

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO

USHIG by Annemarie Allan



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Themes/issues addressed in this book

Family, friendship, trust, betrayal, Scottish folklore, kelpies, selkies, responsibility, danger

Book Summary

On holiday in Scotland, Ellen and Davie attempt to help a stray pony back to safety, but to their horror it turns into a huge, black kelpie and attempts to overpower them. Ellen manages to fight against it and they seem to repel its power. However, the kelpie shifts shape and follows them back home to London in the guise of a boy named Ushig, and it is clear that he has 'glamoured' Davie. When Ushig takes Davie away to an alternate Aldhammer, where the Queen of the Night rules, Ellen manages to follow and attempts to free Davie from the power Ushig has over him. Ushig is bewildered by the lengths Ellen will go to to save her brother, and when he betrays the pair to the Wild Hunt, it seems that all is lost. However, Ellen and Davie discover they have selkie blood in them and their selkie relatives come to their aid. Ushig eventually saves them all, against his nature, and they overcome the Queen and the Wild Hunt. Annemarie Allan introduces themes from Scottish folklore to create this thrilling adventure.

BEFORE READING

Group Activities

- Discussion: : what is a 'kelpie'? What does it look like? Is it a good or evil creature?
- Discussion: what is 'folklore'? Do you know any tales from folklore?
- Discussion: where is Traprain Law? Try to find it on a map. What do you know about this part of Scotland?

AFTER READING (note, contains spoilers!)

Individual Work

- Write a paragraph on the thoughts and feelings you had when:
 - a) The pony turns into a kelpie (chapter 1)
 - b) Ushig appears in London (chapter 5)
 - c) Davie says nobody will believe Ellen if she tells about Ushig (chapter 7)
 - d) Ellen and Davie meet their selkie family (chapter 12)
 - e) Ushig saves them (chapter 22)
- In chapter 6 Ellen tries to write a letter to her Aunt Marian, but she can't quite manage it. Put yourself in Ellen's place and write the letter that she tried to write, explaining about how Ushig arrived in London, and how afraid she is for Davie. Ask her for help.
- Pick one of the 'Peerie Folk' described in the book – a trow, shellycoat, kelpie, selkie, and so on, then draw or paint a picture of what you think it looks like based on the description you have been given.

Group Activities

- Class discussion: what do you do when somebody is acting out of character and you are worried about him/her? Should you keep it to yourself or tell somebody? Who do you tell? Why do you tell somebody? Why not?
- Class project: ancient tribes. Using the Internet and your library, do some research into the ancient tribes of Scotland such as The Votadini, who – as we learn in chapter 19 – lived around Traprain Law. Find out the names of as many as you can, where they lived and when. How do we know these things? What evidence is there that these peoples existed? Create a fact-file on what you have discovered about each tribe.

(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, Mollie Hunter, George Mackay Brown and Allan Campbell McLean. Since then, we have continued to add to the series with a range of highly successful new Scottish novels for children including books by Gill Arbutnott, Alex Nye, Lari Don, Anne Forbes, Annemarie Allan, Mike Nicholson and Margaret Forrester.

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

- Class activity: storytelling and the oral tradition. Ask your parents, grandparents, uncles, or aunts, to tell you any stories about the 'Peerie Folk' or tales from local folklore. Set aside a couple of hours every week for storytelling and share your stories with the rest of the class. Why not invite a storyteller to your school so they can entertain you.*

*Several of our authors are accomplished storytellers and are very happy to do school events.

Vocabulary

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

anticipation (105)	anxiously (27)	apparent (38)	bandana (11)	bewildered (21)
billowed (138)	burden (134)	changeling (85)	clump (46)	compelled (120)
comrade (144)	crescendo (126)	curiosity (76)	disdainfully (103)	eager (181)
encounter (25)	evaporated (38)	expanse (159)	forfeit (164)	gesture (26)
gnarled (14)	hesitation (156)	hostile (176)	hypnotic (167)	innumerable (177)
interior (127)	laden (33)	malevolent (49)	meandering (14)	misgivings (62)
mystified (118)	oblivious (41)	precariously (96)	pylon (27)	ramshackle (50)
rekindle (96)	sardonic (94)	sentinels (171)	sidles (34)	shingle (45)
solidified (144)	solitary (161)	sombre (51)	sponsored (38)	sprawl (12)
stagnant (17)	tension (45)	tentatively (97)	tousled (196)	turbulent (177)
unceremoniously (50)	undertone (83)	undulated (174)	vague (44)	vibrant (105)
waterlogged (21)	wraith (65)			