



Fairy Hill

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Teaching Guide

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RATIONALE AND THEMES

This guide is designed to complement a class reading of the text. The discussion points and activities encourage students to develop critical abilities. The guide develops empathy skills, stimulates discussion and hones communication, presentation and literacy skills. The novel explores the key themes of:

- Courage
- Family and community
- Rural versus city living
- Myths and legends
- The natural world
- Friendship

SUMMARY

Thirteen-year-old Anna is helping her mum prepare for her new wedding. Anna doesn't want life to change and she especially doesn't want to go and stay with her dad in Ireland for the summer.

However, she finds herself settling in to life in County Sligo as she starts to get to know her little brother, Jack, her stepmother, Maggie, her cousin, Jenny, and a new friend, Daniel. But strange things keep happening and Anna wonders if the old stories about fairies might have some truth after all.

Anna has a great time learning to ride horses and surf with her cousin Jenny and exploring the countryside with the mysterious Daniel, but she's also worried about her little brother. No one believes her when she says that she fears the fairies (the sidhe) want to steal him. And then Anna's worst fears come true.

With help from unlikely sources and her own courage, Anna manages to save the day, even convincing her dad that sometimes some things are best left alone. As Anna returns to her life in London, she finds she has changed and is looking forward to her next summer trip.

APPROACH

Fairy Hill is an entertaining read, with well-developed characters, exciting action and plot twists. The novel provides opportunities for discussion about family situations, our natural world and traditional myths and legends. This guide has divided the story into three sections and the activities offer suggestions on developing the themes and examining the writer's craft in building character and plot.

Section One Trying to Fit In Pages 15–96

SUMMARY

The story opens with Anna helping her mum, Kate, prepare for her London wedding to her partner, Douglas. However, Anna is not very happy about her mother's marriage. She doesn't want her life to change; she doesn't want a new family and she doesn't want to have to wear a pink dress! She resents being sent to Ireland to stay with her dad while her mum and Douglas go on honeymoon.

She arrives in County Sligo, irritated and upset. Her father's home is overwhelming; there's so much going on and it's all higgledy-piggledy. Everything is strange and on her first night she can't sleep.

Soon, Anna finds herself reconnecting with her dad. Little Jack becomes like her shadow and Anna starts to understand how younger siblings can be quite annoying! There's a family barbeque and she's surprised at how much she enjoys herself and feels welcomed into the whole family.

Later, she has a disturbing encounter at the beach. There's a strange woman in the sea and Jack follows her out into the deep water. Anna realises she's been selfish and that she's needs to be more careful with Jack.

She takes her cousin Jenny up on the offer of learning to ride and the two girls have a lovely day in the countryside. Anna meets Jenny's grandmother Lily again – but Jenny says to take no notice of the old lady when she starts to talk about fairies (the sidhe).

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Read p. 15.** 'Today my life is going to change forever.' Is change something to be sad or scared about? Why do you think this? Have you ever gone through a big change? What happened? How did it make you feel at the time? How do you feel about it now?
- Read p. 20.** Anna reveals she's still angry with her mum for not taking her on her honeymoon. Do you think this is reasonable? Why do you think she's so annoyed at having to stay with her dad?
- Read p. 34.** Her dad says, 'This part of the country is full of old stories and superstitions about the fairies. They are part of the landscape.' What do you think he means? Do you know of any superstitions and old stories about your neighbourhood? Which is your favourite? Why do you think this?
- Read pp. 35–36.** How do you think Anna's dad feels about his daughter's reluctance to be with him in Ireland? Why do you think this? What are your first impressions of Anna's dad?
- Read p. 37.** Anna complains that her little brother is 'like a shadow'. Why do you think he is following her around? Would this be annoying? Have you ever had a younger sibling or relative follow you around? How did it feel? What did you do? What would you advise Anna to do?
- Read p. 39.** Anna's mum tells her that she just has to get used to things and to try and fit in. Do you think this is good advice? Why? How do you think Anna's mum feels? How do you think Anna feels? Have you ever been in a similar situation?

What happened and what did you do? What advice would you give her?

- **Read p. 47.** Anna is surprised by how much she enjoys the family get-together. Why do you think this is? What is she learning about community spirit? Can you see a change in her?
- **Read p. 75.** Daniel admits that ‘I like it here because folk don’t disturb you.’ Do you have a place you go to for peace and quiet? Do you think it’s important for people to have some time to themselves? Why do you think this?
- **Read p. 78.** Anna’s dad scolds her for returning home late, saying ‘dinner and meals are family time and we expect you to be here for them’. Do you think this is a good policy to have at home? Why?

ACTIVITIES

1. FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Read Chapter One. What are your first impressions of Anna? Choose two or three adjectives to describe her and find examples from the text that prove your point about each adjective. Use a quote to explain your point.

2. EVIL STEPMOTHER

On page 28, Anna decides she might actually get to like Maggie. Why do you think this? How has Maggie tried to make Anna welcome? Think about how Maggie feels having Anna there. Create some questions for her and imagine what she might say. In small groups, take turns to play the role of Maggie and answer your group’s questions.

3. SLEEP HYGIENE

As she settles down in bed on her first night at her dad’s house, Anna struggles to get to sleep: ‘her brain racing, going over things and wondering how she had ended up here’. What advice would you give her? Create a leaflet or informative video with five key things to do to get ready for a proper night’s sleep. Use this information from the Health Service Executive: hse.ie/healthy-you/shake-off-the-sleep-monster.html

4. SIMPLE PLEASURES

On page 35, Anna visits the beach with her dad. ‘Usually when Dad was in London they went to the cinema, galleries, and museums, and he’d taken her for weekends to Brighton, Bath, Edinburgh, Cornwall and Paris, but walking with him on the small beach with its mixture of grey stones and sand was so much better.’ Why do you think she’s enjoying herself more on a walk on the beach than previous times they’ve

spent together? What little things give you pleasure? Create a presentation for the rest of the class on five or six simple things they could do with family or friends to spend some quality time together. Think about which one is your favourite.

5. FAIRY HUNTING

After talking to Aunt Lily, Anna is curious about finding evidence of the fairies and spends hours looking round the fields and surrounding area looking for clues. But does she know what she’s looking for? Create a guide for fairy hunters. What sort of equipment should they bring? What sorts of signs should they look out for? What should they do if they think they find something? How should they record their findings?

6. THE NATURAL WORLD

Read pages 73–75. Daniel knows a lot about nature. Many writers are moved by the natural world. Read Yeats’ poem ‘Wild Swans at Coole’. poetryfoundation.org/poems/43288/the-wild-swans-at-coole How does he describe the natural world? Think about an outdoor place that means a lot to you. Write a descriptive piece that brings it alive. You can choose to write your own poem or write a piece of descriptive prose. Try to use similes and metaphors and sensory details, such as sight, sound and smell.

7. THE BEST AFTERNOON TEA

On pages 88 and 89, Anna sits down with her Aunt Lily for tea. ‘Lily had made tiny little sandwiches, some filled with chicken and mayonnaise, others with tomatoes and salad from the garden, and there were mini cupcakes.’ Have you ever had an afternoon tea? Why do people enjoy them so much? Create a menu card for your perfect afternoon tea. Present your choices to your class, using emotive and descriptive language to explain your choice.

Section Two Strange Happenings Pages 97–197

SUMMARY

It’s a bleak rainy day and Anna is left at home with her dad. To entertain her, her dad takes her up to the attic. Anna spends hours going through all the old mementoes, including her grandmother’s girlhood diaries. She finds a map of the fairy ring and the next morning, she’s up early to hunt for it. She thinks she’s found it – especially when she thinks she can hear soft singing on the wind.

But when she tries to show her dad, the spell is broken and he can’t see what she means.

A few days later, her cousin Jenny comes to stay and they explore, make pots and learn to surf together. Anna’s thrilled to have a friend her own age. But her happiness fades when she wakes after Jenny leaves to find her dad working in the fairy ring field. She rushes down to try to stop him but he won’t listen. He can’t hear the sad singing Anna can hear. She gives up and is on her way back to the house when she comes across Daniel who warns her that she needs to be careful.

Strange things start to happen. First, her star bracelet goes missing and she gets into an argument with Maggie when she suggests Jack may have taken it. Then Jack has a creepy encounter with a cat at her cousin’s birthday party. Things really come to a head when a strange visitor arrives at Fairy Hill and Anna gets the blame when Maggie’s studio is ruined.

The atmosphere has thawed a little by the time her dad goes off for work, leaving Anna with Maggie and Jack for the night. While Maggie is in her studio, Anna hears a noise in the house. Thinking quickly, she hides Jack, but the ghostly woman is determined to keep looking. Daniel warns her that she must protect Jack from the sidhe at all costs.

Anna decides to ask her grandaunt Lily for help. Lily tells her all about changelings. While Anna’s in the library, researching, she spots an old photo with a boy who looks just like Daniel.

Lily’s tips seem to be working and Anna feels happier when she and the family head to Rosses Point Farmers’ Market – but then Jack goes missing.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read p. 108.** Anna takes her dad to see the fairy ring, but the spell is broken. Does he believe her? What do you think he’s thinking? What do you think Anna should do? Have you ever been in a situation when someone hasn’t believed you when you’ve been telling the truth? What happened? How did it make you feel?
- **Read pp. 113–114.** Anna and Jenny are discussing the differences between their two schools. Which do you think sounds better – a big school or a smaller one? Why do you think this? What’s your school like? What are the benefits?
- **Read p. 116.** Jenny and Anna are getting on well and confide in each other about their lives. Jenny says, ‘I love having a girl cousin my age.’ What sort of relationship

do you think the girls have? Do you think it's important to have friends that you can share your feelings with? Why?

- **Read pp. 118–120.** Anna's dad is teaching the girls to surf, but it's difficult. He encourages them to be patient and tells them, 'Do it again and again.' Is this good advice? Why? Have you ever been in a situation where you had to keep trying at something you found really difficult? What happened? How did you feel?
- **Read pp. 129–131.** Anna can't find her star bracelet and suspects Jack may have taken it. However, Maggie gets quite angry with Anna when she continues looking through Jack's things. Who do you think is in the right here? Why do you think this? What advice would you give both Anna and Maggie here?
- **Read pp. 139–141.** Do you think Maggie is being fair to Anna? Why do you think this? What about her dad? What should Anna do? Have you ever been given the blame for something you didn't do? What happened?
- **Read p. 146.** With Maggie and her dad barely speaking to her, Anna retreats up to the attic and reads through her granny's diaries. Have you ever kept a diary? Why do you think people did? Do you think that photos are similar? Why do you think this? Do you think people really tell the truth on social media?
- **Read p. 160.** Anna decides not to tell Maggie about the woman coming into the house. Do you think Maggie would have believed her? Do you think Anna made the right decision by not saying anything? Why do you think this?
- **Read p. 166.** Anna gets angry at Daniel for scaring her with his stories of the sidhe. Do you think he's done it deliberately? Why do you think Anna is so scared? What advice would you give them both here?

ACTIVITIES

1. MAKING MEMORIES

On pages 98–102, Anna spends some time in the attic and finds lots of her grandmother's old things. They make Anna feel close to her granny. Think about your most treasured possessions. What do they say about you? Create your own 'memory box'. Fill it with things that tell the story of who you are, eg. photographs, postcards, favourite books. You could write a letter to someone finding it in the future about who you are.

2. PARALLEL WORLDS

On page 108, Anna tries to explain the difference between the magic and non-

magic worlds. Many magical worlds are quite similar to our worlds. Choose an everyday place in your neighbourhood. Then imagine it in a parallel magical world. What's different? What's similar? Write a short story about someone who walks into the magical world. Describe how it is different. How long does it take for your character to realise they're not where they thought they were? How do they react?

3. FREEZE FRAME

On page 124, Anna can hear sad singing and notices angry birds, but her dad is oblivious and continues digging up the fairy fields. In small groups, create a couple of freeze frames to show what's going on. While Anna and her dad are frozen, have some 'fairies' moving around them. Think about their emotions at losing their home and how they might react to humans when they know the humans can't see them.

4. TAKING THE BLAME

On page 145, nothing Anna says is helping her case. Do you think there's a way she can persuade her dad and Maggie that she's telling the truth about what happened? Write her speech for her. Try and include lots of persuasive techniques, like emotive language and rhetorical questions.

5. CREATING TENSION

Read pages 153–159. Anna is alone with Jack when she hears a noise and her worst fears are realised. How does the writer make this section of the book scary and tense? See if you can detect the tricks the writer has used. What verbs have they chosen to create drama? Have they used particular types of punctuation or particular length of sentences to build tension? Find two or three examples and write about how tension is built. Say what technique is being used to create tension and explain how the chosen quote (example) explains your point.

6. DOCUMENTING THE SIDHE

Read pages 166–168 when Daniel is explaining to Anna about the sidhe and what they are capable of. Have you heard of the sidhe before? What do you know about them? In small groups, do your own research into the topic and create a short three-minute documentary (or write a script) about the fairies. Include interviews with different people.

7. LOOKING AFTER A YOUNGER SIBLING

Anna decides to confide in Jenny and

outlines her fears that something might happen to Jack, but Jenny just says that sometimes younger brothers get themselves into mischief. Read through pages 171–174. What can we learn about how to look after a younger sibling? Have you ever had to look after a child that was younger than you? What happened? In pairs, create a guide to 'how to look after a younger sibling'. Think about the sorts of situations they might find themselves in and the best way to avoid these – and how to ask for help.

Section Three The Hunt for Jack Pages 198–284

SUMMARY

Anna stays at Jenny's while her dad and Maggie and the police hunt for Jack and she's driving herself mad with guilt and fear that her little brother has been taken.

However, Jack is found, alive and well – or so it seems. But when Anna sees him, she is worried that something is still wrong. Jack is not eating and he has no energy. Maggie and her dad insist he'll be back to himself after a couple of days of rest, but Anna isn't so sure.

She confides in Daniel, who says the boy who looks like her little brother could actually be a changeling. Anna's angry with Daniel for his suggestion, but still follows his advice when Jack doesn't respond to prompts with his favourite food or favourite toys. She's horrified when Jack's little face transforms into a strange little old man's. She realises that if that creature in her brother's bed isn't Jack, then Jack is still out there and he needs her to find him.

The next morning, she sets off and is surprised and pleased that Daniel appears to help. However, he can only take her so far and soon Anna is deep in the fairy fort on her own, armed only with a few pebbles and some of Daniel's advice. She finds her little brother but Jack doesn't seem well or happy. Anna has to be patient and think of the best way to rescue him. Finally, when she manages to speak with him, it's clear that he's been enchanted. How can Anna break the spell and free them both from the fairies? A little dinosaur and a favourite song do the trick, but Anna and Jack aren't safe yet. The fairies aren't willing to let them go without a fight. Anna finds herself running and running trying to escape from their enchanted world. When it seems like all is lost, she receives help from the spirit of her granduncle – and they're free.

Even though they've cleared the fairy fort, they're still not safe as a magical fog descends, confusing them. But Anna keeps going and finds the marks for the trail that will lead them home. And still the fairies have more tricks up their sleeves, forcing Anna to make a promise to protect her family. Things go back to normal and soon the time comes for Anna to return to London. She's sad to say her goodbyes, but there are already plans for her to return to Fairy Hill the next summer.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read p. 198.** Anna feels guilty that she didn't share her suspicions with Jenny and continues to keep them to herself. Do you think she's doing the right thing by not telling people about the sidhe and Jack? Why do you think this?
- **Read pp. 199–200.** Anna gets some comfort from Molly the horse. Why do you think she finds the horse a comfort? Have you ever turned to an animal when you were feelings upset about something? What happened? Why do you think animals are such good companions?
- **Read pp. 201–205.** Jack doesn't seem himself. However, Anna is alone in her suspicions that there's something going on – the adults say it's because he's had a shock. What sorts of things do you think Anna could do to make him feel safe and comfortable again?
- **Read p. 205.** Anna goes into the pottery studio to make something for her mum. While she's working, time seems to disappear and 'suddenly Dad was at the door ...' Have you ever been so engrossed in something that you lost track of time? What happened? Do you think this is a good thing? Why do you think this?
- **Read p. 210.** Daniel shouts and Anna hears 'genuine grief in his voice'. How does this fit in with your impressions of Daniel? Why do you think he is feeling upset? Do you think Anna has treated him well? Why do you think this?
- **Read p. 214.** Anna's tried Jack's favourite toys, his parents have tried his favourite meal and Anna's even offered to take him to the beach, which he loves, but Jack still isn't responding. If it were you, what sorts of things would cheer you up? They don't have to be big things – sometimes it's the little things that make us feel better.
- **Read p. 221.** Even though she's scared, Anna still heads off into the woods to find her brother. What does this tell us about Anna? Have you ever had to face your fears to help someone you care about? What happened? How did you feel?
- **Read p. 232.** Anna is desperate to

convince Jack to trust her and leave with her, telling him how much he's loved. How do his dad and Maggie show their love for him. Do you recognise any? How do you show love to people that are important to you?

- **Read pp. 235–239.** The fairies use sound to enchant their enemies. What sorts of sounds would you find torturous? What sorts of sounds do you enjoy? Do you think sound is important in setting mood? Why do you think this?
- **Read pp. 254–255.** Do you think Anna should have made that promise to the fairy woman? Do you think it will be easy to keep? Why do you think this?
- **Read pp. 276–279.** Are you surprised to learn the truth about Daniel? Why do you think this? What do you think of Anna's grandmother? Do you feel sympathy for Daniel? Why?

ACTIVITIES

1. A TEST OF LOYALTY

When Anna explains to Daniel about Jack's strange behaviour on pages 208–209, Daniel suggests that the boy in Anna's home may be a changeling and gives her some advice on how to find out. Anna's angry and refuses to listen, but by the time she goes to bed, she's not so sure. What do you think Anna should do? Have a debate in small groups, using persuasive language to get your ideas across.

2. SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO?

Determined to save her little brother, Anna sets off to find him on page 217. But what do you think her dad, Maggie, Lily and Jenny would say? What advice would they give her? In small groups, create a short drama piece with Anna seated in the centre of her family as they call advice to her. What's her reaction? Does she listen? Should she go off without telling the adults?

3. IMPRESSIONS OF ANNA

In the novel, we've learned a lot about Anna, but we really see her courage on page 227 when she leaves Daniel behind and heads off into the fairy fort alone. What sort of person is she? Look back at your first impressions of Anna. Have these changed? Write an essay about how her personality develops through the book. Choose a number of examples from the text that prove your points. Each paragraph should say what your impression is and use a chosen quote (example) to explain your point.

4. THE FIGHT FOR JACK'S LIFE

Anna is determined to save her brother's life and bring him back to the human world – but how can she make the fairies agree with her? Faced with the fairies on pages 230–232, Anna tries to argue for her brother to return with her. If you were Anna, what would you say to convince them? Think about that might appeal to them. Think of persuasive techniques, like emotive language and rhetorical questions. Do you think the fairies would take well to commands? Know your audience. Write a speech for Anna.

5. BREAK THE SPELL

Read pages 230–235. Anna is trying desperately to break the fairy spell over her little brother, and it's a song and a little dinosaur that brings him back to her. In small groups, freeze frame this scene. Think about how each character must be feeling at different points.

6. TELLING THE TRUTH

On page 258, Anna is relieved to be back safely with Jack, but how can she explain what has happened? Imagine you are Anna. Do you tell your dad the truth? How will he react? In small groups or pairs, write the next scene of the novel. Does Anna tell him everything? How does he react? Do they tell Maggie? Think about what you've learned about each character so far and use this to inform how you direct their words and actions.

7. SHAPESHIFTING

On pages 275 and 276, Anna reveals to Daniel that she knows the truth about him and his ability to shapeshift. What animal would you be if you could change shape? Why would you choose this animal? Create a presentation explaining all about your chosen animal and persuade the rest of the group why your chosen animal is the best choice.

8. GOODBYE FOR NOW

Anna has made a close friend in her cousin Jenny and the two girls are going to find it difficult not seeing one another as much once Anna returns to London. In pairs, divide up the roles of Anna and Jenny. Imagine a month has passed since you last saw each other and either write your cousin a letter or create the script for a video diary telling your cousin about everything that's been happening. You'll probably also want to look back on all the fun things you did together in the summer.