

To be sure the forced representation of the Irish language in the first few chapters, almost put me off, however I persevered and in so doing found myself immersed in the epic tale of Bridie's childhood, following her from the poverty and hunger of Ireland in the 1850s, to her new life in Melbourne and the Victorian goldfields.

Bridie displays a strong, resourceful character, which makes for a positive role model for readers, in the 10 – 14 year age range, whom I believe would enjoy this book. Historical detail of the hardships and horror of the Irish potato famine, together with insight into life for the early arrivals to Australia, make for useful background material for history research. The multicultural nature of the early immigrants depicted in the story, provides a natural link to discussion and comparison of modern day arrivals to Australia.

“Bridie's Fire” is the first of a series of four. As the plot unfolds, the author carefully leaves several threads of the plot unresolved, to ensure that the reader is left wanting to find out more.

The “Children of the Wind” series will be a popular addition to the library shelves.

Liz Taylor, John Paul College, QLD

This is an emotive and compassionate depiction of survival, of people seeking refuge, and finding it where people can not now. Murray deals with the historical perspectives of text with unnerving ease. The many references are insightful connections with daily life. A daily life that brings hunger, sickness and death, with a heap of hope evoked through Bridie's dominant voice.

There is good within Murray's portrayal of this horrid history, the ole Irish spoken by the refugees oppressed by the British is stunning. The narrative is often basic, opening a few flaws in the sweeping plot line. However, the hype surrounding this novel is matched with characters' experiences that touch and grow within the reader. This timely reminder that the Irish are embedded in multicultural Australia shows how the people of this land should embrace refugees.

Troy Martin, Merriwa Central School, NSW

The character Bridie is introduced as a fun loving character with a lot of courage, experiencing life as one expects for all young children; by the seaside with family members and friends.

This brief introduction to Bridie changes dramatically in Chapter Two as a series of tragedies begins to unfold. Bridie's initial courage is strengthened and tested as the subsequent events of the Irish potato famine tear her life apart.

Throughout the course of her journey Bridie loses most of her family and her future, yet she does not lose her respect and consideration for others. This faith in others is challenged many times during her incarceration in the workhouse, her journey to Australia, employment within the new colony and escape to the gold fields. Bridie is driven on by her passion to reunite with her brother and assist others. Based on historical fact the novel flows as an enjoyable and stimulating read providing a number of opportunities for further study.

“Bridie's Fire” would be a valuable tool for students looking at developing personal futures and setting goals. Bridie's self determination gives her the ability to set her own goals against all hardships. With each of these goals she is able to build relationships with others that lead to each small success. Using the novel to reflect on each goal and the associated choices Bridie made, could highlight how one can manage their own identity.

Leanne Banfield, Hartz Support Service, TAS

The book was very disappointing. Loved the Irish chapters. Sparsely written, humorous and fast paced. I thought that the year 7s-9s will love Bridie and all the gritty spontaneity of her poor but honest family.

There's a recent but growing interest in historical stories at Karabar HS. Readers strongly identify with the historical setting, the main character, the everyday life and death choices. The reader can live dangerously (in a chair) and wonder what s/he might do in a similar situation. These plot driven stories teach history without preaching. They do not include every thought of the author.

Bridie's adventures in the colony of Melbourne and on the gold fields lost authenticity. The writing became full of explanations and details. The plot became obvious; the romance early Mills and Boon. Everything was there from the gorgeous son of rich doctor to the evil brother in law attempting rape, to the bush ranger, to the drama queens.

I felt annoyed such a 'you beaut' beginning became turgid.

Fran Ross, Karabar High School, NSW

The novel "Bridie's Fire" by Kirsty Murray is full of excitement. It is a book that you can't put down!

The main character is Bridie, a young girl about the age of 11, who lives in Ireland during the potato famine. She eventually is offered the chance to go to Australia, to start a new life, so she takes it, leaving her brother behind in a workhouse. She finds work as a scullery maid in the upstanding home of the De Quinceys. There she meets Gilbert, and after a time, they both head off to the goldfields in Ballarat. She eventually meets a man named Eddie Bones, and works for him.

I found the story enticing and exciting. I really couldn't put it down, and it appealed to me because Bridie is nearly the same age. The age group is from 10 to 14 year olds, and I think it will teach them a lot about the history of the Irish people.

The author should be proud of the effort she put into the book, it really paid off. The final result is a masterpiece. I would love the other novels if they were as good as this one.

Stephanie Pope, Year 9, Karabar High School, NSW

"Bridie's Fire" is the inspirational story of a young Irish girl who faces the most challenging of odds to secure a new life for herself in a country far from the place of her birth. Taking place during the potato famine in Ireland, the story moves from the destitution of the Irish countryside to the equally daunting ruin of the city of Dublin and finally on to the foreboding harshness of the newly settled Australian landscape. As one by one Bridie's friends and family are lost to her this young heroine forges on, the hope of a reunion with her younger brother keeping alive her spirit, like a spark in the darkness.

This is a well researched and exquisitely written novel that has all the elements of a great saga, written in a language that is both accessible and eloquent. There are great possibilities for using this book in the classroom at the middle years level. It is a wonderful way to introduce a little history (English, Irish and Australian) into the classroom and, given our own Irish heritage, this is a most appropriate area for study. It is also a story with well defined characters that would lend itself well to more intense character study or an exploration of the themes of survival, family, friendship, courage and even a look at child labour. Apart from anything else it is a fantastic adventure story and I look forward to the next chapter in the series.

Kate Schneider, Healesville High School, VIC

"Bridie's Fire" is the sad and moving story of a fiery young Irish girl in the early nineteenth century. In a series of tragic events, Bridie's family and home are lost to her in the Great Potato Famine, forcing her to swallow her determined pride and accept the charity of the workhouse or starve like thousands of others all over her beloved Ireland.

In the workhouse the opportunity arises to emigrate to the "other side of the world" to become an indentured servant in Australia in exchange for the free passage. However Bridie soon finds being a Catholic servant in a Protestant household can be difficult with the cook's frequent outbursts about 'heathens'. Bridie leads a dull, endless existence and, after narrowly escaping being raped by one of the masters, flees to the excitement of the Ballarat goldfields.

There she befriends some colourful characters that draw her into the world of theatre, finally finding both her love and her niche in life.

The story touches upon several themes:

-the hardships faced by millions of people as a result of the potato famine, vividly recreating images of the despair and heartache as Bridie loses her family one by one (the major theme)
- the Protestant vs Catholic animosity in the early nineteenth century
- life on the goldfields of colonial Australia and the diversity of cultures brought to our country in the search for wealth

- Western medicine vs Eastern herbal medicine

Joanne Pearson, Balmoral State High School, QLD

This interesting story of Bridie O'Connor starts in Ireland with a family of five. Bridie is described as a bit wild and Brandon, her younger brother loves the adventure of being with her. There are grand tales of adventure, filled with superstition and Irish heroes.

When the potato crop is blighted the family's fortunes are dashed. The father is forced to steal, everyone gets hungrier and Bridie counts off the number of children who have died in the town. When her father dies the family goes in search of food and work but things don't go their way. The story in Ireland describes the life of the workhouses for the very young orphaned children. After months of soul destroying workhouse labour Bridie takes up the opportunity to go to Australia as an indentured servant when she is only 13 years old. Images of colonial Melbourne are painted as Bridie settles herself in as a scullery maid. The fortunes of colonialists are also explored as Bridie observes her employers. The tale thus far concludes with life on the goldfields where Bridie initially masquerades as a boy. There are three other books to follow and surely Brandon the younger brother's story who was left in the workhouse in Ireland will be told.

This book gives a wonderful insight into:

- The plight of the Irish during the potato famine
- Irish heroes
- Early colonial life in Melbourne
- Life on the goldfields
- The life of girls in both countries.

Margaret Moran, Ivanhoe Grammar School, VIC

Bridie is a nine-year-old Irish girl living happily with her parents when this riveting novel starts. Unfortunately, this is soon to change. Her parents' potato crop fails and her father dies in a boating accident. She, with her mother and brothers, is soon forced to go looking for relatives to help them because they are starving. It is a fruitless search as many other families are in a similar situation. Before long, Bridie is forced to leave her dying mother in a ditch and head off to the workhouse with her surviving brother Brandon.

Bridie has a change of fortune when she is given the opportunity to emigrate to Australia. She starts working as a servant for a wealthy family but is enticed into running away to the goldfields, dressed as a boy. Because of her feistiness, she is involved in a number of adventures there; adventures that give her hope for the future, a hope possibly explored in following books in the series.

This is an excellent historical novel, highlighting the utter deprivation experienced by those affected by the Irish potato blight of the 1850s. As well, goldrush Australia is well depicted with all the noise, dust, and colour experienced. Junior History students would gain a lot from reading this novel, as it would give them a chance to immerse themselves in the period.

Janet Evans, Wynnum State High School, QLD

The main character Bridie is introduced to the readers as a determined and courageous young Irish tomboy girl. In a quite amusing first chapter, she fights in make-believe battles and shows no fear for local tales of demons. But the lighthearted tone quickly disappears when hunger and poverty strike her, her family and numerous Irish people during the potato famine. In a

Dickensian accumulation of tragedies Bridie loses most members of her family then survives the hard conditions of a workhouse.

Later, an opportunity seems to open up when, amongst other Irish orphans, she sails to Australia with the hope of a better life. She is disappointed at first but her determination is never deterred. The descriptions of living – and dying – conditions for Irish people of this time are indeed very dark. Nothing is spared to the little girl: seeing her brother passing away, leaving her dying mother behind, stealing from a dead body. It is almost too much. But at every obstacle the reader is constantly reminded of her determination.

Bridie is obviously a very strong model for young readers. Despite the distance in time and difference in hardship they can identify with her, since her perception of events remains that of a child. In addition, the richly documented historical parts in 19th century Ireland and Australia can illustrate aspects of daily life in those times. She is an inspiration to young people, especially to those who were not born in Australia or whose parents went through the hardship of immigrating to a new country.

Isabelle Baelde, Rose Bay Secondary College, NSW