

# Maybe Stella

Author: Brigid Feehan

## Synopsis

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Stella Doyle misses her big sister Penny and her young nephew Jamie. They are in Ireland for the year living with Penny's Aunt Maeve, so that Penny can learn more about her late father's family. When Penny fractures her shoulder she is unable to look after for her young son. Maeve, in the early stages of motor neuron disease, is unable help. Stella convinces her parents to send her to the rescue. She can't believe her luck, one month in Ireland! What an adventure.

When Stella arrives in Ireland she is incredibly happy to be reunited with her sister and nephew. Although quiet Aunt Maeve seems nice. The only thing taking the shine off Stella's visit is Tommy, a friend of Penny's. Tommy is a real chatterbox, funny and dramatic. And he is always there. Stella finds Tommy's constant presence a source of irritation.

Penny tries to fill up Stella's trip with fun visits to relatives and different experiences. They go and visit Uncle Jim and Aunt Claire in the country and this is where Stella begins to get to know Tommy better. The pair are out hiking when Tommy injures his ankle and they are forced to spend the night in an abandoned youth hostel. After this adventure Stella changes her mind about the young Irishman. In fact, she decides that Tommy would make a perfect boyfriend for her sister. But Penny isn't interested. Stella believes that the problem is that Tommy is too available. He's always around and Penny takes him for granted. So she comes up with a plan that sees Tommy becomes mysterious and aloof. This, Stella believes, is bound to ignite Penny's interest.

Meanwhile Dan comes on the scene, and to Stella dismay Penny seems to be attracted to him. She must try harder to match Penny with Tommy – they'd be perfect together. But Stella has not considered that her actions might have consequences. When Penny learns about her meddling she is furious and Stella worries that her interference into her sister's love life might have the opposite effect to what she intended.

## Text Type

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*Maybe Stella* is the sequel to New Zealand author Brigid Feehan's award winning novel *Stella Star*. This funny, fast-paced novel will appeal particularly to girls.

Told in 1<sup>st</sup> person point of view the narrator of the story is Stella Doyle, a typical young person who has to deal with school, friends and parents. Stella is an aspiring writer and she uses all of her powers of persuasion to convince her parents that she should be the one to travel to Ireland to look after Jamie.

Stella uses her overseas trip as an opportunity and becomes a reporter for the school's newspaper.

Throughout the story the reader learns about Stella's thoughts and feelings regarding her experiences. Her natural enthusiasm and humour make her a hugely likeable protagonist. She is determined to help her sister find true love and even though her meddling backfires her intentions are good.

A challenge Stella faces is accepting that her sister has relatives that are not related to *her* as well. Penny's father was Stella's mother's first husband Sean. He died when Penny was young and Penny never had the chance to learn about her Irish heritage and meet her father's family until now. Stella feels excluded from this part of Penny's life and also feels the need to stick up for her own father, who raised Penny. As the story progresses Stella learns that she is still important to her sister and that her position in Penny's life is not under threat.

In *Maybe Stella* Feehan examines relationships within families, between sisters and between men and women. Stella learns it is not wise to meddle in other people's affairs and that love can't be forced, it must be allowed to take its own course.

## Sharing the Novel

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***The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 7-26), Chapters 3-9 (pp. 27-100) and Chapters 10-Epilogue (pp. 101-186).***

***During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and ideas presented in the novel. Have them make inferences and predictions about what will happen next in the story. Students should discuss the effect of the first person narrative and track the development of the main character Stella, explaining how she changes as the story progresses. Have students identify the main themes in the story and how they are developed by the author. Wherever possible have students relate Stella's adventures to their own experiences and discuss her relationships with other characters.***

## Introducing the Novel

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Have students study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- Who is the main character in the story? What do we learn about her from the blurb?
- Why is the section at the top of the blurb in a different colour and font to the rest of the blurb?
- Who is Penny? What is her relationship to the narrator of the story?
- What advice does the main character give the man that she is talking to about how to impress Penny? What do you think about her plan?

What do you think the consequences of the main character's actions might be?

**Teacher reads Chapters 1 and 2 (p. 7-26) aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.**

### **Comprehension Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 7-26)**

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- Where are Penny and Jamie? Who are they staying with? What has happened to Penny?
- Who is Penny's father? What is Stella's relationship to Penny?
- Why does Stella feel a bit funny talking to Aunt Maeve?
- Why can't Maeve help look after Jamie?
- What good news does Stella's mum learn from Maeve on the phone? What is the bad news?
- What brilliant solution does Stella come up with to solve Penny's problem? What does she see as the main obstacle to her plan?
- How does Stella's mum initially react when Stella outlines her plan? Why does her mother apologise to her before she goes to bed?
- How does Stella know that her father is on her side?
- Who does Stella walk to school with? Why does she decide to confide in him?
- Who is Niko?
- Who comes over for dinner? Why do Stella's parents invite them?
- What does Stella mean when she says "Fleur was more like a normal person than a Principal"?
- What does Stella learn about Fleur and Ben after dinner? What arrangement do Stella's parents make with the couple?

### **Discussion**

- Have you ever been overseas? What was the plane ride like? Where did you go? What was the most exciting thing that you did in the country(s) that you visited? Have you ever been to Ireland? What do you know about this country?
- What do we learn about Stella in the first two chapters? How does she manage to convince her parents that she should go to Ireland? What does the fact that she can formulate such a convincing argument suggest about her character? What is the effect of the story being told in first person point of view?
- Formulate 3 questions that you would like answered about the story.

**Students read Chapters 3-9 (pp. 27-100) independently before the next shared session.**

### **Comprehension Chapters 3-9 (pp. 27-100)**

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- How does Stella prepare for her trip to Ireland? How does Penny react when Stella tells her she is coming? Why does the editor of the paper approach Stella?
- Why does Stella feel sorry for her mother and impatient with her?
- What does Stella do when she finally boards the plane? Why do you think she does this? How does she feel when she arrives at Heathrow airport? Why is Stella so glad that Fleur is with her? How does she feel when Fleur says goodbye?
- Who does Stella meet on the plane from London to Dublin? What does she do? Where does she invite Penny and Stella?
- What is Stella's first impression of Dublin?
- Describe Penny's reunion with Stella? Who is looking after Jamie? Why is Stella relieved that Penny doesn't have a boyfriend?
- How does Penny describe Maeve?
- Describe Tommy. What is Stella's first impression of him?
- What does Jamie call Stella?
- Why is Stella relieved when she finally meets Maeve?
- What does Tommy plan for Stella's first proper night in Dublin? What is craic? Stella has fun initially but what happens to spoil the night for her?
- What do Stella's duties include?
- Why doesn't Stella enjoy her days while everyone else is out? Why doesn't she tell Penny the truth about what she has been doing?
- Why do Penny, Stella, Tommy and Jamie travel to County Clare? What does Stella enjoy the most about the journey? What does she notice about Tommy when she eavesdrops on his conversation with Penny?
- Describe Jim and Claire. How does Stella feel when Penny and Claire look through photos of Kathleen and her first husband Sean? Why does she feel the need to praise her own father? What does Penny do that suggests she understands Stella's feelings?
- What story does Claire tell everyone about the family who lived down the lane? Why is Stella sceptical about this tale?
- What scenic area do Stella and Tommy visit? Why don't Penny and Jamie go with them? Why does Stella find the landscape so magical?
- What does Tommy mean when he tells Stella that you "can't always have thing black and white"?
- How does Tommy get hurt? What do they decide to do about their situation?
- Why is Stella so disappointed when she reaches the youth hostel? How does Tommy get into the premises? Why aren't they able to call for help? How does Stella feel when she realises that they are stuck in the middle of nowhere? How does Tommy try and make her feel better?

### Discussion

- Describe Stella's relationship with Penny.
- Penny is a young mother raising a baby without any support from the father. What challenges do young single mothers face?

- Describe Penny's relationship with Tommy. What does Penny like about him? What evidence is there to suggest that Tommy views Penny as more than just a friend?
- Why is it so important to get to know your family and your heritage?
- How does Stella feel about her sister having relatives that aren't *her* relatives? Are her feelings understandable? Why/why not?
- What is your opinion about the banshee story? Have you heard any strange stories or urban legends? If so, describe one of them. Why do you think stories like these are so popular?
- Predict what is going to happen next in the story.

**Students read Chapters 10-Epilogue (pp. 101-186) independently before the next shared session.**

## **Comprehension Chapters 10-Epilogue (pp. 101-186)**

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- Why is Stella so impressed with Tommy's survival skills? Why does Stella find the hostel so spooky when night falls?
- What does Stella learn about Tommy's relationship with Penny when she starts asking him questions? Why do you think she is disappointed when she finds out that they aren't boyfriend and girlfriend? Is Penny wise not to enter into a relationship with Tommy? Why/why not?
- What does Stella see when she looks at the window? Why is Tommy so confused when he returns from looking outside? How does he allay Stella's fears?
- Who turns up in the morning to rescue Stella and Tommy? Why does Stella decide to drive back to the farm with Tommy instead of Jim? Outline Stella's plan for helping Tommy convince Penny to go out with him. What could potentially go wrong with this plan?
- Describe Stella and Tommy's homecoming. How does Claire react when Stella mentions the travellers in the woods? Why do you think she reacts like this?
- Who is Mary Ryan? What does Mary say to Stella before she leaves?
- Why doesn't Stella enjoy the car ride back to Dublin? Why does she feel indispensable when they all finally arrive home?
- Who does Stella accidentally start talking to about her plan? Why does he find the conversation so amusing?
- What explanation does Maeve come up with for the ghost story? Why does it make sense to Stella?
- What makes Stella think that Maeve knows she hasn't been sightseeing? Where do they go together?
- What advice does Stella give Tommy when she talks to him on the phone?
- Where does Penny suggest that she and Stella go for the weekend? Why does Stella tell her that Tommy is away? Does Stella's plan seem to be working? Why/why not?

- How does Theresa greet Penny and Stella? Describe the B&B. Who is Dan? Why is Theresa so eager for the girls to meet him?
- Who do Stella and Penny socialise with after dinner? What is Stella's initial impression of Dan? Why does she soon change her mind about him? Why does Stella feel so excluded by Penny and Dan?
- Where does Theresa suggest that everyone go on Sunday? What ghost stories does she tell her guests about the place? Why does Stella find the stories so spooky?
- How does Stella try and put Dan off Penny when he asks if they can meet up in Dublin?
- Why do Stella and Penny argue? Is Penny angry at her sister justified? Why/why not? How does Stella know that her sister is no longer angry with her in the morning?
- Why isn't Stella able to get in contact with Tommy to warn him that Penny knows about the plan?
- How does talking with Maeve make Stella feel better about the situation that she has created? Why does Maeve get impatient with Stella at the end of their conversation?
- Why does Stella believe that she has achieved "hyper-cool Euro-traveller" status in the last week of her trip?
- How does Tommy react when Stella tells him about her argument with Penny? How does Stella feel when she realises how upset Tommy is?
- Who turns up unexpectedly while Stella is mulling over her problems? What news does she give Stella? What is the significance of the face that Stella saw in the window of the youth hostel? Why does she become angry when she learns that everyone was trying to stop her from having her own banshee experience?
- How does Penny react when Stella tells her that both Dan and Tommy have called? Why does she feel sorry for Tommy?
- Why does Stella feel like she is leaving everything in Ireland unfinished?
- How does Stella feel when Tommy finally calls?
- Where does Stella's farewell dinner take place? Why does Tommy look so dishevelled when he turns up? Why is Stella so interested in Dan's reaction towards Tommy? What does she notice when they are introduced?
- Why is Stella so happy when she watches Tommy and Penny walking off down the street together? What do we learn about Penny and Tommy's relationship in the epilogue?

### Discussion

- Describe Stella. How does her character develop and change as the novel progresses? What do you think she learns from her adventures in Ireland?
- At what point in the story do Stella's feelings about Tommy change? What do you think it is about Tommy that Stella likes?
- Do you believe that Stella had a small part in getting Penny and Tommy together? Explain your answer.

- Why are relationships so important in this story? Choose an important relationship developed by the author in the story and explain why it is important.
- Identify a main theme in the novel and explain why it is important.
- Explain why a major conflict in the story occurs and how it is resolved.

## Activities

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**Plot** – Complete a flow diagram that details the important events that happen in the story in the order that they occur.

**Research** – Complete a research assignment on interesting tourist attractions in Ireland. Formulate focussing questions to guide your research. Use a range of written, oral and visual resources to gather your information. Present your information in an attractively designed brochure.

**Writing** – Imagine that you are Tommy and need advice about your relationship with Penny. Write a letter to an advice column describing your feelings for Penny and asking for help on how to deal with them. Now write the columnist's reply.

**Writing** – Write a feature article about Stella's experiences in Ireland suitable for publication in a school newspaper.

**Book Review** – Complete a book review for *Maybe Stella*. Include a brief plot summary, comment on the setting, explain the characters and discuss the main themes. Remember to include your personal opinion about the book.

**Character** – Describe Stella's actions and behaviour in a particular situation that occurs in the story. Justify or criticise her motives in this situation.

**Poem** – Write a love poem by Tommy for Penny.

**Questions** – Write 10 discussion questions for the novel.

**Static Image** – Design a static image that depicts one of the important themes presented in the story. You may wish to do a collage, use the computer or design a poster. Use words and images from the story to convey your idea.

**Character** – Complete a profile for a main character in the story. Include information about their attributes, important decisions that they make and how they develop and change as the story develops. Include 5 important quotes from the novel that back up your ideas.

*Notes written by Vicki Williams*