

Teachers Notes
by Anna Ciddor
Night of the Fifth Moon
Anna Ciddor

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Recommended for ages 10 – 14+

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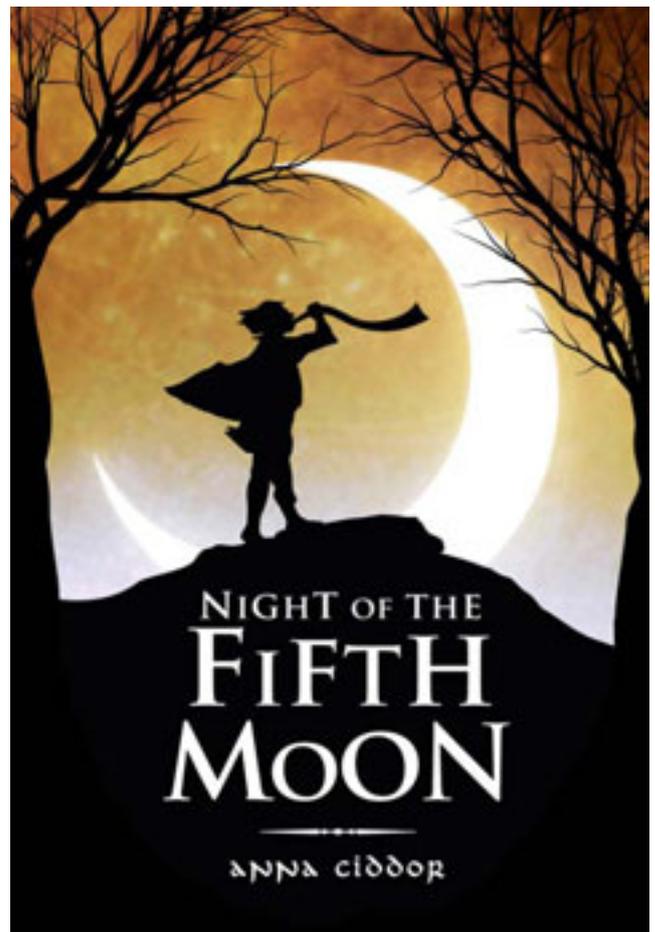
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INTRODUCTION

I think the best thing about this book is that it is set in ancient Ireland and is about all sorts of different things, such as druids, that not many other authors put in their books

(Olivia, age 11)

It didn't feel like I was reading it - it felt like I was experiencing it.

(Jared, age 12)

This book should fascinate and intrigue both boys and girls in the 10-14 age group, combining as it does the excitement of an elimination plot with a unique and intriguing setting. The story opens in a druid's camp where six 'fosterlings' have lived for years expecting to become the druid's apprentices. In the first chapter, the young hopefuls discover that only one of them can be an apprentice. From now on, they must compete to prove their worth, for at each new moon one of them will be sent away. By the fifth moon, only the chosen one will remain.

Readers identify with the alliances, longings and dilemmas of the main characters – six boys and girls who have lived together as a family for five years and must now compete against each other. Interwoven into this struggle are vivid details of ancient pagan lifestyle and culture. The book draws its readers back to a time when life was harsh and basic, when people had a close affinity with nature and everyone obeyed the word of the druids.

NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I chose to write these teachers notes myself as I wanted to pass on some of my research discoveries and writing secrets. This book was born while I was still writing my Viking Magic series: *Runestone*, *Wolfspell* and *Stormriders*. In *Stormriders*, one of the main characters was an Irish boy captured by Vikings. Researching his background, I unearthed some tantalising glimpses of Irish history. Scenes began to haunt my imagination, and inspired me to write a book set in early Ireland at the time of the druids.

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THEMES

Night of the Fifth Moon raises many issues related to the themes of:

- friendship
- competition
- leadership
- loyalty
- belief and trust
- human interaction with the natural environment
- differences and similarities between the past and the present

ENGLISH

SENSE-ATIONAL

Consider this extract from Chapter 26:

Lorcánn staggered through the smoke, carrying the cauldron, and lifted it onto the flames.

Soon, the fumes of healing herbs and burning rowan mingled with the smell of boiling deer flesh. Someone unsheathed his sword and began to sharpen it on a whetstone. The menacing swish swish swish sliced the air. The warriors crowded around the fire to paint their faces with soot and stiffen their hair with ashes and water. As Ket looked at the whitened locks twisted on their heads, and their eyes ringed in black, he felt his pulses quicken. In a few hours, they would be going into battle.

Task 1: Find the use of all five senses in the example above.

Task 2: Have students write their own descriptions using all five senses. Suggested topic: in the classroom.

DESCRIPTIVE WRITING

In *Night of the Fifth Moon* there are several descriptions of festivals, especially preparations for festivals (eg. chapters 8, 19, 23)

Task: Have each student write a description of preparing for a festival their family celebrates.

FIRST LINES

The beginning of a book should set the tone and scene for the story.

Author's secret

An early version of *Night of the Fifth Moon* began with the battle scene from Chapter 2. Although this scene is exciting, it is not representative of the main elements of the story, so it was shifted to Chapter 2.

Task 1: Discuss what tone is set now in the opening lines of *Night of the Fifth Moon*. Do these lines give a fair indication of the type of story to expect?

Task 2: Compare opening sentences of other books.

Task 3: Have students write an opening sentence for a variety of different story types.

KEEPING CONSISTENT

Author's secret

When I am writing, I try to make sure that every word I use:

- a) builds a picture of the world I am creating, and
- b) doesn't jar the reader out of that world.

Examples:

a) In Chapter 1 I needed an expression equivalent to the term 'and pigs might fly' to express the improbability of an event. I made up the expression 'and maybe the trees'll lay eggs' as this incorporated elements of the lifestyle of the period.

b) In an early version of Chapter 14, I wrote that Nath-í 'stole the show'. I realised this term was too modern so I rewrote the sentence. It now reads 'and now look...everyone's fawning over him'.

Task: Have students search the book for examples of metaphors, comparisons, similes, and expressions that help build the world of the story.

POINT OF VIEW

Night of the Fifth Moon is told from the point of view of Ket.

Task 1: Examine Chapter 2 and find clues in the writing to show the chapter is from Ket's viewpoint.

Task 2: Discuss how Chapter 2 could be re-written from Ossian's viewpoint.

Task 3: Have students re-write one incident from a different point of view.

Suggested incidents:

- Chapter 2, the battle from Ossian's viewpoint
- Chapter 11, the incident where Nath-í sets someone's tunic alight, from Nath-í's point of view
- Chapter 13, when Riona is sent away, from Riona's viewpoint
- Chapter 19, the battle between the wren and the robin, from Lorcánn's viewpoint

TELLING TALES

In Chapter 4, Lorcánn retells a story using his own words.

Task 1: Have students choose a classic fairytale or folktale and retell or perform it in their own words.

Task 2: Explore fractured fairytales.

Useful website: http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/mff/fractured_fairy.htm

GENRE WRITING

In Chapter 4, compare the different ways Nessa and Lorcánn tell the tale. Nessa repeats the tale in classic format but Lorcánn converts it into normal speech. Fairytales and folktales usually utilise a special language and sentence construction, such as the opening phrase 'Once upon a time'. When Faelán is telling the tale of the Battle of Moytura he says the sages 'were greater far than all other sages'. The position of 'far' in this sentence is different from the position it would take in normal speech.

Task 1: Examine other fairytales and folktales for language and sentence construction.

Task 2: Examine other types of genre writing.

CHARACTER INTERPRETATION

Task 1: Have students choose three characters from the story and describe each character's personality, using evidence from the story to support their analysis.

(Suggested characters: Ket, Lorcánn, Bran, Riona, Nessa, Nath-í, Faelán, Brehon Áengus, Maura)

Task 2: As we read, we form pictures in our minds. Have students draw or describe the way their chosen characters look.

Task 3: Compare interpretations.

CHOOSING A TITLE

Author's secret

Several school groups were asked to vote on the title for this book. Here are the choices they were offered.

- *The Silver Horn*
- *Cry of the Raven*
- *Fifth Moon*
- *Night of the Fifth Moon*
- *Ket – Druid Boy*

Task: Ask your class which title they would have chosen. Why?

VOCABULARY

Task 1: Choose some examples of challenging words used in the book and ask the class to guess the meanings of the words from the context.

(Examples from Chapter 1: *swathed, brittle, crescent, illumined, coveted, auspicious*)

Task 2: Compile a dictionary of new words – assign a chapter per student.

Task 3: Follow up some of these terms in more depth.

Examples:

- *Harp*
- *Bellows* of a smith in a forge (a simile used in Chapter 23)
- *Sowing* and *reaping*
- *Runt* (an insult used in Chapter 2)

POWER OF THE WORD

Consider this extract from Chapter 3:

'Words,' said Faelán sternly, 'are power.'

Ket thought of the words, all those years ago, that had defeated his father in battle.

'The value of stories is beyond measure,' Faelán continued. 'Tales hold the history of our people and our land.'

Task 1: Discuss how normal people, including students, are affected by the power of the word. Consider the influence of the media, war propaganda, advertising and gossip.

Task 2: Have students find examples of influential words in advertisements. They should examine advertisements aimed at certain age groups and analyse what types of words are the most effective.

Task 3: Based on this analysis, have students write their own advertisements trying to make them as convincing and persuasive as possible

POETRY

In Chapter 12 the fosterlings have to compose metaphors and similes in preparation for writing spell poems.

Task 1: Discuss metaphors and similes. Elizabeth Honey's books have lots of lovely examples in a more modern context.

Task 2: Have students compose metaphors or similes for suggested words.

LIVING THE TEXT

MEMORY GAME

In Chapter 3 the druid sets the fosterlings a task where they have to memorise and recall nine objects.

Task 1: Replicate this activity with the class, using any nine objects.

Task 2: The objects Faelán used were: a bracelet, two small stones, an oak leaf, a feather, a half-melted candle, a limpet shell, and a wisp of tinder. Discuss the significance of each of these objects to people of that time, particularly in the context of the story.

BLINDFOLDS

In Chapter 11 Faelán and the anruth have to circle a large fire blindfolded. Mark out a 'fire' and have students take turns walking around it blindfolded and wearing a cloak.

HOME SWEET HOME

Author's note: My research revealed that a typical Irish house of the period was a round building about 8 metres in diameter. It had low walls, a thatched roof and no windows. There might be posts at intervals to support the roof. Twenty people lived in one house. The fireplace was in the centre and smoke found its way out through a gap in the thatch.

Task: Mark out the area of a typical home, and imagine what it would be like to live in this space (this is approximately equivalent to a normal class-group living inside their classroom).

Useful website:

<http://www.liosnagcon.com/ringfort/tour.shtml> for pictures of a reconstructed ring fort and house

OBSERVATION

In Chapter 7 Faelán tells the children: 'open your eyes and look around you. Study the insects; the birds; the buds on the trees. The river. The sky. Respect them, and learn what they can teach.'

Task: Have each student observe something closely – the clouds, a flower, a bee, a pet, and make detailed notes of his/her observations.

BOARD GAME

In Chapter 22 the board game mentioned could be *Brandubh*, an old Irish game similar to chess. The rules for playing this game can be found at

http://users.indigo.net.au/darke/treubh/art_brandubh.html

ANIMALS FROM THE BOOK

Have students find pictures and information on all the animals, including birds and insects, mentioned in the story.

PLANTS FROM THE BOOK

Have students find pictures and information on all the plants mentioned in the story.

TASTE IT

Taste some of the food mentioned in the story.

Porridge in various forms was a staple meal. Sugar was unknown, but try mixing oatmeal porridge with honey, fresh berries, or even pieces of meat or vegetables!

There are many recipes for barm-brack cakes on the internet. Modern recipes use sugar but the cakes of the past were sweetened with honey or fruit.

DIVINATION

Faelán makes prophecies. Research types of divination such as various forms of fortune-telling and astrology. Have students compare their real characters and lives to the predictions of astrologists. Refer to astrology of other cultures as well as standard horoscopes. Visit <http://www.holymtn.com/astrology/year.htm> for Chinese astrology.

Follow this up with a discussion – see Discussion Topics.

HIDDEN TALENT

In the book Nath-í discovers he has a talent for composing poetry. Encourage the students to explore, discover and reveal their own hidden talents.

THE ENVIRONMENT

THE MOON

The changing phases of the moon are a significant theme through the book. This provides a springboard for various investigations.

Research:

- the moon's phases
- geography of the moon
- moon exploration
- lunar mythology.

Useful website:

<http://www.nineplanets.org/luna.html>

WATER

In Chapter 25, Faelán says: 'Water is both creator and destroyer of life'. Discuss.

SEASONS

Evocation of seasonal changes is an important part of the story.

Task 1: Discuss the seasonal changes students experience in their own lives.

Task 2: Research seasonal behaviour of animals such as migrations of birds.

Task 3: Research seasonal differences around the world.

SAVE THE PLANET

In Chapter 7 Faelán says: 'Ordinary mortals smash through this world, disturbing and destroying for their own needs.'

Task 1: Research and discuss.

Task 2: How can we be part of the 'Greater Harmony'?

STUDIES OF SOCIETY

IRELAND

Author's note The story takes place in the north-west of Ireland, halfway between the modern towns of Galway and Westport. This is the area where the Battle of Moytura supposedly took place. There is now a village called Cong in that location.

Task: Divide the class into groups to research and report on Irish

- History
- Geography
- Flora
- Fauna
- Folktales
- Music
- Modern life
- Food

Useful websites:

http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/pre_norman_history/iron_age.html for information about iron-age Ireland including a clear photograph of a real standing stone inscribed with *Ogham*.

<http://www.shee-eire.com> for information on various topics including mythology and flora, and lots of useful pictures.

<http://homepage.eircom.net/~bronzeagehorns/index.html> for recordings of music played by old Irish instruments.

<http://www.rte.ie/radio/mooneygoeswild/factsheets/mammals/> for information on Irish animals.

TAKE A TOUR

Have students plan a pretend visit to Ireland. They will need to:

- Read tourist guides
- Choose what to visit
- Plan itineraries including where to stay
- Plan transport
- Work out how much time will be needed for travel.

FESTIVALS

The people of ancient Ireland celebrated many seasonal festivals, such as *Samhain* and *Imbolc*.

Task: Research modern seasonal festivals, customs and traditions.

SUPERSTITIONS

The people of ancient Ireland had many superstitious beliefs.

Task 1: List some of these beliefs based on a study of the text.

Task 2: List some modern superstitions.

THE CELTS

The people who lived in Ireland at that time were known as Celts. Research the Celts.

THE IRON AGE

Author's note The story begins in October 415 AD and ends in March 416 AD. This was the Iron Age in Ireland.

Task 1: Research the Iron Age.

Task 2: Research what else was happening in the world at that time.

BURIAL CUSTOMS

In ancient Ireland, as revealed in the story, the dead were buried inside burial mounds, often encircled by standing stones. The dead might be honoured by having their names engraved on the standing stones.

Useful websites:

<http://www.sacredsites.com/europe/ireland/carrowkeel.html>

<http://www.knowth.com/newgrange.htm>

Task 1: Research other burial customs and ways of honouring the dead.

Task 2: Visit a local cemetery or war memorial.

SACRED PLACES

In *Night of the Fifth Moon* there is a Sacred Spring, a Sacred Yew and various standing stones to commemorate people or events.

Task: Research and discuss other sacred places, monuments and memorials.

BATTLE DRESS

Read the description of the warriors' attire in Chapter 2.

Task 1: Discuss why the attackers might have dressed like this.

Task 2: Compare with battle dress of other nations and periods, and discuss why different clothes have been used in different times and places.

CODES

Ogham was the alphabet used in Ireland until Latin was introduced by the Christians.

Author's note My research revealed that only learned people such as druids had any knowledge of reading and writing. Furthermore, it seems that people really believed the ogham letters had magic powers.

Task 1: Research more about *ogham* on the Internet or in books.

Task 2: Have students invent their own alphabets or codes.

GOVERNMENT

Author's note My research of old Ireland revealed that people lived in social groups called *tuatha*, each ruled by a chieftain. Most people in a *tuath* were linked by a common ancestor and the *tuath* was named after that ancestor. One or more druids lived in each *tuath*, and they had the power to decide who should rule. Several *tuatha* grouped together formed a province ruled by a provincial king. Provincial kings fought among themselves for the right to be high king of all Ireland.

Task: Examine the way our society is governed and compare with the system in ancient Ireland.

ART AND CRAFT

POTATO PRINTS

The chapter illustrations of moon phases for *Night of the Fifth Moon* were based on lino cuts and potato prints.

Task: Have students make their own potato prints.

DYEING

The story refers to various natural dyes used for colouring clothes. Use this as a springboard for activities such as tie-dyeing, or experimenting with natural dyes. Dyes can be obtained from berries, bark, shellfish, flowers, soils, etc.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

COLOUR CODES

Author's note In old Ireland, the colours of clothes were regulated by law. Commoners could only wear clothes of dun, yellow, black or white. Chieftains wore red, grey, brown. Kings and druids wore purple and blue.

Discussion topic: In our society, are certain clothing colours or items associated with particular groups of people or occasions?

UNFAIR!

In Chapter 9, when Lorcánn snatches Ket's stone and the boys are tussling, only Ket is reprimanded by the druid. Encourage students to reveal and discuss events when they feel they have been unfairly blamed.

LIFE STAGES

In ancient Ireland children left home at the age of seven to be fostered. This was a way of building alliances between families.

Discussion topic 1: What would students feel if such a practice was adopted by our society?

Discussion topic 2: What common events related to age do we observe in our society?

PEOPLE OF POWER

In *Night of the Fifth Moon* the druid is in a position of great power and respect.

Discussion topic 1: What people have power in our society? Do we respect them? Do they earn our respect? Consider people such as politicians, stars of sport, the media or the music scene, and other celebrities. Compare with other societies.

Discussion topic 2: Would you want to be a druid? Why or why not?

Author's note Druids were scholars, poets, healers, advisers to kings, workers of magic and diviners. They influenced battles, war, and politics. They were schooled in the lore of the traditions, knowers of truth, and able to manipulate that truth as well as inform others about it.

Discussion topic 3: Towards the end of the book, the druid says:

I taught you fosterlings the principles of druidry. I preached about learning the natural order, about valuing every life, about sharing, and being honourable. But I was so carried away by my own loftiness...I began to treat those rules with contempt.

Discuss how power can sometimes corrupt.

Discussion topic 4: Do people in positions of leadership have an obligation to behave in a certain way, as role models? Consider sporting stars, pop singers, members of a royal family.

DIVINATION

In Chapter 13 Bran makes the claim: 'All divination is drivel.' Discuss.

DIFFICULT CHOICES

In Chapter 27 Ket decides to sacrifice his own chance of becoming a druid in order to save Bran's life, even though he doesn't like Bran. Discuss.

MAGIC

Does Faelán really have magic powers or does he make use of the gullibility of his audience? Discuss.

FACING FEAR

Consider this extract from the final chapter, when Ket has to spend a night in the tomb of the Shadow Ones:

Only a short time since, he would have been too terrified to spend a night in a grave with the dead, but now he knew the Shadow Ones would not harm him.

Most of us discover that experiences we have long dreaded are not as bad as we expected them to be. Encourage a class discussion on comparing such experiences.

ABOUT THE WRITER

ANNA CIDDOR

These teachers notes are written by the author, Anna Ciddor. Anna, a qualified and experienced teacher, spent several years producing non-fiction works and educational material before she launched into popular fiction with the Viking Magic series. In these teachers notes she passes on some valuable hints about her techniques, as well as interesting background information to the book.

Anna loves to make school visits so she can meet her readers and tell them more about how she does her research, writing and illustrating. School visits can be arranged through Show and Tell www.showtell.com.au or Booked Out www.bookedout.com.au .

Find out more about Anna and her books at:

www.annacidor.com

www.fifth-moon.com

www.viking-magic.com