



# Fintan's Fifteen

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## Teaching Guide

By Peter Heaney

### RATIONALE & THEMES

The Ballybreen Terriers under-12 hurling team has collapsed spectacularly. They have lost seventeen games in a row, their bainisteoir has resigned and most of the team have quit.

*Fintan's Fifteen* charts their return to glory, which is steered by determination, good humour and a restored belief in themselves.

Spurred on by the efforts of Katie, the Terriers' number-one fan; Rusty, a Brazilian-born hurling enthusiast; and Fintan, a brilliant coach whose self-confidence has taken a knock, the team gathers a multicultural phalanx of players with wide-ranging skills and interests in order to regain their place at the top.

The themes explored include:

- Bullying
- Determination
- Diversity
- Self-esteem
- Competition
- Sportsmanship
- Friendship
- Fairness
- Taking responsibility
- Loyalty

### SUMMARY

Raymond 'Rusty' Arantes, originally from Brazil, has been a member of the Ballybreen Terriers U12 hurling club for a year and a half. He loves his sport and his club, but now it seems that the Terriers are facing collapse after a succession of defeats, resignations and desertions.

Rusty and Katie 'Dinger' Bell, a majorette and the club's most loyal supporter, are determined to keep the Terriers going.

Reminiscing over an old club photo, Katie points out Fintan Lonergan, an outstanding player who mysteriously retired (at age

ten) without explanation just prior to the decline in the Terriers' fortunes. Rusty and Katie set off to attempt to draw Fintan out of retirement.

Hesitant at first, Fintan eventually agrees to become the team's new bainisteoir (manager). He announces his return at a Poc Fada (long shot) competition, causing consternation to the Terriers' bitter rivals, the Kilmore Killers.

Katie's cousin Rory, who has never held a camán before, manages to draw with Fintan in the Poc Fada by virtue of his golfing skills. He is immediately invited to join the new and reformed Terriers.

As the Terriers continue to recruit players from other sporting disciplines, their confidence grows and their performance develops. They also realise how important it is to have fun on the pitch.

The Terriers secure a place in the final of the Lonergan Cup – a competition set up by Fintan's grandfather and which still carries his family name – against the Kilmore Killers. Their rivals employ bullying tactics to try to win, and their bainisteoir attempts to steal the trophy, which only he knows contains a valuable jewel.

When Fintan is forced to take to the field on finals day, the Killers wilt under the galvanised determination of the Terriers, and the Lonergan Cup goes to the worthy winners.

### APPROACH

This is an enjoyable and entertaining read that tackles the sensitive topics of bullying, sportsmanship and gamesmanship in an accessible way. It is easy for the reader to identify with both the characters and the issues.

The book uses comic strips and illustrations as well as the standard textual narrative.

This multimedia style adds a unique dimension to the story and helps to deliver the messages in a positive way.

The story is a valuable prompt to the insidious impact of bullying. It creates an effective platform for discussion in class or small groups.

The themes relate easily to PSHE/PDMU requirements.

This guide has divided the story into two sections, and the activities offer suggestions for developing its major themes.

### Section 1 The Dust of Defeat pp5–57

#### SUMMARY

Brazilian Raymond 'Rusty' Arantes bemoans the impending collapse of the Ballybreen Terriers U12 hurling club after their seventeenth consecutive defeat.

In school, listening to the legend of the first hurler, Cú Chulainn, Rusty had imagined himself imitating his hero with a camán and sliotar. But that was eighteen months and seven bainisteoirs ago, and now a clubhouse spat between the Terriers' goalie and left-winger results in the current manager and half of the team walking out – for good.

Left directionless and unable to field a team, Rusty, Katie and the few remaining players (along with the Terriers' mascot, Ollie the dog) must come up with a plan to keep the team together.

Katie and Rusty agree that they must enlist the help of a new bainisteoir to reverse the Terriers' decline. Looking at an old team photo, Katie tells the story of their erstwhile star player, Fintan Lonergan, and his sudden and unexplained resignation

from the club. They decide to approach him now to ask him for help.

When they meet Fintan, he makes it very clear that he has no interest in becoming involved in hurling again. Dejected, Rusty and Katie prepare to leave. However, the persuasive canine powers of Ollie win Fintan over to their cause.

Over in the Kilmore Killers' camp, Seáneen Brannigan, the team's scheming bainisteoir, discovers that the gem on the Lonergan Cup U12 hurling trophy is part of a long-lost set of emeralds and is worth a fortune. He sets in place a plan to acquire it, by fair means or foul.

Meanwhile, members of the Terriers sign up for the Kilmore Poc Fada competition. Seáneen sneers at them – until Fintan, in disguise, smashes the sliotar around the course in a record twelve pocs.

As Seáneen angrily berates his son Dennis for losing, Fintan and Rusty manage to co-opt Katie's cousin Rory – who has used his golfing skills to tie with Fintan in the Poc Fada – onto their team.

At their next training session Fintan takes charge and boosts morale by organising a spruce-up of the Terriers' clubhouse.

He confesses that bullying was the reason he had left the club abruptly a few years earlier. Ollie the dog had eavesdropped on the Killers' changing room that day and overheard Seáneen, the team's manager, instructing his players to bully Fintan.

#### DISCUSSION POINTS

- *Read pp5–21:* The author has used colourful GAA quotes as chapter headings, to give context and set the tone. What do you think he wants you to understand from the quote on p5?
- *Read p16:* As the Terriers came up against significant challenges, some members abandoned the club and some decided to stay. What do you think separates people into these two groups? What makes some people persevere in the face of almost insurmountable challenges? How can this attitude be developed – or is it foolish to try to resist the inevitable?
- *Read p32:* It is obvious that Fintan does not actually believe that the Lonergan Cup is worthless scrap. What do you think he is *really* trying to say? Why do people sometimes not like to say what they are thinking? How can you interpret what people are really trying to say?
- *Read p54:* Fintan was a victim of

bullying because he had a poor self-image: he imagined that he was less worthwhile because of the way he looked. His self-image made him vulnerable to bullying. How can this cycle of bullying and poor self-image be broken?



#### ACTIVITIES

##### 1. Clash of the Ash (read pp6–8)

Rusty is keen to play hurling. Although he is from Brazil, every aspect of the sport has him spellbound.

The GAA has launched a poster competition to encourage children living in Ireland but originally from other countries to become involved in U12 hurling.

Could you design a poster to promote the sport and encourage participation from young people born outside Ireland?

How would terms like camán, Poc Fada and sliotar translate into other languages? Search Google Translate for foreign-language equivalents.

##### 2. Katie (read p10)

Rusty likes Katie a lot. In fact, she is the real reason he has stayed with the Terriers. He met her on his first day at training, and he has seen her almost every day since.

In his diary, he describes the first time they met, what she said to him, how she looked and how he felt.

He likes to reread this page regularly. Could you make a copy of what you think he wrote?

##### 3. The Talk (read pp30–32)

Fintan is angry with everyone and everything, including the Terriers. However, deep in his head, a little voice is trying to convince him to change his mind.

Use your imagination to create the conversation that Fintan is having with the voice inside his head as he talks to Katie and Rusty in real life.

Use two different coloured pens to show the public conversation we can hear and the private one inside his head that we can't hear.

#### 4. Illustrations (read p41)

The author has used GAA sound bites effectively as chapter headings. The book also has an interesting range of text and illustration styles.

The team at The O'Brien Press was wondering if they should have added 'fun' illustrations to the titles to make them more visual.

Create a 'fun' illustration for the title on p41 to explain it visually. You'll need to keep the style similar to that of the other illustrations throughout the book.

I'm sure the OBP team would love to see your creations!

#### 5. Hurling How-to (read p44)

When Rory agrees to take part in the Poc Fada, Katie and Rusty realise that he needs a little basic instruction in how to hit the sliotar.

Katie is very good at writing clear instructions, and Rusty is an excellent artist. Together, they decide to create a little instruction sheet – which includes words and illustrations – to help Rory with the basic principles of how to hold and swing the camán, how to stand, how to hit the sliotar, etc.

Work in pairs to recreate this sheet.

You will find some useful information on this website: [www.allsaintsgac.com/media/hurling-skills/](http://www.allsaintsgac.com/media/hurling-skills/)

#### 6. Twelve Pocs (read p48)

Fintan and Rory manage to cover the Poc Fada course in twelve pocs. How far do you think that is in kilometers? Could you give a reasonable estimate?

Test your class in the playground to see who has the longest poc. If they shot twelve pocs, how far would the sliotar go?

How much farther do you think an adult hurling or camogie poc might go?

This site has some interesting information on the Poc Fada: [pocfada.gaa.ie/home](http://pocfada.gaa.ie/home)

#### 7. The Poc Fada (read p49 & p63)

Micheál Ferriter has missed the Poc Fada

but is amazed when he hears reports of what has happened.

He wants to write a report for his column, but because he wasn't there, he has no details.

Can you help him out by writing a short piece in his style about how Fintan and Rory won, and how Seáneen must have felt?

## 8. I Like Me (read p54)

Although he was an outstanding player, Fintan was deeply hurt by the insults whispered at him, and they destroyed his confidence.

This is how bullying works, and it can completely change how people see themselves.

On the other hand, a compliment can help to restore or improve a person's confidence.

Work in small groups to make two lists:

The first list will contain insulting words or comments (no bad language) that you think could cause damage and should never be used.

The second list will contain compliments that you think could improve self-esteem and should be used frequently.

Now edit your list to identify the top five in each group.

## Section 2 Riverdancing pp58–121

### SUMMARY

With a new sense of purpose, Fintan, Katie and Rusty begin the task of scouting and recruiting talent for the hurling team.

Fintan's strategy is unconventional, and soon they have signed up a junior wrestler and an acrobat.

Unfortunately the team for their first match is long on enthusiasm but short on skill. But when Fintan promises to strip off his top and do a lap of the pitch if they can score a point, the team relaxes. They recover the sense of fun they need to enjoy the match, and they go on to capture the all-important single point.

Meanwhile Seáneen Brannigan's Internet research confirms that the decorative stone on the Loneragan Cup is indeed one of the missing Evergreen Emeralds, and he determines to get his hands on it.

Training resumes for the Terriers, and Fintan's concept of fun ensures some interesting skill-development activities. The team attempts an egg-and-spoon race on skateboards, and Katie teaches them her 'twirly' majorette moves – all under the puzzled, watchful eye of Seáneen Brannigan, who has hidden nearby to spy on them.

Fintan and Katie's recruitment poster brings in another player with soccer skills. As the blend of talent begins to have an effect, the Terriers snatch a win from the bewildered Lismartin Hackers. This draws the attention of the local press and the dismay of Seáneen, who was relying on the Terriers to continue their losing form, allowing his team to take the trophy (and him to take the emerald).

With continued improvement, and having gained a defector from the rival team, the Terriers win a place in the final against the Kilmore Killers. Fintan talks to the press and reveals his strategy for developing a winning team.

Meanwhile, Seáneen leaves nothing to chance in his determination to steal the Loneragan Cup. He offers to paint the trophy room on finals day, then orders a replica of the Cup that he will swap for the real thing while everyone is outside watching the match.

Arriving for the final, Fintan and the team are met with bullying gamesmanship from the Killers, which continues throughout the match. However, it only serves to strengthen their resolve.

Despite the foul play from the Killers, the Terriers are just behind at half time. Fintan's talk at the break has the whole team howling with pride and determination.

Seáneen sets off to steal the trophy, but Ollie the dog spots him and quietly shuffles off to see what he's plotting.

In the second half, the Killers target their former teammate Kyle. He is forced to leave the pitch through injury, but Fintan decides to take to the field himself.

With Fintan as playmaker, the outcome is inevitable. Already two points ahead, Fintan delivers the *coup de grâce* with a mighty crack that echoes around the field and sends the sliotar crashing past the Killers' goalie. The game belongs to the Ballybreen Terriers.

Meanwhile, Ollie has seen what Seáneen is up to and is able to disrupt his plans. He seizes Seáneen's satchel with all the evidence and runs away with it, leaving



the manager literally hanging in mid-air.

The celebrations are ecstatic. The Terriers are champions, and the Loneragan Cup is back where it belongs. When the contents of Seáneen's satchel are discovered, the provenance of the jewel on the Cup is understood.

Fintan, however, is unimpressed. Behind a huge grin, he states that the riches he now has are worth more than money or jewels.

### DISCUSSION POINTS

*Read p60:* Dominic 'Mansize' McLean is an outstanding athlete. He has excelled at individual sports where his size is an advantage, but now he wants to try a team sport. What do you think is different about team sports? What are the advantages or disadvantages of team sports? What qualities are needed to play team sports and how are they different from individual sports? Which do you prefer and why?

*Read p67:* By offering to run around the pitch with no top on, Fintan reminds the team that it is important to have fun. Do you think that having fun is important in every sporting activity? Is your performance affected if the 'fun' element is missing? Why is this?

*Read p90:* Fintan is now completely transformed, in both looks and attitude. Do you think that our attitude affects the way we look, or does the way we look affect our attitude about ourselves? Is it important to take care of how you look? How do you think our attitudes and our outlooks are influenced if we don't take care of ourselves?

Some useful information on children's mental health can be found on this site: [www.youngminds.org.uk/for\\_children\\_young\\_people/better\\_mental\\_health](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/for_children_young_people/better_mental_health)

*Read p103:* The Killers use gamesmanship as a tactic, playing psychological tricks to

gain the advantage over their competitors. They believe that winning is the only thing that's important. Do you think that this benefits sport? How would you define the reasons for taking part in sport? What sort of behaviors (if any) do you think are unacceptable when playing?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. #MichéalFerriter (read p63)

When this article by Michéal Ferriter appears in the paper, it annoys many Terriers fans, who respond angrily on his Twitter feed.

Michéal decides to publish the best of the Twitter replies in his next article.

Create about twenty hashtag replies for his Twitter page. Not all of them need to be criticisms.

Remember that you have a maximum of 140 characters for each reply.

### 2. The Training (read pp72–75)

Katie and Fintan introduce fun methods of training, and everyone on the team enjoys them.

Consider the skills needed for hurling (balance, speed, accuracy) and then try to create your own training/skill-development programme using as many unusual activities as you can think of.

Identify the top five activities and the skills you hope to develop by practising them.

### 3. Black & White (read pp75–77)

Like all dogs, Ollie cannot see in colour in the same way humans can.

Choose one of his cartoon contributions, make a copy of it, and then add colour to each of the panels.

Does it make a difference to your understanding of what Ollie is saying? Why is this so?

### 4. Recorded Highlights (read pp79–84)

The Terriers have won their first match under Fintan. The excitement is infectious, and Michéal Ferriter is amazed.

In addition to the piece he writes for the newspaper, Michéal has to create a one-minute recording of match highlights for his local radio station.

Choose three or four highlights from the match and create an exciting commentary to describe your experience of watching them.



You can download free recording software from this site:

[audacity.sourceforge.net/download](http://audacity.sourceforge.net/download)

### 5. Ollie Says (read p83)

Ollie the dog was delirious with the win. Later that night, he put together a one-page, five-panel illustration of what he saw.

Help him to create this page.

Remember, not all the panels will be the same size – important information will take a larger panel.

### 6. Half-Time (read p87)

Ollie has a secret talent: he is a genius with numbers.

In the match with the Screeve Ross Scribblers, the final score was 0-7 to 0-7.

Ollie has set these mathematical puzzles for you:

How many possible half-time scores could there have been?

How would you be sure that you had all the combinations?

If the Scribblers had been in the lead at half-time, how would that change the combinations?

### 7. Picture Worth a Thousand Words (read pp116–117)

The author, Alan Nolan, has used cartoons to tell parts of the story, especially the sections that Ollie describes.

If you were to replace this particular section (pp116–117) with words instead of the cartoon, would it still be as exciting?

Try to write a description that is as interesting and lively as Ollie's cartoon.

You can use the 5xW&H test (*who, what, when, where, why & how*) to see if your description answers the questions as well as the cartoon does.



### 8. I'm Rich (read p121)

Fintan dismisses the idea of selling the emerald, saying that he is already as rich as he wants to be. He lists the reasons why he believes he is so fortunate.

In small groups, make a 'rich list' for yourselves, explaining the things in your lives that you believe make you rich. You can add illustrations if you wish.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alan Nolan is a comics writer, graphic designer, artist and co-creator of the horror series *Sancho*. He is the creator of *The Big Break Detectives Casebook*, a graphic novel for younger readers, and the 'Murder Can Be Fatal' mysteries. Born in Dublin, he studied at the National College of Art and Design. He lives in Bray, County Wicklow, with his wife and three sons.



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