



Lily Takes a Chance

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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 the students' critical abilities. The activities aim to inspire young readers by encouraging them to explore 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. This novel explores the class system, following dreams and the impact of war. Key themes include:

- Courage
- Family and community
- Ambitions and dreams
- Equality
- Friendship.

SUMMARY

Lily Takes a Chance tells the story of Lily Brennan, a young housemaid at Lissadell House in County Sligo. It's 1915 and Europe is at war. Lily is worried about the conflict in Europe, but she also has other things on her mind – like if she'll ever get to realise her ambition of being a teacher.

Despite the war, life at Lissadell carries on. Lily tries to appreciate the simple life like her friend Nellie, but it's difficult. There's a friendly distraction when she meets the new stablehand Sam, a boy with ambitions just like her.

As the weeks pass, Lily has a bit of a rollercoaster as she is anxiously waiting to hear about the teaching position at the local school. Her friends' lives are similarly in flux, with her close friend Maeve Markievicz being threatened with boarding school in

England and her new friend Sam filled with excitement at his secret adventure. It's a difficult time for Lily as the lives of everyone around her seem to be changing – but will she be stuck at Lissadell forever?

However, it's not long before her friend Maeve has involved her in an exciting escapade – but as thrilling as the secret trip to Dublin is, Lily soon finds herself in serious trouble. With her life falling apart, Lily is distraught, but her friends rally round and soon everything is back on an even keel. As things improve for each of her friends, Lily's back to feeling left behind – but a surprise announcement means the happiest of news and the book ends with Lily stepping into her future.

APPROACH

This book is the fourth in the *Lissadell* series. It's a very enjoyable and entertaining read, filled with well-developed characters and exciting action and plot twists.

There are also many opportunities for discussion and learning about World War I, class systems and equality. 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 characters and plot.

Part One Friends and Dreams Pages 7 -78

SUMMARY

The story opens with a delivery of navy wool – exciting news for Nellie, but Lily was hoping for something a bit more dynamic. She soon perks up when her friend Maeve arrives and takes Lily on a trip to the stables where she meets the new stableboy Sam. Although Maeve is the niece of Lily's employers, the two girls are firm

friends despite their different backgrounds. However, today Maeve is worried that she might be sent away to boarding school and confides her fears to Lily. Once Lily is back in her bedroom with Nellie and Johanna, talk turns to the war again.

While running an errand, Lily bumps into Sam again and has a very interesting chat – it's clear they're going to be good friends. Maeve returns and persuades Lily to join her in the stables where she confides some of her worries. Lily gets the chance to get to know Sam better and he surprises her with a very thoughtful gift.

On her return from a home visit, Lily bumps into her old schoolmaster who boosts her mood and fills her with hope again – but this is soon dashed when Sam tells her what he thinks is his good news. Soon, Maeve's worst fears come true and Lily is torn trying to help all her friends.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Read p.7** What do you think of Nellie's "great news"? Is this something you would get excited about? Why do you think it's so exciting for the girls?
- Read pp. 13-17** Maeve complains about her governess Miss Clayton – but do you think she behaved well in response? Why do you think this? What advice would you give to Maeve?
- Read p.19** With the three girls sitting knitting round the fire, Lily describes it as "very cosy and peaceful". Do you have any routines at home that you would describe in this way? Can you describe them to your partner?
- Read p.21** Lily describes herself as feeling pinned like a butterfly – have you ever had this feeling? What was it like? What did you do to escape it? What happened?
- Read p.30** Why do you think people like the way things are at the moment? Who do you think they are? What would you

say to them? Why? How do you think the world has changed?

- **Read p.36** What do you think of Lily's Mam saying "be yourself and you can't go wrong." Do you agree? Why do you think this? What advice would you give someone making a new friend?
- **Read pp. 41-44** What do you think of Sam's gift? Has this changed your view of Sam? What sort of person is he? Have you ever received a gift that left you speechless? What happened?
- **Read p.51** What do you think of Lily keeping her dream to herself? Do you think this is the right thing to do? Why do you think she doesn't tell Nellie? What would you do? Why?
- **Read pp.64-65** Lily reminds herself that although Maeve's row with her governess might not be a big thing compared to the war, it's still important to Maeve. What do you think of Lily's thinking? Do you agree with her? Why do you think this?

ACTIVITIES

1. NELLIE CHARACTER STUDY

What do we learn about Nellie in the first couple of pages? Choose two or three adjectives to describe her personality. Can you find quotes in the text that prove your point? Write a couple of paragraphs examining the character of Nellie. Remember to include the quotes you've chosen and to fully explain exactly how each quote proves your point.

2. CHANGING WORLDS

On pages 30-31, Sam outlines the changes that will be seen in the world with girls like Lily no longer having to live and work as servants. Imagine you can travel into the book. How would you explain the changes to Lily and Sam? Do a little research on how working-class people gained more independence over the last 100 years. Write a monologue to perform to the class that outlines what they can expect from the future and how we got here.

3. GRATITUDE DIARY

When she passes her old school on page 47, Lily becomes upset that her dreams are still so far away. She questions why she can't be more like Nellie and be content with what she has. Do you think she's right? Or do you think it's possible to be more grateful for what you have and also to want things to improve? For the next fortnight, keep a gratitude diary. Every morning and every evening, write down two or three things

you are grateful for. They don't have to be big things – they could be as simple as the sound of a friend's laugh or the warmth of a hug from your parents. After the fortnight, think about how noting your gratitude has affected how you feel.

4. OFF TO WAR

What do you think of Sam's attitude to going to fight? Do you think young men should have been as eager? Do you think they knew the truth about war? Do you think the authorities should have been stricter? Do some research into the boy soldiers of the First World War, using articles like these to help:

bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-29934965

historylearningsite.co.uk/world-war-one/the-western-front-in-world-war-one/boy-soldiers/

In small groups, debate whether or not Lily should tell the authorities the truth about Sam's age to stop him from going off to war.

5. LETTER TO MAEVE

Lily is keen to help her friend. But what can she do? Imagine you are Lily. You've had to move away from your family to earn money – so you know a bit about what things will be like for Maeve if she has to move away. What advice would you give her about keeping her spirits up and avoiding being too homesick? Write her a letter advising her on what she should do if she has to move away from school. Think about what you know of Lily and Maeve's personalities.

Section 2 Other People's Problems Pages 79 – 173

SUMMARY

Lily tries her best to persuade Sam not to go to war, but it's no use – he has made up his mind. She has to confide in someone about something or else she'll burst so she tells Nellie about Maeve. Nellie's response is typically kind and Lily feels a little release.

One morning, Lily is brought on a surprising mission by Lady Mary and Maeve to revisit the refugee families in Sligo Town. However, things don't go entirely as planned and Maeve and Lily have the afternoon to themselves. Maeve has a surprise in store for Lily and soon they're chatting with old friends before Maeve takes Lily on a thrilling adventure. It's Lily's first time taking a train and she knows she should be enjoying herself – but there's something not quite

right about the situation. Lily trusts Maeve not to get her into trouble and tries to relax – but when they finally arrive at Maeve's mother's house in Dublin, they don't get the welcome she was expecting.

Lily is torn between feeling sorry for Maeve and feeling angry with her friend for dragging her into the mess she's made.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read pp. 80-82** Lily is struggling to change Sam's mind. Why do you think he was so keen? What other options were there for young men like Sam from poorer backgrounds? What do you think he should do? Why do you think this?
- **Read p.85** Lily has sympathy for Maeve as they wait for her mother, saying that "Waiting is the hardest thing of all". What do you think she means by this? Do you agree with her statement? Why do you think this?
- **Read p. 91** Lily has suspicions about the journey, but tries to stop herself from worrying about it, declaring "I was going to sing along, and enjoy the journey." With this, Lily makes the decision not to worry about things she can't control. Is this good advice? Why do you think this?
- **Read pp.97** The refugee family are not as welcoming as Lily had expected and she finds herself annoyed by their behaviour. However, Lady Mary disagrees and tells Lily "we must try to be understanding". What does she mean? Do you agree with her? Why is it so important to always try and consider someone else's situation before judging them?
- **Read p.103** Lily says that she regrets not introducing her friends sooner. Why do you think she didn't? Do you agree with this? What do you think she should have done instead? Why?
- **Read pp.117-118** Do you believe Maeve? Why? What would you do in this situation? What would you advise Lily to do (remember their different social positions)? Why would you give this advice?
- **Read p. 137.** Why do you think Countess Markievicz chooses to live in Dublin rather than the luxury of Lissadell? What do you think this tells us about her personality?
- **Read pp.151-2** What questions would you have for Maeve? Do you agree with Lily for not asking her why she was behaving "wild"?

ACTIVITIES

1. A WARM WELCOME

On pages 91–97, Lily, Maeve and Lady Mary visit the refugees from the war in Sligo. They bring food, fresh linens and Lily is keen to help teach them some English. But what is a refugee? Why do you think it's important to help them? What sorts of things do you think they need? Why is Lady Mary not offended when the second family behave in a different way to the first?

There are a number of resources available on the UN site:

unhcr.org/teaching-about-refugees.html

In small groups, think about how you would give a warm Irish *Fáilte* to a group of refugees in your local neighbourhood. Draw up a welcome pack. You can include some of the following:

Key words and phrases you think they might find useful (for example, when people in the North refer to 'your man', they're not expecting the other person to know them!)

Local spots of interest.

Key amenities like supermarkets, banks, doctors etc.

Fun things to do in the area (are there any sports clubs they could join?)

Explain any little customs or habits they might find strange (our obsession with Hallowe'en).

2. MAMMY

On page 100, Lily thinks about Maeve's relationship with her mother and comes up with an answer: "And even if she's not perfect, she's your mam and is special to you."

Choose an adult you're close to. What's so special about them? Create something that explains why they're so special to you. This could be a letter to them explaining what you love about them. It could be a script for a video detailing what it is about them that's so special. You could even write and perform a song about the times you've spent together that have meant a lot to you.

3. ALL ABOARD

Re-read pages 107–121. Lily is thrilled to be travelling by train for the first time – she describes it as "the most exciting thing I'd ever done in my whole life." How does she make her excitement clear? Look at the use of punctuation, choice of words and the description of Lily's thoughts and feelings throughout this section. How do they

suggest excitement? Write a short analysis of how the writer creates a sense of excitement in these pages. In your answer, you should use quotes from the text and explain exactly how they build a sense of excitement for the reader. *Extension: What's the most exciting thing you've ever done? Using the techniques used by Judi Curtin, write your own description.*

4. WELCOME TO DUBLIN!

From pages 122–187, Lily is filled with wonder and excitement by the city of Dublin. Have you ever been to Dublin? What was it like? In pairs, research the city and what things you would recommend to a visitor of Lily's age. Take care to think about the sorts of things they would find interesting. Create a guidebook to the city – this could be as a small website or a leaflet. Include recommendations for things to see to properly understand the city, its history, its culture and its people.

5. DIARY ENTRY

When she arrives at her mother's house, Maeve doesn't quite get the welcome she hoped for. Imagine you are Maeve. Write a diary entry exploring how you feel about your mother and the situation. Explain why you've decided to act in the way you have and what you hope the outcomes will be. What will you say to your mother in the morning to try and persuade her to your point of view? Remember to make sure it's reflective of what we have learnt about Maeve and her personality so far.

6. COUNTESS MARKIEVICZ

The Countess is an interesting woman who acts in a way that is totally out of keeping with society's expectations of the way a woman of her stature should behave. Prepare a short piece of drama that explores her personality. This can either be a dramatic monologue from the Countess's perspective, exploring her thoughts, feelings and ambitions or a hot-desking exercise.

Section Three Time to Face the Music Pages 174 – 255

SUMMARY

As the two girls prepare to return to Lissadell, Maeve's mother surprises the two girls by returning and taking them on a trip around Dublin. Lily is overcome with excitement at the carnival and the two friends spend the day laughing and enjoying the fair.

However, when they arrive back in Sligo, it's clear that Lily is in terrible trouble. The next morning, her worst fears come true as Mrs Bailey tells her she is to leave Lissadell. The next few days are bittersweet as Lily prepares to say goodbye to all her friends and the life she loved so much.

The arrival of Maeve gives Lily the courage to speak to Mrs Bailey and tell the truth. After an uncomfortable conversation, Lily is allowed to stay at Lissadell and everything has been sorted out.

Harry returns with a mask covering his injuries and it's clear that there might soon be wedding bells for him and Johanna – much to Lily's delight. It's soon Saturday and Lily returns home to tell her mother everything. She confides in her mam about her fears for Sam and as usual her mam is full of good advice. After a visit with Harry, Sam changes his mind, much to Lily's delight.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Read p. 175** Why do you think the Countess has returned? Has this changed her view of her? Why do you think this? Why do you think Maeve is so flustered? What advice would you give her?
- Read p.190** Why do you think Albert is being so unfriendly? What do you think he thinks of Maeve and Lily having run away? What do you think is going to happen to Lily? Why do you think this?
- Read p.196** Do you think it's fair that only Lily is being punished? Why do you think Lily will get the blame? Have you ever gotten the blame for something that wasn't your fault? What happened? How did you feel?
- Read p. 203** Even though Maeve was the one who got her into trouble, Lily is kind towards her friend. Would you be as forgiving? Why do you think Lily doesn't make more of a fuss? Do you agree with this?
- Read p.211** Why do you think Lily doesn't tell Sam what has happened? Do you agree with her argument? What would you have done? Why do you think this?
- Read pp.223-224.** Why do you think Mrs Bailey changed her mind so quickly? Why is it always important to tell the truth?
- Read pp.226-227** Mrs Bailey owns up to Lady Mary, much to Lily's admiration. Lily states "when you make a mistake you should own up." Do you agree? Why do you think this? Have you ever owned up to your mistake? What happened? How did it make you feel?

ACTIVITIES

1. CARNIVAL

Lily and Maeve are enchanted by the carnival. Have you ever been to a carnival or fair? What was it like? Write a piece of descriptive writing. Remember to include as much sensory detail as possible – so not just the sights, but things that can be heard, smelled etc. Try and bring your reader through the scene.

2. IT WASN'T ME

Imagine you are Lily. How can you persuade Mrs Bailey that you weren't wholly to blame? Write a persuasive speech that explains what happens and why you should be given a second chance. Remember that Lily won't put too much of the blame on Maeve. Try and include persuasive techniques such as emotive language, rule of three and facts.

3. TIMES ARE CHANGING

Re-read pages 203 and 204. Lily wonders if things will change for her and other girls like her. Create a short presentation explaining that she's right. Think about all the things girls can do now that they couldn't have done in Lily's time. In your presentation think about the level of equality for girls across the world. Your presentation could be a video. For research, visit the UN webpage: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>

4. CHARACTER STUDY

When she finds out what's happened to Lily, Maeve returns to help her friend. What does this tell us about Maeve? What sort of a person is she? Write a character analysis of Maeve. Choose three or four adjectives to describe her personality. Find a quote for each adjective and write three or four paragraphs explaining her personality, using quotes to support your point of view and explaining how the quotes prove each point.

5. BROKEN PROMISES

Re-read pages 243–247. Lily has a conversation with her mam about breaking promises as she is desperate to change Sam's mind. She has a brainwave – she can use Harry to show Sam that war isn't what he thinks. In small groups, act out the scenes – Lily speaks to Harry, Harry speaks to Sam. What do you think Lily will say to Harry to get his help? What sorts of things do you think Harry will say to Sam to dissuade him from joining the war?

Section Four Looking to the Future Pages 256– 310

SUMMARY

The Gore-Booths have organised a concert to help with the war effort and the whole house is busy in preparation. Lady Mary is keen for some of the servants to participate, but Nellie's shyness means she is happy to help in the background. The night of the concert arrives and Lily's friends are the stars of the show. As a special treat, Lily is allowed to spend the night at home. but her mother has some troubling news. Will Lily ever get to realise her dreams?

After a sleepless night, the Master arrives with some news that will change Lily's life forever – but how will she break the news to her friends at Lissadell?

Despite her excitement for her future, Lily is sad to leave the job and all her friends. Time flies past and soon Lily is saying goodbye to Lissadell.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Read p. 259** Why do you think Nellie doesn't want to sing? Do you think Lily should try and persuade her? What would you say to Nellie? Have you ever forced yourself to do something that made you nervous? What happened?
- **Read p.270** Why do you think Sam lied to Nellie? Do you think this was the right thing to do? Why do you think this? What does this tell us about his personality? What do you think Nellie would do if she worked it out?
- **Read p.277** Lily's mam says to her "what's for you won't pass you by." What does this mean? Do you think this is good advice? Why do you think this?
- **Read p.290** As she prepares to leave Lissadell, Lily feels sad saying goodbye to everything. Have you ever had to do this? What happened? How did you feel?
- **Read p. 298.** Nellie tells Lily that "You have good friends because you are a good friend." Do you think this is true of Lily? What do you think makes a good friend?
- **Read p.303.** Are you surprised by Lady Mary's goodbye to Lily? What does this tell us about her as an employer? What do you think makes a good employer?
- **Read p.304.** As she is driven away from Lissadell, Lily is content to say goodbye to her old life. Do you think she is right? Why do you think this?

ACTIVITIES

1. CONCERT TRAILER

Re-read chapter 26. What are the key features of the concert? What do you think will excite people enough to attend? In small groups, create a movie-style trailer that persuades people to attend the concert.

2. LEAVING LISSADELL

Imagine you are Lily. How will you tell everyone that you are leaving? How do you think they will react? What are you concerned about? In small groups, freeze frame the reactions of people when Lily explains her plans. Think about what you've learned about Lily and the other staff (and Maeve) so far.

3. THANK YOU LETTER

Imagine you are Nellie. You've just found out that Lily is leaving to follow her dream of becoming a teacher. How does this make you feel? Write a letter to Lily explaining your thoughts. In it, you might want to thank her for her friendship.

4. GOOD FRIENDSHIP

On pages 289 and 290, Lady Mary tells Lily that she and Maeve "can remain friends no matter where you are or what you do". Do you agree? In pairs, create a guide to good friendship to share with your class.

5. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

What do you think happens after Lily leaves Lissadell? Write the next chapter, picking up three months on. Does Lily visit Lissadell to see her old friends? How is her replacement getting on? Or does she meet Nellie on one of her days off? Think about what has happened both at Lissadell plus in Lily's exciting new life.

6. SCHOOL LIFE

Re-read through pages 307-310. What do you think about how schools were in Ireland in the past? How does this compare to your experience? What do you think are the most important changes? In small groups, research the changes in the education system and present to the class. You should include the following:

- Timeline of changes
- Most important changes
- Any old traditions you'd like to re-introduce and why
- Any changes you think should happen in the future and why.