For the Teacher

This reproducible study guide to use in conjunction with a specific novel consists of lessons for guided reading. Written in chapter-by-chapter format, the guide contains a synopsis, pre-reading activities, vocabulary and comprehension exercises, as well as extension activities to be used as follow-up to the novel.

In a homogeneous classroom, whole class instruction with one title is appropriate. In a heterogeneous classroom, reading groups should be formed: each group works on a different novel on its reading level. Depending upon the length of time devoted to reading in the classroom, each novel, with its guide and accompanying lessons, may be completed in three to six weeks.

Begin using NOVEL-TIES for reading development by distributing the novel and a folder to each child. Distribute duplicated pages of the study guide for students to place in their folders. After examining the cover and glancing through the book, students can participate in several pre-reading activities. Vocabulary questions should be considered prior to reading a chapter; all other work should be done after the chapter has been read. Comprehension questions can be answered orally or in writing. The classroom teacher should determine the amount of work to be assigned, always keeping in mind that readers must be nurtured and that the ultimate goal is encouraging students' love of reading.

The benefits of using NOVEL-TIES are numerous. Students read good literature in the original, rather than in abridged or edited form. The good reading habits, formed by practice in focusing on interpretive comprehension and literary techniques, will be transferred to the books students read independently. Passive readers become active, avid readers.

Novel-Ties® are printed on recycled paper.

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SYNOPSIS

It is 1845, and a terrible famine is ravaging Ireland. All across the country, the potatoes on which the Irish depend have been stricken with a blight that turns them to black pulp. With little else to eat, the people of Maidin Bay, like thousands of Irish, are in danger of starvation.

Twelve-year-old Nory Ryan watches the blight on the land threaten to destroy the lives of her family and neighbors. The people of Maidin Bay have been poor tenant farmers for hundreds of years, but now their situation is truly desperate. When Cat Neely and her mother are faced with the loss of their home because they are unable to pay their rent, Nory begs a coin from Anna Donnelly, reputed to be the witch of the glen, to save the Neelys from deportation. But the coin falls down Patrick’s Well, where so many have come to pray and make wishes. Now, Nory must work for Anna in order to repay her for the coin.

There is little comfort for the Ryans. Mrs. Ryan died in childbirth when Patch was born. Nory’s father has gone to sea so that he can turn the catch into money to pay the cruel and greedy English landlord, Lord Cunningham. Maggie, the eldest Ryan daughter, sails for America with her new husband, promising that one day the family will be together again. That leaves Granda, Nory, Celia, and Patch to survive by scraping up food from the sea. Along with her best friend, Sean Red, Nory struggles to help her family through the crisis.

But can she do it? The hateful Lord Cunningham wants to evict all the peasants from the land so that he can graze sheep where their cottages have stood for centuries. For lack of rental payment, he and his agent, Devlin, are confiscating all the animals upon which his tenants depend: the cows, pigs, and even the scrawny hens. It is lucky after all that Nory has gone to work for Anna, milking her cow and helping her gather the herbs from which she makes medicines. Anna, no witch after all, feeds Patch and Nory with the milk from her cow and helps keep them from starvation.

With no mother and a father off at sea, the Ryan children and their frail grandfather must remain strong. They have always stood together, giving each other strength and hope. They dream of America, the place of freedom and plenty where one of their family already lives in a house in Brooklyn, New York. One day, the Ryans dream, they too will be there in the house at 416 Smith Street—if they can survive long enough to get passage on a ship to that faraway land.

It is through Nory’s courage and determination that the family stays alive. But they cannot stay together, after all. When Granda and Nory’s sister Celia set off to find their father, Nory, Patch, and Anna cling together through the worst days of the famine. Finally, tickets come from Da. Although Nory is reluctant to leave Anna behind, she knows that her future can only be in America, reunited with the rest of her family.
PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. Preview the book by reading the title and the author's name and by looking at the illustration on the cover. What do you think the book will be about? When and where does it take place?

2. Read the Background Information on page two of this study guide. Do some additional research to learn more about Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century. Find out about its social classes, the economy, education, and diet. Start a K-W-L chart, such as the one below. Fill out column three after you finish the book.

   **IRELAND—1845**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What I Know</th>
<th>What I Would Like To Learn</th>
<th>What I Learned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-K-</td>
<td>-W-</td>
<td>-L-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Hardship can bring out the best in people. Has your family or community ever been faced with a difficult situation? How did people respond to this challenge? In what ways did some people try to help others at this time?

4. **Social Studies Connection:** Do some research to learn about the ongoing relationship between England and Ireland over the past several centuries. Based on your findings, why do you suppose the English have governed Ireland for so long? What types of problems has this circumstance imposed on the Irish? What do you think should be done about these problems?

5. **Oral Language Activity:** The main character in this novel had to make some painful choices in order to help her family and neighbors. With a partner, discuss ways in which the decisions a person makes can change his or her destiny. Present an oral report about a choice you once made that affected your life in a significant way.

6. **Science Connection:** Famine is a serious problem in many countries in our world today. Choose a country that is currently faced with a food shortage, and do some research to find out what is being done to relieve the famine sufferers. Write a report on how government and private industries are attempting to deal with the famine in that place.

7. Notice the author's dedication at the beginning of the book. To whom does she dedicate this story? Why do you think she refers to those “who stayed” and “those who sailed”? Why might land have been important to those who sailed? What does this dedication suggest about the book you are about to read?

8. Read the short glossary with word pronunciations at the beginning of the book. Become familiar with the words and their sounds.
CHAPTERS 1 – 4

Vocabulary: Draw a line from each word on the left to its correct definition on the right. Then use the numbered words to fill in the blanks in the sentences below.

1. dangle  a. having an almost vertical pitch or slope
2. glint   b. without sense or feeling
3. steep   c. local government officer; similar to a sheriff
4. numb   d. hang loosely
5. hovel   e. taking game or fish illegally
6. bailiff f. shine
7. poaching g. unevenly colored; blotchy
8. mottled h. small, poor house; hut

1. The large family was crowded into the ______________, with all five children sharing the one bedroom.

2. Seeing something ______________ in the stream, the miner quickly scooped up a nugget of gold.

3. A hunter was arrested for ______________ on land that belonged to a wealthy family in the area.

4. I grew tired, trudging up the ______________ hill to our cabin.

5. The ______________ skin of the mountaineer showed that he’d spent many days in the cold and wind.

6. When I let the toy mouse ______________ from my hand, the cat pounced on it as if it were real.

7. After a long swim in the icy lake, my skin felt completely ______________.

8. We watched in horror as the ______________ put an entire family out on the street because they had been unable to keep up payments for their home.

Read to find out why Nory’s sister wanted to leave for America.
Chapters 1 – 4 (cont.)

Questions:
1. Why did Nory and Sean climb all the way up to Patrick’s Well before they ate the dulse?
2. Why did Sean and Nory dream of living in Brooklyn?
3. What evidence shows that Nory and Sean could not read?
4. How did the area around Patrick’s Well reflect the townspeople’s difficult lives?
5. Why was Nory afraid of Anna Donnelly?
6. Why was Anna Donnelly’s coin of no help to Cat and her mother?
7. How did Granda defend Nory’s right to fish in the stream that now belonged to the landlord, Lord Cunningham?
8. Why did Nory worry that Maeve could spell trouble for Nory’s family?
9. Why was Nory shocked when Maggie, her oldest sister, announced her plan to go to America with Francey?

Questions for Discussion:
1. Why do you think Sean and Nory did not know how to read?
2. Do you think Lord Cunningham was unduly cruel or simply acting in a businesslike manner?
3. What might Nory’s desire to help Cat and her mother reveal about her character?
4. Why do you think Nory’s family kept the dog, despite their poverty?
5. Do you think it was selfish of Maggie to leave for America without her family?

Literary Devices:
1. Foreshadowing—Foreshadowing refers to the clues that an author provides to suggest later events in the story. What might the coin that slipped out of Nory’s hand into Patrick’s Well foreshadow?
CHAPTERS 5 – 8

Vocabulary: Use the words in the Word Box and the clues below to complete the crossword puzzle.

WORD BOX
agent  drifted  harvest  stumbled  wail
grazed  grim  hearth  surf
famine  harsh  property  tenants

Across
2. rough; cruel
4. slipped or tripped
6. piece of land
9. someone having the authority to act for another
10. people paying rent for the use of land or space
11. time of starvation

Down
1. not smiling; serious
2. fireplace
3. ripe crops picked when the growing season is over
4. waves of the sea breaking on the shore
5. carried along by currents of air or water
7. feed on grass that is growing
8. cry out loud for a long time out of grief or pain
Chapters 5 – 8 (cont.)

Science/Social Studies Connection:
On the Internet, go to www.people.Virginia.edu/~eas5e/Irish/Famine.html to learn more about the causes and effects of the potato famine in Ireland that lasted from 1846–1850. Also find out how many people from Ireland emigrated to the United States during that period.

Music Connection:
Find some recordings of Irish folk music. Play the songs in your classroom as background while you are reading the book. Why do you think so many of the songs have sad themes? Is it possible that hearing or singing sad songs could make people happy?

Writing Activities:
1. Write a newspaper article to alert the residents of Maidin Bay of the encroaching potato blight.

2. Imagine that you are Nory, and could write a letter to Da. Describe the problems faced by the families in the glen, and tell what has happened to the Ryans since he went to sea.
Chapters 13 - 16 (cont.)

Literary Elements:

I. **Characterization**—In each oval, write a characteristic or trait that Nory possesses. Provide an example of an action that illustrates that trait in the space below. Compare your responses with those of your classmates.

II. **Conflict**—In a work of literature, a conflict is a struggle between opposing forces. It may be the struggle of a person against society, a person battling against nature, or a person’s inner struggle. Use a chart, such as the one below, to record the conflicts that appear in *Nory Ryan’s Song*. Add to the chart as you continue to read the book.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Conflict</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>person vs. person/society</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>person vs. nature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>person vs. self (inner struggle)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Writing Activity:**
Write a journal entry about a time when you had to make a difficult choice. Describe the situation and what you did when you were faced with the decision.
CLOZE ACTIVITY

The following passage has been taken from Chapter Nine. Read it through completely. Then fill in each blank with a word that makes sense. Afterwards, you may compare your language with that of the author.

I was dreaming, rocked in the currach on Maidin Bay, small fingerlets of waves underneath me. There was a ___________ 1 on Sean Red's hook. Drops of water ran ___________ 2 the line as it came in, the ___________ 3 a flash of silver under the surface.

___________ 4 what was that smell? I opened my ___________ 5 It had been my turn for the ___________ 6 side, so there was no need to ___________ 7 over Celia and Patch. I rolled out ___________ 8 the bed, the straw crackling under me. ___________ 9 glow from the hearth was just bright ___________ 10 for me to see Granda huddled in ___________ 11 bed on the other side of the ___________ 12 I stood there to be sure they ___________ 13 still asleep. But how could they sleep ___________ 14 the smell that was drifting in under ___________ 15 door?

Three steps, then I eased the ___________ 16 open. Outside it was bright as day. ___________ 17 moon was up, full and white, throwing ___________ 18 shadows away from me. I heard thunder ___________ 19 though, and the air was damp and ___________ 20 Nighttime belonged to the sidhe, so I ___________ 21 afraid to take more than a few ___________ 22, but it was far enough. The potato ___________ 23 leaned against each other, limp and wet, ___________ 24 leaves shapeless and dripping.

I pulled up ___________ 25 edge of my petticoat to cover my ___________ 26 and backed against the wall of the ___________ 27. My throat felt thick. In my mind was Granny Mallon's voice: "Without potatoes we will starve to death."
POST-READING ACTIVITIES

1. Return to the K-W-L chart on Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century that you began on page three of this study guide. Fill in column three, recording what you learned. Compare your responses to those of your classmates.

2. Return to the conflict chart you began on page fifteen of this study guide. How are some of these conflicts resolved? Are there any conflicts that are not resolved at the end of the book?

3. Read the author’s letter that appears at the end of the book. Why do you think Patricia Reilly Giff’s American relatives would not discuss Ireland? Why do you think Giff felt compelled to write *Nory Ryan’s Song*?

4. Now that you have read *Nory Ryan’s Song*, think about the author’s choice of a title. In what ways does the title suggest the qualities of the main character and her view of life?

5. Drama Connection: The members of the Ryan family promise to join each other in America. Write a scene for a play that shows what happens when the Ryans meet at Maggie’s door. With a group of classmates, act out your dramatic scene.

6. Literary Element: Theme—The theme of a work of fiction refers to the author’s message or its central ideas. What are some important themes of *Nory Ryan’s Song*? List some of the author’s ideas about family, friendship, loyalty, courage, and hope.

7. Social Studies Connection: Do some research about Ireland today and write a short report. Address the following questions:
   - What is the political relationship of England and Ireland at this time?
   - Why is there fighting in Northern Ireland? What attempts have been made to resolve the problems?
   - What is the economy of Ireland today?

8. Choose one of the novels listed under Suggestions for Further Reading on page twenty-two of this study guide. After you have read the book, write a short essay comparing it to *Nory Ryan’s Song*. What kinds of issues does each book explore? How do the messages of the two authors differ? How are they similar?
SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Deitch, Jo Anne Weisman. *Children at Work*. Discovery Enterprises Ltd.
Schlee, Anne. *Ask Me No Questions*. Holt.

Some Other Books by Patricia Reilly Giff

*All the Way Home*. Random House.

* NOVEL-TIES Study Guides are available for these titles.