



Kings of the Boyne

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Nicola Pierce

Teaching Guide

By Peter Heaney

RATIONALE & THEMES

The Sherrard brothers, Daniel and Robert, with their friend Henry Campsie, have followed the Rev. Walker, Governor of Derry, during the siege, to join King William's forces as they face the army of the Jacobite King James II across the River Boyne.

On the Jacobite side, the French cavalry include Gerard O'Connor from a line of dispossessed Catholic nobility and his friend Jacques.

Like the Boyne, the tide of conflict swells and ebbs, claiming lives, testing courage and reshaping fortunes as the kings throw their armies against each other. The destiny and identity of Ireland is formed for centuries by their struggle.

The themes explored are:

- Courage
- Friendship
- Loyalty
- Justice
- Brutality
- Violence & Death
- Identity
- Loss
- Suspicion
- Endurance

SUMMARY

The events at the Boyne in July 1690 and the fortunes of the opposing armies of William and James are revealed through the stories of the Sherrard brothers, Daniel and Robert, who have come from Derry to join forces with William, and Gerald O'Connor from the dispossessed Catholic nobility and his companion Jacques who are enlisted in the French cavalry supporting James.

The horror of what they must all face becomes frighteningly real for Gerald and Jacques as they witness the execution of a boy and girl caught trying to poison a well, while the Sherrards exchange words over the justice of Rev. Walker's order to requisition horses from a local farm that will leave a widow and her family facing starvation.

King James, petulant and unfocussed, is unwilling to accept advice from his lieutenants; his army is enthusiastic but untrained and inadequately equipped.

James's strategy of forcing William to engage across the Boyne initially seems masterly; however,

when William manages to wrong-foot him and seize the tactical advantage, James abandons the field, leaving the remnants of his army to retreat at the mercy of the Williamite regiments.

The course of the battle is remorseless, harvesting lives without mercy, leaving each of the heroes exhausted and haunted by the consequence of their participation and the futility of their sacrifice.

As the surge of battle subsides, Robert is left to guard the lifeless remains of his brother Daniel while Gerald and Jacques return their friend, Joseph, to his home near Trim.

APPROACH

The repercussions from the Battle of the Boyne have shaped the history of Ireland and resonate still, influencing how sections of our community perceive their culture and each other.

The story offers a platform to explore the motives, actions, aspirations and consequences for those who took part and a commentary on the brutalising effect of war.

The content lends itself to discussion as part of both the NI and the ROI curricula. (*SESE and PDMU & WAU*)

This guide is divided into four sections.

Section 1 The Sleeping Army Pages 9-92

SUMMARY

Their part in an impromptu martial law trial and execution reminds Gerald and Jacques of the brutality of their adventure as soldiers of the broody and indecisive Jacobite King James, as they wait in miserable conditions for their king to decide how to engage William's forces.

Arriving in Belfast, William receives a subdued welcome. He reminds the crowd of their loyalty during the siege of Derry.

Rev. Walker, firebrand and former siege Governor of Derry, has raised a troop from the Derry garrison to support William and orders the Sherrard brothers to 'borrow' horses from local farms to add to the cavalry.

In Drogheda, Jacques warns Gerald about the local drinking water as they are met with the stink of animals and waste. Gerald meets Jacques' girl, Nancy, and they visit a bookshop, where Gerald is surprised with a gift from Jacques and Nancy of a book he admired that reminds him of his sister Cait. Searching for horses, Daniel and Robert reach the Watson farm. Observing Mrs Watson plough with her horses, they mistake her for a man before Robert demands that she give up her animals in the name of King William.

Daniel is sympathetic to the widow, but Robert is unflinching. The horses are requisitioned, and Mrs Watson declares her intention of seeking out William in person to request their return.

Tired from drilling their horses, Jacques and Gerald join two Jacobite infantry volunteers, Michael and Joseph, for a beer. They argue over why they are fighting for James.

Jacques' cynicism annoys each of them, and Joseph calms them down with a story from mythology that justifies their cause and predicts victory.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (**Read p13-14**): A boy and a girl have been caught attempting to poison a well, and are to be executed. Did they deserve this punishment? Can prisoners ever be treated justly in time of war?
- (**Read pp17-20**): Gerald and Jacques witness the execution without intervening. Jacques says that the responsibility is not theirs. Is he correct? Is he blameless because the decision was not his? Should they have spoken up if they felt it was wrong?
- (**Read pp31-32**): His family lands have been forfeit, yet Gerald still commands deference because of his name. Do you believe that some families are better because of their name? Does this system of superiority still exist in Ireland?
- (**Read p42**): Rev. Walker orders his men to 'borrow' horses. In effect he meant that they steal them, by force if necessary. Where did he think he got the authority to do this? Is it acceptable to ignore the laws of property even in war? What rights should citizens have in times of war?

- (**Read pp79-80**): Jacques agrees with Gerald that their sense of duty controls their actions. Where do you think your sense of duty should lie? What do we mean by duty? Is it something valuable or simply a control mechanism to make you do something that you would not ordinarily do?

ACTIVITIES

1. Faces (Read pp13-14)

The Protestant boy and girl await their fate. Gerald scans the faces of everyone, trying to understand what they might be thinking.

Create a collage of their faces.

These sites might be useful.

danidraws.com/blog/2007/12/06/50-facial-expressions-and-how-to-draw-them/

youtube.com/watch?v=4za5eEmkcCM

2. Lauzun (Read pp24-25)

The Comte has written to King Louis with his concerns over James's ability as leader.

Create Louis' reply. Think about his ambitions and any instructions he might give to deal with James, eg would he give orders to take control if the situation deteriorated?

3. It's King William (Read pp35-36)

King William has arrived at Belfast and the reaction of the citizens is subdued.

The *Worcester Postman* newspaper has just been launched in England, and Worcester is the hometown for Godfrey, one of William's commanders; he decides to write a report for the paper, including a headline and illustration.

He uses the 5 x W & H format (*who, what, when, where, why & how*) to write his account. Create his piece.

4. Water (Read p51)

Clean water is vital for our health. In Ireland we have clean water to drink and hygienic ways to deal with waste.

Create a chart/list to describe the different ways we depend on a safe supply of water.

Use the site below to compare how some developing countries *still* have to deal with the conditions of water supply that existed in Drogheda in 1690. www.wateraid.org/uk

5. The Book (Read pp59-61)

Gerald discovers a captivating book. The touch and smell, as well as the design and craftsmanship, prompt a very powerful memory of his sister Cait.

Think about your own favourite book. Describe it in a similar way to Gerald's.

What senses does the book stimulate and which memories does it evoke?

6. More Important (Read p76)

As Jean Watson strides away, Daniel wonders what

can be more important than war. He calls after her for an explanation and she turns and snaps a list of 5 things she considers more important.

Recreate her list.

7. Freedom (Read p90)

Gerald states that his reason for supporting James is to be free from tyranny.

What do you think freedom is? How could you decide if you were free?

Work in small groups to create a 5-point entitlement checklist that every citizen would enjoy if they were free.

8. The Sleeping Army (Read pp91-92)

Joseph describes the tale of the Sleeping Army, bewitched by an ancient spell, waiting for Ireland's call.

Create a Wikipedia entry for the Sleeping Army. Describe how they were spellbound and when they may be called upon to wake.

Add maps and illustrations if you like.

Section 2 The Storm Approaches Pages 93-167

SUMMARY

Returning to the camp, Robert tells Henry Campsie about Mrs Watson. Henry is suspicious and believes the widow must be a Jacobite soldier in disguise: he wants to investigate further.

To help the family, Daniel insists on returning alone to check Henry's suspicions.

Mrs Watson's children are upset because their mother has left them to try to recover their horses. Daniel helps with some of the domestic chores before returning to camp with a convenient lie to reassure Henry.

James, weary, homesick and unable to shift a feeling of gloom, struggles to make decisions on how to engage William's army.

The conflict between his commanders is clear. Looking at the River Boyne on a map, James decides to make this the battlefield and the matter is settled.

William's army continues south, and Daniel, while foraging for firewood, finds himself confronted by a wolf, only to be rescued by Mrs Watson, who has followed the army, seeking to talk to William.

Arriving at the Boyne, William decides to make a reconnaissance tour of the riverbank. He is wounded by Jacobite cannonfire. Later, he is forced to make a tour to reassure his men that he has not been killed.

Leading a council of war, he considers two conflicting suggestions from his advisors. Reserving judgement, William leaves his generals to consider his options and how best to heed their advice without giving credit to anyone other than himself.

In the Jacobite camp, Gerald finds his thoughts

drifting to his family, reminiscing on his mother's advice and worrying about his father, who is fighting in Flanders.

Eve of battle preparations are made with letters written and munitions readied.

Jacques returns and Nancy follows him, upset that she is to be left behind. She disappears into the camp and Gerald and Jacques begin a desperate search.

However, she has tricked them and reappears from behind a tree, falling into Jacques' embrace.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (**Read pp94-98**): When Robert tells Henry about Mrs Watson, Henry undermines him. Daniel is annoyed at his brother for not trusting his own judgment. Why do you think Robert allowed Henry to undermine him? Why has Daniel chosen to confront Henry and chide his brother? How has the relationship between the brothers begun to change?
- (**Read pp117-118**): James ignores the battle site advice from his generals. Why did he do that? What does it reveal about his character? Why did no one suggest they scout the riverbank to check if it could be defended easily? Where did the authority lie within the group and how was it exercised?
- (**Read pp125-128**): Mrs Watson recognises Daniel as one of the Williamite soldiers who took her horses, yet she is prepared to help him. Why did she decide to help him? Would she have helped Robert in the same way? What can you learn from her attitudes and beliefs from her actions?
- (**Read p154**): Before the battle, Gerald realises that irrespective of the outcome some things will go on as before. Is this a useful philosophy? What events do we have no control over?
- (**Read pp162-163**): Nancy is distressed. She expects Jacques to demonstrate a commitment to their relationship. Is it reasonable for her to expect their relationship to lead to marriage? Was Jacques wrong to encourage Nancy if he never had any intention of marrying her?

ACTIVITIES

1. The Plank (Read pp105-106)

Mrs Watson sets off to find her horses, but her children want to follow her, so, to stop them, she kicks away a plank used for crossing the stream.

Recreate the conversation she has with her children, scolding and reassuring them at the same time. Use two colours of pen for her thoughts and then words.

2. The Future (Read pp115-116)

James realises that Talbot, Sarsfield and Lauzun are each trying to manipulate him. All four see a different future.

In groups create a prediction chart showing how each of them view the future and the advantage they hope to gain for their own cause.

What role do they see for James in realising their ambitions?

3. Mrs Watson (Read pp121 & 126-128)

Daniel has waited to write to his mother until he has something interesting to say.

He decides to tell her about Mrs Watson, describing her determination and courage.

Compose the letter you think he may have written.

4. Ireland (Read p129)

Suggest 7 reasons why Ireland might be attractive to a foreign power such as James or William.

5. James v William (Read pp132-133)

James and William are both kings, but does the similarity end there?

Create a similarity/differences grid to match them, describe their:

- Approach
- Attitude
- Ambitions
- Character
- Purpose
- Leadership

Find the **FACTS** in the story that tell you about the kings' and their ideas.

6. Fighting and Dying for a Cause (Read p135)

When the Duke of Schomberg comments that Ireland is worth fighting for, William agrees but adds that it is not worth dying for.

What did he mean?

In groups compile a list of 5 things that would be worth fighting for. Are any worth dying for?

7. Today (Read p144)

William has begun to write a diary with his private thoughts and feelings.

How do you think he recorded the events of the day before the battle?

What impressions did they make on him and how did it affect how he saw himself?

Create his diary entry for that day.

8. Sunset (Read p156)

Gerald is determined to enjoy the sunset. The metaphor he chooses, "**like melting butter on freshly baked bread**", is very eloquent in its description of the setting sun.

Describe the different times of day and how the light changes using 5 metaphors.

Section 3 Checkmate Pages 168-244

SUMMARY

James's final war council is an ill-tempered meeting, the discovery that the Boyne can be forded causing disbelief from the French at the lack of local knowledge from their Irish counterparts.

A plan is cobbled together and, despite the gloom, James is heartened by what he sees as a sign from God – a spectacular flock of starlings in the darkening sky.

Henry apprehends Mrs Watson as a spy when she attempts to enter the camp. Daniel loses his temper with Henry and all his threats, and they fight with the soldiers cheering them on.

Sudden silence announces the arrival of the king, accompanied by Rev. Walker.

When he hears what is happening, William releases Mrs Watson, giving her a personal letter and returning both her and her neighbours' horses. Daniel is instructed to assist her with the animals.

Final orders are issued, and the armies prepare to meet each other, with both kings attempting to outflank the other. Timing and terrain are key as the battalions move into position.

William has decided to split his army into 3 sections: the middle section and bulk of his army under the command of Schomberg is to advance across the ford and engage with James's army. Two smaller commands to the east and west will probe the Jacobite flank. Schomberg's son, Meinhard, will lead one and William will lead the other.

The Jacobite scouts misinterpret the Williamite manoeuvre and inform James that William has taken the bulk of his army west to attempt the ford at Rosnaree.

James makes the fatal decision to divide his troops and leads the main section of his army to meet William, leaving a woefully inadequate contingent at the Oldbridge ford to face the main assault from Schomberg.

The small battalion of Jacobites under Talbot face the first cannonfire and watch in horror as William's main army begins to ford the Boyne. Talbot orders his infantry to fire on the Williamites in the water, and readies the cavalry to attack them when they have crossed. A desperate message is sent to recall James.

Michael, Joseph and the rest of the infantry fight the Williamites in close combat while Gerald and Jacques watch with the cavalry, waiting for their orders.

Meinhard successfully crosses the river; however, his father, the Duke, is held up at the ford by the Talbot's Jacobite defence.

James has led his army into a cul-de-sac of impenetrable terrain and is unable to move forward. When news reaches him of Talbot's desperate defence, he realises his fatal mistake and lapses into a reverie, unable to plan an effective response. Instead, he accepts his predicament as inevitable and predestined, opting to retreat back to Dublin, leaving those defending the ford to their fate and the mercies of William's army.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (Read p174): Standing inside the ruins of the church on the Hill of Dunore, James wonders if we are all held prisoner by our understanding of the past. Is he correct? Are our decisions for the future limited by what we see in the past?

Can a Catholic and a Protestant ever look at the past and agree on what they see? How can this help us to create a better future?

- (Read p175 & pp242-243): James looks to the sky for signs from God to guide his decision and actions. Is this a sensible strategy? What does it reveal about his character? Is it possible for signs in nature to be an indication of divine intervention or guidance?
- (Read p181): Mrs Watson has been captured and the soldiers have become very hostile as Daniel tries to reason with them. Is it ever possible for reason to convince such a crowd? What makes a crowd turn into a mob?
- (Read p200): The Duke of Schomberg is anxious to get as many men across the Boyne as possible, irrespective of the injuries. Does he see them as 'cannon fodder'? In war, are commanders ever concerned for the lives of their troops or do they just accept that some will have to die? What does this reveal about the nature of war?
- (Read pp224-225): Michael has crept off in the night to join James's army, without thinking of his wife or his family. What is the attraction of war? Has this appeal a greater effect on men or women? If taking part in war is so dangerous, why do people choose to fight?

ACTIVITIES

1. If (Read pp172-173)

James is struggling to decide on a clear plan. He needs someone who can help him to think clearly and calmly.

Work in groups to decide on 5 options. List their pros & cons. How might James react to your options?

2. The Proposal (Read p173)

James recalls playing with his nephew and decides to make a final attempt to reconcile their differences. He dictates a 5-point proposal to send to William.

William replies, accepting some of the points and changing others.

Work in groups to create the proposal & the reply.

3. The Starlings (Read p175)

James is fascinated as he watches a huge flock of starlings creating patterns in the evening sky.

Create a silhouette picture with dark hills, brooding sky and clouds of starlings.

4. The Horses (Read pp185-186)

Mrs Watson presents her plea to William under the gaze of Rev. Walker, Henry Campsie, Robert and Daniel Sherrard and the rest of the soldiers.

William's reply is unexpected.

Write a **BEFORE & AFTER** comment for each of them, describing what they expected to happen and then their reaction to William's decision.

Who might have agreed with his decision and who might not?

5. God (Read pp224-225)

Both the Jacobites and Williamites are praying to God to keep them safe and help them to kill each other. This seems a strange request given that Jesus preached we should *'Love our enemies'*.

What might God say?

Use your imagination to create God's reply. What teaching might he remind them of?

Use the site below to help you decide.

www.openbible.info/topics/violence

6. Flotsam (Read p226)

Gerald watches as the river takes the body of a dead soldier, carrying it to the sea.

After the battle, those living downstream will see a lot more pitiful flotsam drift past.

Imagine that you live by the coast and watch the story of the battle unfold in the material that drifts past.

Write a cinquain poem in memory of those to whom the items belonged.

www.poetry4kids.com/blog/lessons/how-to-write-a-cinquain-poem/

7. Close Quarters (Read p230)

The Dutch Blue Guards have been fighting face to face with the Irish infantry in the river. The scene is chaotic and deadly.

Create a cartoon of the scene with speech bubbles to show what is being shouted.

Section 4 The Boyne Pages 168-244

SUMMARY

Overwhelmed by the endless stream of Williamite troops emerging from the Boyne, the Jacobite infantry are being crushed despite the ferocity of their defence.

When Talbot orders his cavalry into action, Gerald and Jacques manage to breach the wall of pikes and lead an attack through.

Spotting the danger, Schomberg roars into the mêlée, only to be felled by shot and sabre.

Daniel sees Rev. Walker fall, mortally wounded, and rushes to him. Ignoring Robert's call, he struggles to drag the body from the stream until a musket ball sends him too into oblivion, the bells of St Columb's ringing in his ears as he drifts away.

James has abandoned the field, returning to Dublin. Michael is trying to deal with his friend Joseph who has lost his reason.

Desperately waiting for James to return, Talbot tries to manage the remnants of his men. However, they are hopelessly outnumbered.

The previous evening, Daniel had persuaded Mrs Watson to postpone her return and now she watches as Robert carries Daniel's body to meet her.

She offers to take Daniel's body to her farm for burial and Robert reluctantly releases it before he reads to her the letter William gave her which grants her ownership of her farm forever.

Staggered by the Jacobites' fierce defence, William leads his troops into the Boyne in an attempt to outflank Talbot. He has to be rescued from the strong current but quickly recovers to head a cavalry charge.

Breaking away from the remnants of the Jacobite defenders, Michael finds Gerald frozen at the sight of his wounded horse and ends the animal's agony before the two flee into the woods on foot.

Confronted by an armed Williamite, they realise that Joseph, his mind completely gone, has perched himself in a tree above them, lost in a world of his own.

Jacques and Gerald kill the Williamite but not before the alarm has been raised and they are forced to flee again.

Joseph refuses to leave the tree and the others can only watch from their hiding place as their friend is shot. They then separate to find safety and escape in their different ways.

William is told of James's escape, and decides to let him go. Watching the Jacobites' final stand on the Hill of Dunore, he realises he has won the day and signals an end to the assault.

James retreats to Dublin and makes his escape to France, never to return. Gerald and Jacques return the body of Joseph O'Leary to his home for burial with his family. Humbled by the hospitality they receive, they can offer no comfort or reason as there is none that they themselves can understand.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (Read p257): The Duke of Schomberg has just spent his last few minutes on earth trying to kill as many people as he can, yet assumes that his afterlife will be peaceful and idyllic. Is he correct or deluded? Why do we generally believe that the next life will be better, irrespective of how we have lived this life? Is this assumption correct or is it only a comfort mechanism?
- (Read p263): Rev. Walker is dead; he can have no further interest in how his body is treated, yet Daniel risks his life to ensure it has a proper burial. Why do we go to great lengths to show respect for the dead that sometimes we do not show them when they were alive? What power do the dead have over our actions?
- (Read p269): James is very calm and appears not to recognise or be concerned with the suffering of anyone other than himself. Why did he make no attempt to rescue the others under Talbot's command? Was his detachment due to his upbringing as a member of the nobility or was he simply a selfish and self-centered man?
- (Read p302): Why did Gerald choose to try to kill the Huguenot soldier first rather than knock him unconscious? What has happened to Gerald as a result of his experience of war? Has he become a different person as a result?
- (Read p323): Before the battle, Gerald's understanding of war was sentimental. How did his experience change this view? Do stories and history create this impression of war? Why do people describe war in this way?

ACTIVITIES

1. For God, William and Derry (Read pp256-259)

Henry Campsie writes a description of Rev. Walker's contribution to the battle and sends it back to the city for everyone to read. Help him write this epitaph.

2. Defeated (Read p276)

Talbot understands that they are facing defeat. He realises that there were 3 main reasons why James has been defeated.

Working in groups, describe the three reasons.

3. Why (Read pp284-286)

As Robert carries Daniel away from the battlefield, he talks to his dead brother, telling him all the things he should have said to him when he was alive.

Create the monologue he whispered as he carried Daniel's body to safety.

4. War is (Read pp304-305)

After they heard the volley that cut Joseph down, Michael spat that *"War is stupid."*

In groups create a list of 8 *War is...* statements, adding a *Because...* explanation to each of them.

Imagine that you could interview some of the people who took part in the battle, eg winners, losers, wounded, wives & families etc. Imagine the statements they would give.

5. Courage (Read p306)

Jacques says that knowing when to stop also shows courage.

Listening, Gerald realises that his understanding of courage has changed utterly. He believes that the word itself needs a completely new meaning written for it in every dictionary.

Create Gerald's new entry. Think about what it really means to have courage, how it is displayed and who might have it.

7. Break (Read p312)

Surrounded and outnumbered, the Jacobites defend the Hill of Dunore.

Suddenly the atmosphere changes, slightly at first, then the dam breaks. When the first man turns to flee, the others follow him in a rush.

Describe the fateful moment that provoked the collapse.

What was said to cause the sudden retreat?

Imagine you were there watching and listening to the exchanges. Describe what happened.

8. The Christian (Read p325)

Mrs O'Leary wonders if it really matters to God whether someone is a Catholic or a Protestant.

Create a list of 6 key proofs needed to identify someone as a Christian.