

Irish historical fiction

1. Historical fiction 2. Historical fantasy 3. Contemporary novels relevant to History curriculum

1. Historical fiction

The Key Stage column provides only a rough guide. As suitability for particular age-groups is very much a subjective matter, the only really useful recommendation is for teachers to read the books and then decide upon their possible appropriateness.

Title	Key Stage
Conlon-McKenna, Marita <i>Under the Hawthorn Tree</i> O'Brien Press, O-86278-206-6, £4.99 <i>This is the first of an award-winning trilogy, a gripping story of love, loyalty and courage set in the time when Ireland was devastated by the Great Famine of the 1840s. Three children, Eily, Michael and Peggy, are left to fend for themselves. Starving and in danger of the dreaded workhouse, they escape in the hope of finding the great-aunts they have heard about in their mother's stories. With tremendous courage they set out on a journey that will test every reserve of strength, love and loyalty they possess.</i>	2/3
<i>Wildflower Girl</i> O'Brien Press, O-86278-283-X, £4.99 <i>The second part of the Famine trilogy tells the story of Peggy who emigrates to America after the famine.</i>	2/3
<i>Fields of Home</i> O'Brien Press, O-86278-509-X, £4.99 <i>The third part in the Famine trilogy traces the lives of Eily, Michael and Peggy into adulthood. In America Peggy hears the call of the wild west. In Ireland Eily and her family struggle to make a living on a small farm and Michael works in the Big House and loses his job because the house is burned down and the landlord's family leave Ireland forever. A poor evicted widow's hovel is raised to the ground, and she walks away with dignity to the workhouse. In both cases tragedy is confronted with pride. Survival is still difficult, but now there is the comfort of food - floury potatoes, butter, milk, boiled beef, and jams and tarts.'</i>	2/3
<i>Safe Harbour</i> O'Brien Press, O-86278-422-0, £4.50 <i>Two children are evacuated from the horrors of the London blitz to live in Greystones, Co. Wicklow, with a stern grandfather they have never met.</i>	2/3
Fitzpatrick, Marie-Louise <i>The Long March</i> Wolfhound Press, 0-86327-644-X, £9.99 <i>In 1847 the Choctaw Indians raised 170 dollars for famine relief in Ireland. This superbly illustrated book tells the moving story of that tribe's own dispossession and enforced exile. Young Choona struggles to understand why his people would care about white men dying on the other side of the world, as he learns the history of the Choctaw's tragic Long March to freedom and appreciates the historical similarities between the two peoples, including great respect for the land, dispossession and potato eating.</i>	2/3
Flegg, Aubrey <i>Katie's War</i> O'Brien Press, O-86278-525-1, £4.50 <i>Katie's father returns shell-shocked from the Great War and she helps him recover. Now the civil war is breaking out and the family is split - should Katie side with Mother or with Father? Katie and the Welsh boy, Dafydd, find a hidden arms cache - can they make a difference after all?</i>	2/3
Lally, Soibhe <i>the Hungry Wind</i> Poolbeg Press, 1-85371-717-7, £3.99 <i>The novel is a starkly realistic account of the impact and consequences of the famine on the family of Marya and Breege from workhouse to Australia. It is unusual in that much of the story is set in a workhouse and issues of abuse and exploitation are confronted. Though the grief is ever present, it is also a story of hope and survival of the human spirit.</i>	3
Lisson, Deborah <i>Red Hugh</i> O'Brien Press, 0-86278-604-5, £4.99 <i>The extraordinary true story of Red Hugh O'Donnell - kidnap, gaol, dungeons and escape. Ireland in 1587 was a tough place. The old Irish clans struggled desperately to hold on to their lands. With the Spanish Armada threatening her in the background, the English queen, Elizabeth I, set out to subdue them. A few weeks before his fifteenth birthday, Red Hugh was captured and taken to Dublin Castle - held as hostage to ensure the good behaviour of his father, chief of the powerful O'Donnell clan of Donegal. After several years, one freezing winter's night the chance of escape seemed to come at last, but there were great risks ...</i>	2/3
Llywelyn, Morgan <i>Brian Boru</i> O'Brien Press, 0-86278-230-9, £4.99 <i>A fictionalised biography of the famous Irish king at the time of the Vikings, telling of his exciting career 'in all its glamour, from childhood to the Battle of Clontarf.</i>	2/3

- Strongbow** 3
O'Brien Press, 0-86278-274-0, £4.99
This is a thrilling true-to-life novel about Strongbow, the Norman knight, and Aoife, the Irish princess, against the backdrop of the Norman conquest of Ireland. It is full of battles and warfare but is also a story of love between an unlikely pair - the wilful Irish princess and the greatest of the Norman knights to come to Ireland. Strongbow gives an impression of the confusion and complexity of the period by telling of Strongbow's arrival in Ireland from the points of view of Strongbow and Aoife. The author writes about the famous, the great and the infamous, creating a broad sweep in her stories, and does not use a child observer or narrator.
- Granuaile** 2/3
O'Brien Press, 0-86278-578-2, £4.99 (forthcoming)
Grace O'Malley, pirate and trader, is one of Ireland's most infamous figures. A thorn in the side of the English at the time of Elizabeth I, she lived an extraordinary, adventure-filled life. These letters between Grace and her son, Tibert, capture a lesser-known side of the Pirate Queen.
- McBratney, Sam
The Chieftain's Daughter 2
O'Brien Press, 0-86278-338-0, £3.99
Set in Celtic Ireland, it tells of a young boy who is fostered with some remote Irish tribe and of his involvement with local feuds, with the ideas of a wandering Christian missionary, and with his beloved Frann, the chieftain's daughter.
- McCaughren, Tom
In Search of the Liberty Tree 2/3
Anvil Books, 0-94796-289-1, £3.95
The beautiful atmospheric and dramatic opening to this novel has something in common with the world of folk-tale and magic. The full complexity of Ireland in 1798 is acknowledged through the two boys, Joshua and Sammy, with their different politics and backgrounds and the variety of people they love and respect. The full horror and chaos of the period contrasts with the 'place', a Moravian settlement of peace and equality, in this beautifully written and tightly controlled story, with no excessive detail.
- Ride a Pale Horse** 2/3
Anvil Books, 1-9017-370-8, £6.99
A rich cast of characters, factual and fictional, transport the reader back to 1798 and the battlefields of Wicklow and Kildare as the United Irishmen's rebellion collapses, in which the eleven-year-old Tom Holt is sent with a message to rebel leader Joseph Holt and becomes involved in the fighting.. A defence correspondent's eye for telling detail brings the battles, camp councils and spy-infested alleyways of Dublin's liberties convincingly to life.
- McKeown, Arthur
Battle of the Somme 2
Poolbeg Press, 1-85371-931-5, £3.99
Roy, a young farmer from Co. Antrim, joins the army in the summer of 1914. Travelling first to England for training, he later goes to France, where he meets his death on the first day of the Battle of the Somme. The book concludes with his modern descendants attending a commemorative ceremony to mark the anniversary of his death. It provides a good starting point for historical study.
- Famine** 2
Poolbeg Press, 1-85371-505-0, £3.99
Joe and his daughter Maggie are finally forced by the potato blight in 1847 to leave their farm in the north of Ireland and sell their cow and catch a ship from Belfast to America.
- Mullen, Michael
The Long March 2/3
Poolbeg Press, 1-85371-890-4, £3.50
This gripping and stirring novel for young readers recreates one of the most remarkable episodes in Irish history, telling the story of Emar and her brother Fiach who endured a bitter winter as harassed outlaws. After the Battle of Kinsale in 1602, O'Sullivan Beare left Glengarriff in Co. Cork with one thousand of his followers, the remnants of the army defeated by the English in the Nine Years War. Two weeks late thirty-five people reached their goal - O'Rourke's castle in Leitrim - the rest having perished.
- The Four Masters** 3
Poolbeg Press, 1-85371-204-3, £4.50
This is the third, and most affectionate, book in a trilogy which has as its focus the destruction of Gaelic Ireland in the early seventeenth century. In face of the destruction of their culture, the four scholars set out to copy all the Annals of their country's history. This is history as the art of survival. In a vision the Franciscan Michael O'Leary is moved: 'The whole history of Ireland passed before him in ordered images'. The Annals are saved; Gaelic Ireland is destroyed. One character remarks, 'From now on it will be the planters who will write history.'
- The Little Drummer Boy** 3
Poolbeg Press, 1-85371-035-0, £2.99
The planters' story is told in this novel about the Battle of the Boyne. Again there is a balance between opposing worlds, this time Williamite and Jacobite; but the little Williamite drummer boy Jimmy Wright and the colourful fifer Sam Gault are the characters who stay in the mind after the horrors of battle are over.
- O'Hara, Elizabeth
The Hiring Fair 2/3
Poolbeg Press, 1-85371-272-2, £3.99
The first part of a trilogy exploring the trials and challenges of rural working women's lives in Donegal in the 1890s through the heroine Sally Gallagher. It is enlivened by domestic detail and the author's evocative sense of rural landscape.
- Blaeberry Sunday** 3
Poolbeg Press, 1-85371-360-0, £3.99
The second part of a trilogy exploring the trials and challenges of rural working women's lives in Donegal in the 1890s through the heroine Sally Gallagher.

- Penny-farthing Sally** 2/3
Poolbeg Press, 1-85371-686-3, £3.99
In this, the third part of the trilogy about a working girl from Donegal, Sally Gallagher comes to Dublin to work for a rather eccentric family in a big house. It provides an interesting glimpse of the cultural variety of the nineteenth century as Sally encountered the Gaelic League, spiritualism, the vitality of the theatre, and the growing independence of women and shows that in her personal life Sally's choices were as different as the political and social choices. 'Given Sally's strength of character and commonsense we feel that the twentieth century can be entrusted to her.'
- O'Sullivan, Mark
Melody for Nora 3
Wolfhound Press, O-86327-425-0
Set in the period of the Irish Civil War, Melody for Nora brings together the personal and political in the story of a young girl whose passion is music, but who is forced to experience very closely the tragic events of that time. It conveys the terrible urban poverty and the desolation of the country after such long years of conflict. Hurt and angry, Nora manages to grow and trust and love against this unpromising background.
- More than a Match** 3
Wolfhound Press, O 86327-496-X
This is a tense psychological drama of an angry young girl of German parents growing up and learning to accept herself in the hothouse background of provincial middle-class Ireland in the late 1940s.
- Parkinson, Siobhán
Amelia 3
O'Brien Press, O-86278-352-6, £3.99
In 1914 and almost thirteen, Amelia Pim, daughter of a wealthy Quaker family and suffragette mother, must learn to live with poverty and disgrace.
- No Peace for Amelia** 3
O'Brien Press, O-86278-378-X, £4.50
Amelia's friend Frederick enlists for the Great War, whilst servant Mary Ann's brother is involved in the Easter Rising and is in hiding. The issues for Amelia are love and war. In this second book about Amelia, a wilful, intelligent, resilient character with real capacity for growth and moral strength, her relationship with her parents is again very well-observed and developed. Moral questions are dramatised powerfully in the experiences of a young girl and her friends. The setting is carefully in the period of the First World War. The story is not overwhelmed by historical detail. Social conflicts of the period are nicely integrated into the central story. The terrible fear and horror of war and violence are encapsulated in an incident involving a little toy gun.
- Regan, Ellen
The Mystery of the Lusitania 2
Mercier Press, 1-85635-255-2, £3.99
The story gradually unfolds as seen from the viewpoint of a young American passenger on board. A sense of suspense is created as fictional characters rub shoulders with historical characters. Included is a summary of historical facts on the sinking of the Lusitania and the fate of the U-boat and its captain.
- Reid, Meta Mayne
The Two Rebels 2/3
Poolbeg Press, 1-85371-343-0, £3.99
This well-paced adventure, set against the 1798 rebellion, opens with a hymn to liberty, equality and fraternity which is deeply exciting to Bess and Andrew McLroy, the real heroes of the novel. Although war in reality proves different from the ideal, for Bess and Andrew the story ends happily. Bess has a brooch and sings the haunting love-song, 'I know my love by his way of walking'. Andrew has a hundred guineas, enough to enable him to study law.
- Taylor, Marilyn
Faraway Home 2/3
O'Brien Press, O-86278-634-6, £4.99
Two Jewish children are sent from Nazi-occupied Austria to a refugee farm in Northern Ireland in this award-winning and touching account based on the true story of Millisle refugee farm in Ards, Co. Down.
- Whelan, Gerard
The Guns of Easter 3
O'Brien Press, O-86278-449-2, £4.50
Jimmy Conway's father is in the British Army in the Great War, his uncle with the rebels of the 1916 Rising. Jimmy struggles with this conflict and with the dangers of living in a war-torn city. A very strong story, it is reminiscent of Sean O'Casey's plays where suffering and survival are pitted against heroism and sacrifice and the conflicting ideologies of nation and empire are delicately explored. The terrible events are seen through the eyes of a young boy, Jimmy Conway, who moves through war-torn streets in search of food for his family and witnesses horrors. His survival is his and his mother's triumph: 'in the war that for her was the only real one, she had won.'
Eilís Dillon Memorial Prize; Bisto Merit Award.
- A Winter of Spies** 3
O'Brien Press, O-86278-566-9, £4.99
In 1920, Sarah cannot figure out who is telling the truth and who is lying; then she learns that Dublin is full of spies and danger is lurking everywhere. Michael Collins is in charge, but who exactly is on his side? Sarah becomes involved in spying for Michael Collins in the War of Independence. Sequel to the prize-winning The Guns of Easter.

2. Historical fantasy

Title	Key Stage
Friel, Maeve <i>Distant Voices</i> Poolbeg Press, 1-85371-410-0, £3.99 <i>In this historical dream tale, the contemporary teenage heroine Ellie is haunted, almost possessed, by the ghost of a handsome Viking boy, Harald. He draws her away from her family in Derry over a real and symbolic border to Donegal, where she must free his tortured spirit.</i>	3
<i>The Deerstone</i> Poolbeg Press, 1-85371-225-6, £3.99 <i>In this very atmospheric 'time slip' story, a very good example of its kind, a young Dublin teenage boy meets a boy from the Ireland of 1300 years ago. It is set in Glendalough, Co. Wicklow and is a very good read.</i>	3

3. Contemporary novels with relevance to the history curriculum

Title	Key Stage
O'Sullivan, Mark <i>Silent Stones</i> Wolfhound Press, 0-86327-722-5, £4.99 <i>A gripping, thought-provoking and moving story of two teenagers forced to come to terms with their own and their families pasts at Cloghercree in the Irish Midlands. Mayfly is there because her English New-Age traveller parents believe that the ancient standing stones will miraculously cure her dying mother. Robby is there because, trapped between his embittered great-uncle and the shadow of his dead IRA father, he cannot escape. Matters come to a head when Cloghercree is invaded by the ruthless terrorist, Razor McCabe, on the run from the police.</i>	3/4
Taylor, Marilyn <i>Could I Love a Stranger?</i> O'Brien Press, 0-86278-442-5, £4.99 <i>Jackie's boyfriend Key is away, and when the mysterious Daniel comes to stay, Jackie is intrigued. But is it Daniel who fascinates her, or the secret diary, telling of what happened to his family in Nazi Germany? A telling account of a young person's reaction on learning of the excesses of the Third Reich, and raising more generally the question of ethnic cleansing in the Europe of today.</i>	3/4