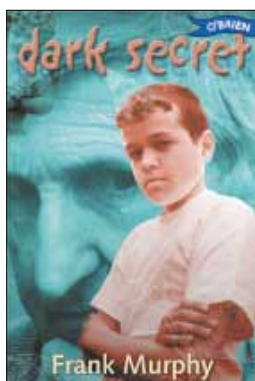


DARK SECRET



by Frank Murphy

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David's mother is dead, and his father, wrapped up in his own grief, spends almost every night in the pub. At thirteen, David has to be strong, to be brave, like his mother had been. But Dad doesn't notice David's efforts to hold the family together: the drinking continues, he loses his job and one afternoon Davy finds him unconscious on the floor. With his dad in hospital, the neighbouring Branagans do everything in their power to make David's stay with them as comfortable as possible, but Davy longs to feel part of a real family again and decides to visit the grandfather he has never seen. Batt Quilty is a man of few words but Davy slips easily into his grandfather's routine, helping out on the small farm. The dark secret which has haunted Batt for many years is only revealed when Davy goes to the local school and, hearing the taunts and jeers, determines to get to the bottom of the mystery. In doing so, he becomes ever closer to his grandfather and also re-establishes the family connection that had been severed through years of suspicion and mistrust.

LANGUAGE – ENGLISH

◆ Vocabulary extension: e.g. engrossed, acquitted, disparagingly, sentinel, arcane, taunt, balked, agitated, petulantly, retaliation, inglorious, callous, redundant, tumult.

◆ Metaphor and simile: e.g. 'his mind was a dark room of despair' (p.11); 'glens that looked liked hump-backed camels marching east' (p.114); 'lost in a muddle of mind-pictures' (p.121); 'trying to open a can of beans with a lollipop stick' (p.132).

◆ Colourful writing: Batt was 'a miser with words ... didn't use two words where one would do' (p.33). Take a descriptive passage from this novel and rewrite using fewer adjectives and adverbs.

◆ Letter-writing: The letter from David's dad opened up old wounds (pp. 67–8). Write the reply David might have sent immediately on receipt of that letter. Might David's letter be different if he waited a week to reply?

◆ Debate: 'The past is a clean slate' (p.45). Discuss this theory, and argue the case from the point of view of 'the local oddities'.

◆ Discussion: When David first hears Batt reciting the twenty-third psalm, he dismisses it (p.28). Explore his subsequent attitude to the 'quaint words and rhythms' (p.125) and suggest reasons for his change of opinion.

◆ Discussion: Read carefully Batt's explanation of what the psalm means to him (pp. 124–125) and then read the actual words of the psalm (p.158). What do the words mean to you?

◆ Discussion: 'All the meaning isn't in the words alone. You can convey a lot in the way you say things.' Do you agree with Batt that intonation and gesture often have as much impact on the listener as content?

◆ Diary-writing: Josie was the only member of her family not on the road waving goodbye (p.156). Write the diary entry that Josie might have made later that afternoon.

◆ Creative: 'A rat or a thrush having a nightmare' (p.105). Write a paragraph describing such a nightmare.

◆ Creative: List some of the 101 reasons that David might have had for wanting to go back to civilisation (p.37).

◆ Creative: 'If that ruin could tell its secrets, what would it say?' (p.78). Outline some of the secrets of Tim the Fiddler's old house.

LANGUAGE – GAEILGE

◆ Logainmneacha: m.sh. Tubber/Tobar; Knocklee/Cnoc Liath; Doolough/Dubh Loch nó Loch Dubh. Examine other placenames in the novel and try to give Irish versions. Explore the origins and meanings of some placenames in your own locality.

◆ Seanfhocal: Is mar a chuirfidh tú san earrach a bhainfidh tú san fhómhar.

SESE – GEOGRAPHY

◆ Human environments: people and communities. Learning about people who live and work in contrasting areas. David was brought up in an urban area and thought the countryside 'was so open and free, so different from the city where he had been surrounded by houses and people' (p.27). Explore how people in these areas depend on each other.

◆ Human environments: people at work. Exploring and investigating the economic activities of farmers (pp. 27, 30–33, 50, 54, 65.) Examine the influence of soils and other factors on farming – why was sheep-farming popular in the locality? Explore the work of the farmer through the year, in particular the description of lambing (pp. 117–121). The Agri-Aware website www.agriaware.ie contains teaching resource material and a fun quiz in the Agri Focus section. Contact Agri Aware, Waverley Office Park, Old Naas Road, Dublin 12. Also, examine the importance of services in the lives of people: shopkeepers, solicitors, an Garda Síochána are all necessary to the community.

◆ Natural environments: local environment. Investigating the effects of weather and other seasonal changes on life in the countryside (p.86); investigating aspects of features such as streams, rivers, valleys, etc. (pp. 29–35) and the effects of snow on animals (p.86).

◆ Weather, climate and atmosphere: weather observations. Collect weather lore, especially local traditions and knowledge – Batt was able to predict frost by examining the sky p.118.

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SPHE

◆ Myself: developing self-confidence. Becoming more independent and autonomous;

making complaints and seeking redress; trusting your own judgement. Davy had to take responsibility for himself because of his mother's death and father's illness; he also had to cope with hostility towards his grandfather.

◆ Myself: taking care of my body. Distinguishing between legal and illegal substances, identifying those most commonly used, and examining the effects; exploring some of the reasons why people smoke, drink alcohol or misuse any kind of substance. Davy's father eventually lost his job and was hospitalised due to dependence on alcohol.

◆ Myself: growing and changing. Identifying and discussing the changes that are experienced in growing from child to adult: changing interests and leisure activities (pp. 30, 50); developing a widening circle of friends (pp. 50, 54, 59–60); coping with transfer from primary to post-primary school (pp. 49, 54, 60).

◆ Myself: growing and changing. Feelings and emotions: discussing how to express and cope with various feelings; choosing the appropriate time to talk (pp. 127–129); talking rather than prolonging a conflict by remaining silent (pp. 140–142, 146–149).

◆ Myself: safety and protection. Identifying situations that may threaten personal safety: understanding bullying and its effects and recognising that bullying is always wrong (pp. 61–63, 70–73); keeping a difficult secret (pp. 78–85, 96–98); assessing how risks may be minimised and the implications of taking risks (pp. 105–107).

◆ Myself: making decisions. Distinguishing between assumption, inference, fact, rumour and opinion in making a decision. Davy had to make important decisions throughout the book: leaving the Branagans; trusting Josie and others; accepting that he might have to spend part of his time with Jacinta and his dad.

◆ Myself and others: myself and my family. Examining some factors that can affect family life: addiction, material prosperity, illness, bereavement, a change in lifestyle.

◆ Myself and others: my friends and other people. Exploring the differences between boy-and-girl and same-sex friendships; considering problems that can arise in relationships and how these can be handled.