



## STRUAY SCHOOL

In *Katie Morag and the Riddles* we visit Struay School for the first time. What differences can you see between Katie Morag's school and your school? What are the advantages and the disadvantages of going to Katie Morag's school?

Make sure that the children have solved the riddles faced by Katie Morag and her classmates. Do they know any other riddles? Ask them to collect riddles from their families and friends. Split the class into small groups, each of which devises their own riddle. Can the other children solve it?

Compile a book of the class's favourite riddles.



## WILDLIFE

Look through the Katie Morag books and list all the different animals and birds you see. Look the animals up in reference books to make sure they've been correctly identified.

How many of those animals can be found near your school? If the Katie Morag books were set in your neighbourhood, what animals and birds would Mairi Hedderwick have to include in her illustrations.

Make a frieze showing the animals and birds living on or near the Isle of Struay, and the animals and birds living in your neighbourhood.

Compare the two and talk about why there are differences.





# The KATIE MORAG Books

Written and illustrated by Mairi Hedderwick

## TEACHER'S NOTES,

written by Lindsey Fraser, FRASER ROSS ASSOCIATES



Lindsey Fraser, Arisaig 1969

When The Bodley Head published Mairi Hedderwick's *Katie Morag Delivers the Mail* in 1984 I was a children's bookseller in Edinburgh. There was great excitement about this new arrival because there were so few picture storybooks depicting a genuine contemporary Scottish setting and lifestyle. Like many other people, the story and illustrations of life on the Isle of Struay reminded me of wonderful summer holidays on the west coast of Scotland and the Outer Hebrides. Woolly jumpers and the slap-slap-slap of my welly boots against the back of my knees as I ran around with my friends were an integral part of those memories. *Katie Morag Delivers the Mail* was an instant success and I remember selling quantities only Roald Dahl's books could then match.

In 1986, by which time *Katie Morag and the Two Grandmothers* had been published to an equally enthusiastic reception, I was working in a children's bookshop in Cambridge. There I found Mairi Hedderwick's books selling extremely well too, proving that it wasn't simply Scots who fell for their wit, charm and perceptive depiction of island life. Young readers of all backgrounds and cultures now have a whole range of Katie Morag stories, poems and activities from which to choose, each offering further insight into a community for which there is endless curiosity.

### KATIE MORAG – A GIRL WITH ATTITUDE

Katie Morag has universal appeal – there is surely a bit of her in all of us. She is one of life's great enthusiasts. Her determination and stubbornness (in Scotland she'd be described as 'thrown') land her in considerable trouble at times but also help her find a way out of her difficulties. She can be stormy and tearful, and she can be charming and helpful. She's energetic, one of life's doers. As a sister, she has her failings,

but like most sisters, her good points outweigh the bad. Katie Morag has terrific generosity of spirit.

There are times when it fades, and others when it can be misdirected. But her family and neighbours, on the whole, adore her and she, on the whole, adores them.

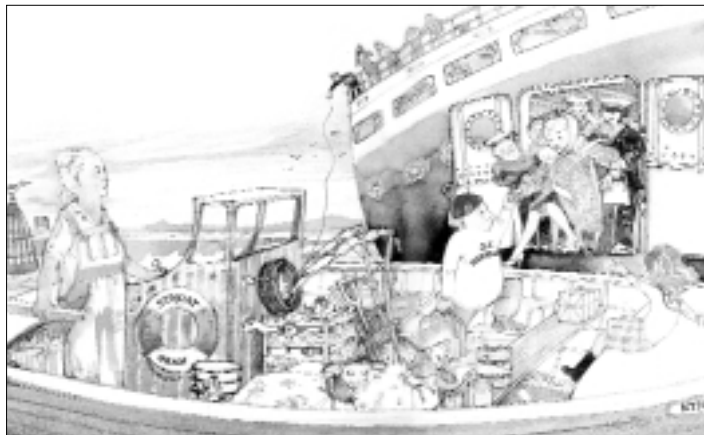


**RESOURCE TO PHOTOCOPY**

[www.kidsatrandomhouse.co.uk](http://www.kidsatrandomhouse.co.uk)

RED FOX **BH**

# The KATIE MORAG Stories



Mairi Hedderwick lived for many years on the island of Coll off the west coast of Scotland and although the Isle of Struay is fictional, it is clear that Coll inspired the setting for the Katie Morag books. The writer uses the interaction of individuals and generations as the basis for her stories. Katie Morag is very much part of her community, the elder daughter of the owners of the island shop and post office and the granddaughter of that feisty crofter, Grannie Island.

The wonderfully curmudgeonly Grannie Island is a great source of entertainment. Her stalwart, hardworking approach to life has earned great praise as a role-model for women.

## THE ADULTS

Adult issues often provide the catalyst for some of the stories.

The construction of a new pier for Struay has a mixed reaction – and not just from Grannie Island, alarmed at the increasing frequency with which Granma Mainland can pay her visits.

Mrs McColl's pale face and desperation at the task of running a business and raising a family is of no concern to a grindingly jealous Katie Morag but certainly contributes to the little girl's unhappiness in *Katie Morag and the Tiresome Ted*.



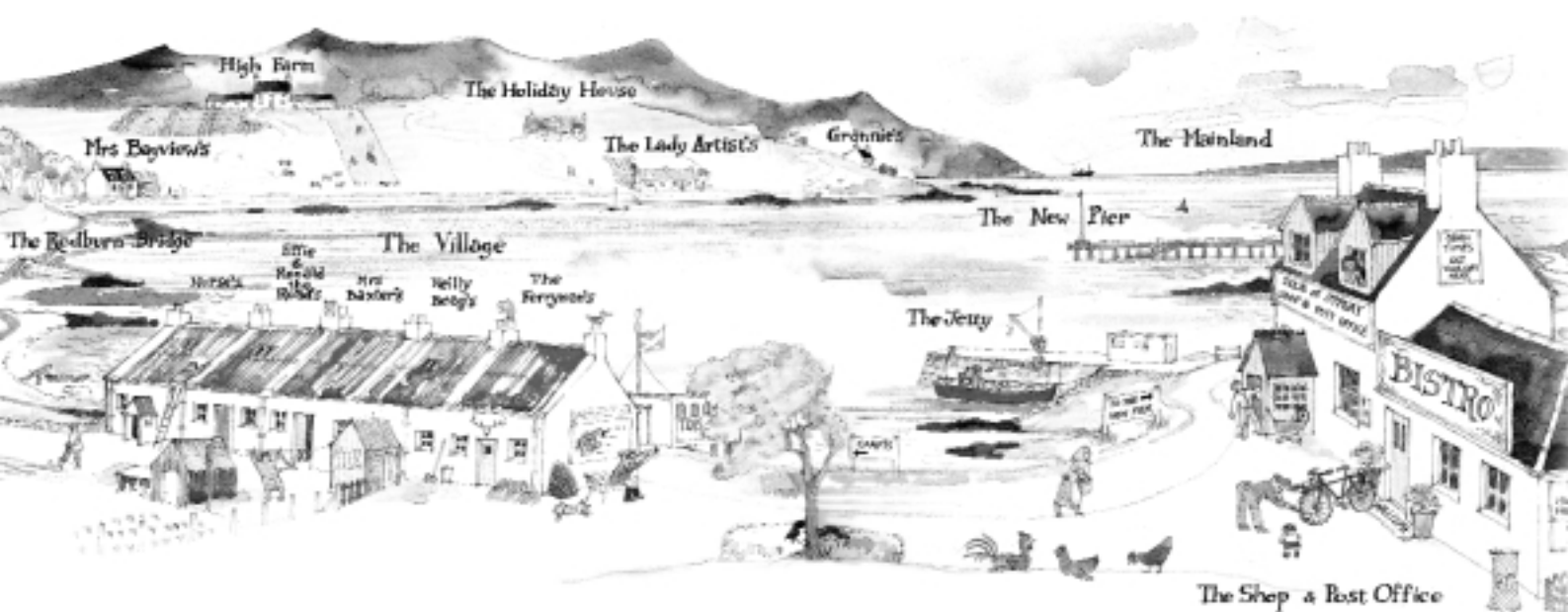
In *The Big Katie Morag Storybook* Grannie Island's illness and her refusal to accept help is a scenario well-known to many families, and definitely shows from which side of the family Katie Morag's stubbornness came.

In *The Second Big Katie Morag Storybook* the mystery behind Katie Morag's gentle, reclusive Uncle Matthew is never completely resolved but shows that even within that small geographical area and tight community, tolerance is essential.

There is the unforgettable love story, flagged up with some mutual flirtation in *Katie Morag and the Two Grandmothers*, between Granma Mainland and Neilly Beag, an unlikely but apparently successful match.

And what of Grannie Island's husband, the mysterious, handsome (in his time) helicopter pilot Captain Nils J Olsen?

Just as in life, loose ends abound and it is one of the many delights of these books that some are neatly tied up in their own good time while others remain shrouded in mystery.



## AGE RANGE

The Katie Morag books, like so many picture storybooks today, are ideal for giving confidence to new readers, and those who are becoming more independent in their choice of books. Mairi Hedderwick loves including words with which children may not be familiar but always in a context in which their meanings can be easily deduced. Don't be put off – use the opportunity to stimulate a fearless interest in the new and unexpected. For less robust readers it may be useful to read the books aloud first, after which they can make their own way with them. Such expressions as 'Gee Whilickers!', 'Wheesht!', 'a smart wee bobby dazzler', 'a fine boorach' tend to be the bits that children remember most easily.

Do take time to explore the illustrations with your pupils, training the children in observation and attention to detail. In doing so, each book will be more meaningful, entertaining and stimulating.

The consistency of presentation, anchored by the distinctive endpapers, is helped with the reappearance of characters who are instantly recognisable and very dear. They will therefore gain confidence from reading new stories about characters they know and love.

For older children and more adventurous readers, reading the text of the single stories may be less of a challenge, but the additional books – the two *Katie Morag Storybooks* and the *Rainy Day* book – offer more extensive stories in which we meet new characters and go further afield on the island. These books enable children to learn more about the Isle of Struay, its landscape, natural history and the lives of those who live there.

## RESOURCE TO PHOTOCOPY

## READING

### THE ILLUSTRATIONS

The books are a pleasure to read aloud, but it is important that children have sight of the illustrations that contribute so much to each plot. *Katie Morag and the Two Grandmothers* is available in 'Big Book' format, but the ordinary sized hardbacks and paperbacks are easily large enough to be enjoyed by groups of five or six children working together.

### DON'T FORGET TO READ THE WORDS THAT AREN'T PART OF THE TEXT.

Each illustration is rich with detail, many of them included for the benefit of adults as much as for young readers. These books will be requested time after time, and Mairi Hedderwick is clearly sympathetic to the need to provide plenty to keep adults alive to Katie Morag's world too. The Isle of Struay Shop and Post Office is always full of interest, from the notices and adverts to the covert theft by tiny hands of some of the goods on sale.

Mairi Hedderwick has a strong sense of humour and as a mother and now grandmother can't resist including witty and timely references to life's ups and down. Look out too for some blatant product placement!

#### For example...

What is the significance of the caption on Mr McColl's apron in *Katie Morag and the Tiresome Ted*?

What books does Katie Morag keep on her bedside table in *Katie Morag and the Wedding*?



In *Katie Morag and the Riddles*, does Mrs McColl's expression on that fateful morning reflect the sentiment of the card on her bedroom mantelpiece?

Look at the menu in *Katie Morag and the Wedding*. Note the vegetarian options.

Why is the raffle held in the Grand Concert in *Katie Morag and the Grand Concert* particularly appropriate for the islanders on Struay?





## Katie Morag's Family Tree



### MAPS

It's easy to find out who lives where on the Isle of Struay from the pictures with which Mairi Hedderwick begins and ends each of the Katie Morag stories. There is even a very detailed map of the Isle of Struay in *The Big Katie Morag Storybook*. (Before you look at it, try to work out where Struay School is in relation to the houses on the bay. A clue: look at the views from the windows!)

Make a big map of the Isle of Struay for the classroom wall. Add pictures of the characters that live in each house. Don't forget their animals.

If you live in the UK, you live on an island, even though it's much bigger than Struay. Look at a map and find out which countries are nearest to the UK. What are the names of the different seas surrounding the UK. Have any of the class ever gone abroad? How did they travel? How many different methods of travel can you think of? What methods of travel might Katie Morag use if she were ever to leave the Isle of Struay?

Draw a map of your perfect island. What would you include? Compare it with your friends' maps – how similar or different is your map from the others in the class? Now that you've seen other children's maps – would you make any changes to your own?

Three generations of Katie Morag's family live on the Isle of Struay – Katie Morag, Katie Morag's Mum, and Katie Morag's Mum's Mum – Grannie Island. Mairi Hedderwick has kindly provided a family tree in *The Big Katie Morag Storybook*, but you may well have deduced that Grannie Island is Mrs McColl's mother. Why?

A Family Tree is a kind of People Map. It can touch upon sensitive issues in families so it may be safer to get the children to create family trees for other families they know well from books or television. Alternatively they could make one up.

### RESOURCE TO PHOTOCOPY

### Writing

Imagine that you and your family are having a holiday on the Isle of Struay. Write a letter telling your friends what you've been doing and seeing. Has anything exciting happened? A storm? A wedding?

Choose words that would describe a sunny day on Struay and then words that would describe a stormy day on Struay. Write sentences using those words and phrases. Write a poem using some of your words and phrases.

If Katie Morag had written a letter to Grannie Island following the incidents with the Big Boy Cousins, what might it have said?

Imagine if Granma Mainland had discovered what Katie Morag and Grannie Island were doing with her rollers and hairnet in *Katie Morag and the Two Grandmothers!* Write down what she would have said to them.

If Katie Morag hadn't found her lost teddy on the shoreline she might have asked her mum to put up a LOST TEDDY poster up in the shop. Make a LOST TOY poster for your favourite soft toy (Just in case you ever lose it).



Write a letter to Katie Morag explaining about your home and school. Tell her about the differences and the things that are the same. Perhaps you would like to swap!

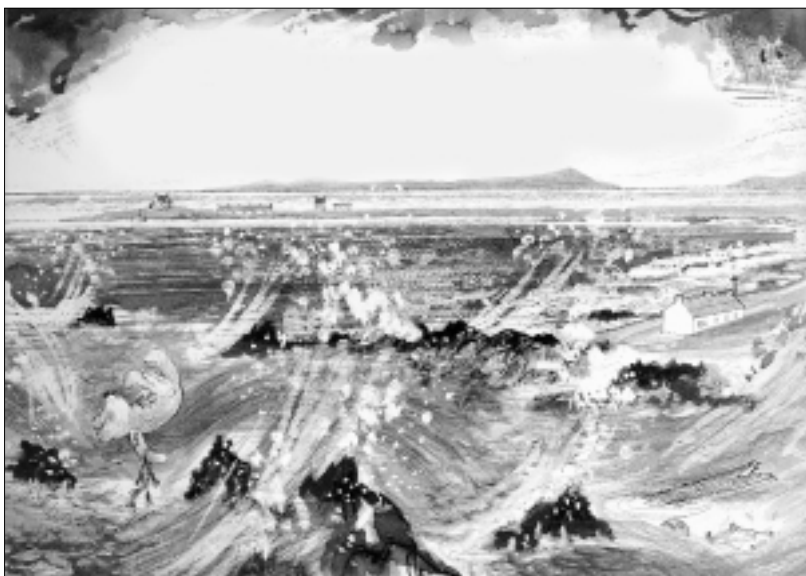
Write a story about an adventure Katie Morag might have if she ever visited your neighbourhood and school. Remember – there's never a dull moment with Katie Morag around!



# Topics and Activities linked with the books

## THE SEASHORE

In *Katie Morag and the Tiresome Ted*, Katie Morag finds all kinds of things washed and blown onto the shore by the storm. Tideline Search in *Katie Morag's Rainy Day Book* shows yet more flotsam and jetsam and gives ideas for lovely things to be made out of seashore discoveries. Have your pupils ever been to the seaside? What – if anything – have they found there? If it's feasible, make a classroom display of things washed up by the sea. If not, create a frieze on which the children add pictures of things they think the sea might toss onto the shore.



## WEATHER CONDITIONS

The weather – and in particular the state of the seas – dominates the lives of the islanders of Struay. Why?

Listen to the shipping forecast (broadcast on long-wave radio three times every day mainly for the benefit of the fishing industry) and find a map showing the various sea areas listed.

If Struay is situated somewhere off the northwest coast of Scotland, to which of the area forecasts would the islanders listen most attentively?

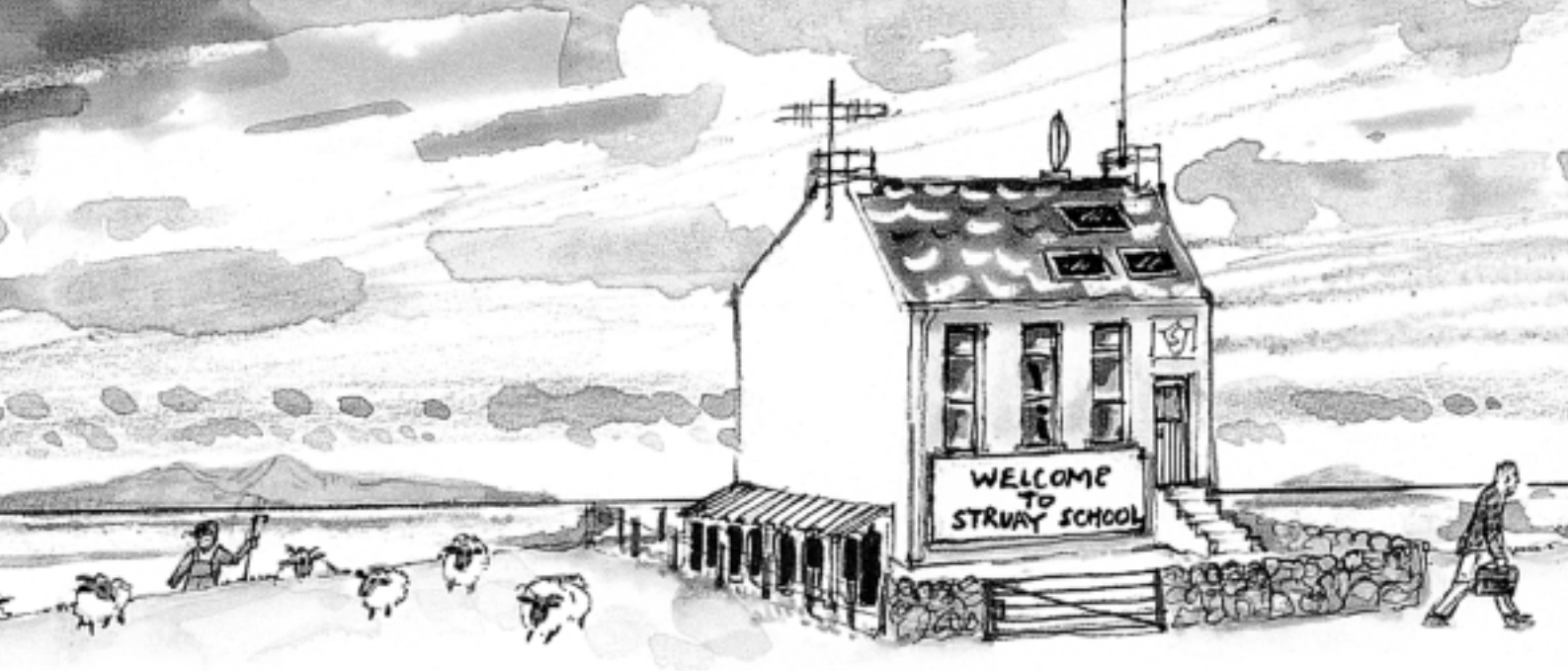
What is the difference between Force Four, Gale Force Eight and Storm Force Eleven?

## THE BISTRO

When the new pier is built on Struay the McColls decide to build and open a Bistro next door to their shop. Why did they make that decision?

Decide on a menu for the Bistro using ingredients found locally on Struay. Compile and design a menu for the Bistro. Ask the children if they have recipes at home for any of the food they decide to include. If it's feasible, prepare some of the dishes.





## THE ISLE OF STRUAY

Few children have the kind of upbringing Katie Morag enjoys (most of the time). Struay School is the only building on the island with a TV aerial and satellite disk attached. The outside world impacts mostly through the arrival of the visitors. News arrives via the *West Highland Free Press* or *The Oban Times* (both of them existing newspapers on which Highland and Island communities are kept well up to date with their own activities as well as those in the wider world). Small as the population may be, there is more than enough going on to keep everybody occupied and the islanders are extremely good at making their own entertainment.

Mairi Hedderwick's illustrations reward close attention. For example in *Katie Morag and the New Pier* look at the history of the ferryman's tea room. The workmen's hut is dramatically saved by Grannie Island and the Ferryman – Katie Morag's blue rope is put to excellent use, the salvage story told as much in the illustrations as in the story.

## The KATIE MORAG books in the classroom

A useful crash-course for teachers coming new to Katie Morag's world is to study the endpapers that appear in each novel – look carefully as they change subtly over the years. The map and the Family Tree in *The Big Katie Morag Storybook* will also help in providing the kind of information that young readers will soon be seeking.

Otherwise, take time to enjoy the books – the stories and the illustrations. As well as being ideal books for sharing, they will inspire all kinds of ideas for extending their use in the classroom.

