



# Gaelic Spirit

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## Gerard Siggins

### Teaching Guide

By Peter Heaney

#### RATIONALE & THEMES

Eoin Madden can see ghosts. This ability has in the past helped to warn him of imminent danger. Each time his ghost friend Brian appears, Eoin knows that danger lurks close by for himself or his friends.

However, this time, when Brian appears, he is accompanied by the ghost of Michael Hogan, the Tipperary full back, who was killed on the field during the Croke Park Bloody Sunday massacre.

Eoin can only wait, watch and hope that he will be able to deal with the danger that he is sure is approaching.

The themes explored are:

- Friendship
- Bullying
- Prejudice
- Revenge
- Success
- Loyalty
- Rivalry
- Enterprise
- Integrity

#### SUMMARY

Eoin has returned to Ormondstown for the summer after a British & Irish Lion Cubs' rugby tour in New Zealand.

With his friend Dylan he joins the local Gaels GAA club for training. When Eoin persuades his friend Alan to come and stay with him for the summer, adventure seems to stretch in front of them.

Eoin's rugby skills prove transferable to GAA and both he and Dylan secure places on the football and hurling teams where they meet Isaac and strike up a friendship.

The Gaels intend to host a summer tournament and, there is great excitement. Everyone is keen to help.

However, life in Ormondstown is not without its headaches. A gang have been terrorizing

the community and extorting protection money from the younger boys. When Isaac falls foul of them, he explains that situation is complicated by the fact that the father of the gang leader, Rocky, is a local Garda.

Eoin and his friends manage to set up a small gardening enterprise, despite their equipment being stolen by Rocky.

Eoin's grandad, Dixie is burgled and they discover that Rocky is responsible. With Alan's skill and a hidden tracking device they manage to locate Rocky's hideout. They make an anonymous call to the Garda sergeant and Rocky's reign of terror is ended. His family are forced to relocate – but not before Rocky vows revenge.

The Gaels tournament is a great success and despite several appearances and warnings by his ghost friend Brian, Eoin is unable to identify where the danger lies.

Croke Park and the All-Ireland hurling final beckons, their tickets, the prize for winning the tournament.

At the stadium, Eoin and the others are shocked when several flashbacks from the 1920 massacre randomly play back in real time for them. When Brian and Michael Hogan appear suddenly, it is only Eoin's quick thinking that saves Dylan from a savage attack and serious injury.

With the danger past and the crowds dispersed, Eoin and his friends get the opportunity to listen to some of the stories from the ghosts of that day before they fade back into the memory of the stadium.

#### APPROACH

This story is entertaining, fast paced and believable, weaving a particular thread from the War of Independence, the Croke Park massacre on Bloody Sunday.

The themes relate easily to PSHE / PDMU and will facilitate a discussion-based

approach to the novel.

This guide has divided the story into three sections and the activities offer suggestions on developing the themes.

### Section 1 Summer at Ormondstown Pages 7 - 63

#### SUMMARY

Returning from his rugby tour in New Zealand, Eoin invites his friend Alan to spend the summer with him in Ormondstown. Delighted, Alan accepts, remembering how good a cook Eoin's mum is.

Deciding to refresh his love of Gaelic sport, Eoin joins the training at his local Gael's club. When he meets his friend Dylan again, he learns that the family is experiencing financial hardship; Dylan's mum has had to take two jobs.

When an away match opportunity to Clonmel appears, which requires a €5 levy, Dylan excuses himself, however Eoin looks to Dixie for some gardening chores to help him earn it. Dixie invites Dylan to help Eoin and pays him as well, much to Dylan's delight and he announces that he will be able to go to Clonmel after all.

Later when Dylan avoids a group of older boys as they walk home, Eoin learns about some of the problems around the town. This is confirmed when they meet Isaac, who reveals that the gang have been intimidating the younger boys and that complaining is useless as the father of the gang leader, Rocky, is a Garda officer.

On the bus to Clonmel Dylan reveals the extent of the family hardship and the decide to start a gardening enterprise to earn extra money. Isaac overhears and offers to help them to source some unused tools.

From the start of the game, Eoin attracts

unwanted attention from his Clonmel marker and when Dylan leaps to his defense, a melee ensues and both of them are sidelined.

The second half is incident free and although the Gaels lose, they are cheered by the news that they have been invited to host a tournament.

Their second game is a hurling match and as they warm up, Eoin and Dylan are surprised when Eoin's ghostly friend Brian makes an appearance. Previously, his appearances always signaled danger, however this time the nature of the menace is unclear.

They win their hurling match by a comfortable margin and offset the football deficit, returning to Ormondstown with the trophy and Eoin's first ever GAA medal.

When the team gets back from Clonmel, Alan has arrived. Later, on their way to call for Dylan, Alan and Eoin meet a breathless Isaac, he confirms that Rocky's reign of terror continues and points out the futility of complaining as Rocky's dad is the local Garda officer.

On their way home, they decided to call to see Dixie and find him in a state of shock. He has been burgled.

### DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read p9):** Blue and yellow are simply colours. There are many things we use or wear that come in these colours. Why does the combination of these colours on a sports shirt cause so much feeling or excitement? Is it reasonable to attach so much importance to a colour on a shirt?
- **(Read p11):** Dylan's mum has two jobs; however, the family still struggle financially. Is this a fair way for society to be divided? Should every job carry a wage that allows people to live comfortably? How does hardship affect every member of the family? Should the state make sure that everyone is paid a living wage?
- **(Read p14):** Eoin is trying to find paying chores in order to earn money. Should children be made to earn their pocket money? What might they learn from this? Would guaranteed pocket money teach them to budget?
- **(Read pp22&38):** Rocky targets Isaac because of his skin colour and the Clonmel player lunges at Eoin because he thinks he is from Dublin. Why is skin colour a common prejudice? Why do we identify and exclude people who are not like us? How can we recognize our own prejudices and prevent them from influencing how we deal with people?

- **(Read pp35&38):** the rules for Gaelic games are clear, yet the Clonmel player is determined to test the referee. What is the difference between fouling and rough play? Why do some players try to intimidate using rough play? How should the GAA make sure that the spirit of the rules as well as their letter is followed by everyone?

### ACTIVITIES

#### 1. Txt Me Plz (Read pp16-17&28)

Eoin is amused that Dixie is unable to understand Dylan's text.

To help Dixie, Eoin decides to create a glossary of 20 useful phrases he can use in text-speak. He adds English translations and some comic illustrations as well.

Help Eoin compile his list.

#### 2. The Bully (Read p22)

Isaac is a victim of Rocky's bullying behaviour and is unsure how to protect himself.

Can you help with what he should do and more importantly, what he shouldn't do?

In groups, create a list of five effective DOs and DON'Ts for him with explanations and perhaps illustrations to help him.

[antibullyingireland.nfshost.com](http://antibullyingireland.nfshost.com)  
[kidshealth.org/en/kids/bullies.html](http://kidshealth.org/en/kids/bullies.html)

#### 3. Clonmel v Gaels (Read p39)

After the match the referee submitted a short report for the County Board on the incident between Dylan and Cormac.

They are anxious to eliminate violent behaviour from the game and need information on what happened and what caused it. They have asked referees to report any incidents.

Write his report for the County Board.

#### 4. What Was That About? (Read P42)

Cormac is replaced and doesn't line out for the second half. Eoin is sure that his coach would have spoken to him at the break.

Create the dialogue of the conversation that they might have had.

#### 5. The Camán Swing (Read p47)

Brian and Dylan confess to difficulty with swinging the camán and Eoin decides to create a short, illustrated guide to hitting the sliotar properly, from the ground, air and from the hand.

Can you help him to design a clear guide?

[earning.gaa.ie/sites/default/files/Coach/Files/Striking%20from%20the%20hand-skillcard\\_aw.pdf](http://earning.gaa.ie/sites/default/files/Coach/Files/Striking%20from%20the%20hand-skillcard_aw.pdf)

#### 6. The Goal (Read pp48-49)

Isaac decides to use his phone to record a commentary of the game when Eoin and Dylan are called on for the last few minutes.

Later he edits the clip to include the 10 seconds on either side of Eoin's goal.

Write and perform your version of his 20 second commentary.

#### 7. It's Like This (Read p59)

Alan is unable to understand hurling. It is a uniquely Irish game that many find exciting, but may have some difficult understanding.

Could you explain the game to someone who has never played the game or perhaps never seen it played properly?

How would you capture the excitement and skills of the game in your explanation?

#### 8. Apple Pies (Read p62)

After their meal and huge apple pie desserts, Eoin and Alan have disturbed sleep. They have strange nightmares about apple pies.

Next morning at the breakfast table, they entertain Eoin's mum by describing their weird dreams.

Give a short description of each of their dreams.

## Section 2 Ormondstown Gaels Pages 64 - 120

### SUMMARY

Dixie is upset by the burglary and Eoin and Alan stay with him until Eoin's dad and the Garda arrive. Dixie is unable to give any clear information on the culprits; however, Alan discovers a distinctive mobile phone on the floor which the Garda remove in an evidence bag.

Later, his first training session with the Gaels, convinces Alan that his sporting skill lies in analysis and Eoin introduces him to the complexities of the game using online videos.

Watching a match at the Gael's ground, with Dylan, they discuss the burglary and Dylan's interest is sparked by the mention of the peculiar mobile phone they found.

After training the next day they meet the Garda who attended the burglary and when

Alan enquires about the phone, his enquiry is dismissed sharply with a veiled threat.

Using Eoin's kitchen as a base, the boys plan the launch of their gardening business and the first trawl of the neighbourhood secures several contracts for them.

Their enterprise is almost derailed at the start when they discover that the equipment they intended to use has been stolen and they have to rely on borrowing what they need from Dixie.

Eoin's casual lie to cover an interruption for training during their first job almost backfires on them, however his subsequent honesty is appreciated and their workmanship earns them praise all round.

On their way home, Eoin steps in to prevent Rocky from stealing Isaac's share of their wages. During the scuffle, Rocky drops his phone and Alan recognizes it as the one he found on Dixie's floor after the burglary.

When Alan reveals that he took advantage of the distraction to install a tracker on the phone, they are able to locate Rocky's hideout. A quick inspection confirms the stolen items and after they have retrieved their own equipment, they phone the Garda station anonymously to report the hoard. Later, Eoin is delighted to learn that Dixie has recovered his clock that had been stolen.

The first day of the tournament descends on them and the Gaels enjoy a successful start. However, when the overnight accommodation lists are posted, Dylan is horrified to learn that he will be hosting two boys from Clonmel, one of whom is Cormac, the lad he fought with the previous week.

## DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read pp70-71):** Eoin learns that his father had played hurling, but wasn't very good at it. Why was his skill level relevant? Is it important to be good at a sport before you can take part? What are the benefits from sport that don't rely on skill? Why do we think of playing sport in terms of skill?
- **(Read pp83-84):** Eoin's team find it easy to secure gardening work. Why are we prepared to hire others to do tedious jobs for us like gardening or fruit picking and then pay them a wage that we wouldn't accept to do the job ourselves? Why is this accepted as fair?
- **(Read pp89-90 & 92 & 95):** Eoin calmly lies to Mrs McGrath, while she is content for them to believe that she baked the muffins. Are lies essential to the ways we communicate with each other? Is it better to tell a lie in some situations or should

the truth always be told, even if there is a chance it might offend?

- **(Read p99):** Rocky is a bully and quite possibly a criminal. Why do some people behave in this way? Is it a choice that they are making or are they simply reacting to their own feelings of anger or hurt? What prevents other people from being bullies when they are hurt or annoyed? How are they able to avoid becoming a bully?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. The Crime (Read pp64-68)

Dixie has been burgled and he is terribly upset.

Although Dixie is the victim of this crime, the effects of it will spread like a ripple.

Draw three large concentric circles and write Dixie's name in the centre. Use this space to describe the effects that the crime will have on him personally.

Use the next ring to describe the effects it will have on his family and friends.

Use the outside ring to describe the effects it will have on the Ormandstown community.

Are all affected equally?

### 2. Keep Safe at Home (Read p68)

As part of their support after the robbery, the Garda give Dixie a 'Home security' advice leaflet.

This leaflet contains lots of useful information on how to protect yourself and your property and has advice to help you recover from the shock of being a victim.

Create a copy of the leaflet.

[garda.ie/en/Victim-Services/](http://garda.ie/en/Victim-Services/)

### 3. I'm a Hero (Read pp97-100)

Isaac is grateful for Eoin's help and listens carefully to his advice.

Later, when he is on his own, he uses his imagination to create the alternative exchange he might have had with Rocky if he had stood up to him the way that Eoin did.

Describe the encounter that his imagination created for him.

### 4. Young Entrepreneurs (Read p102)

When they leave the tools back, Dixie suggests that they write a business plan for their gardening enterprise to look at costs and help to decide on a fair price for the work they do.

What should they think about including? How would they decide how long a job will take? How would they decide what a fair price would be?

Help them to write their plan.

[yeni.co.uk](http://yeni.co.uk)

[wikihow.com/Make-a-Business-Plan-\(for-Kids\)](http://wikihow.com/Make-a-Business-Plan-(for-Kids))

### 5. The Day Book (Read p107)

Each Garda station has a day book and every call to the station is recorded in that book.

After the strange call about the items in the hut, the sergeant writes his report of the conversation into the book.

He has his own suspicions about Dixie's burglary and although not convinced by the call, he decides to investigate himself.

Complete the day book entry where he made his report of the call and detailed his suspicions.

### 6. Match Fixer (Read p114)

When Paddy posts the draw for the tournament, Alan lays out the playing order for Eoin's group.

Allowing three points for a win and one for a draw, he is able to tell them how many points they need to be sure of reaching the quarter final.

He also knows how many games they will need to play to reach the final.

Make a copy of Alan's chart and a list of five questions that the chart could answer?

### 7. That's a Word (Read p116)

In his excitement, Alan uses a word that Dixie has never heard of to describe the goal.

The sound of his new word and the way he used it were more important than the meaning.

In groups, create a list of ten new sound and excitement words that you could use during a match to describe exceptional action.

Don't forget to add an explanation in English for the meaning of each of them.

## Section 2 Danger Pages 121 - end

### SUMMARY

Dylan plays the charming host to the Clonmel boys and their previous aggravation is forgotten.

Leaving his guests at home, Eoin takes a training run and bumps into his ghost friend Brian. However, the reason for his appearances still remains a mystery.

At breakfast next morning, Eoin is surprised to learn that one of his guests is a descendant of Michael Hogan, one of the ghosts he met with Brian.

When the tournament resumes, the Gaels face a weak side in their last group match. Their win secures a place in the quarter-final to face Clonmel.

The change in Cormac's attitude is remarkable and with his aggression missing, Clonmel are deflated. The Gaels take a place in the semi-final.

Alan's tactical analysis reveals the weakness in the Templeberry team. The Gaels are in the final.

Adjourning the competition, to watch Tipperary beat Galway in the All-Ireland semi-final on television, cheers of delight announce the news that there are twenty tickets for the final as a winner's prize in their tournament.

Grangemockler, Ormondstown's opponents, are a team they had drawn with during the group stages.

Advantage changes sides several times in a thrilling match. The difference at the end is a missed intercept that Dylan takes advantage of to punch a goal. The Gaels are going to Croke Park to watch Tipperary in the final.

Their gardening business expands, easing some of the financial pressure for Dylan's mum who also agrees to help Dixie with his housework.

Rocky's reign of intimidation is over. His hideout has been uncovered and the family forced to relocate to Dublin.

Back at school and anticipating the date in Croke Park, Eoin has another encounter with Brian who urges vigilance.

Approaching the ground, Eoin hears shots and watches as a child topples from a wall. As he explains it, the others realize that Eoin is watching flashbacks of Bloody Sunday, 100 years before. The incidents continue, now involving all of them. Shaken, they keep silent and take their seats.

During the interval, the events of that terrible day unfold in front of them and they watch as Michael Hogan is cut down.

At full time, Brian and Michael suddenly appear to shout a warning as Rocky steps from the crowd to stab Dylan.

Eoin manages to disarm Rocky and the

Garda lead him away, the danger finally identified.

As the crowds thin, they share a final conversation with the ghosts of Bloody Sunday, introducing their Grangemockler friend to his namesake Michael Hogan.

## DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read p124):** When Eoin meets Brian, he is warned that he can feel danger in the air. Is it possible to sense danger before you can see it? Do we have instincts that we are not aware of? How would you recognize warning signs?
- **(Read p136):** There are twenty free All Ireland tickets for the tournament winners. Is this a fair division? Why should the winners get the best prize? All the teams entertained the spectators. Do they deserve a share in the prize? Why is disappointment their only reward?
- **(Read p146):** Rocky and his family have been moved to Dublin. Has Rocky been able to avoid justice because his dad is a Garda? How will this persuade him to change? How will it protect the people in Dublin? Should the Garda have dealt with him in Ormondstown instead of moving him away quietly?
- **(Read pp178-179):** Rocky has tried to cause Dylan a terrible injury. Why did he want to hurt him? How can feelings of revenge change the way we see things?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. Croke Park (Read p135)

Croke Park holds a place in the dreams of every GAA hurler and footballer.

To celebrate this the GAA are considering inviting members to contribute to a message board explaining what Croke Park means to them.

Contribute to the message board. You can use text, illustration or poetry to explain why Croke Park is central to your Gaelic sports dreams.

### 2. Share (Read pp138-142)

The Gaels have won the final. Before they leave, Paddy calls Alan aside and asks him to write a match report for the club Facebook page.

Help him to write it and share the excitement he felt at his role in their victory.

### 3. This is serious (Read p146)

When he discovers who the burglar is, the Garda sergeant speaks to Rocky's dad who then speaks to Rocky about his actions.

The author thought he should include one of these conversations but can't decide which one.

Write the dialogue for both conversations and then suggest which one he should use.

Explain your choice.

### 4. Dear Mum (Read p151)

Eoin suggests that Alan should send a postcard to his mum.

Alan thinks it's a great idea, but so much has happened that it is difficult to decide what to include.

Help him to write the card.

### 5. The Tans (Read pp169-170)

Eoin and the others are stunned at what they have witnessed.

As they stand up after watching Billy Scott die they hear a coldblooded shout.

Looking around, they see two Black and Tan auxiliaries across the street with their rifles pointed directly at them.

What happens next? Capture the terror they and the rest of the Croke Park spectators felt on that day.

### 6. We're Lucky (Read p172)

Stunned by what they have witnessed, Eoin and the others reflect that they are lucky to be living in this time and place.

That evening they make a list of ten reasons why they should be thankful.

In groups make a copy of their list.

[globalcitizen.org/en/content/10-barriers-to-education-around-the-world-2/](http://globalcitizen.org/en/content/10-barriers-to-education-around-the-world-2/)

### 7. 1920 (Read pp174-176)

It is 100 years since the Croke Park massacre and times have changed dramatically in Ireland.

Each of the All Ireland match booklets will include a memory to the events of that day.

In small groups, write the piece that should be included in the 2020 football final match booklet.

[wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloody\\_Sunday\\_\(1920\)](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloody_Sunday_(1920))  
[yourirish.com/history/20th-century/bloody-sunday-1920](http://yourirish.com/history/20th-century/bloody-sunday-1920)