**ÉIRÍ’ Évoking Ireland’s Resilient Female Ícons**

In the spirit of awakening the female icons of our ancestral heritage by embracing our mythological culture we have chosen to celebrate an Cailleach Bheara, a goddess that is largely associated with the Beara Peninsula in Co. Cork, our home. West Cork Sudbury School’s students and staff found an Cailleach Bheara to be one of the most strongest female figures of Irish mythology. As a creator deity, her responsibilities were countless. We chose an Cailleach Bheara due to her association with this time of year. October 31st or Samhain is the end of the Celtic year and winter begins, thus bringing the return of the Cailleach.

She was considered to be the goddess of many elements, most recognizably the winds and winter as she controlled its length and harshness. Throughout winters months she was seen to have been a veiled old woman with ragged hair, pale blue skin and red teeth, a sore sight to an innocent wanderer. She also controlled the storms and thunder with the work of her cherished hammer. An Cailleach Bheara highlights hard truth as her youth is sacrificed when winter begins and she returns to the form of an old hag. In Ireland’s folklore, it is said that she had seven periods of youth before she remained stuck as an old woman. Within those winter periods she symbolized hope as better days were yet to come when her youth would once again be restored.

For the purpose of our artistic piece we decided to portray an Cailleach Bheara in the form of a scarecrow to highlight her features and symbolize her strong connection with nature. We used fully natural and upcycled materials for this project as sustainability is a core value in our school community. For the body of our scarecrow we used a large tree branch stood upright to symbolize the harshness of winter as the seasons change and the trees are left bare. Her clothes are stitched from upcycled materials and her head is made from a repurposed lantern. We used dying and dried out ferns as her ragged and matted hair to symbolize her connection with nature and change.

By participating in this competition, a conversation around feminism, folklore, Celtic mythology and archaeology has arisen throughout our school. There has been a keen appetite for knowledge developed over the past few weeks as we worked carefully on our scarecrow. We hope to take part in more competitions like this in the future. Thank you for the opportunity.

Aoibheann and the students of West Cork Sudbury School.

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