



The Boldness of Betty

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Teaching Guide

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RATIONALE AND THEMES

This guide has been designed to complement a class reading of the text in a way that brings the text alive whilst also enriching students' critical abilities. The activities aim to inspire young readers by encouraging them to question the characters' motivations and the overall themes. The guide aims to develop empathy skills, stimulate discussion and encourage readers to dissect literary techniques in fresh and engaging ways. There are also activities included that are designed to hone communication, presentation and literacy skills as well as those that encourage students to develop their ability to collaborate with others. This historical novel centres around the life of a working-class teenage girl in Dublin 1913 against the backdrop of the General Strike and themes include:

- Grief
- Friendship
- Courage
- Bullying
- Family
- Justice
- Equality

SUMMARY

This book is written in the form of a memoir from the point of view of Betty Rafferty, a working-class 14-year-old from Dublin. It's set in 1913 as Dublin's workers go on strike to fight for better working conditions – something that affects not just Betty's family, but the families of most of her friends.

Betty is forced to leave her beloved school to work in a tea shop and she is exposed to the huge class inequalities in the world around her. Membership of the union gives her the opportunity to stand up for her beliefs and to become part of a very powerful movement. She makes a lot of interesting friends from all backgrounds along the way and proves herself a true friend when some of her closest friends experience tragedy.

Tensions in Dublin begin to rise as more and more people are forced into poverty due to the strikes, creating conflict between the strikers and the scabs. At times this boils over into violence, and Betty and her family find themselves in the middle of some very dangerous situations. Meanwhile, the wealthy citizens are less than sympathetic and Betty has to bite her tongue on more than one occasion when accompanying her mother to her dressmaking appointments in the grander homes in the city. Help comes from across the water as members of unions in England send food to feed the starving workers.

As money becomes even tighter, Betty has some difficult decisions to make – always supported by her loving family and loyal friends.

APPROACH

This is a very enjoyable and entertaining read, with many opportunities for discussion on topics as diverse as unions, class divides, inequality and injustice. This guide has divided the story into three sections and the activities and discussion points aim to initiate the development of an understanding of the themes, techniques and characterisation within the novel.

Part 1 Workers' Rights Pages 9-131

We first meet Betty Rafferty, a 14-year-old girl in a working family in Dublin as she begins to write her memoir. The year is 1913 and she's just finished school – not because she wants to, but because she needs to go to work to support her family. Betty doesn't want to have a job; she wants to continue learning, but that's a luxury that working-class girls like herself and her best friend Samira can't afford.

Betty is from a working-class neighbourhood,

but her mother is a dressmaker for some of the richer women in Dublin. She asks Betty to accompany her to the home of one of her clients and Betty is shocked by the difference in living standards and begins to see that the world is unfair.

This view is strengthened when Betty begins work at Lawlor's Tea Rooms. The job is hard work, with long hours and the girls are subjected to some very strict rules. We meet Samira and Ali and learn about Samira's ambitions to become an actress and how they've faced a lot of racism growing up in Dublin. On a walk with Ali, Betty has a shock when she recognises someone living in the Dublin slums – especially when she realises how quickly people's fortunes can change. Betty makes the most of her one day off to spend the time with Samira at the seaside.

At work, there's talk of joining a workers' union to try and fight for their rights and Betty's friend Rosie is very keen. As Betty's eyes are opened to the injustices of her workplace, she is also drawn to the union and tries to persuade her peers to join her.

Samira and Betty go to the theatre where Samira has a very exciting opportunity that quickly turns sour.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Read page 9.** Our introduction to Betty is through her memoir. Why do you think memoir writing is so interesting? Do you think it's important to read first-person accounts of historical events? What should be considered when reading a first-hand account (think about bias and alternative viewpoints)? Do you think they give us a reliable insight into the past?
- Read page 11.** Betty tells us she was born in 1899. Does the date surprise you? How does the author make her seem like a modern girl?
- Read pages 16-17.** Betty and her family run through the list of options open to her: working as a servant, working in a

cake shop, working as a secretary in the future. What do you think about these options? Is it fair that she has so few options? How do you think education might change these options?

- **Read page 24.** Betty is annoyed that her mother calls Lavinia Lawlor 'Miss Lavinia'. Why is she annoyed? Why is her mother so formal? Do you think this is fair? Do you agree with Betty? Why do you think this?
- **Read page 31.** What are your impressions of Lavinia Lawlor? Why do you think this? Do you think it is important to treat everyone with respect? Do you think Lavinia does this? How does this affect your view of her?
- **Read page 39.** What does Rosie mean when she says 'no point being a martyr'? Do you think she's right? Why do you think Betty feels so guilty? Do you agree with her? Why?
- **Read page 44.** What do you think about Miss Warby taking money from the girls' wages for misdemeanours? Do you think it's fair? Why do you think this? Why do you think they allow it to happen? Do you think they have any choice? What would you advise them to do? Why?
- **Read pages 49-50.** What do you think about the priest suggesting that Mr Casey give his children to the nuns? Do you think this would happen nowadays? Why not? How does the writer present the priest here? Why do you think this? Do you agree with the writer's presentation? Why?
- **Read pages 59-60.** Ali's comment that homelessness is close to all of them shakes Betty. Do you agree with him? Why do you think this? Why do you think Betty is so shaken? Why is it important to be compassionate with those less fortunate? What do you think of Betty's comment that 'we all had to face up to how hard life was for lots of people'? Do you agree? Why?
- **Read page 63.** Why do you think Betty isn't allowed to speak with customers? Do you think this is fair? Why do you think this?
- **Read page 66.** Do you agree with Rosie that the workers are right to strike? Why do you think this? What do you think about the fact the workers were expected to give earnings to their employer for his daughter's wedding? Do you think we need unions? Why do you think this?
- **Read page 93.** Mrs Lawlor seems to completely misunderstand what motivates many of her workers. Do you think she knows how her workers are

treated? Why do you think this? Do you think it would bother her? Why do you think this? What is the solution for the girls?

- **Read pages 128-129.** Samira has a very unpleasant encounter with Mr Farrell. Why is he reluctant to give her a role in his Shakespeare plays? Why do you think Samira doesn't say anything? How do you think she feels? Why do you think this?

ACTIVITIES

1. FREE EDUCATION

Betty and her best friend Samira want to continue their education, but they have to work to support their families. Nowadays, children are legally obliged to stay in school until they are older. In Ireland, secondary education became free in 1967, following a famous speech by minister Donogh O'Malley in 1966.

rte.ie/archives/2016/0907/814870-free-secondary-education/

In small groups, create a presentation on education and society. What does the term 'social mobility' mean? Do you think education can achieve social mobility? In your presentation, explain the benefits of free education for all and why it would have been so important for working-class girls like Betty and Samira.

2. SPOILT FOR CHOICE

When Mrs Lawlor tells Betty that her daughter Lavinia doesn't like school, Betty has to bite her tongue. What do you think she thinks of 'girls who didn't appreciate getting to go to school, and who thought leaving it meant playing tennis instead of having to go out and get a job.'? Imagine you are Betty. Write a diary entry explaining your thoughts on these girls and why you think they should appreciate their opportunities.

3. 'FACE CARVED OUT OF GRANITE SLAB'

What are your first impressions of Miss Warby? Think about the way she speaks, what she says and does and the physical description of her. Write a short character analysis, using quotes from the text and explaining why these quotes present this impression.

4. PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORIES

Re-read page 47. Betty explains that she has no photographs of herself or her relatives. Having photographs taken was expensive and a luxury many people could not

afford. Why do you think photographs are important? Create a collage of photographs (or copies of photographs if the originals are precious) that tell the story of who you are. These could be photographs of friends and family, or places you've visited or things you've seen. You could even do a small photography project and take some photographs of your everyday life and create a form of photographic diary. Be prepared to present these to your class and explain your choices and the stories behind the images.

5. HOUSING RIGHTS

What do you think of Betty's description of Foley Street and the conditions people are living in? How does this compare with Betty's neighbourhood? How does it compare to the Lawlor home? Do you think this is fair? Do you think there is housing equality in Ireland today? In small groups, create a small campaign for housing rights. Research conditions in the past, how these changed and why and compare them to current conditions. In your campaign you could include a presentation, posters advertising for improved housing rights, a letter to the local TD asking them to bring up housing inequality in the Dáil.

6. JOIN THE UNION

Betty tries to convince Samira that they should join the union, but Samira doesn't see how girls could change things. Why is she so reluctant? What would you say to persuade her? Write a speech to convince Samira and the other girls that joining the union is important – not only for the rights of workers, but also for the rights of women. Research some of the examples Rosie and Betty give. Were there any laws to protect working-class people in 1913? Your speech should include persuasive devices like rhetorical questions, statistics. Try and make your audience see how their world could be improved. Think about the way Kitty is treated when she injures herself.

Section Two Betty Goes On Strike Pages 132-227

It's a bank holiday and Betty and her family spend the day at a union event in the grand Croydon Park. Back at work, it's becoming more and more clear that Betty did the right thing by joining the union, although Miss Warby is less than pleased. Across the city, workers are leaving their posts to protest their poor treatment. Betty has to visit the Lawlor household again and despite

receiving a gift from Mrs Lawlor, Betty is even more aware of the inequalities in their situations. To her surprise, she meets a familiar face at the Lawlor house – the young man she chatted to about books in the tea shop is Peter Lawlor.

After an honest conversation with her mother, Betty begins to understand her mother's fears and reluctance for her family to join the union.

At work, unfair demands are being made of the workers and the girls make the difficult decision to go on strike. Samira's audition for the union dramatic company is a success and she is thrilled to be given a part in their latest production. Betty's mother is very unhappy to hear that Betty won't be bringing in a regular wage and is worried about the consequences for the family, causing tension in the household.

Dublin is thrown into upheaval with people striking all over the city. When the tram drivers walk out, Betty is thrilled – all of these actions must surely make a difference. Her excitement starts to fade when the threat of violence begins to grow. Betty is unimpressed at having to bring their dog Earnshaw to her picket line, but he soon proves a hit with passers-by and the other girls. Betty begins to make a very unusual friend.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read page 132.** Why do we have bank holidays? Do you think they are important? Why do you think this?
- **Read page 149.** Miss Warby's reaction to Betty joining the union only makes her more convinced that she has done the right thing. Do you agree with Betty's analysis? Why do you think this? Why do you think employers and managers like Miss Warby were so against their workers joining the union? Do you think this is fair? Why?
- **Read page 158.** Why are Betty's mum and Jessie so awkward with each other? What happened? Why do you think this? Do you think this is a normal thing to fall out over? Why?
- **Read page 179.** Do you think the girls did the right thing going on strike? Why do you think this? Do you think it will mean they get better working conditions? Why? What do you think of the reactions to their actions by the customers?
- **Read pages 190-191.** What do you think of Lizzie and Annie? Should they be joining their colleagues on the picket line? Do you have any sympathy for them? Why do you think this? Are the other girls right to be angry with them for

going in to work? Why do you think this?

- **Read page 196.** After speaking to the suffragettes, Betty declares, 'But at the moment, the most important thing for me was getting workers treated fairly. Votes could wait until the strike was over.' Why do you think she thinks this? Do you agree with her? Why do you think this?
- **Read page 207.** One of the tram passengers is infuriated by the timing of the strike as it means he can't get to the Horse Show? Do you think the drivers chose this busy time deliberately? Why do you think this? Think about airline staff and the timing of their strikes – why do you think they always go on strike in the summer holidays? Do you agree with this? Why do you think this?
- **Read page 215.** Betty's father is meant to be going to a meeting, but there's talk that it won't be happening because the police will try and stop it taking place. Why do you think the police would try and stop the meeting? Do you agree with their actions? Why do you think this?

ACTIVITIES

1. KITTY

What are your impressions of Kitty? Write a character analysis based on how she has been presented so far. Think about what she says, how she says it and what she does. Choose four adjectives to describe her personality. Use quotes from the text to support your ideas and make sure you fully explain how these quotes prove your point.

2. PETITION MRS LAWLOR

Betty is disappointed to realise that Mrs Lawlor probably knows how badly her workers are treated. What sort of person is Mrs Lawlor? Do you think the writer wants us to see her as kind? Do you think she would be sympathetic if she really knew what things were like for the girls working in her tea rooms? In small groups, imagine you are the girls working in the tea rooms. You've been given the opportunity to speak to Mrs Lawlor to present your opinions about working conditions. What will you say? Write a petition that tries to persuade her to help you. Remember to use persuasive language – but also remember to make sure that it is suitably polite – you don't want to irritate her by overstepping the class boundaries of the time as that may make things worse.

3. STRIKE BANNERS

When the girls go out on strike, they make banners and placards to try and explain their

situation to passers-by. This is an important way to try and get their message across. They also distribute small flyers to explain their position. In small groups, design the flyers the girls distribute. Consider their message – what exactly are they trying to change? How can they make the general public understand and sympathise? Your leaflets should not contain too many words – the shorter and snappier, the more likely people are to read it.

4. DUBLIN BROUGHT TO A HALT!

The tram drivers striking has a huge effect on everyday life in Dublin. Working in small groups, create a televised news report that explains what has happened and why. Try and include interviews with striking tram drivers, their managers (who are not striking) and some members of the public (include those in support of and those against the strike).

5. PETER LAWLOR

Peter, the son of Betty's employers, doesn't seem to be as dismissive of the strikes as his family. What are our impressions of him? Decide on four adjectives to describe his personality and find quotations from the text that give you these impressions. Write a character analysis, explaining what sort of person he is and explaining how the quotes you've chosen support your opinions.

6. DEBATE

On page 226, Peter says, 'But all this fuss! People breaking tram windows, fighting in the streets. Wouldn't things be better if everyone just, I don't know, took things a bit less seriously?' Do you agree with him? Why do you think he has such a simple view of things? Are the strikers making things worse by turning to violence? In small groups, debate how you think the strikers should act and draw up a list of rules of conduct for members of your union.

Section 3 Dublin Falls Into Chaos Pages 228–416

Betty helps her mother with a dressmaking errand, which means she gets another insight into the lives of Dublin's wealthiest citizens and their anger at the disruptive nature of the strikes. It's quite an adventure, especially as it means Betty gets to travel in a cab and imagine herself as one of the heroines in her favourite novels. However, the daydream is cut short when she and her mother find themselves in the centre of a riot. Samira

and Betty put themselves in danger when they try to find their brothers. Dublin has become a very dangerous place, with riots everywhere and people's anger spilling over into violence.

Betty's friend Rosie has some devastating news but Betty proves herself to be a true friend when she welcomes her into her home. Conditions at Lawlor's Tea Rooms haven't improved, which means even more girls walk out to join the strike. However, money is tight for many families, but this only seems to make them more determined to fight for better working conditions. Food has been sent by fellow unions in England, and the union also steps in to feed its members – a huge project that Betty and her friends are keen to help with. This means they meet some famous names and other women from all sorts of backgrounds who are also helping out. Betty and her friends find themselves more exposed to the suffragette movement and Betty makes some new friends.

At home, things are becoming more difficult. Money is very tight and Betty's nephew has fallen ill. Again, help comes from across the water – but this leads to anger from the local Church leaders. Samira has some wonderful news despite all the chaos and Betty is offered an opportunity which causes her to make some difficult decisions. Meanwhile, the theatre offers some very welcome distractions for everyone.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read pages 244-245.** Betty and Samira are shocked to see policemen use extreme violence on women. What are your thoughts on this? What does this tell us about the police force at the time? Do you think the police should carry weapons? Why do you think this?
- **Read page 248.** Was Betty's neighbour right to protect the policemen? Why do you think this? What do his actions tell us about Mr Gregory? What sort of man is he? Why do you think this?
- **Read page 257.** Betty is puzzled by how the building collapsed. Why do you think it collapsed? Do you think it was well maintained? Why is it important to have building regulations? Are there still issues with building regulations today?
bbc.com/news/uk-40301289
wikipedia.org/wiki/Carrickmines_fire
- **Read page 265.** Betty's mum gives Rosie some comfort by telling her that it's fine to laugh in such tragic times as taking any comfort is important. Do you agree with this? Why do you think this?
- **Read page 273.** Despite all the difficulties

they are facing, people are even more determined to fight for better rights. What do you think about this? Are they doing the right thing? Why do you think this?

- **Read page 281.** Do you think it is fair to turn people away because they don't have a ticket? Why do you think this? How do you think it should be organised? Why?
- **Read page 295.** What do you think about Betty's statement that books and music are 'roses of life'? Do you agree with her? Why do you think this? Do you think these things are still important? Can you think of any 'inspirational' songs? Why do some last in memories for years?
- **Read page 316.** When Robbie is ill, the family can't afford to consult a doctor. Do you think health care should be free? Why do you think this? Why do you think some countries do not have free health care and others do? Do you think this needs to change? Why?
- **Read page 321.** What is a scab? Why do you think they are so hated? Do you agree? Why? Why do you think strikers have been attacking them?
- **Read page 341.** Why is the archbishop so angry? Do you think he is right? What do you think Lily and the other mothers should do? Why do you think this?
- **Read page 388.** Do you think Betty should take the job at the bookshop? Why? What do you think her friends would say? Should she listen to them? Why do you think this?
- **Read page 399.** Has Betty made the right decision? Why do you think this? How do you think Peter feels? Why?
- **Read pages 415-416.** The writer gives us a little of her own history. Based on what we know now, do you think Betty and the other workers made the right decision to go on strike? Why do you think it took so long for free secondary education to become a right?

ACTIVITIES

1. CHAOS ANALYSIS

On pages 234–238, Betty and her mother find themselves in the middle of a riot. How does the writer create the sense of danger and chaos in these pages? Look for clues in the words she's used to describe what's happening, what people say and their reactions to their surroundings. Once you've found four or five examples from the text, write an analysis explaining how these quotations create a sense of chaos.

2. DIARY

On page 262, Samira pokes fun at Betty for

writing her diary, saying no one would find it interesting. However, sometimes it's the little details that make history so interesting. For the next month, write your own diary – aim for 30 minutes 3 times a week. Just detail what happened in your day and how you felt about it.

3. BETTY'S MOTHER ANALYSIS

What sort of a person is Mrs Rafferty? Why do you think this? Write a character analysis based on how she has been presented so far. Think about what she says, how she says it and what she does. Choose 5 adjectives to describe her personality. Use quotes from the text to support your ideas and make sure you fully explain how these quotes prove your point.

4. FOOD PARCELS

In small groups, consider the importance of food parcels for people in need. What would you put in a food parcel for a family of four? Research food parcels and draw up plans for a box. Think about creating meals that are nutritious. Remember, you will have a small budget for a week's worth of food.

5. SUFFRAGETTES

What are our impressions of Nora and Mollie? Why are they so keen for women to have the vote? In this part of the novel we also meet Mrs Sheehy-Skeffington and Madame Markievicz. What do you know about them? In small groups, create a presentation on the suffragette movement in Ireland – who was involved, what happened, what were they fighting for, and anything else you feel is important.

6. PETER'S DIARY

Imagine you are Peter Lawlor. Write a diary entry about everything that is going on. Can you understand why the girls are striking? What do you think about your parents' reactions?

7. NEWS REPORT

There are angry scenes at the train station as the women try to get the children on trains to go to England. Why are the men so angry? In small groups, create a news report from the scene. Explain what is happening and include some interviews with the mothers and other women and the men who are trying to stop them from leaving.

You can read more about Mollie's story in Anna Carey's other books [The Making of Mollie](#) [Mollie on the March](#)