

Mucking About
by John Chambers

It was a fine sunny day, and the only dark cloud around was Manchán's face, scowling at his family. For a week now his mother had been hinting at a surprise and at last he had found out what it was. Her brother, the abbot from the monastery across the lake, had come to collect him, for Manchán was going to be sent to become a monk. A *monk* for heaven's sake!

'Don't say that,' said Brother Abstemius.

'Say what?' said Manchán.

'You know what,' said Brother Abstemius, and Manchán sighed.

'Right,' he said. 'Sorry.'

'For your penance,' added Brother Abstemius, 'you shall peel two bushels of turnips for Brother Cook. He needs them for breakfast in the morning.'

Turnips! For breakfast, moaned Manchán, though not out loud. Brother Abstemius was watching



him much too closely for that. Was this how being a monk was going to be?

'There's nothing wrong with monking,' said Manchán's mother, glaring at him. 'It's a very respectable profession. People will look up to you.'

Great, thought Manchán, his mind still reeling from the turnips.

'Is "monking" really a word?' asked Manchán's sister Méabh. 'It doesn't sound like a word to me.'

'Of course it's a word,' said Manchán's father, who couldn't read. 'It's a word like fishing, or hurling, or singing.' He listed off the three things in life that were the most important to him. Now monking was added to the list. 'Good man, Manchán,' he said. 'You'll bring honour to the family.'

Manchán frowned. 'Why can't I bring honour to the family by fishing or hurling or singing?' he asked. 'Like you do.'

His father scratched his head but couldn't come up with an answer. He gave up and waited for Manchán's mother to explain.

Words in context

1. Find and highlight the following words in the text: penance, profession, reeling, monastery
2. Find the definition of these words.
3. What words could you replace them with?

Retrieval

1. What was the only dark cloud?
2. What was the surprise?
3. What were the turnips for?
4. How is Brother Abstemius related to Manchán?
5. Where was the monastery

Inference questions.

1. What clues can you find in the text which suggest this is not a modern day tale?
2. Why does the phrase 'A monk for heaven's sake' make Brother Abstemius angry?
3. Why did Manchán's mother want him to be a monk? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

Challenge questions

1. How does the author portray the father's character? What makes you think this?
2. List three verbs which the author uses to show how Manchán feels about becoming a monk.
3. Skim and scan for the word 'Great' – why is it in an italic font?