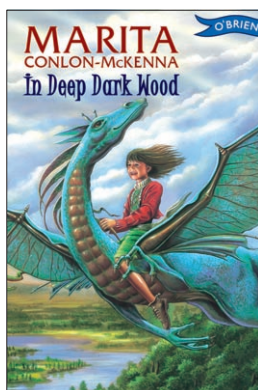


IN DEEP DARK WOOD



by Marita Conlon-McKenna

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Mia and Rory hoped that children their own age would move in next door and are disappointed when, one stormy night, as the winds howl through the small town of Glenakilty, an old lady arrives and takes possession of the house. Unsettled by the old woman's withered face and the piercing grey eyes which seem to stare right at her, Mia takes care not to see or be seen by the neighbour they now call the Bird Woman. But Bella Blackwell exercises a strange fascination for her, and Mia reluctantly finds herself drawn into a mysterious world of dragons and ancient lore. For Bella's arrival is no coincidence; she has long been searching for an apprentice who will replace her as keeper of the dragons, and in Mia she has found a keeper with the sensitivity and imagination to share the secrets of magic and sorcery. When Mia's love for the dragonlings, and her fear of Bella, cause her to leave home, Rory must embark on a quest which will see him battle through the Dark Wood to ensure the safe return of his sister.

LANGUAGE – ENGLISH

- ◆ Vocabulary extension: Jalopy, quizzically, disgruntled, cajoled, reproachful, furtively, exasperated.
- ◆ Character names: E.g., Rose, Daisy, Ivy, Bella Blackwell, Birch Bigg, the Talls, the Stouts. Children discuss these names. Do the names suggest certain images?
- ◆ Discussion: Mia found that stories and fairytales comforted and distracted her (p.8), Rory was practical, while Mia lived in her imagination (p.57). Children build personality profiles, adding to and possibly altering these as the characters develop.
- ◆ Discussion: '... What humans do not understand, they destroy' (p.150). Children analyse Bella's statement and discuss, possibly in the form of a class debate.
- ◆ Creative: Having examined some advertisements from real-estate agents, children write the copy to advertise Mr Hackett's house, using the descriptions on pp.24–25.
- ◆ Creative: Compile a class copy of *Olde Magick* (p.148), with original and imaginative spells and instructions that might prove useful to children (and teachers!) in the year 2005.
- ◆ Creative: Having discussed the reactions of Mia and Rory when they first experienced flying (pp.72, 81–82), children give their own responses, imagining how they would feel and what they would see.
- ◆ Creative: '... A procession of rather ramshackle-looking goods seemed to fly up the driveway by themselves' (p.9). Imagine you are a journalist recently arrived on the scene. Write the account for your newspaper and say whether this is a tabloid or a broadsheet.
- ◆ Creative: Bella fed the dragons on thin strips of raw meat (p.48), but Mia discovered that Trig preferred to eat cheese, crackers, carrots and grapes (p.50). Write a daily diet sheet for the dragons and say why you have chosen each food, then design and decorate the menu.
- ◆ Creative: Working in groups, create a new fantasy world. Write a detailed description of the people and any creatures which share this world. Give a name to this land and to its inhabitants and describe both the built and

natural environments.

- ◆ Story: Having discussed characteristics of the 'quest', children listen to, read and discuss other examples of quests.
- ◆ Story: Children listen to or read any example of a Selkie story (p.131) and discuss similarities with other legends of the sea.

SESE – SCIENCE

- ◆ Plant and animal life: Processes of life. Becoming aware of some of the basic life processes in animals: Feeding (pp.48, 50, 86), using their senses (pp.28–29, 187), exercising (pp.110–113).
- ◆ Plant and animal life: Variety and characteristics of living things. Sorting and grouping living things mentioned on pp.15, 16, 18, 35 into sets, according to observable features.
- ◆ Environmental awareness and care: Recognising how the actions of people may impact upon the environment. Discuss how the planned by-pass affected the local environment (pp.30, 35).
- ◆ Environmental awareness and care: Science and the environment. Identifying ways in which science and technology contribute positively to society. Discuss the positive or adverse effects of building a bridge over the swamp (pp.108, 203), and Bella's insistence that Mia should study astronomy, astrology and 'develop a broad background in many subjects, including the sciences' (p.113).

SESE – GEOGRAPHY

- ◆ Human environment: Natural environmental features and people. Becoming aware of natural features in the locality and their relationship to the lives of people living in the area. Discuss the interrelationships between the daily lives of the giants and the fertility of the local soil, examine and classify the flora and fauna surrounding them (pp.90, 101–103, 108). Examine placenames and their origins in natural features, e.g., Terra, Arbor, Montan and Mare, the four territories of Aland (p.184).

SPHE

- ◆ Myself: Developing self-confidence. Becoming more confident in coping with change and with situations that are unfamiliar. Discuss Mia's doubts and uncertainties (p.61),

her fears and loneliness (p.74) and her growing confidence (pp.112, 130, 185).

- ◆ Myself: Making decisions. Exploring and discussing the factors that influence personal decisions and choices. Discuss the choice made by Mia (p.42), was this an impulsive or considered decision?
- ◆ Myself: Safety and protection. Personal safety: Discussing a variety of risky situations and behaviour and assessing and evaluating how these risks may be avoided or minimised and the implications of taking risks. Mia chose to ignore her initial feelings of unease and mistrust and decided to spend time with Bella and the dragons. Having failed to explain her fears to Rory, she felt 'alone and unsure of herself' (p.39) and began telling lies to protect her secret (p.55) though she didn't really want to deceive her family. Was Mia right to trust Bella (p.162) and was she right to put herself at risk in order to protect the endangered dragons?
- ◆ Myself and others: Myself and my family. Exploring how family members love, protect and care for each other. Discuss Rory's reaction to Mia's story (p.39), his subsequent quest to ensure her safety, his feelings of guilt and his concern for her (pp.57, 126, 173).
- ◆ Myself and the wider world: Local and wider communities. Recognising how people have both an individual and a communal responsibility to the community. Discuss the attempts made by Mia's mother to welcome Bella into the community (p.13) and her parents' belief that she was befriending and supporting an elderly neighbour as Rory had done (pp.18, 22, 52).

VISUAL ARTS

- ◆ Manuscript paper: Take a sheet of strong paper, crumple slightly and tear small pieces from edges. Paint with cold tea and leave to dry. Use to make map of buried treasure or for other 'old' maps.
- ◆ Colour dragons: See *Discovering Art*, Book 1, pp.6–7.
- ◆ Art appreciation: Salvador Dali was a famous Spanish/Catalan artist who worked with surrealist images. Examine some examples of his art and give your opinion of his work. You might choose to represent some of the images in this book in the style of Dali.