

**Literacy
Association of
Ireland**



**Cumann
Lítearthachta
na hÉireann**

Newsletter

Bumper Christmas Edition 2022



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A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A chairde,

Welcome to the Christmas 2022 bumper edition of LAI Literacy News.

As we enter the festive season we hope Clara's picture book wish list and Sinéad's writing tools wish list give you a few ideas for stocking fillers, or for seasonal reading and writing binges.

There is no shortage of fireside reading material for you to enjoy with your mince pies. Enjoy Aisling Cannon's piece on oral reading fluency and artful approaches to developing fluency in children.

Fillimid ar áiseanna BARD de chuid Dheirdre Ní Ghallachóir le tacú le cainteoirí óga Gaeilge barr feabhais a chur ar a gcuid scileanna teanga. Tugann Padaí de Bléine léargas léirstinneach dúinn ar an ngearrsceál *An Gnáthrud*.

Take a close look inside a Tallaght school that has been working closely with young people to create a culture of reading to become a well-read school.

If you want a break from the Christmas crackers' jokes, have a go at Gene's Word puzzle.

Rebecca Curtin's article on gender stereotypes in children's books gives us much food for thought on how to create opportunities for children to engage with these narratives on a critical level, and how to encourage children to consider more deeply the messages being imparted.

Next year promises to be another literacy-packed calendar with our webinar series running again in the spring and our national conference taking place in the autumn.

As we bring 2022 to a close, the Literacy Association wishes you a gentle end to the year and a season of restful reading.

Léigí libh!

Claire M. Dunne

Uachtarán Chumann Litearthachta na hÉireann



Resource Spotlight!

The Spring edition of the LAI newsletter featured a wonderful piece on **Bard** by Deirdre Gallagher/ Ní Ghallachóir- a language pattern and approach to reading which ensures accuracy in oral and written communication *as Gaeilge* – 🗣️✍️!

This edition of the LAI newsletter includes a helpful resource created by Deirdre to support the implementation of this approach.

Follow Deirdre on Twitter  <https://twitter.com/deelangall> and on Instagram  <https://www.instagram.com/deelangall/> where she shares lots more of her brilliant resources!

1.

Gníomhaíocht Shamplach: Cosúlachtaí litrithe/Patrúin litrithe

Áis: Bileog oibre/ Mata 'Cosúlachtaí litrithe/Patrúin litrithe'

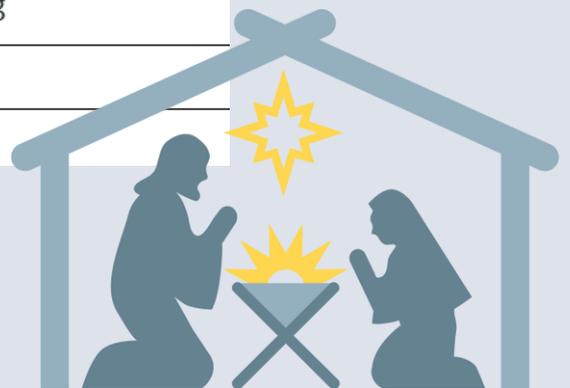
T.F.: Táimid ag foghlaim chun cosúlachtaí litrithe/patrúin litrithe a aithint

Cur síos: Cuir grúpa focal ar an gclár bán/osteilgeoir le sraithlitreacha comóna iontu m.sh. *beomhar, ceolmhar, glórmhar*. Abair leis na páistí/daltaí/foghlaimoírí go mbeidh siad ag picadh amach cosúlachtaí litrithe/patrúin litrithe. Tabhair an bhileog oibre dóibh agus iarr orthu na focail a chur i ngrúpaí de réir na bpatrún litrithe. Aibhsigh na litreacha deireanacha comóna.

dearfach	siopadóireacht	éistim	bialann	
suimiúil	niamhrach	ildánach	scríbhneoireacht	
iarsmalann	tuigim	fiúntach	tumadóireacht	
cairdiúil	roinnim	spéisiúil	leabharlann	
anamúil	pictiúrlann	feicim	garraodóireacht	
Patrún litrithe 1	Patrún litrithe 2	Patrún litrithe 3	Patrún litrithe 4	Patrún litrithe 5
suimiúil cairdiúil anamúil spéisiúil	feicim tuigim éistim roinnim	fiúntach cabhrach dearfach ildánach	scríbhneoireacht garraodóireacht siopadóireacht tumadóireacht	leabharlann iarsmalann bialann pictiúrlann

GENE'S CRYPTIC CHRISTMAS PUZZLE!

1	Far Eastern delightful country
2	Fine Gael Headgear
3	Famous four weeks on a tabular display
4	Hymn requires car maintenance
5	Summon the entirety of believers
6	A shortened manager
7	Radio ditty on campanologist's tools
8	No noise between 8.00pm and 6.00am.
9	Producing urban rhyming lyrics on A4 or A3
10	Crimson bird for stealing
11	Not Southern stick
12	Crazy biscuits for cheese
13	(ABCDEFGHIJKLMNPOQRSTUVWXYZ) X 2
14	Mild green washing up liquid
15	12 O'clock accumulation
16	A dozen percussionists thumping
17	Decorate the corridors
18	Think over little Edward's moan



Dr Gene Mehigan, Marino Institute of Education

Answers at the back! No peeping!

ORAL READING FLUENCY: ACTION RESEARCH IN FIRST CLASS

Aisling Cannon

“Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with shades of deeper meaning.”

- Maya Angelou

There are times during a teaching career when a child says, or does, something that reaffirms the difference you are making to their learning. This happened to me in April 2022, when I was working with my First Class pupils on an Oral Reading Fluency project as part of my Masters research. As soon as we got into class, a child excitedly approached me to tell me that she had been working on her reading the evening before in preparation for an opportunity to perform to her class that day. This short interaction told me that the child felt innately inspired and motivated to read in her spare time because there was an authentic reason for doing so. Moreover, I could tell by her demeanour that reading was starting to become something that she perceived as joyful and fun.

This child was part of my mainstream class of 28 pupils in a co-educational, urban school in Dublin. As you would typically expect, the cohort had varying levels of proficiency in reading by First Class with differing degrees of skill in word recognition. As their teacher, I was curious to know how to move all children from word-by-word decoding to something more fluent sounding which might help them to understand better what they had been reading. After extensive

research, I discovered that Oral Reading Fluency instruction was an approach that might help me in this endeavour. I designed a simple intervention to ascertain the effectiveness of everyday fluency instruction where I measured the pupils fluency before the study and again at the end. Through this, I discovered that:

1. Daily fluency lessons (15/20mins in length) helps pupils to improve oral reading fluency.
2. Pupils gain confidence and enjoy reading more when they participate in oral reading fluency lessons.
3. Fluency building methods have further reaching implications than reading alone, pupils can be inspired to write as a consequence of participating in fluency lessons.

The intention of this short piece is to share with readers the approach that worked in my classroom. The information may be of interest to staff working with the Primary Language Curriculum (NCCA, 2019) as it provides ideas to support learning outcomes that pertain particularly to reading fluency and self-correction. Parents may also find these ideas helpful as a way of supporting early readers at home.

What is Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)?

For some time, ORF has been confused to mean fast reading. It is true that reading rate is associated with ORF but it is not rate alone that defines fluent reading. Most definitions of ORF involve the components of accuracy, automaticity and prosody as set out below:

Fluency combines accuracy, automaticity, and oral reading prosody which, taken together, facilitate the reader's construction of meaning. It is demonstrated during oral reading through ease of word recognition, appropriate pacing, phrasing, and intonation. It is a factor in both oral and silent reading that can limit or support comprehension (Kuhn et al., 2010, p. 240)

Taking into consideration the three sub-components, I designed lessons that incorporated a focus on accuracy, automaticity and prosody each day to assist my pupils in their developing fluency. First Class is a crucial time for this instruction to take place as pupils move from individual word decoding towards 'fluent-speech like reading' (Mehigan, 2020, p. 2). Accuracy in ORF refers to the pupil's ability to accurately recognise and read the words on the page. Automaticity refers to how quickly and effortlessly this can be done, and prosody refers to the expressive, oral production of the text. When all of these components come together, the result should be fluent reading leading to good comprehension.

How can I improve ORF in my classroom?

The National Reading Panel (NRP) tells us that extensive literature

reviews indicate that classroom practices which encourage repeated oral reading with feedback and guidance leads to meaningful improvements in reading expertise for students—for all readers, regardless of proficiency level (NICHD, 2000). Repeated reading of familiar texts has been found to significantly aid in fluency development (Chomsky, 1976; LaBerge & Samuels, 1974; Stahl & Heubach, 2005).

We've all heard the expression that practice makes perfect. Whilst no First Class reader needs to be 'perfect', providing opportunities for each child to practice reading aloud passages of text in the form of poetry, song, story or even a drama script can lead to improved fluency. Although repeated practice is key, this should not become monotonous and so to maintain interest we must provide a genuine reason for the reading. When we provide a genuine reason for reading such as an opportunity to perform a passage, it inspires pupils to give a meaningful rendering of the text to the listening audience (Rasinski, 2004).

Artfully teaching Oral Reading Fluency

Fluency Café

To achieve this in my classroom, we set up a Friday Fluency Café. For half an hour each Friday morning, my classroom became a pretend café complete with juice and biscuits while we listened to each child perform their chosen passage from the week. Performing was entirely optional for each child to ensure they always felt comfortable in their learning environment. Laughter, joy and fun were important elements in each fluency lesson and particularly during the Friday sessions. Ensuring

the children experienced success in reading and an opportunity to see it as a fun activity was key.

Fluency Development Lesson (FDL)
Monday to Thursday fluency instruction were the preparation days for our Friday Café. Each day, we worked on a new passage (poems, songs, scripts) and read and reread them over a short timeframe. I adapted an approach called the Fluency Development Lesson (Rasinski, 2003). During each lesson, each child had their own copy of the passage and the simple steps that I followed are set out below:

1. Pupils read aloud the passage from the previous lesson in pairs.
2. The teacher introduces a new text and reads it to the pupils two or three times while they follow along. This can be a poem, song, riddle, joke, speech or script.
3. The teacher and pupils discuss the nature and content of the passage, clarifying the definition of any new words and demarcating appropriate phrasing.
4. Teacher and pupils read the passage together (chorally) several times. Antiphonal reading (e.g. reading aloud with a group) can also be used to create variety and maintain engagement. This type of assisted reading supports all learners to join in regardless of reading ability.
5. Pupils read in pairs to each other remembering to be supportive of their peer and to help them out if necessary.
7. Pupils engage in word study activities (e.g. word sorts with word bank words, word walls, flash card practice, defining words, word games, etc.)

9. The pupils take a copy of the passage home to practice with parents and other family members.

10. Pupils return to school and read the passage to the teacher or a partner who checks for fluency and accuracy.

11. Friday Fluency Café - the pupils come along for juice and biscuits and select their favourite passage from the week to read aloud to their classmates. A supportive, upbeat and encouraging environment is crucial for this to work. Fun and enjoyment are key.

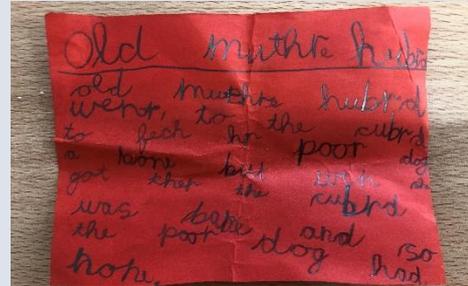
Fluency Learning Wall

To chart the progress we made each day, we added our new passage to our learning journey wall. This acted as a reminder to the children of the pieces we were working on and a resource that they could use to practice their reading. Once the week was over, the passages were taken off the wall and stored in a class book which the children could access to re-read at any time. The blank wall was filled again each week with our new collection of passages.



Opportunities to Write

Throughout the intervention, I also discovered that many of the children were engaged in writing down the poems they had enjoyed from memory. Many of them also wrote variations of the poems that they had read. Some of the children even typed up the songs and poems on their home computers, entirely unprompted by an adult. This reminded me of the need to develop all literacy skills in cohesion with one another and not in isolation. The pupils were making links that came naturally to them, given their newfound skills, confidence and enjoyment in reading. Shanahan puts this succinctly by stating, ‘The key to adding fluency, or any other important element, to a classroom routine is to ensure that all the other essentials are addressed, too’ (Shanahan, 2012).



Old Mother Hubbard - Written by a child from memory after a fluency lesson

This short piece shared a sample of some of the approaches that worked in my classroom to help my pupils improve their oral reading fluency. More than likely, you are already doing a lot of this type of instruction on a regular basis. If you are, it's great to know that these simple strategies work to improve accuracy, automaticity and prosody for our pupils. Through sharing short poems, songs and stories we can bring reading alive for our pupils and hopefully ignite in them a passion for reading.

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**TALES FROM A TALLAGHT SCHOOL - ENGAGING
RELUCTANT READERS AND MAINTAINING A READING
CULTURE IN THE SCHOOL CREATING *READERS FOR LIFE***

In 2018 St. Aidan's Community School became a Well Read School. It was a major achievement, enormous endorsement and a great honour. The whole school community got involved and since then we have continued our journey to create Readers for Life, fostering and making reading for pleasure part of our whole school community culture.

Accelerated Reader (AR) – Independent Reading and Comprehension

The Accelerated Reader Programme continues to be a success in our school. Along with a number of other activities e.g. Literacy Week and Google Classroom Reading Competitions aimed at engaging reluctant readers and maintaining a reading culture in the school. I also celebrate and recognise students Accelerated Reader Certifications with certificates and prizes. These students move to the various AR Clubs starting with the 100 Percent Club, Millionaire Club and finally the VIP Club.

All 1st and 2nd year students are timetabled to attend a Library Class once a week as part of their English curriculum. During this class the students independently read and are tested with quizzes about the books. They start out in September doing a STAR test which helps to identify their Reading Level and the books that are best suited to that level. Typically, the students start reading quick easy reads independently. These books have five questions on the Accelerated Reader Quiz and the students have to achieve 60% to pass the quiz. This helps to build confidence. The Librarian and English Teacher build on this by encouraging the students to start reading more challenging books with 10-20 quiz questions. The more the student reads, the higher the points, the more prestigious Reading Certificate starting at Ready Reader climbing to Classic Reader and then the bigger the prize!

I have established 1st and 2nd Year Google Classrooms for Timetabled Library Classes where the students can access SORA (JSCP Library Project Digital Library), Accelerated Reader and exchange book recommendations and book reviews. These reading initiatives are encouraging more reading across the

school. Students are emailing me with photos and comments about the books they are reading.

In the Academic year 2021-2022 the students read 17,759,218 million words and a total of 2,509 Reading Practice book quizzes were passed. This year the 1st and 2nd years have read 8,060,657 words and a total of 1,019 Reading Practice quizzes passed since the second week of September 2022.

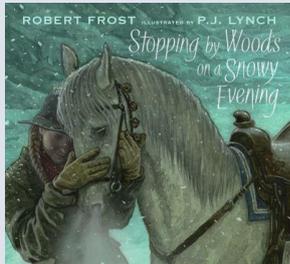
We are delighted that this year we achieved the next level in our Well Read journey we were awarded the Readers for Life National Award by the PDST on 23rd September, 2022.

Second year student Kyle talks about the Accelerated Reader Programme in the school he says “AR is a programme we use to motivate students to read more. It allows us to gain more knowledge from the amount of books we are reading, and it’s been hugely beneficial to me”.

St. Aidan’s Community School Librarian, JCSP Librarian Martina Flynn.

CLARA'S CHRISTMAS PICTUREBOOK WISH LIST!

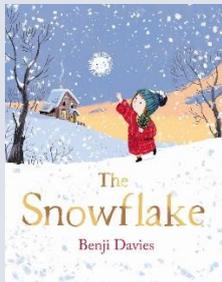
What is the best festive gift to give, or receive? A book – because it's the only gift you can open *over and over, again, and again, and again!* Jokes aside, the following is a selection of wonderful texts, to enjoy across the festive season and beyond.



Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening (Walker Books, 2022)

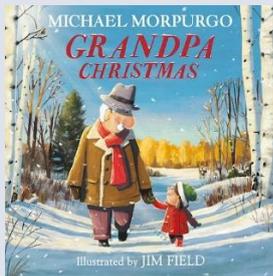
Whose woods these are I think I know...

Many of us will recall the opening words to Robert Frost's classic, *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*. Renowned illustrator, PJ Lynch, reignites the poem with his signature, hypnotic illustrations and invites us to read the verses with fresh eyes.



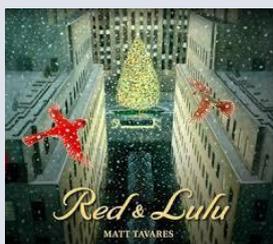
The Snowflake by Benji Davies (Harper Collins, 2020)

A wonderful exploration of finding one's place in the world. Benji Davies can do no wrong. A timeless picturebook that readers, young and old, will relate to and return to.



Granda Christmas by Michael Morpurgo (Egmont, 2018)

It is generally a clue in itself when Michael Morpurgo's name is on the cover! Morpurgo has created a masterpiece, in this picturebook, which, despite the title, is one, which can be enjoyed, revisited, and reread, year-round. A powerful and poignant tale of environmental awareness and the importance of appreciating and protecting the little things in life.



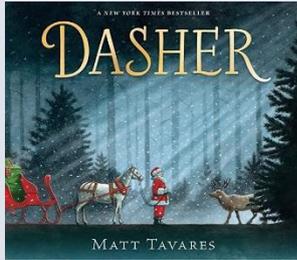
Red & Lulu by Matt Tavares (Walker Books, 2018)

Is it even Christmas if we don't enjoy at least one love story? Move over Love Actually, and make way for Red & Lulu! A delightful tale of love, loss, separation and reunification - all embedded in the playful surroundings of the Rockefeller Christmas Tree tradition. One to be enjoyed with all ages.



The Christmas Eve Tree by Delia Huddy (Walker Books, 2017)

A moving read which explores homelessness in a tender but meaningful way. There will always be one little tree which everyone looks past - but sometimes it's just waiting for the right owner so see the beauty in even the barest of branches. An important read highlighting the true meaning of Christmas.



Dasher by Matt Tavares (Walker Books, 2020)

The tale of how a brave little doe change Christmas, forever! Full of festive cheer and sentiment, this provides a lens into Santa's story that we may not have seen through before. Championing the importance of aiming high and following your dreams. Another festive read which will appeal to all ages.



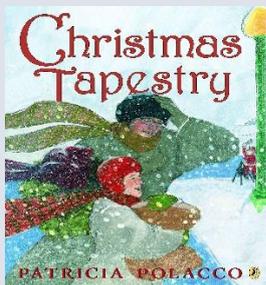
The Crayons' Christmas by Drew Daywalt (Harper Collins, 2019)

Those of us who enjoyed *The Day the Crayons Quit* will delight in this festive spin on the life of a collection of very opinionated crayons. This text brings a playful lens to the fore with a variety of interactive components. With letters, ornaments, posters and pop-up trees, this makes for an exciting and engaging Christmas read for young readers.



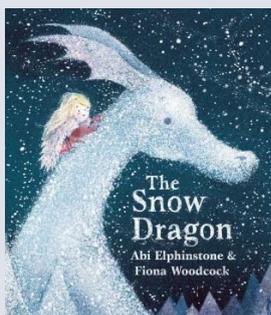
The Polar Express by Chris Van Allsburg (Clarion Books, 1985 / 2015)

It wouldn't be a list of recommendations of Christmas texts without a classic. Chris Van Allsburg's *The Polar Express* is the perfect example of a longstanding but timeless classic, one, which will continue to appeal to readers for decades to come.



Christmas Tapestry by Patricia Polacco (Puffin Books, 2008)

We all love a book with a twist in the tail! *The Christmas Tapestry* tells readers of a Christmas miracle facilitated by an unexpected festive reunion between a Christian family and a long-separated Jewish couple. A heart-warming and emotional story, brimming with sensitive and important nods to the loss and separation caused by the Holocaust. An important Christmas read for senior primary readers.



The Snow Dragon by Abi Elphinstone (Simon & Schuster UK, 2019)

At Christmas time, Phoebe and her sausage dog Herb don't have much to look forward to in Griselda Bone's orphanage. Yet, even in the midst of the bleakest times, hope and magic shine through and adventure can be just around the corner. Another timeless and ageless tale to enjoy across the winter months.

Wishing you all a Merry Book-mas!

Happy reading!

Clara Fiorentini, Marino Institute of Education

AN GNÁTHRUD - GEARRSCÉAL AS AN GHNÁTH

Padaí de Bléine

Níl fairsingeach go leor i scéal gairid le lochtanna a bheith air; tá sa scéal fhada. Ní bhaineann scéal gairid ach leis an aon eachtra amháin; caithfidh an eachtra a bheith filiúnta agus brí a bheith léi a mbeidh doimhne an tsaoil inti. Le fiche focal a chur in aon fhocal amháin, is cosúla scéal gairid le dán filíochta ná le cruth ar bith eile litríochta. Bogann sé an croí agus an intinn ar an dóigh chéanna a mbogann dán iad. Dálta an dáin, níl bun cleite amach ná barr cleite isteach ann. Nuair atá sé léite agat, ba chóir duit a bheith ag machnamh go domhain tostach, agus do chroí a bheith ag insint duit gur iontach an rud an saol. Níl scéal maith gairid ar bith dar cumadh riamh nach bhfuil mar sin.¹

Gearrscéal snasta is ea é *An Gnáthrud* le Deirdre Ní Ghrianna, a chloíonn le cur síos Mhic Grianna thuas ar cad is gearrscéal maith ann. Is gearrscéal aon eachtra amháin é atá lonnaithe i mBéal Feirste le linn na dTrioblóidí, a bhogann an croí gan amhras. Is gearrscéal comhaimseartha go fóill é cé gur scríobhadh breis agus fiche bliain ó shin é agus tá teachtaireacht láidir agus an-ábhar machnaimh i ndán do léitheoir an lae inniu. Cuireann an t-údar ar chumas an léitheora a bheith ar an láthair trína cur síos simplí gonta.

Cuirtear gnáthphictiúr os comhair an léitheora ag tús an scéil agus cuirtear an léitheoir ar a shuaimhneas. Casann Jimmy, an príomhcharachtar orainn go luath agus cuirimid aithne air de réir a chéile. Fear clainne atá ann agus is gnáthdhuine é ag déanamh an ghnáthruda. Faighimid amach nach bhfuil sé ar a shuaimhneas sa teach tábhairne fad is atá a bhean Sarah sa bhaile leis na páistí; mac agus an cúpla; beirt ghirseach Elizabeth agus Margaret. Sa mhéid seo b'fhéidir go dtiocfadh leis an léitheoir a rá nach gnáthdhuine é agus é ag

¹ Seosamh Mac Grianna, *Pádraic Ó Conaire agus aistí eile*, (An Gúm, Baile Átha Cliath, 1936), pp. 29-30.

iarraidh pilleadh abhaile in áit fanacht amuigh leis na fir ag ól, ach go bhfuil an t-údar ag iarraidh pearsa dheas dhearfach thuisceanach fhial a chur in iúl don léitheoir a rachas i gcodarsnacht leis na frithlaochra níos déanaí sa ghearrscéal. Is fear céile dÍlis é agus is follasach go bhfuil grá mór aige dá bhean agus dá chlann; “Cad é mar atá na girseacha beaga?”, “Gabh mo leithscéal, a Mhicí, déan sé phionta agus ceann beag de sin, mura miste leat.”² Cuireann ceist Mhicí, fear an bheáir, cor sa scéal agus cor sa chinniúint. De bhrí go bhfuil an oiread sin grá ag Jimmy dá bhean agus dá chuid páistí ní ghlacann sé féin le pionta eile nuair a chuireann Micí tuairisc na bpáistí ionas go dtig leis dul abhaile le bheith leo. B’fhéidir dá nglacfadh sé le ceann eile nach mbeadh sé ag dul abhaile chomh luath sin agus go mbeadh duine éigin eile i gceist sa dúnmharú. Mar a dúirt Liz an freastalaí sa bhialann leis; “Tá tú rud beag luath anocht, nach bhfuil?”³ Cionn is go raibh sé luath, ba eisean an té a roghnaigh frithlaochra an scéil in eachtra an dúnmharaithe. Is cinnte go n-éiríonn le Ní Ghrianna a léiriú don léitheoir cé chomh leochaileach agus a bhí an bheatha an t-am sin sna Sé Chontae. Thiocfadh leis tarlú am ar bith, in áit ar bith agus cineál crannchuir a bhí ann in amanna. Is é an rud is íorónta faoi ná dá n-ólfadh Jimmy ceann eile agus dá gcloífeadh sé leis an ghnáthrud, agus leis an ghnátham ag an bhialann go mb’fhéidir nach scaoilfí é agus go mb’fhéidir go scaoilfí duine eile ina áit – ní dhearna sé an gnáthrud. Bhris sé a cheangal leis an ghnáthrud, bhí sé róluath agus bhí sé san áit chontráilte ag an am chontráilte dá dheasca. De bhrí gur gnáthfhear é a bhfuil tréithe deasa aige agus a chuidíonn le daoine eile, cuireann sé an léitheoir ar a shuaimhneas agus cuireann an léitheoir dúil ann. Baineann Deirdre Ní Ghrianna úsáid as nathanna Bhéal Feirste aistrithe go Gaeilge mar atá: ‘fear ólta sú’⁴ agus is féidir a rá go bhfuil an t-údar ag iarraidh an léitheoir a chur ar a chompond leis an duine agus lena leithéid de dhuine agus le Béal

² Ní Ghrianna, Deirdre. (1999) *An Gnáthrud*.

³ Ibid.

⁴ ibid. p. 61.

Feirste, á thabhairt chun na cathrach arís agus fiú aoibh an gháire á cur air agus aithne aige ar dhuine a déarfadh a leithéid. Thiocfadh leat a rá fosta go n-éiríonn leis na nathanna cainte an gearrscéal a cheangal le Béal Feirste agus le hacmhainn ghrinn na ndaoine.

De réir mar a théann an scéal ar aghaidh tuigeann an léitheoir go soiléir an grá atá ag Jimmy dá bhean Sarah.

...b'fhada le Jimmy go dtaradh Oíche Shathairn nuair a bheadh sé féin agus Sarah ábalta teannadh lena chéile ar an tolg ag amharc ar video agus buidéal beag fíona acu.⁵

Grá simplí nádúrtha daonna atá ann agus treisíonn an tsimplíocht seo an tsuim atá ag an léitheoir ann. Cruthaíonn an t-údar carachtair eile síos fríd an scéal chun níos mó solais a chaitheamh ar Jimmy agus chun forbairt a dhéanamh air mar phríomhcharacter. Is é Jimmy an t-aon duine sa ghearrscéal a dtagann forbairt air. Léiríonn Jimmy dílseacht dá chara Billy a bhí i dtrioblóid leis an tsaol ar obair agus tagann sé i dtarrtháil air. Agus é sa bhiatheach Síneach is léir go gcuireann iompar na ndaoine óga déistin air lena ndroch-chaint. Ar a bharr seo, is léir go bhfuil muinín ag Liz, an freastalaí sa bhiatheach, as Jimmy nuair a scaoil sí a rún leis maidir leis an chaidreamh a bhí aici le fear tráth. Mar sin de, síos fríd an scéal cuirimid aithne ar dhuine cairdiúil, dílis, gráúil, smaointeach, athair, fear céile, cara dílis agus é sona sásta leis an tsaol.

Is as lár na soininne mar sin a thagann deireadh fuilteach marfach leis an scéal agus is fíor a rá gurb é an sliocht deireanach an sliocht is tábhachtaí sa scéal. Baintear geit mhór as an léitheoir agus réabtar an suíomh te teolaí cairdiúil cineálta as a chéile. Ritheann cuid den gheit a baineadh as gaolta duine a scaoileadh de dheasca na dTroiblóidí leis an léitheoir ag an pointe seo.

⁵ ibid. p. 63.

Ní fhaca sé an splanc solais, ach ar an tsaol seo dáiríre, scaoil stócach a raibh caint ní ba ghraiflí aige ná an mhuintir a bhí sa teach iteacháin, scaoil sé urchar a shíob leath an chloiginn de Jimmy agus a d'fhág ina luí ar an tsráid reoite é.⁶

Deireadh uafásach marfach atá ann agus cuimhnímid siar ar an líne:

Amuigh ar an tsráid, agus ceo na Samhna thart air, ní raibh in Jimmy ach duine gan ainm.⁷

Ní comhtharlú ar bith é go bhfuil Mí na Samhna ann agus é ina Mí na Marbh. Shílfeá go raibh an t-údar ag tuar an deiridh fhuiltigh thubaistigh ag an phointe seo agus an fallás truamhéileach in úsáid aici. D'éirigh léi codarsnacht a léiriú idir an teas sa teach tábhairne, an teas sa bhialann, teas na clainne agus fuacht na sráide agus fuacht an ghunnadóra. Tá míofaireacht an chogaidh soiléir sa scéal seo agus is cinnte go bhfuil sí soiléir do mhuintir an Tuaiscirt a thuigeann go rímhaith teachtaireacht an scéil seo. Níl amhras ar bith ann ach go bhfuil lón ábhar machnaimh sa scéal seo agus go mbogfar croí an té a léifeas é leis an aon eachtra amháin. Tá teicnic chliste ag an údar a chuirimid ar ár suaimhneas chun geit mhór a bhaint asainn ag deireadh an scéil. Ó thaobh na litríochta de, níl ann ach gnáthscéal a bhíodh le léamh ar nuachtán lá i ndiaidh an lae sular cuireadh na sosanna comhraic i bhfeidhm. Is é an ghné a thugann luach litríochta dó ná go gcuireann an scéal an léitheoir ag smaoinreamh ar an dúnmharú gan chiall le tobainne agus le gníomh an dúnmharaithe gan choinne. Maidir leis an teanga anseo, tá sí liteartha, simplí agus éasca a thuiscint. Tá blas na cathrach le sonrú ar roinnt de na habairtí cosúil le, 'tá sé suas duitse' agus

⁶ ibid. p. 65.

⁷ ibid. p. 63.

‘fear ólta sú’, atá aistrithe go liteartha agus saibhreas na Gaeltachta ar nós , ‘Níor bheo dó a bheo,’ agus ‘níor lú uirthi an diabhal ná..’ Is follasach go gcloíonn Ní Ghrianna le coinbhinsiún an ghearrscéil sa mhéid is go n-ardaíonn sí ár bhfiosracht ag tús an scéil chun cor tobann a chur ag deireadh an scéil. Músclaíonn sé trua agus bá sa léitheoir agus is litríocht mhaith í a dhéanann a leithéid. Ar ndóigh, nuair atá an scéal seo léite agat uair amháin, ní bhíonn an éifeacht chéanna leis an dara huair agus agus an cor ar eolas agat. Sílimse gurb é an cor seo a thugann an éifeacht dó mar ghearrscéal. Fóireann an teideal go hiontach maith don scéal. Gnáthrud a bhí ann do na fir dul ar oilithreacht chuig an teach tábhairne agus an bhean ag fanacht sa bhaile. Gnáthrud a bhí ann don bhean an obair tí a dhéanamh agus an fear amuigh ag saothrú tuarastail. Gnáthrud a bhí ann do Jimmy agus Sarah béile Síneach a chaitheamh le chéile ar an Aoine. Is é an teachtaireacht a léimeann amach as an scéal, áfach, gur gnáthrud a bhí ann go scaoilí daoine le linn na dTrioblóidí ar bhonn rialta. Is d’aon ghnó, shílfeá a úsáideann Ní Ghrianna na hainmneacha, Jimmy, Liz, Billy, Sarah ar na carachtair agus iad neodrach agus in úsáid ag an dá phobal mhóra. Tá an grá go mór chun tosaigh sa scéal agus tagann an gníomh danartha go hiomlán salach ar an charachtar. Ní thiocfadh le duine ar bith a rá go raibh a leithéid de bhás tuillte ag Jimmy. Baineann sé siar as an léitheoir an rud a tharla dó. Táimid ár gceistiú féin ag deireadh an ghearrscéil cad é mar a thiocfadh le duine ar bith duine neamhurchóideach, dála Jimmy, a dhúnmharú.

Sa mhéid sin is cinnte gur éirigh le Ní Ghrianna leis an ghearrscéal seo. Mar a deir Ó Faolain:

I think it is safe to say that unless a story makes this subtle comment on human nature, on the permanent relationships between people, their variety, their expectedness, and their unexpectedness, it is not a short-story in the modern sense.⁸

⁸ Sean Ó Faolain, *The Short Story*, (The Mercier Press, Cork), 1948, p. 200.

Dá mbeadh aithne ag frithlaochra an ghearrscéil ar Jimmy ní mharódh siad é. Tá sé suimiúil go gcuirimid aithne mhaith ar Jimmy agus nach gcuirimid aithne ar chor ar bith ar an duine ar chúl púicín a rinne an gníomh. Fágтар muid ag an deireadh ag iarraidh ciall a bhaint as an rud a tharla. Is dócha gur fágadh cuid mhór teaghlach ar an dóigh chéanna ar chluinstin an scéil dóibh gur dúnmharaíodh ball an teaghlaigh.

Is cinnte gurb í bean Jimmy, Sarah a fhulaingíonn go mór, i ndeireadh na dála, agus í fágtha le triúr clainne le tógáil léi féin. Is gnách go ndéanann gearrscéalta Ní Ghrianna cur síos ar shaol na mban, fadfhulaingt na mban agus ar chruatan an tsaoil s’acu fosta. Mar a deir Julia Nic Eidhin:

Snaidhmtear téamaí éagsúla trí scéalta Ní Ghrianna, uaigneas, coimhthíos, eiseachas, frithchléireachas, feimineachas, uathlathas, leispiachas, athrú, imeallú, banéigniú, éalúchas, ól, éadóchas, na goirmeacha iarbhreithe, an galar dubhach féin agus an fuath.⁹

Is gearrscéal cuimsitheach é *An Gnáthrud* a phléann an saol i rith an dTrioblóidí agus a thugann pictiúr soiléir amháin dúinn atá ina phictiúr uilíoch den tréimhse sin ach a bhfuil luach lena theachtaireacht go fóill. Is cinnte gur thuig Ní Ghrianna tréithe an ghearrscéil éifeachtaigh agus í i mbun pinn a dtagraíonn Seosamh Mac Grianna dóibh ag tús an ailt agus a dtagraíonn Rippier dóibh thíos (1976);

The limits of the Short Story are apparent. It may not wander far: it has to keep close to its basepoint, within the bounds of place time and character; it will only carry a few characters, three at least, at best not more than three; there is not time, or space, for elaborate characterization – we are flying a kite not a passenger-balloon or an aeroplane; and there is often no plot, nothing much more than a situation, and only just enough of that to release a

⁹ Julia Nic Eidhin, ‘Léirmheas ar an Ghnáthrud’, *Feasta, Deireadh Fómhair*, 2001, p. 14.

moment or two of drama, enough to let the wilful kite swirl, change colour, catching the winds of mood. A short Story is concentrated stuff...¹⁰

¹⁰ Joseph Storey Rippier, *The Short Stories of Seán Ó Faoláin*, (Harper and Row Publishers, U.S.A. 1976), p. 52.

GENDER STEREOTYPES IN CHILDREN'S PICTUREBOOKS: HOW DO OUR PUPILS RESPOND?

Rebecca Curtin – LAI Thesis Award Winner

In December of 2020, I was introduced to the brilliant children's author and illustrator, Bethan Woollvin through a module on Children's Literature as part of my first year in my masters in literacy education. I quickly purchased my own copy of her book, *Little Red*, for my Junior Infant (JI) class. In this fresh and funny parody of Little Red Riding Hood (LRRH), Little Red meets the wolf on the way to her grandmother's cottage. He quickly rushes ahead to gobble Granny and waits for Little Red to arrive. However, in this version, Little Red notices the front door is ajar and peeks in, recognising the wolf's trick. Instead of waiting for the woodcutter, she is unafraid and goes inside, secretly armed with an axe she has picked up from outside. Tension mounts as Little Red and the wolf go through the familiar script of the fairy tale, before the wolf leaps from the bed to devour her. Flick forward to the next page however, and there is no sign of the wolf, only Little Red, an enormous smile on her face as she leaves, wearing a new fur coat, ears and tail included.

Once recovered from the surprise twist, my pupils loved the story and were fascinated by Little Red's bravery. Christmas came and after it, two months of lock down, so we never revisited the book. Schools reopened for infants just in time for World Book Day in March and one of my girls dressed up in a bright, distinctive red cloak. I complimented her LRRH costume, only to be sternly corrected that she was not *that* LRRH, but the *bad one*. My fascination was instantly caught, first that a story read once, months prior and before both Christmas and lockdown, had resonated with this little girl enough for her to dress up as Little Red, and secondly by her use of '*bad*'. Little Red was

defending herself against the predatory wolf who wanted to eat her- how was it *bad* to fight back? It was from this exchange that my research study was born.

Gender inequality and our expectations of the roles of males and females are topics often discussed and debated in contemporary society. The elimination of gender inequality is also a listed goal in the UN's 2030 Agenda, (United Nations, 2015), a mission adopted by the organisation in 2015 to build a more equitable, and sustainable world for all global citizens. Here in Ireland *The Second National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development 2022-2026* (ESD) (Department of Education, 2022) was published last June, outlining how we will meet the goals of this agenda. Within education, Aistear is currently undergoing an update, with ESD potentially being incorporated into the framework as a means for tackling these complex but important issues with our youngest primary pupils. (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2021) These upcoming changes are a significant development on the educational horizon which has an important bearing on this study.

The aim of the study was twofold: to investigate the attitudes of JIs towards gender stereotypes within LRRH, and whether these attitudes could be challenged through exploration of feminist parodies. Through observations and focus groups with a Talk and Draw structure, I used story time and Aistear as a framework for my data collection, grounding the study in a critical literacy pedagogy. Critical literacy is a process of enabling pupils to accept nothing at face value, but instead to identify and reflect upon any overt and covert messages being conveyed, and where these fit into their own context and world view. (Lee, 2020) Careful consideration was given in the study design to accommodate the developmental and cognitive abilities of the JIs, while also building comprehensive pictures of their inner thoughts and lived experiences. By highlighting the stereotyped messages surrounding gender in the original

LRRH, I hoped to enable the children to recognise and challenge the messages of the traditional narrative.

I used my own JI class as my sample for this study, selecting at random ten children, five boys and five girls. Data collection was conducted over a period of about four weeks. It began with a reading of the original LRRH tale, followed by a whole class discussion and an Aistear block. The children acted out the story using simple props while I observed. During this role play they stuck closely to the traditional narrative. They generally requested parts which matched their own gender and followed the script of the story closely. The boys especially reacted with disbelief and laughter if anyone asked for a role of the opposite sex to them. While the girls did mainly ask to play female parts, they were unfazed if they ended up in a traditionally male role. When taking on a part of the opposite gender, the children all immediately changed their behaviours. Girls playing the wolf or woodcutter deepened their voices, while boys skipped and used high pitched voices when being LRRH or Granny.

Once this was finished the two LRRH parodies were introduced. The first was *Little Red* which changed the story as outlined earlier. The second parody was a straight gender swap with the narrative remaining unchanged. However, every character was the opposite gender to the traditional version- LRRH was a male, the wolf a female, and so on. These were followed by a second Aistear block, again acting out LRRH, but this time opening the role play up to all the parodies as well as the original.

The responses of the children to the parodies were mixed. They were visibly excited when Little Red recognised the wolf but chose to enter the cottage anyway, and had audible reactions of delight when Little Red revealed her new wolfskin coat after defeating the wolf. With the gender swap parody however, they were unimpressed. The girls especially focused on the very feminine

features of the wolf in the illustrations, discussing her high heels, lipstick, colourful fur, and long eyelashes. Meanwhile, the boys were more concerned with the male LRRH, calling it 'silly' that it was a boy.

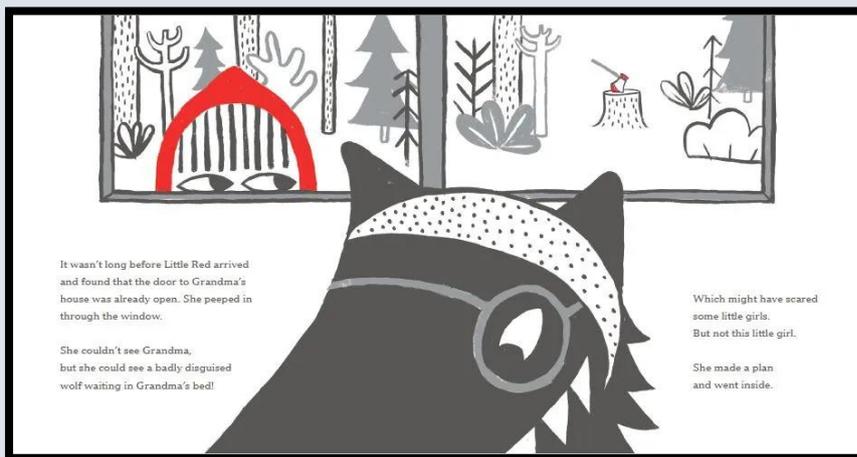


The illustration of the wolf and LRRH in the gender swapped version of the story, from 'Gender Swapped Fairy Tales' by Jonathan Plackett and Karrie Fransman

During the second Aistear block, re-enacting *Little Red* dominated the role play, with the boys' previous concerns about acting a female part all but gone. One of the boys immediately rushed forward to play Little Red, calling her '*the smart one, the girl who took the fur.*' After listening to the parodies his previous resistance to female roles had vanished, and he played Little Red with great enthusiasm. He frequently looked towards the audience, laughing, and wanting to share the fun as he gleefully chased the wolf to take their headband, which symbolised the wolf's fur. Meanwhile, although the girls did want to play Little Red, they showed far more hesitation when inhabiting the role. One girl confidently played the entire parody until she reached the climactic scene of confronting the wolf. Suddenly, she was shy and unsure, looking to me for help, clearly unwilling to take the wolf's headband. With encouragement she did step

forward and gently tap the wolf with the ‘axe’, before putting the headband on herself, but the contrast between her uncertainty and the other boy’s abandoned enthusiasm for the same scene was notable.

After the Aistear observations, focus groups were conducted, with participants drawing their favourite part of any of the stories while chatting about their thoughts and opinions on the tales. The children showed a particular fascination with the *Little Red* scene where she peeks in through the window and sees the wolf pretending to be Granny. Instead of becoming frightened, she makes a plan and goes in to confront the wolf. Out of the nine participants who took part in the focus groups, three drew direct copies of the illustration from the book for this scene.





Two of the other drawings were of Little Red, but did not depict this specific scene.



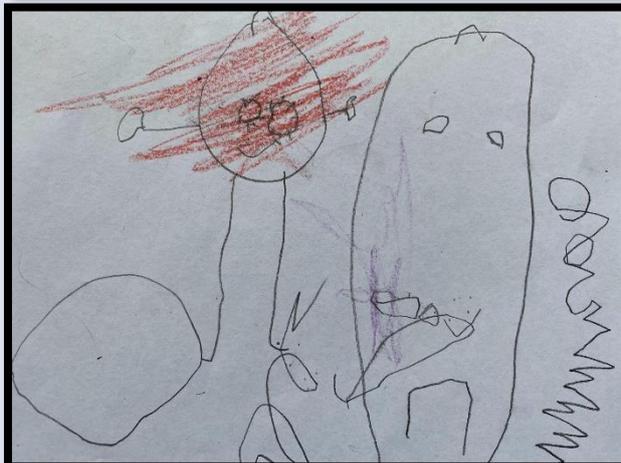
One of the girls drew her own version of Little Red, including a male and a female Little Red, as well as both a male and a female wolf.



Another drawing by a male participant showed a male Little Red confronting the wolf.



Overall, only one participant drew a picture of the traditional version. The final drawing simply showed LRRH with her family with no clear indicator which version was depicted.



While the children did fully embrace *Little Red* in their drawings, they still used frequent gender markers. In the drawing with the map, the pupil explained he had given the wolf hair because she was a female wolf and therefore had hair and not fur on her head. In the picture with the two wolves, the female wolf is clearly indicated through her pink dress, hair slides, and long eyelashes. The children also shared some concerns about the gender swap in their conversations, with one girl stating that she didn't like the change, although she couldn't give a reason when asked why. She also did not like that Little Red didn't wait for the woodcutter, explaining that that was what she was supposed to do.

Overall, in the findings gender stereotypes were clearly present in the children's worldviews and expectations, particularly before the introduction of the parodies. While the drawings still held many gender markers, there was a significant improvement towards acceptance of children crossing gender lines in the role plays after the parodies were read. The boys showed a marked change, and were eager to be Little Red, speaking of her with admiration and respect. This was far from their initial disdain for the part and seemed to be linked with the changing of the position of power within the story from the wolf to Little Red. LRRH held no interest for them as the victim of the story, and the wolf was a far more popular role. However, once Little Red confronted the wolf and won, she suddenly was the part they all wanted to play.

Research shows that children establish their social status through confidently engaging in behaviours that their peers perceive as risky. (Kleppe, Melhuish and Sandseter, 2017) Little Red might have been a girl, the gender which traditionally holds the lower rungs of the social ladder, (Hofstede, Student and Kramer, 2018), but she was willing to confront the wolf and defeat him.

Suddenly, the power transferred to her, and it would seem this made her a more desirable character to the children, the boys in particular. Meanwhile, while the girls did enjoy drawing and discussing Little Red, their hesitancy to occupy her role fully in Aistear indicated that they were less empowered by this tale. It may have been more effective if the confrontation between Little Red and the wolf had been explicitly shown in the illustrations instead of just alluded to, as the girls did not seem to know how to reclaim the power for themselves with confidence.

Going forward there is a lot to learn from the findings of this study, and more that warrants further research. These findings clearly indicate that as educators we must be mindful of both the overt and covert messages being imparted through the literature we share with our students. This does not necessarily mean eliminating stories which no longer align with contemporary values, but more that we create opportunities for our pupils to engage with these narratives on a critical level and encourage them to consider more deeply the messages being imparted.

The success of tackling gender inequality through stories and Aistear in this study highlights the enormous potential of this framework for building awareness and action in our upcoming generations in line with the UN's 2030 agenda. The young age of our infant pupils is not a barrier to their ability to engage with these meaningful topics in an age-appropriate way.

And finally, there is a clear opportunity for further research into why these young female participants were so much more reluctant than their male counterparts to seize the power within the narrative when given the chance. If we are to truly eliminate gender inequality in our classrooms and in our society then we must instil a sense of confidence and bravery in all our students, regardless of their gender, or role in the fairy tale.

Rebecca Curtin has been teaching primary education for almost thirteen years. Specialising in infants' education, she has taught in both the UK and Ireland. She recently completed her masters in literacy education through Mary Immaulate College, Limerick, winning the LAI's Outstanding Dissertation award for her research. Rebecca is currently on a career break, working in museum education and curriculum development for literacy and STEM in San Diego, California.

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SINÉAD'S CHRISTMAS WRITING TOOLS WISH LIST!



1. Magic Writing Boards
2. Writing Easel
3. Theraputty
4. Highlighters
5. Finger Paints
6. Silly Scents
7. Twisty Dropper

Dr Sinéad Lambe, Dublin City Univeristy



ANSWERS TO GENE'S CRYPTIC CHRISTMAS PUZZLE!

<i>Turkey</i>
<i>Party Hat</i>
<i>Advent Calendar</i>
<i>Carol Service</i>
<i>O Come All Ye Faithful</i>
<i>Manger</i>
<i>Jingle bells</i>
<i>Silent Night</i>
<i>Wrapping Paper</i>
<i>Red Robin</i>
<i>North Pole</i>
<i>Crackers</i>
<i>Noel Noel</i>
<i>Fairy</i>
<i>Midnight Mass</i>
<i>12 drummers drumming</i>
<i>Deck the halls</i>
<i>Mulled Wine</i>

A CHRISTMAS VERSE

OICHE NOLLAG

Le coinnle na n-aingeal tá an spéir amuigh breachtha,
Tá fiacail an tseaca sa ghaoith on gcnoc,
Adaigh an tine is téir chun an leapan,
Luífidh Mac Dé ins an tigh seo anocht.

Fágaig' an doras ar leathadh ina coinne,
An mhaighdean a thiocfaidh is a naí ar a hucht,
Deonaigh scíth an bhóthair a ligint, a Mhuire,
Luíodh Mac Dé ins an tigh seo anocht.

Bhí soilse ar lasadh i dtigh sin na haiochta,
Cóiriú gan caoile, bia agus deoch,
Do cheannaithe olla, do cheannaithe síoda,
Ach luífidh Mac Dé ins an tigh seo anocht.

© 2011, Máire Mhac an tSaoi

A CHRISTMAS VERSE

CHRISTMAS EVE

With candles of angels the sky is now dappled,
The frost on the wind from the hills has a bite,
Kindle the fire and go to your slumber,
Jesus will lie in this household tonight.

Leave all the doors wide open before her,
The Virgin who'll come with the child on her breast,
Grant that you'll stop here tonight, Holy Mary,
That Jesus a while in this household may rest.

The lights were all lighting in that little hostel,
There were generous servings of victuals and wine,
For merchants of silk, for merchants of woollens,
But Jesus will lie in this household tonight.

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