



Sam Hannigan and the Last Dodo

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Teaching Guide

By Peter Heaney

RATIONALE & THEMES

An unexpected and rare addition to Sam's menagerie challenges her resourcefulness. With the help of her eccentric granny, Nanny Gigg, and the support of her friends Ajay and Ogg, Sam must try to protect a dodo – a bird the rest of the world thinks is extinct – from falling into the cooking pot of the poacher Captain Stinky, and relocate it safely to a remote island in the Indian Ocean.

The themes explored are:

- Conservation
- Taking care of pets
- Friendship
- Loyalty
- Responsibility
- Animal welfare

SUMMARY

Sam Hannigan runs a shelter for animals at Clobberstown Lodge with the help of her granny, Nanny Gigg, her best friend Ajay, and handyman Ogg.

Before he leaves for Irish College in the West of Ireland, Sam's brother Bruno plays a mean trick on her. However, Sam and Ajay plot a reprisal that will leave him red-faced with his new friends at College.

That night, there is a tremendous storm and Sam decides to bring the animals into the safety of the house. Mayhem ensues when a python swallows Nanny Gigg's dentures.

The next morning, they find a strange package on the doorstep along with a cryptic message from Doctor Marjorie Crowe, a long-forgotten schoolfriend of Nanny Gigg's who is now a famous explorer.

An exotic, brightly plumed bird bursts from the box in pursuit of a mango. Ogg identifies it as a dodo, a species that was thought to have gone extinct at least 350 years ago.

Marjorie Crowe's note explains that the dodo is called Desmond and requests that

they babysit him for a few days to protect him from animal poachers.

Sam, Nanny Gigg and Ajay organise excursions to keep Desmond entertained, disguising him from prying eyes while they are outdoors.

With Desmond dressed in a child's dinosaur costume, they all go out for a day at the seaside in Bray. However, as they leave, Desmond's scent is picked up by Captain Stinky, a chef who is notorious for creating exotic dishes from rare animals.

Unaware that Stinky and his henchman Chum are now on Desmond's trail, Sam and Ajay prepare their entries for the local talent competition. Ajay discovers while on stage that Desmond has stowed away in his ventriloquist bag; he is forced to improvise and ends up stealing the show.

Marjorie Crowe contacts Nanny Gigg and they arrange to meet the next morning at Bullock Harbour. Marjorie warns that Captain Stinky is in the area.

That afternoon, when Desmond gets restless, they decide to risk another outing. They disguise him as a young child and take him to a crazy golf course, where Desmond surprises them all by laying an egg. They'll have to call her Desdemona from now on!

Stinky and Chum have followed them to the crazy golf centre, but the gang manage to distract them and flee, barricading themselves into Clobbertown Lodge.

Stinky gets into the house in a 'Trojan pie', but Ajay comes to the rescue using some of the incredible gadgets that Daddy Mike – Sam and Bruno's grandad – left behind when he disappeared years ago.

Nanny Gigg, Ogg, Sam and Ajay pack Desdemona and her egg into their friend Mario's ice-cream van and make for Bullock Harbour. Stinky and Chum follow them, and a final confrontation on the harbour wall

ends with Chum being trapped by Ogg, and Stinky being swallowed by a python. Marjorie's submarine appears and Nanny Gigg, Ajay and Sam hop onboard to relocate Desdemona and her egg safely and secretly back to their natural habitat.

APPROACH

This story is lighthearted and entertaining, bubbling with humour as it explores the consequences of looking after an 'extinct' creature and protecting it from animal hunters; an allegory for how we treat the animals who share our planet.

The guide has been divided into three sections, each with opportunities for imaginative discussion.

Section 1 Desmond the Dodo Pages 6–48

SUMMARY

Sam and her friend Ogg do their morning rounds at Hannigan's Haven, inspecting the animals' cages and corrals. The weather forecast predicts that Storm Gabby is on its way later that day.

Just before her brother Bruno leaves for Irish College, Sam falls victim to one of his pranks. She is rescued by her friend Ajay, and they devise the perfect retaliation: they collapse with laughter as they wave Bruno goodbye with a 'monkey egg' packed in his suitcase.

Ajay decides to sleep over in case Sam needs help with the animals during the storm. Nanny Gigg fortifies the two friends with a delicious selection of mismatched snacks.

A sizzling flash of lightning announces the arrival of Storm Gabby. The animals are terrified, and Sam, Ajay and Ogg shepherd them into the house, where they will shelter until the storm has passed.

Generally, the animals are well behaved, however when Nanny Gigg finds that her dentures are missing, they discover that Priscilla the python has swallowed them. Ajay runs sneezing powder under Priscilla's nose, and she sneezes them out safely!

In the morning, when the storm has passed, they discover that a huge cardboard box has been left on the doorstep with a cryptic message from Nanny Gigg's old schoolfriend, explorer Doctor Marjorie Crowe.

They bring it inside and carefully open it, revealing a large, lively and very colourful bird, who careers around the kitchen chasing a mango that was stowed in the box.

Ogg does a quick reference check and announces that the bird is a dodo, a species from the Indian Ocean that is thought to have gone extinct in the 17th Century.

They must shelter the bird for the weekend, keeping it safe from animal poachers.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read pp7–8:** Hannigan's Haven is home to many domestic and exotic creatures whose owners have abandoned them. Why do people keep pets? Is it fair to keep animals as pets? Why do we keep some creatures as pets and eat others? What is the difference?
- **Read pp13–14:** Bruno likes to play tricks on his sister Sam. Is he being mean? Can playing tricks be a sign of how we feel about each other? Can playing tricks be another way to bully someone? How could you stop this?
- **Read pp28:** The Clobberstown community has organised a talent competition, and many of the young people taking part have large family groups there to support them. Why do parents like to showcase their child's talents? Is this always a good thing? What is the benefit for the child? What happens if the child is shy or doesn't really want to perform?
- **Read pp41–42:** Scientific research suggests that humans were responsible for the extinction of the dodo. Is our influence on the planet generally beneficial or not for other creatures? Do we have a responsibility to prevent animals from becoming extinct? What laws might be effective to protect other species from the dodo's fate?
www.dodobird.net
www.thedodo.com/africas-poaching-crisis-how-do-699797004.html

ACTIVITIES

1. The map: Read p5

King Putt's Krazy Golf have sponsored a useful map of the Clobberstown area.

Can you work in small groups to create a similar map of your local area?

Who would your map be most useful for, and what would be the most important information to include on it?

2. Hannigan's Haven: Read pp7–8

Sam and Nanny Gigg run an animal shelter for strays and abandoned pets. This costs a lot of money, and they need financial assistance to help them continue their work.

Sam and Ajay decide that a poster campaign in their local area might help to let people know why the Haven is important.

Help them design the poster that they will put up around the Clobberstown area.

3. The monkey egg: Read pp17–20

Sam and Ajay convince Bruno that the coconut is a monkey egg, and they persuade him to take it with him to Irish College in the West of Ireland.

How were they able to fool him? Working in small groups, can you identify the traits of Bruno's personality that Sam and Ajay used against him?

4. Cacophony: Read p26

As the animals get settled inside the house, they make a terrible racket.

Working in groups, create a sound file that gives an impression of what the noise sounded like.

You can make the sounds yourself, record them, or use the Internet to find them.
www.zapsplat.com/sound-effect-category/animals/

5. Mum's the word: Read p28

At the talent competition, some of the children are reluctant to perform and seem to be forced by their parents to do a 'party piece'.

What was the most embarrassing thing that you were ever forced to do by your parents?

Make sure to include a description of how you felt.

6. Dodos are colourful: Read pp38–39

When the box is opened, it reveals a beautiful bird with the most vibrant plumage.

The illustration on p39 is in black and white and doesn't show the wonderful colours of the bird. Make a larger copy of the illustration and add colour to bring the drawing alive.

7. I'd like to be: Read p45

Marjorie Crowe had been interested in animals and the environment ever since she and Nanny Gigg were children together in school. When she grew up, she became an explorer.

What are you interested in at the moment? Describe your interests and the careers to which they might lead.

Section 2 One more dodo day Pages 49–92

SUMMARY

The dodo gets bored and starts to create havoc in the confined space indoors. Sam and Nanny Gigg realise that they will have to organise an outdoor excursion for him to exhaust his energies.

Disguising him in Bruno's dinosaur costume, they take a trip to Bray. They walk along the prom, eat some delicious food, and go on the amusements. Nanny Gigg reminisces about her husband, Daddy Mike, who was a remarkable inventor.

Before they leave the seaside, they all enjoy a cone from Nanny Gigg's good friend Mario, who sells ice cream from a van on the seafront.

However, Desmond the dodo's scent is picked up and identified by the notorious animal poacher Captain Stinky, who stealthily attaches himself to their trail.

Once home, Sam and Ajay prepare for the talent competition. Ajay intends to reprise his ventriloquist act. Sam can't think of a suitable idea, so Ajay suggests she uses Priscilla the python in a snake-charming act.

On stage, disaster strikes when the snake's basket falls over and Priscilla tips out, terrifying the audience in the front two rows.

Ajay takes to the stage next and discovers that his dummy has been displaced by Desmond the dodo, who is hiding in his suitcase. Undeterred, he proceeds with his act using the dodo instead of his dummy. He is a sensation and deservedly wins first

prize to thunderous laughter and waves of applause.

Back home, Nanny Gigg receives a transmission from her explorer pal Marjorie Crowe, asking to extend the dodo's stay with them for another day.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read pp68–69:** Captain Stinky delights in eating all sorts of animals. There are many animals that we too enjoy eating. Are we really very different from him? What would happen if everyone we ate less meat? Would we be healthier? Would the planet be a better place? www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetailsKids.aspx?id=2238&np=284&p=335
- **Read pp80–81:** Ajay's act is not very well rehearsed, but the audience think it is hilarious. What does 'funny' really mean? If something is funny for one person, why is it not funny for everyone? What are we saying when we laugh at something or someone? Are we always saying that we like it? Can laughing be unpleasant? How can you tell the difference?
- **Read p89:** Nanny Gigg gets a video call from her friend Marjorie. Their conversation is instantaneous even though they are many miles apart. Modern phones and computers give us the opportunity to talk to a wide and distant group of people. How has this changed the ways we talk to one another? Is it always good to be able to connect with people 24/7?

ACTIVITIES

1. Alliteration: Read p49

The author uses alliteration when he calls the python Priscilla and describes her as poor and petrified. It makes his descriptions lively and more interesting.

In small groups, choose five animals you think are interesting and then describe them using adjectives and adverbs that create an alliteration effect. You can add illustrations to complete your description if you wish.

examples.yourdictionary.com/alliteration-examples-for-kids.html

2. The stroll: Read p56

Both Sam and Nanny Gigg enjoy the excursion to the seaside.

Where was your favourite trip? Describe why you enjoyed it so much. Explain what can be seen and heard there, and what activities there are to do.

You can include how you feel when you

are there and the effect it has on you when you return home. Include an illustration or a picture if you wish.

3. The invention: Read p57

Daddy Mike was an imaginative inventor who created some very unusual gadgets.

If you were able to build a gadget with awesome powers, what would it be?

Describe your invention and explain what it does. You can include a diagram and any warnings that you think are necessary.

You can also describe the first time you used the gadget and the effect that it had. Were you impressed?

4. Mario's ice creams: Read p61

Mario Junior Junior is the third generation of his family to sell ice cream on the seafront.

Unfortunately, he is facing a lot of competition, and business is not as good as it once was.

Sam and Ajay decide to distribute promotional leaflets for his van at school to encourage more people to buy ice cream from him.

They think that his family involvement over three generations is a really interesting fact.

Can you help them design a poster?

5. Delicious: Read p63

Ajay, Sam, Nanny Gigg and Desmond the dodo really enjoy their ice creams. They take lots of time to savour the cool sensation and the taste of the cones.

Write a short poem (Cinquain or Haiku) to describe the pleasure you get from eating your favourite ice cream.

www.poetry4kids.com/lessons/how-to-write-a-cinquain-poem/
www.kidzone.ws/poetry/haiku.htm

6. Captain Stinky: Read pp66–69

Captain Stinky is a notorious animal poacher who is wanted by the police in many countries for his crimes.

Interpol have found out that he has been spotted in Ireland. They email a single sheet international 'WANTED' file and a poster to the Clobberstown Gardaí to warn them.

All the information they have is on the file, and only the most important information is on the poster.

Make a copy of the file and the poster that Interpol sent.

7. The Chronicle: Read pp77–86

The *Clobberstown Chronicle* newspaper has

sent a reporter to write an account of the talent show.

She describes everything that happens on the night, commenting on the quality of the acts and capturing the sense of excitement for the newspaper's readers, including some interesting background information on the best acts.

Can you help her write the report?

www.bbc.co.uk/schoolreport/27697544

8. Health and safety: Read pp78–79

After Priscilla the python is safely returned to the basket, the talent competition can continue.

However, at the end of the show, one of the parents makes a complaint to the hall manager. The manager decides he needs to write a health and safety report about the incident for his supervisor.

Can you help him write the report? What should he include? Was there a risk to the public? Who was responsible? Was every care taken before, during and after Sam's act? What questions should he ask himself, and how can he answer them?

Section 3 Home at last Pages 93–147

SUMMARY

The dodo is being difficult again. They need another excursion, and Sam suggests the newly opened King Putt's Crazy Golf. It sounds exciting, and it is indoors and away from prying eyes.

With Desmond disguised in a duffle coat and a large floppy hat, Nanny Gigg, Sam and Ajay set off.

However, Stinky and his henchman Chum have identified their location and are following them.

A surprise awaits them all on the Egyptian-themed golf course when they discover a newly laid dodo egg and realise that Desmond is in fact female.

They are confronted by Stinky, who wastes no time making his intentions clear: he wants to eat both the dodo and her egg.

Ajay throws scorpions on Stinky and Chum, creating a diversion that allows them to escape home, where they prepare for a siege.

Ajay explores Daddy Mike's inventing shed to see if he can find any useful gadgets.

A soft knock on the door raises tensions. Peeping through the curtains, they see a huge pie sitting on the doorstep.

Suspecting that it may be a 'Trojan pie' – referring to the legendary Trojan horse that had men hidden inside – they open the door very carefully and read the note pinned to it. Suddenly, Stinky and Chum spring from the pie, but with the help of Daddy Mike's inventions they are unceremoniously and quickly repelled.

The next morning, still anxious about what Stinky will do next, the gang are relieved when Ogg, their huge, powerful and resourceful friend, arrives at the door.

They try to figure out how to get the dodo and her egg safely to Bullock Harbour to meet Doctor Marjorie Crowe, and decide to ask Mario Junior Junior, the ice-cream man, to bring them there.

When they are all aboard his ice-cream van, they make a bolt for the harbour. However, Stinky has been watching and sets off in pursuit. After a wild chase, he corners them at the harbour where Chum is pinioned by Ogg with a spectacular axe-throwing display, and Priscilla the python claims Stinky as a snack.

When Marjorie surfaces in her turtle-shaped submarine, Nanny Gigg, Sam and Ajay climb aboard and set off for the Indian Ocean. They deliver the dodo back to her secret island community and watch the egg hatch in safety, realising that this is a secret they can never share.

Meanwhile, at Irish College, Bruno figures out that Sam and Ajay tricked him into thinking the coconut was a monkey egg. He vows to get revenge when he's back in Clobberstown!

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read pp104–106:** An allegory is a picture or a story with a hidden meaning. If Sam and her friends represent the people who are anxious to protect the planet, then what do you think Stinky represents?
- **Read pp122–124:** Sam and the others are excited when they realise the dodo is not extinct, as everyone thought. How are we disadvantaged when a creature becomes extinct? Are there any Irish creatures that might become extinct? Why does our way of life have such an impact on the lives of other creatures? What can we do about it?
www.biodiversityireland.ie/biodiversity-irelands-top-10/10-species-risk-losing/
- **Read p135:** Sam refuses to give the dodo egg to Stinky, explaining that it represents

a second chance for humans to get it right. What does she mean? Where is the balance between what humans need to survive, and what other creatures need to survive? Whose needs should come first?

ACTIVITIES

1. How many ways? Read p5

The gang has decided to visit King Putt's, and Sam has to plan the route. Looking at the map, she sees that there are several possible ways to get there. Calculate how many possible routes there are and create SAT-NAV directions for each of them.

They need to be clever about the route they take, to avoid being detected by Stinky. Explain which way you think they should go.

2. King Putt's: Read pp101–102

After they pay the entrance fee, they are each given a map of the course with all nine holes marked. Each hole has been designed around a theme from Ancient Egypt.

Make a copy of the course map, then name and illustrate each of the holes.

3. Yuck! Read p110

Ajay describes in detail the disgusting experience he had of munching on a snail.

Describe the most revolting thing you have ever eaten. Close your eyes and remember the taste and smell and the experience as you tried to chew and swallow it.

4. The gadget: Read pp117–121

Sam and Ajay use Daddy Mike's gadgets to great effect on Stinky and Chum. If you could borrow one of them for the day, which would you choose and how would you use it?

Write a short description of how you used it and the effects it had.

5. I'm the LAST: Read pp123–124

Desmond is probably the last dodo on the planet. There are many creatures endangered in the world. In Ireland, the red squirrel might become extinct soon.

In small groups, research why the red squirrel is under threat and write a letter to RTÉ to ask them to make a programme on the red squirrel to alert everyone to the danger.

Think carefully about how you would present your argument.

6. Yes, Garda: Read pp128–131

The police have received complaints about two vans driving dangerously near Bullock

Harbour. A patrol car has stopped Stinky.

One of the gardaí questions Stinky, and when she is satisfied, she makes him clean all the ice cream off his windscreen and allows him to continue.

How did he convince her that he was innocent?

In pairs, create and perform the dialogue they might have had.

7. Simple rules: Read p140

There are very few places left in the world that humans have not visited yet.

If you found yourself in such a place, what would you do to make sure you didn't disturb the animals or plants already there?

In small groups, compile a list of 'should do / shouldn't do' suggestions.

8. Paradise: Read p143

When Sam splashes ashore on Dodo Island, she imagines that this is what paradise looks like.

Describe in detail what your vision of paradise would look like.

Class project

Endangered creatures

How do our lifestyles affect our environment? What can we do so that our 'footprint' is less destructive for the creatures who share the planet with us?

Are there endangered animals in Ireland?

www.wwf.org.uk/what-we-do/area-of-work/promoting-sustainable-living

thecircular.org/what-do-we-know-about-irish-endangered-animals/

www.theworldcounts.com/stories/environmental-issues-for-kids

www.christianaid.org.uk/news/new-climate-change-resources-schools-and-small-groups



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