

DREAM INVADER

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GERARD WHELAN

Teaching Guide

By Gillian Perdue

RATIONALE AND THEMES

This story introduces and develops many themes, and can be interpreted on many levels, as it moves seamlessly between myth and reality, between rural scenes and urban housing estates, raising thought-provoking questions as it goes. It is a gripping read, with some moments of pure horror, which pupils in the senior cycle of primary school and in the junior cycle of second-level schools will find riveting and entertaining. It also deals sensitively with such themes as:

- The integrity and resilience of the very young child
- Transition from childhood to adult life
- Confronting fears and weaknesses
- Family relationships: love and affection/frustration and inadequacy
- The impact of stress and modern living on quality of life
- Respect for the role of mystery and folklore in our lives
- The struggle between good and evil
- The concept of evil
- Courage, forgiveness, rehabilitation

SUMMARY

Saskia is the bright twelve-year-old daughter of an Irish mother and her Dutch artist husband. We meet her as she sets off for a visit to the city where she will stay with her aunt and uncle, Ruth and Phil, and her little cousin, Simon. Saskia has a problem – her waking life is exciting and fulfilling, whereas her dreams are drab and dull by comparison. Simon also has a problem with dreams – he is being visited at night by a terrifying creature, the Pooshipaw. Simon's very life is at stake and Phil and Ruth, though

concerned and well-meaning, are no match for the ancient forces let loose. The family pays a visit to Nanny, who immediately enlists the help of her friend, Birdie Murray. Birdie has been fighting the forces of evil over many lifetimes and, with her gift of telepathy along with her wisdom and insight, is well prepared for battle. Saskia becomes Birdie's ally in a dangerous game where the prize is a small boy's life.

APPROACH

For the purposes of this exploration, the novel has been divided into five units, each of which contains suggested discussion points and language-based activities.

UNIT 1 SASKIA

SUMMARY

We meet the twelve-year-old Saskia – articulate, intelligent, sarcastic and none-too-pleased at the prospect of staying with her boring Uncle Phil and Aunt Ruth while her parents are away in Holland. The only thing she is looking forward to is seeing her much-loved little cousin, Simon, whom she doesn't see very often as they live on opposite sides of the country. On her journey, she ponders her problem: the fact that her dreams are boring and tedious. When she reaches the city, she finds her aunt and uncle exhausted as Simon has been having nightmares for a few weeks. These began when he started sleeping in a racing-car bed. When he wakes, screaming, all he can remember

is that he was driving the green car and the Pooshipaw was there. The family decides that a holiday is needed, and they head off to visit Granny in the country.

Read pp.9–42.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- What is your opinion of the character of Saskia as we first find her? Why do you think she was not looking forward to her visit to Dublin?
- Uncle Phil is not exactly sure what artists do. Can you define the job of an artist? Discuss the meaning of the word 'Art'.
- The Pooshipaw likes to take its time and says: 'What is the world, if, full of care, we have no time to stop and stare.' Do you agree with this saying? Discuss.
- Discuss Simon's first visit from the Pooshipaw and his subsequent nightmare. What makes the dream so frightening for a young child?

ACTIVITIES

1. PARENTING SKILLS

Phil and Ruth consulted their childcare book to see what it said about nightmares (p.14). Write a series of interview questions for your parent(s)/guardian(s) to answer, regarding their theories about bringing up children. Conduct interviews and report your findings in class. Where do you think you will turn for advice if you decide to have children?

2. CHARACTER SKETCH

Read pp.39–40 and find reasons for Ruth and Phil's disapproval of Nanny's lenient, loving childcare. Then write two short

pieces about Nanny – one from Ruth’s point of view and one from Simon’s.

3. FAVOURITE GAMES

What had Simon’s favourite game been before the nightmares started? Write a poem or essay about your favourite games when you were a toddler. (You may need to ask a parent or grandparent.) Why does Simon not play this game any more?

4. MEETING THE MONSTER

What are your first impressions of the Pooshipaw after meeting him in this unit? (pp.23–34) Describe the Pooshipaw, both in appearance and character. On a large sheet of paper, illustrate the Pooshipaw in a medium of your choice.

5. ACROSTIC POEM

If you read the first letter of each line of an acrostic poem downwards, they will make a word or phrase. Write an acrostic for BIRDIE or the POOSHIPAW.

6. RESEARCH

Saskia’s father is a Dutch artist. The Dutch painter, Rembrandt (1606–1669), had a wife called Saskia and they were happy until her tragic death in 1642, when she died giving birth to their son. Write a short account of Rembrandt’s life and look at some of his well-known paintings.

UNIT 2 THE STINK OF POOSHIPAW

SUMMARY

Saskia, Simon and his parents arrive at Nanny’s house on the southeast coast. Ruth and Phil begin to relax almost as soon as they arrive, although they’re still very concerned about Simon. Nanny takes one look at (or, rather, one sniff of) the child and declares that he stinks of Pooshipaw. She immediately enlists the help of her friend Birdie Murray, a ninety-five-year-old local eccentric/good witch. Ruth, Phil and Saskia have to face the fact that something evil is trying to get Simon. Though sceptical initially, Simon’s parents eventually see just how dangerous this force is and realise that he really is in danger. Birdie, with her ancient wisdom, telepathic

skills and courage, is confident that they will succeed. Saskia discusses her Problem with Birdie and a plan is hatched.

Read pp.43–81.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Why did Nanny look shocked as soon as she saw Simon?
- Discuss the character of Birdie Murray as she is introduced in this unit. Why does she say: ‘‘tis hard to put in words’ when asked to explain what is happening to Simon?
- Organise a class debate/discussion on the motion: ‘Grown-up people have trouble believing things sometimes.’
- On p.65, Birdie says: ‘I lives for me work.’ Who else lives for his work?

ACTIVITIES

1. LETTER-WRITING

Saskia liked Nanny the moment she met her (p.44). Write a letter from Saskia to her parents in Holland, detailing her first impressions of Nanny.

2. TREASURED TOYS

On p.48, we see how Simon makes straight for a box of old toys in his granny’s house. Describe the contents of a toy box you may have had when you were young. What do you remember? What were your favourite toys?

3. PARENTS

Discuss what you have learned to date about Ruth and Phil. Look for examples of their feelings about Simon (pp.13, 36, 38) and their stressful lifestyle (pp.14, 15, 21, 35). Do you think that they are doing everything they can to help Simon? Write out a short conversation between Ruth and Phil as if they were discussing the problem after Birdie’s visit. Act it out in class.

Ask your parent(s)/guardian(s) what they would do if you were in Simon’s situation.

4. EVIL

What do you think Birdie means when she says: ‘This is an ould fight.’? Read pp.62–63 and discuss Birdie’s explanation of the Pooshipaw as ‘a creature of evil’. Why is that not the same as an evil creature? Write an essay entitled Evil, explaining your opinion on the nature of evil.

5. TELEPATHY

Define the word ‘telepathy’ in your own words, then find three examples in this unit of Birdie’s telepathic skills and list them. In small groups, conduct a class experiment on this phenomenon. One person thinks of a colour/animal/number, the others try to ‘read’ that thought. Record and report the findings.

6. GEOGRAPHY

What are the three contrasting environments described in this book? In which environment is Saskia most happy?

Write a paragraph describing each locality: urban, rural (wild and rugged), rural (seaside and holiday-type). If you could choose, which of these environments would you like to live in? Give reasons for your answer.

UNIT 3 PREPARATION FOR A SHOWDOWN

SUMMARY

Phil and Ruth enjoy their holiday and relax more than they have done in years. Birdie has figured out a plan with Simon, Tiger Mike and Saskia, though the children have no clear recollection of it in the day-time world of logic and reason. They return to the city, where Birdie makes a final visit in preparation for the showdown between herself and Bad Jack. Phil and Ruth discover an old photo which seems to show that Birdie has been living, albeit under different names, in the little village since 1865. Bad Jack, the man who sold them the bed, appears in a photo too. Birdie explains, when confronted with this picture, that she has known him for many years and was even his friend once. She likens herself to an auditor, for Phil’s benefit. Bad Jack’s books need balancing and she is going to perform an audit. Saskia has an interesting dream and is prepared for her role in the confrontation.

Read pp.82–116.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Discuss the effect this holiday is having on Phil and Ruth’s relationship (see p.83). Can you find any other relationships that have improved? (see

p.85)

- In what way are Kitty Mahon, Livvie Crowe and Birdie Murray related? In which picture does Bad Jack appear? We know that people cannot live for almost two hundred years. Can forces such as the forces of good and evil live forever? Discuss.
- What force does Bad Jack represent? Was he always bad? (see p.100) Can you think of any experiences that would make a person go 'bad'?

ACTIVITIES

1. DREAMS

In this unit, Saskia has her first interesting dream. Write a dream or nightmare in which you are the main character. (It can either be real or fictitious.) Ask your teacher to read the dreams aloud in class and see if you can guess who is the author of each.

2. CHILD-UNFRIENDLY

On p.99 we read that Bad Jack hates children. Make a list of those qualities in children that he probably hates most. Do you think he would like the fact that Simon isn't really all that scared of the Pooshipaw? What are Simon's real feelings for this creature (p.31)?

3. CONSERVATION

The Pooshipaw likes foul, dirty, unkempt places. On p.114, he gives credit where credit is due and admits that 'humans show some talent for making dirt'. Is there anywhere in your locality that is being destroyed in this way? What about our rivers and seas? Write an essay with the above quotation as its title.

4. WORDS

Birdie says that 'words are only little wiggly things', and that 'they're useless when it comes to important things'. What do you think she means by this? Discuss.

Here is a list of emotions that a person might want to convey. In what way, without words, could you express the following emotions: 'I'm sorry'; 'I love you'; 'You are my friend'; 'I'm frightened'; 'Go away'; 'I'm angry with you'; 'Help me'.

5. PLEASANT PLACES

For a Pooshipaw, the most pleasant place

of all is a stinking rubbish dump. Write a paragraph describing your ideal place. Then write a sentence or two describing pleasant places for some of the following: a duck, a frog, a maggot, a rat, a fish, a vision-impaired person, a toddler, a teenager, an elderly person, a hearing-impaired person, a teacher!

6. TRAVEL BROCHURE

Write a travel brochure for Pooshipaws, describing various places a pooshipaw might want to visit. What activities and entertainment would be available on site? What other facilities might the client require?

UNIT 4 THE BATTLE FOR SIMON

SUMMARY

Simon goes to sleep and finds himself already in the green car with the Pooshipaw beside him. However, he has been strengthened by his time with Nanny and Birdie, and the dream has lost some of its terrible power. They are joined by a revitalised Birdie, Tiger Mike as an all-American super-hero and a ghostly, glittering Saskia. The Pooshipaw is defeated easily by Birdie's laughter and by the sheer force of good that they all embody. Instead of destroying him, Birdie offers the Pooshipaw a choice, and he chooses to be whole and be healed. He crosses over to the side of good. Then Saskia accompanies Birdie as she confronts Bad Jack. Birdie goads him and he tries to destroy her, almost succeeding in a vicious assault. An enraged Saskia yells at Jack while Birdie tries to recover. The stone had made Saskia invisible, and now the bone reveals its terrible power – it's Birdie's old bone and, when thrust into his chest, has the power to destroy Jack.

Read pp.116–144.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- On p.118, we read that Simon is able to study the Pooshipaw closely, now that he is no longer afraid of him. What does he notice about the creature now?
- Do you agree with Birdie's view that

there are lots of important things grown-ups cannot do?

- Why do you think the crash scene had changed into one of a happy picnic?
- Why does Simon choose to forgive the Pooshipaw, in your opinion? (p.128) Birdie sees this ability to forgive as a sign of Simon's strength. Would you agree with that as a general rule – that it takes more courage to forgive someone who has hurt you than to punish them in return? Discuss.

ACTIVITIES

1. COLOURFUL EXPRESSIONS

The Pooshipaw uses many colourful expressions. eg. 'bile on a bike!' and 'snot on a skate!' Make up some exclamations of your own to express surprise, anger or disappointment. Birdie, too, uses idiomatic expressions. Make a list of your favourite of Birdie's sayings.

2. METAPHOR

This is when you compare two things, without using the word 'like'. On p.135, Birdie uses the metaphor of an organ-grinder and a monkey. Find out about this popular Victorian entertainment. Write a short explanation of this metaphor as it is used here. Can you find other metaphors in this unit?

3. CHAT SHOW

Imagine the Pooshipaw is going to appear on the Pat Kenny/Oprah Winfrey/Kilroy Show, and tell his story of bad-guy turned good-guy. Write the interview questions. Act it out in class.

4. CLASS DEBATE

Discuss the motion: 'Laughter is as sharp as a sword when used against you' (p.129).

5. DREAM MACHINE

Simon realises early on that driving the green car is like one of those supermarket rides. Design a ride for young children. Illustrate in a medium of your choice and write underneath what would happen on the ride and how the machine would operate. How would it be powered? What price would it be? Design more for your friends/family.

UNIT 5 THE END OF BAD JACK?

SUMMARY

Bad Jack is defeated, for the moment at least. Simon wakes the next morning as if from a deep, refreshing sleep. In his room are mementoes of the dream – Tiger Mike, now with a stuffed toy Pooshipaw attached to his back, and the shiny green racing car. Saskia's part in the adventure is over too, though Birdie has promised to keep her end of the bargain. Bad Jack's house was burnt to the ground. Phil, Ruth and Simon pay a visit to Nanny and discover that Birdie died peacefully in her sleep the night before. Her last remaining relative, a young widow called Mary Wickham, appears in the village. She used to work as an auditor, but now wants to settle in the seaside town. Saskia joins her parents in Amsterdam, where she will spend the rest of the holiday. She now has a rich dream life as Birdie promised. Some of it she shares with Simon, Tiger Mike and the Pooshipaw; some she keeps just for herself as she dares to dream a monster of her very own.

Read pp.145–175.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- How did Saskia manage to defeat Bad Jack with the old bone? (p.147)
- What does Birdie mean when she says that Saskia 'crossed over a little bit'?
- Discuss Ruth and Phil's different reactions to the end of the story. Ruth has decided to stop questioning and just accept it. What about Phil?
- Discuss Simon's response to Mary Wickham. Do you think he knows that Birdie is dead? Has Birdie really gone?

ACTIVITIES

1. RECIPE FOR A GOOD LIFE

Saskia's father says that life is all about 'enlarging your ideas' (p.167) and Birdie says that 'when you stops learning you're dead.'(p.170) Write a Recipe for a Good Life that Birdie would give to Saskia, Phil, or one of the many babbys she minded.

2. CREATIVE

When Tiger Mike comes alive he has a very real personality. Imagine that one of your toys or belongings came to life, and write an adventure story with you and that object as central characters.

3. LETTER-WRITING

Read p.154 and look for signs that Phil is

changing and becoming less rigid. He decides to take the day off work. Write a letter from Phil to his boss, explaining his recent absences.

4. CLASS DEBATE

What is Birdie's response to Saskia's question, 'What are you, Mrs Murray?' (p.174) It would be easy to see Birdie purely as a symbol of goodness. Yet more than once, we read about her having a darker side. Organise a class debate on the motion: Birdie represents pure goodness.

5. EPITAPH

An epitaph is generally found on the tombstone of a person (or pet) who has died. It usually would contain something about the personality of the deceased and may say how he/she died. Write an epitaph for Birdie and/or one for Bad Jack.

6. GEOGRAPHY

Look up Amsterdam and Schipol, both of which are mentioned on p.167. Use a web search or encyclopaedia to find out about Holland and Amsterdam, a very interesting city. Write about your findings and report in class.

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

ABOUT THE AUTHOR, GERARD WHELAN



Gerard Whelan's first novel, *The Guns of Easter*, won the Eilís Dillon Memorial Award and a Bisto Merit Award. *Dream Invader* is his second book, and won the Bisto Book of the Year Award for 1998. Originally from Enniscorthy, County Wexford, Gerard now lives in Dublin and writes full-time.

Reviews for *Dream Invader*

'A richly original and skilfully crafted story which blends fantasy and folklore with moments of true horror.' *Bisto Book of the Year Citation*

'Gerard Whelan's dramatic novel is a spine-chiller.' *Sunday Tribune*

'Gerard Whelan's vivid storytelling makes us believe utterly in his people and in a world that includes an ointment that induces visions [and] a stone that makes you invisible.' *Irish Times*

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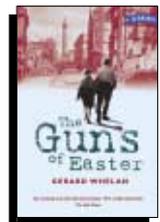
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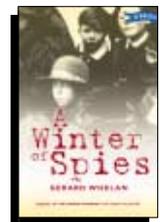
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