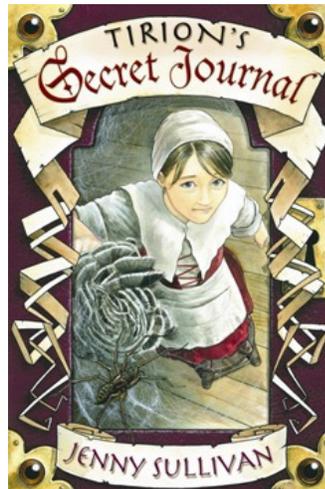


TIRION'S SECRET JOURNAL

Jenny Sullivan



Winner of the Tir na n-Og prize for 2006 *Tirion's Secret Journal* by Jenny Sullivan is the fictional diary of ten-year-old Tirion Griffiths. It describes her introduction to the world of work as spider-brusher at Llancaiach Fawr. Her story offers a lively and entertaining perspective on the life of the household and the people who worked there at the time of the English Civil War.

Carefully researched with advice and guidance from the staff at Llancaiach, the novel offers a double perspective onto Tirion's experience. She keeps an 'official' diary for her mother and stepfather, but her 'secret' journal is where she writes about her most personal feelings and opinions.

The novel offers opportunities to develop a wide range of language and thinking skills with pupils in the nine to thirteen age range. After reading the story, you might like to try some of the activities on the following pages.

IDEAS FOR SPEAKING AND LISTENING (INCLUDING DRAMA)

GUESS WHO?

One of the most intriguing and unusual features of *Tirion's Secret Journal* is the inclusion of footnotes. These are very useful because they add a lot of extra information about the period in which Tirion lives. Talk with the rest of your class about the "voice" behind the footnotes. Is it Tirion's voice? Whose is it? What kind of person is he or she? What makes you think this? What evidence can you find? [You might like to try reading sections aloud with different people reading a) Tirion's main diary, b) her secret journal and c) the footnotes.]

THE FILM OF THE BOOK

Re-read the beginning of the novel where Tirion arrives at Llancaiach. If you were making a film of this scene, what kinds of camera shot would you use? Wide shots? Close-ups? Long shots? Tilts (where the camera moves up and down)? Panoramic shots (where the camera sweeps across the landscape)? What would you put on the soundtrack? (Remember to look carefully at other films to give you some ideas.) You might like to create a storyboard to show the sequence of shots and information about the soundtrack.

IN THE HOT SEAT

In Chapter Seven Ifor plays a trick on Tirion by spreading honey in her hair. Prepare questions to ask either Tirion or Ifor (or both) about this incident. Choose somebody to play the part of Tirion or Ifor. They will have to answer your questions. Remember not to ask things which will just give the answer 'yes' or 'no'. *Why did you?* and *How did you?* questions make people think and encourage them to give longer answers.

A SENSITIVE MOMENT

In the same chapter, Chapter Seven, Tirion finds Ifor crying in the garden (page 78). She is very surprised and wants to help him, but Ifor is very embarrassed. Work in pairs: one of you is Tirion, the other is Ifor. Act out the kind of conversation you would have had. Remember that Ifor has been busy tormenting Tirion, but he has also been very kind to her by keeping spiders out of her way. You might like to turn your improvisation into a script for others to act. Check to see how scripts are laid out by having a look at some written examples. *Can I Be The Ghost?* (ISBN 1 85902 662 1) published by Pont Books would be a good place to start.

MAKE YOUR MIND UP

So once the Master and Mistress had finished their cold meat and left-over custard, I slipped away...(Chapter Ten, page 112)

Tirion suspects that the magpie has taken Colonel Prichard's buttons. She knows that she could get into a lot of trouble if she climbs up into the tree to look for them. Her friend Ifor is suspected of stealing them, though. What should she do? Choose one person to take the role of Tirion. Everybody else needs to give Tirion some advice about whether she should climb the tree or not. You need to give her a reason to go with the advice: "I think you should / should not climb the tree because..."

You could try the same activity with other decision points in the story, such as when the steward forbids Ifor and Tirion to leave the kitchen on the day of the king's visit.

Scroll down for reading and writing ideas.

IDEAS FOR READING AND WRITING

FACT OR FICTION?

Tirion's Secret Journal is a historical novel. This means that the historical information contained in it needs to be accurate, and the author, Jenny Sullivan, carried out plenty of research before writing the novel. Read the section from *I was grateful for the warmth of the kitchen* (on page 49) to *I agreed* (on page 50) where Tirion finds out some information about how fine ladies used to make themselves look beautiful. Find out whether people really did use baby's 'wee' to make their skin look good? Where could you find out the answer to this kind of question?

DID THEY REALLY?

As you read the story, lots of other things might puzzle you. For example, you might find it strange that people drank ale or wine rather than water. With a friend, choose one special puzzle to research. Make a list of questions you would like to ask. Use information books and the internet to research your answers. When you have finished, decide which was the best source of information. Which ones did you think you could trust? Why?

WRITE A REPORT

Reports give us information. They take one main subject – like spider-brushing for instance – and deal with every aspect of it, for example, *why spider-brushing was important in big houses, what equipment was used for spider-brushing, what kind of people became spider-brushers*, and so on. To write a good report, you need to do some research and plan your work carefully. *Tirion's Secret Journal* would be a good source of information for a report about the work of the spit-boy or ... the job of the spider-brusher!

SPIDER-BRUSHER NEEDED

Once you have the basic information about the job, it is easy to turn it into a different format. Study some job advertisements from a national newspaper or from your local paper. (It might be fun to look at both to compare them.) You should now be able to write an advertisement for the job of spider-brusher or the job of spit-boy.

TO GET RID OF FLEAS

First study some recipes or instructions to see how they are laid out. Usually they give you a title which explains what the instructions are meant to do, for example, *To Get Rid of Fleas*. There is usually a list of ingredients and sometimes a list of equipment. Then there is usually a point by point list of things to do. Very often these are numbered. Read page 76 of *Tirion's Secret Journal* for Hannah Saer's information about getting rid of fleas. Can you put this into a simple recipe format?

WHY WAS THERE A CIVIL WAR?

Read what Jenny Sullivan has to say about what caused the Civil War in the section which begins on page 122. Make a list of causes, for example, *King Charles I believed that no-one but God could tell him what to do*. Use an explanation framework like this to link your ideas together:

I want to explain why...

There was one main reason for this...

There were other reasons too, such as:

So now you can see why...

You may find these phrases useful: *this meant that...this caused...because of this...as a result...in order to*

A LIFE IN THE DAY

Tirion has given you two examples of how to write a diary. One – her secret journal – is very chatty and gives lots of personal information; her other diary gives away less information. She writes it more politely and more formally, because her mother will read it and her step-father may get to know about it. Use the story to find out information about the daily lives of Ifor, Bleddyn Cook or any other of the servants. Try writing a diary entry for one of them. You might like to choose one special day, for example the day of King Charles's visit. You need to decide whether you are going to write a secret diary (for your eyes only) or whether other people are going to be able to read it, perhaps Colonel Prichard himself!

SHOULD GIRLS BE TAUGHT TO READ AND WRITE?

Tirion is very lucky that she can read and write. Not many girls were taught reading and writing back in 1645. No doubt Tirion's step-father, Master Eyes and Ears, wouldn't have approved. Imagine that you are an adult (mum or dad) living at that time and make a list of points in favour of (or against) teaching girls to read and write. Now add some extra detail to each point to give extra weight to your argument. Would your argument be different if you were writing from a child's viewpoint?

END OF YEAR REPORT

Imagine that you are Colonel Prichard. Write an end of year report on Tirion's performance at Llancaiach. You might like to use a report format from your own school, but you will have to remember to change the subjects. *Spider-brushing* would definitely be one of them! *Behaviour* would be very important too!

A TIRION DICTIONARY

Many unfamiliar words are used in the course of *Tirion's Secret Diary*. As you read the story, make a note of any vocabulary you don't already know. Most of the words are explained in the story or in the footnotes. Use a school dictionary to see how dictionary compilers write their definitions. Often they present the word in **bold**, then explain its part of speech (whether it's a noun, verb or adjective), then how it is spelled in the plural and (finally) they explain what it means. This is one possibility:

Jakes (noun).	Jakes or jakeses (plural).	An outbuilding used as a toilet.
Word (Part of speech)	Plural spelling	Meaning