



Taking Sides

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Teaching Guide

By Peter Heaney

RATIONALE & THEMES

Ireland is split between those who support the Treaty negotiated by Michael Collins and those who reject it outright and have resorted to violence in their opposition to the new government. Robust response from the government escalates the tensions and a bloody civil war ensues.

When Annie Reilly wins a scholarship to Eccles Street convent school friendship and circumstances propel her into the privileged world of Susie O'Neill, her brother Tommy and his friend Peter Scanlon.

As the Civil War rages and the rebel occupation of the Four Courts is broken by artillery, life for the friends seems untroubled. However, Peter has become gripped by republican fervour and, unknown to his friends, is being drawn into a web of deceit, complicity and an escalating role in supporting their cause.

When the government executes five rebels, Annie is kidnapped as part of a reprisal plot and Peter realises how cynically his friendship with her has been manipulated.

Recognising what he has done, he mounts a single-handed rescue and tragedy is averted. However he must leave Dublin permanently to ensure his safety and, as the Civil War splutters to an end, each of the friends must now follow their own destinies.

The themes include:

- Trust
- Courage
- Friendship
- Loyalty
- Privilege
- Prejudice
- Idealism
- Violence
- Making choices

SUMMARY

The Treaty compromise has sown division among the former comrades in the War of Independence and as the government seeks to re-establish normality, civil war erupts.

On his way home from playing rugby for his school, Belvedere, Peter Scanlon encounters a rebel at a Black and Tan checkpoint, an event that sparks Peter's fervour for the Republican cause.

Annie Reilly's family is delighted when she wins a scholarship to Eccles Street college, promising an education that they could not have otherwise afforded.

In school she meets Susie O'Neill, a carefree girl, who, despite her social status, is without any pretension. They become friends and Annie meets Susie's brother Tommy and his friend Peter.

During the holidays the group enjoy each other's company and Annie's reservations about their social divisions prove unfounded, her friends enjoying a day's outing organised by her father in his taxi.

But, unknown to the others, Peter has become involved in the rebel cause. As violence escalates and the Four Courts is occupied, he is drawn further into a web of complicity, delivering clandestine messages and finally hiding weapons.

Annie takes a summer job to help pay for her college expenses while the political situation deteriorates with the assassination of Michael Collins.

While delivering a message to a 'safe' house, Peter thwarts a raid by government troops and prevents them seizing incriminating evidence.

But his cover is about to be blown. When Annie is invited to a party in his house she discovers him about to deliver a parcel to

a courier. When the police intercept the courier and question Peter, he uses Annie as his alibi, much to her annoyance.

Annie's father has secured work driving government ministers in his taxi, and when five of the rebels are executed, Annie is kidnapped to secure her father's co-operation in capturing a senior minister. Peter realises that he has been duped and his friendship with Annie betrayed.

Seizing the initiative, he rescues Annie who warns the police before the plan can be carried out.

When Peter confesses his involvement to his father, arrangements are quickly made for him to go and stay with relatives in Sligo, where he is joined by his family who move there permanently, severing all links to Dublin.

As the Civil War fizzles out, life for Annie and Susie returns to normal and their friendship with Peter is never renewed.

APPROACH

The range of themes and the authenticity of the characters offer a broad platform to explore several issues across both historical and contemporary contexts.

The historical events of the Civil War are presented in an accessible way, encouraging debate on their causes and outcomes.

The story also offers the opportunity to consider the influences on their own choices and how inappropriate choices might be avoided.

An effective strategy will include small group discussion and activities that encourage outcomes by consensus.

The activities have been divided into three sections to reflect the structure of the story.

Section 1

Change in the air (pp 7 – 96)

SUMMARY

On his way home from playing schools rugby, Peter is queuing at a Black and Tan checkpoint when the man in front turns and slips something into his kit bag. Terrified that it's a weapon and that he will be discovered with it, Peter is hugely relieved to make it safely through the checkpoint and hand the package back. But the incident has fired Peter's imagination and he determines to get involved in the republican cause in some way.

In school, Annie anxiously waits for the announcement of the Eccles Street scholarship results. She's got it! Her parents greet the news with a pride and delight that humbles Annie who is aware of the financial sacrifices that will be needed to allow her to attend the school.

Peter has kept the incident at the checkpoint a secret from his friend Tommy and when he recognises the gunman at the Irish club talking to his teacher, Mr McMahan, he offers his support directly to him afterwards.

At the Eccles Street induction event, Annie meets Susie and a friendship blossoms. Although they won't start school until September, Susie suggests they meet up during the summer activities.

Peter threads his way through the streets towards the Four Courts; his mind racing and his kit bag again providing the innocent cover for the letter he has been given to deliver to the commander of the occupying troops:

Annie uses all her diplomacy to persuade her parents to allow her to visit Susie during the summer. They are concerned that the difference in class between the families may be an issue for Annie, but, despite their initial reservations; to Annie's delight, they agree.

And when she visits Susie, Annie is made feel at ease, meeting Susie's brother Tommy and his friend Peter who is impressed by her.

Annie has agreed to attend the Irish club and enjoys the first night despite Peter having to challenge unwelcome comment about where she lives.

Peter uses the cover of a fishing trip to meet Mr McMahan for his next assignment

– delivering a package to a safe house, and uses the cover of a picnic to the countryside to complete his mission.

The news of the assassination in London of Sir Henry Wilson MP provokes an argument between Annie and Peter, who hold different views on its justification, and threatens their friendship.

Peter is shocked when intercepted by Finbar, the gunman he has rescued from the Tans but agrees immediately to his request to transport and conceal an item from the safe house.

Annie overhears at home that she is to have a summer job working in a fishmongers.

Peter organises a farewell party before they all go on holiday and is pleased that his argument with Annie has not affected their friendship as they all laugh and toast the future together.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (Read pp12-13): At the checkpoint Peter has the opportunity to tell the officer about the package in his bag. Do you think that he should have taken the opportunity then to do so? Was he right to smuggle the package through the checkpoint?
- (Read p50): Peter has chosen to be subversive and to act against the elected government. Do you think that it can ever be justified to act in this way when there is a freely elected government in place? Does anyone have this right in a democracy?
- (Read pp74-75): Why do you think Josie is angry? Who do you think that she is really angry with? Do you think her anger is justified? How would her situation be different in modern Ireland?
- (Read p85): When his arguments were rejected, Eamon De Valera withdrew from government and there was civil war. He was convinced that he was right and everyone else was wrong. Do you think that the principle of majority rule in a democracy is always the most effective way to govern? What sort of action might be justified if you disagreed strongly?

ACTIVITIES

1. Wanted (Read pp 9 & 10)

Peter will never forget the face of the gunman he met at the checkpoint and who used the kitbag to hide his weapon.

When he got home Peter decided

to create a 'Wanted' poster for his scrapbook. He tried to include all the details that he could remember; including a description as well as an illustration.

Could you recreate the poster that he made?

2. I was there (Read p 27)

As she walks home, Annie enjoys the bustling experience of living in the centre of Dublin.

See if you can find an old photograph of Dublin from that period. Try

www.irishhistorylinks.net/pages/Old_Dublin_Black_White.html

Choose an interesting photo and then draw yourself into it.

Now that you are there, can you describe what you see and hear and smell? Who would you talk to and what do you think they would say to you? What do you think you could say to them?

3. Followers & Leaders

(Read p 33)

Peter's impression of his friend Tommy is that he is a follower rather than a leader.

What do you think that this means?

Peter thought that he was a leader, but was he really?

Draw two columns in your book and name them **Follower** and **Leader** and give three examples of the qualities that each would display?

Do you think that Peter was a follower or a leader? What evidence is there to convince you?

4. The Eccles St. Girl (Read p 40)

After their briefing, the girls were all given a pamphlet on what it was like to be an Eccles Street girl.

The pamphlet was illustrated and contained all the information they needed on how to behave, what to do and say and how to conduct themselves on every occasion.

Could you recreate the pamphlet and illustration? What type of information would it contain and how do you think it would have been presented?

5. Four Courts Orders (Read p 50)

Recently a letter has come up in an auction of Civil War memorabilia.

It is the letter that Peter delivered to the

Four Courts.

The letter was to be read to the men defending the building. What orders and encouragement do you think it contained?

Attempt to recreate the letter. If you like you could distress the paper with stains from old teabags and bake it in an oven for a few minutes to create an authentic appearance.

6. The Incident Log

(Read pp 79-81)

Unknown to Peter, Willow Cottage is under observation by a Garda surveillance team.

They keep a log of everything that happens around the cottage and they have recorded the arrival and departure of Peter.

That evening they submit their log and write their report.

Could you help them to write the report and complete the log of what they saw?

Remember: their log will be the facts only and the report will be their interpretation of what they saw.

7. Tommy's Advice

(Read pp 87-90)

(You may work in pairs for this activity)

Unknown to Peter, Tommy decided to meet him outside the 'Bot' and has overheard the conversation with Finbar.

He is very concerned at what he hears and tries to advise his friend.

Could you recreate the conversation they had? Try to think of three arguments / cautions that Tommy might use and Peter's replies to them.

When you have finished you can perform the dialogues for the rest of the class.

8. Annie *(Read pp 93; 99; 115)*

Eccles St. has sent out a form for a character reference to be completed. This is normal procedure for every first year and it helps the school to determine where the girls' strengths lie and also where they might need support.

What, in your opinion, would Annie's reference say about her? Do you think that you could help to create Annie's reference?

Read the pages carefully and try to find two other examples of how Annie behaves that would throw light on her character.

Section 2 Civil War (pp 98 - 163)

SUMMARY

The government have taken the Four Courts back under control. The action results in many casualties and causes widespread destruction and disruption.

Peter is frustrated that his family holiday will take him out of Dublin at this crucial time while Annie is annoyed at her enforced loss of work and wages for the week.

Peter's irritation sours his holiday, provoking a petulant outburst on the golf course. Annie enjoys receiving Susie's postcard and becomes aware of her father's concern that his job driving government ministers might bring danger for him.

Peter's mood lifts when he returns to Dublin and the group of friends reassemble.

Annie has bought them all sweets from the day trip she took during the holidays and has also brought some fresh fish from her workplace for Peter's mother. Peter chides his mother for her snobbish reaction to the gift.

Enthusiastically, they all accept Annie's offer to organise a day trip in her father's Model T taxi.

When Michael Collins is shot, the nation mourns his death and Dublin comes to a stand-still for his funeral. Peter, despite his active republican support, is moved.

During their trip to the beach, Annie is embarrassed by her father's attempts to impress her friends, while Peter begins to appreciate the struggles her family has made to support her.

Back at school after the holidays, Peter is delighted when Mr Mac breaks protocol and asks him to move a consignment from the cottage to the hiding place in Dublin. Cycling through the fog, Peter stumbles on a government patrol preparing to raid the cottage. He takes a diversion, thwarts their intention, manages to recover the package and escapes the cordon with seconds to spare.

Annie has been invited to a musical evening at Peter's house and is enthralled by the atmosphere.

She overhears Peter take a phone call

that raises her suspicions. Following him into the adjoining Botanical Gardens, she is horrified when she realises that he is about to retrieve and deliver a parcel that he has been hiding for the rebels. When detectives attempt, unsuccessfully, to arrest the courier, Annie is forced to become a reluctant accomplice to Peter's flimsy explanation for their presence in the street at that time of night.

Afterwards, her reaction strips him of any illusion about the devastating effect an arrest would have on her life and she returns home, leaving him stunned and confused.

At mass on Sunday the priest reads a letter from the Bishops denouncing the rebels and their actions. Peter is horrified at their attitude.

At school, Annie and her class witness a rebel running past their classroom in a hail of gunfire. She immediately thinks of Peter and when they meet at the club, she asks him if he is still involved. His prevarication confirms her suspicions.

At school, Mr Mac shocks Peter by telling him that he has been stood down from active service. He can't understand why.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (Read pp118-119): When Annie's brother demands that she clear the table, she refuses and they squabble. Her mother advises Annie to acquiesce. It is only when her father intervenes that her brother accepts that she is not required to do his bidding. Why do you think that her brother would only listen to his father and not his mother and why did her mother ask Annie to do as her brother asked for the sake of peace?
- (Read p 126): Annie's father is trying to impress her friends. Why do you think he thought it necessary to do this? Was he right to do this or do you think it just made him seem silly? Why do you think we need to impress others and what ways do we use to do this?
- (Read p 128): Peter realises that his own privileged background is a result of wealth, in contrast to the struggle that Annie's parents have to make to send her to Eccles St. Do you think that it is fair that access to a good education is dependant on your ability to pay? Do you think that a good education is a right or a privilege?
- (Read pp 161-162): Peter is shocked that the government is to execute five

prisoners. Do you think that this is a reasonable action for the government to take? What arguments do you think were made at the meeting to decide this action? Were any of the ministers against it and what do you think they said? Why do you think that their arguments were not successful?

ACTIVITIES

1. The Note (Read pp 101)

Peter has left a note at the cottage for Finbar, offering his help in any way. When the house is raided the note is found and becomes part of the police evidence.

However Peter has been cautious and does not incriminate himself in the note and identifies himself in a way that only Finbar or Mr Mac would recognise.

Do you think that you could create a copy of the note that he left?

2. The Four Courts falls

(Read pp 102-104)

The Four Courts has fallen and lies in a smoking ruin. In school Peter's class have been asked to write a short newspaper report of the event.

Could you write the report that Peter presented? Remember that he will have a lot more information and will have been able to include statements from some of the volunteers who defended the building during the artillery bombardment as well as statements from people in the street.

He also included a comment from Annie.

You can use the link below for a good picture to go with your report.

irelandposters.com/dublin_city/four_courts/four_courts_shelling.jpg

3. Personal Safety (Read p 113)

Annie's dad is employed by the new government as a driver for the minister. The threat to both their safety is very real and the Dept for Security has issued guidelines on how to avoid and minimise the dangers.

Annie's father has been issued with an official advice pamphlet on how to keep him and his passenger safe in every circumstance.

Do you think that you could help design and write the leaflet that he was given?

4. Michael Collins (Read p 123)

Michael Collins has been assassinated and

the country mourns. Dublin comes to a standstill for his state funeral.

Could you prepare a commentary on the event as though you were there? Remember that this is for radio, as there was no television at the time.

You will need to include details of what you see, including the crowd's reaction and perhaps some short interviews with people who are there.

You will also need to include some details on Collins's life and his contribution to the struggle for freedom.

Try to keep your commentary to 2 minutes and record it for the class to listen to.

You can find some information on Collins on the following site.

www.historylearningsite.co.uk/michael_collins.htm

5. Desktop Publishing

(Read p 130)

Annie remembers the worn and carved desks from St Mary's.

Draw a picture of what one of the desks might have looked like?

What sort of things might have been carved in to it?

Now look carefully for distinguishing marks on your own desk.

Chose one of the marks or use your imagination and try to create the story of the person who left the mark.

What do you think was happening on the day that the mark was left?

6. I'm here (Read p 145)

When Annie follows Peter into the garden, it a turning point in the story. The author was unsure when Annie should have revealed her presence.

What effect do you think it might have had on the plot if Peter saw Annie a few minutes earlier, before he retrieved the parcel? How do you think the story might have changed?

Can you create the discussion that they might have had in the garden?

What would you recommend to the author? Keep the story as it is or change it at this point?

What reason would you give him for your decision?

You could write to him at The O'Brien Press with your comments.

7. It was My Decision (Read 148)

The detective watches Annie for what seems an age, waiting for her answer.

Very quickly she scans all the possibilities and decides to support Peter's story.

That night she writes an entry in her diary and gives three reasons for her decision.

In small groups could you discuss her motives for supporting Peter, even though it was a huge risk for her?

Can you rank her motives and decide which one was the most important for her personally?

8. The Witness Statement

(Read p 156)

When the excitement of seeing the gunman in the street has subsided, the girls are allowed to go for lunch.

When they return to class after lunch they are addressed by a police detective who gives each of them a witness statement sheet and asks them to complete it, describing what they saw before they went to lunch.

Annie & Susie collaborate on what they saw. Susie is inclined to exaggerate while Annie is more factual. Susie has written the statement and Annie is forced to edit it before it is given up.

Work in pairs to write the statement as Susie might have written it initially and then edit it in red pen as Annie might have corrected some of the exaggerations?

9. Hawks & Doves (Read p 161)

It is ninety years since the Civil War and the cabinet papers of the government meetings have just been released.

They show all the discussions that took place in government at that time.

One of the discussions was between those ministers who wanted to treat the rebels harshly and those who were reluctant to repeat what had been done to the leaders in 1916.

Could you recreate the two main arguments that each side used in the discussions?

Which argument do you think finally persuaded the government to carry out the executions?

Section 3 Private War ..Kidnapped.. (pp 167 - 215)

Annie has been kidnapped. Blindfolded, she is driven to a location outside the city; where, her mind in a whirl, she realises that her kidnap will be used to coerce her father's co-operation in something terrible.

When she doesn't come home from school, her mother begins to search for her. Distracted, she visits Peter's house to look for her there. Peter is shocked and suspects that Mr Mac is responsible.

Confused and angry that his friendship with Annie has been abused, he determines to discover if his suspicions are correct and decides to go to Willow Cottage to confront Ned.

In the barn where she is imprisoned Annie hears raised voices beyond the wall and recognises one of them as Peter's.

Ned's clumsy denials about Annie and her whereabouts have turned Peter's suspicions to certainty and when Ned threatens him, Peter produces a revolver that he has taken from the cache and Ned is wounded in the leg, forcing him to hand over the barn keys.

When Annie is freed, she accepts Peter's assurance that he wasn't involved and they decide that Annie must cycle back to Dublin to alert the authorities and prevent Mr Mac and Finbar from carrying out their plan to assassinate a government minister by forcing Annie's dad's to co-operate.

The assassination plan is already in place when Annie finally persuades the detectives to allow her to accompany them as they approach her father's cab where he waits for his passenger.

Peter has made it home safely and confronts his father with the news of what he has done. A decision is made that Peter must be moved immediately to Sligo to avert danger and to allow his father to plead his circumstances informally with a senior policeman. The family prepare to spend the night in a hotel in case the rebels try to exact revenge.

Following the detectives' instructions carefully, Annie manages to approach her father's cab unnoticed and alert him that she has been freed. After a brief exchange of shots, the would-be assassins are wounded and captured from the back

of the taxi where they had been hiding in wait for the minister.

The following morning, Peter persuades his father to allow him to say goodbye to Tommy and Susie before he boards the train to Sligo and, unseen, he manages to give Susie a letter to deliver to Annie.

As she finishes reading the letter; Annie senses that it will be a long time, if ever, before she sees Peter again. With a flourish, she raises an imaginary glass of lemonade to toast all their futures, remembering that day on their picnic. Then she tucks the letter into a book and goes to join her family for lunch.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (Read pp 178): Five rebels have been executed and Mr Mac and his cell are determined to avenge them with a reprisal killing of a government minister. They see their actions as perfectly justified. Why do you think that they believe themselves to be right? Is their thinking reasonable? Where do you think the flaws, if any, are in their reasoning?
- (Read p 183): Ned has been shot but the description is unclear whether it was as a result of a struggle or a deliberate shot from Peter. Do you think that Peter could have shot him deliberately? Why do you think that the author is ambiguous on this incident? How do you think that Peter's character would have changed if the author had decided that he was capable of shooting someone?
- (Read p 189): Peter now realises that he has been naïve in believing that the struggle was honourable. What had once seemed a just struggle for freedom now appears selfish and sordid? Do you think that a struggle which requires people to be killed can ever be justified? What justification do you think there is for a cause that will kill people to achieve its aims?
- (Read pp 196-197): Peter's father immediately acts to protect Peter and the rest of his family. He does not try to alert the police about a possible assassination or that Annie's father is in danger. What does this say about him? He also decides to use his influence to save Peter from any consequences of his actions. Do you think this is fair? How do you think privilege and influence can protect some people and not others? Why do you think he has chosen to use influence rather than act responsibly?

ACTIVITIES

1. Remember what to do

(Read pp 169 & 174)

As Annie is driven away in the kidnap vehicle she tries desperately to remain calm.

She remembers that her father was sent on an anti-kidnap course by the government and had been given a detailed leaflet on what to do if ever he was kidnapped.

As her mind calmed she began to remember the 'do & don't' information section.

Could you help her by designing a simple leaflet that would be useful to someone who had been captured?

2. Ned's Thoughts

(Read pp 175 – 184)

Ned's face is a mask and Peter is unsure what he is thinking. He wants to convince Ned that he is capable of using the gun he has drawn.

Ned is shocked at first but then begins to read each of Peter's words and actions very carefully to decide if Peter's threat is real.

In small groups could you draw two columns in your copy book? Mark one column for everything that Ned sees or hears and the other column for his interpretation of each of these.

Can you decide at the end why Ned is convinced that Peter will not use the gun?

3. Ned's Expression

(Read pp 188 - 189)

Peter held Ned's glare for one final time before he left.

The image of that expression was forever burned into his memory.

Many months later, as part of his healing process, Peter attempts to draw the face he saw. A face that showed all the fanaticism that would be prepared to do anything to achieve its goals.

Do you think that you could reproduce the portrait that Peter created of Ned? To achieve a better effect you might prefer to use black paper and draw your portrait using white chalk.

4. The Briefing

(Read pp 198-199)

In a side street by the City Hall, the detective gives everyone a final briefing.

His instructions are short and very clear. There are no wasted words and again he emphasises what everyone's role is to be and the signals that will be used.

Do you think that you could prepare the briefing that he gave and deliver it in the way that he did, with all the authority of his rank?

5. The Medal Citation

(Read p 203)

When Annie gets her medal she is also presented with an official citation on behalf of the new government, describing what the medal was awarded for and praising her bravery.

Do you think that you could design a suitable scroll to accompany the medal that was presented to Annie by the police?

6. I'm Shocked

(Read pp 205-206)

Susie and Tommy sit in stunned silence after Peter leaves. Neither can recognise the friend that they knew in Peter.

When they begin to discuss what he has told them, one of them is prepared to try and justify what he did while the other condemns his actions totally as extremely foolish and endangering them all.

Working in small groups, decide who might have taken each position and create a short dialogue of three comments only and the replies that were given.

How strong do you think that the feeling expressed might have been?

7. Peter's Thoughts (Read p 207)

As the car pulls away and Peter waves to his friends for the last time, he makes three promises to himself.

Can you decide, in small groups, what you think the promises might have been and why you think he decided to make them?

Who do you think the promises concerned and what effect do you think they might have on his life?

8. Annie's Letter (Read p210)

When she read Peter's letter, Annie was tempted to write a letter to him. She had so many things to say to him, but was unsure where to start.

Could you help her to draft a letter?

Do you think that Annie would criticise him or offer him support?

Make a list of the things she might want to say and decide what would be the best way to say them.

Finally, do you think you could compose the letter in the style of Annie's writing?

9. Ireland since 1923

(Read pp 212-215)

resources.teachnet.ie/dhorgan/description2.htm

Many things have changed in Ireland since the Civil War ended and the lives of Annie, Susie, Tommy and Peter are unrecognisable.

Working in small groups, decide on the five major events that occurred in Ireland

since 1923 and the effect it had on their lives?

Draw two columns in your copy. Label one of them EVENT and the other EFFECT and then make a list of what you consider the five major events to have been.

You will find lots of interesting information on the Internet site above.

CLASS ACTIVITY

The themes of the book focus on a significant historical time in Ireland.

Two approaches that might prove interesting include:

The Capsule

Project to create a modern time capsule to be buried until 2112, containing artefacts / stories / images / impressions from a range of contemporary sources – media could include AV / text / images / podcasts / etc.

Tionscadal: An tUachtarán nua

The new President of Ireland is very anxious that children are aware of the history of Ireland and how it has shaped her people.

He has announced a Front Page celebration: he has asked your class to choose what you think was the most interesting time / event in Ireland since 1923 and create the front page of a newspaper that reported the event.

About the author



Brian Gallagher was born in Dublin. He is a full-time writer whose plays and short stories have been produced in Ireland, Britain and Canada. He has written extensively for radio and television and is one of the scriptwriters on RTE's long-running drama Fair City.

He has written three musicals: *Larkin* and *Winds of Change* (with Shaun Purcell) and *Whiskey in the Jar* (with Dave 'Doc' O'Connor).

He has written several novels. Outside of writing his interests include travel, tennis, music and inland waterways. He lives with his family in Dublin.

What happens when your best friend ought to be your enemy?

Liam and Nora form an unlikely friendship when he lends her a helping hand during a music competition. Liam's father, a mechanic, is a proud trade union member, while Nora's father is a prosperous wine importer.

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