

RED HUGH

by Deborah Lisson

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When she became Queen of England in 1558, Elizabeth, realising that England had little real power in Ireland outside the Pale, made every effort to bring the Irish fully under English control. Those families who rebelled were dispossessed and their lands granted to English people who were loyal to the Crown. By 1587 only the province of Ulster remained largely free of English control. The O'Neills of Tyrone and the O'Donnells of Donegal were the most powerful families in Ulster. When it appeared that they might form an alliance, the Lord Deputy decided to ensure the O'Donnells' loyalty by capturing their chief's son and possible successor, Red Hugh. There followed his four long years of captivity in Dublin Castle. This is Red Hugh's story, one of fear, one of loneliness and of self-doubt, but also a story of courage and resolve, a gripping tale of treachery, loyalty and the constant desire for freedom.

LANGUAGE – ENGLISH

- ◆ Vocabulary extension: Magnanimity, mendacity, sepulchral, perfidious, mollified, incumbent.
- ◆ Hiberno-English: E.g., 'and he after hearing' (p.12), 'supper is preparing' (p.17), 'I'm killed entirely' (p.18), 'wouldn't I be dead by now and you not fetching me down ...' (p.117).
- ◆ Descriptive writing: E.g., '... sea lifting and dropping with gut-wrenching monotony' (p.35), '... nose swollen like a piece of bread dough' (p.33), 'writhed like a maggot on a griddle' (p.208).
- ◆ Imagery: E.g., 'The English queen is as cruel and grasping as the Morrighu ...' (p.89), 'If Perrot had resembled a bull, then Fitzwilliam ... was a fox, nervous and fussy ...' (p.81).
- ◆ Creative: Write a short piece describing Red Hugh's thoughts and fears as he waited with Art for the return of their guide (pp.157–160).
- ◆ Creative: Red Hugh escaped by using the privy shaft (p.153). How might he have escaped four centuries later?
- ◆ Discussion: While many authors of historical fiction choose to place imaginary characters in actual events, the books *Red Hugh*, *Strongbow* and *Brian Boru* are based on real historical characters and happenings. Discuss the limitations and possibilities this latter approach might present for the author.

LANGUAGE – GAEILGE

- ◆ Logainmneacha: M.sh., Tír Eoin/ Tír Eoghain, or Eoghan's territory; Tír Conaill/Tír Chonaill, named after Eoghan's brother, Conall, now Dún na nGall (Donegal) meaning Fort of the Foreigners. Explore placenames in your area.
- ◆ Ainmneacha: M.sh., Dónal Gorm, Ferdoragh nó Fear Dorcha, Iníon Dubh, an Domhnallach, Ard Rí, cenél Chonaill/ sliocht Chonaill; tánaiste. Explore old ways of naming people before use of surnames **or** when all people in a district had the same clan name. How did they identify people? Try inventing a naming system for your class without the use of surnames. Use Irish or English.

- ◆ Caitheamh aimsire: Ficheall (lth.44, 94), brandubh (lth.94).
- ◆ Beannachtaí/mallachtaí: M.sh., A Dhia, A Chríost.
- ◆ Seanfhocal: *Cad a dhéanfaid mac an chait ach luch a mharú?* Discuss this Irish proverb while analysing Hugh mac Ferdoragh's comment that 'a weasel doesn't change its nature' (pp.55–56).
- ◆ Meath na Gaeilge: Explore the anglicisation policy of the Tudors and their viceroys (pp.46, 84).

SESE – HISTORY

- ◆ Local studies: Games and pastimes in the past. Becoming familiar with aspects of the history of games and sports in ancient times: Hurling (pp.150–151); exploring aspects of the leisure interests and games of people in the past: House visiting and storytelling, music and dancing (pp.23–24, 190–193).
- ◆ Life, society, work and culture in the past: Life in medieval towns and countrysides in Ireland and Europe. Becoming familiar with aspects of the lives of the people: Homes (pp.17, 23, 116–117, 164), languages and literature (pp.40, 84, 94), faith, beliefs and religious practices (pp.75–79, 81–84, 95), relationships of chieftains and the clans (pp.14, 20–21, 46, 56, 73, 193, 198). For information on the O'Donnell clan, contact vodonnell@eircom.net or view the website at <http://homepage.eircom.net/~vod>
- ◆ Fieldwork: Visit Donegal Castle in Donegal town. For further information contact Dúchas [www.heritageireland.ie]. **Also**, arrange a visit to the Birmingham Tower, Chapel Royal and State Apartments, all in Dublin Castle.

SESE – GEOGRAPHY

- ◆ Human environments: County, regional and national centres. Becoming aware of the location of the counties of Ireland, some of their towns and cities, the origins and geographical significance of their placenames. Children plot the journeys of Red Hugh, using map of Ireland (p.6).

- ◆ Natural environments: Land, rivers and seas of Ireland. Becoming familiar with the names and locations of some major natural features in Ireland and with the relationship of these features with elements of the built environment (pp.43, 119–121, 150–158).

SPHE

- ◆ Myself: Growing and changing. Feelings and emotions, discussing and practising how to express various feelings in an appropriate manner. Discuss the effectiveness of the Earl of Tyrone's dissembling (p.52), and Red Hugh's rages or tempers (p.32, 100).
- ◆ Myself: Making decisions. Recognising that opportunities to exercise choice can increase as responsibilities are accepted and as the trust of others is earned. Discuss Red Hugh's reluctant and gradual acceptance of responsibility (pp.169, 208, 210), and his realisation that 'bravery without brains' is a 'dangerous virtue' (p.203).
- ◆ Myself and others: Relating to others. Examining the various ways in which language can be used to isolate and discriminate against people. Discuss the insulting expressions used by the Irish captives, e.g., 'as black as an Englishman's guts' (p.104), 'as tight as the truth in a Saxon's mouth' (p.107), and also Fitzwilliam's arrogant belief that 'to speak English is to be civilised' (p.84).

MUSIC

- ◆ Listening and responding to music. Listen carefully to the words and music of the songs 'Follow Me Up to Carlow' (in *Folksongs and Ballads of Ireland, Vol. II*, Ossian Publications) and 'O'Donnell Abú' (in *Irish Songbook*, Oak Publications), which tell the stories of Fiach MacHugh O'Byrne and Red Hugh respectively. Does the strong rhythmic beat in each song prompt particular emotions? Discuss the use of rousing ballads to inspire political feelings and actions.