



Little Island

NAME UPON NAME BY SHEENA WILKINSON

About the book

It's Belfast, it's 1916, and Ireland is a very divided place. This is the story of a young girl who is part of a divided family and who feels caught up in opposing politics about the Easter Rising and the Great War (nowadays known as World War I). Fourteen-year-old Helen is shaped by her mixed background – rural, Catholic Irish values from her mother's side; urban, Protestant Ulster ones on her father's side.

Helen's favourite cousin Sandy, on her father's side of the family, joined the army straight from school and has already seen action in the Great War in France; his mother, Aunt Violet, is a die-hard anti-Home Ruler. On the other side, Helen's uncle Sean is staunchly nationalist, as is his son, Helen's other favourite cousin, Michael. But even though Michael is in favour of independence for Ireland, he decides, very much against his family's wishes, to enlist, as he believes that helping Britain to win the war will bring Home Rule for Ireland closer.

About the author

Sheena Wilkinson has been established as one of Ireland's most acclaimed writers of contemporary realistic fiction for young people. Winner of multiple Children's Books Ireland awards and recipient of special bursaries from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland for the development of her writing, Sheena is now a full time author and writing teacher living in Belfast.

Belfast in 1916. Fourteen-year-old Helen is shaped by her mixed background – rural, Catholic Irish values from mum Kathleen; urban, Protestant Ulster ones from dad James. Her parents are relaxed in their politics but others in the family circle are more extreme – Aunt Violet is a die-hard anti-Home Ruler, more British than the king, while Uncle Sean is staunchly nationalist. These are the parents of Helen's older cousins: Sandy, who joined the army straight from school and has already seen action in France, and Michael, who runs away from home to enlist. But before he leaves for France, Michael is deployed to Dublin to help quell the Rising, where he's expected to open fire on his fellow Irishmen. Who and what are they fighting for?



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BEFORE YOU READ ...

The title

'Name Upon Name' is a phrase that appears in the book, and also a reference to the W.B. Yeats poem 'Easter 1916', which is quoted at the start of the book:

Too long a sacrifice
Can make a stone of the heart.
O when may it suffice?
That is Heaven's part, our part
To murmur name upon name,
As a mother names her child
When sleep at last has come
On limbs that had run wild.

Thinking about that title, what do you think the book will be about? ‘

The cover

Do you like the cover? Do you recognise the building on the cover?

The cover illustration is based upon WWI recruitment posters.

Take a look at the back cover. You'll see that the blurb is presented as if it is part of a letter. Why do you think that might be?

BEGINNING

Discuss

In the first chapter, Helen talks about praying to St Anthony to help find lost things. Which religion does this tradition come from? What other beliefs like this can you think of?

Discuss

In chapter 2 Helen and her cousins talk about conscription, and joining the British Army. Here are some WWI recruitment posters used in Ireland. Do you think these posters would have been effective? How are they convincing men to join the war effort?



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Activity

Chapter 4 mentions old boys' parcels – packages sent out to soldiers at the Front who used to attend Helen's school. What would you put in a parcel to the Front? You can compare your list to the contents of the packages Helen makes in the next chapter.

Discuss

Not all children in the early 20th century went on to secondary school education. Most children stayed at their elementary schools until the age of 14, when they would go out to work in factories, in mills, on the land, in the shipyards, etc. Helen is a middle class girl attending a secondary school. Single-sex schools were common, but there was also a tradition, especially in the northern part of Ireland and in Scotland, of co-education. How are boys and girls treated in Helen's school? Are they equal, or not?

Research

In chapter 6, Helen and her mother have a disagreement about the role of women. When do you think women in Ireland got the right to vote? Look it up. And now find out also when women in the United Kingdom got the right to vote. Are you surprised by the results of your research?

Research and discuss

In chapter 11 Helen mentions that Miss Cassidy has asked her to join a scholarship class, to help her prepare for college. Earlier in the novel Miss Cassidy says 'Why not? It's 1916.



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Lots of girls go to college now.' Find out women could first go to college in Dublin and in Belfast.

Discuss the obstacles facing women who wanted to go to college and have careers.

Activity

When Helen's cousin Sandy is promoted to the rank of lieutenant, he has a new uniform. Research the different ranks and uniforms in the army at this time. See the BBC Schools website about WW1 for images and more information about life as a soldier.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/0/ww1/25401266>

Read and discuss

Sandy sends Helen a letter telling her about the awful thing he had to do. Sandy's letter shows the true horror of war. Look at these two poems that give very different pictures of World War One and discuss them in class. How do the poets feel about the war? Discuss the imagery, the tone and note also the dates – how perceptions of the war changed with time.

Dulce Et Decorum Est by Wilfred Owens (1917)

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of disappointed shells that dropped behind.

GAS! Gas! Quick, boys!-- An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And floundering like a man in fire or lime.--
Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.



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If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,--
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.

The Soldier by Rupert Brooke (1914)

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam;
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.



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MIDDLE

History

When working for the school magazine, *The Collegian*, Helen helps compile the Roll of Honour. Ireland's War Memorial Records (eight volumes) were published in 1919. Only 100 copies were printed and they were illustrated by Irish illustrator and stained-glass artist Harry Clarke. St Patrick's Cathedral has a copy of this record. Sample pages can be seen on their website, and the record can be searched:

<http://www.stpatrickscathedral.ie/Irelands-memorial-records.aspx>

Group activity

As part of her research for this novel, Sheena Wilkinson looked at a 100 year old magazine from Methodist College, Belfast. Does your school have a magazine? What kind of articles would you like to see in it? Make a magazine as a class activity or in smaller groups. Write articles, think of a name for your magazine, create illustrations and design a cover.

Research

In chapter 13 Helen describes writing for the magazine as a 'sort of war work.' Making up the old boy's Parcels is another way in which Helen was involved in the war effort. Research war work and how women could be involved on the home front. This is a useful resource: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/0/ww1/26439020>

Write

At the start of chapter 15, Helen receives a letter from her cousin Michael about his training and his strained relationship with his family. Write Helen's response to this letter.

Discuss

Throughout *Name Upon Name*, Helen reads school stories, she especially likes books by Elsie J. Oxenham and Angela Brazil. Both authors were popular in the early twentieth century. What can you find out about these authors? All of the books Helen reads are real titles which were available in 1916. One of these books is *The New Girl at St Chad's* (available online through Project Gutenberg <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/24025>). How do these early school stories compare to books you read and enjoy today? Remember that at this time these books were aspirational for young girls as access to secondary education was widening. Helen is encouraged to read more grown-up books – she is given Jane Austen's novels for Christmas and is lent a history book by George.

Read



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In chapter 18, Helen's father tells her about the Rising. 'They declared a republic yesterday. Madness! As if they've got a hope. Connolly and Pearse and – oh, a whole crowd of rebels. Taken over the city!'

Read and discuss the Proclamation of the Irish Republic, which was read out in front of the General Post Office. What did the rebels want? Did they succeed in their aims?

<http://www.nli.ie/1916/pdf/1.intro.pdf>

Activity

The Irish tricolour flag was not widely used until after it was flown at the 1916 Rising. It became the official Irish flag and Article 7 of the Bunreacht na hEireann, the Irish Constitution, states 'The national flag is the tricolour of green, white and orange.' Discuss what the tricolour means, and design your own Irish flag.

Write

Helen sees reports in the newspaper about the Rising 'the news was all of barricaded streets and looting and snipers – the city seemed to have gone mad.' Imagine you were in Dublin in 1916. Write your own newspaper report about the Easter Rising. The image below shows the damage to Sackville Street (now O'Connell Street) after the Rising.



ENDING

Write

At the end of the novel Helen travels alone to Derryward. This is a scary experience for her. Write Helen's diary entry that night – about her journey and about what happens when she arrives in Derryward.



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Alternatively, you might like to write a diary entry for one of the other characters – maybe Helen’s cousin Nora, or her aunt or uncle – and describe Helen and Michael’s surprise appearances from their point of view.

Discuss

Throughout the book we see the differences between town life and country life. Make a list of the differences, and compare it to the differences between town and country life today.

Write

Write the discussion Michael and Helen have with Nora, following the last scene in the book.

Discuss

Did you like how the book ended? Were you surprised? Would you have finished the story in a different way?

AFTER READING

Write

Think about what happens after the book ends. You might like to think about what happens immediately after the book finishes, or what is going on in the characters’ lives several years later.

Write

Write a review of *Name Upon Name*.

Activity

Look at the cover again. Do you think it represents the book well? Design your own cover for *Name Upon Name*.

Other fiction about WWI and the 1916 Rising:

Amelia and *No Peace for Amelia* by Siobhán Parkinson (O’Brien Press)

The Guns of Easter by Gerard Whelan (O’Brien Press)



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The Great War : Stories Inspired by Objects from the First World War by various authors including Sheena Wilkinson, and illustrated by Jim Kay. (Walker Books)

Online resources:

BBC Schools WWI website: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/0/ww1/>

National Library of Ireland 1916 Rising: <http://www.nli.ie/1916/>