



# The Spiral Path

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## Teaching Guide

By Peter Heaney

### RATIONALE & THEMES

This story completes the Ayla trilogy. Ayla, her friends and uncles, fresh from victory over Nuada and the Danann at Muirthemne on the plains of ancient Ireland, pursue the remnants of his army across time, back to their home to prevent the Danann king exacting vengeance on their unprepared and unsuspecting village.

Crackling with magic, Ayla and her friends must summon and deploy their every resource and face unspeakable dangers if they are to rescue their families, restore the village and thwart the ambition of Nuada to destroy everything in his path installing Danann rule across time itself.

The themes explored are:

- Courage
- Fear
- Anger
- Magic
- Friendship
- Loyalty
- Determination
- Identity
- Integrity
- Trust
- Self awareness

### SUMMARY

The remnants of Nuada's Danann army, pursued from the battlefield, merge into the mist among the ogham-inscribed pillars, his threat to seek vengeance ringing out as they make for the time gate.

The earth trembles, felling the pillars as the time gate closes behind them. Ayla and her team, taking the decision to follow, step into the gate to emerge into a version of their home that is strangely unfamiliar.

Alerted by the behaviour of their families and neighbours, Ayla realizes that the Danann have consolidated their position, bewitching almost everyone in the village and sealing it

off with a conjured perimeter storm.

Gathering their resources, Ayla and her friends and uncles understand that they must face and defeat the Danann magic again to rescue the village from their power and restore normality.

Drawing on support both from the few who are unaffected by the spells and from across time to the ancient kingdom of Fal, they pursue Nuada and his sorcery to the edge of the abyss, unsure until the final moments whether their struggle will be in vain or whether Ayla can finally hold Nuada and his master, the Dagda, to account.

### APPROACH

Essentially this is a fun adventure. It is very fast-paced, credible and will capture the imagination of any child who reads it.

The activities can either be used for small group or individual response.

The plot is colourful and very visual, lending itself easily to graphic interpretation.

The guide is divided into three sections to reflect and complement the development of the story.

## Section 1 The Strange Pages 13–68

### SUMMARY

As the noise of battle fades and consciousness revives Ayla, she realizes that they must pursue Nuada and the remnants of the Danann army through the misty terrors of the ogham-scored pillars and enter the collapsing time portal to prevent him making real his threat to wreak vengeance on their homes.

In hot pursuit they emerge into the modern village that they seemed to have only just

left, expecting the Danann to fall on them immediately; however, it is with wary suspicion that they discover there is no evidence of the Danann to be found.

Blending into the monotony of ordinary routine, they experience growing unease at their parents' behaviour and the general lethargy and disconnection they see everywhere. In addition, the fact that no one can transmit or receive electronic signals, of any kind, undermines their composure as the feeling grows that things are not as they seem.

Ayla remains uneasy. Troubled by fragmented snatches of memory, she isolates herself, the threat from the Danann constantly in her thoughts.

Her friends Finny, Sean and Benvy share the apprehension witnessing the bizarre behaviour they see around them.

When Ayla startles her uncles Taig, Lann and Fergus with a message on their answer phone, they rush to find her.

### DISCUSSION POINTS

**(Read pp28–30):** As the time gate pulses and swallows them, Ayla and her team journey many years into the future to the present time. Will time travel ever be possible? What sort of contradictions might it cause? Would travel be possible in different direction? i.e. into the past or the future or even different presents that are existing simultaneously?

[www.sciencekids.co.nz/videos/physics/timetravel.html](http://www.sciencekids.co.nz/videos/physics/timetravel.html)

[mocomi.com/is-time-travel-possible/](http://mocomi.com/is-time-travel-possible/)

**(Read p63):** Sean has arrived at Daly's sweet shop and feels uneasy because he misses Ayla's leadership. Sometimes it is easier to allow someone else to make our decisions, especially the difficult ones. How far should we allow anyone to lead our decisions or behaviour, especially if we are not really comfortable with what

we are being asked to do?

- (**Read p66**): Taig loved the Danann woman Nemain, and he allowed his feelings to compromise his loyalty to his brothers and Fal. Was he right to follow his own feelings? Where should loyalties lie when this happens? When loyalties conflict, who should decide the priority?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. The Bull Rider (Read pp20–21&26)

The Danann warrior astride the huge bull wreaks destruction with his scythed blade until Fergus stuns the animal with a blow from his mighty fist. It is a frightening image.

Create a comic book / cartoon-style drawing to illustrate the fury of the exchange between the two giants.

[www.artistshelpingchildren.org/howtodraw.html](http://www.artistshelpingchildren.org/howtodraw.html)

[www.how-to-draw-funny-cartoons.com/how-to-draw-comic-books.html](http://www.how-to-draw-funny-cartoons.com/how-to-draw-comic-books.html)

### 2. The Time Gate (Read pp28–29)

Throughout the story the ability to recognize Time Gates is critical however they are not as unusual as you might think. There will probably be one in your local area.

Use your imagination to describe the Time Gate closest to you and explain how it might be activated and used.

Describe very briefly what you would expect to happen if you entered it. You can add an illustration for effect if you wish.

### 3. 2017 (Read p42)

Ida has followed Ayla through the Time Gate from Fal to Ireland 2017. Her experiences here are completely unfamiliar and she is very confused.

Work in small groups to decide what things about us in 2017 that she really **NEEDS TO KNOW** in order to survive here.

Create a simple **HELP SHEET** to explain the essentials to her.

Remember that she only understands ancient Irish and uses arrow grass to help her understand us.

Is there other magic you could use to help her?

### 4. Simple Pleasures (Read p49)

For the initial few weeks after they return from the wild excitement and danger of Fal, the friends enjoy the mundane activities of ordinary life, taking satisfaction from their

simple pleasures.

Think carefully about your own day and identify which ordinary activity you enjoy the most.

Write a cinquain poem to describe the pleasure that the activity brings to you.

[writeshop.com/writing-a-cinquain-poem/](http://writeshop.com/writing-a-cinquain-poem/)

### 5. Fergus's Dream (Read pp64–66)

As he sits by the fire plucking a pheasant for supper, Fergus snorts his displeasure.

Domesticity was not what he imagined when he entered the Time Gate with the others in Fal.

He closes his eyes and sighs deeply and his mind fills with images of what he thought might happen.

Write a brief description of what he thought might happen.

You will need to write it from his point of view and not as an observer.

### 6. The Ancient Irish (Read p67)

When he hears the phone ring, Fergus believes it is a mythical and magical relic from ancient Ireland.

These artifacts ruled the lives of many in ancient Ireland and they believed that their power could be used either to protect them or destroy enemies.

Can you research or use your imagination to create five impressive artifacts / weapons and explain briefly how you would use them if you controlled their powers.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_magical\\_weapons#Irish\\_mythology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_magical_weapons#Irish_mythology)

## Section 2 Preparation Pages 69–119

### SUMMARY

The sense of strangeness the friends feel about the village and its inhabitants grows and Sean is kidnapped in broad daylight as he tries to flee an incident outside Daly's sweet shop.

Ayla's uncles, spurred into action by her frantic phone call race to her aid, bounding obstacles as if they were toys.

Benvy, arriving late to meet the others, witnesses the mayhem outside Daly's. Confused, she takes a call from Finny who is at school then gets an ominous text from Sean summoning her to Coleman's Wood.

At school, Finny tries desperately to contact Sean and Ayla before venturing into the bowels of the school in response to the prompting of the former headmaster, the druid Cathbad, who appeared to him in a dream, urging him to find the key to unlock a door in his underground study.

Bounding into the supermarket to rescue Ayla, her uncles' fears are confirmed by the sight of the crowded aisles with everybody hypnotically chanting Ayla's magic title, 'Storm Weaver'.

Staggered, they hear one of those hypnotized call out to them in the ancient tongue with a message from across time that they must seek the Smith below the White Hill who will arm them against Nuada.

Benvy, distracted, reaches Coleman's Wood searching for Sean. She fails to see the followers and is taken too.

Ida has ventured out alone to find peace in the forest and a clue to her identity. Stepping into a trap she now dangles dizzily from a tree. Trying to focus on the face of the woman questioning her in the strange modern tongue, she repeats the only words she knows, 'Benvy Craddock'.

When they locate the White Hill, Ayla and her uncles are dismayed to learn that they must return again underground.

Finny has found the key but before he can respond to the knocking beyond the door he is discovered.

Beckoned by his gigantic servant into the gothic forge, then quizzed by the Smith, Ayla reveals her identity and requests his help.

Managing to open the ancient door before being overpowered, Finny is relieved to see Lorcan and Goll, warrior and magician poet from Fal step through to rescue him.

Struggling against her bonds and unable to scream through her gag, Benvy regains consciousness to discover that she and Sean have been taken by the goblins.

Following her captor further into the woods Ida approaches a cottage cocooned in a protective web of enchantments where her unease melts to joy at the sight of old Podge Boylan.

Recognition confirms them as father and daughter, long lost, now reunited.

At the forge, the uncles surrender their magical weapons to the Smith who begins to chant his spells and crafts a helm for Ayla to arm her for the final encounter with Nuada and the Dagda.

## DISCUSSION POINTS

- (**Read p90**): Ida is drawn into the forest urged by a restless voice from deep inside her that she can't still. Is it sensible to listen to or act on our inner impulses? Where do these instincts come from and how reliable do you think they are?
- (**Read pp93–94**): Ayla is reluctant to go on. She simply wants to rest and be normal. What drives her to continue? Does each of us have an instinct that will allow us to overcome difficulty? How can we develop this instinct?
- (**Read p99**): Ayla had promised herself that she would never again enter a tunnel. Her previous experience had left her a great fear. What is fear? How does it control us? Are there ever times when fear can be exciting? How can some things frighten one person and not another?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. They Came (Read p74)

As Taig, Fergus and Lann bound across the town to find Ayla, they do not realize that they are being watched.

Lugh, a Danann scout is following unseen and watching with interest.

Later he makes a full report to Nuada, describing what he has seen and heard.

Create a copy of the report you think he might have delivered.

### 2. Cathbad (Read p78)

Finny starts at the apparition of Fr. Shanlon's vacant face as he listens to the message pulsing from his root filled, gaping mouth. It is truly a terrifying vision.

Using white chalk and dark paper, recreate the image you think he saw.

### 3. Places (Read p92)

Ayla recognizes that the White Hill is in fact Knockwhite, its Anglicized name meaning 'The White Hill'.

Many English place names in Ireland are Anglicized versions of much older Gaelic names.

Think of the names of places in your local area. Can you identify any that you think have their original roots in Gaelic?

Find five and explain what the Gaelic meaning of the English version is.

[www.irish-place-names.com/meanings/](http://www.irish-place-names.com/meanings/)

[www.dochara.com/the-irish/place-names/irish-place-names/](http://www.dochara.com/the-irish/place-names/irish-place-names/)

### 4. Kilnabraka (Read p95)

From the height of the hill, Ayla can see the thunderous perimeter that has isolated Kilnabraka from the rest of the world.

Their isolation has caused a sensation within the Irish media who are anxious to investigate and report on what is happening.

Use your imagination to pretend that you are a reporter who has managed to penetrate the storm barrier and write a scoop report on what has happened using interviews and your own investigation.

You will need a striking headline.

### 5. Sons of Cormac (Read p93)

Taig, Lann and Fergus are not Ayla's uncles. Rather, the ancients have appointed them as her guardians.

They are warriors of Fal and proud sons of Cormac. However, we know little about them and absolutely nothing about who Cormac was.

To help other readers, use your imagination to create a biography for each of them and a family tree to explain a little of their ancestry.

Decide how much detail you will need to make them interesting and exciting. You can add illustrations.

### 6. The Smith (Read pp102–103)

Ayla and her uncles reach the forge under the White Hill where they meet Finnegan the Smith. He is a vain little man who likes to boast of his achievements and the wondrous things he has made.

Above the entrance to the forge he has nailed a parchment describing himself in very glowing and exaggerated terms, including a list of the awesome weapons and devices he has created.

Create a copy of his parchment.

## Section 3 The Final Battle Pages 120–208

### SUMMARY

Rescued from the bewitched clutches of the school, Finny insists on an explanation from Lorcan and Goll, who tell him that, after the battle they fought together in Fal, it took a year for them to recover and follow him through the time gate, even though only a fortnight had passed for him.

Sluiced to consciousness in the forge, Taig, Lann and Fergus watch as Ayla dons the helm. She is transformed and when she

removes it she is able to tell them that she has seen everything and knows where her friends and Nuada are.

Hoisting Ayla on his back, Fergus and the others return to the farmhouse to arm themselves before they all set off for Coleman's Wood.

Bound, dazed and wounded, Benvy and Sean try to make sense of the scene in the woods, discovering that a giant ogre guards them.

Watching as Podge and Ayla renew their father-daughter bond, Sean's mother recalls the night of the storm when Podge persuaded her to share the protection of his cottage with the enchantments that everyone scoffed at, preventing her falling victim to the Danann mind-paralyzing curse that seized the village twelve months previously.

Mixing a herbal charm, Podge tells them where to find her son Sean and they set off.

Finny, Lorcan and Goll are reunited with Ayla and her uncles, and they set off together to find Sean and Benvy.

Realizing that the ogre is the same one he tamed in Fal, Sean subdues him with a convincing display of hoax magic.

When Ida's attempt to calm and restrain some of the goblins fails, Mary and Podge intervene and they all need rescuing by Sean and Benvy, aided now by the humbled ogre.

Ayla shares what she knows with Finny. As they approach the Danann she is increasingly alarmed as everyone except her falls under the Danann enchantment.

In the glade of the Danann camp Ayla faces Nuada, her senses yielding momentarily to the unexpected embrace of calm and beauty emanating from him.

Converging on the camp, her friends with Gomor repulse a goblin assault, Sean deploying his trick with the thunderclap to effect.

About to succumb to Nuada's vision of beauty, Ayla realizes it is a corrupt illusion and draws a storm down to destroy the camp, managing to wake Taig and the others from their trance to join the battle.

Leaving the rage of battle, Ayla descends underground to the magical hall of the Red Root King, to face the force behind Nuada – the powerful Dagda, her father.

Understanding his true intent for mankind, Ayla summons a storm and destroys him.

Returning to the surface, she creates a swirling time vortex to transport Nuada and the Danann back where they came from,

watching as Lorcan and Goll enter the pit too, pursuing the Danann across time itself, to ensure they will never return.

Things in the village return to normal, without recollection, Ayla forever grateful that Taig, Lann and Fergus made the decision to stay with her and take the role of uncles.

## DISCUSSION POINTS

- (*Read pp130*): The persistent voice in Ayla's mind coaxes her to use the power she has available to change things. Is this a sensible way to use power? Why do you think we try to gain power over others? Is it acceptable to want others to do things the way we think best? Can having a lot of power to decide things for others ever be unhealthy?
- (*Read pp139 & 143–149 & 157*): Podge has immersed himself in the ancient folklore of the Celts, believing in the power of their talismans to protect him from the dark magic of the Danann. Is he correct? Can decorated stones really offer protection? Does the power lie only in his imagination? How would you test it?
- (*Read pp186–187*): Ayla is momentarily spellbound by the vision that Nuada has conjured for her before she realizes that it is simply a corruption of the reality she knows. There are many 'magics' today that try to blind us with coaxing visions. Why are we so easy to fool? How would you recognize and resist a false vision? Which types of visions are the most powerful?
- (*Read pp195–197*): After learning that the Dagda was indeed her father and witnessing the power he promised to her, Ayla makes the decision to reject his offer completely, conjuring a storm that destroys him. What changed her mind and why did she choose to spurn his offer?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. Spelled Ordinance (*Read pp133–134*)

As Taig, Lann and Fergus choose their weapons to fight the Danann, Ayla decides that she will give each weapon a special enchantment to increase their power and link them to a fabled weapon from the armoury of ancient Ireland.

Use your imagination to create the spells she used and describe the powers that each of the weapons now has.

Illustrate them and detail the ancient weapon they mimic.

### 2. The Chant (*Read pp154–155*)

Sean realizes that, despite his size, the Gomor can be intimidated by the threat of magic, and he is doing his best to improvise what he think will be authentic-sounding chants to control him.

He is struggling to remember words and phrases that rhyme and needs help.

Use your imagination to create a powerful eight-line chant, using rhyming couplets, that will cow the ogre.

[www.kidspot.com.au/things-to-do/activities/how-to-write-poetry-couplet-poems](http://www.kidspot.com.au/things-to-do/activities/how-to-write-poetry-couplet-poems)

[www.poetry4kids.com/lessons/poetry-dictionary-for-kids/](http://www.poetry4kids.com/lessons/poetry-dictionary-for-kids/)

### 3. Wind (*Read p161*)

As the Gomor bends over and relaxes he releases an enormous fart in a cloud of sulphurous gas with a stench that chokes those around him.

The author thought about adding a sense of humour at this point with a short paragraph describing what the Gomor did and the assault on everyone's sense of smell because of it.

Create the paragraph he could have written.

### 4. Real and Illusions (*Read pp184–186*)

Ayla, struggling to identify what is real and therefore important to her is confused by the visions of beauty and perfection conjured by Nuada,

It is an important skill to have for everyone; to be able to differentiate between what is real and what is illusion.

Working in small groups, create a two-column list of what you think is real and

what is illusion from the images and visions you see every day.

Give five examples of each and explain why you have chosen them?

### 5. The Door (*Read p194*)

As Ayla enters the final underground chamber, she sees the door, each panel carved with an episode from her history, the final panel still blank.

Use your imagination to create a large (A30) sized replica of the door with all the illustrations.

### 6. Slán Abhaile (*Read pp202 & 205*)

Taig, Lann and Fergus stand on the edge of the abyss, raise their fists in salute and prepare to pursue the Danann horde through time itself back to their home in Fal.

Yet they change their minds and decide to stay with Ayla.

Why did they change their minds?

Use your imagination to create the dialogue they had with each other on the edge of the pit as they made their final decision.

### 7. Dream Time (*Read p204*)

With the spell broken, the villagers return awkwardly to normality, anxious to bury their memories of the trance.

However, one of them is determined to remember and record their experiences and the promises the magic made to enchant them.

Recreate the record you think she made of her Dream Time, describing her experience and what she thought was happening.

## Also by Matt Griffin



*A Cage of Roots*: full of magic and mystery, deeply rooted in Irish mythology and legends ... an astonishing debut ... a dark, deep tale of destiny and loyalty of heroic proportion, a strong recommendation for fantasy readers; this will keep you on the edge of your seat. *Stunning. School Librarian Magazine*

*Storm Weaver*: This is an original, intelligent and enthralling fantasy adventure. The author's eerie black and white illustrations add to the mood. *booksforkeeps.co.uk*