

RUN FOR YOUR LIFE

Jane Mitchell

Little Island Books
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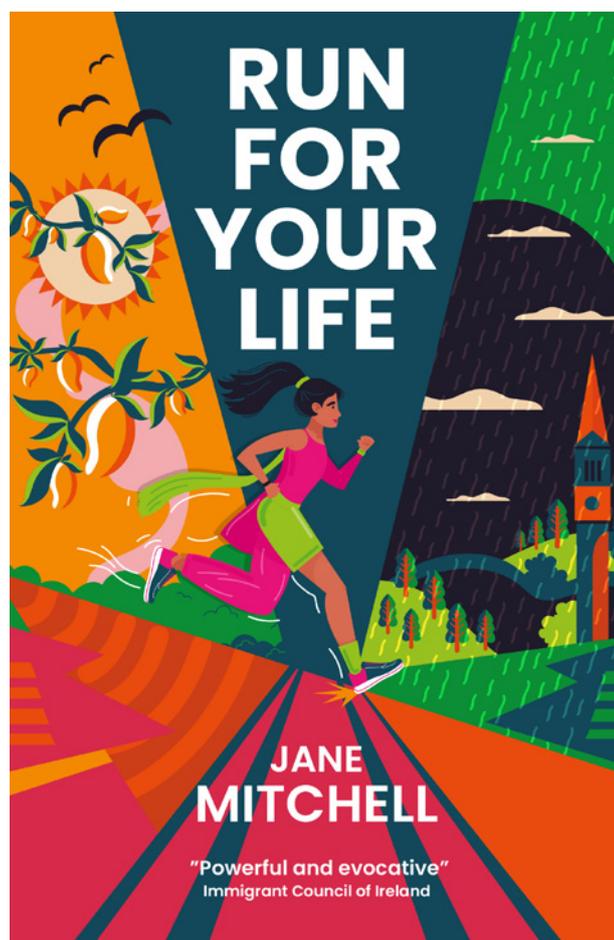
Themes

- Human rights
- Women's rights
- Gender inequality
- Violence against women
- Forced marriage
- Culture
- Home
- Direct Provision
- Exile
- Racism

Note to teachers Scenes of domestic and racist violence are present in this book and may be triggering for some readers.

Note to readers Over two thousand children and young people are living in Direct Provision in Ireland. You may be one of them, or some of them may attend your school or be part of your community, but each one is unique with their own story that they may or may not wish to share. Not all young people from cultures other than Irish have come to Ireland as refugees seeking asylum, and some may have been born here. They and their families may have lived here for many years and call Ireland home. Remember, family and social traditions vary from culture to culture, and it's OK to be curious and want to learn about them, but always be sensitive, and remember, no matter who you are or what your life experience, the best thing you can do is be kind and include everybody in your circle of friends.

Summary Azari is a happy twelve-year-old girl who enjoys school and loves running. An unforgettable and traumatic event shatters her world, forcing her and her mother to flee for their lives. Overnight, her world is turned upside down, split into two halves each as different, she says, as mangoes and lemons. Arriving in Ireland, she and her mother are placed in a Direct Provision centre, trying to navigate their way and tell their story in a foreign language, with strange food and customs and where summer looks like winter. Running links the two parts of Azari's life, allowing her to feel strong and forget her troubles as she runs towards a future full of dreams and free of fear.



Judges' Comments This compelling novel follows the story of Azari who ends up living in one of Ireland's grim and inhumane Direct Provision centres when she and her mother are forced to flee their own country. For Azari, running – a passion she brings with her from home – provides her with a sense of power, confidence and happiness, as she navigates the difficulties of a new life in Ireland. Respectfully written with wonderfully vivid and complex characters, Mitchell's brilliant narrative is one of freedom and constraint, secrets and lies, hope and heartache.

About the Author Jane Mitchell has written several books for children and young people that have won national and regional awards in Ireland and the UK, including the Bisto Book of the Year, Children's Books Ireland Merit Award, Reading Association of Ireland Award, and Children's Choice Award. Her books have been listed on the school curriculum in Ireland and Brazil. *A Dangerous Crossing*, which told the story of Syrian refugees, was shortlisted for the Irish Book Awards Children's Book of the Year in 2017, and also for the CBI Book of the Year Award in 2018, and has sold over 100,000 copies worldwide. Jane's favourite hobbies are travelling to other countries and playing the flute and piano. She is a keen sportswoman who swims and runs marathons.

QUESTIONS

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. What do you think of the cover of *Run for Your Life* – can you take it in all at once or does it need closer inspection?
2. Look at the front and back – what graphic details can you pick out?
3. Look at the figure and what they are wearing. Does it give you a clue as to what the story might be about?
4. Do you think the colours the illustrator has chosen have any significance?
5. What effect does the combination of colour palette and graphic style have on your impression of the story (e.g., is it an exciting, sad, scary or happy story)?
6. Does the position of the title and its size contribute to your opinion?
7. Finally, look at the logos on the cover and the names of the reviewers. Are these significant?

AS YOU READ

1. The chapters do not tell the story in a linear manner but switch back and forth between Azari's home village and Ireland. Can you notice any difference in mood, tone or colour between both settings? Likewise with the characters, how do they appear in both settings?

Chapter 1

1. What is your first impression of Azari and her mother?
2. Do you think their minds are in the present or the past?
3. What fruits does Azari use to describe the two parts of her life? Why?
4. What impression do you get of her village at first? Are all her memories bright?
5. How do Azari and her mother arrive in Ireland? Do they know where they are?
6. What is Azari's first impression of Ireland – the weather, the smells, the faces?
7. Why do you think Azari is being advised to go to the IPO?
8. When you hear Azari and her mother discussing the ghosts, what impression does it make on you?
9. Does Azari's mother act like the parent with the officials?
10. Does their reaction to men give you an insight into their culture and life experience?
11. Why do you think Mother is always tired and won't go out? Was she always like this or do you catch glimpses of her behaving differently at times?

Chapter 2

1. What happened when Azari was seven years old and how did it change things?
2. Who is Sharnaz and what is the relationship between her and Azari like?
3. What changes Sharnaz and how does it affect the sisters' relationship?
4. Do you think their lives are heading in different directions?
5. What do you think of Father?
6. Are boys and men treated differently?

Chapter 3

1. How do you think Azari and her mother feel on arriving at the Direct Provision centre?
2. What skills does Mother believe are more important for Azari to learn than going to school?
3. Do you think the food the people in the centre are given to eat every day sounds good?
4. How does Azari feel when she goes out running?
5. Does Princess fade into the background or do you think she's a big character?
6. What does she call Azari? Why?
7. What do you think it would be like to start school in a new country with a new language?

Chapter 4

1. What happens to Azari that changes her life abruptly?
2. What implications do the changes have for the things she enjoys in life?
3. Do Coach and Father seem to share the same values?
4. What is life in the factory like?
5. How can she work at such a young age?
6. Why is Mother uneasy?

Chapter 5

1. Where is Mother learning English?
2. How has Mother's life changed? Is the relationship between her and Azari changing too?
3. Who are the Farooqs? How do they influence Mother?
4. What does Azari discover in the library that leads her to understand the different attitude to menstruation in Ireland?
5. Do you think it's right that women should feel inferior or ashamed because of their bodies?
6. Do her classmates treat Azari well?

7. How does she feel when Robert speaks to her? How do they connect?
8. What does Sharnaz's voice in her head say? What does she think her mother would say?

Chapter 6

1. What decision does Father take that changes everything?
2. Describe Sharnaz's reaction to marriage at fourteen years old?
3. How does Father treat her?
4. What action does Sharnaz take?

Chapter 7

1. How does Azari feel at being included in book club?
2. How is she treated by other girls in her class?
3. Why is Mother so angry when Sharnaz returns to the centre?
4. What impression do you get of Meri?
5. Does the manager offer Azari and Mother a real choice?
6. What energy does Princess bring to the centre?
7. Why is being able to cook your own food from home so important to the residents of the centre?
8. What does Azari learn about Fiza?
9. What does Azari's discovery of her national flag lead to?

Chapter 8

1. What is the mood at home like following Sharnaz's disappearance?
2. Does the hunt for Sharnaz remind you of anything?
3. How do the actions of the mob make you feel?
4. How does Father describe his own daughter when Mother tries to help?
5. Can you imagine Azari and Mother's feelings at Sharnaz's fate?
6. Who helps them to escape and why?

Chapter 9

1. Does Azari feel she belongs in book club?
2. What greets her back at the centre?
3. Why would the manager ban meetings?
4. Is Azari kind to Fiza, and what does Princess say?
5. What does Princess mean by rebelling quietly?
6. What surprise does Mother have for Azari?
7. Is Mother still frightened of men?

Chapter 10

1. What does Azari discover about Fiza?
2. How is Azari picking up Irish ways and sayings?
3. How does Mr Farooq spoil the atmosphere in the canteen?
4. How does Princess feel Direct Provision impacts on the residents and their lives?
5. Is Azari honest with her mother about her running companion? Why?

Chapter 11

1. How does Azari feel when the official letter arrives?
2. Does Mother think of Ireland as home?
3. What is Mother's reaction when she is told about Robert?
4. How does she feel about secrets?
5. Does Azari seem happier now?

Chapter 12

1. How does Azari see the change in Princess and why?
2. How is her summer?
3. What is happening with Liz, and how is Azari managing Mother behind the scenes?
4. How do they remember Sharnaz approaching the anniversary of her death?
5. What is the new case worker like?
6. What effect does recounting their story have on Azari?
7. What turn is the attitude to refugees in the centre taking?
8. What happens as they are waiting for the bus?
9. How does the Irish air make Princess feel?
10. What do they see at the gates?

Chapter 13

1. What is happening at the gates?
2. How do you think the residents feel locked inside with the chanting going on outside?
3. How do the protesters look to Azari?
4. What does the burning remind Azari of?
5. How does Azari spring into action when she discovers the fire?
6. How does she feel afterwards?
7. How do the locals respond to the attack on the residents?
8. What is so nice about the B&B?

Chapter 14

1. What is it like for Azari when she returns to school?
2. How do her classmates respond?
3. Where do the friends find each other?
4. What plans do they make to stay in contact?
5. Does the ending leave you hopeful?

AFTER YOU HAVE READ

1. Read pages 247–9 to give you the facts, figures and key issues on Direct Provision in Ireland.
2. Take some time to reflect on the themes of the book – there is a lot to think about and some might be upsetting.
3. Discuss the bullies and the protesters – why do you think they might hold these views? Do they usually act alone or in a group? Why? What could be done to change their views?

ACTIVITIES

- Have a think about Irish culture. You may take it for granted if you've grown up here, but what would you miss about it if you had to live in another country? Make a list and compare with your class/group's lists.
- If you had to leave home in a hurry, maybe never to return, what would you take with you? Ask your family members to do this activity too. Compare your lists and see what you all feel is most important to each of you. Then make a collective family list.
- Food is an important way of bonding and connecting. We share stories and experiences around the table. Think of the food you love and what it would feel like if you couldn't ever have a home-cooked meal.
- With the help of teachers and parents, you could organise a food fair in your school where people can share their culture and part of their identity through food. Maybe your home economics teacher could help you look at some typical dishes from non-Irish cuisines.
- Find out how many nationalities and languages are present in your school or any clubs you may attend. Make a combined list amongst your class and mark all the locations on a world map.
- Design a poster saying 'hello' and 'welcome' in every language in the school. Don't forget to include Irish!
- Look on the shelves in your school library, public library or bookshop. What languages are the books written in? Are there any in languages other than English? A cake sale or one of the food ideas above might be a fundraiser to buy some books in languages other than English for your school.
- Set up your own book or film club exploring books and films from various countries and cultures. You could start with the book they are reading in the book club in this story by the same author (details below).
- Sports for women are currently changing in Ireland, with increased media coverage and open discussion of clothes that can make it less stressful for women during their period. Talk to your parents, guardians and grandparents about the changes they have noticed around this topic in their lifetime.

FURTHER RESOURCES

- Recommended additional books to read:
 - *A Dangerous Crossing* by Jane Mitchell, Little Island Books, ISBN 9781910411582
 - *Amazing Muslims Who Changed the World* by Burhana Islam and various illustrators, Penguin, ISBN 9780241441824
 - *Be Inspired: Young Irish People Changing the World* by Sarah Webb and Graham Corcoran, The O'Brien Press, ISBN 9781788493284
 - *Girls Play Too* by Jacqui Hurley and various illustrators, Irish Academic Press, ISBN 9781785373374
 - *Girls Play Too, Book 2* by Jacqui Hurley and various illustrators, Irish Academic Press, ISBN 9781785374081
 - *Rocking the System* by Siobhán Parkinson and Bren Luke, Little Island Books, ISBN 9781912417438
 - *Stories for Boys Who Dare to Be Different* by Ben Brooks and Quentin Winter, Quercus Books, ISBN 9781787471986
- Recommended online resources to explore:
 - 'Break the Mould' on Sinéad Burke's website: <https://www.sinead-burke.com/break-the-mould>
 - BOLD GIRLS resource pack on the Children's Books Ireland website: <https://childrensbooksireland.ie/resources-ideas/ideas-activities-packs/bold-girls-resource-pack>
 - Free To Be Me resource packs on the Children's Books Ireland website: <https://childrensbooksireland.ie/resources-ideas/ideas-activities-packs/free-be-me-resource-packs>
 - Mind Yourself resource pack and videos on the Children's Books Ireland website: <https://childrensbooksireland.ie/resources-ideas/ideas-activities-packs/mind-yourself-resource-pack-and-instructional-videos>
- Recommended organisations to research:
 - Amnesty International: <https://www.amnesty.ie/end-direct-provision/>
 - Ombudsman for Children: <https://www.oco.ie/childrens-rights/>
 - Fighting Words: <https://www.fightingwords.ie>
 - Sport Against Racism Ireland (SARI): <https://www.sari.ie>
 - Sports Ireland: <https://www.sportireland.ie>
 - Youth Theatre Ireland: <https://www.youththeatre.ie>