

IRISH CULTURAL SOCIETY WRITING CONTEST HELPFUL HINTS

Thank you for entering our contest. We hope that you have fun noticing how the accumulated details of our lives can tell a stranger a good deal about us. We are certainly more complex than what we hang on our walls, put on our shelves, or listen to on our I-Pods. But nonetheless, some important part of us is revealed by what we keep and choose to display.

The article we include with the contest materials and repeat on this web site, *The Meaning of Irishness* by George E. Ryan, should be the model of your essay. Read the essay carefully and make note of Mr. Ryan's choice of details which show his Irishness. Notice the magazine to which he subscribes, the books on his bookshelves, the music albums he has kept. Notice the names of people and even dogs. Pay attention to choices in home furnishings: the crystal, the door knocker, the wall hangings, and even his favorite colors.

Of course, Mr. Ryan's life is not your life. You may want to write about heritage, but you may choose to write about any of your passions. The soccer player's cleats and autographed balls; the dancer's tap shoes and signed programs; and the chess player's half-finished game and biography of Bobby Fisher are all suggestive of a part of who the writer is. Make authenticity your first writing choice and then be a keen observer of the details of your surroundings.

Style, of course, is very important. Mr. Ryan injected humor, always welcome to a reader, in his essay (last paragraph: "looks *foine*— er, fine, just fine.") Be playful with your material and language; do not hesitate to exaggerate. Entertain your reader!

A few suggestion on what not to do: Don't use the "you" approach, where "you" is an anonymous visitor. (Ryan uses *I, me, my*.) Don't make the essay a "CSI" investigation— "Guess what my heritage is." (Ryan tells us his identity in the first sentence.)

We have given you a model to work from, but what we want from each entrant is a fresh essay which is enriched by the diversity of heritages and interests which make the schools in Nassau County places of excitement and creativity.

Perhaps some of Mr. Ryan's references are unfamiliar to you. *Aer Lingus* is the airline of Ireland; *Gaelic* is Ireland's native language; *Sean O Riada* is an Irish folk singer; *Celtic* refers to the Celts, early settlers of Ireland; *Galway* and *Cobh* are ports from which many Irish immigrants left to go to America; the *River Liffey* flows through Ireland's capital city, Dublin; *St. Fiacre* was a holy man born in Ireland who served as a priest in France in the 7th century; *George Bernard Shaw* is one of Ireland's greatest writers; *Waterford* and *Belleek* are expensive Irish crystal and china; *foine* is Mr. Ryan's attempt to imitate the word *fine* as it might be said by a person with an Irish *brogue* (accent).

Any questions? Address them to webmaster@irish-society.org.

John Walsh
Contest Chair