



Into the Grey

ISBN 978-1-84717-864-0
eBook ISBN 978-1-84717-414-7

Celine Kiernan Teaching Guide By Peter Heaney

RATIONALE & THEMES

When their nan, who suffers from dementia, accidentally sets fire to their house, fifteen-year-old twins Pat and Dom have no idea of the events that will follow as a consequence.

The family relocates to cramped temporary accommodation, and their presence disturbs an almost tangible sense of loss as the boys are drawn into the tragic lives of the previous occupants.

Disturbing indications flicker at the edges of their understanding, and when they rescue an old man from drowning, they are pitched into a terrifying experience of separation.

Dom's existence is sucked into a maelstrom of grief, and Pat must face the horrors of World War One trench warfare – and the nightmare of 'The Grey' – to rescue him.

Some of the themes explored are:

- Courage
- Loss
- Fear
- Loyalty
- Determination
- Death
- Anger and control
- Care for the elderly
- Intolerance
- The afterlife

SUMMARY

When their home and belongings are destroyed in a fire, Pat, Dom and their family move to a cramped and dusty holiday cottage by the sea. Tensions strain as they try to adjust to the new surroundings.

Pat and Dom explore the area and begin to experience sightings and half-remembered thoughts that are alien to them.

When they rescue an old man from the sea, the sense of being drawn into someone else's memory intensifies.

Pat is terrified when an apparition of a

goblin child possesses his brother and Dom begins a physical deterioration that only Pat witnesses.

Pat starts to piece together some clues from his nan's shredded memory and the recollections of the old man they rescued. He learns the story of Lorry and Fran, of child mortality and WW1 loyalty, a horror that is rooted in the history of the holiday cottage and, unknown to them, a significant part of their nan's past.

As Dom deteriorates, his spirit trapped, Pat must enter The Grey – a space between reality and death where he can find answers and rescue his brother before it is too late.

Aided by James, the man they rescued, Pat revisits the horror of the trenches. He devises a way to save Dom, and brings closure to the tormented story of Lorry and Fran.

APPROACH

The issues addressed in the story are complex and challenge ideas about death and the afterlife. The mirror stories of the two sets of brothers are woven together with themes of loss, separation and identity.

Sensitive, directed discussion in small groups is an effective approach.

Section 1 The Goblin Boy Pages 9–86

SUMMARY

When their nan accidentally causes a fire in the kitchen, Pat and Dom's home is destroyed, leaving the twins and their family with nothing but the clothes they are wearing. They move to temporary accommodation at a seaside summer cottage. They bring Nan, who is senile, to live with them.

Wakened by a vivid nightmare in which he was drowning in a mud-filled WW1 trench,

Pat discovers his twin Dom in the throes of an apparent asthma attack. Shaking him, he watches the attack disappear as Dom calls out a strange name.

Next morning at breakfast, they learn that their baby sister Dee also had a feverish night, hallucinating about a 'bad man' who was intent on abducting Dom. Pat raises their father's concern by revealing Dom's apparent asthma attack.

Exploring the town after breakfast, the boys see a drunken old man being forcefully evicted from the pub. Bitter words are exchanged as he staggers away.

Later, at the empty harbour, a strange military figure draws their attention to the same old man entering the sea. Without thinking, the brothers follow him into the freezing water, almost drowning themselves in order to rescue him.

Arriving home, numb with cold, they are ushered, feverish, into bed to recover. Sleeping fitfully, Pat hears Dom having a hissed conversation – he sees that it is with a terrifying goblin boy, who peers malevolently from Dom's bunk.

The tension is broken by their mother, urging them to come downstairs to watch TV. Pat, followed by Dom, bolts down to the security of a hot meal and family normality, unable to explain what he has witnessed.

As the evening approaches and they prepare to go to bed, Pat allows Dom to shepherd him upstairs, realising he must face whatever waits in the bedroom.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Read p10:** The family is watching a war film. The film does not glorify the action, and it is difficult to identify the heroes. Is war always a battle between good and bad? What might happen if each side recognised good points in the other?
- Read pp33–34:** The boys' mum is

distressed because no one will share responsibility for the care of their elderly nan, her mother-in-law. Is she right to be annoyed? Whose responsibility is it to care for a relative who is unable to care for themselves? How can responsibility be shared fairly? What rights does the elderly person have?

- **Read pp54–58:** Pat and Dom watch the old man being evicted from the pub. When Dom finds his poppy crushed into the mud, he suggests to Pat that the old man provoked the reaction. Was the old man a victim of intolerance, or was he foolish to go to a republican bar in the first place? Should you show tolerance for traditions you don't support? How can you do that?
- **Read pp65–67:** When the old man enters the sea, Pat and Dom immediately follow, without thinking of their own safety. Is this reckless or heroic? Should you place yourself in danger to help another? How else could you help?

ACTIVITIES

1. Essentials (read p9)

A fire has destroyed the family's home and belongings, leaving them with only the clothes on their backs.

If you had to evacuate your home at short notice, which three items would you rescue? Explain why.

2. Evacuate Now (read pp15–16)

The family has to evacuate immediately. Dad's quick thinking ensures that everyone is rescued safely.

Create an evacuation plan for your own home. How could you ensure that everyone is clear about what they need to do? Visit these websites for advice:

www.nfpa.org/public-education/by-topic/safety-in-the-home/escape-planning/basic-fire-escape-planning

www.nfpa.org/public-education/by-topic/safety-in-the-home/escape-planning

3. Sound of Silence (read p23)

Pat listens to the hostile silence between his parents as the car drives through the rain.

Work in small groups to identify five different types of silence, and describe the situations in which you hear them. Write a cinquain poem to describe the different sounds of silence.

writeshop.com/writing-a-cinquain-poem/

4. Cool (read p31)

Pat and Dom have been given some cash

to buy new clothes, however the family's financial resources are limited.

Imagine you were given €60 to replace your wardrobe. Could you equip yourself with cool kit?

List the items you would buy and their prices. Remember that you have no clothes at all, so you will need to think about underwear and socks too.

5. Really (read p69)

The woman working in the shop is a gossip; she repeats the story to the next customer, who promptly repeats it again. Each time the story is repeated, it is exaggerated. After a short while, it is scarcely recognisable.

Create five separate people who repeat the story and add an exaggeration each time it is told. Perform the changes aloud, adding different voices each time.

6. The Goblin Boy (read pp75–76)

Frozen by fear, Pat watches as the goblin boy peers over the edge of Dom's bunk.

Create a suitable illustration for the story here. What does the goblin look like?

Section 2 Possession Pages 87–160

SUMMARY

Dom coaxes Pat back to the bedroom and listens as he recalls his nightmare, confessing a similar experience.

Later, wakened by his young sister's screaming, Pat finds that Dom has gone. He looks out the window and sees the goblin leading Dom into a thicket in the garden.

Rushing in pursuit, Pat briefly encounters the phantom of a young soldier. Blaming it on a trick of the light, he corners Dom and the goblin by the garden wall.

But before he can act, the soldier bursts from the bushes. The goblin, in terror, plunges into the sagging body of Dom as the soldier explodes into light fragments.

As Pat touches him, Dom reacts violently, beating his brother until his rage is exhausted, then pleading for Pat to keep the event a secret.

In the morning, they learn that their nan is to return to live with them, the rest of the extended family unwilling to care for her longer than necessary. Their mother's frustration is a welcome distraction, but

Pat notices that Dom is becoming more disorientated.

Eavesdropping, Pat learns that their granny is originally from the local area. He watches uneasily as Dee, their young sister, fails to recognise Dom; and then Nan mistakes him for someone else.

Pat's hand stings from an abnormal icy sensation when touches Dom.

The boys are tasked with looking after their grandmother. Pat's fury boils over listening to the alien who is possessing his brother, and they grapple on the floor. Their father separates them, banishing them to their room. Nan identifies Dom as Francis, a child from her past, before her memory slips again into the mists of dementia.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read p93:** Both Pat and Dom are scared, unable to explain the strange events they have experienced but assuming they are sinister. Why are we often afraid of the dark or the unknown?
- **Read pp104 & 138:** Their baby sister Dee awakens, terrified, from a nightmare. Later she is aware of the changes in Dom, failing to recognise him. Are children able to 'see' things that adults cannot? Or are they more likely to be influenced by their imaginations? Would you be more likely to believe a child if they reported something very unusual?
- **Read p113:** Pat realises that his brother is haunted by the goblin. Is this type of possession really possible, or does it only happen in scary stories? Are there other possible explanations for Dom's behaviour?

ACTIVITIES

1. Light Tricks (read p104)

Moonlight can confuse our eyesight, and our imaginations can conjure up terrors that do not exist. Perhaps this is what is happening to Pat in the garden.

Using the link below, find an image of a face formed from a tree. Imagine that you are in the forest alone when you glance up and see it. Write a convincing description of what you imagine might happen next.

designdrizzle.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/314.jpg

(This picture belongs to David Watson & Design Drizzle. Please acknowledge him if you display your work.)

2. The Carer (read pp143–144)

As a result of her stroke, Nan has memory

loss and is unable to care for herself. The family must care for her instead.

The job of caring for a loved one suffering from a serious illness is important, but it can be very difficult. Read some of the carer's stories below and then write a carer story for the Finnerty family.

www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-22493627

<https://carers.org/carers-stories>

3. Hands (read p144)

Margaret Conyngham recognises Nan. When she looks at their hands clasped together, she is able to see the effects the years have had since they last met.

Draw the two women's hands, showing how they clasp each other and the changes that age has made to them.

4. Listen Please (read pp150–151)

Pat hopes his dad will recognise the changes in Dom, unable to find the words himself to explain what has happened.

Help Pat write a short note for his father to explain what has happened. He is afraid that his dad will find his explanation incredible, so he needs to tell the facts in a sensible way.

5. Terror (read p157)

As Dom's anxiety increases, Pat sees the terror etched on his brother's face.

Create an illustration to show the effect of this change on Dom's face as he sits simmering with rage in the armchair.

Section 3 Francis and Lorry Pages 161–246

SUMMARY

Pat is frustrated that only he can see the changes in Dom. He tries without success to cajole the spirit of Francis to vacate his brother's body.

He notices that as Francis becomes agitated, Dom's temperature plummets. Fearing for his brother's life, he persuades him to take one of Nan's sedatives to calm him. They both fall into a troubled sleep.

Later, they face a lecture about their behaviour from Dad, who is unable to see any difference in Dom despite Pat's pleas.

Retreating to the living room, Pat soothes Dee's questioning about the strange boy. Meanwhile, Nan speaks with Dom and it emerges that there is a childhood connection between her, Francis and the neighbour they

are renting the cottage from.

When their father leaves for Dublin for work, Pat realises that only he can rescue Dom. Exploring the garden together, Pat is probing Francis for detail and explanations when they see James Hueston, the old man they rescued from the sea. He has come to express his gratitude to the twins.

Invited in for tea, James charms their mother and relaxes Dom. In the next room, Pat feels an eerie presence and rebuffs it. His nan wakes up and seems strangely disturbed by what he has done.

James reveals the history of the house, sketching the tragedy that befell Francis. Dom raises suspicions as he begins to interact with James on events that he couldn't possibly know about.

James also confesses to recent strange hauntings. When Nan enters the room, suddenly lucid, she recognises him and reveals the links between them and the long dead Lorry and Francis.

Their conversation discloses a tragic story of loss that swirls through the horrors of the First World War. Nan's observations puzzle the twins' mum, Olive, but confirm to Pat what he suspected about the spirit now possessing Dom.

Hopeful that James can help, Nan distracts Olive, asking for help to get ready for bed, leaving James alone with the brothers.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read p172:** Pat gives Dom some of Nan's medication to calm him down. He has no idea how much to give him, nor the effect it will have. Was this safe? Should you ever take another person's medication? What could have happened?
- **Read p197:** When James smiles at Olive, she is immediately put at ease. Why is it important to see the face of the person you are talking to? How can it help to understand or accept what they are saying? What dangers are there in this?
- **Read p226:** When James reminisces, memories are awakened in Francis. What is memory really? Why is it important to have memories? How do memories control our behaviour?
- **Read p241:** James confides that, despite his tragedies, experience has taught him that life will always go on. What did he mean by this? Is it a comforting thought?

ACTIVITIES

1. Changes (read pp165–166)

As Dom becomes agitated, Pat notices that

his temperature drops dangerously.

It is normal to experience some physical changes when you are stressed. Think carefully about what happens to you when you are stressed. What physical changes do you notice?

In small groups, identify three common changes you experience. Describe what triggers them and try to think of useful strategies to control them.

medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002059.htm

2. Where Bom (read pp205–206)

Later, when her mum is putting her into bed, Dee tries to explain what she saw and what she thinks has happened.

She hasn't got a clear vocabulary, but she tries her best in a burst of five short sentences.

Create the short speech Dee made in her own words.

3. It's Me (read p225)

James and Nan sift through their childhood memories. Sometimes it is difficult to remember details of what happened so long ago.

Create a memory for yourself by writing a cheerful letter to the person you think you will be in sixty years' time, describing in detail something that makes you happy today.

4. Remember (read p238)

Everyone listens in amazement as the conversation between Nan and James reveals a past they never knew existed.

Every family has a wealth of interesting stories in their history.

Research an interesting story from the history of your own family and tell it as a conversation between two of your relatives.

5. Passchendaele (read pp239–240)

James quietly recalls the horrors many Irishmen faced in the WW1 trenches. Their sacrifices were largely ignored because they fought in British regiments.

A schools competition has been announced to research the Irish contribution to WW1.

Work in small groups to create a poster illustrating ten facts and honouring the Irish contribution to the conflict. The following link will be helpful for background information:

www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Historical/Information/1916_Commemorations/Irish_Soldiers_in_the_First_World_War.html

6. Life Goes On (read p241)

Despite the tragedies he has experienced, James still has a positive outlook. His belief that 'life goes on' has helped him to cope.

A philosophy like this is useful to help us deal with challenges.

Design a positive lifestyle poster to hang on your bedroom wall that will help support you when things are difficult.

7. It's Still Me (read p245)

Nan suffers from dementia. She only understands what is happening some of the time. Her memory is unreliable.

Before she goes to sleep, she decides to write a short note to the family thanking them for their care and explaining that she is still Nan, irrespective of whether she remembers who they are.

Help her to write the note.

Section 4 Deliverance Pages 247–342

SUMMARY

A hurried conference with James in the garden reveals the extent of Dom's possession.

In a dream, James has seen Dom's ghost struggling to escape from Lorry, Francis's brother who served with James and died at Passchendaele.

Realising he can 'dream share' with James, Pat understands that the ghosts of Lorry and Francis have been searching for each other for a hundred years.

Pat launches a savage beating on Dom, before collapsing in exhaustion and despair. Later he finds Dom crumpled, near to death, on the bedroom floor.

Nan delivers a lucid message that Pat must find a way to sleep so the ghost of Lorry can help him to rescue Dom.

Swallowing the last two sedatives, Pat wraps his arms around Dom and surrenders to sleep and Lorry's experience of death in the WW1 trenches.

Pat wakes to a 'dream share' with James in Black Paddy's deserted trench where Lorry died. He is unsure what to do, knowing only that the fates of Dom and Francis lie in his and James's hands.

Screaming for direction, the path to The Grey – a place pulsating with emptiness – is revealed. Pat rushes in, forcing James to

rescue him before they devise a strategy to search without getting trapped.

Using a coil of rope to maintain contact, they search The Grey until the ghost of Lorry thrusts the struggling Dom into Pat's arms. While James pulls them across the threshold to The Grey, Lorry gently disentangles the spirit of Francis from Dom, freeing them both.

Returning awake from the dream, Pat finds Dom restored but desperately ill. He releases him to his mum and spends a fretful time awaiting the doctor's reassurance that he will recover.

Slowly, the constant playing of James's old records draws Dom out of his trance, and when their cousins pay an unexpected visit, his recovery seems secured.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read p249:** Pat is distressed. Unable to help Dom, this desperation urges him to fight. Why is anger often a first response to difficulties? How can we control these urges and use reason instead?
- **Read p259:** When he sees a bird in distress, Dom kills it to end its pain. Was this cruel or compassionate? Is it right to kill an animal to end its pain? Can this logic apply as a solution to human pain?
- **Read pp284–286:** Pat and James share a dream, allowing them to rescue Dom and Francis. What are dreams? Why do we have them, and what is their purpose?
- **Read p294:** James, terrified, has misunderstood The Grey, believing this is what death is, and Pat reassures him. Is he right to be afraid of death? Why do religions promise contentment after death? How do they know?

ACTIVITIES

1. Anger (read pp247–248)

Pat is so consumed by rage that he can feel the physical effects on his senses.

What colours, sounds and feelings would you associate with rage?

Compose a cinquain poem to describe the physical effects of anger on your senses.

writeshop.com/writing-a-cinquain-poem/

2. Ghosts (read p261)

Pat notices that Dom does not bleed when he splits his lip, recalling a myth that ghosts do not bleed when injured.

Ghosts attract many myths. Compile an illustrated list of the eight most plausible ghost myths.

3. My Sound (read p309)

Clasping his terrified brother, Pat hears Dom's unique sound: waves crashing on rocks.

Use your imagination to identify your own distinct sound.

Describe it, explaining when it can be heard and whether it is the same if you are happy or distressed.

Could you record it?

4. Thought Torrent (read p310)

Held tightly by his brother, Dom's thoughts flood incoherently. He experiences terror and tries to understand what is happening, the stream of words and images swirling through his mind.

Use less than 100 words to create the effect of the garbled tumble of dialogue Dom has with himself.

Perform it for the rest of the class.

5. Dominick Finnerty (read pp322–326)

The doctor is puzzled by Dom's symptoms and observes the behaviour of both brothers.

Later he writes a report and gives his opinion on what has happened. He sends a copy to Social Services as well.

Create a copy of his report.

6. I Remember (read pp339–340)

When Pat sees the drawing, he is unsettled by the accuracy of it and wonders what story Dom will tell when his memory is restored.

Use your imagination to write a description of the possession as Dom experienced it.

Find more great books by Celine Kiernan on www.obrien.ie

