

Book Club Discussion Guide for *Spancil Hill* by Leara Rhodes www.leararhodes.com

Spancil Hill is a novel about a young man, Cahey, from Connemara region in Ireland, who was taught to speak Irish and English, and how to care for horses by his father. These skills were steppingstones to learning about how he could survive without family and institutions to support him. At the beginning of his story as a teenager in 1895, Cahey's father said to him, "Our biggest gift is to learn how to survive." Cahey's search for answers as to why his family disintegrated due to illness, famine, and work limitations, forces him to leave Ireland and begin again in New York where he becomes the most sought-after horse trainer at the Vanderbilt American Horse Exchange and learns that being Irish is difficult in Ireland and in New York.

Irish heritage for readers of *Spancil Hill* can be discussed through the following questions:

1. How was housing representative of being Irish in New York at the turn of the century?
2. Where did Cahey seek "like" communities to make him feel at home?
3. What literature was shared in the book that indicated what was being read during that time?
4. Irish identity was shared through food, songs, dance, and language. Which ones would you like to know more about and why?
5. Assimilation was needed for the immigrants to feel a part of America. Some assimilation was forced. How so?
6. Cahey knew a lot about how to take care of horses—a skill he had learned in Ireland. What did he know?
7. There were many reasons to leave Ireland. Why did Cahey leave?
8. Irish in America often kept up with politics back in Ireland. What were some of the issues Cahey thought about?
9. Letters to family and friends were ways people heard news about Ireland. How did Cahey remain in touch with Ireland?
10. Memory is the strongest feeling immigrants have of home. How did Cahey remember?



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