

# *The quest for Aideen*

NLS Planning on p. 10

*Celtic Magic Tales* by Mac Uistin, Liam, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-341-0

'This is a beautiful land,' Aideen whispered to Mir as they stood in the valley and admired the waterfall tumbling down over glistening rocks into the river below.

'Yes,' Mir nodded. It was great good fortune that led our people here.'

On they walked along a sunlit path that curved up the side of a hill. All at once a dark shadow fell over them and they heard a sudden sharp scream. Looking up, they saw an eagle plummeting towards them, its great menacing talons spread open and its cruel beak thrust forward.

Frightened, Mir and Aideen fell to their knees. The eagle swooped close over their heads and glided away into the distance.

Mir and Aideen rose to their feet, trembling. Mir's face was ashen and his eyes had a haunted look.

'Aideen, I have seen that bird before,' he said in a low strained voice.

'When?' she asked.

'In a terrible dream I had. A dream that still frightens me.'

'Tell me,' Aideen said, taking his hand in hers.

'I dreamt that a fierce bloodthirsty race came over the sea and tried to destroy our people, the Tuatha de Dannan. The sails of their ships bore the emblem of that eagle. Our people were driven underground to live in the Otherworld where there is no spring or summer or singing of birds.'

Mir shivered and tightened his grip on Aideen's hand. 'But the worst part of the dream was that you and I were separated and I never saw you again.'

The colour ebbed from Aideen's lovely face. 'That can never be!' she cried. 'I shall never leave you, Mir. Never!'

'Perhaps this dream is a warning,' she declared, after a moment's anxious thought. 'The Tuatha de Dannan must be in danger. We must return to the palace and tell the king.'

'It may be too late, Aideen. Look!' Mir pointed out to sea.

A long line of ships stood out on the horizon. There were close to fifty ships in all and as the sails drew nearer Mir and Aideen saw that each bore the image of a huge eagle with outstretched talons and beak. The sun glinted on the swords and spears of a host of fierce-looking warriors on the decks.

'Those are the warriors I saw in my dream!' Mir exclaimed.

'Quick!' Aideen said. 'We must warn the king.'

They ran back to the gleaming white palace of the Tuatha de Dannan and burst into the throne room where King Cormac was in council.

'What is the meaning of this?' he demanded angrily.

But the anger faded from his eyes as Mir and Aideen told him of the warlike strangers approaching their shores. He heaved a deep sigh and stroked his beard.

‘I was afraid that this might happen someday,’ he said. ‘Many years ago it was foretold that a race called the Milesians would come over the sea, take this beautiful land of Banba away from us and force us to live underground.’

‘We shall drive them back into the sea!’ Mir declared in a voice that echoed round the room.

The old king sighed again. ‘We have been so long at peace that I fear we may not possess the skill to defeat them in battle.’

Cormac shook himself then and said with determination: ‘But I have other ways of dealing with them. Bring me my staff. It was given to our people by the great Lug of the Long Arm and has magical powers.’ He rose to his feet. ‘And tell my soldiers to prepare for battle.’

The Tuatha de Dannan watched from the hilltop as the strange ships approached the shore. On the boats the long-haired warriors roared defiantly and waved their weapons.

‘They are a fierce race of people indeed,’ King Cormac murmured, ‘but perhaps this will persuade them to leave us in peace.’

He raised the magic staff and cast a spell. Huge waves rose up on the sea and tossed the ships like corks. On the boats the warriors cried out in alarm as they were pitched violently from side to side. Some prepared to jump into the sea, fearing their ships were about to sink.

Suddenly a tall white-haired man appeared in the prow of the leading ship. He spread his arms and uttered a loud incantation and the sea became calm again.

King Cormac looked puzzled. He raised his staff to stir up the waves once more, but nothing happened. The sea remained calm and unruffled.

‘These strangers have very powerful magic,’ the king said. It seems we are left with no choice other than to fight them.’

He turned to his soldiers. ‘Prepare your arrows,’ he ordered. Hundreds of bows were drawn back.

‘Now!’ the king commanded.

The bowstrings twanged and a deadly hail of arrows hissed towards the Milesians. But their druid uttered another incantation and a thick mist fell around the ships. The arrows hit the mist and dropped harmlessly into the sea.

The mist shielded the ships until they reached the land. With bloodcurdling cries, the Milesians stepped ashore and emerged from the mist, charging up the hilltop with their swords drawn.

Mir and Aideen watched anxiously from their vantage point on the hill as King

Cormac led a group of his warriors to meet them. There was a great clash of weapons as the Tuatha de Dannan came face to face with the Milesians. Swords flashed and spears whistled through the air. Then the Milesians began to retreat as King Cormac drove at them with the great sword that had not been wielded in battle for many years.

‘We are winning!’ Mir shouted triumphantly to Aideen.

Suddenly the king slipped and fell. His sword rolled down the path. Horrified, his men turned and fled back to the hilltop, thinking their king was dead. King Cormac got to his feet slowly, dodged a spear thrust and retreated after them.

Sensing victory, the Milesians surged up the path after him. King Cormac ran to a huge boulder looming over the hill and tapped it with his staff. Slowly the boulder creaked and shifted. Then, gathering speed, it rumbled down the path.

The Milesian warriors froze with fear as the massive rock thundered down upon them. Then their druid’s voice boomed out like thunder, ‘Do not fear. I, Maelduin your druid, will protect you.’

He pointed at the boulder and cried, ‘Stop!’

The rock came to a halt inches from the Milesians.

‘Go back!’ commanded the druid. And the boulder rolled back up the path towards the Tuatha de Dannan.

At once the de Dannan’s yells of triumph changed to yelps of fear. ‘King Cormac,’ they cried, ‘make the boulder roll down again.’

‘I cannot,’ the king replied. ‘I am powerless against this magic – the prophecy foretold that a druid named Maelduin would have greater magic than mine. We must seek safety in the palace.’

Flinging away their weapons, the Tuatha de Dannan fled towards the palace. They reached the main door just ahead of the Milesians. And the heavy door clanged shut behind them, leaving the Milesians roaring with anger outside.

Mir ran to a look-out point as a great weight thudded against the door. ‘They are using a huge battering ram,’ he announced.

The Tuatha de Dannan gasped with fear when the door began to splinter and crack. ‘They will kill us all!’ a trembling voice cried.

‘Follow me into the inner hall!’ the king commanded.

His people hurried after him. Raising his hand for silence, King Cormac began, ‘My people, we have a difficult decision to make. Either we must leave this lovely land and go to live in the Otherworld beneath the ground, or we can stay and die at the hands of the Milesians.’

‘But there is no sun or sky or trees or birds in the Otherworld,’ an old man protested. ‘We have all those beautiful things here. We cannot leave them now.’

Heads nodded and voices murmured in agreement.

‘I, too, am reluctant to leave,’ the king said. ‘But if we remain here we shall be slaughtered by the Milesians. We will be safe in the Otherworld. We can start a new life there.’

‘The king is right,’ said Mir. ‘We must go or die.’

The Tuatha de Dannan agreed reluctantly - there was little choice. King Cormac gestured at those nearest him to move back. Then he waved his magic staff and a wide opening appeared in the stone-flagged floor. Steps stretched down below as far as the eye could see.

‘Hurry!’ the king cried, urging his people into the Otherworld. Mir and Aideen held back, glancing round the palace which held so many fond memories for them. On the top step above them stood King Cormac also taking a last look at his beloved kingdom. He shook his head slowly and sadly, then waved his staff, and the opening closed over King Cormac and Mir and Aideen. They turned and climbed down the long steps to the Otherworld with heavy hearts.

The Tuatha de Dannan soon settled into their new kingdom in the world below. They built a shining white palace that was even more magnificent than the one they had left in the land above.

King Cormac ruled wisely over the Otherworld for many years, and there was much mourning among his people when eventually he died. After his burial ceremony, the Tuatha de Dannan gathered in the hall of the palace to select a new king.

Mir was chosen. He had grown into a strong and handsome young man and when King Cormac had become old and weak Mir had helped him with his duties. A great cheer rang out when the crown was placed upon Mir’s head and he was presented with the king’s magic staff.

Soon afterwards Mir and Aideen were married. Among the guests at the wedding feast in the palace was Fuamnach, a young druidess. She loved Mir wildly but Mir was blind to all except Aideen. In despair Fuamnach had tried to cast a spell on him so that he would love her, but even her magic was not strong enough against their love. Fuamnach knew she could separate Mir from Aideen only by using the magic staff.

One day Fuamnach saw Mir leaving the palace and she slipped into the throne room. There, over the throne, hung the magic staff. Fuamnach took it down and crept, quietly into the music room where Aideen was playing her harp. She tiptoed up behind her and, whispering some words, waved the staff over Aideen’s head.

Instantly Aideen was transformed into a beautiful butterfly with golden blue-spotted wings. Again Fuamnach waved the staff, and a great gusting wind blew through the room, sweeping the butterfly out of the palace and up to the roof of the

Otherworld.

Fuamnach waved the staff once more and a crack appeared in the roof. The butterfly blew through it into the land above and the crack closed with a crash. With her lips twisted in an evil smile, Fuamnach hurried back to the palace and replaced the magic staff.

When Mir returned he went into the music room. The harp was there but there was no sign of Aideen. He searched every inch of the palace and all over the Otherworld, but Aideen was nowhere to be found.

He questioned everyone, but no one could help him. Finally, he went back to the palace and sat on the throne. A terrible feeling of sadness swept over him. Without Aideen he felt completely alone. Fear gripped him – suppose he never saw Aideen again?

He remembered the awful dream he had had. His people had been driven to the Otherworld by the Milesians, just as in the dream. Was he now to be separated from Aideen forever as he had dreamt?

What had caused her to vanish like that? Magic? If so, perhaps magic would help him to find her again. Mir took the magic staff down from its place behind the throne and held it in front of him.

Where is Aideen?’ he asked.

The staff jumped from his hand and glided swiftly out of the palace. Mir raced after it and saw it hovering just below the roof of the Otherworld where an opening had appeared. The staff swooped down into his hand and carried him up through the opening.

Mir blinked in the bright light and looked around him at the trees and the birds. It was strange being back in Banba again after so long.

Then he noticed a milk-white horse tethered to a bush. It neighed and tossed its head as though inviting him to go with it. Clutching his magic staff, Mir mounted the steed and set off on his quest for Aideen.

For years Mir travelled the land of Banba searching for Aideen. Sometimes he saw a beautiful butterfly fluttering in the sky. The colours of its wings reminded him of Aideen’s golden hair and blue eyes but he never imagined that the lovely creature could be his beloved. Whenever Aideen saw Mir she tried to fly down to him but the gusting wind always carried her away.

One day the wind swept her through an open window into the palace of the King of Leinster. It was the king’s birthday and a sumptuous feast was being held in his honour. The table was laden with goblets and dishes of gleaming gold and a musician entertained the king and queen and their guests with the rippling chords of a harp.

Looking for a place to rest, the butterfly fluttered around the queen, just as she caught up a goblet of wine to her lips. The butterfly was swept into the goblet, and, with a gulp, the queen swallowed Aideen down with the wine.

Nine months later a child was born to the queen. Aideen was in human form once again. When she grew up she was the most beautiful girl in the kingdom and the king and queen were very proud of her.

But Aideen was not happy. She had not forgotten Mir and she yearned to be with him once more. Every time she played the harp, her eyes filled with tears as she remembered their happy life together in the Other-world.

Meanwhile, far away in Connacht, Mir was searching the province for Aideen. His final wish at night and his first wish in the morning were that he would succeed in finding his one and only true love.

Many princes came to the King of Leinster's palace hoping to marry Aideen. But she refused them all and sent them disappointed away. One day, Dara the High King of Banba arrived from Tara on a visit. He was a proud, handsome, young man, used to getting anything he wanted. One look at Aideen and he was in love. As they walked together in the garden, he asked her to be his wife.

'I cannot marry you,' Aideen said. 'I am in love with Mir.'

'And who might this Mir be?' Dara asked impatiently. 'A king like you.'

'I have never heard of him!' the High King snorted. 'Where does he live?'

'In the land of the Otherworld.'

'I have never heard of that either! Forget about this Mir and marry me.'

'I cannot.'

Seething with anger, the High King stumped out of the garden, jumped into his chariot and drove furiously to his palace at Tara. He sent for his chief druid.

'I am in love with Aideen, daughter of the King of Leinster,' Dara said. 'I intend to marry her. But she will not consent, she says she is in love with some king named Mir. Use your magic powers to make her forget all about him.'

The druid raised his hands and cast a magic spell. Then he turned smiling to the High King. 'It is as you wish. She has no memory of this man anymore.'

'Good!' the High King gave a jubilant laugh. 'Now I shall make her my wife.'

He drove quickly back to Aideen and again asked her to marry him. This time she agreed. The King of Leinster held a great feast that night to celebrate their engagement.

Next day, Aideen was walking alone in the garden when Mir rode by on his way to Tara. When he saw her, he reined his horse to a halt. He rubbed his eyes as though he could not believe what he was seeing. Was it really Aideen? He took a good long look. Yes, he had found her at last!

He leapt to the ground and ran into the garden.

‘Aideen!’ he shouted, his face beaming with joy.  
She swung round and stared at him. ‘Who are you?’ she demanded.  
A look of bewilderment came over Mir’s face. ‘I am Mir,’ he said. ‘Don’t you remember me?’

‘No!’ Aideen snapped. ‘I have never seen you before.’

‘But surely you recall our life together in the Other-world.’

‘I have never heard of such a place. And I don’t want to.’

Aideen turned on her heel and strode towards the palace. Mir hurried after her.  
‘Aideen, wait -’ he began but she wheeled round at the door and motioned him angrily away.

‘Listen,’ Mir said, ‘I love you, Aideen, and I want to take you back to our own land.’

‘This is my land,’ Aideen said. ‘Soon I shall be its queen. I am going to marry the High King.’

Mir watched sadly as Aideen entered the palace. How could she have forgotten him, he asked himself. She must be under some magic spell. Perhaps the High King had something to do with it. He must prevent her marrying him! And with that Mir mounted his horse and galloped off in the direction of Tara.

When he arrived at the palace, he told the guards he was a foreign prince who wished to meet the High King. He was shown into a room where the king was seated in front of a chess board.

‘I am Prince Olaf of Norway,’ said Mir introducing himself. ‘I have heard of your great skill as a chess player and I would like to challenge you to a game.’

‘Very well,’ the High King said. ‘But we must play for a prize. What shall it be?’

‘A hundred pieces of gold,’ Mir suggested.

He nodded and the game began. Although Mir was an expert chess player he allowed the High King to win. Dara’s face broke into a broad smile when Mir gave him the gold.

‘I would like to play another game,’ Mir said. ‘And the prize?’

‘A thousand pieces of gold.’

Again Mir allowed the High King to win.

‘One last game?’ Mir proposed as he handed over the gold.

‘What is the prize to be this time?’

‘Whatever the winner wishes.’

The High King nodded in agreement and the final game began. But this time Mir was the victor.

‘Well?’ the High King said in a disappointed voice. ‘What prize do you wish to claim?’

‘I wish to give one kiss to Aideen,’ Mir replied.

The High King jumped angrily to his feet. ‘You are no foreign prince,’ he rasped. ‘You are Mir!’

He drew his sword and raised it high over Mir’s head. ‘You will never see Aideen again!’ he hissed.

Mir waved his magic staff at the sword and the weapon shattered into little pieces. Then Mir pointed at the High King. ‘I won the wager fairly. Are you going to keep your word?’

The High King looked at the fragments of his sword and moistened his lips nervously. ‘Come back in a week,’ he said, ‘and your wish shall be granted.’ Mir heaved a sigh of relief. He would see his beloved Aideen again!

A week later Mir arrived at the palace gates. Sounds of merriment and celebration drifted out from the windows.

‘I wish to see the High King,’ he told the guard.

‘Go away,’ the guard ordered. ‘The king is being married today and has given instructions that you are not to be admitted.’

Mir’s heart filled with bitterness. The High King was trying to trick him! He raised his magic staff and pointed it at the palace.

Inside the palace the wedding was about to begin. As the High King took Aideen’s hand in his, he smiled at how he had outwitted Mir. Then he noticed a strange mist swirling in through the window. Suddenly Mir appeared at Aideen’s side. A gasp of amazement came from the High King and the assembled nobles.

‘I have come to claim the prize I won from you at chess,’ Mir said to the High King. ‘I wish to give one kiss to Aideen.’

The High King glared at him but he knew he would have to keep his word in front of his nobles. A crafty grin hovered on his lips as he remembered the magic spell his druid had placed upon Aideen. What difference could one kiss from Mir make, he thought.

‘I am sorry to have caused you this embarrassment, my dear,’ he whispered to Aideen. He stared angrily at Mir. ‘You may have your wish,’ he said. ‘Then leave this palace and never return.’

Aideen looked at Mir with disdain. But when he kissed her, her face glowed with joy. She could remember who he was!

‘Mir!’ she cried, ‘my one and only true love!’

She threw her arms around his neck and smothered his face in kisses. The High King knew that the druid’s spell was broken and with a furious bellow, he drew his sword and made a murderous lunge at Mir. But Mir evaded the blow. He waved his magic staff over Aideen and himself and they were transformed immediately into a

pair of white swans.

The swans flapped their wings and soared out through the window high into the air. On they flew until they reached the opening in the roof of the Otherworld. Still clutching the staff in his beak, Mir touched the soft plumage covering himself and Aideen. In an instant they were changed back to their human forms.

As they entered the Otherworld and the opening closed over their heads, two snow-white feathers drifted down. Mir and Aideen caught them before they reached the ground.

There was great rejoicing among the Tuatha de Dannan when their king and queen returned. Fuamnach was so surprised to see Aideen again that she confessed what she had done and threw herself on Mir's mercy. With a wave of the staff he banished her to the land above. Then the magic staff was put back in its place above the throne and the two snow-white feathers were placed beside it.

And Mir and Aideen were never parted from each other again.

Tuatha de Dannan - the ancient gods of Ireland - is pronounced Too-ha Day Dan-in.

# Literacy Hour Weekly Plan

Class: Y 5 & 6

Autumn Term First half

Week Beginning:

<b>Range</b> MYTHS & LEGENDS – IRELAND Celtic Magic Tales: “Quest for Aideen”		<b>Text Level Objectives: (YEAR 5 TERM 2) T1, T2, T3,</b>				
		<b>Sentence level Objectives:</b> S10				
		<b>Word Level Objectives:</b> W1, W2,				
	<b>Text Level</b> Shared Work	<b>Word/Sentence</b> Shared Work	<b>Guided</b> <b>Reading/Writing</b>	<b>Independent Activity</b>	<b>Plenary</b>	<b>Assessment</b>
<b>Mon</b>	Read up to para. break on p15 Discuss setting, characters, features Opening = good ‘v’ bad - contrasts Predictions – use clues given.	Highlight N, V & A used in passage 1 – how they have been used for effect.	Class Groups	Children given first passage and asked to predict what may happen in rest of story. On passage two, children underline N, V & A used	Children to read a selection of their predictions out to rest of the group.	Which children are able to identify N V A without support.
<b>Tues</b>	Re read the battle scene. Consider thoughts of King Cormac as warriors approach. Also consider what the approaching warriors are thinking.	Pronouns. Identify what they are, where they are used in the text and how used to avoid ambiguity.	Class Groups	Children given copy of battle text. One group = King Cormac. Other group = Druid Maelduin. Ch. Highlight what their character saw/did in two diff colours.		
<b>Wed</b>	Focus attention on highlighted scripts from TUE. Discuss POV. How diff characters have diff feelings. Why they say/do one thing but think/feel another.	Consider the language and dialogue used myths and legends. Similar to modern? What are diffs?	Class Groups	<b>Drama:</b> Using ideas of what two sides of battle might say/think. Whole class/2 groups- freeze frames of BATTLE/ATTACK etc In pairs Alter-Ego action/dialogue	Children to present their Alter Ego pieces showing thought V action.	
<b>Thurs</b>	Using example of highlighted text from WED, model writing which ch will attempt today. Writing from one character’s POV, adding thoughts/feelings of character.	Personal pronouns. Identify what they are - where they are used in the text changing can alter parts of text	<b>Guided Writing:</b> CT to work with one group on structure and content of writing from POV.	Using highlighted text from TUE. Children asked to rewrite one part of the battle from their characters P.O.V. and how personal pronouns can change parts of text	Children to read their pieces – alternating point of view. To finish for HWK	
<b>Fri</b>	Read to end of story. Discuss features that made the story different from novels. Themes of legend –unusual/magical/fantasy.	List features and identify one example of each from the story.	Class Groups	Re-cap the legend and identify features of a Celtic Tale. Worksheets Examples of Emotion Use of Magic, Character Studies.		