

Name: _____ Class: _____

Granuaile

By Fiona Waters
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Granuaile, also known as Grace O'Malley, was a well-known leader and pirate in Ireland over 400 years ago. In this informational text, Fiona Waters discusses the life and accomplishments of Granuaile. As you read, take notes on how Granuaile's experiences compared to the experiences of the men of her time.

[1] Granuaile was the daughter of the chieftain Owen Dubhdara. She grew up in Belclare Castle, a fortified¹ tower with a great hall where the clans² would gather for huge feasts. She had been christened³ Grainne. From early childhood, she loved being with her father on board one of his great fleet of ships. Her father did his best to discourage her because she was a girl, but Grainne was determined. She cut all her hair off and borrowed some of her brother's clothes. When she appeared dressed as a boy and demanding to be taken on the next voyage,⁴ her mother was angry, but her father laughingly agreed to take her with him. And so her life on the high seas began. From then on she was known as Grainne Mhaol, Bald Grace, and in time this name became shortened to Granuaile.



"Statue of Granuaile at Westport House" by Liam O'Malley is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

In those days, girls got married very young, and Granuaile's husband was called Donal O'Flaherty. Her parents thought he might be able to tame their wild daughter, because he was known as Donal an Chogaidh, 'Donal of the Battles.' But although she bore three children, she became more and more involved in the adventures of the O'Flaherty clan. She had learnt much at her father's side and men were impressed with her skill and her success. When Donal was killed in an ambush,⁵ Granuaile defended her castle successfully against her husband's enemies.

Although the O'Flahertys admired Granuaile greatly, they were not prepared to accept her as their leader after Donal was killed. So Granuaile returned to her father who was very proud of his daughter's exploits.⁶ He gave her the castle on Clare Island to live in and there she set up as a chieftain in her own right, with some two hundred followers. Granuaile then turned to piracy and soon became the most daring and most feared pirate on the west coast, her coffers⁷ overflowing with stolen treasure.

1. **Fortify (verb):** to strengthen a place against an attack
2. a group of families that are related to each other
3. to give someone or something a name
4. **Voyage (noun):** a long journey, involving travel by sea or in space
5. **Ambush (noun):** a surprise attack made from a hidden place
6. **Exploit (noun):** a bold or daring action
7. a chest for holding valuables

By now the English realized that she was making it too dangerous for them to travel by sea and that she had to be stopped. She finally met her match in the new governor of Connaught, Sir Richard Bingham. He chased her on the high seas, threatened to put her to death and finally imprisoned her. Two years in Dublin Castle almost destroyed her brave spirit, but she was released when she promised to give up piracy.

- [5] By now Granuaile was growing old and she decided to write to Elizabeth I, Queen of England,⁸ to ask for the Queen's protection in the future. In time the Queen replied, asking several questions. Granuaile decided to travel to London to see her.

As she waited to be received by the Queen, she began to daydream about the exciting life she had led and did not hear the Queen's servant speak.

"Madam!" he said. "I insist you accompany me to the inner chamber. Her Gracious Majesty Queen Elizabeth is ready to receive you." Granuaile started back from her dreaming. She looked down her haughty⁹ nose at the impatient courtier. "Do not sneer at me, you popinjay,"¹⁰ she roared. "Do not believe that I am not an important person just because I do not wear fine clothes like the Queen of England. In my lands I am as powerful as your Gracious Queen."

Granuaile brushed the courtier aside, and strode off to meet the Queen.

The two women looked each other straight in the eye. Each of them knew the other was strong, brave and fearless. "You are most welcome to my court," said the Queen. "Pray sit here by my side and let us talk." Granuaile bowed her head and took the chair beside the Queen. They made a strange pair, both no longer young, both proud, both truly remarkable. The Queen was dressed in a beautiful white brocade¹¹ dress with rings on each of her fingers. She wore much make-up, and a huge red wig covered her head. Granuaile wore no make-up on her weathered face, her grey hair was her own and was simply tied back with a ribbon. Her dress was of plain wool, her velvet cloak was old and worn and the only sign of her wealth the brooch of heavy gold which was pinned on her shoulder.

- [10] The two women talked for a long time, to the amazement of the rest of the courtiers. And when Granuaile walked out of the court that day, she held her head even higher. The Queen had granted every one of Granuaile's requests. Her brother and her son were released from prison, and she herself was provided with a living for the rest of her days.

Granuaile lived until she was in her seventies, a good age for those times. Even as an old woman, she remained a leader who was admired by all her followers. And by a strange coincidence, she died in 1603, the same year as Queen Elizabeth — two women who, despite their very different lives, had met and understood each other.

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8. Queen Elizabeth I was the Queen of England and Ireland from 1558 until her death in 1603, bringing stability and success to her kingdom.

9. **Haughty (adjective):** having or showing a proud and superior attitude

10. a dated term for someone who cares too much about appearances

11. a fabric, usually silk, woven with a detailed design

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: What is the central idea of the passage?
 - A. Granuaile and the Queen were unable to rise to power because of their gender.
 - B. Granuaile and the Queen were considered great leaders because they were women.
 - C. Granuaile rejected others' expectations of her and led an adventurous life.
 - D. Granuaile changed people's ideas about women in power with her success as a pirate.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "When she appeared dressed as a boy and demanding to be taken on the next voyage, her mother was angry, but her father laughingly agreed to take her with him." (Paragraph 1)
 - B. "Although the O'Flahertys admired Granuaile greatly, they were not prepared to accept her as their leader after Donal was killed." (Paragraph 3)
 - C. "By now Granuaile was growing old and she decided to write to Elizabeth I, Queen of England, to ask for the Queen's protection in the future." (Paragraph 5)
 - D. "she died in 1603, the same year as Queen Elizabeth — two women who, despite their very different lives, had met and understood each other." (Paragraph 11)

3. Which statement describes how Granuaile is introduced in the text?
 - A. She is portrayed as a foolish girl who didn't understand the consequences of her actions.
 - B. She is introduced as a violent girl who always wanted to join the fight.
 - C. She is portrayed as a confused girl who didn't know how to be a woman in her time.
 - D. She is described as a bold and adventurous girl who refused to be told what to do.

4. How does paragraph 7 contribute to the development of the central idea?
 - A. It emphasizes how Granuaile was not respected by many people.
 - B. It contributes to Granuaile's portrayal as a proud and successful woman.
 - C. It helps readers understand why Granuaile was feared by many.
 - D. It shows how Granuaile thought more of herself than was proper.

5. What connection does the author draw between Granuaile and the Queen?

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. In the context of the text, why do you think people followed Granuaile? What traits did she possess that made her a good leader? What traits do you think are important for a leader to possess?
2. According to the text, how were Granuaile's experiences influenced by being a woman? How was she treated differently than the men in Ireland? How have your experiences been influenced by your gender?
3. In the context of the text, how was Granuaile brave? What risks did she take as a clan leader and pirate? Describe a time when you were brave and took a risk.