

THE WORLD OF SORCHA, QUEEN OF THE CASTLE

Who is Sorcha?

Sorcha O'Neill is a young girl, born in 1900 in Castlebellingham, Co. Louth. At the age of 12, she gets a job working as a scullery maid in the magnificent Bellingham Castle. At home, she lives with her mother Bríd, her father Austin, her Gaeilgeoir grandmother Mamó and has two older brothers, Cathal and Liam. Her father is a manager at Woolsey's Brewery in the village.



WHAT HAPPENS TO SORCHA?

Sorcha witnesses a very exciting time in Irish history. Her mother is a devoted advocate and member of the Gaelic League, while her grandmother taught her to speak Irish and all the Celtic legends. Both her brothers join the Irish Volunteers. When war breaks out on the continent, her older brother Cathal signs up. Liam does not believe in fighting for the British crown however and this causes tension within the family.



As Sorcha grows up, she finds herself drawn to nationalism too and is keen to play her part. She joins Cumann na mBan and bravely gets involved in the 1916 rising but the killing of Constable Charles McGee in Castlebellingham terrifies her and her loyalties feel confused.



As Sorcha's father Austin is not a nationalist, the building tensions in her family see a split and with Liam in prison for his role in the rising, Sorcha finds herself separated from her mother and grandmother.



By 1918, as Sorcha nears maturity, she forms a relationship with her childhood sweetheart Tommy and sees the return of her terribly maimed brother, Cathal, from war. This prompts the return of her mother and a family agreement that the O'Neill women can continue with their nationalist activities.



The book ends at the dawn of 1919 and the formation of Dáil Éireann. After a turbulent seven years, Sorcha has witnessed the dawn of the Irish State but she knows at what cost. The book ends with the family happily together and looking forward to the future ... blissfully unaware of what is ahead.

LEARNING POINTS

The following topics are touched upon in the book:

- The Land Wars and rise of tenant farmer rights, the role of the 'Big House' in the early 20th century in Ireland
- Irish nationalism and the Gaelic / Celtic revival
- The Omeath Gaeltacht & historical attitudes towards the Irish language
- Irish fairytales and Celtic legends
- The formation and history of the Irish volunteers, including their split and divide
- World War I
- The role of Irish soldiers in World War I and the effect of war on local economies
- Cumann na mBan
- The 1916 Rising
- Countess Markievicz and Irish Nationalist women
- Education and career prospects for young adults in early 20th century
- The formation of Dáil Éireann and the lead up to the War of Independence

DRAW & ILLUSTRATE YOUR OWN SCENE