

Literary Workshop – *Wilderness* by Roddy Doyle

Pre-reading activities

Oral literacy - Language work on novel's title

Brainstorm the word 'Wilderness' for meanings. Ask what the students think of when they see/hear the word. What places, familiar or unfamiliar, do they associate with wilderness? What do they expect to see or find in a wilderness? If they were in a wilderness, how might they feel? (emotions/feelings)

What other words can the students see in 'wilderness'? Introduce key words not suggested by students ('Wild' - adjective, 'wildness' - noun, 'bewilder' – verb meaning to be puzzled or confused, 'bewilderment' - noun). Note how these words describe places, people, states of mind, and emotion.

Ask what they think the title 'Wilderness' then could suggest about the novel's storyline/concerns/main idea/theme, note suggestions on board.

Possibly, read extracts from the novel which focus on the boys' experience of wilderness, last paragraph p74 – What do the boys learn about wilderness? How do you think they feel? pp169-170 – How would you describe the boys' feelings now? Do you think they are, perhaps, more relaxed in the wilderness, more courageous? Read an extract, which focuses on Grainne's experience of wilderness, 'The Bedroom,' p22 – How does she feel? How does she view her relationship with the other family members here?

Examination of novel cover and blurb

Using a worksheet, students will make predictions about the novel based on the cover and discuss whether their predictions have changed on reading the blurb.

Design of a film poster for the novel

Students will design a film poster with a caption and a visual image recreated from a specific extract in the novel. Examples of film posters online will help students to identify the key elements to be found in such posters.

Creative work – Collage

Create a collage of pictures/images from magazines, newspapers etc. which students believe illustrate or capture the idea of 'wilderness'.

As the novel is set in Ireland and Finland, show the students images of wilderness from both countries on the internet/books etc. (Irish examples could include Connemara, bog areas, remote places in the North and South West)

Writing literacy

Summarising the two stories in the novel

There are two stories being told in this novel side by side; the chapters tell us about the boys on their holiday, the sections tell us about Grainne's relationships and meeting with her mother. Using a chart, tell the students to summarise each story as it is told in the chapters and sections. This exercise requires students to use language concisely.

Activities to promote oral, reading and writing literacy

Selected chapters in book

Individual written work

‘Eyes’ and Chapter One

Questions about the novel’s setting, researching the name Gráinne, and information about each family member

List the adjectives used to describe Gráinne as a teenager (pp.17-19)

Identify examples of Gráinne behaving badly.

What effect does Gráinne have on Frank and on Sandra? (pp. 17-20)

Section, ‘The Bedroom’

Describe Gráinne’s mood in this section. How does Doyle establish her mood?

Individual/Group work

Chapter Two

The students will identify the locations of Ireland and Finland using a map.

Assign the students the task of finding out 3 things about each country using specific headings such as language spoken, features of the landscape, native animals (Chp.10, end of p163), popular leisure activities or sports, size of population, celebration of Christmas etc. For each heading write a sentence about each country using appropriate connectives to compare, e.g. In Ireland, the majority of people speak English *whereas/but* in Finland the Finns speak Finnish.

Students list 5 items they think the boys need for their holiday in Finland. See the opening of Chapter Two for ideas.

For each item listed students must explain why it is needed.

Section, ‘The Bus’

Students will imagine what Gráinne is thinking and feeling as she travels to the airport.

Individual/Pair work

Chapter Three – focus on sentences

With the use of extracts, students will examine various sentence lengths and their effect on the reader.

Section, ‘The Airport’ (after Chapter Three)

Students will rewrite this section in pairs using connectives. Each pair will swap their finished piece with another pair and compare the differences. Then each pair will compare the differences between their version and Roddy Doyle’s version using a chart to make points.

Individual/Pair work

Chapter Four

Students will consider what makes a good parent and compare Sandra’s parenting, and Rosemary’s, with their ideas.

Section, ‘The Airport’ (after Chapter Four)

Students will reflect on Gráinne’s meeting with her mother using a template to elicit responses.

Individual/Group work

Chapter Five – Mapping the tension and use of verbs

With the aid of a tension chart, students will identify where Doyle builds and relieves tension in Chapter Five.

Ask the students how Doyle creates mood. What things could go wrong? How does he hint that things might go wrong?

Assign the students the task of identifying verbs that describe different types of movement by the animals on the opening two pages (72-73).

Set the students the task of identifying further verbs that could be used to describe the movement of dogs and horses (other types of animals could also be assigned to students in pairs/groups for this exercise)

Pair/Individual work

Chapter Six – Use of adjectives

Sandra asks the boys do they think the holiday is exciting. They reply, “The best ever!” p.86

What adjectives other than ‘best’ could the boys have used to describe the holiday?

What adjectives could be used to describe a holiday that somebody has not enjoyed?

Writing literacy

Language of information – Roddy Doyle describes how Aki makes coffee outdoors in the Finnish wilderness (pp.88-89). Tell students they will each write instructions for how to make coffee in a house OR how to do something specific outdoors like Aki, for example, how to cook sausages, how to light a fire (read description of Tom lighting a fire p194).

The students’ instructions must be in point form etc.

Section, ‘The Café’

Students will imagine what Gráinne is thinking after meeting her mother in the Café in order to develop empathy for her.

Pair/Individual work

Chapter Seven – Establishing mood

Students will identify how mood is established and how certain characters can change it using examples from the chapter.

Postcard exercise to record the boys’ response to Kalle and his dogs

Individual work

Chapter Twelve - Diary entry

Diary entry/writing literacy - Explain that diaries are a daily record of a person’s life from their point of view (first person narrative). Show an example of a diary entry (Anne Frank) to ensure students are familiar with the genre and conventions.

Who is the audience for a diary? What style will a diary writer use then? Have you ever read or kept a diary?

Tell students they will each write a diary entry describing the thoughts and feelings of Johnny on the day that he, Tom and Sandra are rescued by Kalle and Aki.
Create a response in the first person to selected detail in the chapter.

Other creative activities to develop literacy

Write a blurb for the book

Distribute a 'My Blurb' worksheet for students to complete. Explain that a blurb must be concise, name key characters and capture the reader's attention with a sense of drama, excitement and urgency.

Write a book review

Distribute a book review template for students to complete. Plenty of templates on the internet – E.g., www.primaryresources.co.uk Click 'Book, Author & Reading Resources' link.

Consider the strengths of the book with the students:

Juxtaposition of two stories that relate to the title in different ways – we learn that wilderness can refer to a physical and emotional landscape;

Precise and suitable descriptions and images to conjure up a snow scape and the movement of sleds and animals;

Realistic depictions of the behaviour of two children and a teenager;

Realistic portrayals of parent-children relationships;

Use of humour throughout the novel even in tense situations;

Creation of tension and drama concerning the search for Sandra and the subsequent rescue of the family;

Open-ended nature of the story at the end

Design a Book Cover

Distribute a book cover template for students to complete. Encourage students to be original and, now they have read the book, perhaps to include some reference to Gráinne's wilderness experience as a teenager.

Class Quiz

Organise a class quiz as a fun activity to see how much the students can remember about characters and events in the book.