

A Teacher's Guide to

Fiona's Lace

by Patricia Polacco

About the Book

Many years ago, times were hard in all of Ireland, so when passage to America becomes available, Fiona and her family travel to Chicago. They find work in domestic service to pay back their passage, and at night Fiona turns tangles of thread into a fine, glorious lace. Then when the family is separated, it is the lace that Fiona's parents follow to find her and her sister and bring the family back together. And it is the lace that will always provide Fiona with memories of Ireland and of her mother's words: "In your heart your true home resides, and it will always be with you as long as you remember those you love."

This is a story about a story—a family story—and how it carried memories all the way from Ireland to America and helped a family stay together when circumstances might have separated them forever.

Discussion Questions

Choose the questions and activities that work best with the age and interests of the child or class you are sharing this book with.

1. The author's great-great-grandmother Fiona came from Glen Kerry near Limerick, Ireland. Everyone's family comes from somewhere. Where does your family come from?
2. How many different countries from around the world are represented in your classroom? How many different states?
3. What was life like in Ireland for Fiona and her family? Do you think she was happy there?
4. When Fiona and her family left Ireland, they had to decide what to take with them and what to leave behind. What would you take if you were moving to a new home in a new country?
5. What did the family think life would be like in America? How did the reality match their expectations?
6. How was life in Chicago different from their village in Ireland?

7. This story took place over 140 years ago in the 1870s. When the Hughes family left Ireland, they had to travel by horse and wagon, ship, and train, and it took a long time. How might they travel if they were taking that trip today? There have been many other changes and new inventions since then. Make a list of some of them.

8. Immigrants like Fiona and her family, who left their homeland to come to America with very little money in their pockets, needed to be courageous. What does courage mean to you?

9. Fiona and her family had to face many obstacles and hardships. Their father lost his job and they had to leave their home and country. They had little money and a long journey. They lost their new home and possessions in a fire. What do you think helped them through?

10. When Fiona's mother Annie had arthritis and could no longer make lace, she taught Fiona the secrets of fine lacemaking, and Fiona was able to make money to help the family. How else did the lace help the family?

11. The lace is a tangible representation, something you can touch and see. It served to remind family members of the faith and love that sustained them over generations as they overcame hardships and saw many of those hardships turned into blessings. Have you or anyone you know had to overcome a hardship? Can you think of a time when something that was sad or hard turned out to have a blessing in it?

12. When Mick thought he would never find Annie, the lace led him to her very door. Later in the story, Fiona makes lace for a posh dressmaker to make money so the family can buy a farm. When the great fire threatens to separate the family forever, Fiona uses it to guide her parents to her hiding place. The lace carries the stories and love that helped the family through their hardships. The lace eventually became a family heirloom and has been passed down through generations and is still used as part of each new bride's veil. Can you think of anything that your family passes down—like a ring, jewelry, candlesticks, tablecloth, or recipes?

13. "It's in your heart home resides and will remain there as long as you remember those you love." How did these words help Fiona and her family? How did the story about how her mother and father met help Fiona? Can you think of any sayings or stories that your family tells?

14. In the end, Fiona's lace was covered with smoke and soot. Do you think it was ruined or do you think it was her "most beautiful creation"? Why?

15. Fiona and her mother were talented lace makers. Their father was a wonderful storyteller. What is your special talent?

Questions for Further Discussion & Activities

1. Fiona's journey began in Limerick, Ireland. Can you find it on a map? Her journey ends in Chicago, Illinois. Can you trace the journey on a map? How many places has your family lived in? Can you name them? What do you know about them?
2. Ailish imagined life in America to be very grand. She thought the streets were paved with gold and that even servants had servants. Think of a place you have never been. It could be another state, another country, a different climate, or even a different planet—it could be a new home or even a new bedroom. Use your imagination and write a story about your new home.
3. With the help of a teacher or librarian, research some major inventions from the 1870s to the current day. Create a time line of these inventions. Are you surprised by all the things we have now that didn't exist then? Which invention is your favorite?
4. Life in America was hard for many immigrants in the 1870s. Many Irish immigrants faced prejudice as well as poverty. Do some research and see what you can learn about this period. What is prejudice? How did the prejudice toward the Irish show itself?
5. The fire that destroyed Fiona's home in the book was the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. Research more about the fire and the devastation it caused.
6. Go to the library and read an Irish folktale. Retell it to your class. See if you can find a story about a pooka or banshee or leprechaun.
7. Make a list of the Irish words the author uses in the book and look them up in a dictionary or on the Internet.
8. What is the cultural heritage of your class? Find the places on the map where everyone's family came from. Learn about the different customs and traditions. Have a class party with foods from each country or special recipes from different families.
9. Look at the pictures of the party the Hughes family held in Chicago. Notice how they are playing music, singing, and dancing. What kinds of instruments did they use? What would you use to make music at your party? If you or your classmates play an instrument, bring them to class and see what kind of music you can make.
10. Make your own Irish Instruments:
 - **How to make a Bodhrán/Irish Drum:**
<http://www.tinytappingtoes.com/uncategorized/make-your-own-bodhran-irish-drum/>

- **How to make a whistle from a straw:** <http://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Whistle-from-a-Straw>

11. Make a family tree of Fiona’s family. Make a family tree for your own family. Google “family tree for kids” to find a template.

To learn more about genealogy, check out <http://www.climbingmyfamilytree.com/genealogy-for-kids/>

Here are some tips to help children with their family tree project

<http://voices.yahoo.com/helping-kids-their-family-tree-project-12016826.html?cat=25>

12. The pictures in this book are very beautiful and expressive. Try reading the book again just looking at the pictures. Do you notice anything new in the pictures or the story that you didn’t see before? How do the pictures help to tell the story?

13. You can tell a lot about life in Ireland and in Chicago just from looking at the pictures. Talk about what life was like in both places. In what way do the illustrations add to the words to paint a picture of life in both places? Draw a picture or make a collage of life in your town or school.

14. Fiona and Ailish loved hearing the story of how their parents met and about the lace that led her father to her mother’s door. Write your own family story.

15. Interview a parent or grandparent (or other family member) and ask them to tell you some family stories. Write or illustrate one of their stories. Write or draw a story about you and your family to pass down to your children.

16. Fiona and her mother were skilled lace makers. Do some research to learn more about this craft. You can find videos on YouTube that demonstrate Irish lace making. Here’s one:
Irish Crochet Lace Demonstration by Nora Finnegan
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBWGTNM8SMU>

17. You can make your own lace out of paper. There are lots of crafts using paper lace or plastic lace that you can find on the Internet. Let your imagination go and have fun!
Here’s one for making paper lace.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqjxIVm_goM

18. Retell this story as a play, puppet show, or readers’ theater. Which character would you like to be?

19. Become a reviewer. Make a video talking about this book.

20. This is based on a true story. Find out more about the author, Patricia Polacco, and read other books she has written and illustrated. You can begin here: <http://www.patriciapolacco.com/>

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