZE FRAME

Read pages 231–7. This is a very exciting and tense part of the novel. Decide in small groups which 5 scenes are the most important and create 5 different freeze frames to show the tension and excitement of the scene Mollie is describing. Don’t

forget to use facial expressions as well to show what the characters are thinking and feeling.

### 3. TWITTER

The Irish suffragettes are angered by the actions of the English suffragettes and are worried that they will be blamed as well. Imagine an argument on Twitter where the Irish suffragettes are trying to defend themselves against the accusations of other Twitter users that they are violent and aggressive and should be put into prison. Create a 10-Tweet Twitter argument between three or four people with different views.

### 4. GRACE’S POINT OF VIEW

Imagine you are Grace and you have just witnessed the scene with Phyllis on pages 273–276. What do you think about what you have just seen? (Remember you don’t support the suffrage movement.) Write a diary entry outlining events as you saw them, what you thought about them and what your fears and concerns for the future are.

### 5. FRANK

Imagine you are Frank. Write a letter to the local newspaper giving your views on the suffragette movement and explain why you think other people should agree with you. Remember it needs to use polite but persuasive language.

### 6. FÊTE NEWSLETTER

What happened at the dog show? Do you think people enjoyed it? Write a short news report of events, detailing what happened.

### 7. CLASS DEBATE

How do Frank and Harry’s views on the suffragette movement differ? Consider their viewpoints in light of how people thought at the time the book is set and create 4 or 5 arguments either for or against the suffrage movement. Debate as a class.

### 8. NEXT STEPS

What happened next? Create a presentation for the rest of your class on what the movement did next, identifying four or five aims of the movement and whether or not they achieved them. Was there a difference between the role of women in Britain and in the new Republic

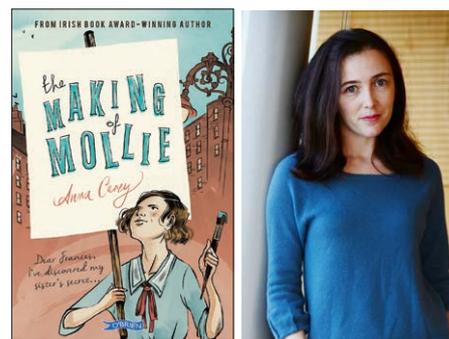
of Ireland? Why?

## 9. THANK YOU

Did the suffragettes succeed? What is different today because of them? Write a letter to the suffragettes thanking them for their actions. Do you think they would be proud of the level of equality that exists today or do you think there is still work to be done? Consider the rest of the world – do women have the same rights all over the world?

## The Making of Mollie

by Anna Carey



*Mollie Carberry’s life seems pretty dull until she discovers her older sister Phyllis is a suffragette! When she and her friend Nora get involved they must face the question of how far a girl should go for her beliefs.*

*‘best suited to challenge a sixth class to read historical fiction and to form political opinions and thoughts ... I think it is important that children have access to reading material that is not only entertaining and well-written but also challenging to their thoughts and actions. Anna Carey ticks all these boxes in this novel’*

*InTouch Magazine*

*‘literary role model ... teens young and old should read Anna Carey’s The Making of Mollie, an accessible diary-style account of the suffragette movement in Dublin in 1912 with some remarkable contemporary parallels’*

*Irish Times*

*‘an excellent portrayal of life in Dublin 1912 ... the strength of the story is the drama within Mollie’s family running in tandem with the threatened upheaval in society where the authorities and most of the male population are against the suffragette movement’*

*Irish Examiner*