

Who Needs Florence Nightingale?

An alternative 'significant woman' for Primary History

Are you in danger of becoming jaded with teaching Florence Nightingale year after year? Are you looking for an alternative female to illuminate the 'lives of significant men, women and children drawn from history' in History at Key Stage 1?

If so, Sandra Kirkland's experience at Naseby CE Primary School can be of help. Sandra gave herself a new lease of life and aroused the excited curiosity of Years 1 & 2 by announcing that they were going to study an Irish pirate. The excitement became almost irrepressible when it gradually dawned on the children that the pirate was a woman - the fearless Grace O'Malley (c.1530-1603), also known as Granuaile (pronounced Gran-oo-ale).¹

Telling a good story

More than the 'pirate queen' of Irish legend, Granuaile was a courageous woman who stood up for her rights during the turbulent Tudor conquest of Ireland. When young, it is said she cut off her hair and wore male clothes to go to sea.

More than a woman, Granuaile was a Gaelic chieftain. She commanded a fleet of war and merchant ships, trading with France, Spain, England and Portugal, dominating the waters off Western Ireland, resisting and then treating with the invading Tudors. By land Granuaile stormed and defended castles, engaged in the then favourite Irish practice of cattle-rustling, gave birth to four children and generally showed she was the equal if not the better of any man.

According to one horrified Tudor official, she '*hath impudently passed the part of womanhood and been a great spoiler and chief commander and director of thieves and murderers at sea*'. Such was Granuaile's power that in 1593 Elizabeth I agreed to meet her in London to consider requests for money and permission '*to invade with sword and fire*' the queen's enemies.

The only Gaelic woman ever to appear at court, '*the wild grandeur of her mien erect and high, before the English Queen she dauntless stood ... well used to power [and] dominion over men of savage mood*'. Her petition was successful, but Granuaile died ten years later outwitted and impoverished by Tudor officials who never forgave her earlier 'betrayals'.

Enlivening the History curriculum

Sandra unfolded Granuaile's life in a series of compelling stories, drawn from a number of accessible texts, including *My Very First Book of Pirates* (R. Walker, Barefoot Books, 1-84148-304-4, pp 34-41), *Time Traveller 2* (R. Day et al., C.J. Fallon, 0-71441-129-9, pp 83-8); a biography, *Granuaile* (M. Moriarty & C. Sweeney, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-62-0), and an historical novel, *Granuaile* (M. Llywelyn, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-578-2).

These stories provided the basis for five key questions: How many Irish people can you name? Who was Granuaile? What adventures did Granuaile undertake throughout her life? What was Granuaile like? Why did Granuaile meet Queen Elizabeth I?

This approach encouraged children to develop a range of historical skills almost without noticing. They were delighted that their pictures of Granuaile were as valid as any of those produced in the books they read - there are no contemporary portraits of her. They debated the reliability of the evidence on which accounts of her life are based - mainly English State Papers. How far could English officials in Ireland be relied upon to report fairly on a woman who was often their enemy? There were imaginative dramatisations of Granuaile's meeting with Elizabeth, accompanied by much disagreement on how fairly or otherwise Elizabeth and her officials treated Granuaile towards the end of her life.



'Upset when her father refused to take her on a [sea] trip because she was a girl, the story goes that Grace cut off her hair and donned male clothes.'

Granuaile by M. Moriarty & C. Sweeney, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-62-0, p. 15

Year 1

Look at the picture above of the shorthaired Granuaile with her mother, brother and father in the background.

Describe the events using speech bubbles to explain emotions.

Year 2

Freeze frame or hot seat the picture above of the shorthaired Granuaile with her mother, brother and father in the background.

Focus on how differently males and females are expected to act.



Granuaile as imagined by Year 1 children working with students from University College, Northampton



'GRANA UILE [sic] introduced to QUEEN ELIZABETH'
Frontispiece to *Anthologia Hibernica*, Vol. II, 1793
There is no contemporary account of this meeting which took place in 1593.

1. Look at the picture on the left and the list of phrases below.
Which phrases do you think apply to Granuaile and which to Elizabeth I?

<i>linen saffron smock</i>	<i>gown richly embroidered</i>
<i>lace handkerchief</i>	<i>weather-beaten face</i>
<i>chalk-like face</i>	<i>large woollen sleeveless cloak</i>
<i>sober dress</i>	<i>ornamental style.</i>

(Year 2: Suggest a reason why the two women would be dressed in clothing that was so different.)

2. Do you remember the reasons why Granuaile met Elizabeth I?
Can you imagine what they said to each other?
Use Drama conventions to reconstruct the picture above, then try to reconstruct the conversation between the two women, e.g., 'Still image' and 'Thought tapping'.
Or
Use hand puppets to act out the imagined conversation.

Addressing the whole curriculum

The enjoyment and learning went beyond History. Central issues in PSHE were addressed in the debate on gender roles, then and now, stimulated by Granuaile's disguising herself as a boy to go to sea, while the English dismissal of Granuaile as a 'pirate' prompted a debate about perceptions - 'pirate' to some, 'freedom fighter' to others.

The existence of a suite of songs, with telling words and evocative music (*Granuaile*, sung by Rita Connolly, Tara CD 3071), encouraged the children to 'explore and express their ideas and feelings about music using movement [and] dance' and to appreciate 'how music is used for particular purposes'.

The song 'Free and Easy' prompted children to apply their geographical skills by asking 'What can you see from the masthead? ... Spanish ships a-fishing.... A Portugee from Newfoundland.... A trading ship from Galway.' and 'Where shall we go for a cargo? We'll run right down to Vigo.... We'll take a look in at Bordeaux.'

Building on Key Stage 1

What is more, work at Key Stage 1 can be built upon at Key Stage 2 to offer a different perspective on the Tudors. Ireland became 'Elizabeth's Vietnam' as Irish chieftains responded to the English invasion of their territories. Some, like Granuaile, tried to be clever, pretending to co-operate with the Tudors, yet continued in her old ways. Others resisted violently and, according to one Englishman, 'They spoil and burn and bear away as fit occasion serve'.



'Cattle raid' by John Derrick,
Image of Ireland, 1581

Exploiting the Literacy Hour

Finally, for some History teachers, Granuaile provides a way of asserting the place of History in the curriculum. Maggi Denton of St Paul's Catholic Junior School in Liverpool uses four stories about Granuaile primarily for non-fiction work in the Literacy Hour in Year 3 but also to develop historical skills. At Gorsemoor Primary School in Staffordshire, Rebecca Brookes encourages children to distinguish between fact and fiction by using historical texts on Tudor Ireland and an imaginative novel, *The Ghost of Grania O'Malley* (M. Morpurgo, Egmont, 0-74974-691-2).

Enriching the curriculum through Ireland

The story of Grace O'Malley, Granuaile, is just one of Ireland's rich store of stories which help to provide a 'sounder map of the past' and increase 'choice, range and fun in our teaching'.² Teachers - and their pupils - can only benefit by taking more account of Ireland and its stories. It is easy to do since 'Ireland in Schools'³ provides - without charge - a wealth of teaching and learning materials and advice.

¹ For further details, see S. Kirkland & Maria Wykes, 'Grace O'Malley, alias Granuaile, pirate & politician, c. 1530-1603', *Primary History*, Spring 2003, pp 34-6

² P. Bracey, 'Enjoying a good story', *Primary History*, Spring 2003, pp 6-8

³ 'Ireland in Schools' is a national voluntary programme supported by private donations. It aims to make the study of Ireland a normal part of the curriculum in schools in Britain. Further details may be obtained from the programme's website at <http://isresource.org>.