

# OUR OCEAN - MARINE LEGENDS, FAIRY TALES and FOLKLORE in IRELAND



EXPLORERS EDUCATION PROGRAMME  
**ART & POETRY PROJECT**

---

By Cushla Dromgool-Regan, The Camden Education Trust  
and Dr Nóirín Burke, Galway Atlantaquaria



# OUR OCEAN - MARINE LEGENDS, FAIRY TALES and FOLKLORE in IRELAND

EXPLORERS EDUCATION PROGRAMME  
**ART & POETRY PROJECT**

By Cushla Dromgool-Regan, The Camden Education Trust  
and Dr Nóirín Burke, Galway Atlantaquaria



This project involved the Explorers Education Programme outreach teams including:

Anna Quinn, Galway Atlantaquaria – Galway  
Gavin Beetlestone, Leave No Trace - Ireland – Donegal and Sligo  
Carmel Madigan, Loophead Summer Hedge School – Clare  
Eleanor Turner, Sea Synergy Marine Awareness and Activity Centre – Kerry  
Shazia Waheed, Lifetime Lab @ Old Cork Waterworks – Cork  
Cormac O' Callaghan, Lifetime Lab @ Old Cork Waterworks – Cork  
Carmen Prieto Rodriguez, Lifetime Lab @ Old Cork Waterworks – Cork

The strategic development and management of the Explorers Education Programme is delivered by the Camden Education Trust.

The Explorers Education Programme is supported by the Marine Institute and is funded under the Marine Research Programme by the Irish Government.



EXPLORERS EDUCATION PROGRAMME  
**ART & POETRY PROJECT**

---



First published in 2019 by  
Marine Institute, Rinvilla, Oranmore, Galway

Poems and artwork copyright © their respective authors, 2019  
Preface and Introduction copyright © Cushla Dromgool-Regan, The Camden Education Trust  
Cover artwork by iSupply  
ISBN 978-1-902895-63-5

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior permission of the author or publisher.

# OUR OCEAN - MARINE LEGENDS, FAIRY TALES and FOLKLORE in IRELAND.

---

## PREFACE

---

The Marine Institute's Explorers Education Programme outreach team and up to 300 primary school children from around Ireland took part in a project called Our Ocean – Marine Legends, Fairy Tales and Folklore in Ireland. Developing unique pieces of artwork, storytelling and creating poems, the children were given the opportunity where they learned about their local maritime heritage and identity.

The children engaged in learning about a selection of well-loved marine legends, fairy tales and folklore from Ireland, including stories such as the Children of Lir; the Salmon of Knowledge, as well as the adventures of Fionn Mac Cumhail. The children also discovered new tales involving thrilling stories of mystical islands, marine immortals, fantastical creatures, giants and mermaids.

The artworks and diverse poetry completed by the children during this project highlights the importance of recording our local myths and tales, and sharing these with wider audiences around Ireland and beyond.

This book represents a selection of some amazing artwork and poems completed by the school children, which we hope you enjoy.

### **Cushla Dromgool-Regan**

Explorers Education Strategic Manager and Communications Lead  
The Camden Education Trust

# Aknowledgements

On behalf of the Explorers Education Programme, the Marine Institute and the Camden Education Trust, I wish to thank all of the children, teachers and schools for their enthusiasm in taking part in the Our Ocean - Marine Legends, Fairy Tales and Folklore project. Their enthusiasm and energy truly made this project come to life.

A special thanks to all of the Explorers Education Programme outreach team, led by Dr Nóirín Burke at Galway Atlantaquaria, for delivering the Our Ocean – Marine Legends, Fairy Tales and Folklore in Ireland project in schools around the coast of Ireland.

This project involved a significant amount of work from concept to delivery which was only made possible with the dedication of the Explorers outreach team. A big thank you to everyone involved.

We would also like to thank those who assisted with this project including: Rab Fulton, who wrote the story about Hy Brasil; Orla McGovern, who wrote the story about Dalkey Danny; Seanchaí Batty Burns, for speaking to the children about local myths and legends, such as Lady of Gollerus in County Kerry. We would also like to thank Garry Kendellen at Galway Atlantaquaria and Mervyn Horgan from Lifetime Lab @ Old Cork Waterworks who organised all of the photographs of the paintings for this book.

# Contents

Preface . . . . .	v
Acknowledgements . . . . .	vi
Introduction: . . . . .	1
<b>The Mermaid on the Grey Rock</b> . . . . .	2
<b>The Children of Lir</b> . . . . .	4
<b>The Vikings</b> . . . . .	6
<b>The Tale of Cill Stifeen</b> . . . . .	8
<b>The Salmon of Knowledge</b> . . . . .	10
<b>The Selkiest Silkie</b> . . . . .	12
<b>Old Leabhraidh Laingseach</b> . . . . .	14
<b>How Galway got its Name</b> . . . . .	16
<b>The Tale of Dalkey Danny</b> . . . . .	18
<b>St. Brendan the Navigator</b> . . . . .	20
<b>Legend of Oisín and Tír na nÓg</b> . . . . .	22
<b>The Merrows</b> . . . . .	24
<b>Fionn Mac Cumhaill - Giants Causeway</b> . . . . .	26
<b>The Legend of Hy Brasil</b> . . . . .	28
A Selection of our Favourite Fables . . . . .	30
About the Editors . . . . .	33
About the Explorers Education Programme . . . . .	34
References . . . . .	36





# Introduction

Our Ocean - Marine Legends, Fairy tales and Folklore in Ireland provides a selection of artwork and poems created by primary school children around Ireland. The artwork and poems are full of mythical glory and reflect the children's ideas and inspirations, influenced by local and well-loved stories in Ireland.

The artwork and poems have been selected that represent a wide range of Irish folklore. Some of the stories date back many centuries telling fables of Vikings, Saints, warriors and heroines. Others provides an insight into modern tales of fishermen and their catch. A common theme throughout the work is the mystery that surrounds our ocean and how it has forever influenced our lives through tragedy, inspiration, wellbeing and hope.

Some of the poems have be written by individual children and others have been drafted by the whole class. Their work is a delight to read and showcase the children, who range in age from junior infants to 6th class, as young scholars to be.

The project involved the following schools:

- **St. Michael's National School, Sneem, County Kerry**
- **Glasheen Girls Primary School, Glasheen, Cork**
- **Glasheen Boys National School, Glasheen, Cork**
- **Liscannor National School, Liscannor, County Clare**
- **Cork Educate Together National School, Cork**
- **Scoil Rois Primary School, Salthill, Galway**
- **Bayside Senior National School, Sutton, Dublin**
- **Kilbarron National School, Ballyshannon, County Donegal**
- **Saint Aidan's National School, Hollyfield, Ballinrillick, County Sligo**

Please share your feedback on this book and the work of all of the school children. We would also love to hear about your favourite marine legends, fairy tales and folklore.

**Facebook:** ExplorersMarineEducation | **Twitter:** @explorersedu | **Website:** www.explorers.ie

#OUROCEANFOLKLORE



The artwork and poem were inspired by Irish folklore relating to merrows also known as mermaids. Tales in Ireland suggest that merrows are famous for owning objects that control their mermaid stature, and separates them from other species.

The tale of the *Lady of Gollerus* tells a story of a green-haired mermaid with a tale of silver and glitter. She weds a local Kerryman, who it is discovered has deprived her of her 'magical red cap' to prevent her from returning to the sea. One day while cleaning, she discovers the hidden cap and places it on her head. Although a loving mother and wife, she longs for her mother and father after being gone for so long. With the powers of the red cap, she leaves for the ocean never to return.

# The Mermaid on the Grey Rock

**Class:** 5th – 6th Class    **Teacher:** Mr Hussey

**School:** St. Michael's National School, Sneem, County Kerry

**Poem by:** Finlay Kinnard

Sitting on the grey rock full of pride.  
Quickened Seanin's walk to a stride.  
The mermaid swished her flaxen hair.  
Why they would make a perfect pair!

Seanin didn't hesitate, he wanted her badly,  
So he stole her magic cap, but sadly,  
She whined and whimpered, buried her head  
in the sand,  
He whispered in her ear, 'take my hand'.

He gave her hand a subtle squeeze,  
As the wind blew the waves in a very salty breeze,  
She spoke to the waves in a very sweet tone.  
Don't worry, Father, I am not alone.

They ran to the Church to get married,  
And through the threshold Seanin carried,  
His new wife, through the doors of the husband's  
house,  
A building too cramped for a mouse.

It was a humble home, but slightly small,  
very old and not very tall.  
Then one day, when Seanin was in Caherdaniel,  
or thereabout,  
The wife went in the loft to clean it all out,  
And what did she find among all the mess?  
Her stolen magic cap, no less!

She placed the cap upon her scaly head,  
She passed the kitchen and her bed,  
She passed the church, and passed the pier,  
And in the water she disappeared.

So as her husband opened the door,  
He realised he no longer had a wife anymore,  
The only people he did meet,  
Were his sobbing children with webbed hands  
and feet.

Now on the grey rock, bathed in the sun,  
Left for the children by their mum,  
On Sundays, although quite sparse,  
Is a golden coin in a golden purse.

# The Children of Lir



The artwork and poem were inspired by the Irish story *Oidheadh Chlainne Lir*. The tale often referred to as 'The Children of Lir', mixes magical elements of spells with a Christian message of faith, bringing freedom from suffering.

Lir was associated with being a god of the sea and was the rival of Bodb Dearg for the kingship of the Tuatha Dé Danann. When Lir's wife Aebh died, Bodb introduced his daughter Aoife to him to marry.

After the marriage, Aoife grew jealous of Lir's children and cast a magic spell over them. The spell transformed the children into four white swans. Aoife cursed the swans for a period of 900 years for each swan where they lived 300 years on Loch Dairbheach in County Meath; and 300 years at Sruth na Maoilé, the name given to the narrowest expanse of sea in the North Channel between County Antrim and Scotland. They then spent the last 300 years at Inis Gluairé, known as a rock in the Atlantic.



# The Children of Lir

**Class:** 3rd Class    **Teacher:** Ms Sparling

**School:** Glasheen Girls Primary School, Glasheen, Cork

**Poem by:** Amy Olden and Elizabeth Quirke

Long, long ago, there was a man named Lir;  
He had four children, whom all he held dear.

One sad day his wife Eva passed away,  
Life without her was cold and grey.

Lir decided the time had come,  
His dear children needed a new mom.

The lovely Aoife became queen,  
She was the most beautiful person they had ever seen.

But, looks can be deceiving..  
At first she seemed so lovely and nice,  
But really she was cold as ice!

Lir loved his beautiful wife,  
But she was sharp as a knife.

Who knew what was in store,  
Her wicked ways came to the fore!  
She grew bitter, jealous and sour,  
Then one day she rose to power!

And on that fateful day,  
She cast an evil spell and made the poor children  
go away.

Four swans they became,  
Aoife just laughed and turned away!

Lir rushed down to the bank of the lake,  
To his amazement, four swans swam his way!

They told him what had happened,  
He was deeply shocked and dismayed.  
Lir built his house at the side of the lake,  
And stayed with his children until his wake.

Lake Derravaragh had been their home,  
It was time to say 'Goodbye' to the place they  
were raised,

Time flew by in the Sea of Moyle,  
And before they knew it, they were gone.

The Isle of Glora was Glorious.  
They were together, warm and well fed.

Then one day, the bell rang,  
The spell was broken, whish... bang.  
Suddenly with pain in their head,  
Each fell to the ground...Dead.



The artwork and poem were inspired by stories of the Vikings conquest in Ireland that lasted over 200 years along the east coast of Ireland. The Vikings were known as the fair foreigners and were said to be great warriors.

There are references to Vikings settling Waterford in the years as early as 860. This includes stories that it was established by a Viking-chieftain named Sitric in 853. It is said that in the 13th-century the Norwegian king Harald Finehair founded Dublin and gave Waterford to his brother.

The Vikings were known for their skills as blacksmiths, metal workers and boat-builders. After many battles, defeats and collaborations with the High Kings of Ireland, many settled along the coast of Dublin, Wexford, Waterford, Cork and Limerick creating trade between Ireland and Europe.

# The Vikings

**Class:** 4h Class    **Teacher:** Mr O'Sullivan

**School:** Glasheen Boys National School, Glasheen, Cork

**Poem by:** Peardar O'Súilleabháin

From Scandinavia the Vikings did come,  
Sailing on longships they were not here for fun.  
Lambay Island was the first port of call,  
Not long after, the Irish did fall.

Plunder and pillage, theft that was planned,  
The Norsemen wreaked havoc and moved in-land.  
Stealing precious treasure from sacred monasteries,  
The Vikings paid no attention to the holy men's pleas.

Leif Erikson sailed west, Newfoundland he discovered.  
The Vikings explored America long before Columbus had it uncovered.  
Norsemen they did not destroy what they found,  
They took over land spreading their skills around.

Into our history the Viking story is woven,  
Despite the precious treasures that they had stolen.  
In Wexford they settled, in Cork too they stayed,  
For 200 years, in Ireland they did trade.



This artwork and poem were inspired by the local legend of Cill Stifeen. The story involves two clans from the west Clare coastline, based at Liscannor and Loophead. There is a clash of clans, a love of a woman, as well as mythical land protected by the sea.

To enjoy more details of this local legend from Clare, see the chapter 'A Selection of Our Favorite Fables' at the end of this book.



# The Tale of Cill Stifeen

**Class:** 4th – 6th Class    **Teacher:** Ms O' Connell

**School:** Liscannor National School, County Clare

**Poem by:** Darragh Lambe, Jack Clarke, Mikie McMahon,  
Jody Mattingley, John Sheridan, Susie Greene and Ella Healy

Long, long ago, in 600 BC,  
The land of Cill Stifeen went under the sea.  
A lots been forgotten, a lot we don't know,  
But this is the story and here's how it goes:

There were three brothers, Kings of the land,  
Their lives were quite normal if not a bit bland.  
They had some fine cattle, but still were too greedy,  
So they raided Loophead, as they were needy.

Ruadhan and Ceannuir had their lands minded  
While Stifeen brought sea over his land to hide it.  
They went to Loophead and got many cattle,  
But the people then chased them and soon there was battle....

Two of the brothers escaped but one died  
And the land of Cill Stifeen shall forever hide.  
It has been said, that Cill Stifeen's land,  
Shall once again rise to a six fingered hand.



The artwork and poem were inspired by the adventures of how Fionn Mac Cumhail gained his power and wisdom after accidentally eating the salmon of knowledge. Long ago a salmon named Fintan swam up the Boyne River from the Irish Sea and rested in a well found in the river.

Surrounding the well were nine hazel trees which produced nine hazelnuts that were filled with all the knowledge of the world. The salmon ate the nuts that fell into the well and gained all the world's knowledge. This led to the belief that the first person to eat the salmon's flesh would in turn gain this knowledge.

Destiny transpired when Fionn as a young boy accidentally burnt his thumb while cooking the salmon, that had been caught by his teacher the druid and poet Finegas. As a result, Fionn Mac Cumhail became Ireland's greatest warrior and hunter that ever lived.

# The Salmon of Knowledge

**Class:** 4th Class    **Teacher:** Ms Kennedy

**School:** Cork Educate Together National School, Cork

**Poem by:** Liadh

The Salmon of Knowledge swam freely  
by the banks where Finnéigeas lived.  
He longed to catch the amazing fish.  
He tried once, he tried twice  
he tried all day long.  
But no luck, no luck.

A fair-haired boy named Fionn tried to help him.  
No luck, still no luck  
Until one day, they saw a golden fin and  
the flash of a tail.  
Finnéigeas caught it.  
Fionn cooked it and burnt his thumb.  
He sucked it and the knowledge was his.

Finnéigeas arrived home and noticed Fionn had the knowledge.  
“Go lead the Fianna Fionn”, he said  
“I know you will lead them well”.



This artwork and poem were influenced by the folklore which regarded a mermaid as a seal-woman. In county Kerry, some tales state the Lee family was descended from a man who took a *murdúch* (mermaid) for a wife. It is said she escaped and joined her seal-husband, suggesting she was of the seal-folk kind.

There are also stories where the Conneely clan of Connemara was descended from seals. It was taboo for them to kill the animals lest it bring ill luck. It is also mentioned in this connection that there is a Roaninish (*Rón-inis*) "seal island" off Donegal, outside Gweebarra Bay.

# The Selkiest Silki

**Class:** 4th Class    **Teacher:** Ms Kennedy

**School:** Cork Educate Together National School, Cork

**Poem by:** Freya and Zohra Mountasser

When the Selkie reaches the land,  
She walks across the golden sand.  
But she will never be truly free,  
For she needs to return to the deep blue sea.

When her love locks the chest,  
On land she shall never rest.  
When she finds her beloved coat,  
she runs to the ocean free to float.





The artwork and poem is inspired by the story of Labraid Loingsech. Labraid had been exiled by Cobthach, the High King of Ireland, for being considered the most generous man in the country.

Banished to live overseas, he became a famous mariner. After thirty years, Labraid returned to Ireland and was given the province of Leinster.

The story is further told that Labraid became the High King of Ireland who had horse's ears.

# Old Leabhruidh Laingseach

**Class:** 4th Class    **Teacher:** Ms Bradfield

**School:** Glasheen Boys National School, Glasheen, Cork

**Poem by:** Mark Donnelly and Clarence Aquino

Old Leabhruidh Laingseach had horses ears  
Kept it a secret for no one to hear  
So he grew long hair so no one could see,  
The horrible sight he had come to be!

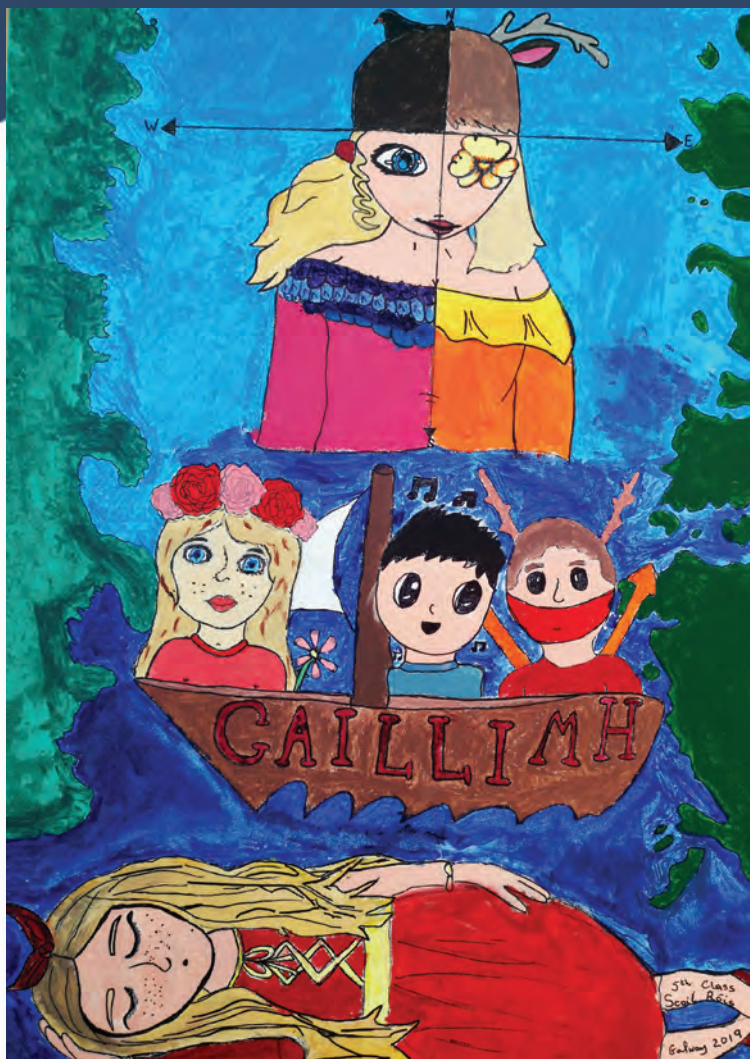
He ordered a barber to deal with his hair,  
but killed him so no one would know what was there.  
Then the barber was dead and his secret not said,  
but like all of these things it soon came to a head.

A few years passed and his hair grew long,  
none would dare cut it but a widows son.  
His hair was done but the barber not dead,  
"What will I do?" this is what the boy said:  
"Please don't kill me! I'm an only son!  
I did your hair and now it's done!"  
A few weeks passed and he grew very ill,  
Mom said "go get some sleep while I find some pills"  
They went to the doctors to see what was wrong,

It wasn't an illness but a secret kept too long!  
There was no cure so he left through the doors  
but then he thought of something obscure...

His mind told him to go to the tree,  
to tell his secret so he could be free!  
There was a big festival and they needed a harp  
They went to the tree to borrow some bark.

The king loved the music especially the harp,  
But when it sang his secret, he soon fell apart.  
"Who cares" said the king, once he had calmed down,  
he then left his ears out, all hairy and brown!



The artwork and poem were influenced by the story of Hy Brasil from Rab Fulton's *Galway Bay Folktales*.

The story of how Galway got its name is based on how the nobleman Manannan Mac Lir transformed himself into a human to stop the spread of people to Ireland. Lir convinced the King of Ireland about the legend of the magical island called Hy Brasil. The island was made from mist and cloud and possessed unlimited space, wealth and resources for those who could settle on it.

To enjoy more details of the story of Hy Brasil see the chapter 'A Selection of Our Favorite Fables', at the end of this book.



# How Galway got its Name

**Class:** 6th Class    **Teacher:** Ms Kelly

**School:** Scoil Rois Primary School, Salthill, Galway

**Poem by:** KT Conneely  
and Hannah Reddington

Hy Brasil was a magical place,  
Manannan Mac Lir wanted all of its space,  
He chose four runners to place a spear,  
But Manus got distracted by a big red deer.

Sile saw a beautiful flower,  
She watched it for more than an hour,  
Machda was determined to place the spear  
But a beautiful sound is all he could hear.

Gaillimh ran west, she was the best,  
When she got there, she took a long rest.  
The Island turned into mist and cloud,  
And Gaillimh was lost, never to be found.



The artwork and poem were influenced by the story of Dalkey Danny from Orla Mc Govern's *Dublin Folk Tales for Children*. The story provides reflection of characters and colourful personalities of people that have lived in Dalkey, Dublin.

Danny was a fisherman who always wore a hat with a flower stuck in it, his favourite being a daisy. Danny loved to go fishing and tell stories to the people he met at Dalkey harbour about his experiences and that of the local fishermen. The tales were many and included stories of fishermen playing tug-of-war with an enormous six metre conger eel. Danny also told stories of the weather and how to tell the direction and strength of the wind by throwing grass and flowers into the air.

'Daisy petals are the best' and that's why Danny always kept one tucked in his hat.

# My Dalkey Danny

**Class:** 5th Class    **Teacher:** Ms Carberry

**School:** Bayside Senior School, Sutton, Dublin

**Poem by:** Erik Sammon

Dalkey Danny, storytelling, smart, happy, interesting.

Lover of weather, stories and the sea.

Who feels kind, clever, generous.

Who needs company, a haircut and a new boat.

Who gives tours, fish, kindness.

Who fears sinking, drowning, bad weather.

Who would like to see Willie Flanagan, who lives in Dalkey.



The artwork and poem were influenced by the story Brendan the Navigator who is the patron saint of seafarers and travellers. St Brendan is one of the early Irish monastic saints and one of the Twelve Apostles of Ireland.

Of all the Irish saints, St Brendan was the most adventurous. He loved travelling across the ocean and was very skilled with a small boat called the coracle. He is known for his legendary quest to a mythical island, somewhere in the North Atlantic.

Stories tell how St Brendan landed on an island that was actually a great big sea-monster and another where he narrowly escaped a sea-cat as big as a horse!

# St Brendan the Navigator

**Class:** 4th Class    **Teacher:** Ms Bradfield

**School:** Glasheen Boys National School, Glasheen, Cork

**Poem by:** Ryan and Diarmuid

Saint Brendan, they say, was born down in Kerry,  
You could tell by his face, he was very merry.  
He travelled around the earth on his boat,  
Spreading the gospel to many afloat.

He travelled around and along with his monks,  
Sleeping all smug in their cosy bunks.  
Iceland, Greenland and America he travelled to,  
I wish I could do that too, do you?





The artwork and poem were inspired by the Irish mythology of Tír na nÓg. It is said to be a place of paradise where there is everlasting youth, beauty, health, abundance and joy. Reaching the island is however considered to be an impossible task for humans, as one would have to cross a stretch of water and then travel beneath the waves. If those that found the land of paradise, ever returned and touched the ground of Ireland, they would age 300 years and die.

The story of Oisín and the mystical woman called Niamh tells of their love and tragedy.

After spending time in the land of Tír na nÓg, Oisín returned to Ireland on Niamh's horse to see his family. However, much had changed and Oisín set out to go back to Niamh. On his trip back from Tír na nÓg, Oisín touched the ground, while helping men move a rock on the beach. As the legend warned – he aged 300 years and died.

# The Legend of Oisín and Tír na nÓg

**Class:** 4th Class    **Teacher:** Mr O'Sullivan

**School:** Glasheen Boys National School, Glasheen, Cork

Oisín, who's name means 'young deer',  
A valiant warrior who fought without fear,  
One day hunting amuigh ar an sliabh,  
A doe came forward transforming into Niamh.

Niamh Cinn Óir the beauty of all the lands,  
She and Oisín fell in love holding hands.  
'Come away with me, away to Tír Na nÓg,  
The land of eternal youth' she said with a póg.

Music with no end gloriously filling their ears,  
Peace, wealth, prosperity banishing all fears.  
The beauty of eternal youth, no worry of age,  
Feasts leaving no hunger; plays shown on stage.

Tír Na nÓg, a land of perfection,  
But loneliness filled Oisín like infection,  
'I must go home, I must see my clan,'  
But wise Niamh said 'No' to Oisín's plan.

Oisín managed to convince her  
with great aching for his land,  
He left saying 'slán' setting his sights on Ireland.  
'Do not set foot on Irish soil, or our magic will unbind',  
Oisín arrived home but his family he did not find.  
Struck by sadness, forgetting to heed her warning,  
He climbed from his horse never to see a new  
morning.

Oisín had set off longing for his friends,  
But they had long met with their own solemn ends.  
Oisín is now a star, far, far above,  
While Niamh is still searching the lands for her love.



This artwork and poem were inspired by Irish folklore of merrow maidens and mermen. With most of our planet covered by water; the legends of merfolk have been in existence for centuries.

Merrow maidens have been known to lure young men beneath the waves, where afterwards the men live in an enchanted state entrapped under the sea.

While female merrows were considered to be very beautiful, the mermen were thought to be very ugly.



# The Merrows

**Class:** 3rd Class    **Teacher:** Ms Sparling

**School:** Glasheen Girls Primary School, Glasheen, Cork

Merrows live deep in the sea,  
Where they swim gracefully.  
They have green skin and  
A scaly fin and have shiny tails,  
that have slimy scales.  
She brushes her hair with a beautiful comb  
While she sits on a large, smooth stone.

The males with green hair and teeth  
They don't look very neat.  
With their pig-like eyes and red nose  
Their beauty comes to a close.

A man will come and take the cap,  
and set the merrow in a trap.  
And then there is the beautiful cape,  
That everyone is trying to take.

There is also a belt so fine  
That everyone thinks is so very divine.  
The human will keep the item forever  
But they do not know that merrows are clever  
And they will always find their treasure.



The artwork and poem were inspired by the story of how the Giant's Causeway got its name. The legend is told that it was the home of the mighty giant Fionn Mac Cumhaill. The story of the volcanic formations is linked to the story where Finn is having trouble with the Scottish giant Benandonner, who is threatening Ireland. Finn is so angry he grabs chunks of the Antrim coast and throws them into the sea forming the path for Finn to follow and teach the Scottish giant a lesson. However, Finn quickly retreats due to the size of Benandonner, only to be saved by his quick thinking wife. Disguising Finn as a baby, she leads the Scotsman to believe that if the child is this big – his father Fionn Mac Cumhaill must be the biggest of all giants.

# Fionn Mac Cumhail - Giants Causeway

**Class:** Junior Infants – 6th Class **Teachers:** Ms Leslie and Ms Gillespie

**School:** Kilbarron National School, Ballyshannon, Co Donegal

Two giants arguing across the Irish Sea,  
The Scottish giant shouted 'come and fight me',  
Fionn in his anger carved a large boulder and launched it over his shoulder,  
It didn't go to plan but in a twist of fate created the Isle of Man,  
Fionn laid some stones to build a way, to fight Benadonner across the Bay,  
But Benadonner was gigantic, so Fionn ran home scared and frantic,  
A plan was hatched by Oonagh, his wonderful wife, to trick Benadonner and save Fionn's life,  
She dressed him up as a baby boy, and put him in a cot and gave him a toy,  
She invited Benadonner in and made iron bread, he broke his teeth and his face turned red,  
He took one look at the size of the baby and thought to himself that his plan was crazy,  
He ran back home and along the way, he broke every stone making the Giant's Causeway!



The artwork and poem were inspired by the story Hy Brasil, a mysterious island that is said to be clouded in mist except for one day every seven years. Stories about the mysterious island circulated throughout Europe for centuries, suggesting that it was the promised land of saints or a paradise where an advanced civilization lived. It has been found on maps as early as 1325. On most maps, the island was located roughly 321 km off the west coast of Ireland in the north Atlantic Ocean. It was last observed on a map in 1865 and was simply noted as "Brazil rock." It has been further suggested that the Porcupine Bank, discovered in 1862, appears to have been an island at some point in time. The bank's highest point sunk either due to a land catastrophe under the water or rising sea levels.

# The Legend of Hy Brasil

**Class:** Junior Infants - 6th Class    **Teachers:** Ms McGill and Ms Harrison

**School:** Saint Aidan's National School, Hollyfield, Ballinrilllick, County Sligo

Hy Brasil the island of the West,  
Hy Brasil the Island in the mist.

Hidden from the humans by the Tuatha Dé Danann , the fairies of old,  
Showing itself occasionally, a legend to be told.

The Kings sent his best, with a mission to endure,  
Three men and the Kings daughter, success from this was sure.

The men became distracted by the beauty and the magic,  
The consequences of their actions would soon become so tragic.

The princess was successful, she was the only one,  
and took a moment in victory to bath there in the sun.

Ran away did the men, as the land began to shake,  
the Land, the sand, the mountains beneath them began to break.

Retreat to the sea to get themselves back home,  
forgotten on the island had they one of their own.

The king he was heartbroken, with his daughter left at sea,  
In her memory it was spoken, "Gaillimh" his kingdom would be.



# A Selection of our Favourite Fables

## The Tale of Cill Stifeen

**Local legend adapted by Carmel Madigan, Loophead Summer Hedge School.**

The tale of Cill Stifeen dates back to the 6th Century, and has been handed down in oral folklore. It was first written about by Westropp circa 1830's (collected during the topographical survey of Ireland) and it involves two clans from the west Clare coastline, based at Liscannor and Loophead.

The story is told of Liscannor clan Corcomodruad which included three brothers and the clan of Turrolbh Mac Starain, which also involved three brothers at Loophead. The Corcomodruad clan made a raid on the Turrolbh Mac Starain and stole their cattle.

The Turrolbh Mac Starain clan also had a beautiful sister, who they had to protect from suitors, for should she ever 'depart the single life' the three brothers lives were fated to end. They built her a single fort, and there she dwelled alone.

On finding their fine cattle stolen, the Turrolbh Mac Starain brothers immediately set off to chase down their stock and the three Corcomodruad brothers, Ruadhin, Ceannuir and Stipheeen. They caught up with them at the sand bar beyond Lahinch, where a ferocious battle for the cattle ensued.

Their absence from Loophead was noticed by a charmer from Kerry, who had long wished to charm their sister and take her away. He seized the moment and took her to Kerry on his boat. She went happily.

During the ferocious battle for the cattle, Stipheeen was slain. He had no sons to protect his fort, so he had brought a magical cloak of water over it. His fort at Cill Stifeen is to this day submerged and can only be emerged from the ocean by a girl with six fingers.

Meanwhile on returning to Loophead, the three brothers of Turrolbh Mac Starain, found their sister had been taken away. As warned, the brothers of Turrolbh Mac Starain met their fate at Pollnapeiste, the hole of the sea monster on the edge of the Shannon as it flows out to the sea.



# The Story of Hy Brasil

**Adapted by Nóirín Burke from Rab Fulton's story in the book Galway Bay Folktales**

Manannan Mac Lir was a sea god of the the ancient supernatural people called the Tuatha Dé Danann, who lived in an elusive 'otherworld' under the Island of Ireland long ago.

After humans started to settle in Ireland, Manannan Mac Lir started to worry that the humans would expand into entering into his 'otherworld', ruining it.


He came up with a plan to trick the humans, by pretending to be human himself. Manannan Mac Lir transformed himself into a wealthy nobleman, called Lord Orbsen, and began to live in the human world.

Now around this time, there was a legend of a mythical island named Hy Brasil. This island, which was made from mist and cloud was said to possess unlimited space, wealth and resources for those who could settle on it. The island was meant to appear off the west coast of Ireland at certain times of the year, and begin a journey inwards through Galway Bay, towards the river Corrib. It was said that the Island would start to become more solid as it made this journey.

To stop the spread of humans in his magical world Lord Orbsen approached the human King in the west of Ireland and told him the story of Hy Brasil. He said to the King "if you could place a spear into the four corners of the Island before dawn, on the morning the island sat in the mouth of the river; then the island of Hy Brasil and all its riches would be yours' forever."

That summer, as the mist was sitting over the bay, the island of Hy Brasil began to be visible out in the Atlantic Ocean. As the humans watched it get closer and closer to their shores, the King selected his four fastest runners, including his daughter princess Gaillimh, for the task of placing the spears in the island of Hy Brasil. They trained every day, seeing who could be the fastest.

The first runner was Marcus, a mighty hunter and warrior; known for his speed while hunting red deer. The second was Sile, the fastest woman on the island, who loved nature and animals. The third was Machda, who loved music and poetry. And finally, the fourth runner was Gaillimh, who loved her family and people most of all.



Finally, the day arrived to try to secure Hy Brasil for their own. As night slid away, the King and his people, plus the four runners sailed out across the mouth of the river to the island of Hy Brasil. The wonders that awaited their eyes, with stunning castles and palaces, rich forests and crops, sandy shores and beautiful valleys stretched as far as the eye could see.

Manus took off running to the east. As he reached the end of a large field of beautiful grass, he saw an enormous red stag standing there. Manus had never seen such a magnificent animal and drew back his spear to try to kill it. At this, the stag took off galloping and Manus took off after him, losing sight of his task to place his spear in the most easterly point of the Island.

The second runner Sile, headed north. As she ran through the forests she heard a beautiful bird song all around her. Rounding a corner, she came upon a flower so stunning it stopped her in her tracks. She fell to the ground to explore it further, smelling its sweet aroma and losing all thoughts of her quest to help conquer the island forever.

Machda, the third runner began running to the south, across the soft golden sands. As he leaped across the sand dunes he began to hear the sweetest song to ever reach his ears. As the melody filled his head, he turned from his path to follow the music back towards the mountains.

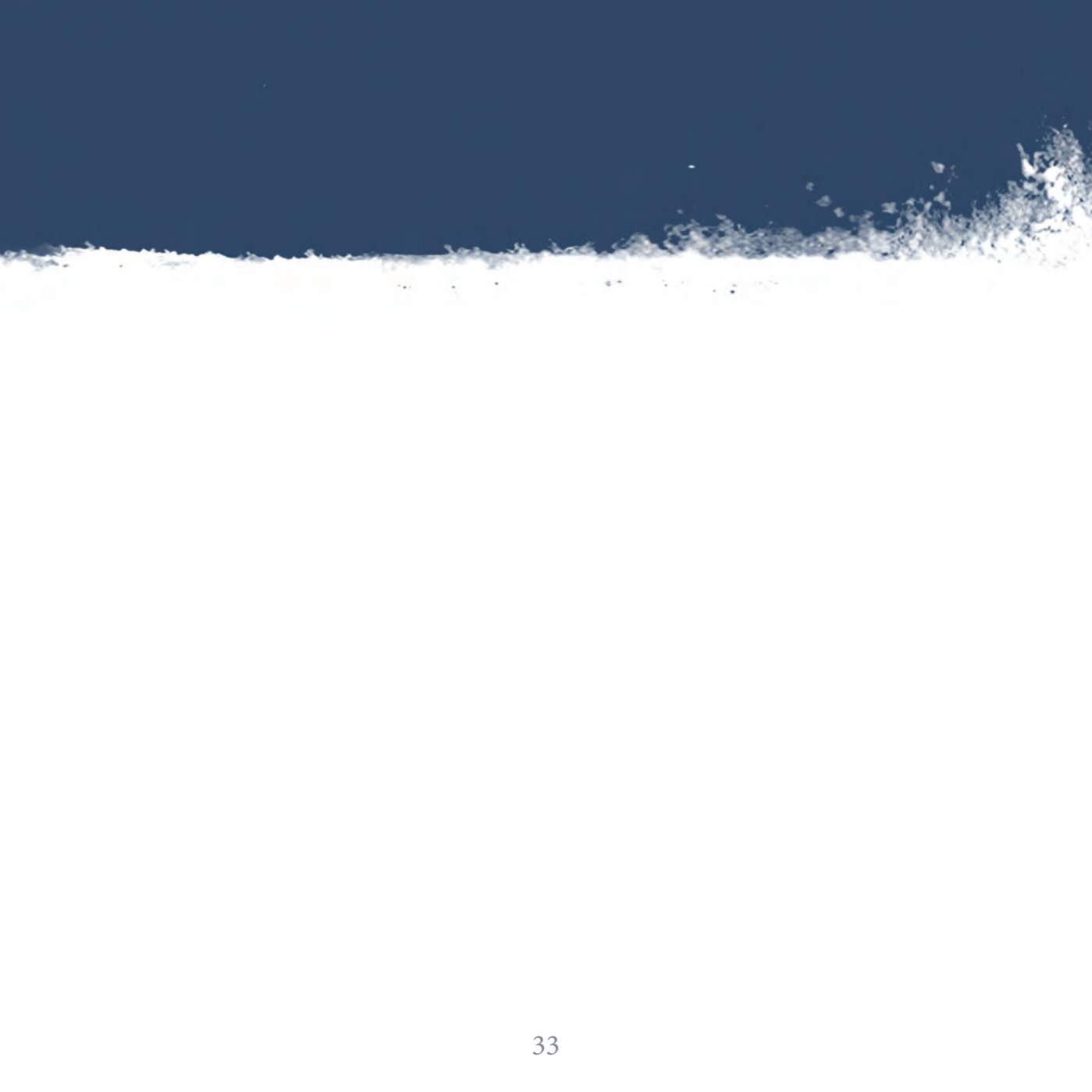
And Gaillimh, what fate awaited her? As Gaillimh ran to the west, she thought she saw her family and friends amongst the trees and around every corner. Head down she ran on, ignoring all those who appeared in her way until finally she reached the most westerly point on the island. Here she placed a spear, and then lay down on the grass to rest.

As dawn began to break, the island started to return to mist again. Panicked the King and his people began to flee the island and return to boats. Marcus, Sile and Machda became aware of their surroundings again as the ground beneath them started to fade. Racing, they headed back to where the boats were moored.

As the boats sailed away from the Island, the King realised that all were safe except for Gaillimh, who had fallen asleep after her long run. The Island faded into the mist and cloud again and Gaillimh was lost to the ocean forever.

In honour of Gaillimh and her sacrifice, the King named their settlement after her. This became the city Gaillimh and Galway was born. The Island of Hy Brasil can be seen on many ancient maps and appears sometimes off the west coast of Ireland.





# About the Editors

**Cushla Dromgool-Regan** is an ocean literacy expert with over fifteen years experience working in communications, education and outreach for the Marine Institute. Cushla has a MSc (Marketing) by Research where she examined the barriers and solutions to ocean literacy in Irish primary schools. This research contributes to highlighting the importance of bringing together different stakeholders in developing social marketing multi-level systems strategies in the context of ocean literacy.

Cushla now works for Camden Education Trust where she manages the strategic development of the Explorers Education Programme. Her role is supported by marine scientists and experts at the Marine Institute as well as the Explorers outreach teams around the coast of Ireland.

Cushla is passionate about increasing our understanding of the ocean, helping people develop their ability to communicate about the ocean, as well as ensuring people are able to make responsible decisions regarding the ocean and its resources.

---

**Dr. Noirin Burke** is the Director of Education at Galway Atlantaquaria, the National Aquarium of Ireland, where she has worked for over 10 years. Her job involves developing and delivering educational activities within the aquarium and through outreach.

Noirín is part of the coordination team for the Explorers Educational Programme. She provides support to Explorers outreach centres nationally, helps develop and trial new materials and activities, and assists with teachers' training through regional Education Centres and St Patricks Campus, Dublin City University. She promotes the programme through social media platforms and provides content for the Explorer's website: [www.explorers.ie](http://www.explorers.ie).

In Noirin's role, she has also worked on Local Agenda 21 projects, the Discover Primary Science and Mathematics Programme, Galway Field Studies Centre at Galway Atlantaquaria, Sustainable Energy Authority Ireland and Junior Cycle for Teachers. She is co-secretariat for the Irish Ocean Literacy Network, and has been on the board of the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group for over six years.

# About the Explorers Education Programme

The Explorers Education Programme aims to build on Ireland's maritime heritage by increasing awareness of the value, opportunities and social benefits of our ocean wealth and identity. The programme provides an important platform for supporting, equipping and training teachers, enabling them to use marine themes in the classroom. It also helps to develop relationships with the wider community and society.

The Explorers Education Programme in schools involves a team of outreach experts that deliver marine modules to primary schools. With a focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) and STEAM (including arts) projects, the outreach team currently work with primary schools in ten coastal counties reaching over 13,000 primary school students and over 500 teachers annually\*.

With an emphasis on cross curricular teaching, the Explorers Education Programme provides over 100 lesson plans and a range of resources covering the Irish curriculum subjects. These are freely available to download at [www.explorers.ie](http://www.explorers.ie)

The programme actively promotes ocean literacy and marine outreach activities through professional development training and workshops. This training is provided by the Explorers outreach teams and is supported by regional ATECI teacher education centres. The team also provides support with teaching third level trainee teachers how to include marine on the curriculum at Dublin City University - St Patricks Campus.

The Explorers Education Programme's strategic development and planning is managed by the Camden Education Trust on behalf of the Marine Institute. Guided by the Marine Institute's *Strategic Plan (2018-2022) Building Ocean Knowledge – Delivering Ocean Services*, the Programme aims to promote our ocean wealth and increase ocean literacy in primary schools in Ireland.

The coordination of the programme's deliverables is supported by Galway Atlantaquaria. The Explorers Education Programme's modules in schools are delivered by the outreach team at Galway Atlantaquaria, Leave No Trace - Ireland, Loophead Summer Hedge School, Sea Synergy Marine Awareness and Activity Centre, Lifetime Lab @ Old Cork Waterworks, Oceanics Surf School and Marine Education Centre, and Marine Dimensions.

\*based on 2018 Explorers Education Programme figures

# References

Dulahan. (2013) *Labhaird Loingseach* (pronounced Lowry Lynshoch), posted in Storytellers: The Gift of Gab & The Golden Tongue. Available at <https://tradconnect.com/group/storytellers-the-gift-of-gab-the-golden-tongue/forum/topics/labhaird-loingseach-pronounced-lowry-lynshoch> (Downloaded March 2018)

Fulton, R. (2013) *Galway Bay Folk Tales*, The History Press Ireland, pp 183.

Jefferies, H. A. (2010) *Viking Cork*. Available at <https://www.historyireland.com/vikings/viking-cork/> (Downloaded March 2018)

Maguire, B. (1987) *The Boyne Valley book and tape of Irish Legends*, published by O'Brien Press, pp 48.

McGovern, O. (2018) *Dublin Folk Tales for Children*, published by The History Press Ireland, pp 160

Winters, R. (2016) *Legends of the Selkies, Hidden Gems of Sea Mythology*. Available at <https://www.ancient-origins.net/myths-legends/legends-selkies-hidden-gems-sea-mythology-006409> (Downloaded March 2018)

*The Sea in Irish History* (Unknown Author and Year). Available at <http://www.askaboutireland.ie/learning-zone/primary-students/3rd-+-4th-class/sea-time-story/the-sea-in-irish-history/> (Downloaded March 2018)

*The Story of the Merrows* (Unknown Author and Year). Available at <http://www.irelandseye.com/animation/explorer/merrows.html> (Downloaded March 2018)



## #OUROCEANFOLKLORE

**Facebook:** ExplorersMarineEducation

**Twitter:** @explorersedu

The Explorers Education Programme™ is supported by the Marine Institute and is funded under the Marine Research Programme by the Irish Government



*Foras na Mara*  
*Marine Institute*

