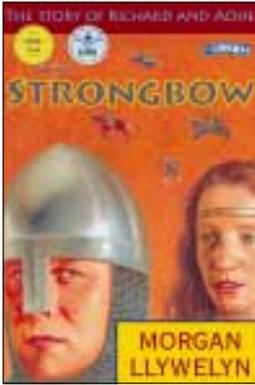


# STRONGBOW

by Morgan Llywelyn

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Like the Vikings, from whom they were descended, Norman lords were great warriors and adventurers and were very successful in war. Christened Richard FitzGilbert de Clare, Strongbow was expected to hold the title Earl of Pembroke, but his decision to support the elderly King Stephen against the victorious Henry Plantagenet cost him dearly and he lost not only the title but property as well. Sensitive and caring by nature, his personal and political misfortunes seemed likely to overwhelm him, until an Irishman offered him the chance of a new beginning in Ireland. Dermot Mac Murrough, King of Leinster, surrounded by enemies, sought the assistance of Norman lords. Strongbow agreed to help on condition that he could marry Princess Aoife and become King of Leinster when Dermot died. This is the story of Aoife and Strongbow, told, in alternate chapters, from their different perspectives; a story of courage, of conflict, of ambition, but above all of love in difficult circumstances.

## LANGUAGE – ENGLISH

- ◆ Vocabulary extension: Shrewdly, tardily, lavishly, folly, wilful, recruit, portreeve, fanciful.
- ◆ Descriptive writing: E.g., 'battlements looked like dragons' teeth against the sky' (p.40), 'the air was laced with lark song' (p.56).
- ◆ Discussion: 'Every ass likes to kick at a dead lion' (p.54). What did Aoife mean and how else might she have explained this?
- ◆ Discussion: Strongbow noted that 'Dermot was a man to envy, having children who loved him so' (p.124). List the differences between Aoife's relationship with Dermot and Richard's with Gilbert.
- ◆ Discussion: 'Being ill ... had forced Enna to study ... he had become a fine scholar' (p.67). Blinded by his father's enemies, how might Enna spend the rest of his life?
- ◆ Creative: 'In years to come his name would be used to frighten naughty children' (p.7). List other names which have been used to inspire fear in children, and invent others based on evil attributes.
- ◆ Creative: 'That was like asking a cow's permission before you bought it' (p.103). Write the conversation as a Norman knight seeking a cow's agreement!

## MATHEMATICS

- ◆ Representing and interpreting data: Developing an awareness of the variety of languages in common use in Ireland in different eras. Children compile pictograms, single/multiple bar charts and pie charts of languages spoken in their class/in their school/in their community.

## SESE – HISTORY

- ◆ Local studies: Games and pastimes in the past. Exploring aspects of the leisure interests

and games of people in the past. Aoife played ball, chase-me and all-fall-down, fished and climbed trees (p.10). When older she rode her pony and hunted red deer with hounds, but disliked falconry (p.128).

- ◆ Life, society, work and culture in the past: Life in Norman Ireland. Becoming familiar with aspects of the lives of women, men and children from different social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, including the lives of 'ordinary' as well as 'more famous' people. Discuss the Irish system of educating the families of kings (pp.10, 61, 77, 114); homes of the nobility (pp.8, 10, 120, 125); homes of the poor (pp.47, 115); fosterage (pp.35, 118); treatment of servants (pp.15–16, 82); feasting (pp.36, 89, 151); settlement patterns and urban developments (pp.47–49, 74–75, 109, 113); Irish system of electing kings/chieftains (pp.109, 124–126).

- ◆ Fieldwork: 1. Visit Strongbow's tomb and the casket containing Laurence O'Toole's heart in Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin. Visit any Norman Castle in your locality. For details on sites appropriate for school visits, contact Dúchas [www.heritageireland.ie](http://www.heritageireland.ie)  
2. Visit the Hill of Tara (Tel. 041-9824488), or Navan Fort, Co Armagh (Tel. 0801861 525550 or [www.navan.com](http://www.navan.com)).

## SPHE

- ◆ Myself: Self-identity. Identifying realistic personal goals and targets and the strategies required to reach these. Gilbert de Clare did not accept his son's individuality and Richard did not have the power to assert his rights or trust his own judgement. Discuss how his father's assessment affected Richard's self-image and beliefs about himself.

- ◆ Myself: Growing and changing. Identifying the changes that are experienced in growing from child to adult. Aoife admitted that she was afraid of change (p.99), but her life changed with her marriage (p.108). Discuss her changing interests and increasing personal independence. Also, discuss the different types of love that exist (e.g., marriage for love/arranged marriages), and explore how love is portrayed in music, films, books and magazines.

- ◆ Myself: Making decisions. Acquiring a sense of the importance of making informed decisions at many levels, identifying the important facts and moral questions about problems. Orphaned at a young age, Strongbow must make many difficult decisions about his career, his property and his sister's future. Did he always consider the possible consequences of his choices?

- ◆ Myself and others: My friends and other people. Exploring how the opinions, views or expectations of others can influence how people relate to each other. Examine Strongbow's relationship with his father and discuss how his family's expectations (pp.12–14, 28, 43) influenced all his future relationships and behaviour.

## VISUAL ARTS

- ◆ Visit the National Gallery of Ireland, Merrion Square, Dublin [or](http://www.nationalgallery.ie) search [www.nationalgallery.ie](http://www.nationalgallery.ie) for details on the painting *The Marriage of Princess Aoife to the Norman Richard de Clare (Strongbow)*.
- ◆ Find a copy of the Bayeux Tapestry, which tells the story of the Norman Invasion of England in 1066, and examine each panel carefully for evidence of Norman prowess with bow and arrow. The upper panels also show details of life in pre-Norman England.