



Na Sithichean agus Sgeulachdan Traidiseanta

- Leugh an earrann agus freagair na ceistean.

Read the passage and answer the questions.

Oral tradition, or the telling of traditional stories and folklore, has always been an important part of Gaelic culture. In days gone by, it was very common for family and neighbours to gather in the evenings and entertain each other with songs and stories that had been passed down through the generations. Before the days of television, internet, computer games and cinema, this was the way in which people entertained themselves. Very often, stories were of a supernatural nature and would include fairies, witches, wizards, seers, rituals, superstitions, weird creatures, ghosts and second sight.

The story below, **Am Fear Crotach is na Sithichean** (The Hunchback and the Fairies), is one such example and tells of the fate



suffered by one man at the hands of some very mischievous fairies. Nowadays, people may scoff at the idea of a belief in **na sithichean** (the fairies) but the Gaels and other Celtic peoples held strong beliefs in the supernatural world. There are many reports in Scotland, even today, of people encountering these magical little creatures.

Cò iad? Who are they?

There are many different ideas as to who these creatures are and where they came from. One belief held was that **na sithichean** were a race of little people who had to go into hiding underground because humans had invaded their lands. Others believed that they were spirits of the dead, or some form of angel that was forbidden from going to heaven.

Cò ris a tha iad coltach? What are they like?

There are many differing accounts of what **na sithichean** are like. They are generally described as looking like humans, but having magical powers. Today, images of fairies being young, pretty, females who appear in little girls' story books are very common. To the Gaels, they were quite different. They could be male or female, tall, radiant, angelic beings or short, ugly, goblin-like trolls. There are also accounts of shape-shifter fairies who could take on whatever appearance they wanted so that they could trick people. **Na sithichean** were usually believed to be friendly to reasonable humans but there are some stories of them behaving mischievously and badly. Generally, people were very wary of getting on the wrong side of them.

Càit a bheil iad a' fuireach? Where do they live?

Na Sithichean were generally thought to live underground, particularly inside a little green knoll or mound (**sithean**) on which they would come out and dance by moonlight. Their dancing would make circular marks or rings on the surface of the **sithean**. People would see this and avoid these areas for fear of being tricked by the fairies, or even being taken away underground by them. Only a very bold or foolish man would lie down to sleep on a fairy mound or venture near one after sunset.

Tinkerbell or goblin? Good or evil? Whatever your views on the folklore of the fairies, or indeed, whether or not you believe in **na sithichean** at all, one thing is certain. Reports of their existence in one shape or another have been recorded for centuries.



Obair 1

Na Sìthichean agus Sgeulachdan Traidiseanta

1. Show how the telling of traditional stories has always been an important part of Gaelic culture.
2. What kind of stories were told?

Cò iad?

3. What beliefs were held about the fairy people?

Cò ris a tha iad coltach?

4. Show that there are different opinions on the appearance of fairy people.
5. In what ways did they behave differently towards different humans?

Càit a bheil iad a' fuireach?

6. Where are **na sìthichean** generally thought to live?
7. Why would humans avoid standing on the surface of the **sìthean**?
8. Do you believe in fairies? What do you think a **sìthiche** would look like?

Dèan dealbh!



Am Fear Crotach agus na Sìthichean

- Leugh no èist ris an sgeulachd.
- Freagair na ceistean.

Read the story and answer the questions which follow:

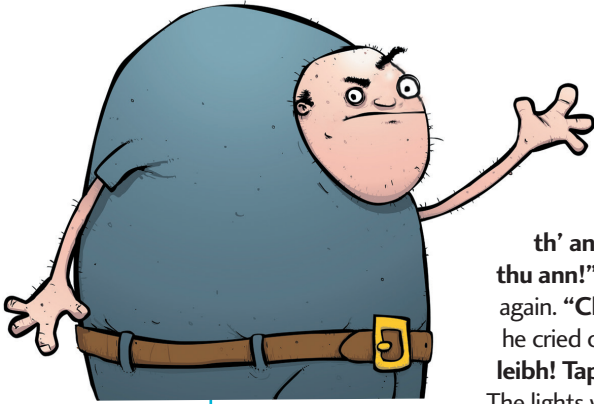
O chionn fhada an t-saoghail ... bha Cailean Crotach a' fuireach ann am Baile nan Cnoc, baile beag faisg air Ùige anns an Eilean Sgitheanach...

Once upon a time, **Cailean Crotach** (Colin the Hunchback) lived in the village of **Baile nan Cnoc**, near Uig in the Isle of Skye. One evening as twilight was falling, **Cailean** was on his way back home from the nearby village of Siadar. Between the villages of Siadar and **Baile nan Cnoc** lies the Fairy Glen. **Cailean** knew that he would have to pass through Fairy Glen to get home and was more than a little bit nervous as night was falling fast. As he walked, his mind was filled with images of the stories he had heard from neighbours about **na sìthichean**. All around him things seemed to dart and dance in the shadows and once or twice he was sure that he heard the ringing of distant laughter and the rustling of little feet in the bracken. "Mice and rabbits!" he reassured himself, as he whistled a tuneless tune.

All of a sudden, something scurried across the road in front of him and shot into the long grass. **Cailean Crotach** strained his eyes to follow the creature and what he saw was neither mouse



'Fairy Glen, Isle of Skye'



nor rabbit! It was a man! The tiniest man he ever saw, with long, green shirt-tails and little hobnail boots. Against his better judgement, **Cailean** immediately found himself chasing the little creature through the tangled bracken, but it was useless. It had grown so dark he could hardly see his own hands in front of his face. More than a little relieved, he turned to head back to the road, scolding himself for being so gullible. “**Hud! Geifilis is nonsaireachd a th’ ann. ’S e th’ ann gun teagamh, a Chailein,**” he said to himself. “**Amadain thu ann!**” But whichever way he turned, he just couldn’t find the road again. “**Chan eil mi a’ tuigsinn seo. Dè idir a tha a’ dol air adhart?**” he cried out. Just then he saw some lights in the distance. “**Ò, tapadh leibh! Tapadh leibh!**” he said to himself, as relief flooded over him.

The lights would be from his own village of **Baile nan Cnoc** and he would soon be safe and sound in his own little house.

As the lights drew nearer, he could hear singing. One of the neighbours must have called round for a **cèilidh**, but what in the name of fortune were they singing? It was a dreadful tune altogether for it only had two notes and two words. “**Diluain, Dimàirt! Diluain, Dimàirt! Diluain, Dimàirt! Diluain, Dimàirt!**” went the song. “**Dè fon ghrèin ...?**” exclaimed **Cailean** to himself in disbelief. **Cailean** lengthened his stride. He couldn’t have been more than a few yards from the lights of the village now and had a wee chuckle to himself at the silliness of the song. But the chuckle soon stuck in his throat as he saw where the lights were coming from. Each light was a lantern bobbing and circling round and round the summit of a little hillock, held up by little men wearing long green shirt-tails and hobnail boots...

Round and round they danced, singing their odd little song, “**Diluain, Dimàirt! Diluain, Dimàirt! Diluain, Dimàirt! Diluain, Dimàirt!**” His heart in his mouth, **Cailean** crouched behind a rock and watched them. Before long his fear disappeared. ‘What a comical sight it was and what a funny song,’ he thought. But what was he to do? Was he to be stuck here all night listening to this awful dirge? “**Diluain, Dimàirt! Diluain, Dimàirt! Diluain, Dimàirt! Diluain, Dimàirt! Diluain, Dimàirt!**” On and on **na sithichean** sang until **Cailean** could take no more. “**DICIADAIN!**” he blurted out. No sooner had the word left his lips than **na sithichean** froze in their steps and, one by one, turned to stare in his direction. But much to **Cailean’s** relief and surprise, they began to laugh and once again resumed their dance, this time singing “**Diluain, Dimàirt! Diluain, Dimàirt! Diluain, Dimàirt, DICIADAIN!**” On and on they sang and danced, delighted with their new song, “**Diluain, Dimàirt! Diluain, Dimàirt! Diluain, Dimàirt, DICIADAIN!**”

So pleased were **na sithichean** that they wanted to repay **Cailean Crotach** for his help. As the others danced round their little knoll, an elderly **sithiche** began to approach **Cailean’s** hiding place. “**Thig a-mach!**” said **an sithiche** and **Cailean** edged himself round the rock just far enough to catch a glimpse of the little man. “**Thig a-mach!**” ordered **an sithiche** and **Cailean** summoned all his courage and looked into the creature’s wizened little face.

“**Dè an t-ainm a th’ ort?**” asked **an sithiche**.

“**S e ... ’s e ... ’s e Cailean Caimbeul ... Cailean Crotach an t-ainm a th’ orm,**” **Cailean** stuttered.

“**Uill, tapadh leat, a Chailein. Tapadh leat gu dearbha,**” said **an sithiche**. He explained that they had been singing that song for many, many years and that they he had got just a little fed up of it. He told **Cailean** that they would all enjoy singing their new song and then he gave **Cailean** a small green **sporan** made of woven leaves.

“**Dè tha seo?**” asked **Cailean**.

“**S e preasant a th’ ann,**” said **an sithiche**, gesturing for **Cailean** to take the **sporan** from his hand.

“**Dè th’ ann?**” asked **Cailean** again. He didn’t want to be rude but was very unsure about accepting a gift from **na sithichean**.

“**Siuthad!**” encouraged the little man. “Take this home with you. It will grant you one wish. But you must make your wish before dawn as the daylight will take the magic away.”

Cailean reached and took the leaf **sporan** from an **sithiche**. “**Tapadh leibh,**” he said and put it in his pocket. He looked to the sky and he could see dawn approaching. Where on earth had the night gone and how was he to find his way home? But when he looked back down there was no sign of **na sithichean**. Not a note could be heard of their song and there he was, standing back on the road, only yards from his village. “**Dè fon ghrèin ...? Ach ciamar...?**” **Cailean** gasped in disbelief. Had he dreamed it? Was he losing his mind? The last few yards home were full of unanswered questions. Shoving his hands in his pockets, his fingers touched upon something small, cool and fresh... “**An sporan!**” he cried out loud. It wasn’t a dream! He ran and danced the last few steps to his house, singing “**Diluain, Dimàirt! Diluain, Dimàirt! Diluain, Dimàirt, DICIADAIN!**” hoping there would be just enough of the night left for the magic to work.

The next morning the people of the village couldn’t believe what they saw. “**Cò tha sin?**” they asked each other when they saw **Cailean** come out of his house. “**An e Cailean Crotach a th’ ann? Ò, chan e, chan e!**” they said.

“**S e! Mise a th’ ann!**” exclaimed **Cailean** with delight. Indeed there he was, standing tall and straight as an arrow – the hump on his back was gone! **Cailean** told all that would listen about **na sithichean** and why he was given the magic **sporan** and before long his story had spread throughout the island.

Cailean’s story particularly caught the interest of **Murchadh Mòr Mac-a-phi**, a man born with the same affliction, who lived south of Uig and as mean and miserable a soul ever to be born in Skye. “I’ll get just the very thing that he got,” **Murchadh** promised himself. The very next day, **Murchadh** set out on the long walk towards **Baile nan Cnoc** in search of **na sithichean**. He reached the Fairy Glen just as night was falling and settled himself down in the bracken behind the rock he had heard about in **Cailean**’s story. There, a short distance away, was a little green knoll “**Ò-ho! Seo e! Seo an t-àite!**” he said to himself, rubbing his hands with glee. As the hours passed, **Murchadh** became more and more impatient and cross. “**Ach càit a bheil iad?**” he huffed to himself “**Càit a bheil sibh?**” he yelled out over and over, growing angrier and angrier by the minute. The night was as dark and still as a tomb. “**Huh! Sithichean? Àireamh na h-Aoin’ oirbh!**” he shouted over his shoulder in disgust, as he hobbled back to the road. No sooner had he set foot on the road back to Uig than he heard singing. “**Diluain, Dimàirt! Diluain, Dimàirt! Diluain, Dimàirt, DICIADAIN!**” **Murchadh** stopped in his tracks, hot-footed it back towards the knoll and there they were! **Na sithichean!** This was the moment he had waited for.

“**Diluain, Dimàirt! Diluain, Dimàirt! Diluain, Dimàirt, DICIADAIN!**” they sang when suddenly they were interrupted.

“**DIARDAOIN!**” bellowed **Murchadh Mòr**. He was so pleased with himself, he was bent double laughing. When he opened his eyes and straightened up he saw that the singing had stopped and all but one of the little creatures had disappeared. All but one, who was now standing at his feet looking none too happy.

“**Huh! Sin thu!**” said **Murchadh Mòr** rudely to the little man. The little man stood, glaring at him. “**Agus?**” he demanded. “**Agus seo! Seall!**” retorted **Murchadh Mòr**, pointing at the hunch on his own back. Slowly, it dawned on an **sithiche** why this man had interrupted their song.

‘So you think you can teach us a thing or two, eh?’ said an **sithiche** to himself. ‘Well, I can do better than that,’ he thought. Immediately he knew just what to do. “**Tha mi a’ tuigsinn a-nis,**” began an **sithiche**.

“**Uill, greas ort!**” demanded **Murchadh Mòr**.



“Ceart gu leòr. Suidh sìos an sin!” Calmly and politely, **an sithiche** gestured towards the rock where **Murchadh** had been hiding earlier. **Murchadh** lurched off in the direction of the rock, muttering as he went. When he sat down, **an sithiche** was again at his feet and he was holding out a cloth bag with a big round heavy looking object in it. **Murchadh** snatched the bag from the little man’s hands.

“Agus dè tha seo?” he demanded.

“S e бага a th’ ann,” replied **an sithiche**.

“Tha fios agam! Ach, dè tha ANNS a’ bhaga?” asked **Murchadh Mòr**, exasperated with the little man as he stood smiling up at him. **An sithiche** calmly explained to **Murchadh** that this was a reward for his patience, thoughtfulness and good nature and he was to carry it home and open it just before dawn. The instructions were quite clear: **NA FOSGAIL AM BAGA AN-DRÀSTA**. Without even as much as a “**Tapadh leibh**”, **Murchadh** was off, lumbering down the road as fast as he could. Of course, **Murchadh** being **Murchadh** paid no heed to anyone but himself, and as soon as he was out of sight, he opened the bag. It was still dark and he couldn’t see very well, but suddenly, he was aware that the bag had become very much lighter. He reached his big stubby fingers deep into the bag and rooted around for his reward. “**Dè tha anns a’ bhaga seo?**” he questioned out loud as he urgently searched the bag. It was then he knew he’d been tricked. “**Càit a bheil sibh? Càit a bheil sibh? Chan eil càil anns a’ bhaga seo!**” he howled into the darkness. Seething with anger he tossed the empty bag into the ditch and, cursing as he went, headed for home, his back aching like never before. ‘**Ah uill, cha tig an aois leatha fhèin!**’ he grumbled to himself as he hobbled through the front door. He was so tired he fell straight into bed and into a deep sleep.

The next day, it was midday before **Murchadh** emerged from his slumber and his back ached terribly. By the time he came out of his house, quite a little crowd had gathered. Incensed that **na sithichean** had tricked him and too proud to admit it, he had already decided what he would tell them: that they had granted him one wish, just like they had done to **Cailean Crotach** of **Baile nan Cnoc**, but that he had decided to keep his wish a secret. Ready to tell his news, he opened his door to a sea of expectant and anxious faces. Some people gasped, some immediately looked away in shock, others stood quite still, their faces wide eyed and frozen as they pointed. For there stood **Murchadh Mòr Mac-a-phì** with not one great hunch on his back, but two. Although it had gone unnoticed by him at the time, **na sithichean** had given him something. He had been gifted with the very thing he set out for – the very thing that **Cailean Crotach** once had!

Obair 2

Ceistean

1. What kind of person was **Cailean Crotach**?
2. How would you describe **Murchadh Mòr**?
3. Why do you think the fairies treated them so differently?
4. Did **Murchadh Mòr** deserve the treatment he got from **na sithichean**? Give reasons for your answer.
5. Is there a message in the story for all of us? Think about the different ways in which the two men receive their ‘gifts’ from **na sithichean**. Can you think of any other stories which contain a moral or a message for the reader?
6. The story comes from the Gaelic tradition and would have been passed down through generations of storytellers. Do you believe the story? Give reasons for your answer.

