



The Peasants and The Mariners

Reading Guide

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Preliminary Remarks

- The following assignments offer tasks and activities, which the teacher or students can choose from.
- Many tasks are suitable for talks or presentations to the class.
- Some tasks overlap with others.
- The material can be edited and students may copy instructions, questions, and answers into their exercise books.

The Author Speaks

Gemma Open Door stories are often concerned with home — making a home in a new place, learning how to live in a new world, seeking the familiar in a strange land. When I set out to write a travel book about being of Irish descent and leaving my home in the United States to travel back to my homeland, I tried to get a feeling for what it might be like to be somebody seeking the familiar in an unfamiliar place. You may never read a travel book that thinks about home as much as this. Can you be at home when away from home? How does a person arrive in a life full of journeys? I wanted to tell a story about finding a home anywhere the heart will sustain a home.

About the Author

Brian Bouldrey has written the nonfiction books: **Honorable Bandit: A Walk Across Corsica**, **Monster: Adventures in American Machismo**, and **The Autobiography Box**; four novels, **The Sorrow of the Elves** (also a Gemma Open Door title) **The Genius of Desire**, **Love, the Magician**, and **The Boom Economy**, and he is the editor of several anthologies. He is recipient of Fellowships from Yaddo and Eastern Frontier Society, and the Joseph Henry Jackson Award from the San Francisco Foundation, a Lambda Literary Award, and the Western Regional Magazine Award. Brian is the North American Editor of the Open Door literacy series for GemmaMedia. He teaches fiction, creative nonfiction, and literature at Northwestern University.

Pre-Reading Questions

COVER:

How does the picture of the boat moving towards the Irish countryside affect you?

TITLE:

Consider the title of this book as a reference to Ireland. How do you think this title portrays the Irish? Do you agree with this view?

Activities While Reading

SETTING:

How do the two settings in this story play off each other? Notice how the switch from urban Chicago to rural Ireland changes the tone of the narrator. Can you describe the difference?

Make a list of the various towns and cities Garth and Brian visit on their trip.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES:

Write a brief (two to three sentences) character summary of the various characters Brian and Garth meet on their trip.

Post-Reading Questions

SETTING:

How does the setting in this story affect the development of the characters? Specifically how does it change the narrator's point of view?

CHARACTER:

How would you describe Garth's role in this story?

How does Brian change over the course of the trip? Does Garth change?

POINT OF VIEW:

This book is told through the first-person perspective of Brian. How does this point of view affect the way we meet new characters? Select a passage and try writing it from Garth's perspective. How does this change the storyline?

THEME:

The main focus of the book is Brian and Garth's travels to Brian's ancestral home. How does the theme of home tie in with belonging in this story?

Brian mentions memories of his mother throughout the book. Does motherhood help define home, and if so how?

TITLE:

At the end of the book do you think Brian succeeds in growing a stronger relationship with "the peasants and the mariners" of the Irish people?

SUMMARY:

Write a 90 to 100-word summary of Brian and Garth's travels.

BOOK CRITIQUE:

Explain what you liked or did not like about **The Peasants and the Mariners**. You can use specific passages to prove your point.

Did **The Peasants and the Mariners** change the way you think about home? If so, in what way?

POSTCARD WRITING:

Write a postcard from the perspective of Gerhardt describing his encounter with Brian and Garth to a close friend.