

THE LOST ORCHARD



by Patrick Deeley

ISBN: 0-86278-651-7 £4.99pb 172 pages

Paul Duggan lives with his parents in a small, rural village on the edge of the beautiful and mysterious fastness known as the Callows. Life is calm and tranquil in 1960s Darkfield, although Paul is worried that any possible involvement, however innocent, with local bully Raymie will prevent his acquiring the special centenary edition of his favourite comic, *Captain Valour*. However, he soon has more important concerns and, as planes begin to fly over the village, the rumours of an open-cast mine become a reality which gradually divides the community. Paul's growing friendship with local eccentric Magpie, an outsider like himself, has a profound effect. And as metallic dust begins to fall on hay meadows, bogs and marshes, Paul is forced to make choices that affect home and school life. In the manner of the heroic Captain Valour, Paul and Magpie confront their enemies and alter the perceptions of the community forever.

LANGUAGE – ENGLISH

- ◆ Vocabulary extension: e.g. respite, countered, resonance, impending, augment, espied, manoeuvre, wistful, ruckus, spatial, chastisement, misdemeanour, incubate, festooned, reproachfully.
- ◆ Colourful writing: e.g. 'tearing away like an old coat' (p.43); 'a dragon's liquid eye, reflecting back the clouds and the blue sky' (p.39); 'all blow like a sheet on a clothesline' (p.51); 'worried thin with ill-health' (p.120).
- ◆ Sustained description: e.g. the description of the wildlife in the Callows (pp. 38–40, 55, 71–72); the initial changes brought about by the heavy machinery (pp. 142–144).
- ◆ Discussion: Raymie explains that if he beats Paul in a road-snoozing competition he'll 'be repaired ... won't be a sucker no more' (p.79). Discuss the importance of his 'tough guy' image to Raymie and suggest other, safer, ways for him to have saved face.
- ◆ Discussion: Paul asks Magpie's advice about the road-snoozing competition. When he tells Magpie about the bullying and explains that he wants to look after his own 'patch of earth', Magpie says they're both 'the same kind of fool' (pp. 87–88). What advice might you have given Paul had he sought it?
- ◆ Discussion: Paul realised that he had taken a stand when he agreed to put up the posters. He said it 'seemed natural to be on Magpie's side ... he was an underdog after all' (p.77). Consider carefully both sides of the debate and decide which side you might have taken. If you had agreed with Magpie, would you have agreed to intervene directly, as Paul did, by writing slogans and sticking up posters?
- ◆ Creative: Paul and his family watched the locals as they were interviewed on TV (pp. 64–65). Write the piece that you might give, live to camera, if you had been present and asked your opinion of the proposed development **or** write the rest of the interview between Magpie and the reporter (p.67).
- ◆ Creative: Paul says he was 'hoping to gain some kind of insurance by talking it all out' (p.20). Have you ever tried a similar tactic with

parent/guardian or teacher? Write a short paragraph, factual or other, detailing your efforts.

◆ Further research: At the beginning of the book, Raymie is in sixth class, struggling with his reader (p.9), yet on page 78 we learn that he'll 'be spendin' another year in that bleddy school ...' Find out more about the primary school system in the 1960s and discuss the various options open to Raymie at the end of sixth class. Contact the Irish Museum of Education, 96 Upper Rathmines Road, Dublin 6 (Tel: +353 1 4970033).

◆ Further research: Cora tells Paul that her mother could 'put the Evil Eye' on Raymie and his friends (p.11) and Mrs Delaney also rejoices in the unofficial local title of 'Wise Woman of Darkfield' (p.12). What effect and what power might Mrs Delaney's encyclopaedic knowledge of herbs have on an isolated rural population? Compare Mrs Delaney's reputation with that of Dymphna in Siobhan Parkinson's *Four Kids, Three Cats, Two Cows, One Witch (maybe)*. You might like to do some research about the ill-treatment of 'witches' or women with healing powers throughout history.

SPHE

- ◆ Myself: self-awareness. Recognising and appreciating that each person is a unique individual and that this individuality is expressed in many different ways: through interests and activities pursued, lifestyle, beliefs, personal attitudes and principles held. Magpie is introduced as 'an old, old man, with white and black streaked hair ... proud and ancient and very strange' (p.16). Find examples throughout the book which express Magpie's individuality.
- ◆ Myself: developing self-confidence. Developing further the ability to express personal opinions, thoughts and ideas; thinking about and commenting critically and constructively on the views of others; becoming more independent and autonomous. At first, Paul has to do a 'courage check' (p.39) to cross the Callows by himself, but later he announces that he is 'going across the Callows' and his father doesn't argue (p.70). His ability

to think critically about new thoughts and ideas is developed throughout the book.

- ◆ Myself: growing and changing. Identifying and discussing the changes that are experienced in growing from child to adult: increasing personal and community responsibility. Paul increasingly felt the need to play an active role in Magpie's campaign (pp. 74–77), and felt 'guilty' when the campaign moved on without him (p.135).
- ◆ Myself: safety and protection. Discussing a variety of risky situations and behaviour and evaluating how these risks may be avoided and the implications of taking risks: Paul felt obliged to protect his 'own patch of earth', which was the road he walked every day, to and from school (p.88). His chosen method was, to say the least, dangerous. Discuss the implications of Paul's risk-taking and say if the end result outweighed the possible consequences.
- ◆ Myself: making decisions. Exploring and examining critically the factors and levels of thought that influence decisions and choices: impulse, parental opinions, peer and media influences, values and beliefs. Which, if any, of these factors most influenced Paul's decision to participate actively in Magpie's campaign against the mining development?
- ◆ Myself and others: my friends and other people. Exploring the importance of friendships and interacting with others and realising that making and changing friends is part of the natural process of growing up. Recognising, discussing and understanding bullying and its effects: what behaviour constitutes bullying, the effects of bullying on self and others. Cora and Magpie each have, in their different ways, a profound effect on Paul's personality and character development. Discuss.
- ◆ Myself and the wider world: developing citizenship. Recognising and exploring the positive contributions made to the local community by various community groups and individuals; appreciating the environment and developing a sense of individual and community responsibility in caring for the Earth and being custodians of the Earth for future generations. Read the Epilogue and consider the contribution of Magpie and AMID.