

"A unique and wonderful picture of adolescence from a fresh new voice."
— EMIL OSTROVSKI,
The Paradox of Vertical Flight



THE
CARNIVAL
AT
BRAY

A NOVEL

JESSIE ANN FOLEY

STUDY GUIDE

Thanks for reading and studying the novel. The below prompts, questions and activities can be used in any order and we encourage instructors to adapt and make them their own.

Study Guide TOC

- Activity: Writing Prompt, a new place, pre-reading exercise
- Activity: Judging a Book by its Cover, pre-reading exercise
- Activity: Characters, make a character web for Maggie
- Activity: Revision, compare and contrast chapter drafts
- Activity: Research, Irish and Irish American culture
- Activity: Discuss, poetry in the novel
- Activity: Writing Prompt, response to music in the novel
- Activity: Character Change, examine character development
- Activity: Group Breakout Discussion, Questions and Topics for Discussion
- Activity: Writing Prompt, fictional letter

WRITING PROMPT: A NEW PLACE

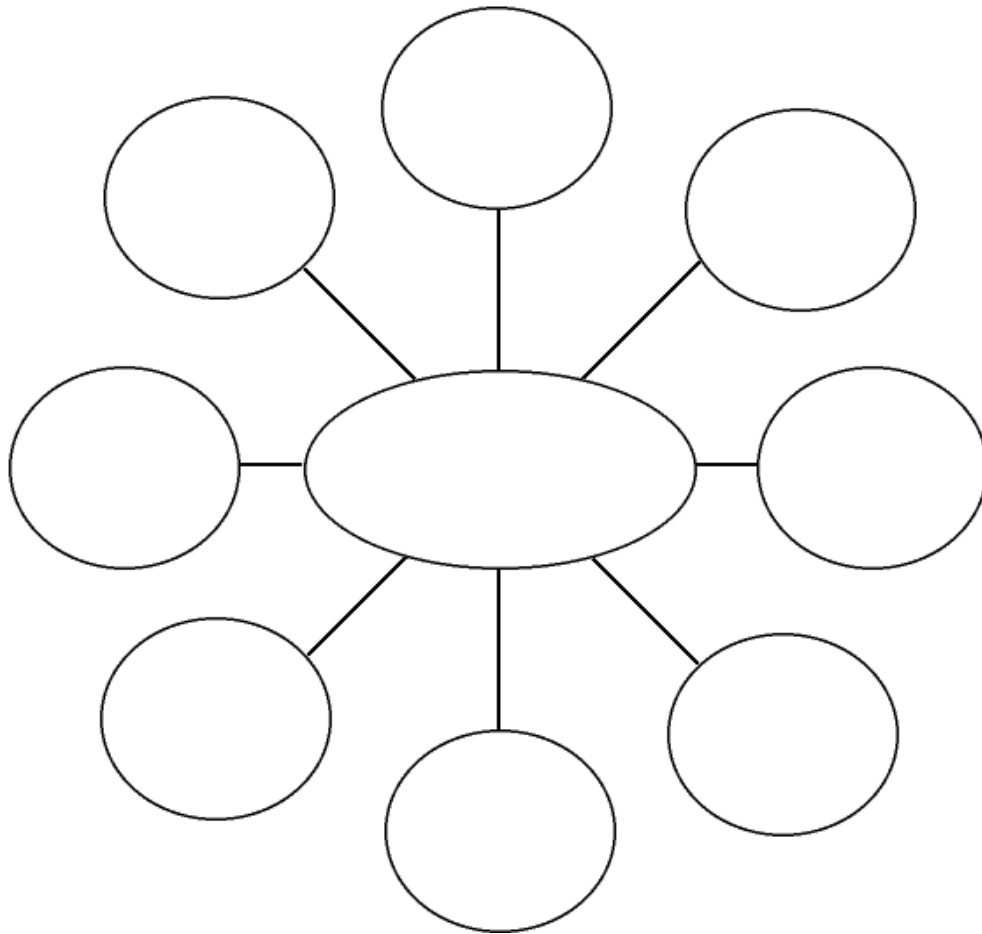
Think of a time you were new to a place, whether it was a big move to a different town, the first time you visited a friend's house, or any situation where your surroundings were different than anything you'd experienced before. Free write for five minutes about that experience. How did the place look, sound, or smell? What were you feeling and thinking? What was unfamiliar and what was similar?

ACTIVITY: JUDGING A BOOK BY ITS COVER

Before you begin reading, examine the cover of *The Carnival at Bray*. Keep in mind cover decisions are deliberate, and a collaboration between a designer, publisher, and author. From viewing the front cover, what do you assume the tone of the book will be? Where do you think the story takes place? Can you assume anything else about the book from the cover? Read the description on the back of the book. What are you curious to read more about? What conflicts do you think the book will address? Jot your thoughts down in a journal so you can revisit them when you finish reading *The Carnival at Bray*.

ACTIVITY: CHARACTERS

After reading the first chapter of the novel, create a character web like the one below for Maggie. Fill in the bubbles with as much detail as possible about her life, her motivations, her likes and dislikes, her relationships with other characters, etc. Cite page numbers and specific passages to support your conclusions. Add to this web as you continue to read the novel. Continue to make webs for other characters as they are introduced.



ACTIVITY: REVISION

Compare and contrast the following drafts of the first chapter of *The Carnival at Bray*. We have provided the draft Foley first submitted for publication, and the final draft after three months of revision. As you read, pay attention to setting, pacing, perspective, and point of view. Highlight areas where the author made changes. (The published draft is 637 words shorter than the original.)

SUBMITTED DRAFT

CHAPTER ONE

The carnival at Bray, hastily built for the short months of summer, stood on a rocky coastline in a maze of rickety gaming booths and creaking rides. It was separated from the rest of the town by a strip of asphalt road, and that separation somehow made it look lonelier, the

pink and green lights of the old-fashioned Ferris wheel winking and dissolving in the reflection of the sea while the town remained steady, dim, and watchful. Maggie had already ridden the Takeoff, which made her feel like a pebble being skipped across a lake; the Crazy Frog, which whiplashed her back and forth so hard that she dinged her head off the safety bar and emerged with a painful purple egg already rising from her temple, and finally, Space Odyssey, which spun around so fast that gravity suctioned her and Ronnie to the cushioned wall like splattered bugs. Another girl who was pinioned across from them barfed, but the suction was so strong that the puke no sooner arced from the girl's mouth than it was sucked back with a wet *splat* all over her own face. The ride ended abruptly, dropping everyone unceremoniously to the ground, and they fled the sour smell of peanuty vomit on wobbly legs.

Earlier that evening, after they'd eaten cheeseburgers at a seaside chipper, Colm had paid the woman at the counter while Maggie's mother pressed a handful of money into her palm and told her to take Ronnie to the carnival.

"We just want a little honeymoon time," Laura had explained, gazing at her new husband's back and smiling so widely Maggie could see her missing molar. "We'll pick you up when it closes." Then she added, with her trademark brand of desperate optimism, "It'll be fun! A girls' night out, just you and your sis!"

Maggie had discovered that "honeymoon time" was just a sugary way of saying that her mother and Colm were doing it every chance they got, so she didn't bother pointing out that every night for that past three weeks had been a "girls night out", since the only people Maggie and Ronnie knew in the whole country were each other.

The announcement that, after a four month courtship, her mother was marrying Colm and they were all moving to Ireland wasn't really all that surprising. Since the day nine years earlier when their father had walked out on them for a woman known in their house only as "Bitch", Maggie's mom had drifted from romance to romance, each one a whirlwind, and each one ending in disaster. It was easy for Laura Lynch to meet men—she was only 33, had high, round breasts and green eyes fringed in long, mascara-tarred lashes, and she spoke in a gentle, low voice that men leaned in to hear. She wasn't unintelligent, but she was unimaginative; she had always let circumstances dictate her social life. She'd started dating their father, she claimed, solely because he lived down the block from her and neither one of them owned a car. When he had moved to Wisconsin to be with Bitch, she got an afternoon bartending job at Oinker's, a divey little tavern on Elston Avenue that for years had been a butcher shop: the floor of the beer cooler was still covered with the gelatinous black stains of pig's blood. The job at Oinker's was a convenient set-up for Laura: when her shift ended, she just relocated to the other side of the bar, and those nights at Oinker's became the sole make-up of her social life. Accordingly, it was the only place she met her suitors. The first of these was Terry, a real-estate agent who would walk around their apartment shouting into the cordless phone, crop-dusting the air with silent, sulfurous farts. Then came Ned, who "accidentally" walked into Maggie and Ronnie's bedroom naked, and finally Stan, the contractor who, on the night he admitted he was "not technically divorced", managed to steal a pair of cubic zirconia earrings and Ronnie's entire Beanie Baby collection before sneaking off in the middle of the night.

But despite all the disappointment, Maggie's mother had managed to remain a romantic, and she always bounced back with remarkable hopefulness, though this hopefulness was often bracketed by long periods of despair, lubricated by boxed red wine. In these times Maggie and

Ronnie hunkered down at their grandmother, Eileen's, who lived right upstairs from them in a two-flat building on Troy Avenue. Nanny Ei was a chain smoker whose kitchen walls shone with yellowy grease, a result of decades of daily breakfast fry-ups. Yet she had a sort of squalid dignity about her; her apartment was covered in a snowscape of beige doilies and her living room rug, though rust-colored and old, was always scored with fresh vacuum cleaner marks. Nanny Ei was assiduous about dumping out her ashtrays, and, most importantly, she was kind to her granddaughters. She felt sorry for them. But it always seemed that just when Maggie and Ronnie were getting used to sleeping through the sunrise that poured into Nanny Ei's front room each morning, where they roosted on the lumpy pullout couch, their mother would get her act together, the clouds of her depression would clear, and she would come to take her girls back downstairs, lecturing them that they must always remember that no woman needs a man to make her life complete.

It was the day after one such lecture that she met Colm. Soon enough, the feminist rants were replaced by comments like, "Girls, when you know, you *know*." Maggie wanted to ask if she'd *known* with their dad, too, or Terry, Ned, or Stan, but her mother's happiness was so acute that she'd feel like a bad sport poking holes in it. And though Maggie was wary as ever, advising Ronnie to lock up what remained of her decimated stuffed animal collection the first time Colm had come over for dinner, she had to admit that of all her mother's boyfriends, he was certainly the best looking. He was a roofer—he'd been replacing the gutters at Oinker's when he'd met Laura—and his skin was weathered and tan, with sinewy veins snaking up his Frisbee-sized hands. His black hair was so thick that it jutted from his forehead like the brim of a baseball cap, and his eyes were a mesmerizing, oceanic blue. The fact that Colm was Irish solidified their mother's infatuation, since Laura's father's father had grown up in a little white

stucco house at the end of a gravel road lined with tall ferns in Ardfert, County Kerry. When Laura sat down to deliver the news to her surprised daughters, she showed them an old photo of this ancestral house and explained to them that, given their ethnic backgrounds, they shouldn't feel like they were moving to a foreign country, but instead, like they were finally coming home. She kept calling Ireland "The Motherland" or "The Olde Sod", and she often brought up her grandfather, who had died decades before the girls were born.

"If Gramps knew I was bringing you back to The Motherland to live," she told them one afternoon, "by God, would that make him happy."

Colm, for his part, was crazy about their mother; he followed her around like a panting terrier, and words like "fate" and "destiny" were joyously lobbed back and forth between the two of them. Laura was so happy that she once even called Bitch by her real name, which, Maggie learned, was Lucille.

They moved into Colm's clean little home in Bray, a damp, briny place a half hour outside Dublin. The town stood on the edge of the Irish Sea, which was gray, lapping, and horizonless, and reminded Maggie of Lake Michigan in March. They'd been there for three weeks now, and since school wasn't starting until mid-September, she and Ronnie had little to do but wander the uneven, hilly streets, kicking at moss and trailing their hands along the rough white walls that stood at the edges of front lawns. There weren't any street signs, and most houses didn't even have address numbers, but the girls found their way around fairly quickly. It was just like Chicago, Colm told them: if you wanted to know what direction you were going, just remember that the water is always to the east. But on the Northwest Side of Chicago, you had to ride the eastbound bus for over fifty blocks before you began to smell the water; here, the

sea was pervasive. On sunny days it glinted from the crests of hills or between the walls of buildings, and at night, while she lay in bed, its restless sighing brought Maggie a comfort that she couldn't quite name. Even her clothes and hair began to take on its fishy, expansive smell, but eventually, and sooner than she expected, she stopped noticing, the way a woman stops noticing the scent of her own perfume.

The egg on Maggie's forehead was beginning to throb, but she agreed to ride the bumper cars because if she refused, the staccatoed incantations of Ronnie's please-please-please-please-pleases might give her a worse headache than the ride itself. Besides, they had at least another hour before Laura and Colm came to get them.

The rink was mostly empty, with cars pointing every which way so that they reminded Maggie of one of those Hollywood blockbusters where a horrendous disease has caused a whole city to flee, abandoning their cars in the middle of the highway. The few other kids waiting with their ticket tokens were Ronnie's age—no more than nine or ten. At fifteen, Maggie was by far the oldest person in line. Earlier, they'd passed a group of Irish teenagers, boys and girls of about Maggie's age—perhaps her future classmates at St. Brigid's. Their faces were familiar, just like faces she'd seen a million times back home, but despite all her mother's talk of the Olde Sod and the photo of the little stucco house with the tall ferns, they looked foreign to her. The boys were dressed in tracksuits and gym shoe brands she'd never heard of, and the girls wore tights with their skirts and heavy gold necklaces. Maggie had been fascinated and she'd longed to talk to them, but not one of them had even glanced in her direction.

Ronnie chose a shiny yellow bumper car, while Maggie picked pale blue. The ride operator turned a switch, and the electric current beneath her car hummed to life. Before she could even press the accelerator, a jug-eared boy who could barely see above his dashboard accidentally reversed into her at full speed. Her head whipped back on impact, her eyes caught an image of cloudy sky, and then she saw white, drifting stars. The egg on her temple roared. Gingerly, and trying to move her head as little as possible, she steered meekly over to the rubber edge of the ring and stayed put while Ronnie and the other kids flew past, yelling, laughing, crashing.

By the time the ride operator switched off the power and Maggie had moved unsteadily across the track to find her sister, Ronnie had befriended all the other kids from the bumper cars, even the jug-eared boy who had crashed into her. One little girl was unfurling sheets of pink cotton candy and handing them out to the others. Maggie watched as she handed Ronnie a long piece, and Ronnie took it and folded it up into squares, like origami, and then shoved the entire parcel into her mouth. The other kids laughed, and some of them began folding up their pieces, too. When Ronnie saw her, she waved.

“Hey!” She called, her mouth full, “we’re going to back to Space Odyssey! Come on!”

Maggie ached to make friends, to have other kids to talk to. But what was the point? What if the teenagers, the girls in the lipstick and jean skirts, saw her walk by with this group of ten-year-olds?

So she waved her sister away.

“Nah,” she lied, “I’m just gonna go meet some people at the Ferris wheel. I’ll see you when Mom gets here.” Ronnie looked at her across the wet pavement and the ringing lights of

the booths—Dart a Card, Smash a Can, Roll a Coin—as if she was trying to figure something out. Finally she shrugged, and ran to catch up with the other kids.

The drizzle had quickened into a decisive, heavy rain, and the clouds over the sea rolled by, their dark shapes blackening the whole of the sky. Maggie stood alone, watching fat raindrops poke holes into the choppy gray surface of the Irish Sea. When they'd first arrived in Bray, Colm had told them, if you want to be a true Irishwoman, you've got to become an expert on water. Salty water and clear water, thick rain and misty rain, downpours and trickles, thundery rain and soft rain. She looked out at the sea. Colm had explained the difference between a sea and an ocean, but now she could not remember what it was and her head hurt too much to think about it very hard. She reached up and gingerly ran her fingers over the bump, which started just under her wet hairline and stood out from her scalp at least a half-inch. Back home, she thought, the bell would just be ringing on the last period of her first day of high school.

She looked up and saw that she was standing directly below the Ferris wheel, its great twinkling arms reaching up in spindly supplication to the low sky. The reflection of its green and pink lights stretched out, wobbly, into the waves.

“Last ride! Last ride!” a man called indifferently from the cozy shelter of his ticket booth. Maggie felt in her pocket and produced a few coins that flashed in her palm like silver fish. The man took the money, and indicated an open seat with a nod of his head.

“Sit wherever you like,” he said, and Maggie saw that the Ferris wheel was empty.

She sat in the nearest booth and pulled down the safety bar. The ride jolted, and she was lifted quietly into the dark, misty sky. The higher she went, arcing away from the center of the

wheel, the colder and damper the air became, until she was so high that the ticket man looking up at her was as small as a board-game piece. She could see the group of teenagers walking down the shore in the direction of the town, huddled together against the rain. Directly below, Ronnie and her new friends were playing a game of tag. Their tiny shapes darted around the maze of gaming booths like mice in an experiment.

Across the street from the carnival, at a pub called Quayside, Maggie could see into a bright square of window. Even as far away as she was, she could tell that the two dark heads leaning together were Colm and her mother, sitting at a table with drinks between them, secret, private, obviously in love. One by one, she watched the lights of the carnival booths winking out, and still the ride climbed higher. She looked east, out to where there was nothing but waves and darkness. Breathing in the dampness, Maggie wondered what would happen if she tumbled out of her seat, splashing into the lapping nothingness, and how long it would take before someone noticed she was gone.

PUBLISHED DRAFT

CHAPTER 1

September 1993

The carnival at Bray stood huddled against the rain on the rocky coastline of the Irish Sea, the pink and green lights of the old-fashioned Ferris wheel winking and dissolving in the reflection of the waves. Maggie had already ridden the Takeoff, which made her feel like a pebble being skipped across a lake; the Crazy Frog, which whiplashed her back and forth so hard that she dinged her head off the safety bar and emerged with a painful purple egg already rising from her temple; and finally, Space Odyssey, which spun around so fast that gravity suctioned her and Ronnie to the cushioned wall like splattered bugs. Halfway through the ride, a girl who was pinioned across from them barfed, but the suction was so strong that the puke no sooner arced from her mouth than it was sucked back with a wet *splat* all over her own face. The ride ended abruptly, sending everyone thudding to the ground, and the sisters fled the sour smell of peanuty vomit on wobbly legs.

“Where to next?” Ronnie was counting the remaining tokens in her palm. “I still have enough for three more rides.”

“Aren’t you getting *cold*?” Maggie looked at her little sister, whose pale, wet hair was plastered to her head and whose hand-me-down windbreaker hung to her knees as warm and waterproof as a plastic grocery bag.

“Yeah, but Mom said she wasn’t going to pick us up until the carnival closes.” Ronnie squinted across the dark road at the row of pubs and moss-streaked hotels where their mother had fled with Colm. “Do you think they’ll get back sooner?”

“And interrupt *honeymoon time*?” Maggie laughed. “Be serious.”

“What does that even *mean*?”

“I’ll tell you when you’re my age.”

“But that’s what you said about ‘douche,’ and ‘condom,’ and the first line of that Liz Phair song,” Ronnie complained.

“Well,” Maggie said, putting an arm around her sister’s thin shoulders and drawing her under the leaky umbrella, “honeymoon time is kind of like all three of those combined. When *you’re* sixteen and I’m twenty-one, we’ll talk *all* about it. Now—where should we cash in the rest of those tokens?”

“Bumper cars!” Ronnie shrieked, breaking free from the protection of the umbrella and racing ahead to the arena, where empty cars pointed every which way like in one of those apocalyptic movies where a whole city evacuates to escape an infectious disease.

“Don’t you want to go on the Ferris wheel?” Maggie called after her. She reached up and touched the lump at her temple. It was hot and throbbing, and dotted in the center with a small smear of blood.

“C’mon! Let’s do the bumper cars! Please? Please? Please? *Please?*” Ronnie hopped up and down beneath her sodden windbreaker.

“*Fine*,” Maggie sighed, holding out her hand to the rain to clean the blood from her fingers.

Ronnie flashed a winning smile, infectious and gap toothed, and they lined up behind the small herd of other little kids who stood waiting to turn in their tokens. Maggie was taller than all of them by at least a head. Earlier, they’d passed a group of Irish teenagers, kids of about Maggie’s age—maybe even her future classmates at Saint Brigid’s. The boys were dressed in tracksuits and gym shoe brands she’d never heard of, and the girls wore tights under their skirts

and heavy gold necklaces. Not one of them had even glanced in her direction. Maggie was quickly learning that being Irish-American, as she was, was quite different than actually being Irish. Now, she stood behind Ronnie and watched the group as they walked toward the road. Their clothes, their slang, the way they wore their hair: all of it was foreign and unfamiliar; all of it was new, intimidating, and strange. *I'm never going to fit in here*, she thought.

The announcement that, after four months of dating, their mother was marrying a man five years her junior and they were all moving to his hometown in Ireland so he could help run his brother's construction business wasn't really all that surprising. Since the day ten years earlier when Maggie's father had walked out on them for a woman known in their home only as Bitch, her mom had developed a tendency to fall madly in love with whatever loser she was currently dating. It had always been easy for Laura Lynch to meet men—she was still young, had high, round breasts and green eyes fringed in long, mascara-tarred lashes, and she spoke in a gentle, low voice that men leaned in to hear. Each of her romances was a whirlwind, and each ended in total disaster. In the aftermath, Laura would lubricate her despair with great quantities of red wine and the occasional sleeping pill. Over the years, whenever this happened, Maggie had learned to quietly pack a bag for herself and Ronnie, drag it up the stairs, and knock on the door to their grandma's apartment on the second floor of the two-flat.

"Mom's having one of her moments," she'd explain.

"How bad this time?" Nanny Ei, dressed in pleated jeans and a seasonal turtleneck, would step out in the hallway and the three of them would listen to the noises drifting up the stairs from the first floor. Sometimes there was sobbing. Other times there was drunken snoring. For the really bad times, there was Bob Dylan's *The Freewheelin'* blasting from the tape player, and for

the really *really* bad times, there was Joni Mitchell's *Blue* album, with Laura howling along in an off-key soprano.

"Okay, girls," Nanny Ei would sigh, herding them into her cozy apartment of faded beige carpets, fried breakfast smells, and cable TV. "I'll make some pork and beans."

When she met Colm in April, Laura was coming off a *Blue*-level breakup with Ned, the gambling addict who had spent most of his days walking around the apartment shouting bets into the cordless phone and crop-dusting the air with silent, sulfurous farts. Colm possessed all of the qualities that Ned—and, for that matter, all of Laura's previous boyfriends—lacked. He had a job, for one thing, and teeth that appeared to be brushed regularly, for another. Not only that, he seemed to be as crazy about Laura as she was about him. In August, they were married at the Cook County Courthouse. In September, they moved to Colm's clean little house in Bray, a damp, briny town a half hour outside Dublin.

Ronnie chose a shiny yellow bumper car, while Maggie picked pale blue. The ride operator turned a switch, and the electric current beneath Maggie's car hummed to life. She lurched forward just as a jug-eared boy who could barely see above his dashboard stomped on the gas and reversed into her at full speed. His laughter trilled into the night while Maggie's head whipped back. White, drifting stars filled her vision. She managed to steer over to the rubber edge of the ring and park while Ronnie and the other kids flew past, yelling, laughing, crashing.

By the time the ride operator switched off the power and Maggie wobbled across the track to find her sister, Ronnie had befriended all the other kids from the bumper cars, even the jug-eared boy with the demolition streak. One little girl was unfurling sheets of pink cotton candy and handing them out to the others. She gave Ronnie a long piece, and Ronnie took it and

folded it up into squares, like origami, then shoved the entire parcel into her mouth. The other kids laughed, and some of them began folding up their pieces, too. When Ronnie saw Maggie, she waved.

“Hey!” She called, her mouth full, “we’re going to go back to Space Odyssey! Come on!”

But what was the point? Maggie thought. What if the teenagers, the girls in the dark lipstick and jean skirts, saw her walk by with this group of ten-year-olds?

She waved her sister away. “Nah,” she lied, “I’m just gonna go meet some people at the Ferris wheel. I’ll see you when Mom gets here.” Ronnie looked at her across the wet pavement and the ringing lights of the booths—Dart-a-Card, Smash-a-Can, Roll-a-Coin—as if she was trying to figure something out. Finally she shrugged, and ran to catch up with the other kids.

The drizzle had quickened into a heavy rain, and the clouds over the sea rolled by, their dark shapes blackening the whole sky. Maggie stood alone beneath the Ferris wheel, its great twinkling arms reaching up in spindly supplication to the low sky. Fat raindrops poked holes into the choppy gray surface of the sea. When they’d first arrived in Bray, Colm told them that it was just like Chicago: if you want to know what direction you’re going, just remember that the water is always to the east. But on the Northwest Side of Chicago, you had to ride the eastbound bus for over fifty blocks before you began to smell the water; here, the sea was pervasive. On sunny days it glinted from the crests of hills or between the walls of buildings, and at night, while Maggie lay in bed, its restless sighing shaped a feeling in her chest that she couldn’t quite name. Even her clothes and hair began to take on its fishy, expansive smell, but eventually, and sooner than she expected, she stopped noticing, the way a woman stops noticing the scent of her own perfume.

“Last ride! Last ride!” a man called, the tip of his cigarette glowing in the cozy shelter of his ticket booth. Maggie felt in her pocket and produced a few coins that flashed in her palm like silver fish. The man took her money and dumped it in a drawer.

“Sit wherever you like,” he said, jabbing a thumb at the empty Ferris wheel.

She sat in the nearest carriage and pulled down the safety bar. The ride jolted, and she was lifted into the dark, misty sky. Colm had told them, if you want to be a true Irishwoman, you’ve got to become an expert on water. Salty water and clear water, thick rain and misty rain, downpours and trickles, thundery rain and soft rain. He had explained the difference between a sea and an ocean, but now she could not remember and her head hurt too much to think very hard. She reached up and ran her fingers over the lump. It started just under her wet hairline and stood out from her scalp at least half an inch. Back home, she thought, the bell would just be ringing on the last period of her first day of her sophomore year.

The ride climbed and climbed, arcing away from the center of the wheel, until Maggie was higher than the steeple of Saint Paul’s Church, and the group of teenagers walking down the shore, huddled together against the rain, were as small as board-game pieces. Across the asphalt strip from the carnival, at a pub called Quayside, she could see into a bright square of window. Even as far away as she was, she could tell that the two dark heads leaning together were Colm and her mother, sitting at a table with drinks between them, oblivious to the rest of the world, completely and totally and nauseatingly in love. One by one, she watched the lights of the carnival booths winking out, and still the ride climbed higher. She looked east, out to where there was nothing but waves and darkness. Breathing in the dampness, Maggie wondered what would happen if she tumbled out of her seat, splashing into the lapping nothingness, and how long it would take before someone noticed she was gone.

DISCUSS: THE TALE OF TWO DRAFTS

1. Note areas where Foley cut details about Laura's past. How does this effect the pacing of the chapter?
2. What information is communicated through dialogue in the published draft that was previously communicated through summary?
3. What changes do you notice in the description of the carnival or the town of Bray?
4. How are Maggie's feelings of isolation communicated in the submitted draft? How does that change in the published draft?
5. Note the how quickly or slowly information is revealed in each draft. How quickly do we find out where Maggie is, what time period it is, how she got there, and why she's there in the submitted draft? How quickly do we find out in the published draft?
6. Note places where the perspective changes from the submitted draft and the published draft. Where is the overall narrator telling the story? What moments come from Maggie's perspective? What draft feels more intimate? Why?
7. How might you apply similar revision techniques to better communicate something in your own writing, whether it's an essay or fictional piece?

ACTIVITY: RESEARCH

Find one outside resource on Irish culture (language, food, music, etc.) and one resource on Irish American culture to bring to class. Have each student present these resources, and then discuss Maggie’s cultural identity as a group.

ACTIVITY: DISCUSS

In the novel, Maggie connects to the poem “A Dream of Death” by W.B. Yeats, and lines from the poem are repeated throughout. Discuss motifs the poem and novel have in common. Why do you think this poem appeals to Maggie?

A Dream of Death

I dreamed that one had died in a strange place
Near no accustomed hand,
And they had nailed the boards above her face,
The peasants of that land,
Wondering to lay her in that solitude,
And raised above her mound
A cross they had made out of two bits of wood,
And planted cypress round;
And left her to the indifferent stars above
Until I carved these words:
She was more beautiful than thy first love,
But now lies under boards.

ACTIVITY: WRITING PROMPT

In the author interview included in the back of the book, Foley says returning to the music of the nineties while writing the novel “reminded [her] of [her] capacity to be amazed, shaped, exposed...” On the following page, spend five minutes writing about the ways in which Maggie is amazed, shaped, or exposed by the music in the novel. Then, spend five minutes writing about music, art, literature, or films that shape you in some way.

ACTIVITY: CHARACTER CHANGE

Characters evolve over the course of story. Their physical or mental condition changes, and they find themselves in a different “place” from where they started. Break into groups and then chart events that document Maggie’s physical and mental maturity over the course of the novel. Then, write a 250-word essay documenting a seminal event that has shaped your evolution. Support your findings with textual passages from the novel.

ACTIVITY: GROUP BREAKOUT DISCUSSION

Review the “Questions and Topics for Discussion” below or in the back of the book. Assign two questions or topics to small groups to discuss amongst themselves. Reconvene and have each group present their thoughts to the class.

Questions and Topics for Discussion

- 1) *The Carnival at Bray* is written in third person, rather than the sardonic first person that’s common in young adult now. What access does the third-person point of view allow readers that they wouldn’t have known in first person? Why do you think the author made this decision?
- 2) Ronnie asks Maggie a lot of age-inappropriate questions, to which Maggie responds, “I’ll tell you when you’re my age.” How does Uncle Kevin’s way of handling this compare to Maggie’s? How does Maggie learn about what it means to be an adult?
- 3) Many of the characters in *The Carnival at Bray* are outsiders in some way. How does being an outsider in Ireland shape Maggie’s identity? In what ways are the other characters in the novel outsiders?
- 4) How does Maggie’s relationship with her mother, Laura, mature over the course of the book? What does Maggie understand about Laura at the end of the book that she didn’t understand at the beginning?
- 5) How do the song lyrics and poems quoted throughout the novel shape your understanding of Maggie or the time in which she’s living?
- 6) Mental illness is explored through Eoin’s mother, Mary, Uncle Kevin, and Kurt Cobain. Discuss the way the author deals with mental illness in this novel.
- 7) How does Dan Sean mark the passage of time and the history of Bray in the novel?
- 8) When Maggie and Eoin run away to Rome, they essentially play house. Laura is often described as doing much of the same with Colm. What do you think Maggie learns about love and relationships from her mother, and where do you think she makes an effort to do something different?
- 9) How are images of the natural world (e.g., the water surrounding Bray or the Italian countryside) used to set the tone of certain scenes?
- 10) When Maggie decides to travel to Rome to see Nirvana as per Uncle Kevin’s instructions, Dan Sean dubs it a pilgrimage. Throughout the novel, she prays to Uncle Kevin for guidance. Discuss Maggie’s faith, whether it be in religion, Cobain, love, or Kevin.

ACTIVITY: WRITING PROMPT

Kevin's letter to Maggie, and Maggie's letter to Eoin are pivotal moments in the novel. Choose two other characters, and write a letter from one to the other on the page below. What would Aíne write to Paddy? Or Ronnie to Maggie? Choose the characters that most appealed to you, and be creative to capture the character's voice.