

For the Teacher

Story Synopsis

This is a storyteller's version of the voyage of St. Brendan in which he travels west from Ireland and finds an island paradise. While many scholars throughout history have downplayed his story as legend, recent research has shown that such a voyage was possible in the kind of boat he had. Many now believe he reached the North American continent.

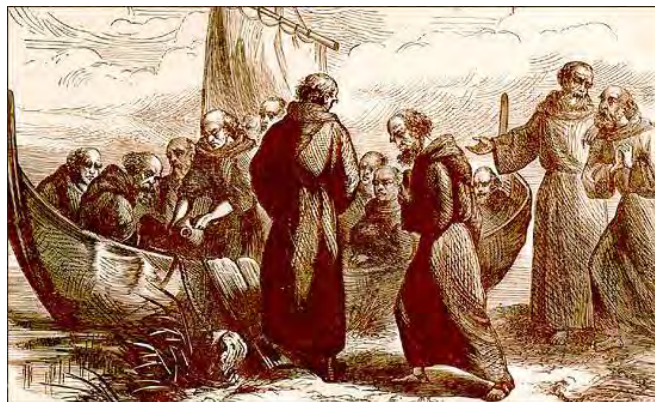
Jean Fritz has portrayed the fantastical tale the way it is recorded in Brendan's *Navigatio*, but she does take liberty with the character of Brendan. He is somewhat comical and brusque in her version. This is not the story of his sainthood, but the story of his voyage.

As a boy Brendan seemed special or extraordinary and was taken to a monastery to study and become holy. After he became a monk, he heard a friend describing a voyage he had taken to an island in the west that he claimed was like paradise. (The friend's clothing even *smelled* like paradise!!) Brendan became obsessed with the idea of finding this place and set out in a leather boat with some companions to find it. They passed islands where giants threw hot coals at them, islands with huge sheep, and islands with lots of birds. They passed through arches of ice and camped out on a whale's back. They finally reached a sweet smelling place that Brendan was sure was the island he sought. An angel appeared to him after a while, though, and told him to return to Ireland. When he returned he told everyone of his fantastic journey.

Directing the Study

This is a book you can read to your child in one sitting, or ask an older child to read himself in one sitting. You can

1. Have your child do the "before reading" activities. You may especially want to look at some maps of Ireland and the Atlantic west of Ireland. Label or talk about what countries are to the west of Ireland.
2. Read the story and ask the discussion questions as springboards to conversation about the story. Let the child go back through the story and retell it by looking at the pictures.
3. Complete as many of the "after reading" activities as you like.



Student Section

This is the story of a great journey that St. Brendan of Ireland took with some of his companions long ago. Think about what St. Brendan might be thinking at each step of his journey.

Before Reading

1. Look at a map of Ireland and the Atlantic Ocean and find out and label the places to the west of Ireland. (Make sure you know which direction is west!)
2. What do you think a paradise is? Look up what it means, or talk about it with your teacher. What would it look like to you? Draw a picture of it and add lots of color.
3. If you were taking a long ocean voyage what kinds of things would you pack? And what kinds of things do you think you would see on the voyage.

While Reading (Discussion questions)

1. Why was Brendan considered special as a boy?
2. Do you think he enjoyed being in the monastery? How can you tell?
3. What did he plug his ears? Do you think that was a good thing?
4. What was it that made Brendan want to go on a boat voyage?
5. How does Brendan know he has reached the land he sought?
6. Why does Brendan leave the land?
7. What do you think people thought of his story when he returned?

Vocabulary

navigator	cross (adjective)	whit
swooped	predicament	scholars

After reading

1. See if you can calculate how many miles from Ireland to the northern North American continent. Predict where Brendan landed.
2. Draw a picture of what you think Brendan's isle looked like. Describe what you think it smelled like.
3. Read the story of St. Brendan from a Catholic source and compare it to this story. What are the similarities and differences? Discuss the differences between fact and opinion. Discuss how the author uses facts in this story. What parts could not be considered facts? Why not?
(Catholic Encyclopedia entry <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02758c.htm>)
4. Divide a paper in half. On each half draw a map: one from Brendan's time, one from our time. Label them.
5. Pretend you were a monk who traveled with Brendan. Write, tell, or draw the story of your voyage.