



## READING STRATEGY

Each student should have sticky-notes and a pen or pencil on hand (this way, they can make notes without writing in the book). As they read, they should use their sticky-notes to mark:

- Something they do not understand, in which case they should write a question on the note
- Something they do understand and can relate to, in which case they should write a comment on the note (for example: 'I felt this way when I got sent to the principal's office for whispering with my friend in class.')
- Something that surprised them, in which case they should write their reaction on the note

They should try to make at least one note on each page, but they can do more. Try modeling this method on the first page together, then have them read silently for the rest of the chapter. Once everyone has finished, students should pair off and discuss what they wrote on their sticky-notes. This is a good way to get a discussion rolling and have students compare their thoughts on the reading.

## EXERCISES

1. Titles
2. You're the illustrator
3. Story structure
4. Sacred (or cursed!) objects
5. Myths and monsters
6. Themes
7. Build-a-monster
8. Design-a-monster
9. A good scare
10. Superpower
11. Setting the scene
12. Modern monsters
13. Continuing the story
14. Name your own Darkisle book
15. QUIZ! Which character are you?



## EXERCISE 1: TITLES

Sometimes chapters get titles. Think about what makes a good title: a sneak peek of what's to come, or a summary in just a few words. As you read through the book, give each chapter a title.



## EXERCISE 2: YOU'RE THE ILLUSTRATOR

Do the illustrations match what you think Conn and the Abhartach look like? Draw your own version of any character.



## EXERCISE 3: STORY STRUCTURE

Each story has four main parts.

1. The introduction: we meet our characters and are introduced to the world, or the setting of the story
2. The rising action: something goes wrong (or many things go wrong)! It gets worse and worse until...
3. The climax: the BOSS FIGHT
4. The resolution: things are resolved and calmed down, and now we see where that leaves our characters and how they've changed.

Can you identify the four main story parts in *Conn of the Dead*? Think about the story as a whole, or individual characters. For example, what is Aunt Doireann's rising action? (her emergency at work and her decision to bring Conn along to UCD)



## EXERCISE 4: SACRED (OR CURSED!) OBJECTS

The National Folklore Collection in UCD where Aunt Doireann works holds all sorts of strange and mysterious artifacts. All of them are sacred, and some of them are cursed. Do you have any sacred objects or artifacts of your own? Maybe you keep them on a special shelf in your room or in a shoebox under your bed. Describe your object(s) and write about where you found them and what makes them sacred to you.



# CONN OF THE DEAD

BY DAVE RUDDEN

ILLUSTRATED BY  
ALI AL AMINE



## EXERCISE 5: MYTHS AND MONSTERS

Conn has a passion for storytelling, especially stories about monsters and heroic warriors. Split into teams and research Irish myths and monsters. Work on a presentation that Conn would be proud of. Get creative with it! (But probably no swinging from any catwalks.) Use props if you can, and assign roles to each member of the team. Present your myths.



## EXERCISE 6: THEMES

Pick out a few themes in *Conn of the Dead* (ex. family, mythology, identity and being comfortable with who you are). Write a short explanation of how you chose your themes and back it up with evidence from the book.



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## EXERCISE 7: BUILD-A-MONSTER

Every good horror story has a unique monster. The Abhartach is a necromancer zombie with mind control and endless body parts stuck together. Describe your own version of the Abhartach. What details would you add to make your monster unique? Give it a name.



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## EXERCISE 8: DESIGN-A-MONSTER

Draw your unique monster.



## EXERCISE 9: A GOOD SCARE

Horror is perfect for scaring the heck out of your audience, but a good horror story is not only about chills. It is often about family, friendship, or being brave enough to save someone you love. Think about some scary stories you enjoy. What else are they about? How can horror be a useful tool for telling a certain type of story? Write a response.



## EXERCISE 10: SUPERPOWER

Conn's inability to sit still and focus ends up being his superpower that he uses to defeat the Abhartach. What is your own superpower? Think about what makes you unique, or how your 'flaws' could actually be strengths. Write a short piece on how you would use your superpower.



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## EXERCISE 11: SETTING THE SCENE

The setting of a story is like the stage of a play. The backgrounds and props work together to help the story come to life. The setting is also responsible for what is available for characters to use in a scene. Think about the vault of UCD as a setting in *Conn of the Dead*. What are some ‘props’ that Conn, Inez, and the Abhartach use? Imagine the Abhartach’s skull ended up somewhere else. What would change about the story in a different setting?



## EXERCISE 12: MODERN MONSTERS

Many monsters are ancient beings. But what if they learned the rules of our modern world? The Abhartach learns how to infect the computers at UCD and uses the 3D printers to build himself a new body. Write a short scene about a monster who learns how to use technology.



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## EXERCISE 13: CONTINUING THE STORY

Pick one of the following prompts and write a short scene.

1. What do you think happened to Eoin and his brothers after the talent show?
2. Do you think Conn and Inez go on to become good friends?
3. What do you think Conn's ideas are for next year's talent show?



## EXERCISE 14: NAME YOUR OWN DARKISLE BOOK

The Darkisle series features pun titles and monsters from Irish mythology. In *Conn of the Dead*, Conn defeats the Abhartach, and in the second Darkisle book, *Nell on Earth*, Nell is up against the Dobhar-chú. If you were to write a Darkisle book, which Irish myth would you draw inspiration from? Give your story a pun title.



## EXERCISE 15: QUIZ! WHICH CHARACTER ARE YOU?

1. If you were an animal, what would you be?
  - a. A border collie
  - b. A black, black cat
  - c. A ferret
  - d. The most terrifying beast you could ever imagine
  
2. Your dream holiday destination is...
  - a. Anywhere warm and sunny
  - b. A dark cave
  - c. Australia? Or Peru, or wait, maybe Japan. Or wait!
  - d. Inside your head
  
3. What is your favourite subject in school?
  - a. History
  - b. Math
  - c. Mythology...oh, is that not a subject? It should be.
  - d. I do not need school. I am older than the Old World.
  
4. When you grow up, your dream job is...
  - a. A doctor of Medieval Irish
  - b. A spy
  - c. A member of the Fianna (ancient warrior brotherhood of Ireland, remember?)
  - d. World domination



## EXERCISE 15: QUIZ! WHICH CHARACTER ARE YOU?

5. What is your favourite after school activity?
  - a. Watching a good horror movie
  - b. Reading my third book of the week
  - c. Playing zombie video games
  - d. Plotting and planning and lying in wait...
  
6. What is your favourite meal?
  - a. Fish and chips
  - b. Cheesy pasta bake
  - c. Ice cream
  - d. Your soul...delicious
  
7. What is your favourite color?
  - a. Blue
  - b. Black
  - c. Red, and also green, and also purple
  - d. The colour of abyss, of vast emptiness
  
8. What would you perform for a talent show?
  - a. Motorbike tricks---Is the stage big enough?
  - b. Is not performing an option?
  - c. An epic story that may or may not include a gallon of fake blood
  - d. Mass mind control



## QUIZ RESULTS

If you answered mostly a's... you're Aunt Doireann! You're fun-loving and smart, with a passion for understanding the world around you. You work hard, and it's definitely not your fault that your papers and pens end up all over the room when you're deep in a project. You're good at listening to others and knowing what to say.

If you answered mostly b's... you're Inez! You're quiet and reserved, and that's okay. You might come off a little ghoulish, and that's also okay. You follow instructions to the letter and organize your bookshelf alphabetically. You like things in their places, but you know how to think outside the box. If there's an emergency (perhaps an ancient being trying to take over the world), you're a good person to call. You keep a clear head.

If you answered mostly c's... you're Conn! Master of untied shoelaces and a hundred and twenty-seven things on your mind at all times. You are a whirlwind of creativity and ideas (not all of them work out, but that's okay because you have at least thirty other ideas to try). Your endless energy might intimidate some people, but the people in your corner know you're never too much and that your heart is always in the right place.

If you answered mostly d's... you're the Abhartach! Yikes! But hey—you're someone who is always looking for new ways to succeed. You don't accept your limitations. And you're always looking to make a new friend. BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY.