



Exploring Junior Cycle Texts

Savage Her Reply by Deirdre Sullivan

Savage Her Reply by Deirdre Sullivan is a novel included as part of the Prescribed Material for Junior Cycle English (For the student cohorts commencing Junior Cycle in 2025, 2026, and 2027 and presenting for examination in 2028, 2029, and 2030).

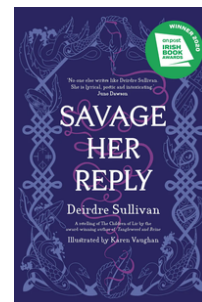


Image courtesy of
Little Island Books

Please note:

- The following tasks might be completed over a series of lessons.
- You may like to adapt and adjust the tasks to suit your context.
- *Savage Her Reply* covers themes which could be considered sensitive and controversial. You may wish to consult with our READY Framework to support you in your study.



Scan the QR code or click here to
access a Getting Started with Guide
for this Text

Before You Read...(Teacher Guidance)

Pre-reading Activities - Discussion Starters:

1. Discuss your favourite fairytale or children's story.

Whose viewpoint is it told from? How might we interpret it differently if the viewpoint changed? What if a villain told the story?

2. Consider how characters in fairytales are not in control of their own destinies.

What does the word 'destiny' mean to you? Do you believe in destiny?

- Students might like to explore synonyms that could be used instead of the word 'destiny'.

3. Prediction Carousel

The text to the right is taken from the start of a chapter in the novel *Savage Her Reply*.

What could the lines tell us about the story we are about to read?

- Students might like to discuss and debate some of the potential directions the story could go in at their desks.
- One 'expert' can host students from another group explaining their predictions. Groups rotate around the room with experts remaining at their stations.

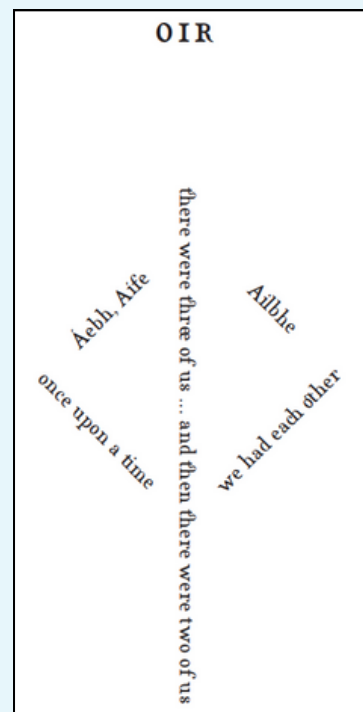


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Extract

From *Savage Her Reply* Background to the novel:

This extract is taken from the novel *Savage Her Reply* by Deirdre Sullivan. The novel is written from the perspective of Aífe, the central villain in the original legend *The Children of Lir*. Here, Aífe recounts how she was sent away from home at an early age with her two sisters, never to return again.

Some say destiny is woven by the skillful fingers of a goddess. Others claim that it is carved in stone. I don't remember my mother's hands, or how she used them. Our attendants were, in some way, mothers to us. They gave me much. But the relationship is different, I think. They were warrior women, sworn to keep us safe. I don't remember what my father looked like, what made him smile. It has been said to me that I was like him. Comments made in passing, but I held to them like jewels. We missed our family, but we understood why we had to leave. Bodhbh had asked for us, and our parents wanted what they had to be safe. They needed his protection, power, kinship. And so they gave us up. It wasn't supposed to be for ever. We were supposed to return more connected, not less. We were supposed to return.

There are them that think we forge our own destiny. After all this time, I am still unsure. Apart from this: I know that I don't know. That there are things we do and do not choose. We are ourselves, and we are also stories people tell. When we faded from our parents' lives, we must have become a different sort of thing to what we were. An honour or a threat. Or something blurry in between the two. It cannot have been easy to let us go, their only children...

*(Deirdre Sullivan, *Savage Her Reply*, 2020, pp. 15-16).*

Activities Based on Extract

The following questions may be based on the extract included or form part of your extended study of the novel. Students may like to complete the activities individually or collaboratively.

1. Exploring Tone

Encourage pupils to read the extract aloud in pairs. Afterwards, guide them to discuss how Aífe's tone comes across as she describes her life. Prompt pupils to consider how details about her tone shapes their understanding of her personality and experiences.

2. Discussing identity and perception

Lead a discussion on the line, '*We are ourselves, and we are also stories people tell*'. Invite pupils to reflect on what the speaker might mean, and support them in making connections between this idea and how people form their own self-image, as well as how others may construct stories about them. Pupils could then write their ideas as a reflective response.




Reflect and Respond

The following questions may be based on the extract included or form part of your extended study of the novel. Students may like to complete the activities individually or collaboratively.

1. Monologue Performance

Click on the right to listen to the extended extract read by Deirdre Sullivan.

Have pupils write a monologue from the perspective of a character who is marginalised or silenced in a fairytale or myth they know. Guide pupils to reflect on the different styles of monologues produced by their peers.

[Click to listen to a longer version of the extract read by author Deirdre Sullivan on Youtube.](#) 

2. Book Trailer Pitch

Ask pupils to imagine they have been asked by an educational book publisher to create and present a “book trailer” to persuade others to read texts from the Junior Cycle text list, reflecting on key themes and moments.

- Have pupils write a script for a pitch they will present to the team outlining their idea. Encourage them to include visuals, digital media, storyboards etc if they wish.

3. Perspectives and identity

Lead a discussion on how others’ perceptions can shape thoughts and behaviour.

Ask pupils to reflect on a moment they agreed or disagreed with how others saw them.

Support them to write a school website article titled ‘*We are ourselves and we are also stories people tell*’, exploring identity and perception.

4. Creative writing

Encourage pupils to write a short story or poem starting with ‘*Some say destiny is...*’. Allow time for collaborative planning or idea-sharing before writing.

5. Heroes and Villains Debate

As a class, guide pupils in a debate or discussion of the prompt: ‘The line between a hero and a villain is often blurred’. In pairs or groups, students should outline their thoughts using *Savage Her Reply*, other texts, current events, or experiences as stimulus.

Aid pupils in drafting a speech or debate position and to record or discuss reflections on how their view of villains has changed.