



Blazing a Trail

Sarah Webb, illustrated by Lauren O'Neill

Teaching Guide

By Nicola Heaney

RATIONALE AND APPROACH

Filled with beautiful illustrations, this stunning collection profiles the inspirational women of Ireland who excelled in their fields. It tells the stories and struggles of twenty-eight women and how they overcame obstacles to pursue their dreams and ambitions. From backgrounds in sports to medicine, adventure to politics, these women and their exploits and endeavours shaped history and helped to create the Ireland of today.

This teaching guide is designed to stimulate young readers and inspire them to explore their history through a range of suggested activities which includes debate, design, research skills, extended writing and other elements of the curriculum.

Activities and discussion points based on individual women follow, while at the end of the guide is an exploration of the featured women's lives, and the subject, as a whole.

Granuaile

Discussion Points

- Granuaile had the sea 'in her blood'. What is in *your* blood? Discuss with a partner.
- She cuts all her hair off to show determination. Can you find other examples that show she was determined? With a partner, decide which one shows the most determination.
- Have you ever done something because you were determined to succeed? Explain to a partner.
- Look at the illustration of Granuaile and make a note of all the detail – what objects are used in the image? What is Granuaile doing? Discuss with a partner: how is she presented in the image? What five adjectives would you use to describe her based on this illustration?

Activities

- She is accused of being 'unwomanly'. What do you think this is? With a partner, research what behaviour was expected of a female in the 16th century and write a list of ten guidelines a woman was expected to follow. Once you've finished, think about what it means to be a woman today – is it the same? Write a list of five pieces of advice for schoolgirls on what it means to be a woman in 21st century Ireland.
- Think of four female world leaders today. What traits/strengths do they have in common?
- She got to meet with Queen Elizabeth I, another famous and powerful woman. How do you think the meeting went? In groups of four, create three freeze frames of their meeting. Remember, Elizabeth I's courtiers would have been very shocked by how bold Granuaile was by asking the queen – and being able to speak Latin!
- Imagine you are Granuaile. Write an account of one of your sea voyages, remembering to describe storms, your ship and your piracy.

Maria Edgeworth

Discussion Point

- What exactly did Maria do for education? Re-read her profile – what do *you* have to thank her for today?

Activities

- Why do you think women weren't educated at the time? Research Malala Yousafzai – what do you know about her? Why is she so special?
- Watch this video: [youtube.com/watch?v=1e8xgF0JtVg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1e8xgF0JtVg) and visit the website girlieffect.org. Read this report: en.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/gem-report/files/girls-factsheet-en.pdf. Create your own presentation on the importance

of educating girls.

- Why did Maria have to pretend her brother was in charge? Imagining you are her brother, write a diary entry, do you resent your sister or think she's wonderful?
- Lots of poets visited her, like Wordsworth and Byron. Write a short poem about her, praising her writing and her actions for her tenants.

Dr James Barry

Activities

- What an interesting life Margaret Bulkley had! But there was no newspaper coverage of the funeral. Write a newspaper article about the death of Dr James Barry, giving details of all the extraordinary things he achieved in his lifetime.

Anna Haslam

Activities

- Some of the reasons given for women not being allowed to vote included:
 - A woman's place is in the home; going out into the rough world of politics will change her caring nature.
 - Women already have the vote in local elections.
 - Many women do not want the vote, and would not use it if they got it.
 - Women do not fight in wars.
 - The vast mass of women are too ignorant of politics to be able to use their vote properly.
 - If women are given the vote, it will not be the gentle intelligent women who will stand for parliament, but the violent suffragettes. Parliament will be ruined.
 - Women's brains were seen as 'too small' to cope with the demands of political understanding.
- They may seem silly now, but people passionately believed these things were

true. Sometimes it is more difficult to persuade people of something if you don't agree with it: choose two of these arguments and write a short persuasive paragraph for each, using as many techniques as you can. Are you able to persuade a partner to agree with your argument?

- List the five most important rights a woman has here in Ireland. How many rights are available across the world? How many were available to your grandmother?
- Anna Haslam was a Quaker. Research the Quakers – what are their five key beliefs?

Mother Jones

Discussion Point

- Why do you think Mother Jones was seen as 'dangerous'?

Activities

- With a partner, research the UN rights of the child: [downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_summary-1.pdf](https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_summary-1.pdf). Choose three rights and create a placard on A4 paper much like those in the picture of Mother Jones. Make them as snappy as you can!
- Write her funeral elegy. Then choose your own modern hero and write one for them. What makes them so inspirational?

Nellie Cashman

Discussion Point

- What do you think 'I prefer being pals with men to being cook for one man' mean? Why do you think Nellie Cashman felt like this?

Activities

- With a partner, research Nellie's life and create a map of everywhere she visited.
- Re-read through her life. Write four diary entries from key points in her life, describing what she did, what obstacles she faced and what she did to overcome them.

Sarah Purser

Activities

- 'We cannot live by bread alone, and it is a poor heart that never rejoices [in art].' What do you think Sarah Purser means? As a class, debate why arts and culture are so important in society.
- Her gravestone reads 'Fortis et Strenua', Latin for strong and active. Create a Latin motto for the gravestone of your own modern hero.

- Using tracing paper, create a 'stained glass window' of a portrait of either a famous woman or another woman you think is inspirational.
- In the UK, Jane Austen, a female novelist, is featured on banknotes. Create a new stamp or bank note celebrating an inspirational woman.

Maud Gonne

Activities

- Look at the illustration of Maud Gonne. What sort of a woman do you think she is based on the image? What has the artist chosen to emphasise? Now, compare the illustration with those of Anna Haslam and Mother Jones. What do they have in common? What is being emphasised about each one? Use your thoughts to create a poster in a similar style showing a woman living today who you think has been a strong campaigner for woman's rights.
- Every Nobel Prize winner has to deliver a speech. Imagine you are Sean MacBride. Write a speech accepting the prize explaining how much influence your mother had in your life and how she inspired you to fight for peace and justice in the world.

Research

- How many women have won a Nobel Prize? Choose five and write a short summary of each of their achievements.

Anne Sullivan

Activities

- Create a factfile on Helen Keller and the creation of Braille.
- Choose five words to describe Anne Sullivan and each of these words in the official sign language of your country. Share them with the rest of the class. How difficult was it to learn?
- Imagine you are Anne Sullivan. You have travelled to the 21st Century. Write a diary entry detailing your impressions – what impresses you? Is there anything that disappoints you? Do you think enough progress has been made in the way society treats people with disabilities?

Countess Markievicz

Discussion Point

- Look closely at the illustration of Countess Markievicz. What is she doing? Why has the artist included the smoking gun and the dog? Do you think this is a true

representation of Countess Markievicz? Why? Are there any other objects you'd include in this image? Discuss in pairs.

Activities

- Imagine you are Countess Markievicz. You have just met Maud Gonne for the first time. Write a diary entry about what happened: what were your first impressions? How did she inspire you?
- In small groups, create an interview with Countess Markievicz. What sort of questions would you ask her about her achievements? How do you think she would answer? Hot-seat the activity, with someone in your group playing the role of the Countess.

Aleen Cust

Activity

- 'We can understand women educating themselves to tend women – but horses! Good heavens!' Write the rest of the article in *The Ballinasloe News* outlining what Aleen Cust did. Try and include some interviews with people that both agree and disagree with her actions.

Dr Kathleen Lynn

Discussion Point

- How has the artist chosen to illustrate Dr Lynn? Do you think babies and bicycles is enough to show what sort of woman she is? What else might you include?

Activity

- Write a letter to Dr Lynn, thanking her for her vision and her efforts to improve the world of medicine. What effect has she had on your life today? Outline three things you think have been improved because of what she did.

Hanna Sheehy Skeffington

Activity

- The Irish Constitution of 1937 currently contains a clause that 'recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the state a support without which the common good cannot be achieved'. A second clause obliges the state to 'endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home'. Should this clause be removed? Write three to four reasons for keeping it and three to four reasons to remove it and debate as a class.

Lilian Bland

Discussion Point

- Compare the image of Lilian Bland with the image of Lady Heath. What are the similarities? What sort of women do you think they are? Which one seems the most fearless based on the illustration? Is this true based on what we know about their lives?

Activities

- Lady Heath designed biplanes. Can you design your own plane? Draw sketches from different angles and write a report explaining how your plane will launch and fly. You can be as imaginative as you want!
- Use stiff paper to create your own paper aeroplane. In groups, work out how to create a 'fair' test and compete to see who has created the best plane.

Eileen Gray

Activities

- Research Modernism in architecture. Design your own building in a similar style and write a sales brochure persuading customers why they would want their house built like this. Consider the design but also the practicalities of things such as light, heating and anything else you feel is important.
- Who else is buried in Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris? Do you think Eileen Gray is in good company?
- What exactly does E-1027 look like? Write a report describing the building.

Máire Ní Chinnéide

Discussion Point

- Can you think of a game men and women can play as equals where physical strength isn't very important? Is it popular? Why do you think this is?

Activity

- Máire Ní Chinnéide founded camogie. Can you create your own sporting game? Write a report outlining the rules.

Lady Heath

Discussion Point

- Which do you think is more impressive – Lady Heath's achievements in aviation or her achievements in sport?

Activity

- Mary's plane was later owned by Amelia Earhart. Write a letter from Amelia

Earhart to Mary persuading her to sell her plane. Remember, they were both exemplary aviators so your letter should be full of praise for what Mary managed to achieve!

Mainie Jellett

Discussion Point

- How does the illustration reflect Mainie Jellett's style?

Activity

- What is Modernism? Research Mainie's art and create your own Modernist piece of art in her style for International Woman's Day. This could be a logo or a symbol.

Dame Ninette de Valois

Activity

- Dame Ninette lived for a very, very long time. What changes did she see taking place in the world? Think about inventions in technology, medicine, war etc. In small groups, create a presentation of the five biggest changes in her lifetime.

Dame Kathleen Lonsdale

Discussion Points

- 'Kathleen believed that for a married woman with children to become a first-class scientist, she must first choose the right husband.' Do you agree? Why do you think Kathleen Lonsdale believed this? How were women's rights different then? Discuss with a partner.
- What do you think would be a suitable title for her autobiography? Think about her most important achievements and the sort of woman she was.
- How does the artist show how important crystallography was to Dame Lonsdale? Explain why you think the illustration is so suitable.

Maureen O'Hara

Activities

- Think about female action heroes such as Wonder Woman, Lara Croft etc. What stunts have you seen? Write a film review about a film you've seen that has a powerful female character, giving your thoughts on why the film is a success and the role the female character has.
- Create a female hero that would appeal to young children. Think about the personality traits she would have. Sketch her and write a short adventure story where she shows exactly what makes her

a hero.

- Imagine a film is being made of Maureen O'Hara's life. Create a poster to advertise the film.

Maeve Kyle

Activities

- Why do you think people were 'outraged' that Maeve Kyle competed for Ireland? Write two newspaper articles on her athletics performances – one from 1956 and one from 1964. The articles should show how views towards her changed, with the 1956 article shocked and the 1964 proud of her achievements.
- Create a storyboard with six panels. In each panel, sketch and caption an event from her life.

Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell

Activities

- Write a letter to the Nobel Prize committee outlining why you think Jocelyn Bell Burnell should have been awarded the Prize for Physics in 1974. Remember to use evidence of her achievements as well as persuasive techniques.
- Look at the illustration. How is she depicted as a scientist? Which symbols or objects are used? Compare with some of the other illustrations with scientists in the book. Is there anything they have in common? Draw a picture of yourself as a scientist using the same style.

Anne O'Brien

Activities

- Women's sports in Ireland are becoming more and more popular. Research the current Irish women's football or rugby team and create Top Trumps cards for at least five different players, giving details of their strengths.
- Compile a list of female 'All Stars', highlighting sporting achievements of women in Ireland today.
- Prepare an interview with Anne O'Brien. What sort of questions would you ask? Would they be the same questions you would ask a male sports star? Why do you think some sports journalists ask different questions based on the gender of the athlete they are interviewing? How can we change this?

Mary Robinson

Discussion Point

- Study the illustration of Mary Robinson. Is this a suitable portrait for a president? Why? Compare it with images of other women involved in politics (like Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, Maud Gonne, Countess Markievicz) – how are they different? Why do you think this is? What do you think the artist is emphasising about Mary?

Activity

- When she won the election, Mary thanked ‘the women of Ireland, mná na hÉireann, who, instead of rocking the cradle, rocked the system’, which is a strong and powerful statement. Create your own slogan about the women of Ireland.

Blazing a Trail into the Future

Discussion Points

- Are these the women you were expecting to see here?
- The images in this section are simpler, with each woman accompanied by one object to symbolise her success. What other symbols might you add to the whole illustration? Why? Why do you think the images are simpler than those earlier in the book?

Activities

- Choose one of the seven women (Annie and Kate Madden count as one). Write up a piece on them in the style of the rest of the book. Use your imagination to tell how their story will unfold in the future – but don’t make it too unrealistic.

Whole Text Activities

1. Selecting the women

Choosing the women for this book was a really difficult task, as there were so many inspirational figures to choose from.

Are there any women you feel are missing from this list? Write your own description of their life in the style of the book.

2. Dinner Party Guests

Think about female role models today. They don’t have to be from Ireland, they can be from anywhere in the world. Imagine you have an opportunity to invite five incredible women from different fields to a special meal. Choose one each from art

and literature, politics, science, sport and entertainment. Who would you choose? Why? Is it an easy decision? How do you decide – do you draw up criteria? Write a paragraph for each woman arguing why she should be seated at the table.

3. Advice for young people

Having read the whole book, what advice do you think these women would give to the young people of Ireland today? Create five slogans based on the exploits and adventures of these women, eg., ‘Even if everyone else is saying you’ll fail, never give up on yourself’.

4. Front Cover

If you had to put only one woman on the front cover, who would it be? Why? Who do you think has made the biggest impact on today’s world/helped the most people? Why? Is this enough to put them on the front cover?

5. Letter Writing

Write a letter to a woman of your choice, asking them about something not mentioned in the book. Do you ask for advice? Inspiration?

6. Most Admirable of All

Choose the woman who you admire the most – maybe it’s because of her achievements or maybe it’s because you feel more of a connection to her than the others. Write a persuasive speech to deliver to your class on why this woman should be ‘Ireland’s Top Woman in History’.

7. Awards Night

As a class, imagine you were giving out awards to the women in the book. Who would win:

- most curious
- most inventive
- most compassionate
- most determined
- most brave?

Consider the illustrations used to show these women. Using the same style and the same objects, create a poster for each of the winners.

8. Categories

- The women in the book can be divided into rough categories: arts and entertainment, science and medicine, politics, sport and adventurers. Put the women into these five categories. Which category saw the greatest achievements? How did you decide? Did you draw up

criteria?

- Look at the illustrations for each of these categories. Are there any common symbols/motifs in the images? What sort of message is the artist trying to convey for each woman?
- Create your own poster for each of the categories. Use the style of the illustrator. Should there be a single female central to the image? Or are all the women’s achievements equal in this category? Does this matter? Present your poster to the rest of the class and explain your design choices.

9. Future Trailblazers

Who from the future trailblazers would the older women most admire? Why? What similarities lie between them? Write a piece in defence of the woman you think they’d choose, persuading them why she’s the most impressive so far.

10. Who Would You Meet?

Who would you most like to meet? Why? What would you do? What do you think their impressions would be of today’s world? Write a short script imagining a conversation you would have.



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