



# The Case of the Vanishing Painting

ISBN 978-1-78849-391-8

eBook ISBN 978-1-78849-510-3

Brian Gallagher

## Teaching Guide

By Nicola Heaney

### RATIONALE & THEMES

This guide has been designed to complement a class reading of the text in a way that brings it alive whilst also enriching the students' critical abilities. The activities aim to encourage them to question the characters' motivations and the overall themes. The guide aims to develop empathy skills, stimulate discussion and help readers to dissect literary techniques in fresh and engaging ways. There are also activities that are designed to hone communication, presentation and literacy skills. This novel explores topics such as friendship, honour and social hierarchy. Key themes include:

- Family and community
- Courage
- Friendship
- Social Equality
- Fairness.

### SUMMARY

The story centres around a couple of days in Dublin in June 1911. Tim and Deirdre Kavanagh's father has been accused of stealing a valuable painting. They know it's a mistake and set out to prove his innocence, along with the help of their friend Joe Martin. However, they have to cross the line into criminality a few times themselves and it soon becomes clear that they'll have to deal with some very dangerous characters.

Luckily, the two boys are huge fans of Sherlock Holmes and have a lot of inventive ideas and plans. But will they work? And will anyone believe the word of three children? The game is definitely afoot!

### APPROACH

*The Case of the Vanishing Painting* is an exciting yarn of three friends tracking down a thief – but it also raises questions about social hierarchy and inequality.

There are many opportunities for discussion and learning about the roles of different professions in society. There are also opportunities to discuss the importance of treating people fairly and acting with honour

and respect. This guide has divided the story into three sections and the activities offer suggestions on exploring the themes, developing an in-depth understanding of the power and strength of true friendship and examining the writer's craft in building characters and plot.

### Part One Investigating A Crime Pages 7-77

#### SUMMARY

Our first meeting with Deirdre Kavanagh is action-packed. She's in the middle of breaking into someone's house while her twin brother Tim waits outside. They're trying to find evidence that will help their father who is in trouble. However, their plan begins to unravel as Deirdre finds herself trapped in a study when the housekeeper returns earlier than planned.

After this very tense opening chapter, the narrative begins four days earlier. It's 1911 and the twelve-year-old Kavanagh twins live in a Dublin suburb with their parents. Their father works for the railways and has become entangled with an art robbery that happened on a Galway–Dublin service he was working. There's a strict social hierarchy amongst the adults and even though Mr Kavanagh is widely believed to be innocent, there are some adults who are avoiding associating with the Kavanagh family – including Mr Martin, the father of Joe, one of Tim's closest friends. Mr Martin tries to encourage his son to avoid associating with Tim Kavanagh for the family's reputation, but Joe stands by his friend. As the three friends prepare their musical piece for a local show, Joe comes up with an idea to solve the crime together. Both he and Tim are big fans of Sherlock Holmes – plus it's the school holidays so they have all the time in the world.

Deirdre has to bite her tongue when local girl Sadie Nolan makes snide comments about her father. Sadie's father is more senior in the company than Deirdre's father and

she doesn't want to get him into any more trouble. Things are not great – their father, like a couple of others, is still under suspicion at the company. The friends go for a picnic along the river to try and distract themselves. However, trying to clear their father's name is at the forefront of all their minds – especially as they suspect the situation is more serious than their parents will admit.

They suspect the director of the National Gallery of Ireland to be involved somehow so plan to break into his home, bringing us up-to-date with the first preliminary chapter. Luckily, Deirdre manages to get away without detection and has gathered some clues. They have a thread to follow and start to plot their next move.

#### DISCUSSION POINTS

- Re-read pp. 9-14.** Why do you think the writer has started the novel in the present and then flashed back so quickly to four days earlier? Does it make you more interested in the story? Why do you think this is?
- Re-read pp.18-19.** Joe's father wants him to steer clear of his friend Tim Kavanagh for 'the sake of our family'. What does his father mean by this? Do you think this is fair? Why do you think this? Have you ever been told you're not allowed to be friends with anyone? What happened?
- Re-read p.22.** Deirdre says to Tim 'But we can't do anything right now, so we should probably try to work on the song.' What do you think of this? Do you think she is correct? Why do you think this? Have you ever tried to distract yourself from your worries like this? What other techniques would you recommend?
- Re-read pp.25-26.** Joe has a 'mad idea' that the friends should try and find out who the art thief is themselves. Do you think it's a good idea? Why do you think this? What advice would you give them?
- Re-read p.30.** Deirdre is playing with Sadie Nolan, who she doesn't like. However, she tries to remember her Mam's advice 'everyone in life was on the same journey'.

What do you think this means? Do you think it is good advice? Why do you think this? How do you think we can act upon it in our everyday lives?

- **Re-read pp.34-35.** The librarian advises the boys to 'never apologise for seeking knowledge.' Do you think she's right when she says it's the 'key to advancement'? Why do you think this? Have you ever seen someone being teased for having an interest in learning? What happened?
- **Re-read pp.36-37.** In order to find Mr Wilson's address, the boys have to do some detective work in a library. Nowadays, we'd just use an internet search engine. In pairs, think of at least five other ways we used to find or share information before the internet. Do you think things were easier or more difficult then? Why do you think this?
- **Re-read p.46.** Deirdre plans to break into Mr Wilson's house to find some answers. Do you think this is a good idea? Why do you think this? Have you ever heard the phrase 'the end justifies the means'? Do you think it's right? Why do you think this?
- **Re-read p.50.** Joe has a thought that he wishes his dad was more like Mr Kavanagh – and then feels guilty. Do you think he's being fair on his dad? Why do you think this? What advice would you give to Joe in this situation?
- **Re-read p.72.** In discussion with his dad, Joe has the thought that 'Dad would regard the idea of a director of the National Gallery stealing a painting as outlandish.' Why do you think his father thinks this? Do you agree with him? Why do you think this?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. TOWN PLANNING

On page 19, Joe describes the local area and how houses of different sizes were built to suit the different financial positions of the families in the area. Joe thinks 'such distinctions were foolish.' Why do you think such distinctions were made? In small groups, decide what amenities are needed in a good neighbourhood. Think about how to best build a sense of community. In your groups, plan a newly built neighbourhood on the fringes of your town. Think about the amenities it will need, the way houses are designed and laid out and how people will access the place. Present your plans to the rest of the class, explaining your choices.

### 2. INCIDENT REPORT

Re-read pages 26-29 and note down everything that we learn about the theft. Imagine you are helping the friends with their investigation. Write up an incident report based on exactly what happened and who was involved. Make your language formal and

lay it out like a report with clear headings. At the bottom, write a list of the sorts of things that could be investigated and why you think these would be useful.

### 3. FATHER-DAUGHTER RITUAL

On pages 41 and 42 we see Deirdre preparing a cup of cocoa for her father as part of their father-daughter ritual. Think of a ritual you either already do or could do with someone in your household. Write a short piece of writing describing it in a similar way to the novel. Try and include lots of detail, including smells and sounds.

### 4. FRIEND OR FOE?

Deirdre is playing on the street with some other girls when Sadie Nolan appears and says unkind things. Deirdre snaps and responds to Sadie with some harsh words. Do you think she should have snapped at her? What would you have done? Look at some of the other instances in the novel where Deirdre bites her tongue – what do you think she really wanted to say? In small groups, script the incident with two Deirdres – the public-facing Deirdre whose voice everyone hears and a private one who speaks her inner thoughts.

### 5. BUILDING TENSION

The scenes around Mr Wilson's home are incredibly tense – but how does the writer create this effect? Re-read through pages 59-69 and choose three or four examples that show he's building tension. Think about what the characters say or do. Think about the use of dramatic irony (when the audience knows something the characters don't). Does Gallagher use any devices to create tension like a digression (when a scene switches at a cliffhanger to build tension)? What are the effects? Write up your findings. Each paragraph should say how tense the part is and explain how the chosen quote (example) explains your point.

### 6. LOCAL LEGENDS

Re-read pages 72-75. What do you think about the legend Tim retells to the family? Are there any such stories about your local area? In groups, find at least five or six pieces of folklore or legend local to your area. Choose one each and write it up as a short story, using your best writing skills to bring the story to life. Put your stories together in a little book and share with the rest of the class.

### 7. LIVING A NIGHTMARE

On pages 75, 77, Joe describes a recurring nightmare in vivid detail. But what do you think it means? Have you ever had a recurring nightmare? Choose a nightmare you've had or heard about and write it in vivid detail, paying attention to the sensory detail. Think about building tension through sentence structure and punctuation to really bring it to life.

## SUMMARY

Deirdre is touched by a lovely gesture for her father from the local shopkeeper. It's clear that there's a lot of support for him in the local community, which inspires them to continue with their plan. The three friends tail Mr Wilson on the train to Howth to spy on his meeting. Deirdre manages to put up with the boys' talk of Sherlock Holmes, especially as it's clear they're on to something.

From a distance, it's clear that something's gone wrong as Mr Wilson argues with a man on a boat. The trio trail him up the coast and follow him to a pub where he meets a man who looks quite dangerous. Despite this, Joe tails them the whole way to the door of a cottage and almost gets caught. However, before being discovered, he learns a few important things about Mr Wilson's plans.

Back in Dublin, it's Residents' Day and despite the excitement, Mr Kavanagh has admitted things are getting to him. Sadie Nolan's behaviour at the sporting events annoys even easy-going Tim who is determined to beat her. The three friends' musical performance is a roaring success and there's a heartwarming show of support for their dad.

After the excitement of the concert, it's back to normal the next day. Tim stands up for himself against some of the local boys and Deirdre has a heart to heart with her mum. After a day off from thinking about the crime, the three friends head off for another picnic and start to think of a plan. The next morning sees them heading off on a long cycle trip to Howth, but Joe is starting to feel uncomfortable about lying to his father. Sadie Nolan is still taunting Deirdre, which makes her even more determined to prove her father's innocence.

In Howth, the friends are hoping to find out more information. When the trawler looks to be in action, Joe and Tim head off to the cottage to see what they can find. However, their luck runs out when it's clear that there's more than just Con Furlong involved and the boys are lucky to escape unharmed.

## DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Re-read p.78.** Deirdre is getting tired of Sadie's constant sniping. Why do you think she is so nasty to Deirdre? Why do you think this? What would you advise Deirdre do?
- **Re-read p.92.** Tim explains that he doesn't feel guilty about Joe being involved because clearing Mr Kavanagh's name is his fight too. What do you think of his reasoning? Do you agree with him? Why

do you think this? Have you ever been in a situation like this? What happened?

- **Re-read pp.93-94.** Do you think Joe does the right thing by going up to the trawlerman's cottage? Why do you think this? What would you have advised him to do in this situation?
- **Re-read pp.96-98.** Joe's quick-thinking helps get him out of trouble. What would you have done in this situation? Do you think Con Furlong believes him? Why do you think this? Is it a good idea to copy something you've read in a story?
- **Re-read p.105.** Joe's father tells him 'Whenever I hear someone say "I'll do my best", I feel they're giving themselves a way out. That they're not fully committed to what they're attempting' What do you think of this comment? Do you agree? Why do you think this? What would you say to Joe at this moment?
- **Re-read p.109.** The audience is keen to give their support and Mr Kavanagh receives a standing ovation. How do you think he feels at this point? Why do you think this?
- **Re-read p.111.** Tim loses his patience with Paul Dillon. Do you think it's fair that Tim's musical achievements are just ignored by some of the local boys? What do you think of him throwing the ball at Paul and walking away? Was this the right thing to do? Why do you think this?
- **Re-read p.112.** Deirdre teases her Ma about the phrase 'self-praise is no praise'. What does this phrase mean? Do you agree with it? Why do you think this?
- **Re-read pp.116-118.** What do you think of Joe's plan? Do you think it'll work? Why do you think this? Is there anything else you think they could do?
- **Re-read p.117.** Tim advises thinking of the problem like a chess puzzle by thinking of every potential move and working out a counter-move. Do you think this is a good idea? Do you think this is a good way to think about life in general? Why do you think this?
- **Re-read pp.122-123.** Joe is feeling guilty about not telling his dad the whole truth. How do you think his father would react? Do you think Joe is right not to tell him? Why do you think this?
- **Re-read pp.125-126.** While spying on the Bailey Maid, Deirdre feels guilty about the beggar sitting on the harbour and gives him some of her money. What does this tell us about her? Why do you think this? What do you think of her feeling that the world is unfair? Can you think of how we can all help people less fortunate than ourselves?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. OUT OF PLACE

On pages 83 and 84, the three friends are walking along as if on holiday. What do you think of this setting for something as dramatic as theft of an important painting? Does it fit? Do you think that makes it more or less interesting? In pairs, come up with three or four examples of peaceful, happy settings. Then think about adding in something out of place. For example, you could imagine a city filled with Christmas shoppers. Suddenly, a herd of cows appears. They were being transported and the farmer took a wrong turn and the truck was damaged so they escaped and now they're running around causing havoc. Write the scenario up. Think about really setting the scene and then introducing the surprise.

### 2. IT'S ALL ABOUT SADIE

Sadie Nolan manages to irritate even Tim. But what is it about her that's so unpleasant? Choose three adjectives to describe her personality. Look through pages 102 and 103 and earlier in the novel to find examples that show these aspects of her personality. Write up an analysis of her character. Each paragraph should explain an element of her personality, refer to an exact quote from the book and explain exactly how this quote proves the point you're making.

### 3. ACTING OUT

While she's standing on stage about to introduce their piece, Deirdre is tempted to make a speech about their father's innocence, but decides against it. Imagine she goes ahead with it. In small groups, script the scene. Think about what Deirdre would say. Think about how people in the audience – and Joe and Tim would react.

### 4. ANONYMOUS LETTER

The friends decide that the police wouldn't take them seriously so they agree on sending an anonymous letter telling them about what's happening. Do you think this is a good idea? Why do you think this? Imagine you are with them. Write the anonymous letter. What will you put in it to convince the police to act? How will you disguise your identity?

### 5. ALMOST CAUGHT

Pages 130-136 are filled with tension as Tim and then Joe are almost caught by the other Furlong. In small groups, choose the five most tense parts of the story at this point and freeze frame each of them. Think about what the characters must be feeling at each point and try to reflect this in their body language and facial expressions.

### 6. FRIENDS STICK TOGETHER

It's clear that the situation has become even more dangerous and Tim gives Joe the chance

to drop out, but Joe responds with: 'I'm going to pretend I never heard that. We're all in this together, and that's an end to it. All right?' Do you think this is true friendship? In small groups, think about what true friendship means and write a list of at least five things that define a true friendship.

## Part Three Catching Criminals Pages 139 – 217

### SUMMARY

After the events at Howth, all three are feeling tense. At the dinner table, Deirdre snaps at her parents for pretending that everything is fine. As a result, their parents tell them the whole truth, that not only is their father's job at risk, but they could also lose their home.

Joe knows his father is a little more subdued as a result of his poor performance at cricket and is concerned about how to deal with this. Back at the Kavanagh's, Tim is especially worried about the fact that Furlong now knows what the two boys look like!

The big day arrives. Deirdre is up early and ready for action. However, there's a spanner in the works when Joe's dad surprises him with a day off so they can spend time together. Joe tries to dissuade him, but his father is determined they'll spend the day together. There's almost a delay at the Kavanagh's, but Tim steps in. Deirdre has a strange encounter with Sadie Nolan, but manages to make her way to Howth in good time. Despite the setback of losing Joe, Tim decides to plough on with the plan regardless.

Both twins are in position and things are getting tense. Meanwhile, Joe is stuck at the cricket ground while his father talks to another man. Frustrated, Joe decides to run off and help his friends. Tim is delighted to see him and together the boys set off to Howth to meet with Deirdre.

In Howth, Deirdre can't believe her luck when she spots Wilson with the painting. For a moment, it looks as everything will be easy – until one of the Furlongs appears and captures her. She has a plan to try and get rescued, but will it be enough?

Down on the harbour, the boys are suspicious of the beggar – and their fears grow when Deirdre doesn't appear. Luckily, they realise she's being smuggled onto the boat by Furlong, but their attempt to help Deirdre means they're all captive on the boat.

Out at sea, their situation worsens – until some quick thinking means they overpower the Furlongs. Even when they're beaten, the Furlongs try one last trick, but the three friends manage to save the day without anyone getting too badly hurt.

## DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Re-read p.141.** When Tim explains what he thinks she means, Deirdre reveals that she would normally 'have resented her brother deciding what she meant.' What does this mean? Do you think you would resent someone else deciding what you mean and explaining it to others? Why might it be annoying?
- **Re-read p.144.** Joe is worried about what is going to happen so he settles down to pray – but to his dead mother. What do you think about this? Do you think this would be comforting? What do you think she might say to Joe about how to deal with his father?
- **Re-read p.151.** Deirdre thinks that Wilson would 'keep gentleman's hours' What does this phrase mean? Have you ever heard it before? What do you think of it as a phrase? What does it say about the class divide?
- **Re-read p.156.** Has the interaction between Deirdre and Sadie changed your view of Sadie? Why do you think this? Why should we always try and behave with empathy?
- **Re-read p.162.** Deirdre finds the concept of dealing with Wilson herself both satisfying and frightening. Why do you think this is? How would you feel in this situation? Have you ever had to face your fears to do something to help someone else? What happened?
- **Re-read p.166.** Joe is frustrated because his Dad 'was always highly respectful of anyone in authority'. What do you think of his father's attitude? Do you agree? Why do you think this?
- **Re-read p.171.** Joe is worried about the consequences of his actions in disobeying his father like that. Do you think he has done the right thing? Why do you think this?
- **Re-read pp.182-183.** Deirdre wakes to find herself a captive. Her instincts tell her to go on the attack. Do you think this is the right strategy? Why do you think this?
- **Re-read p.186.** Is Furlong right when he says no one would believe Deirdre? Why do you think this? Have you ever been in this situation? What happened?
- **Re-read p.200.** It's clear that Joe has a plan, but do you think it's wise to try and take on the Furlongs? They're armed and dangerous. What would you advise the three friends to do in this situation?
- **Re-read p.207.** What Deirdre does is extremely dangerous – but why do you think she jumped in after the painting? Was it sensible? What would you have done in her situation? Has something like this ever happened to you? What happened?
- **Re-read pp.210.** Deirdre's flare alerts the coastguard. But what must they have

thought when they came across the *Bailey Maid*? Imagine you're the coast guard. What are your thoughts?

- **Re-read p.213.** Tim admits to Joe that he's worried about having shot someone. Joe tells him that he had to for all their sakes. Do you think this is good advice from Joe? Why do you think Tim feels like this? What advice would you give him?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. MOTHERLY CONCERN

Despite everything, it's clear that Deirdre and Tim's ma is trying to keep everybody's spirits up, like on page 142 when she says 'why don't we leave it at that and carry on as best we can?' But how do you think she really feels? Imagine you are Mrs Kavanagh. Either create a diary entry or a vlog on your thoughts and feelings. Think about what we've seen of her so far in the novel.

### 2. TENEMENTS

With all the worry, Tim is unable to sleep and lies awake thinking about what could happen to them. On page 146, he mentions the tenement housing they could be forced to move to. But why was that such a bad thing? What do you know about the tenements? In small groups, research tenement housing in Dublin at the time. Prepare a short presentation for the rest of the class on what it was, why they were dreaded and how things were changed.

### 3. WELLBEING

As Tim struggles to sleep on page 147, he tells himself 'He had to live in the present, prepare as best he could for the future, and hope for the best.' Is this good advice? What do you do when you're worried about something? Create either a leaflet or a small video on advice on what to do in this situation. Think about everything you know about wellbeing.

### 4. GENDER ROLES

We're told on page 154 that it's unusual for Tim to offer to do the chores for his sister – even though she was up at the crack of dawn to make everyone's breakfast. Is this fair? Write a persuasive speech on why chores should be shared across genders in the home. Think about using devices like rhetorical questions, facts and statistics and emotive language.

### 5. GOOD ADVICE

As she's saddened by a memory of happier times, Deirdre reminds herself that 'life would be good again, and that this time too would pass.' There's lots of good advice like this throughout the novel. In small groups, choose at least five good pieces of advice in the novel and create either a video reel or a presentation displaying these pieces of advice. Be prepared to explain why you think these

are good lessons for life.

### 6. DEIRDRE

Deirdre is incredibly brave throughout the novel and willing to put herself in danger and awkward situations to protect those she cares about. On pages 189 and 190, even when she's in danger, she keeps her head and plots an escape. What sort of character do you think she is? Choose five adjectives to describe her personality. Find a quote or example in the novel that proves she is each of these adjectives. Write up an analysis of her character. Each paragraph should explain an element of her personality, refer to an exact quote from the book and explain exactly how this quote proves the point you're making.

### 7. FIRE ON THE HARBOUR

There's chaos on the harbour – and it must look very dangerous to an observer. Imagine you're a witness. Describe what happened. Think about the actions of everyone involved. Do Tim and Joe look like boys rescuing someone or like vandals trying to rob a fishing trawler? Either write up a description or give an interview.

### 8. DON'T SHOOT!

Somehow Tim gets hold of the gun and it looks as if things might be about to get better for the three friends, but Tim's no killer and Con Furlong knows it. Things come to a head on page 203. In small groups, examine the scene on the boat from pages 196-210. Which are the most dramatic parts? Choose your favourite five and freeze frame them. Think about each character's thoughts and feelings and how this can be shown through their facial expressions.

### 9. HELLO, JOE

Joe is worried about his father's reaction, so Chief Superintendent Leech promises to try and smooth things over for him. But how do you think Joe's father will react? In small groups, act out the scene as Joe and the policeman explain the situation to Joe's father. Remember that the policeman is someone in authority – will that make things easier for Joe?

### 10. NEWS REPORT

The solving of the crime and capturing of two notorious criminals would make a very exciting news story. Make a note of the most exciting parts – the fact the criminal was a very important person, the capturing of two notorious criminals and the fact the people who solved it were three twelve-year-olds. Plus it was very dramatic with the fire on the harbour and the shooting on the *Bailey Maid*. Write up a news report. Include interviews with the children, the police and any potential witnesses.