



# THE LOST ORCHARD

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PATRICK DEELEY

## Teaching Guide

By Liz Morris

### RATIONALE AND THEMES

This is a sensitive and thought-provoking story, which deals with the hopes and fears of a small rural community in mid-1960s Ireland and the courage required by those who make a stand or dare to be different. It introduces and develops other universal themes that will appeal to students in the senior classes of primary schools and junior classes in second-level schools, such as:

- Environmental awareness
- School and life in rural communities
- Bullying
- Friendship
- Respect for the wisdom of the elderly
- Developing self-awareness and confidence

### SUMMARY

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 their community forever.

### APPROACH

For the purposes of this exploration, the novel has been divided into four units, each of which contains suggested discussion points and language-based activities. Website and other useful addresses for further research and development are listed where relevant.

## UNIT 1 ACROSS THE CALLOWS

### SUMMARY

Having been promised a copy of the centenary issue of his favourite comic on condition that he avoids trouble, Paul Duggan is anxious to avoid confrontation with thirteen-year-old Raymie. But, having publicly humiliated the bully with his superior vocabulary, he is reluctantly forced to depend on younger Cora Delaney. Cora, who gradually convinces him of the effectiveness of 'power words', proves a strong and able ally, but Paul continues to consider himself 'an outsider', like his hero, Captain Valour. He is drawn to the other village 'outsider', the wise but eccentric Magpie. When planes begin to appear in the skies over Darkfield, Paul crosses the beautiful but dangerous Callows in search of answers. What he learns surprises and excites him, and he leaves Magpie armed with his first power word.

Read pp.9–48

### DISCUSSION POINTS

- Magpie is described as 'a pagan, pure and simple', who wouldn't enter the house if the priest were within (p.16). Consider the implications of such an attitude in the Ireland of the 1950s. What, if anything, does this tell us about Magpie?
- Cora believes that brains and not brawn got them out of the scrape with Raymie, but Paul says that that was 'an exception' and 'against the natural order' (p. 14). Do you think that Raymie would have 'thumped hell' out of Paul even if he had used his brain the way that Cora did?
- Paul says that he hates the 'y' at the end of his name (p.17) and later he discusses his feelings with his parents (p.19). His father advises him to 'pretend it doesn't matter a whole pile' and his mother says that 'no silly name-calling is worth getting a nose-bleed over.' Do you agree with their advice?
- The 'downside to being gifted', according to Paul, includes 'the names, the threats, the clod-throwing ...' (p.19). Can you think of other 'downsides' which might be associated with being unusually clever? Contact An Óige Threitheach, The Irish Association for Gifted Children, Carmichael House, 4 North Brunswick Street, Dublin 7. Tel: +353 1 873 5702 or visit [homepage.tinet.ie/~iagc/iagc.htm](http://homepage.tinet.ie/~iagc/iagc.htm).
- 'Pride can be the ruination of a person' (p.21). What might you have done in Paul's situation? Do you agree that 'not losing face was vital'?
- In reply to Cora's question, Paul says

that he is 'an outsider' and compares himself with Captain Valour, 'another outsider' (p.27). Later we read that Magpie 'seemed like a total outsider' (p.35). Do you think that this is an appropriate term to describe these characters? What does it tell you about their personalities?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION

The following words appear in this unit. Arrange them in alphabetical order and write a definition for each word, consulting a dictionary if necessary: belligerent, faltered, interjected, nonchalant, conceding, abdicated, reminisced, flourishing, antiquated, avail.

### 2. THE IDEAL GIFT

Paul's 'extra-special birthday present' would be Issue 100 of the American superhero comic, *Captain Valour*. Write a short paragraph about your ideal birthday or other present.

### 3. SIMILES AND METAPHORS

The author uses many descriptive and colloquial phrases, e.g. 'I couldn't do a hen's race without ...' (p.17) and 'a lad with pepper's own temper' (p.19). Make a list of similar phrases throughout this unit and write a paragraph on their contribution to the atmosphere of the novel.

### 4. TEACHER KNOWS BEST?

Mr McGrane suggests that the planes flying over Darkfield have 'come bearing cartographers' (p.32) and various residents of Darkfield offer several other theories (see pp.29–30). Why doesn't Paul believe his teacher? What does this tell us about their relationship? Write a short piece describing the relationship between the two.

### 5. COLOURFUL WRITING

The 'wide wild wet fields' of the Callows (p.17) have a pivotal role in this novel. Reread the many references to nature and the environment in this unit and research and list those birds and plants which have become endangered species in Ireland since the 1960s. Try to write a paragraph similar to those on pp.22, 38–40 about your own locality.

## UNIT 2 CHALLENGES

### SUMMARY

When he announces that there will be a goldmine in Darkfield, Paul becomes the centre of attention in the schoolyard. The younger children ignore even Raymie Boland and the other bullies as they too become caught up in the excitement. Soon news of a mine is corroborated on TV and radio: Darkfield is rich in deposits of lead, zinc and silver. Everything begins to change in the village. Locals and politicians are interviewed and speak of increased prosperity and jobs for the young. Only Magpie warns of the dangers of open-cast mining and, with Paul's help, begins a campaign to alert the villagers to the possible destruction of the Callows. In school there is a different excitement as the bullying increases. Raymie has begun extorting money from the younger children and Paul intervenes, humiliating him with a neat left-hand hook. But Raymie has now lost face and challenges Paul to a dangerous contest.

Read pp.49–92

#### DISCUSSION POINTS

- Consider the references up to now to the use of 'power words' (see pp.14, 33, 49). Do you agree with Paul that you could 'start a spell just by saying a certain word'? Suggest power words of your own and say in what circumstances you might use them.
- 'The truth is, they don't need an excuse for bullying' (p.53). Cora was speaking about Raymie and his friends. Do you think that it is generally true that bullies need no excuse or reason?
- The villagers, with few exceptions, are united in their joy about the proposed changes. Even the parish priest refers to the development of the mine as 'God's generous intervention in the affairs of Darkfield' (p.55). Consider the reasons which influence their opinions and say which side you might have taken in the local debates.
- Why did the Fifth Class children pretend they hadn't seen any bullying? (p.62) As Raymie would soon be leaving the school, do you sympathise

with their desire for 'a quiet life'? Consider the effect on schools and on society in general if everyone believed that 'There'll always be some bullying ... The world's not perfect.'

- Paul thinks that Magpie is brave, but Magpie believes himself to be a coward, 'afraid to sell' his land. He tells Paul that there are 'too many big consequences to selling' (p.72). With whom do you agree?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. CHANGING TIMES

In this novel there are many references to a typical classroom of the mid-1960s (see pp.9, 62). Compile a list of all such references and compare it with a modern classroom. Ask a parent or guardian to describe their primary school classroom and write a paragraph detailing both differences and similarities. Contact the Irish Museum of Education, CICE, 96 Upper Rathmines Road, Dublin. Tel: + 353 1 4970033.

### 2. CAMPAIGN SLOGANS

Magpie and Paul compose slogans 'to talk the mine down' (p.75). Choose some topical environmental or other issue and write your own slogans which should encourage readers to support your cause.

### 3. CLASS DEBATE

'If we don't look after our own patch of earth, there's no point in talking about saving the great rainforests and such.' (See pp.87–88). Organise a debate to discuss the motion.

### 4. WEATHER LORE

Dad says that he can 'read the signs better than a weather forecaster can' (p.69). He knows 'by the sunset, and by the way the midges fly' (p.69) or by listening to the curlew whistling (p.41). Find other examples of weather lore and compile a class list. Write a paragraph comparing and contrasting forecasts from the Meteorological Office with those of Paul's father.

### 5. RESEARCH

Referring to the proposed mining industry, the interviewer mentions that 'ninety-five percent of the profits are going abroad', and Magpie has already told Paul that

‘profit’s the why they are here’ (p.44). But the government minister states that the company has ‘ploughed huge amounts of money into this venture’ (p.66). Find out more about the tax and other benefits for multinational companies who choose to operate in Ireland or other countries. Write a paragraph on your conclusions.

## UNIT 3 VICTORY AND DEFEAT

### SUMMARY

Magpie has become for Paul the real-life Captain Valour, and he realises that he has outgrown the fictional character. When Magpie convenes a meeting in the local hall an action group is formed with a view to raising public awareness of the dangers of open-cast mining. Paul, inspired by Magpie’s example, now believes it possible that just one person can make a difference, and he is convinced that the road-snoozing competition will see an end to Raymie’s bullying. He is proved right, though his parents and teacher are both saddened and surprised by his participation in the foolhardy contest and punish him severely. Raymie and his friends, on the other hand, now accept Paul as one of their own and invite him to accompany them on an apple-raiding expedition to Magpie’s orchard. In the dark, he sets off across the Callows to warn Magpie of the impending raid, but is captured, bound and gagged and left overnight in Magpie’s musty shed.

Read pp.93–126

#### DISCUSSION POINTS

- Magpie and Father Burke disagree profoundly on the ‘fate of the world’, the former believing ‘it depends on us’, the latter saying it ‘depends on God alone’ (p.95). With whom do you most agree?
- ‘The times were rough and ready. You didn’t run to your parents, no more than to your teacher’ (p.98). Do you think this was the ‘right way’, or do you think that programmes such as Stay Safe have improved matters for parents, teachers and pupils?
- Raymie had challenged Paul in order ‘to repair’ himself (p.79). Why was it so

important for Raymie not to lose face in front of his peers? Read the account of the road-snoozing incident on pp.104–108, and say if you think he succeeded in maintaining his tough image.

- Told of the impending raid, Paul decides he must warn Magpie (p.120). Do you think he was wise to attempt to cross the Callows in the dark? Should he have told his mum? What advice might you have given Paul in order to minimise the dangers to himself while maximising the end result?
- Paul risks personal safety on a number of occasions in this book. Like Captain Valour, he is reluctant to confide in anyone, seeing this ‘as the essence of lonerdom’. Do you think his behaviour is justifiable on these occasions? Do you consider it ‘reckless or brave, or plain disobedient ... inconsiderate might be the word’ (p.37)?

### ACTIVITIES

#### 1. MEDIA CAMPAIGN

As part of his campaign, Magpie decides to hold a meeting (p.94). This might be called Phase Three of his plan to convince his neighbours of the dangers of open-cast mining. Consider Phases One and Two, and plan your campaign strategy on some issue of concern in your locality.

#### 2. ROUGH JUSTICE?

As punishment for his participation in the road-snoozing competition, Paul receives lines from his teacher and an increase in his daily chores from his parents (p.112). Taking into account Paul’s motives and the dangers involved, devise an alternative and appropriate punishment.

#### 3. HEALTHY RESPECT?

Paul’s mother is the first to complain to a teacher at Darkfield School (p.117). Earlier, we are told that Mr McGrane was ‘feared big-time’, and not just in school (p.32). Have attitudes to teachers and others in authority changed over the years? Write a paragraph describing your teacher or another authority figure.

#### 4. STRATEGIES

Not for the first time, Paul has clearly underestimated Raymie’s organisational abilities (pp.118, 125). As a result, he is captured and gagged. Devise an

alternative plan of action that might have resulted in Paul saving the orchard.

## 5. HUMAN-INTEREST STORIES

Imagine that Paul’s mum notices his absence a few minutes after his departure. What is she thinking as she sits alone in the house? Interview Mrs Duggan and write a ‘colour piece’ for the local newspaper, describing her feelings and emotions that evening.

## UNIT 4 FAREWELLS

### SUMMARY

Though many apples have been robbed by Raymie and his friends, Magpie explains that not everything has been lost. High in the rafters hang four enormous butterfly pupae and, as Paul touches one gently, he feels the ‘wonder of the world’ beating inside his mind. The campaign against the mine continues and Paul’s dad writes letters to the local and national media. But the destruction of the area continues apace – topsoil is stripped, trees, hedges and grasses disappear and a large tailings pond has appeared. Spring flowers are coated in metallic dust. Families sell their land and leave the area. Magpie himself falls ill and dies. The pupae hatch and take flight, symbols of the beautiful natural resources Magpie had struggled to protect. When, years later, Paul returns to the mine, he finds the area worked out and abandoned but the Callows, in all its mysterious beauty, still lives. The lights of the factory have long since dimmed but the stars have come back into their own.

Read pp.127–172

#### DISCUSSION POINTS

- ‘Four prayers,’ Magpie says quietly. ‘Four prayers for the world. And yours the fifth’ (p.128). What did Magpie mean by this?
- As they gaze at the pupae, Paul asks, ‘Why are they here? What does it mean, them being here?’ (p.129). Later, he describes them as hanging ‘in splendour still, their ... grey-green cases enfolding a promise we could only guess at’ (p.136). Read pp.168–169 and discuss the

significance of these butterfly pupae.

- 'When you have someone to champion you, you can face any hardship' (p.130). Do you agree with Paul? Have you ever gained the courage to tackle some problem because of support you received from an unexpected quarter?
- On Paul's return from the orchard, Mam took 'from the dresser the latest issue of Captain Valour', which his father had just bought, and shredded it, right before his eyes (p.131). What caused Mam to react like this?
- It is rumoured that 'giant gates of gold' will be erected at the entrance to the mine (p.134). At the banquet, a promise is made that 'a golden ... truly magnificent gate ... a special bequest ...' will be erected, as 'a symbol of the new-found wealth and prosperity of Darkfield' (p.151). Read the Epilogue (p.171) and discuss the symbolic significance of these gates.

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. CHANGED UTTERLY

The presence of the mine has brought changes to Darkfield, some of which are described on p.134. List other, less obvious, changes that the new industry has brought to the small rural village, and say if

you think these were positive or negative.

### 2. FORMAL LETTER-WRITING

Paul's father 'took to writing letters against open-cast mining' and sent these to local and national newspapers. Write a letter of protest about some issue of concern to you. State your points clearly, bearing in mind the intended readership. Choose a suitable magazine or newspaper and send for possible publication.

### 3. ACTIVISM

Magpie believes that 'the letters have started a debate ... There's others now, from all over Ireland, talking about that mine' (p.136). The Epilogue (p.172) proves that he was correct. Can you think of other instances where one person's actions have altered the course of history? Write a paragraph on their campaign and discuss the long-term effects of their actions.

### 4. FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE?


The effects on both community and landscape of the open-cast mine are detailed throughout the novel. Read pp.137-138, 142-143, 171-172 and consider the effects, both positive and negative, of multinational companies on developing countries and communities. Might an indigenous company have been

more sympathetic to the needs of the community? What were the advantages and disadvantages of the site from the company's point of view?

## 5. RESEARCH

The Callows is an area which is internationally famous for meadow flowers, insects, winter birds and summer nesting birds. Visit the website of Clonown School in the Shannon Callows <http://homepage.eircom.net/~clonownns> which details the conservation and environmental work of the pupils and staff of Clonown National School and contains information on a local brick industry. Otherwise contact Eco-Schools at [www.eco-schools.org.uk](http://www.eco-schools.org.uk) for information on environmental projects in primary and other schools. The Irish Peatlands Conservation Council, Capel Chambers, 119 Capel Street, Dublin 1 produced an invaluable handbook, *Peatlands and the Primary School Curriculum*, in 1994. Visit [www.ipcc.ie/publications.html](http://www.ipcc.ie/publications.html) for book and ordering information.

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 Denotes activities that are suitable for both senior cycle primary school use and junior cycle secondary school use.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR, PATRICK DEELEY



**PATRICK DEELEY** is a teacher and poet. Books of his poetry have been published by Dedalus Press. He also runs a workshop in Ballyfermot, specialising in children's poetry. Originally from Loughrea, County Galway, he has spent more than half his life teaching in Dublin.

### Reviews for *The Lost Orchard*

Very engaging story about a cosy little village that is forced to re-identify itself with the arrival of open-cast mining.

*Books Ireland*, December 2000

A book which celebrates the miracles of nature in word pictures and a special friendship between a young boy and an old man.

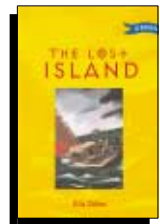
*BookFest*, Children's Books Ireland, 2000

The book has pace, and the relationship between Paul and his much older friend Magpie is well-drawn.

*Children's Books in Ireland*, Winter 2000

### OTHER BOOKS FROM THE O'BRIEN PRESS

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