



# The House on Hawthorn Road

ISBN 978-1-78849-090-0  
eBook ISBN 978-1-78849-159-4

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## Teaching Guide

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### RATIONALE & THEMES

This guide has been designed to complement a class reading of the text in a way that brings the text alive whilst also enriching the students' critical abilities. The activities aim to inspire young readers by encouraging them to question the characters' motivations and the overall themes. The guide aims to develop empathy skills, stimulate discussion and encourage readers to dissect literary techniques in fresh and engaging ways. There are also activities designed to hone communication, presentation and literacy skills. This novel deals with some very interesting ideas about time travel its key themes include:

- Loyalty and trust,
- Courage,
- Prejudice and discrimination,
- Family,
- Equality,
- History and legacy.

### SUMMARY

The novel opens in modern day Dublin as Beth tries to adjust to life in Ireland. Her family has moved from London after the death of her beloved Gran and she finds it difficult to settle in to her new school – something which is made even more difficult by the fact that her brother and sister have fitted in just fine. Things get even worse when the class bully decides that Beth is her new target. As if Beth didn't have enough to worry about, a strange boy keeps turning up in her house and messing around with her belongings. Little does she know, things are about to become even stranger...

### Section 1 Settling In Pages 7 – 73

#### SUMMARY

The novel opens with Beth and her family arriving at their new home in Ireland. Change has happened very quickly and Beth is finding it difficult to adjust. She is quiet by nature, probably because the rest of her family all have so much to say. Life at school is a nightmare; not only is Beth not making any friends, but her classmates are being very mean to her, calling her names and making her miserable. At home, things aren't much better and they become even worse when a strange boy appears in her bedroom and starts messing around with her things. Beth decides to try to trap him and find out where he comes from – but when she does, she can't believe what's happening. Robbie is from the past – somehow there's a tunnel between two different time periods hidden in the walls of 3 Hawthorn Road.

#### DISCUSSION POINTS

- Read pp.5-10.** What are your first impressions of Sylvie, Beth's mum? What sort of person is she? Is she the sort of person who could understand a shy son or daughter? Why?
- Read p.12-13.** Beth is angry with her brother as he gets a lift to school. Is it his fault his mother drives him to school? How do you think he feels about being singled out for special treatment? What do you think he might say to his sister? What advice would you give Beth about her behavior towards her brother?
- Read p.28.** Jess's reaction to the mysterious activity in Beth's room is that there might be a poltergeist. Do you know what a poltergeist is? Do you think it could be this? Do you believe in ghosts?

Why do you think some people do?

- Read p.33.** To help her with her problems at school, Beth says "she'd love an up-to-date novel about a girl having a horrible time at a new school." Why do you think this is? Do you think reading books can be helpful when things are difficult in life? Why do you think this is?
- Read pp. 42-43.** What do you think of Jess's plan? What would you do differently? Have you any ideas on who the boy is?
- Read pp.53-55.** When he's invisible, Robbie likes to try and scare Beth. What would you do if you were invisible for a day? Why?
- Read p. 72.** How do you think Beth can explain what has happened? What would you say if you visited another period in time?

#### ACTIVITIES

### 1. Character Sketches

What are our first impressions of the Boffin family? Draw an outline of each member of the family and label it with adjectives that you think best describe them – try to use adjectives for their personalities and adjectives for their physical appearance. You will be adding to this as the novel develops, so don't fill each outline up! *Extension: Can you find quotes in the text to prove why the adjectives you have chosen are accurate? Add these to your character sketches.*

### 2. First Day of School

In Chapter Two, all three of the Boffin children start at their new schools. Can you remember your first day at school? Was there anything you were worried about? Did your worries come true? What happened? In pairs or small groups, create a five-minute podcast script for children about to have their first day at a new school. Try to keep

it light-hearted – maybe add some funny stories and anecdotes.

### 3. Asking For Advice

Beth is finding it very difficult to make friends at school, especially as some of the other girls are being very mean to her. What advice would you give her to help her make more friends? Are there any changes she could make to her behaviour? Do you think she is right when she worries that Aisha might think she is weak for not standing up to Grainne? In pairs or small groups, one person should take the role of Beth and the other the role of someone offering advice. Act out a conversation where Beth asks for some advice on how to settle in to her new school.

### 4. Family Meals

Is it important to eat together as a family? Why? Beth complains that food is either sandwiches or takeaways. What simple meals could they create as a family that would be healthy and nutritious and easy for Jess, Cormac or Beth to make if their parents were busy. Work in small groups to create a little recipe book of a week's meals for a family of five. Try visiting supermarket websites like Sainsbury's or Tesco for ideas.

### 5. Time Travel

Beth follows Robbie and ends in a different time period. Why do you think time travel is so interesting? If you could go back in time, where would you go? Why? What would you do? Imagine your school has been given a time machine and your class is allowed to use it – but only once. Write a speech to deliver to the rest of the class persuading them that your idea is the best. Use as much persuasive language as you can – try to think about what might persuade your classmates to choose your idea.

### 6. Robbie's Character

When she visits Robbie in his home, Beth learns more about the sort of boy he is. He seems to be two different people – the naughty boy that annoys everyone and something else. What are your impressions of him? Write a character study of the sort of boy he is, making sure you use and explain at least five quotes from the book so far. *Extension: Why do you think he is so naughty?*

## Section 2 Life Swap Pages 73 - 159

### SUMMARY

Beth's situation has grown even more desperate. Grainne O'Reilly is making her life miserable at school and Robbie is making things difficult at home. Worst of all, she has no one to talk to – until Jess comes with her through the wall into the 1950s. Although she's glad to have someone to share the adventure with, Beth suspects that Jess is more interested in Robbie's handsome brother Jack than hanging out with her sister. Beth's dad falls ill and is rushed to hospital. While her mother goes with him, the three siblings take another trip back in time. Beth's friendship with Robbie develops and they soon end up helping each other with their problems. However, things take a turn for the worse when Robbie's family follow him through the wall and end up trapped in the modern world.

### DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read p.74.** Jess reveals to Beth that she's miserable. Did you expect her to be so sad? Why do you think people hide their true feelings about things? Is this a good thing? Why do you think it might be important to be honest about your feelings with people you trust?
- **Read pp. 79-81.** What do you think of Gran's advice? Do you have someone who always gives good advice? How do you think Jess feels when Beth agrees to help? Do you think this will help their relationship?
- **Read pp. 91-93.** What do you know about dyslexia? Why is it so important that people with dyslexia are supported at school? Why do you think Robbie's teachers may not understand? What do you think Beth has planned to help him?
- **Read p. 102.** Beth's dad is about to tell her about how he dealt with bullies before he falls sick. What do you think he is going to say? How do you think people should deal with bullies?
- **Read p. 109.** Do you think it is a good idea for Beth to bring Robbie to school with her? What sort of things might happen? What do you think Robbie will make of her school? What sort of things would you tell him to look out for in a modern school environment?
- **Read pp. 117-119.** Do you think it is a good idea for Beth to help Robbie in his exams? Why is it important that people

who need it are offered the use of a scribe in exams? How would you explain it to Robbie's teachers?

- **Read pp. 125-128.** What is Robbie's school like? Does it seem like somewhere you would want to go to school? Why? How is it different from school nowadays? Which do you prefer? Why? If you could change one thing about modern school, what would it be?
- **Read pp. 145-146.** Robbie's family end up in the modern world and are amazed by the things in Beth's room – particularly her mobile phone. Think about your own bedroom and home. What other things do you think someone from the 1950s would be amazed by? Why?
- **Read pp. 150-156.** What are your impressions of Robbie's mother? Do you think her life would be improved if she lived in the modern day? Why?

### ACTIVITIES

#### 1. Sisters

On pages 73–77, Beth thinks about all the things that are making her miserable. She is upset that she is no longer close with her sister and has no-one to talk to. What do you think would help the sisters become close again? Imagine you are Beth. Write a letter to Jess explaining how you feel. Make sure you mention your surprise at hearing how upset and unhappy Jess has been.

#### 2. Drama

What do you think happens when Cormac, Jess and Beth visit Robbie and his siblings on page 105? Don't forget this is Cormac's first trip so think about his initial reactions. Work in small groups and create a script of what happens. What sort of thing do you think families did in the evenings before television? How do you think Beth, Jess and Cormac will react to family life in a different time? Will they let the others see them or will they stay hidden? In your groups, practise performing your script to show the rest of the class.

#### 3. Revenge on Grainne

Unsurprisingly, Robbie makes fun of Grainne, pulling her chair away and tying her laces together so Grainne gets in trouble and looks foolish in front of the others. Work in small groups and choose three or four scenes. Freeze frame them. Think about how no one but Beth knows what is going on – how will her facial expressions show this? Remember no one else can see Robbie, so everyone is probably very confused.

## 4. Traffic-Free Zone

On page 125, Beth is surprised by how quiet the roads are as she walks to school with Robbie and his friends. Can you imagine a world without cars? What would it be like? How could people get around? Do you think less traffic is a good thing? Work in small groups to create a map of your local area, but so that other forms of transport are used to get around.

## 5. Bully

For Robbie, it's very simple what Beth needs to do – she needs to stand up to Grainne. Do you think it's that easy? Work in pairs or on your own to create a guide to dealing with bullies. Try and explore why some people might bully others and the sorts of things that students should do to help each other if they notice someone else is being bullied.

## 6. School Meals

While stuck in the cupboard at Robbie's school, Beth wonders about the quality of the school lunches. Why is it so important that schools offer a balanced diet for children at school? Work in small groups to create a healthy menu for school menus for a week. Try and think about how each lunch should contain a balance of different foods and remember that schools operate on a budget.

## Section 3 Trapped in Time Pages 160 - 213

### SUMMARY

After the lightning has destroyed part of the house, Robbie and his family have become trapped in 2019 and find the modern world strange and a bit scary. Isabelle in particular finds the way in which Sylvie behaves to be very different and a bit strange, which causes quite a lot of tensions between the two women. Things are also difficult between Cormac and Robbie and Robbie's need to find out how everything works leads to some expensive breakages. Beth's father comes out of hospital and is surprised to find his house full of strangers. Meanwhile, back in the 1950s, Robbie's father is heartbroken by the disappearance of his whole family. The police are interested in what he knows and he has to convince them that he is not responsible. Robbie accompanies Beth to school, fully visible, and is so angered by Grainne's teasing that he decides to get revenge. But they make a sad and surprising discovery which changes the way they see the school bully.

### DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read pp. 160–63.** Robbie's family are amazed by all the traffic and cars. What do you think life in 2070 would be like? How would we move around? Why do you think Tomi is surprised by the fact that the guards were female and pretty? Were you surprised to read this?
- **Read pp. 179–180.** Robbie reveals to Beth that he is sad that other people don't understand how his brain works. Why do you think he thinks other people believe him to be 'stupid'? What advice would you give him?
- **Read pp. 187–190.** Why do you think Sylvie is upset that Robbie's family have been staying? Do you think she likes Isabelle? Why? What advice would you give her?
- **Read pp. 196–197.** Beth reveals that she admires Robbie and his attitude to other people. Do you think he will be a good influence on her? Why? Do you think it is important to always listen to what other people tell you? How could this make someone unhappy? What advice would you give Beth about being more assertive?
- **Read pp. 205–209.** Why do you think Grainne lied about how rich her family was? Why do you think she didn't tell anyone about her dad? Do you see her in a different way? Do you have any sympathy for her? What do you think Beth should do now that she knows?

### ACTIVITIES

#### 1. Diary Entry

Robbie's mother Isabelle is amazed by the modern world and all the new technologies available. Imagine you are Isabelle. Write a diary entry exploring your thoughts and feelings about the strange new world you have found yourself in. What are your impressions of Beth's mother? Does she seem like a good mother (according to what a 1950s mother would believe)? What is your main concern about your husband stuck in the past?

#### 2. The Role of a Woman

Sylvie and Isabelle have very different views on the qualities of a good wife. How have things changed in the last 100 years? Do a research piece on the changes to women's rights since 1919 and present them to the rest of the class – either in a presentation or by explaining a poster. Try and use a range of interesting photographs from different periods of time. Do you think women have

equal rights now? What still needs to be changed? Write a short persuasive speech as part of your presentation to convince the rest of your class of changes that need to be made to ensure that women across the world are treated equally to men.

#### 3. Robbie

What are our impressions of Robbie? Have they changed as the novel has progressed? Do you think he is a good friend to Beth? Write a long analysis using quotes from the text – make reference to your earlier analysis and comment on the ways in which he has changed.

#### 4. Drama

Robbie and his family have a few days until Beth's father returns home. Work in small groups to act out a few scenes that might take place over these days – for example, Isabelle's surprise at how easy preparing dinner is in 2019 and the others' surprise at different types of technology. What do you think Beth's father's reaction will be to finding these strangers in his home? Freeze frame the scene.

#### 5. Cormac

When explaining their adventures to his father, Cormac gets very excited. What sort of a boy is Cormac? Do you think he likes music? Why? Imagine you are Cormac. Write a diary entry about how life has changed since Robbie's family came to stay and what you want for the future.

## Section 4 Everything Falls Into Place Pages 214 - 302

### SUMMARY

Despite their constant arguments, Robbie is trying to look after Cormac. Just like with Beth, Robbie's presence in the Boffin house has made the younger members of the family learn more about themselves. Across the city, an old man who lives next to Grainne O'Reilly was disturbed by the appearance of Robbie and can't get their meeting out of his mind. Through Grainne, he invites Beth and Robbie to his home. However, he becomes unwell and Robbie and Beth leave – but not before they see a familiar object in the basement. While they're talking about the bike they saw, Jack overhears and insists that they show him. Upon seeing Jack, the old man becomes even more unwell and is taken to hospital. Beth, Robbie and Jack are confused about why the bike is in the old

man's house. Meanwhile, Isabelle decides to try and leave the house, but as she is getting ready, Beth suddenly makes the connection – the old man who lives next to Grainne is Robbie's father, Ron. Everyone gets into the car and heads to the hospital to see him, where he is delighted to see his family. Their reunion is bittersweet – Ron is 108 years old, not the young father they left behind. Isabelle decides to move in with him and Ron returns home to them from the hospital. That evening, something happens and they find themselves back in the 1950s, without saying good bye to their 2019 friends. Beth is missing Robbie desperately, turning up every week to see if he has reappeared. To her surprise, a friendship begins to grow with Grainne.

### DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read pp. 218-219.** Cormac gets more and more upset when Robbie teases him. Why do you think he is so upset? Why do you think he cares so much about what Beth has said about him? Why do you think he attacks Robbie? Do you think this is the answer? What advice would you give Cormac?
- **Read pp. 225-226.** Jess is very interested in Jack, but he seems more interested in cars. Do you think he really cares about her? What advice would you give Jess? What advice would you give Jack?
- **Read p. 230.** Isabelle is too afraid to go outside. What advice would you give her? What sort of things can she expect to see in 2019? What precautions should she take?
- **Read pp.245-251.** What do you think is going on? Who is Ron? Why do you think the others haven't realized this? How would you explain it to them?
- **Read pp. 267-268.** Beth suggests that they ask Ron questions only their father would know the answer to. What sort of questions do you think they could ask? Work with a partner to create your own list of five questions only you would know the answer to.
- **Read pp. 269-270.** Why do you think Sylvie has made soup? What does this suggest about any changes to her personality? Do you think she has changed? Why?
- **Read pp. 277-279.** What sort of changes have Robbie, Dorothea and Jack seen in the world? Which ones do you think are better? Do you think Ron is right when he says that it's better that Jack is being teased by girls? Why?
- **Read pp. 293-294.** What do you think of Dorothea's story and how their time

in 2019 influenced her family? Is there anything here that surprises you? Why?

### ACTIVITIES

#### 1. Ron's Lonely Years

Ron has spent the last sixty or so years searching for his family, imagining he's seen them. Imagine you are Ron being interviewed for a TV appeal to find your family. What would you say to your family to persuade them to come back to you? What sort of things would you say to help them realise how much you miss them?

#### 2. Music

When he plays the tin whistle, Cormac creates 'a melody that made Robbie think of a kite drifting high in the sky on a summer's day.' What's your favourite piece of music? What does it remind you of? How does it make you feel? Write a description of a piece of music – think about how the notes change in pace, how they change in tempo – what emotions do you think the music is creating at different points?

#### 3. Food Description

On page 241, Robbie declares that pizza 'is the most delicious piece of food ever created by God.' What's your favourite food? Why? How would you describe the taste? Write a piece of descriptive writing, focusing in on all the detail – what it looks like on the plate, what it smells like, how it tastes, how it feels when you take the first bite. Try and include one or two examples of similes or metaphors.

#### 4. Analysis of Jack

What sort of person is Jack? Is he a nice person? Do you think he is arrogant? Think about the way he speaks to Jess and Beth. Write up a short character analysis, using quotes from the text to support your ideas.

#### 5. Robbie

Imagine you are Robbie. Write a diary entry about how everything has changed and how you feel about your new school. How do you feel about your father? What are your feelings towards Beth – are you angry with her?

#### 6. Goodbye

Imagine Beth and Robbie got a chance to say goodbye to one another. What would they have said? What things would they have learned from one another? How have their lives changed from meeting one another? In small groups, create a script and act it out in

front of the rest of the class.

#### 7. Hotseating Grainne O'Reilly

Were you surprised that Grainne invited Beth to her house? Why do you think she did this? Why do you think she behaved in the way that she did? Create a list of questions for Grainne. One person should imagine they are Grainne and answer these questions in the way she would.

#### 8. Lasting Legacy

Imagine you are Beth. Write a reply to Robbie's letter.