



# ‘IT’S YOUR TURN’

Suggested Performance Pieces  
for the children’s ‘Craic  
Across The Miles 2021’

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## Introduction

This collection of spoken pieces was compiled to offer children wanting to take part in “**It’s Your Turn**” our ‘*Children’s Craic Across the Miles*’.

Our aim in producing a ‘*It’s Your Turn*’ was threefold. Firstly, to give children from Irish diaspora currently living in Great Britain a way of connecting with their culture and heritage. The second was to encourage cross generational conversations so that the experience of the Irish, who emigrated to Great Britain in the twentieth century was not forgotten. The third was to provide children who do not meet other children with an Irish heritage, a way of connecting with others.

In terms of subject matter, you will find pieces which link to Irish Mythology, pieces that reflect lives lived in Ireland and lives lived as part of the diaspora in England.

The pieces in this booklet have either been written especially for the event or are pieces which we found in poetry books or on the internet. Some must be used as they are. However, those that were written by the women who puts this anthology together can be altered to suit the child. If you are amending an existing or creating a new piece, we ask that you ensure that the piece will take no longer than four minutes to perform.

We hope that it will be of use to you and that your child will enjoy taking part. One last word. Whilst we would love the children to add actions to their pieces, we would remind parents to bear in mind. that the cameras on which they will be filmed are static.

Maureen Alcorn, Maire Bunocore, Eithne Cullen and Anne Curtis.  
The Writers

## **IRISH MYTHS AND LEGENDS**

In the next few pages, you will find some Irish myths from long ago. They are:

- The Salmon of Knowledge
- How Cu Chulainn Got His Name
- The King with the Donkey Ears

If you are a good ‘seanchaí’ which means storyteller in English, you might want to just bring this story alive for people by reading it or recounting it in the best way you can. If on the other hand, you are someone who likes to act then you might want to perform the speech that you will find under the story. Just to let you know, we are more than happy for boys to perform pieces that have been written for girls and the other way round.

## **The Legend of the Salmon of Knowledge by Maureen Alcorn**

Long ago, there lived a boy called Fionn who wanted to know everything. But his mother got so tired of him asking questions all the time, that she sent him to live with Finnegas, the wisest man in Ireland.

One day, Finnegas sent him to fish in a pool near the River Boyne. Fionn sat under the shade of an old hazel tree watching a big silver salmon eat the hazel nuts that fell into the water. After he caught this lovely salmon, Finnegas told him to cook it. But he warned him, ‘The fish is all for me. Don’t eat any of it!’

Fionn was annoyed because the fish smelt delicious as he was cooking it. As he was removing the salmon from the fire, Fionn burnt the tip of his thumb on the hot skin, so he sucked it hard to take the pain away. He took the salmon to Finnegan. Finnegas asked Fionn if he had tasted any of the salmon.

‘I did not!’ said Fionn feeling hungry and annoyed.

‘You sure that you didn’t even taste the skin?’ Finnegas demanded.

‘I only put my thumb in my mouth when I burnt it – but I didn’t eat any!’ Fionn told him.

Finnegas was furious. ‘Now you have the knowledge!’ he shouted. ‘That fish was the Salmon of Knowledge. It has eaten the nuts from the ancient hazel tree of knowledge. The person who tastes that salmon gains all the wisdom and knowledge in the world! All the knowledge will be inside you now!’

‘But I don’t feel any different!’ Fionn said.

‘Put your thumb in your mouth,’ ordered Finnegas, still angry.

Slowly, Fionn put his thumb in his mouth. Suddenly, he felt all the knowledge in the world rush into his head. Fionn knew all the answers to all the questions ever! Fionn and Finnegas ate the salmon anyway but Finnegas did not have much of an appetite.

“There is nothing for me to teach you now, he said sadly. You must go to Tara and take your father's place at the head of the Fianna. “Always use your knowledge wisely.”

When Fionn grew up, he became a great warrior and a wise leader of the Fianna, the greatest band of warriors Ireland has ever known. Whenever he wanted to know something, all he had to do was put his thumb in his mouth and the answer just came to him. Always.

## **Fionn and the Salmon of Knowledge by Maureen Alcorn**

I can still hear my mammy's words as she pushed me out of the door shouting. 'No more questions Fionn! My poor head can't stand it. Stop it now!'

All I did was ask how birds could fly. But she wailed and cried, then gave me a note for Finnegas the wise man and said that I was to go and stay with him. 'He can answer all your questions!' She cried. 'Leave us in peace!'

Finnegas knew more than my mammy, but he didn't know everything. Even he got a temper on him when I woke him up in the night to ask why water turned to ice. 'But I want to know everything!' I said, as he turned over and started snoring again.

His face was cross the next day when he told me to go and catch a salmon from the River Boyne. I liked it there, sitting in the shade of an old hazel tree, watching nuts plopping into the water. Suddenly, I saw a great big silver salmon bobbing up and eating one of the nuts. I was excited – 'Yes!' I whispered to myself. The salmon was so busy eating he didn't see me with my net – and I caught it! I was really excited and ran to tell Finnegas.

'Well done Fionn!' he said. He had a strange sparkle in his eyes when he told me to cook it but not to touch a single bit of it. He wouldn't tell me. It's just not fair, I thought. I caught the salmon. It was a huge salmon. Why couldn't I have a little mouthful? What was the harm? But Finnegas was my master so in the end I decided to obey him.

The salmon smelt delicious as it cooked on the fire. The juicy fat crackled and sparked as it dropped into the fire. I licked my lips, imagining the taste. I poked the salmon with a fork – it was ready, so I lifted the salmon off the fire gently. But, just before I got it on the plate, the skin burnt into my thumb. 'Agh!' I yelled, sucking my thumb to take away the pain.

Finnegas had a hungry look in his eyes when I brought it in to him. He also looked worried. I couldn't understand why. 'You didn't eat any of it did you?' he demanded.

'No!' I promised.

'You didn't touch the skin?'

I started to say no, then remembered. 'It burnt my thumb so I licked it – but I didn't eat any!'

Finnegas was furious. He started shouting at me and I was a bit frightened. His face got red and blotchy and he kept shouting, 'You've got the knowledge!' 'You've got the knowledge!' I was confused. 'What do you mean, master?'

'That was the salmon of knowledge. It has eaten the nuts from the old hazel tree that holds all the knowledge in the world! The first person to taste the salmon gets all the knowledge in the world!'

'Yes! That's me.' I thought. I was so happy.



## **The Legend of How Cu Chulainn Got His Name by Maureen Alcorn**

Culann worked for King Conor who had a really savage guard dog which attacked and bit people. Its name was Cu. It was kept in an iron cage when there were visitors because it was so dangerous. One day, King Conor came round to Culann's for a meal, and when he was safely inside the house, Cu was let out of the cage to protect the king from his enemies.

King Conor made a big mistake. He forgot his nephew, Setanta, was coming later, after his game of hurling. Soon, Setanta was whistling and skipping along the road to Culann's not realising the danger he was in. He was only seven, but he was already the best hurler in Ireland.

When Setanta reached the gate, he heard a savage growl behind him. Then suddenly, something huge and hairy was flying towards him. Cu's red eyes, yellow fangs and dripping jaws showed no mercy.

Without even stopping to think, Setanta threw his hurling ball straight down Cu's throat. The monstrous dog leapt high into the air, in agony, then dropped to the ground. Dead.

Culann opened the door, King Conor was right behind him. They had heard the terrible noises. 'I was nearly killed by that dog!' Setanta said, calmly. 'I am Setanta, nephew of King Conor – and I want to train as a Red Branch Knight.' The Red Branch Knights were the bravest of the king's warriors.

'And you will be a great one!' said the king, proudly. 'No one else could have killed the Cu.'

Culann was furious though. 'I have lost the best guard dog in Ireland!' he shouted.

Quick as a flash, Setanta replied, 'I will guard your house instead and protect you from harm until a puppy is raised to take the place of the dog you lost.'

Culann quickly agreed. And Culann's house was never attacked or robbed as long as Setanta was guarding it. Later, when Setanta became the most famous warrior in Ireland, he was renamed Cu Chulainn, which means Culann's hound.

## **How Setanta became Cu Chulainn by Maureen Alcorn**

As I walked along the dusty road, I practised hitting the sliotar as high up into the air as I could with my hurley. It made loud thumping sounds as I hit it again and again, flying higher and higher. They called me the best hurler in Ireland today. I could remember every little move I made in the game we played that afternoon.

I could see the huge gates of Culann's house as I turned the last corner in the road. My uncle, King Connor, had told me to meet him there. There was something special I wanted to ask him and I thought about the words I would use. I picked up my sliotar and opened the gates, which creaked as if in pain.

Suddenly I saw a huge black shadow running at me. It was growling like a monster and I could see huge yellow fangs snapping wildly. There was no time to think, as the beast leapt at me, all red fur and dripping jaws. It was him – or me. I threw my sliotar into the air, then hit it as hard as I could. I aimed for the monster's throat. Time seemed to stand still – then the sliotar smashed straight down his gullet, like a bolt of lightning. The beast dropped down dead, right in front of me. It was a mass of twisted legs and fur.

Some welcome, I thought, as the door opened. Then I saw Culann and my uncle, staring at me, then at the dead beast. My uncle told me that he was sorry about the guard dog and that he would have tied him up, only he had forgotten that I was coming.

'I killed it,' I said proudly, 'before it killed me! Now will you let me train as a Red Branch Knight and be one of your warriors?'

My uncle smiled proudly, 'I'm sure that you will be a great one,' he said. No one else could have killed the Cu.'

But Culann was very cross and shouted at me really loudly, that he'd lost Cu who he was the best guard dog in all Ireland. I wanted to make things right so I told him that I would guard the house until they could raise a puppy to replace Cu.

And that was how I got my new name Cu Chulainn – Culann's hound.

## **The King with the Donkey's Ears by Maureen Alcorn**

There once was a young boy called Donal who wanted to be a barber when he grew up. His mother was disappointed. She wanted her only son to be famous throughout Ireland but Donal didn't want to be famous. He wanted to cut hair and help people to look good.

Now, the King of Ireland had a big secret. His name was Labhrai Loingseach and his secret was that he had donkey's ears. He wore them flattened down under his crown so no one would know. Whenever he had his hair cut, he killed the barber, so his secret would never get out.

One day, Donal was called to the palace to cut the King's hair. His mother wept and wailed – and refused to let him go. Then she went to the palace gates and screamed and bawled out loud for hours. She made so much noise that everyone had to stick their fingers in their ears; except the king who had to keep his ears hidden. He asked his Chief Minister who was making that terrible noise.

'It's your new barber's mother,' he replied. 'She doesn't want her son to die. She says she will keep on screaming forever unless he is allowed to live.'

The king was so tired of the noise that he agreed that he would let Donal the barber live – but only if he agreed to keep the secret. When Donal came, he promised to keep the king's secret whatever that was. As soon as he took off the crown, he saw the ears – but cut the King's hair and kept the promise.

Afterwards, Donal could not get the image of the donkey ears out of his head. He dreamed about them and became pale and sick. But he kept his promise to the king, even though his mother kept on asking what the secret was. He said, 'I have promised not to tell anyone with a mouth or ears...'

'Tell a tree,' she suggested. 'A tree doesn't have mouth or ears.'

So Donal went straight to the riverbank and told a big willow tree his terrible secret. He felt much better afterwards.

One day, a musician saw the tree and decided he would use a big branch from it to make a harp. He was an excellent musician and the king asked him to come to the palace to play for him. As soon as the musician began to play, the harp started to sing all by itself!

'Labhrai Loingseach has donkey's ears,  
Labhrai Loingseach has donkey's ears...'

Everyone stared at the king as the harp continued singing. Labhrai was so furious he jumped out from his throne. But his crown fell off and everyone saw his huge furry donkey's ears. They pointed and whispered but that was all that happened. This helped the king to learn two things – first, that you cannot keep a secret in Ireland. Second, that being different is no big deal. Life was much easier for the king after this because he didn't have to keep his secret safe.

Donal became a hero because he had saved all the barbers in Ireland from certain death. The King made him the Royal Hairdresser, so he had the job he loved for life!

## **The Asses Ears by Eithne Cullen**

My name is Donal, and I was just getting ready to cut the king of Ireland's hair, when we heard a screaming and screeching coming from the gate.

'Oh no' I thought. I told him it was my Mam and she'd never wanted me to be a hairdresser. He said it wasn't that. But told me he'd have to kill me. after I cut his hair

I realised why when he took his hat off and I saw his amazing ass's ears. Tall and furry and elegant. That was some secret. That's why he'd killed other hairdressers. But I could keep a secret and I could really do something with those ears.

Maybe it was the way I styled his ear hair or Mammy's screeching at the gate, but he let me go. He liked my styling and thought I looked honest. and when I said I wouldn't tell I meant it.

From then on I styled his hair and then I noticed he didn't wear his hat indoor so much. But the secret was killing me. So, one day I went to the side of a beautiful lake and whispered the secret into the bushes: *the king's got ass's ears... the king's got ass's ears*. I didn't know the breeze would take it up, or the reeds by the water or the trembling willow leaves... but they did and the king's secret went round the kingdom. At first people laughed, then they asked questions and then got used to it.

He called me in and threatened me but I told him he looked stylish and he should go on the balcony and see what people thought. He did. A few laughed, some gasped but mostly they cheered. Next day in the papers they said he was unique, brave and classy. One editor praised him for his honesty and said we could trust this honest king. He invited me to come and live with him in the palace, so I did. And I brought Mam. I knew if I ever got in trouble her screaming would be enough to save me.

## **BEING IRISH IN GREAT BRITAIN**

In these pieces which you are very welcome to change if you like, the writers have tried to capture some of the experiences, which Irish children or children of Irish parents living in Great Britain may have had over the years. These pieces should be performed with great expression. A good way to do this is to think how the person speaking might be feeling and take it from there.

## Show and Tell by Eithne Cullen

*Have you ever played hurling, the Irish game which a bit like hockey only speedier and more skilful? If you haven't then maybe you've watched a game. In this short story by Eithne Cullen, a child who lives in London and who is champion hurler, finds that his teacher at school don't really know much about the game.*

Today was the day when I was going to be able to tell the other kids in my class that I am good at sport too. You see they think that I am rubbish just because I'm not good at football. I took the medal that I won in the minors' cup at the weekend in to show them; only it didn't go the way that I had planned.

After assembly Mrs Tingley called me in to her office to have a little chat. And she started off asking me about the bruise on my face, she called it a black eye. So, I told her I got hit by the slither. She said "Slipper? Who hit you with a slipper?" So I had to tell her 'no', and explain what a slither is. So, then she asked "Curling? Isn't that a Winter Sports game?" So, I had to tell her what hurling is, and she was finding it hard to understand what I explained; she did say "Is it a bit like hockey?" So, I said 'I guess' so, but she wasn't really trying to understand. To her, hockey is what we play in PE with plastic sticks and a plastic puck. So, I just let her believe it.

Then, she asked me about the team but when I said that we're called "The Geraldines" she said: "Isn't that a girl's name?" But I didn't say anything. And she asked where we play and I told her Clapham Common. Then she asked if I'd played at the weekend and I told her about the final and winning the trophy. I told her the score was 4-17 to 6-8. But she couldn't understand how we won with that score, and I tried to explain, but it was very hard. I showed her my medal, and she just nodded and said, "Very nice!"

When I went back to class and it was my turn for 'show and tell', I thought about showing the medal, but it seemed too much to have to explain. So I showed them my Spurs pencil case and they all seemed to understand that.

## **Granny's house by Eithne Cullen**

*In this short story a boy or girl who lives in England recalls holidays that she had with her granny in Ireland.*

I can't really explain why Granny's house is so different from ours. She has "the central heating" as she calls it, but it comes from a big tank in the yard, it's called an oil tank. She has a fire in the living room, and she burns these little bricks of turf. She told me about how, when she was young, they'd go up to the Wicklow Hills and cut their own turf from the ground, with a cutter called a *slean* and they'd put it in a pile by the road to dry before they brought it home to burn. It's true I've seen those piles of turf on the roads in the country when we've been driving round.

Granny has so many holy statues in her house. There's one like a doll in a glass case with frilly petticoats, and it's called "The Child of Prague." She says it's Jesus, but it doesn't look like him to me.

When Aoife and I were there last year, we ran round the house counting them all and Aoife shouted: "There's more Marys in my room than in yours!" The grown-ups laughed, but I think I was supposed to be jealous, but I wasn't. Mind you, I'm not so keen on meeting the picture of Jesus with the blood on his face when I go to the toilet in the night.

On the wall in the hall is a nasty looking stick, it's like a bit of a log, all shiny polished black. Granny says it's a *shillelagh* and people used to use it if they got into a fight. I asked my Dad if granny'd ever used it and he said she never did, but watch out for the wooden spoon, I think she might have smacked him with it when he was little, but she doesn't smack us. She spoils us and makes us pancakes, gives us the big eggs with double yolks from the hens in the garden and Taytos with red lemonade. We love going to Granny's.

## **St Patrick's Pot by Anne Curtis**

*In some Irish families, children were given gifts on St Patrick's Day. This gift was called a St Patrick's Pot'. In this piece a child is trying to persuade his mum she really ought to allow him to have the gift, even though he doesn't really deserve it.*

Please mum. Please may I have the St Patrick's day present that Grandpa sent



over from Ireland. I know he said that I could only have it if I'd been good. But he didn't say '*all of the time*' and I have been good some of the time. Haven't I?

Okay my bedroom is in a state. And yeah, Dad probably does make less mess at work demolishing buildings than I do when playing with my toys. But mum, you told me that toys can be educational. And how can my brain learn if it has to concentrate on being tidy?

Okay I admit. I did switch the teacher on the computer off for the online science lesson. But isn't '*hands on*' a better way for kids to learn? And you're always saying that I spend too much time in front a screen. Okay, sneaking down to the garage, stealing some methylated spirit and setting it light to see what would happen - wasn't the best idea. And yes, I am sorry that the paintwork on our brand-new car was ruined. And I know I was lucky not to end up in hospital with three-degree burns. But Mum think of the valuable life lessons that I learnt.

Yes, there was the small matter of cutting up my school skirt/ trousers to make a bag in the needlework class. But as you are always moaning that I eat a load more food during lockdown than I did when I was at school. So they probably don't fit me anymore, anyway.

Yes I know I haven't done a Maths lesson for weeks- but I did make us all a St Patrick's Day cake. And you have to do all types of maths to make a cake. Stuff like weighing and measuring and that. I know I used up all the butter, eggs, sugar and milk in the house and split green colouring everywhere. And I'm sorry you had to queue up for hours outside Tesco in the rain and got a terrible cold because of it. One which laid you up for a week. But it was nice cake, wasn't it mum? Wasn't it? I bet grandpa would think so if he could only taste it.

## Visiting Grandma by Anne Curtis

*In this piece a child explains what happens when they visit their grandparent who has dementia, in an old people's home.*

Often, when we visit my granny in her old people's home, she has a case and a coat beside her on the chair. Gran puts her coat on the minute we walk in. Then she smiles and tells us to *'hurry up because we've a long journey ahead'*. Because *'Today, we are all going to Mayo'*. Mayo is the county in Ireland that gran comes from.

But we're not, so Dad has to take granny back to her chair and say: 'Not today Mum'. That always makes granny sad, so I hold her hand and say *'Perhaps one day grandma. Perhaps one day'*. Dad doesn't like me telling fibs. You see granny is never going back to Ireland. It's because she's too old and too unwell. But it doesn't stop her wanting to all the same.

Mind you, I'm not quite sure why granny wants to go. Where she lives now seems a much nicer, and we do visit her a lot.

Once, dad showed me a photo of the cottage that granny lived when she was young. It looked really run down. Dad says that the family were poor back then because there were hardly any jobs in Ireland at the time. That's why granny had to come over to England. And that's where she met grandad, who had done the same thing. Dad says that they fell in love the moment they set eyes on each other, in the factory where they both got jobs.

I asked dad why granny would want to go back to somewhere where she was much poorer. He said that it was about 'belonging'. England was a big shock to grandma when she first came over. It was much busier, there were more cars and people than she had ever seen in her life. And she missed her family. Dad also says that some people weren't always nice to Irish people. They called them names. A bit like they do to people who are different today.

Dad explained that this didn't last for long. The homesickness went, granny met grandad, they made friends, then children like Dad were born. They both worked hard and had a happy life in England. The trouble is that gran's dementia has made her forget this bit. She can only remember Ireland and doesn't understand why we won't let her go back.

Poor grandma. Dementia is not very fair is it?

## Who Ate My Sandwiches? By Anne Curtis

*Have you ever asked your granny or grandad what it was like going to school in Ireland? If you did, they more than likely told you that the teachers were much stricter then, than they are today. It was not usual for children to slapped or smacked with a ruler as a punishment. This piece is a comedy piece spoken by a teacher who is very cross and also a bit crazy. S/he is waving a ruler at the class.*

Silence in class? Not a word. Do you hear me? *(The teacher taps the ruler on the desk as she says each word She then picks up a plastic sandwich box).*

Who can tell me what this? Very good, Mary Doyle. It is a sandwich box. And can anyone tell me what is in it? Correct Mary Murphy. Nothing. Not a single crumb. And do you know what this means? It means that one of ye was after eating my lunch. My lovely lunch that I'd been looking forward to all year. My ham, cabbage and shamrock sandwiches for St Patrick's Day, ready to drink down with a glass of bog water sister sent over from County Galway.  
by my sister.

Sit up straight and let me look at all of ye. Whose got a guilty face? Which of ye has crumbs round their lips? Was it you Tommy Dolan with your skinny, bony body who looks like his mother never feeds him. And what about you Bridget Brody whose shirt buttons never do up? Sure, you'd eat anything. Put your hand down Mary Doyle before I bite it off. Let me see, Angela Noonan who looks like butter wouldn't melt in her mouth. Were you badly named child? Should you be Devilla, Not Angela? Was it you who wolfed them down? *(Pause)*

So no one is going to own up? Well, I have to punish the whole class so. Take your lunch boxes out of yer bags and put them on the desk so I can confiscate them. Because if I can't have my lunch then yer not having yours either.

What is it Mary Doyle? Jumping up and down in your seat like you've big load of ants dancing in your pants. No, you can't go to the toilet, you should have gone at playtime. Oh very well then, what is it? My sandwich box is on the table behind me. Well so it is. This is the box that your mother sent the biscuits for the class in. Well Mary Doyle, next time your mother decides to treat the class on St Patrick's day tell her to remind her daughter to put the box back in the bag, so no confusion need occur. Do you understand me now? Now put yer lunch boxes away and take your maths books out.

## **The Feis by Maria Buonocore**

*(Irish dancing is a great way of keeping an important Irish tradition alive as these next poems about Irish dancing show.)*

Brand new socks and curly hair,  
Boys and girls assembled there.  
Each young heart is beating fast:  
The Feis! The day has come at last.

Parked in the meadow fresh and green,  
A dozen lorries, dressed and clean  
Become the stages for the show  
Where all the dancing feet will go.

Beginners, Juniors, Seniors, all  
Will rally to the fiddler`s call.  
See those frocks and kilts a-flowing.  
Eight-hand Reels, to-ing and fro-ing,

Heel and toe and toe and heel,  
They hop and skip in every reel.  
High steps and trebles of the jigs,  
Flap the capes and stir the wigs.

Then hornpipes, with that stamping sound  
Will always draws the crowds around.  
Every parent sees with pride  
Their child`s head held high, arms at their side.

Amazed the young ones stop and stare  
While parents hum the fiddler`s ayre.  
Next the medals, silver bronze or gold.  
For some a cup that they can hold,

And all contestants from the start  
Feel proud that they have taken part.  
The music stops, the children play.  
The dozen lorries drive away.  
The Feis was music, dance and fun.  
Now all drive home in the setting sun.

## **The World of Irish Dancing    Author Unknown**

This is a different world to the one out there.  
Here dancers soar, eager to master their flair,  
The energy, the race, the solid rhythmic beat.  
The music the intricacy of well-choreographed feet.

Anticipation, fear, nerves, shooting glee,  
The essence the beauty is the perfect 123,  
The reels, the jigs, a Creative Hornpipe and the Trance,  
The Planxty, storytellers and Kilkenny Races dance.

The joy, the heartache, only ever more than few  
Perseverance, the forgotten teacher who inspired that love in you,  
Loyalty, sacrifice, trust and belief  
A parents care, their sacrifice, that feeling....relief!

Yes, it's a different world to the one out there,  
A world of talent, choreography, triumph and despair,  
Friends, competition, celebrations, a teacher's proud smile,  
The work has paid off, you're a star for awhile.

Then back to the nerves the excitement the dread,  
The travel, the music, the steps in your head.  
The highs, the lows, the sashes galore,  
The challenge, the dream, the will to be more.

Remember to be humble, forever gracious in defeat.  
To thank, to respect, the people we know and who we meet,  
For it is not the dresses or the make up that sets us apart  
It is the love of our dance, the true love of our heart.

***We found this poem on the internet. We couldn't find the poet's name.***

## **The Irish Dancer Author Unknown**

I walk out onto the stage  
Hands held firmly by my sides  
Shoes neatly tied. White socks glued to my shin  
Behind me the firm front flap of my dress,  
I clenched my sweating hands.  
Heart beating out of my chest ,  
I put on my performance smile  
And look out into the crowd.

Chest puffed out  
Feet turned out to their fullest  
The music begins to play  
The beat of the jig pumps in my veins  
I dance.

Legs flying, mind soaring,  
Higher and higher, I urge myself to jump  
Kicking and leaping rallies and clicks  
Can't miss a step.

I'm floating through the fast pace routine  
Jump jump and 123  
Mentally block out the audience  
And the dancers round me.

My curly wig bounces as I leap  
Shoes click satisfyingly as I dance without fault  
My heavy embroidered dress hops with me  
I'm free.

I reached the end of my steps  
Complete satisfied  
Heart pounding in my head  
The audience cheers I bow.

*We found this poem on the internet. We couldn't find the poet's name.*

## Thomas Street, Dublin 8 by Maire Buonocore

*(In this poem a grandchild recalls what the memories that were evoked when her grandad found an old map of Dublin.)*

Granddad came across a map of Dublin, yesterday.  
He showed me streets where he once lived and where he used play.  
He`d hear the church bells chiming out their hourly song, AVE ((Arvay).,  
While busy people worked and shopped, and children got in their way.

Then all at once the sights and sounds of how it used to be  
Were dancing vibrant in his mind, as busy as could be.  
Thomas Street, a busy road, a bus route into town,  
But he remembered horse and carts clip-clopping up and down.

The horse that carried milk crates Jing-jangled as it passed.  
The horse was trotting slowly, not allowed to go too fast.  
The cart that picked up refuse left out at every door  
Would stop and start, and start and stop, till it could hold no more.

And other horse and carts clopped by with ladders, tools and sacks.  
Granddad laughed and waved to them and drivers would wave back.  
A short walk down a cobbled street would take him to the Quays,  
Where all at once the seagulls flew and he could feel the breeze.

Then stand upon the Ha`penny Bridge and moving down below.  
He`d see the mighty waters of the River Liffey flow.  
Across the road from where he lived it was Marrowbone Lane  
Where herds of sheep were taken up, but never came back again.  
All the children, thought it fun to see sheep in the city.  
When they found out just where they went, they thought, `Oh, that`s a pity.`

Turning left down Thomas Street on Friday, what a sight.  
The fish market would open up as soon as it was light.  
From every household people came for fish fresh from the sea  
For each Friday everybody had fish for their tea.

It was good to find the city map of Dublin yesterday.  
And walk the streets with Granddad and see where he used to play.  
And hear again the church bells ringing out the song AVE (Arvay).  
While busy people worked and shopped and children got in their way.  
I`ll go there when I`m older. It will not be the same,  
But I know that if I close my eyes, I`ll see him play again.

## My Week By Maire Buonocore

*(In this poem Maire, who came from Dublin to live in London when she was a child, remembers back to her days in Dublin.)*

Sunday, wear your Sunday best. No breakfast – you must fast.  
Early Mass, Communion, then cooked breakfast! Mmmm.. at last.  
The afternoons were wonderful, a drive. We were so glad.  
For the Wicklow mountains - and a picnic feast with Mam and Dad.

Monday school, it's bread and cheese, then tables, threes and fours,  
And Irish language, Catechism, with games played out of doors.  
Then home for tea and homework, which we knew that we must do,  
But bedtime was the best of all, what song? What story new?

Tuesday, schoolbag full of books, (you had to bring them all),  
In time for morning gatherings and for the long roll call.  
T'was bread with meat, a tasty sort, speckled and quite square,  
And home again, more homework, and tight curlers in your hair.

Wednesday, a happy day, today a currant bun,  
And always that small drink of milk before the lunchtime fun,  
Then handwriting and reading, Irish and English texts.  
Spellings to be learnt at home. Oh gosh! Whatever next?

Thursday it was meat again, but nobody complained.  
Mammy handed open bread and pleasantly explained, \*  
`It's good for you so eat it up, and drink your milk as well.`  
We did, and we grew big and strong as everyone could tell.

Friday it was bread and jam, we munched up every crust.  
It tasted wonderful to us, so hungry, t'was a must.  
We knitted stockings, sewed our seams, sang songs from times of yore,  
But could not wait to run back home, a new weekend once more.

Saturday was tidy rooms, but that was so much fun.  
We'd find lost sweets, play hide and seek, and when all that was done  
We'd go out in the busy street, play games, we had such fun.  
Sometimes we'd be playing till the setting of the sun.

Then Sunday, it's our Sunday best, then Mass, then wait until  
We have our lunch then Dad would say, `Today, Killiney Hill.`  
Our favourite place where we would romp with cousins one and all,  
Midst obelisk and bluebell mist until the bedtime call.

\*Maggie was an elderly lady who would hand us all a slice of bread from a huge enamel basin when it was lunchtime at school. The bread, or bun on Wednesdays, came with our daily ration of milk. We can say Mammy, but it was our school dinner lady, Maggie, who fed us.



## **The Wild Atlantic Way by Maire Buonocore**

*(In this poem the poet recalls a holiday in Kilkee, Co Clare with her grandmother).*

Nana and I had a holiday in a place they call Kilkee,  
A little town in County Clare, nestled by the sea.  
The sunlight danced on distant waves as I walked along the shore.  
The sand was soft, the breeze was fresh. I could not have asked for more.

Along the cliff-tops further on, no sand nor friendly beach.  
The waves were surging, crashing up as far as they could reach,  
And balanced on a narrow ledge men fishing 1, 2, 3.  
To catch a mackerel or two to take home for their tea.

On to the Cliffs of Mohair where the tide is in all day  
Where weathered rocks weep endless tears while wilful waters play  
And overhead the eagles and the seagulls cry and call.  
And the splashing, crashing mighty waves accompany it all.

Then night time. Silence. Stars all round. It's dark as dark can be.  
How different from my city home where noises comfort me.  
Then in the middle of the night, a noise, a thunder CRASH!  
There was no wind, there was no rain, there was no lightening flash.  
BOOM! BOOOM! The dreadful sounds kept on, a rhythm on a drum. BOOM!  
BOOOM! For hours – what was the noise? When will the morning come?

I went down to the beach next day to wander by the sea,  
For I was on my holiday in County Clare, Kilkee.  
The sunlight danced on distant waves as I walked along the shore.  
The sand was soft beneath my feet, just as it was before.

I stopped and stared, and rubbed my eyes, for this is what I found,  
The strong sea wall was cracked in two, huge boulders scattered round.  
A ton of stones were scattered over houses on the strand  
As if they had been lightly thrown by some almighty hand.  
Cars were scuffed and windows cracked by stones flung far and wide  
In the middle of that starlit night, by the Wild Atlantic tide.

If you should ever travel to Ireland's Westside coast,  
You'll see mountains, lakes and rivers, but the thing to watch for most  
Is the rushing, gushing fury of those dark, deep waves at play,  
Then, listen for the thunder of the Wild Atlantic Way.

## **Irish Nurses**

*Over the years thousands of Irish women joined the National Health Service as nurses. It is widely agreed that the health service would not be what it is to day without the help of nurses from Ireland and other parts of the world. This is why we have included two poems about nurses. We found both of them on the internet and we are not sure who wrote them.*

When you crossed the sea to nurse them  
You brought a special gift  
For you were earthly Angels  
That sick patients were blessed with.

Irish angels that would laugh with them,  
Irish angels that would cry  
Irish angels that would pick them up  
And lift their spirits high.

Angels with a great big smile  
And even bigger heart  
And angels with such gentle ways  
Who cared right from the start.

Special nurses you truly are  
You stand above the rest  
And all of those you cared for  
Were more than truly blessed .

## **For a Special Nurse**

Long before you entered nursing  
The Lord had played his part,  
Planting seeds of love and kindness  
In the portals of your heart.

So it's clear that you've been gifted  
With a sympathetic ear,  
And blessed from the beginning,  
With a willingness to cheer.

And the people that you care for,  
Are better off by far,  
When they're touched by your compassion  
By the person that you are

For in times of woe and worry  
Where there frightened or they're blue  
No one could be more consoling,  
Than the friend they'll find in you

## **Paving the Way by Maria Buonocore.**

*From the 1930s onwards many Irishmen came over to work on the building sites, motorways power stations and other industrial projects in England. In most cities in England, Wales and Scotland as well as many other towns, there are many buildings which were built by Irishmen. We thought it only right that we should include some poems about builders.*

Driving on an A Road, I think it was A10.  
Dad said `It`s much better now, than it was back then.  
This road was long and windy and went right through Hertfordshire.  
It took *three hours* to Cambridge when we started out from here.`

It was the Irish builders, who in my Granddad`s day  
Came to work from Ireland and who built this motorway  
Back then in the local town ,the shops were in one place,  
But now the old shops that Mum once knew have gone without a trace.

`It took three years to pull them down – we all thought, What destruction!  
But brick by brick the Mall was built, a wonderful construction.`  
It was the Irish builders, my Granddad too I`m sure,  
Who laboured here to build the Mall, a place that would endure.

Now, when we`re in the city, or driving through a town  
We see places where old buildings are being taken down.  
To build new libraries, new hospitals, new parks, new swimming pools,  
New maisonettes, new offices, new colleges and schools.  
But don`t forget the Irish builders, who in my Granddad`s day  
Laboured here for progress. It was they who paved the way.

## **OTHER IRISH POEMS**

## **I've News For You- Anonymous**

*This is a poem from ancient Ireland that has been translated from Gaelic by Sean Hutton. In this poem the poet gives us an idea of what Ireland was like at the time. We think the poem dates back to the 9th or 10th century but no one is sure. We do not know who wrote it.*

I've news for you  
the stag bellows,  
winter's snow,  
summers gone;

high cold wind,  
sun low in sky,  
short days,  
heavy seas;

deep red bracken's  
skeletal form,  
barnacled goose's  
customed call;

cold has seized  
the bird's wing  
icy season  
that's my news.

**Anonymous**

*We found this lovely poem in the 'Poolbeg Book of Irish Poetry for Children' by Shaun Traynor. It is published by Poolbeg Press in Dublin and is widely available from bookstores. You can also find it on the internet.*

## **If I knew by Anonymous**

If I knew the box where the smiles are kept,  
No matter how large the key,  
Or strong the bolt I would try so hard  
'Twould open I know for me,  
Then over the land and sea broadcast  
I'd scattered the smiles to play,  
That the children's' faces might hold them fast  
For many and many a day.

If I knew the box was large enough  
To hold the frowns I meet,  
I would like to gather them everyone  
From nursery school or street,  
Then, folding and holding, I'd pack them in  
And turning the monster key,  
I'd hire a giant to drop the box  
To the depths of the deep-deep sea.

*We found this lovely poem in the 'Poolbeg Book of Irish Poetry for Children' by Shaun Traynor. It is published by Poolbeg Press in Dublin and is widely available from bookstores. You can also find it on Shaun Traynor's website.*

## **A Soft Day by Winifred M Letts**

*If you've ever been to Ireland, you will know that it rains a lot. In Ireland a rainy day is often called a 'soft day'. This poem celebrates the beauty of that rain in the countryside. Winifred M Letts, the poet was born in Dublin in 1882; she wrote plays and stories for children as well as poems.*

A soft day thank God!  
A wind from the south  
With a honeyed mouth;  
The scent of drenching leaves,  
Briar and beach and lime,  
White elderflower and thyme  
And the soaking grass smells sweet  
crushed by my two bare feet,  
While the rain drips, drips, drips from the caves.

A soft day, thank God !  
The hills wear a shroud  
Of silver cloud;  
The web the spider weaves  
Is a glittering net;  
The woodland path is wet,  
And the soaking earth smells sweet  
Under my two bare feet,  
And the rain drips,  
Drips, drips, drips from the leaves

*We found this lovely poem in the 'Poolbeg Book of Irish Poetry for Children' by Shaun Traynor. It is published by Poolbeg Press in Dublin and is widely available from bookstores. You can also find this poem on the internet.*

## **The Ninepenny Fidil by Joseph Campbell**

My father and mother were Irish  
And I am Irish too;  
I bought a wee fidil for ninepence,  
And it is Irish too.

I'm up in the morning early  
To meet the dawn of day.  
And to the lintwhite's piping  
The many's a tune I play.

One pleasant eve in June-time  
I met a lochrie man:  
His face and hands were weazen,  
His height was not a span.

He boor'd me for my fidil  
"You know" says he "like you",  
"My father and mother were Irish  
And I am Irish too!"

He gave me back my fidil  
My fidil stick, also  
And stepping like a Mayboy  
He jumped the Leargaidh Knowe.<sup>1</sup>

I never saw him after  
Nor met his gentle kind;  
But whiles, I think I hear him  
A-weaning in the wind.

My father and mother were Irish,  
And I am Irish too;  
I bought a wee fidil for ninepence,  
And it is Irish too.

I'm up in the morning early  
To meet the dawn of day,  
And to hear the lintwhites' piping  
The many tunes I play.

***Joseph Campbell was born in Belfast in 1879 and died in 1944. His main interest was in poetry and collecting songs. We found this poem on the internet.***



## **POEMS FOR ST PATRICK'S DAY**

*We thought that we should include a few poems about St Patrick, leprechauns, shamrocks and other things associated with St Patrick's Day just for the fun of it. We found most of these poems on the internet.*

### **St. Patrick Brings A Promise by Anonymous**

It ought to come in April, or, better yet, in May,  
when everything is green as green - I mean St. Patrick's Day.  
With still a week of winter this wearing of the green  
seems rather out of season - it's rushing things, I mean.  
But may be March is better when all is done and said:  
St. Patrick brings a promise, of springtime just ahead!

### **St. Patrick's Day by Jean Blewett**

There's an Isle, a green Isle, set in the sea,  
Here's to the Saint that blessed it!  
And here's to the billows wild and free  
That for centuries have caressed it!

Here's to the day when the men that roam  
Send longing eyes o'er the water!  
Here's to the land that still spells home  
To each loyal son and daughter!

Here's to old Ireland—fair, I ween,  
With the blue skies stretched above her!  
Here's to her shamrock warm and green,  
And here's to the hearts that love her!

## **I'll Wear a Shamrock**

St. Patricks Day is with us,  
The day when all that's seen  
To right and left and everywhere  
Is green, green, green!

And Irish tunes they whistle  
And Irish songs they sing,  
Today each Irish lad walks out  
As proud as any king.

I'll wear a four-leaf shamrock  
In my coat, the glad day through,  
For my father and mother are Irish  
And I am Irish too!

## The Leprechaun and Me by Maire Buonocore

I was walking through a little wood.  
I heard a sound and then I stood.  
A tapping sound is what I heard.  
Not a squirrel, not a bird,

Something different. What *is* that sound?  
It came from somewhere near the ground.  
I tiptoed as quietly as I could,  
That day that I was in the wood.

Then I saw a real surprise  
I held my breath... I rubbed my eyes...!  
A little man in red and green  
was busy working there unseen.  
This man, no taller than a mug,  
drank his fruit juice from a jug.

I saw him hammering a shoe.  
I knew exactly what to do.  
He was hammering tic-tac-tic.  
I had to catch him. I had to be quick.

This little fellow, I was told,  
would give to me his crock of gold.  
But... leprechauns are very quick.  
and leprechauns know every trick.

He`d try to fool me with a lie,  
for Leprechauns are very sly.  
I stooped and caught him and held him tight.  
He struggled and wriggled with all his might.  
I had to grip him and to stare,  
and keep him in my gaze, right there.

*`Let me go! Set me free!  
You know you can`t hold onto me!`*  
*`Your gold,` I said, `give it to me.  
Then of course I`ll set you free.`*  
*`The gold?` she`s got it,` he replied,  
`that lady standing at your side.`*

I turned my head to have a look,  
but found myself in that shady nook  
all alone. No elf, no gold,  
recalling the storied I'd been told.  
I'm telling this tale today to you.  
It happened to me, so I know that it's true.

### **Five Little Leprechauns by Leanne Guenther**

Five little leprechauns on St. Patrick's Day  
The first one said, 'I'd like to play!'

The second one stood beside a rainbow.  
The third one waved and said, 'Hello!'

The fourth one said, 'Good luck to the bold.'  
The fifth one said, 'Just don't touch my gold!'

Plink, plink went the harp ' they all danced around,  
Then five leprechauns ran off with a bound.

## **I Know A Funny Little Man - Anonymous**

*This poem is sometime thought to be Irish in origin because of the Irish legends about leprechauns and the 'little people'. We cannot be sure.*

I know a funny little man,  
As quiet as a mouse  
Who does the mischief that is done  
In everybody's house.  
Though no one ever sees his face,  
Yet we can all agree,  
That every plate we break was cracked  
By Mr. Nobody.

'Tis he who brings in all the mud  
That gathers in the hall.  
'Tis he who lets the front door slam,  
And scribbles on the wall.  
When we can't find the scissors,  
Or have lost the back door key,  
The one to blame in every case  
Is Mr. Nobody.

We know he cracked the window  
And broke the china plate,  
We know he left the kitchen floor  
In such a dreadful state.  
We know his faults and failings,  
His sins are plain to see,  
And so we always put the blame  
On Mr. Nobody.

**Anonymous**

## **The Wearing of the Green Day**

It's the wearing of the Green Day  
The wearing of the green  
For Irish people around the world  
The shamrock can be seen.

It's the wearing of the Green Day  
The day we celebrate  
The pride that our family is Irish  
On this important date

On the wearing of the Green Day  
We have time to dance and sing  
And the sound of Irish music  
Provides a welcome touch for spring

It's the wearing of the Green Day  
When we remember well  
All the different Irish people  
And the stories they can tell

But for this wearing of the Green Day  
There will be no parades,  
We don't care we'll bang the drum  
Until the daylight fades.

## **The Irish Counties Poem**

We are Munster's counties fair,  
Cork. Kerry. Limerick and Claire.  
Waterford, Tipperary here we are.  
Welcoming you from near and far.

Leinster is beyond compare.  
Dublin, Wicklow, Carlow, Kildare,  
Wexford, Offaly, Laois, Kilkenny,  
Longford and Louth are as good as any  
Meath, Westmeath and that is all  
Over now to a province so small

Connaught it is the smallest, oh  
Galway, Leitrim and Mayo  
Roscommon, Sligo that's the lot  
Just one more verse for you we've got.

We are Ulster's counties nine,  
Let's forget the dividing line,  
Donegal, Derry, Antrim, Down  
All are countries of renown.  
Armagh, Monaghan and Tyrone  
Cavan, Fermanagh now all are known.