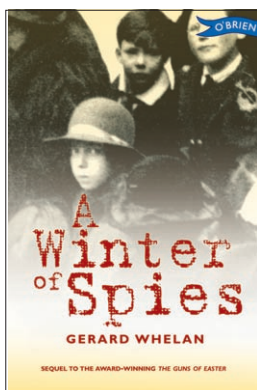


A WINTER OF SPIES

by Gerard Whelan

ISBN: 0-86278-566-9 • €6.95 pb • 192 pages



'Real life is a lot of things, but simple isn't one of them.' *A Winter of Spies* is two books in one: the first an accurate depiction of life during the darkest days of the War of Independence in Dublin, the other a portrait of the maturing of a young girl. Sarah Conway experiences the usual frustrations of growing up, denied by her parents the responsibility and freedom she feels is her due. But in the course of the book she learns that in times of mortal physical danger responsibility and freedom can have costs that include the lives of others, including those for whom she cares most deeply. A story of family and individual growth set against a background of chilling violence and betrayal.

LANGUAGE – ENGLISH

- ◆ Vocabulary extension: Defiled, jaunty, citation, to elicit, listless, rueful, furtive, vapours.
- ◆ Descriptive writing: E.g., 'eyes of a killer ... eyes as cold as stones' (p.14), '... momentary smile ... like a light going on in a dark room' (p.94).
- ◆ Discussion: 'A family clearing up a mess and starting over – that was history for you' (p.188). Children analyse this statement and suggest alternative definitions.
- ◆ Discussion: 'When people turn their backs on friends out of fear the country really is lost' (p.151). Children examine the different attitudes to war of family and friends, their different perspectives (pp.36, 66) and say why they think the statement true or false.
- ◆ Creative: Children write Sarah's diary for the period, noting her changing perceptions.
- ◆ Creative: Having perhaps first examined contemporary newspaper reports from the *Irish Times*, *Irish Independent* and *Freeman's Journal* (available on microfilm in the National Library of Ireland, Kildare St, Dublin), children write an eye-witness account of the atrocity witnessed by Sarah and Jimmy (pp.78–81).
- ◆ Poetry: Contrast the work of WB Yeats with that of Francis Ledwidge, Wilfred Owen, Rupert Brooke and other poets of the Great War and discuss their perceptions of war, comparing nationalistic fervour with rejection of war.
- ◆ Visit War Memorial Gardens, Islandbridge, Dublin, to see inscription from a poem by Rupert Brooke.

SESE – HISTORY

- ◆ Local studies: Buildings in my locality. Exploring some features of the local environment such as streetscape (Sackville St, p.75), local canal (p.23), railways (Kingsbridge,

p.17), important buildings (GPO, pp.75, 96). Investigating maps/photographs of sites then and now, purpose of construction, elements which have changed and the reasons why (e.g., tenements to modern apartments) and the lives of people in these places over time.

- ◆ Local studies: My locality through the ages. Becoming familiar with important events in the history of Dublin city, setting local figures or events in the national and international context, collecting ballads, stories and traditions relating to these events.

- ◆ Story: Stories from the lives of people in the past. Becoming aware of the lives of ordinary women, men and children from different social, cultural and religious backgrounds. Discuss Sarah's realisation that 'history was herself ... her Ma baking in the kitchen' (pp.117–188), and the changing fortunes of the Ryans (p.70) and the Conways (p.32–33).

- ◆ Eras of change and conflict: World War I. Becoming familiar with the ways in which the everyday lives of people changed, conflicts in people's thoughts and beliefs, the reactions of people to their experiences and the long-term effect of changes and conflicts. Discuss Da's reflections on what the Great War had been about (p.18), Connolly's thoughts on those who had fought (p.97) and Sarah's on those who had survived (p.109).

- ◆ Politics, conflict and society: 1916 and the foundation of the State. Acquiring some knowledge of the major personalities, e.g., Michael Collins (pp.92–106, 171–180), and events and developments (pp.16–18, 40, 60–64, 189–191) in this period, and discussing the motivations and actions of different individuals and groups.

- ◆ Fieldwork: Visit the Road to Independence exhibition at the National Museum of Ireland, Kildare St, Dublin (Tel: 01-677 7444).

SPHE

- ◆ Myself: Self-identity. Recognising and appreciating that each person is a unique individual and that this is expressed through interests and activities pursued, beliefs, personal attitudes and principles. Discuss Sarah's growing awareness that the different attitudes of her family to war were equally valid and were determined by experience, by age and by gender.

- ◆ Myself: Growing and changing. Identifying and discussing the changes that are experienced in growing from child to adult. Discuss Sarah's initial 'bloodthirsty talk' (pp.38–42), her acceptance that 'she didn't feel so adult any more' (p.13), her 'first steps into the adult world' (p.15), her sense that 'the world she knew had shifted away from her ... nearly a stranger in her own life' (p.145) and the realisation that 'the adult world was a complicated place. She'd join it soon enough' (p.187).

- ◆ Myself and others: Myself and my family. Discussing changes in family expectations as a child grows and matures. Discuss Sarah's increasing independence and conflicting opinions, with particular reference to her thoughts on pp.38, 58, 59.

- ◆ Myself and the wider world: National, European and wider communities. Becoming aware of elements of own cultural heritage and traditions: Music, literature, language and folklore. Beginning to explore the concept of democracy: Role of the Oireachtas and the Constitution, role of elections, equal rights.

- ◆ **Read also:** *Revolutionary Woman, My Fight for Ireland's Freedom* by Kathleen Clarke, and *Markievicz, The Rebel Countess* by Mary Moriarty and Catherine Sweeney.