

**Setting**

*What Will the Weather Be?* is set in Ireland, in the region of the British Isles. Encourage students to locate Ireland on a world map, if you have one.

Ireland is an island that lies to the west of Great Britain. The island is divided into two parts: the Republic of Ireland or just “Ireland”, which is its own country, and Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom.

The flag of the Republic of Ireland can be seen on **page 11**.

You can ask students to find other objects in the story that have the same combination of colours as the Irish flag.

- Green and orange balls of wool (**pages 2, 4, 15**)
- A green and orange kite (**title page** and **page 9**)

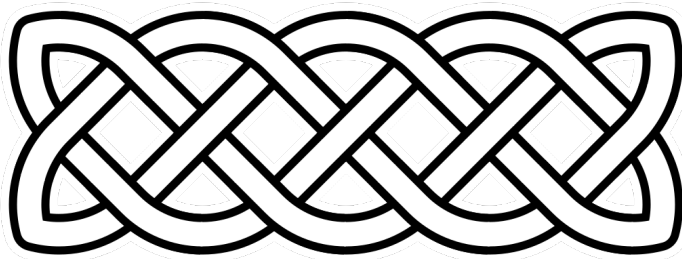


Although the book is primarily set inside a house, the characters imagine outdoor Irish scenes. The cliffs on **page 3** are inspired by the Cliffs of Moher in the Republic of Ireland, on the western coast of the island. At their highest point, they are 214 metres (the height of a very tall skyscraper building) above the ocean. They are 8 kilometres (about 20 laps of a sports oval) long. They are recognised by UNESCO, and are a popular tourist destination.

The castle on **pages 11-12** is inspired by the Rock of Cashel, also known as “Cashel of the Kings” and “Saint Patrick’s Rock”, in the county (administrative division) of Tipperary. There are a number of legends connecting Saint Patrick to the castle. It was an important site for the kings of Munster from the 4<sup>th</sup> century, although most of the castle that remains today was built in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. It contains both Celtic art and medieval architecture.

The house in the story is inspired by Irish thatched cottages, which vary from region to region based on what building materials are nearby. Walls can be made from stone (as in the book), mud, or turf. Floors could be mud, clay, or flag stones (as in the book). The thatch of the roof (seen best on **pages 4-5** and **16**) could be made from straw, heather, rushes, grasses, or flax.

The house contains a number of references to Irish culture. Celtic knots inspire the patterns on the white and blue dish next to the television (**page 2**) and the wall hanging (**pages 5, 10, 13**). Celtic knots are a traditional form of Irish art used for decoration of various objects. A famous historical example is the illustrations of the Book of Kells. Today, Celtic knots are used in a variety of ways, including in jewellery and home decoration. Most Celtic knots are made from a single unbroken line, called an “endless knot”. Some students may enjoy the challenge of tracing a Celtic knot with their finger (it does not matter where they start!).



**Page 16** also features an image of a four-leaf clover, considered to be lucky in Irish folklore, and a book by an Irish author, Oscar Wilde.

## Characters

The main animals in the story are based on species of shrew, pine marten, and badger found in Ireland. Depending on where you are in the world, your students may have seen other species of these animals before. What makes the animals in the story different from those they have seen? Consider the size of the animal, colour, markings, ears (size, shape), tail (size, shape, position, thickness), legs (length, width), feet (size, number of toes), etc.



*Eurasian pygmy shrew*



*European pine marten*

(Vince Smith, [CC BY 2.0](#), cropped)



*European badger*

Birds appear as minor characters in the story:

- Wrens (**page 2**) are found throughout Ireland.
- Puffins (**page 3**) are found in coastal areas—like the Cliffs of Moher—and on small islands.

Take care when reading “Weather Wren”—the “w” in “weather” is pronounced, but the “w” in “wren” is silent.

## Story

Weather is a common topic of discussion in daily life. It is also something that children experience and can understand from a young age. Depending on where you are in the world, the weather may not change much from day to day and so your students may or may not have experienced changing their plans based on the weather, as the animals do in the story. You can discuss students’ experiences of weather with questions such as:

- What is the weather like today?
- What other kinds of weather do we have here?  
(e.g., sunshine, rain, wind, snow, heat, cold, storms, frost)
- Do you have a favourite kind of weather?
- What activities do you like to do when it is:
  - sunny?
  - windy?
  - rainy?

On **page 2**, Shrew watches a news-report on television to find out what the weather forecast is. You can ask students how their family finds out information about the weather (e.g., television, newspaper, phone app, internet search, etc.). While meteorology (the study of weather) is very advanced and largely accurate, it is always a *prediction* of *future* conditions based on current conditions. It can never be 100% certain, as Shrew says on **page 13**. This gives us the opportunity to talk about *chance*.


**Mathematical language and concepts**

The concept of chance is very difficult for young children to grasp. For the first few primary years, our description of chance is language-based and relies on real world experience. Students for whom English is a second language may find the work more challenging, as they will not have had the same exposure to the words in everyday conversation.

At this level, we usually think of chance in three categories:

- will happen/certain to happen
- might happen/possible to happen
- will not happen/impossible to happen.

In the “might happen” category, “might”, “maybe”, “possible”, and “could” are the most general terms and should be the focus at this level. However, this category actually covers the entire range of events between “impossible” and “certain”. Within this broad range, some events are more likely than others. We have included language in the book which conveys this (see the table below), because students may have heard these words in daily life, and it does not hurt for them to see them written down and used in context. It is not yet essential for students to understand what is more or less likely. For now, they can identify all of these words as belonging to the category of “might” happen.

	Category	Words	Examples
	will happen	will always happen, will happen, definitely will happen, sure, certain	<i>I am certain the sun will rise tomorrow morning.</i>
	might happen	not every time, likely, more likely, probably will	<i>It is likely that I will play outside at lunch today.</i>
		might, maybe, possible, could	<i>I might visit a friend this weekend.</i>
		might not, less likely, unlikely, probably will not	<i>We will probably not cancel maths class next week.</i>
	will not happen	will never happen, will not happen, impossible	<i>It is impossible that we will ride horses in maths class tomorrow.</i>
least likely			

Any examples discussed may produce different answers between students. This may be due to the students’ experiences (e.g., some students might prefer to go to the library at lunchtime, etc.). Otherwise, differences in answers are likely to be due to differences in students’ *reasoning*. For example, some students may think it is impossible that they will ride horses in maths class tomorrow, because it has never happened before. Others may recognise that even though it has never happened before, it *could* happen, and so it *might* still happen tomorrow.

Very few events in our experience are completely certain. The characters discuss this idea on **pages 13-16**. In these early years we need to be mindful to keep a balance between correcting students, while not making them upset or scared. There are many events in students’ daily lives that appear certain to them because they happen every day. However, as adults we recognise that these events are not actually certain. For example, a student may say that “it is certain my mum will pick me up today”. This is not strictly certain to occur, but we may do more harm than good by pointing this out.

**For students requiring extension**

These students may be ready to think about comparing the chance of different events to identify what is *more or less* likely.

Shrew describes tomorrow's weather using the following statements:

- "It is likely to rain tomorrow." (**page 2**)
- "It is less likely to rain in the afternoon." (**page 6**)
- "It is more likely to be windy in the afternoon." (**page 8**)
- "It is possible it will rain *and* be windy." (**page 10**)

You can ask your students questions such as:

- When is it *more likely* to rain tomorrow: in the morning or in the afternoon?  
(morning—on **page 6** Shrew means, "it is less likely to rain in the afternoon *than in the morning*")
- What is *less likely* to happen in the afternoon: rain or wind?  
(rain)
- Do you think it is *more likely* to be windy, or to rain *and* be windy in the afternoon?  
(be windy—the latter is only "possible")

These students may also be able to understand more of the subtleties of the conversations between the animals:

- On **page 3**, Pine Marten says "It *always* rains when I want to play outside", but on **page 4** Shrew says "That's not true. It doesn't rain *every* time."  
Ask your students: Was Pine Marten lying? Why do you think he said what he did?  
(e.g., Pine Marten was probably exaggerating because he was sad and disappointed that he wouldn't be able to go to the cliffs tomorrow. He might have remembered some other important times when it rained when he wanted to play outside, and that made him *feel like* it always happens this way.)
- On **page 4**, Shrew tells Pine Marten, "You are simply *never* happy about the weather!".  
Ask your students: Do you think this is true, or is Shrew exaggerating?  
(e.g., Shrew is probably exaggerating because Pine Marten is probably happy when it is sunny and he can play outside. Shrew probably means that Pine Marten is always unhappy when he can't play outside because of the weather.)
- On **pages 14-15**, Shrew says she will *definitely* sleep tonight.  
Ask your students: Do you think Shrew can be certain about this? (not completely)  
What are some reasons that she might not sleep tonight?  
(e.g., she might find it hard to fall asleep, someone could snore and keep her awake, there could be a storm that keeps her awake because it is loud or because she is scared of it)

You can also challenge these students to identify the key word Badger and Pine Marten use to talk about the different possible activities. ("could", **pages 7, 10, 11, 12**)