



# THE YOUNG REBELS

ISBN 978-0-86278-579-6  
eBook ISBN 978-1-8471-7387-4

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## Teaching Guide

by Liz Morris

### RATIONALE AND THEMES

This story is set in Ireland in the early years of the twentieth century, a time of great upheaval in Europe, and so is very suitable for use as part of a history project or investigation. It also introduces and develops many universal themes which would interest pupils in the senior cycle of primary schools and the junior cycle of second-level schools:

- Suffering and loss
- Transition from child to adult
- Parental fallibility
- Friendship and loyalty
- Personal responsibility
- Conflict, both personal and political

### SUMMARY

The story of a young boy's coming-of-age under the care and guidance of Padraic Pearse, this novel centres around the modern and enlightened educational theories at the heart of Pearse's school, and follows the lives of some of those St Enda's pupils who followed their headmaster to witness his heroic stand for Irish freedom in the General Post Office in 1916. Seen through the eyes of a young boy, the grief of separation from his beloved mother, the relief and guilt he feels on leaving his bullying father, his growing attachment to the cause of freedom and the events that lead to the Easter Rising and its painful aftermath are vividly brought to life in this powerful and timely historical novel.

### APPROACH

For the purposes of this exploration, the novel has been divided into six units, each of which contains suggested discussion points and language-based activities.

## Unit 1 Leaving Home

### SUMMARY

When his mother becomes dangerously ill, John Joe's bullying father and strict but loving aunt send him to St Enda's, a school that prepares boys to become 'complete men' by offering a wide range of subjects and a wide variety of sports. At first he is lonely and 'hates' the Irish language through which most subjects are taught. Slowly he becomes fond of the teachers, who include Con Colbert and Thomas MacDonagh, and acquires good friends. He also learns to think independently about religion, exploitation of workers and about the equality of all men and women.

Read pp 9 – 37

### DISCUSSION POINTS

- It is clear from the beginning that the adults in John Joe's family have very differing ideas on how to raise young boys. Discuss the positive and negative ways in which the members of the family interact with each other, and with the outside world.
- The Headmaster believes that 'true freedom can only exist where there is self-discipline' (p18). Do you agree with this philosophy?
- John Joe hates the Irish language because 'it's the language of poverty' and says that the government has 'contempt for everything Irish' (p19). Can you suggest reasons why Irish people might have had little esteem for Irish culture and language at that time?
- Padraic Pearse had a very close relationship with his mother (pp16, 25,

41) just as John Joe did with his (pp9, 10, 22, 23). Yet Pearse respects and is proud of his father, while John Joe doesn't want to be anything like his father (p34). Do you think John Joe is too hard on his father? Can you offer an explanation for his father's behaviour?

### ACTIVITIES

#### 1. 'A wide and beautiful place'

John Joe is astonished when he first sees St Enda's (p14). Read his description of the house and its grounds. The Pearse Museum is currently undergoing extensive renovations and is due to re-open in 2008. Contact The Pearse Museum, St Enda's Park (tel: +353 1 4934208) for booklet or to arrange a visit, or visit [www.heritageireland.ie](http://www.heritageireland.ie).

#### 2. Then and Now

Make a list of the subjects taught in St Enda's (see pp16, 18, 30, 39) and compare with those currently taught in Irish schools. Ask your parents or grandparents about the subjects they were taught in school and say which curriculum you consider most 'child-centred'.

#### 3. Special Birthright?

Consider the methods used by Pearse (p18) and MacDonagh (pp21, 22) to teach the Irish language. Contact the current leaders of the main political parties in Ireland or visit their websites and note their position on the importance of Irish language in the modern curriculum.

#### 4. Teacher: Could do Better?

Write a definition of what makes a good and effective teacher, then write an advertisement that would attract potential candidates to apply for a position in your

school. Do you think Mr Pearse would have agreed with your requirements?

## 5. Further Reading

Constance Markievicz, 'together with a man called Bulmer Hobson', founded Fianna Éireann in 1909 (p32). For information on the history and tradition of na Fianna Éireann, go to <http://www.historyireland.com/20th-century-contemporary-history/fianna-na-heireanna-fianna-eireann/>. Read also the chapter on Countess Markievicz 'revolutionary, labour activist and the first female MP elected to Westminster' on pp158 – 165 of *Wild Irish Women* (ISBN 978-1-84717-368-3).

## Unit 2 'Esprit de Corps'

### SUMMARY

John Joe continues to develop physically, intellectually and emotionally. As he becomes ever closer to the Pearse family, he sees how hard the ardmháistir works, raising funds for his two schools, and attending meetings. When John Joe's mother dies just before Christmas, Pearse accompanies the grieving boy to the house, coming to his rescue when his father loses his temper and slaps him. John Joe joins the Fianna and drills, marching and going on manoeuvres with them, while the possibility of war in Europe looms closer.

Read pp 38 – 64

### DISCUSSION POINTS

- Willie Pearse tells John Joe that his brother was an 'outstanding boxer' who was 'afraid he might hurt someone' so he stopped boxing altogether (p40). What does this tell us about the character of the headmaster?
- John Joe says that 'any child would be lucky to have Padraic Pearse for a father' (p41). Consider the truth or otherwise of this statement in view of John Joe's past comments about the amount of time the Ardmháistir spends in his office, and on how exhausted he appears in the morning (p40).
- 'There's always been one law ... for the Protestants and another for Catholics'

(p46). Bearing in mind that Pearse's father was a Protestant and an Englishman, consider John Joe's statement above in conjunction with his earlier comment that 'in a republic all men, and all women too, are equal under the law' (p34).

- When John Joe's father rejects his embrace and slaps him, there is 'a shocked gasp in the room', yet no relative or neighbour intervenes and it is the Ardmháistir who steps between father and son (p49). How might Bertie try to explain his behaviour in the parlour? Can you explain or understand why he reacted as he did?
- John Joe says that when his mother died he thought he would 'never have fun again' and that he now sometimes feels 'guilty' that he is having fun (p59). Can you empathise with these mixed emotions? Consider how you might react in his position.

### ACTIVITIES

#### 1. Poetry

John Joe finds a 'slim volume of poems written by the Ardmháistir' in the library (p43). Read and discuss the poem 'Ideal' written by Pearse and translated from the Irish by Thomas MacDonagh, paying particular attention to the last verse. This poem is included under the heading Frustration and Jealousy in the anthology *Irish Love Poems* (ISBN 978-0-86278-514-7).

#### 2. Blood Sacrifice

In an article entitled *The Coming Revolution*, published in December 1913, Pearse wrote 'We must accustom ourselves to the thought of arms ... to the use of arms ... there are many things more horrible than bloodshed; and slavery is one of them.' Say if you think he was rehearsing such sentiments when he explained the 'meaning of Home Rule' to John Joe (pp44- 45).

#### 3. Oil on Canvas

One of John Joe's classmates refers to the child in the painting hanging in the front hall of the school and says it was painted by 'an Irish artist who is a great admirer of the Ardmháistir' (p47). This canvas, Íosagán, by Beatrice Elvery, represents the Christ child as a boy of about twelve, standing with outstretched arms, and is currently on

loan to the National Gallery of Ireland, Merrion Square, Dublin, though it still belongs to the Pearse Museum. See if you can find out more about the work of this artist.

#### 4. Fond Memory

John Joe's family observe the traditions and rituals of the time when his mother dies. Read carefully John Joe's description of the rooms in the house, of his mother lying upstairs (pp48-50) and compare with Cindy's description of her mother's more contemporary funeral in *Sisters ...no way!* (pp3-5) (ISBN 978-0-86278-495-9).

#### 5. The Rare Oul Times

On the Saturday after Christmas, Willie takes John Joe into town on the tram (p53). Imagine Willie's reaction to a journey from Dundrum to Stephen's Green on the Luas, and say what he might think of Grafton Street during the Christmas period some ninety years later.

#### 6. The Great War

Speaking about the likelihood of a war in Europe, MacDonagh says that many of the poor Irish have already joined the British army and that 'thousands more will be recruited, or conscripted' if war is declared (p62). Read Chapter One of *The Guns of Easter* (ISBN 978-0-86278-449-2) and say if you understand why Jimmy Conway's father enlists so that his wife will get 'a weekly payment from the government'.

#### 7. Further Reading

Tomás Ó Criomhthain (1859-1937) wrote about his life on the Great Blasket Island in two important works called *An tOileánach* and *Allagar na hInse*. Read some of these most interesting books and consider the effect the tragic drowning had not only on Pearse, but also on Ó Criomhthain, whose daughter's life had been saved by Eveleen Nicholls (pp41-43).

#### 8. More Reading

John Joe quotes from one of the most famous speeches delivered in an Irish courthouse (p60). Read about the life and times of Robert Emmet in *O'Brien Pocket History of Irish Rebels* (ISBN 978-0-86278-857-5) (pp 40-44). See Jerome Connor's sculpture of Emmet in St Stephen's Green, Dublin.

## Unit 3 Family Squabbles

### SUMMARY

As the Russians, French and Germans mobilise their armies, Na Fianna Éireann joins the Irish Volunteers on a trek to Howth where they help to unload rifles and boxes of ammunition from the *Asgard*. Police and soldiers ambush them, but fail to disarm the Volunteers though they kill four innocent civilians. John Joe and his friends help to save the ammunition and bring it safely to the Countess Markievicz. John Joe's father becomes increasingly violent and eventually Aunt Nell leaves the house forever. Roger's brothers enlist in the Dublin Fusiliers, fighting continues in the trenches of Europe, and John Joe debates the purpose of war with his Ardmháistir.

Read pp 65 –103

### DISCUSSION POINTS

- 'Aunt Nell and I are conspirators against my father' (p68). Have you been aware of the gradual change taking place in the relationship between John Joe and his aunt? What, if anything, does this tell us about the relationship between John Joe and his father, or might it tell us more about Aunt Nell's openness to change and new ideas? (See also p85).
- '... the others are looking to me as their leader' (p80). Can you trace John Joe's development from the rather solitary and lonely boy of the first chapter to this boy who has adopted the role of commander and leader?
- Aunt Nell describes the outbreak of the Great War as 'a family squabble' (p87). Read John Joe's description of what happened on the twenty-eighth of June (pp 66-67) and also what happened exactly one month later (pp 86-87). Can you suggest a reason why Aunt Nell might choose to describe the war in domestic rather than global terms?
- Flight or fight? When his father drunkenly raises a hand to him, John Joe draws back before he can stop himself, though he knows this is a mistake, 'that always makes him worse' (p88). What might have been the outcome had John Joe reacted differently? What advice would you offer John Joe if you were trying to help him to deal with a

threatening parent/carer?

- Crime and Punishment: Pearse doesn't mete out punishment to the boys because they tell the truth and admit to having told lies (p102). Would your principal/ teacher behave in a similar way? Pearse said he'd achieved something when John Joe owned up and told the truth, do you agree?

### ACTIVITIES

#### 1. Tom Clarke

'A notorious republican called Tom Clarke gave a ringing address at the graveside' (p66). Tom Clarke later became the first signatory of the Proclamation. His wife Kathleen became a Dáil deputy and first woman Lord Mayor of Dublin. Read her insider's account of these years in *Revolutionary Woman – My Fight for Ireland's Freedom* (ISBN 978-0-86278-294-8).

#### 2. Your Country Needs ...

Consider the recruiting posters used to encourage men to enlist in the British army (pp88,92) and have a class poster-campaign to encourage people to consider the horrors of war or one to promote the solution of global issues by peaceful means. The Imperial War Museum in London has a very large collection of material on World War I, including some Irish recruitment posters. You can search their Collections Online at [www.iwmcollections.org.uk](http://www.iwmcollections.org.uk).

#### 3. Household Chores

John Joe helps Mrs Pearse to sweep, dust and scrub, to boil sheets and to polish windows (p89). Read some of Olive Sharkey's *Ways of Old – Traditional Life in Ireland* (ISBN 978-0-86278-599-4) and write an account of the work Mrs Pearse might have done in the week before the return of the students.

#### 4. Favours

The boys 'discuss chivalry and codes of honour' (p91), talking about the 'colours' given by knights to their ladies to wear. Write an adventure story of your own in which you win the heart of fair lady through brave and fearless deed.

#### 5. Just War?

'But what can one do when one's country's attacked?' (p97). 'Just wars should be fought in, and unjust wars should be fought against' (p100). Have a class debate on the

topic of the necessity or otherwise of war in self-defence.

## Unit 4 Conflict Resolution

### SUMMARY

Large numbers of recruits join the Volunteers, and the seven commanding officers train them. There is a rehearsal for an uprising in the Dublin mountains on Easter Day and some of the Fianna, including John Joe and Roger, accompany the Volunteers. John Joe reveals his terrible secret to the Ardmháistir and is given permission to remain at St Enda's for the summer holidays. Now part of the Pearse household, he is given access to privileged information about the future uprising. Roger's brother is killed in France and Roger feels terribly bitter about this waste of a young life. O'Donovan Rossa also dies, but he has spent his life in the struggle for Irish freedom and large crowds turn out to honour him. Pearse's graveside oration stirs the hearts of all those who hear it.

Read pp 104 – 126

### DISCUSSION POINTS

- Mr Pearse has told the boys that 'chieftains in ancient Ireland gave one another gifts after a battle, so their conflict would not continue into the next generation' (p94). John Joe also remembers that 'in ancient Ireland battles were fought hand to hand...' (p104). What are the merits and possible disadvantages of these ancient methods of solving disagreement?
- John Joe realises that he would be 'very unhappy' if Roger weren't with him on the manoeuvres (p106). Yet his initial reaction to Roger was far from positive: at first he thinks that Roger gives himself airs and comments on how many sweets he eats and on the size of his home in Rathgar (pp13-17). Trace the development of the boys' friendship over the course of their time together.
- Roger believes that his brother died 'for King George' while John Joe believes Donald was 'sacrificed for a cause that was not his' (p121). Do you agree with either assessment? Do you think his sacrifice was completely in vain?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. A Light in the Window

Pearse explains that Joe Plunkett chose that day as he 'likes the symbolism of the Resurrection' (p105). List other symbols that have become associated with political or social events and say how you think these symbols have contributed to the success or failure of the movements.

### 2. In confidence

'Perhaps you had best tell me what it's like...' (p113). Write the words John Joe might have spoken in the Ardmháistir's office, beginning with the less important matters and ending an account of the violence visited on his mother by her husband. Visit [www.endabuse.org](http://www.endabuse.org) or [www.womensaid.ie](http://www.womensaid.ie) for more information on domestic violence and abuse.

### 3. Fly on the Wall

John Joe says he'll never know what his father said nor how he felt on receipt of the letter sent by Mr Pearse (p116). Write and/or act with a partner the scene as Bertie describes his reaction to a close friend and confidante.

### 4. Our Fenian Dead

The National Photographic Archive holds the photographic collections of the National Library of Ireland ([www.nli.ie](http://www.nli.ie)). Under the 'Large Collections' section of the Photographic Archive web-page, information is provided on the Keogh Collection. This collection of images was created by the Keogh Brothers of Dorset Street, Dublin and dates from 1915-1930. It includes personalities and events surrounding the 1916 Rising and can be viewed online by entering '1916' in the Subject Keyword of the online catalogue. View the images of the lying-in-state in City Hall, the removal of remains from the Pro-Cathedral and the burial of O'Donovan Rossa.

### 5. Funeral of O'Donovan Rossa

Read pp 121-126 again before arranging a visit to the grave of O'Donovan Rossa. For guided tours of Glasnevin cemetery, including the Republican plot, contact +353 (0)1 882 6550 or visit [www.glasnevintrust.ie](http://www.glasnevintrust.ie) for tour schedules.

## Unit 5 Changing Times

### SUMMARY

Irish Volunteers now march openly through Dublin carrying rifles, and the Citizen Army, Cumann na mBan and the Irish Girl Guides also drill in public. John Joe learns that, while Connolly and his Citizen Army want a socialist state, Pearse and his Volunteers want an independent republic. Britain will willingly grant neither. John Joe realises that politics affects every part of his life and learns more about the Irish Republican Brotherhood and the Irish Parliamentary Party. A date has been set for an uprising, though it is to be kept secret from chief-of-staff Eoin MacNeill. As Easter approaches, John Joe's thoughts focus more on Ireland's resurrection than on Christ's, though he is too young to take part in the Rising. MacNeill finds out about the plans and countermands Pearse's orders, but the Rising is to go ahead, beginning on Easter Monday John Joe decides he won't be left behind.

Read pp 127 – 158

### DISCUSSION POINTS

- John Joe says that 'many Irish people don't seem to care if they are dominated by a foreign power' (p130). What can be the outcome of feelings of powerlessness or apathy in a person or group of people? What can be done to avoid or resolve these feelings?
- 'England's trouble is Ireland's opportunity' (p90). '... the enemy of our enemy is our friend' (p133). 'Your first duty is to take your part in ending the war' (John Redmond MP, Waterford, August 1915). Read pp20,21 of *The Easter Rising – A Guide to Dublin in 1916* by Conor Kostick and Lorcan Collins (ISBN 978-0-86278-638-0) and discuss the opposing viewpoints of the Irish Parliamentary Party, Pearse's Volunteers and Connolly's Citizen Army. Say with whom you most agree.
- John Joe is the possessor of many secrets but refuses to betray either the trust of the Pearse family or his father's violent and abusive behaviour (pp 137, 138). Do you think he is right to keep these secrets? If you knew a child who was

being beaten as John Joe had been, what might your advice be?

- 'There is no place for cautious men in a revolution' (p148). Do you agree?
- John Joe says that, at fifteen, he's 'too old to cry and too young to take part in the Easter Rising' (p153). How might you have reacted had you been assigned duties 'well away from any possible danger'?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. Human Rights Education

Developing empathy and understanding for others is a key feature of human rights education (HRE) today, just as it was nearly 100 years ago in St Enda's. In small groups, consider the divided loyalties of boys such as Roger, and act a scenario where he tries to explain his mixed feelings to a group of his schoolfriends.

### 2. 'I Have a Dream...'

List the goals and aspirations of James Connolly and his Citizen Army and Padraic Pearse and the Volunteers (p131), say where these visions for the future overlapped and mention which, if any, of their dreams were realised.

### 3. Rights and Responsibilities

John Joe says that 'independence is terribly important. It's like growing up; being in charge of your own life' (p134). List the rights conferred by independence and its accompanying responsibilities.

### 4. Home for Christmas?

The House of Commons voted for conscription on the Feast of the Epiphany, also known as Nollaig na mBan or Women's Christmas, a feast still celebrated, especially in rural areas, with freshly baked scones and tea. Read pp75-83 of Bidy White Lennon's *Best of Irish Festive Cooking* (ISBN 978-0-86278-930-5). Make some buttermilk scones and serve them to the class.

### 5. Part of the Bigger Picture

The twenty-third of April, St George's Day, is now celebrated as World Book Day, the date of Shakespeare's birthday. It is also the date on which the most recent Irish census was taken. Discuss the huge changes that have taken place since the IRB chose this date for the uprising ninety years ago (p142). See [www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie)

## 6. Online exhibition

'...the Volunteers don't look very professional' (p147). The National Library of Ireland has an exhibition 'The 1916 Rising: Personalities and Perspectives': [www.nli.ie/1916](http://www.nli.ie/1916) This study resource draws almost exclusively upon the collections of the National Library, including its rich holdings of books, newspapers, photographs, drawings, proclamations and manuscript material. Over 500 images have been selected for study and analysis. As part background to the 1916 Rising, the online exhibition looks at John Redmond, the National Volunteers and World War I. Examine some of these photographs and say if you agree that the Volunteers 'have their hearts in their eyes' (p148).

## Unit 6 Easter Week, 1916

### SUMMARY

Once the Pearse brothers have left, John Joe collects Roger and they too set off for Dublin where 'rebels' have occupied the General Post Office and attacked Dublin Castle. The two boys enter the Metropole Hotel without difficulty where they spend the night. The next morning, the first squad of Volunteers arrive to take over the hotel. Martial law is declared. The two boys find food in the larder, before another three little boys arrive to join them, wanting to fight. Searching for food in the streets the next day, John Joe finds a copy of the Proclamation and reads it aloud. The fighting is getting closer, the shelling goes on and on and finally snipers arrive to take up positions in the boys' room. Seven more boys arrive and James Connolly gives pistols to Roger and Conor and John Joe. When Connolly is injured, these three race to act as stretcher-bearers. John Joe meets Pearse who has begun to order people to leave the GPO, and several find refuge over a grocery shop nearby. By Saturday, Pearse has surrendered in order to prevent further deaths. The Volunteers are marched off to await their fate. Within days, the seven signatories of the Proclamation are dead but freedom is now on everyone's lips: they have given Ireland back her soul.

Read pp 159– 217

### DISCUSSION POINTS

- Roger interrupts John Joe as he is thinking about Marcella and how his feelings towards girls have changed (p167). In groups, discuss what he might have said had he finished the sentence
- John Joe is astonished when Roger angrily replies to the desk clerk's dismissive comments about the 'Sinn Féiners' (pp174, 175). Are you surprised that Roger expresses such concern for the 'thousands of people in Dublin who go to bed hungry every night'? Has Roger displayed this side of his character before?
- In his handwritten manifesto, Pearse writes that the men and women 'who have carried the fight this far' have already 'won a great thing. They have redeemed Dublin from many shames, and made her name splendid among the names of cities' (p204). Do you agree with this assessment?
- 'What did we lose when they shot you?' (p215). John Joe addresses this to his memory of his beloved Ardmháistir. Try to answer his question, but first read the author's note (pp218 – 220) and consider in your reply Pearse's educational achievements as well as the events of Easter Week.

### ACTIVITIES

#### 1. The Guns of Easter

'As we pedal into the city, at first everything seems peaceful. Dubliners are enjoying their holiday' (p164). Jimmy Conway in *The Guns of Easter* had expected to spend that day with his uncle at the Fairyhouse races though he was to be disappointed. Read Chapter 6 and 7 and see how Jimmy's mood swings from joy to despair and back again as he walks in Sackville Street on Easter Monday morning.

#### 2. Portrait of an artist, 1929

Jerome Connor was born in 1874 in County Kerry, Ireland. Later, his father sold the farm and the family moved to Massachusetts. Jerome lived and worked in the USA until 1925 when he returned to Ireland. Find out about The Patriot, designed in miniature in 1927, which was to feature a text in Irish 'dedicated, 1932, to the heroes of Easter Week.' The memorial was never realised. But a second bronze was cast from the original plaster in 1991 for the National Gallery of Ireland.

#### 3. From Pillar to Post

John Joe wishes he'd 'been there to hear it! – Padraic Pearse read out the Proclamation of the Irish Republic ...' (p178). In the pamphlet *Step Together – From Pillar to Spire* (ISBN 0-9546150-1-8, OtherWorld Press) the poet Stephen McKenna, who was outside the GPO at the time, is quoted as later saying 'he felt sad for Pearse because the response from the crowd was chilling ... Most were indifferent and went on their way, unaware of the significance of what was about to begin.' Read the full text of the Proclamation (pp11, 12) and imagine how you might have reacted to Pearse's words had you been present.

#### 4. Ninety years on ...

Study the special supplement to mark the Rising's 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary, issued free with *The Irish Times* on March 28<sup>th</sup> 2006. (An online version can be viewed at [www.politicalworld.org](http://www.politicalworld.org)). In these sixteen pages are detailed accounts of the events of each day, with photographs and maps – the full text of the Proclamation is reproduced – and an article outlining how the political parties today lay claim to the 1916 legacy. An accompanying poster features a map on which are marked the main centres of fighting in Dublin, a map first published in a special Irish Times 'handbook' after the Rising.

#### 5. The Long Revolution

In January 2006, President Mary McAleese addressed a conference titled *The Long Revolution: the 1916 Rising in context*. Her words about 'the small band who proclaimed the Rising ... their deaths rise far above the clamour – their voices insistent still'... provoked much comment in newspapers and generated angry debate. The full text is printed in *The Irish Times* January 28 and can be viewed online at [cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/poi/mmca270106.htm](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/poi/mmca270106.htm). Read it, and if possible read the editorials, letters to the editor, and the articles, which followed this speech. Described as 'the President's dreadful speech' by Kevin Myers (*Irishman's Diary*, February 1<sup>st</sup>) and as 'her very thoughtful address in UCC' in a letter printed in the same paper February 4<sup>th</sup>, the reactions were extremely varied. What are your thoughts on her speech?