

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO

THE HILL OF THE RED FOX

by Allan Campbell MacLean



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Themes/issues addressed in this book

Independence, spying, Isle of Skye, friendship, treason, Cold War, death, grief, deceit

Book Summary

It is the 1950s. Twelve-year-old Alasdair leaves his comfortable life in London and travels to the Isle of Skye for a holiday. Free from his mother and aunt, he is keen to find out all about the island and desperate to live up to his dead father's reputation. During his journey north, a mysterious man thrusts a note into Alasdair's hand before jumping off the train, and Alasdair soon finds himself in the middle of a Cold War plot to kidnap brilliant scientists. In addition, he dislikes and mistrusts sinister Murdo Beaton, the man using his father's croft and with whom he is staying; he's certain Beaton is involved in the plot. With the help of his father's friends and his own determination, Alasdair sets about thwarting the web of espionage and danger unfolding around him.

BEFORE READING

Group Activities

- Discussion: what do you know about the Cold War? Who was involved in it? What do you know about spying?
- Discussion: talk about crofting. What is a croft? Where might you find one?
- Discussion: independence. What does 'independence' mean? What makes you feel independent?

AFTER READING (note, contains spoilers!)

Individual Work

- Write a paragraph on the thoughts and feelings you had when:
 - a) The guard on the train doesn't believe Alasdair (chapter 4)
 - b) Murdo Beaton almost sends Alasdair to his death (chapter 16)
 - c) The policeman finds the stolen money in Duncan Mor's house (chapter 18)
 - d) Alasdair realises that he is trapped (chapter 19)
 - e) You learn that Duncan Mor is dead (chapter 24)
- Photocopy or print out a detailed map of Skye and turn to page 257 of the book. Using the list of place names on that page, plot as many as you can on your map. See if you can find Sgurr a'Mhadaidh Ruaidh (Hill of the Red Fox) also.
- In chapter 21 the tinkers shelter Alasdair. Read this section again and then write at least four paragraphs on what you think the tinkers' lives were like. Was it a hard life or an easy one? How do you think they got food? And money? How did they have a bath? Would you like to live like that?

Group Activities

- Group activity: castles. In chapter 21 Major Cassell mentions Duntulm Castle, home of the MacDonalds of the Isles. Pick one of the following castles: Inverary Castle; Blair Castle; Cawdor Castle; Dunvegan Castle; Eilean Donan Castle. Find out all you can about your castle. Is it still inhabited? When was it built? Who built it? Is it attached to a clan? Are there any legends surrounding it? Does it have a ghost? Write a report on your findings and present it to your class.
- Class discussion: Sir Reginald Gower says: "The brave don't die, Alasdair ... their deeds outlive us all." What does this mean? Do you think Duncan's bravery will help Alasdair to deal with his grief? In what way?
- Class activity: term project on Russia. Create a large frieze of Russia to cover one wall of your classroom. Fill it in with everything you know about the country from national dress, to the different languages they speak there, to what happened to Russia's monarchy. If you know any Russian music add that too!

(continued overleaf)

KELPIES

Series Summary

The award-winning Kelpies series is Scotland's favourite collection of children's fiction. Floris Books took over the list in 2001, republishing classic works by authors such as Kathleen Fidler and Allan Campbell MacLean. Since then, we have continued to add to the series with a range of highly successful new Scottish novels for children.

CURRICULUM REQUIREMENTS COVERED

5-14 Curriculum (Scotland)

Years: P4-P7

Listening:

Listening in Groups

Listening for Information, including instructions and directions

Reading:

Reading for Information

Reading to Reflect

Awareness of Genre

Talking:

Talking in Groups

Talking about Texts

Talking about Experiences, including feelings and opinions

Writing:

Functional

Imaginative

National Curriculum (England, Wales, Northern Ireland)

Key Stage 2

English: Reading

Reading Strategies

Response to Texts, including analysing and evaluating

Reading for Information

National Literacy Strategy:

Text-Level Reading

Text-Level Writing

Vocabulary

Vocabulary

- Check you know what the following words mean (example page numbers in brackets):

admonition (54)	creel (15)	eloquent (235)	furtive (85)	numeral (38)	pursue (34)	subside (160)
aggravating (85)	culvert (63)	embankment (36)	gunwale (118)	ominous (214)	rapier (176)	thrift (149)
atomic (190)	dejected (179)	flagstone (53)	interminable (138)	plight (195)	sallow (109)	thrust (152)
consternation (101)	desultory (229)	folly (126)	mariner (40)	poised (212)	scoundrel (187)	unorthodox (251)
convalescing (8)	dismal (17)	foreboding (201)	momentum (15)	prevail (34)	sporadic (224)	