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about this pack

This pack is a bind-up of resources for the best titles by Irish artists from 2015–2020. These resources were originally published as shadowing packs or Junior Jury resources packs as part of the CBI Book of the Year Awards or more recently as part of the KPMG Children’s Book of the Year Awards. We hope that by gathering them together in primary and secondary school packs, we have made the very best titles by Irish authors and illustrators more accessible.

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THE DEEPEST BREATH

Meg Grehan

Little Island Books

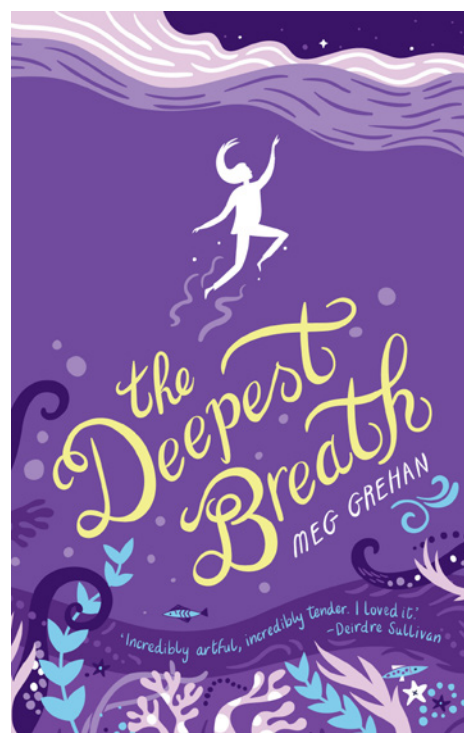
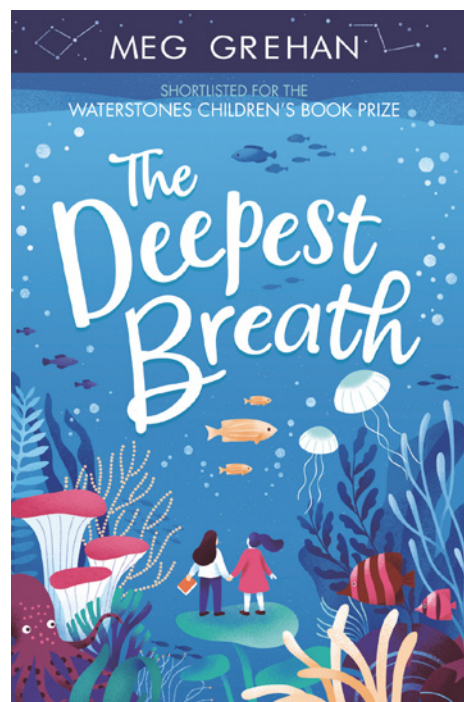
ISBN 9781912417186

Themes Identity, relationships, LGBTQ+ themes, anxiety, love and friendship

Summary Stevie is eleven-years-and-two-months-old and she is a worrier. She worries about bad things happening or about the chance of bad things happening. In her daily struggle against worry and fear, she has an ally (her understanding, unwaveringly supportive mum) and a weapon: knowledge. The more Stevie knows, the better she can keep fear at bay. But lately, Stevie has encountered something she can't work out, something she can't get information on, something she can't seem to share with her mother. It's a warm, fuzzy feeling and she only gets it in the presence of her classmate, Chloe. *The Deepest Breath* is a story of self-discovery and self-affirmation that uses the very accessible format of the verse novel to great effect. It's a book about paying attention to yourself and others, about reconciling what you know and what you feel, and ultimately about being brave.

Judges' Comments A thoughtful, exquisitely gentle and heart-rending verse novel that explores with a superb lightness of touch important themes relating to anxiety, emerging sexual identity, friendship and love. The lyrical narrative captures with great delicacy the fragile voice of an eleven-year-old girl, whose feelings for her friend both excite and confuse her, as she seeks understanding and affirmation from her mother. The motif of water, of drowning and breathing, lends a dreamy atmosphere to this tender, courageous and ultimately uplifting story.

About the Author Meg Grehan is a young writer originally from County Louth but now hiding away in Donegal in the northwest of Ireland, with a very ginger girlfriend, an even more ginger dog and an undisclosed number of cats (none of whom is ginger). She has written for online newspapers and journals such as *The Arcade*. In 2018 she won the Eilís Dillon award from Children's Books Ireland for her first novel, *The Space Between*. She is currently studying film and likes cake and rain; dislikes going outside.



QUESTIONS

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. You've been doing one thing while looking at this book and you didn't even notice it: you've been *breathing*. Breathing is something we usually do automatically, without thinking. But the title of this book brings attention to it. Why do you think that is? In what situations might you need a 'deep' breath? What about 'the deepest' breath?
2. Look at the cover. Does the illustration give any clues as to what the book is about? About the main character(s)? About where the story takes place?
3. There are two versions of the cover. You can see them both in this pack. Which one do you prefer? Why?

AS YOU READ

Chapters 1–5 (pp. 1–31)

- What strikes you on the first page of the first chapter? Have you ever read a book like this? Is it poetry? Is it a novel? Is it both?
- Pay attention to the punctuation. What do you notice? What is punctuation for? Does it work here? How?
- Why does Stevie want to know everything? Can she succeed? Is it the only or the best way to solve her problem? Can you think of other ways?
- How is she planning to learn? What do you think of that strategy?

Chapters 6–8 (pp. 32–96)

- In her dream about her dad, what does Stevie find so comforting (pp. 25–28)? Does it make sense to you?
- The octopus (p. 45) and the batfish (p. 62): what do you notice about the kinds of underwater creatures Stevie likes? Compare them to the species that scare her (fin whale, p. 44; barreleye fish, p. 55).
- Sometimes, Stevie is out of breath or she holds her breath on purpose. What emotion is causing Stevie's breathing to change? Is it always the same? Is it always negative? How does Stevie react? Look at her first nightmare (pp. 9–10), when she reads about the barreleye fish (pp. 55–58) or when Chloe offers to do a trade (pp. 60–61).
- Stevie talks about the 'smart' part of her head and the 'squishy' part (p. 67). What does she mean by that? Compare this to what she says about magic (p. 14) and what she says about the 'only ... thing / In the whole of me / That I don't know' (p. 3). Are there different ways of knowing? Of being smart?

Chapters 9–12 and Epilogue (pp. 97–156)

- 'Why didn't I think I was part of / Everyone?' Stevie wonders (p. 128). What does she mean by that?
- 'Am I dumb?' / I ask / 'For not knowing / For having all the clues / And not putting them together?' (pp. 128–129) What were the clues? Did Stevie have them all? Did you? Why do you think she didn't 'put them together'? And does it make her 'dumb', in your opinion?
- Was it brave of Stevie to speak out? To herself, to the librarian, to her mum?
- When her mum says that she 'get[s] it', Stevie cries again, 'But it's different / This time.' Why does she think that, in your opinion? How is it different?
- Towards the end (p. 147) Stevie breathes out. How is it different from before? What does she feel this time?
- Stevie finally figures out what her feelings for Chloe are. But what about Chloe's feelings for Stevie? Read p. 155 again. Is there a 'clue' in there?
- On the last page (p. 156), Stevie takes 'the deepest breath'. What does it mean? How is this breath different from all the others? Does the book's title make sense to you now?
- Is it a happy ending? Is it an ending at all? What do you think might happen next?

AFTER YOU HAVE READ

- Stevie is very quick to think badly of herself. Make a list of all the occasions she puts herself down. Why do you think she feels that way? Do you know anyone like this?
- Breathing is an important theme in the story. Do you think the shape of the story (it's called a novel in verse or a verse novel) suits this theme? Why or why not? Would it work if the text was written in standard paragraphs? What is the effect of having lines and stanzas?
- Stevie's mum plays a huge part in her life. Think of three (or more) words to describe her. What other characters can Stevie count on? Do they help in the same or different ways?
- Very often, Stevie experiences the world through books first. For her, it's a safe way of learning about things and figuring them out. But for a long time she can't find a book that features someone who feels the way she does. Has this happened to you? Do you feel it's important to have books representing all sorts of people in all sorts of situations? And is it important to read about people who are different from you too?

- Stevie thinks a lot about the sea. Make a list of what she finds wonderful about it and another with what she finds scary about the sea. Does this theme work well for this story? Why or why not?
- Stevie is also interested in the stars, but this theme isn't as important in the book. Why do you think that is? Could it work? Make lists of what is wonderful and scary about the stars (and space). Could it work with the theme of breathing too?
- Pick three (or more) words to describe the book you have just read. Would you say it was realistic? Interesting? Exciting? Important? Enjoyable? Funny? Sad? Confusing? Or anything else?
- Did you feel you could relate to Stevie?
- Did you enjoy the shape of the story: the novel in verse? Did it make *The Deepest Breath* easy or hard to read? Do you think it suits Stevie's story? Would you like to read more novels in verse?

ACTIVITIES

1. How was
Your
Day?

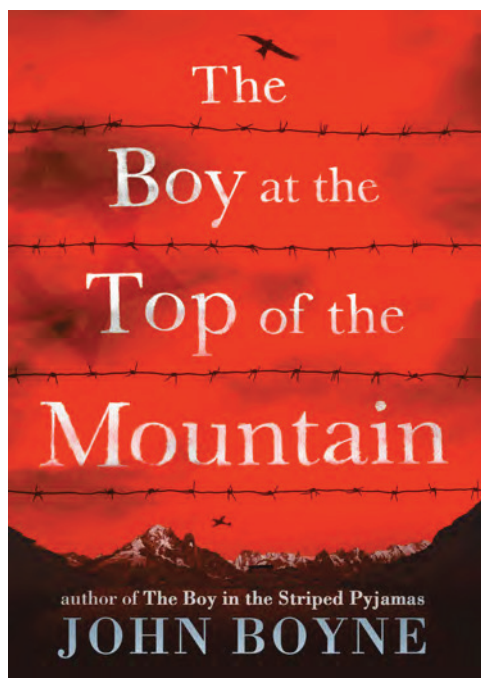
Write about your day (or your night!) in verse, like Stevie. Your text can be about the whole day or just a few moments. Keep only the most important and interesting details: you are trying to paint a picture with your words. Think carefully where you want to finish each line. They don't have to be the same length and *they don't have to rhyme!* Read it aloud, marking a tiny pause between each line. Does it work? Are you happy with it? Tweak it as much as you need to.

2. Octopus poems: There are lots of ways to be smart and everyone has their own areas of expertise. If you were an octopus, you could store all your knowledge in not one but nine brains. Make a list of nine things you know or can do. Read them aloud to make sure you like the rhythm of them. See if you want them to rhyme or not. Now draw an octopus head and arrange your text in the shape of the arms (one thing/line per arm) and inside the head (for the ninth thing/line). You could instead decide to make a similar poem with things you don't know but want to learn about; or with things that scare or worry you.
3. Write a review of this book and rate it. How many stars (or octopuses!) out of five would you give it?

4. A reviving cup of tea: Stevie knows the value of comfort food – pancakes, hot chocolate and very milky tea with lots of sugar make her feel better. But she also finds comfort in other things – taking deep, steady breaths, holding Chloe's hand, confiding in her mum, going to the library ... Write your own recipes for 'revival'. For the first recipe, list the foods and drinks that cheer you up on a bad day. For the second recipe, list anything else that brings you comfort. Check back on these lists next time you're feeling low!

FURTHER RESOURCES

- Check out the publisher's reading guide <http://littleisland.ie/book-guides/>
- Explore Children's Books Ireland's reading lists including especially the Rainbow Reads and Emotional Well-Being lists <https://childrensbooksireland.ie/reading-list/>
- Explore the INTO LGBTQ+ Teachers' Group educational resources. Here you will find Prezi presentations, lesson ideas, suggested resources for the classroom and much more: <https://www.into.ie/about/our-structure/associated-groups/into-lgbt-teachers-group/educational-resources/>
- Try these other great verse novels for young readers: *Love That Dog* by Sharon Creech (8+), *The Crossover* by Kwame Alexander (10+), *Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds (12+).



THE BOY AT THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN

John Boyne

Doubleday

ISBN 9780857534521 (HBK)

Summary

When Pierrot becomes an orphan, he must leave his home in Paris for a new life with his aunt Beatrix, a servant in a wealthy Austrian household. But this is no ordinary time, for it is 1935 and the Second World War is fast approaching; and this is no ordinary house, for this is the Berghof, the home of Adolf Hitler. Pierrot is quickly taken under Hitler's wing and thrown into an increasingly dangerous new world: a world of terror, secrets, and betrayal from which he may never be able to escape.

Judges Comments

Pierrot, half French and half German, lives in Paris in 1936. After his parents die, he is sent to live with his aunt, a housekeeper in an alpine lodge outside Salzburg. But this is no ordinary lodge: Pierrot has been brought to Bergdof, home of Adolf Hitler. Taken under Hitler's wing, Pierrot adopts a new name, Pieter, dissociates himself from his Jewish childhood friend, embraces a Nazi uniform and becomes increasingly callous. This unsettling allegorical story challenges the convention of empathy and invites reflection about patriotism, manipulation, entitlement, propaganda, the traumas of war and the figure of the antihero.

About the Author

John Boyne was born in Ireland in 1971. He has written four previous novels for young readers, including *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (winner of the Bisto Book of the Year Award in 2007), *Noah Barleywater Runs Away*, *The Terrible Thing That Happened to Barnaby Brocket* and *Stay Where You Are and Then Leave*. John also writes books and short stories for adults.

Reading Journal

The suggestions below highlight some important things to look out for as you progress through the book. Try to make notes and record your changing responses to the story, as this will be useful when you come to tackle the questions and activities featured on the following pages.

Before you begin the book

Think about what the title might mean. Imagine being at the top of a mountain. For some people it will evoke positive feelings and the sense of achievement at having reached the peak. For others it brings a negative feeling, associated with loneliness and isolation. How do you feel when you think about it?

Look at the book's cover. What will the book be about? What clues do you think the barbed wire, the isolated cabin, the solitary bird and the plane suggest about the story? Read the blurb on the back cover. What do you already know about the Nazis and Hitler? We are told that Pierrot 'must choose where his loyalties lie.' This suggests that he will have to make important decisions. Think about what this might involve. Who do you think he will have to choose between?

Part 1–1936

Chapter 1—Three red spots on a handkerchief

- The book opens with following line: 'Although Pierrot Fischer's father didn't die in the Great War, his mother Émile always maintained it was the war that killed him.' Explain what Pierrot's mother meant.
- Anshel gave Pierrot the sign of the dog. What traits do we associate with dogs?
- How did Pierrot's father feel about Jewish people? 'Papa is looking down at us now D'Artagnan,' he said. 'And one day I am going to make him proud of me.' How do you think Pierrot will make his father proud?
- Why do you think Pierrot wanted his mother to have a picture of his father after she had died?

Chapter 2—The medal in the cabinet

- Simone and Adèle welcome all children—'Colour, race or creed mean nothing to us.' Why would they have had to point this out? Was this unusual?
- How do you think Pierrot felt when he wasn't allowed to go to temple?
- What does the word 'Gentile' mean?
- 'And besides, life isn't getting any easier for Jews in Paris, is it?' Why do you think life was becoming difficult for Jewish people at this time?
- Why was Mme Bronstein so anxious to explain that she would have treated Pierrot the same if he had been Jewish?

Chapter 3—A letter from a friend and a letter from a stranger

- Why do you think Hugo was so upset by what Josette said to him?
- What did the bloody handkerchief remind Pierrot of?
- How did Jacques get the medal?
- Do you think that bullies often behave the way they do because they were mistreated or have suffered in the past themselves?
- Where did Beatrix live? Why do you think that Simone was surprised by this?

Chapter 4—Three train journeys

- Why do you think the woman made the old man leave the compartment?
- Why do you think none of the people tried to stop the man in uniform from standing on Pierrot's hand?
- How were the boys in the compartment on the train to Munich dressed? Why did Pierrot want to be dressed like them?
- 'Today the Austrian people have a place they call home. But one day ... poof!' What do you think was about to happen in Austria?
- How was Pierrot like Emile?
- What was disturbing about Anshel's story?

Chapter 5—The house at the top of the mountain

- What was hanging above Pierrot's head when he woke up in the morning? What do you think the spider and a web might symbolise?
- What was the house called?
- What job did Beatrix have?
- What address did Pierrot invent?
- Who did Beatrix remind Pierrot of?

Chapter 6—A little less French, a little more German

- Look up the word Bohemian. What does it mean?
- According to Ernst, why did people wear uniforms?
- What did the master say that work would achieve?
- Why did Beatrix not want Pierrot to talk about where he came from?
- Pierrot's new name was to be Pieter. Do you think that changing a name can also change the person in terms of how they behave and what they believe?
- What favour was Pierrot to do for Ernst? Why do you think he asked him to do this?

Chapter 7—The sound that nightmares make

- Why could a letter from Anshel get Pierrot into trouble?
- Who was in the photograph in Beatrix's room?
- How did Pierrot react to the killing of the chickens?
- Why did Anshel say he had to wait in the gutter?
- What signs would Anshel and Pierrot use instead of their names when writing letters to each other?
- What did Pierrot do when he saw the master?

Part 2—1937–1941

Chapter 8—The brown paper parcel

- What did Pierrot think might be better than being bullied?
- How was Pierrot's father dressed in his dreams?
- Why did Eva not believe that her old clothes should be given to the poor?
- When talking about dogs, Hitler said 'I prefer pure breeds.' What is the significance of this comment?
- Hitler's dog during the war was called 'Fuchsl' or 'Little Fox.' Who else used the sign of the fox?
- 'He was a member of the Deutsches Jungvolk now he told himself. Papa would be so proud of me, he thought.' Why do you think Pierrot believed this?
- At the end of the chapter, why did Ernst stop talking when he saw Pierrot?

Chapter 9—A shoemaker, a soldier, a king

- Why did Hitler think that Pierrot's mother was an ignorant person?
- Why did Hitler think that Henry Ford should run for president?
- Which book reminded Pierrot of home?
- Why do you think the Duke appeared nervous when Hitler joked about taking over England?
- What countries were like a pair of great oak trees?
- Why do you think Hitler told Pierrot that disloyalty never goes unpunished?

Chapter 10—A Happy Christmas at the Berghof

- How do you think Beatrix really felt about losing her room?
- Why do you think Anshel had to leave Paris?
- Who did Beatrix believe was the darkness at the centre of the world?
- Why do you think Katarina started talking about Heinrich and what had happened to his father?
- How does the author create tension before the cake is served?
- Is there anything else Beatrix or Ernst could have done to kill Hitler?

Part 3—1942-1945

Chapter 11—A special project

- The author now refers to Pierrot as Pieter. Why do you think he does this?
- What did some people think should happen to Pieter after what Beatrix had done?
- 'He didn't have an Aunt Beatrix, he told himself. That was another boy entirely. A boy named Pierrot.' Why do you think Pieter told himself this?
- How did Pieter feel when he sat at Hitler's desk?
- What do you think the shower rooms were going to be used for if they didn't have water? Do you think Pieter had any idea what they would be used for?

Chapter 12—Eva's party

- Why did Pieter not wear his uniform?
- Why do you think Katarina told Pieter about Ruth?
- Why do you think Katarina's father wanted to go to the party?
- Who else was described as eating like a rat in the first chapter?
- When Pieter attacked Katarina he heard two voices in his head. Which of the two voices in his head do you think belonged to Pierrot?

Chapter 13—The Darkness and the light

- What happened to Emma?
- Why do you think the woman who told him about the Holzmanns did so without any fear?
- What did Herta say would be the worst crime of all?
- What did Pieter find in the closet?
- Why do you think Pieter stayed at the Berghof even though he knew enemy soldiers would come?

Epilogue

Chapter 14—A boy without a home

- Why did nobody speak to Pieter in the camp?
- What did Pieter think of when he couldn't sleep?
- What became of Hugo?
- Why did Anshel say that they couldn't be children anymore?

Questions

1. At the beginning of the book we feel sympathy for Pierrot because of how difficult his life has been. However we begin to lose sympathy for him as the story moves on. How does the author achieve this?
2. Pierrot's father tells him 'You may have been born in France and you live in Paris, but you're German through and through, just like me.' Do you think that a person can have only one nationality or is identity more complex than this?
3. After his father attacks his mother, Pierrot ran to Anshel's apartment and began reading his stories. 'Somehow he found that losing himself in a world that wasn't his own was a welcome escape.' Do you ever find comfort in stories when things aren't going well?
4. Pierrot's best friend is Anshel, yet he ends up becoming a Nazi and hating Jewish people. Why does this happen? Do you think that something like this could happen today?
5. When Pierrot first put on the uniform that Hitler gave him 'he thought of Kurt Kotler again, and realised how wonderful it would be to have such authority; to be able to take what you wanted, from whomever you wanted, instead of always having things taken from you.' Had the uniform changed Pierrot? Do you believe that people act differently when they wear a uniform, especially a military one?
6. Pierrot tells Beatrix 'You're just a woman. Necessary to the Reich, of course but the business of Germany is best left to men like the Führer and me.' What does this statement tell us about how the Nazis and now Pierrot felt towards women?
7. 'It was Pierrot who had climbed out of bed that morning, but it was Pieter who returned to it now before falling asleep.' How are Pieter and Pierrot different?
8. After he betrays his aunt and saves Hitler, the author refers to Pierrot as Pieter. Why does the author do this? Do you think someone can change who they are inside by taking on a different name?
9. 'But he wasn't French any more, he realised. Nor was he German.' Pieter comes to this conclusion when the war is coming to an end. If he wasn't either of these nationalities, then what was he? Is it possible not to have any nationality?
10. If you were Anshel, how would you have reacted after Pierrot/Pieter had told you the story of his life so far? Would you have wanted to be friends with him?
11. The book is divided into three sections and ends with an epilogue. Does this structure have any impact on your enjoyment or understanding of the book?
12. Many people believe that it is important that we remember what happened during the holocaust so that nothing like that could ever happen again. Do you think that anything like it could happen in Ireland? Has anything like this happened here? Explain your answer.

Activities

Pretend that you are the adult Pierrot and that you are writing a letter to your younger self. What advice would you give? Pierrot would tell Anshel stories which he would then write. Tell a friend a short story and ask him/her to write it down. Now swap roles. How have the stories changed? What did you prefer more, telling the story or writing it? How are the two activities different?

Write a diary entry from Anshel around the time Pierrot stopped writing to him. Describe what is happening to your family at this time. Consider why Pierrot has stopped writing to you.

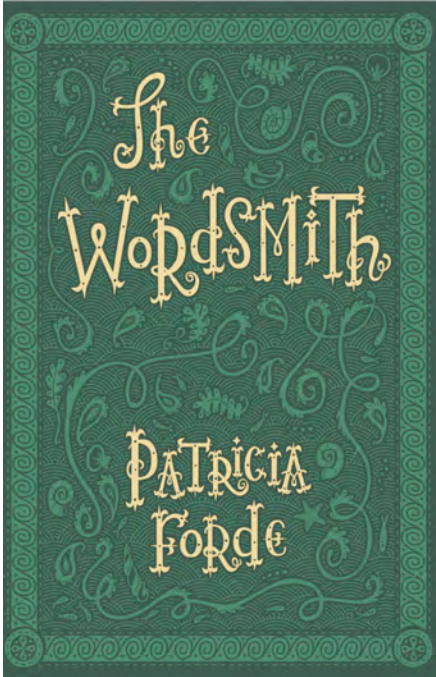
During the Holocaust six million Jews were killed by the Nazis. Research what happened to the Jewish people of Paris and France. When you are carrying out this research make sure that you consult reputable sources. If you are unsure of the reliability of a source ask a parent, teacher or librarian for advice.

Write a summary of what happened to the lives of Pierrot and Anshel after the book had ended. Write a review of the book, recommending a suitable age group.

How did you feel when Pierrot betrayed his aunt? Would you have preferred if he had not done this? Would this have made the book better? Discuss other books in which something shocking or uncomfortable happens and think about why authors write events like this into their stories.

Each chapter has a title and together they read almost like a summary of the book. Create a different title for each chapter:

- Three red spots on a handkerchief
- The medal in the cabinet
- A letter from a friend and a letter from a stranger
- Three train journeys
- The house at the top of the mountain
- A little less French, a little more German
- The sound that nightmares make
- The brown paper parcel
- A shoemaker, a soldier, a king
- A Happy Christmas at the Berghof
- A special project
- Eva's party
- The Darkness and the light
- A boy without a home



THE WORDSMITH

Patricia Forde

Little Island Books

ISBN 9781908195999 (PBK)

Summary

On the death of her master, Letta is suddenly promoted from apprentice to Wordsmith, charged with collecting and archiving words in post-apocalyptic, neo-medieval Ark. When she uncovers a sinister plan to suppress language and rob the people of Ark of the power of speech, she realises that she has to save not only words, but the culture itself. A beautiful and gripping dystopian story of how words make us who we are.

Judges' Comment

Forde's evocative and reflective novel poses thought-provoking questions about global warming, the power of communication, the role of religion and the value of the arts. This novel offers opportunities for debates, creative writing and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) discussions about human rights, freedom of speech, totalitarian regimes and the importance of language in their own lives and wider society.



About the Author

Patricia Forde lives in Galway, in the west of Ireland. She has published three picturebooks in the Irish language and lots of easy reader titles. *The Wordsmith* is her first novel for this older age group. She has also written two plays, as well as several television drama series for children and teenagers. She has worked as a writer on both English and Irish language soap operas. In another life, she was a primary school teacher and the artistic director of Galway Arts Festival. She lives with one husband, two teenagers, and a dog called Ben in a house in the middle of a small wood. In her spare time, she collects vintage children's books and reads them late at night.

Reading Journal

The suggestions below highlight some important things to look out for as you progress through the book. Try to make notes and record your changing responses to the story, as this will be useful when you come to tackle the questions and activities featured on the following pages ...

Before you begin the book:

- Look at the cover. It is quite plain. Does it attract you? Would you prefer a picture/illustration?
- The typeface of the title is unusual—does it make you more or less interested in the book? Does it hint at anything about the book?
- Look closely—what more can you see on the cover? Turn the book over and look at the back and spine of the book. Notice the details.

Read the Prologue:

- Does the prologue encourage you to read on? Is it confusing or enticing? Or both?

Read Chapters 1–3

- Look at the chapter heading illustrations. (Word Cards) What purpose do you think they serve?
- There are two types of speech in Ark. What are they? And what is the difference between them? How many words does John Noa, the ruler of Ark, want to cut from the approved List?
- On page 17 we begin to understand what it is to 'edit' words that are deemed no longer useful. How is this done? Why does the boy not recognise the word 'ant'?
- In the first mention of a place 'outside Ark', Benjamin, the Wordsmith tells Letta, his apprentice that 'there is a lot of unrest out there'. What does he hint about what's happening inside Ark?
- On page 19 Letta imagines her future as a trained Wordsmith. What does she imagine herself doing?
- On her walk, Letta meets a group of children. What is different about the way they spend their day, to how children spend their time where you live?
- Letta goes to the beach. It is not a place of play but one of fear, with memories of destruction caused by great tidal waves. What might have caused these tidal waves do you think?
- Letta works on a special box of words for apprentice carpenters. What words does this box contain?
- Letta notices a young boy, Daniel, has 15 notches on his tally stick. What do we learn about how and why tally sticks are used in Ark?
- On page 24 Letta prepares boxes of words, detailing 30 types of fruit to be removed, including pineapple. Which fruits remain on the List? Why might the names of these fruits remain?
- A Boy—a stranger, comes into the shop. What does he ask for? And where does Letta find it?
- The Boy is wounded but alive. Letta brings him to her room. Is this unusual behaviour for Letta? Why do you think she chooses to harbour a possible felon?
- Marlo (the boy) gets delirious from his wounds—uses non-List words, e.g. 'betray'. When the fever breaks, Marlo and

Letta chat more, and even share a joke—based on use of a 'textspeak' word. What is the word? And why might it be important that they share a sense of humour?

- How is food served in Ark? Do you think this is a good idea?
- Marlo explains the gavvers shot him, with Black Angel—what is the effect of this?
- Why might Mrs Truckle (the teacher), not like using the tally sticks?
- Werber Downes is serving at the water station. What type of character is he? And what does he think of Letta?
- Did you guess where Marlo hid when the gavver called to look for him? How did the gavver describe the boy, and his type, to Letta?
- The last section of this chapter is in italics—why do you think this is? What do we learn from John Noa?

Read Chapters 4–6

- What was Letta's parents' last message to their baby daughter?
- We hear about Tintown. Who lives there? And why?
- Letta considers turning Marlo in but changes her mind after witnessing a particular incident. Why does she reconsider? Is she right?
- 'Poor Goddess, she had come to warn them, but they hadn't listened'. Who, or what, was the Goddess, and what did she come to warn about?
- What does Marlo tell Letta about the difference between a Desecrator and a Creator?
- Letta still loves Ark, but she finally admits to herself that she hates List. What do you know, so far, about why John Noa created List? Do you agree with his view, or with Letta? Why?
- Letta is tempted to tell Mrs Truckle everything. Why doesn't she? Would you have told her?
- Why is Letta helping Marlo? Might there be more than one reason?
- Why does Letta decide to go to the Wheatfields to meet Marlo's uncle Finn? What does she see when she gets there? What does she hear?
- Marlo and Letta discuss the future. In what way do they see it things differently? Could their views be reconciled?
- Read the section in italics. Why does John Noa blame words? Is he right?

Read Chapters 7–9

- Letta makes her first visit to John Noa's house, where she meets Amelia Deer. What do we find out about Amelia?
- John Noa tells Letta something shocking. What is it? How does he handle giving the news?
- Next day Letta went to the Central Kitchen, opened the shop, transcribed words—all in a kind of numbness. Was this a realistic portrayal of a reaction to sudden bad news?
- Letta goes to Benjamin's study and examines a map of the Forest. What does she notice?
- Why does Letta set out for Tintown? Does her description of Tintown remind you of any kind of town from today's world? What do you think life would be like there?
- Letta is attacked by a group of children. Who rescues her? And how?

- Letta helps an injured old man on the street, by giving him water. What used he do, before the Melting? Where does the old man's son take Letta?
- Smith Fearfall repeats to Letta the story of finding the body of Benjamin Lazlo near the river. But a small detail makes Letta suspicious of his story—what is it?
- As Letta heads out of Tintown she comes across the Wordless. What are the different theories of their origin? Which theory do you believe? Or could there be another explanation?
- Once back inside the wall—Letta sees something intriguing on the windmill. What does Letta see? And what is her reaction to it?
- What does the old man say to the crowd? What do the gavvers do to him? What is the reaction of the crowd to how the gavvers treat the old man?
- Letta prepares to make new ink. Did you enjoy the detailed description of how she makes the ink?
- On page 111 we hear about Ark's 'Two child policy'. What do you think of this? Does it remind you of any similar policy in the real world?
- Letta talks to Hugo through a grating into his prison cell. He tells her how to contact the Desecrators/Creators. How does the young gavver treat the prisoner? How does Letta react?
- Letta returned home, to find a card in the Dropbox. What did the card say? Were you surprised?

Read Chapters 10–12

- How does Letta react to the suggestion that Benjamin may be alive? Does she believe it?
- While leaving a note at the Goddess statue, what does Letta impulsively promise Rose, the Healer's wife, that she will do?
- What do you think of the different ways that Rose and Letta view the Goddess statue?
- Marlo has a narrow escape as John Noa visits Letta in the shop. What did he come to say to Letta? Will Letta trust him this time?
- In the Italic section, we learn more about life before the Melting and the speeches given by John Hardy, last Prime Minister of England, Ireland and Wales. What do you think happened to Scotland?
- Letta decides to persuade John Noa to put some abstract words back into the list. What words was Letta talking about, and why did she want them back? Do you think he would agree?
- While waiting to meet John Noa, Letta overhears him and the gavvers talking about Benjamin. What were they saying? How does John Noa get around his 'no kill' policy? Is this honest?
- On page 142 Letta finally realises/decides that John Noa is her enemy—why?
- To fulfil Marlo and Finn's plan to find Benjamin, Letta agrees to go once more to John Noa's house. What does she go there for? Why would Letta risk her life like this?

Read Chapters 13–15.

- Letta asks John Noa to add the word 'hope' to List. How does he explain that this is not a good idea?

- Letta hides in a laboratory—what does she discover there about John Noa's deception?
- Hiding under John Noa's desk, Letta overhears a chilling conversation. How does he describe Man?
- On page 160 Letta hatches a plan, to use a bottle of ink to help find where they are taking Benjamin. How will this work? Do you know a story where a similar device is used when entering a forest?
- What happens when Letta sees Benjamin is actually on the cart? Does everything go as planned?
- Where does the beetroot ink trail lead them? What do they find inside the ring of fire?
- Where does Edgeware take them? And what state is Benjamin in at this time?
- What does Letta realise about her feelings for Benjamin? Have they changed?

Read Chapters 16–18.

- As Letta nurses Benjamin, what does he warn her about? What does he tell her not to do? What does he tell her she must do? What does he say about the birds?
- Do you see as ironic that as Letta struggles to express her love, Benjamin says 'no need for words'?
- How does Letta react to Benjamin's death?
- Why does Letta not agree to Finn and Marlo's invitation to live with them and join the revolution?
- Edgeware reveals that she once had a son—what does her story suggest about the future of Ark?
- Read the Italic section. What do we learn about John Noa's state of mind? Does he have hope?
- By page 192, as we observe Marlo and Letta exchanging goodbyes, we get a glimpse into their feelings for each other. Describe them.
- What happens on Shoe Changing Day? What does it tell us about life in Ark?
- How has Letta's attitude towards Ark changed since the start of the book?
- Marlo brings Letta to a hidden space under the Pumphouse in the forest, where they are to question the Scavenger Fearfall. What type of world does Letta see there?
- How does listening to the music affect Letta? What does Leyla, the musician say about music?
- What do you think of John Noa's assertion that humans should be no different from the sheep in the fields? What does Marlo have to say about this?
- How is the interrogation of Fearfall carried out? Does this remind you of anything you have seen in a film or on TV? What threats do they use? What information do they eventually get from Fearfall?
- On page 212 Letta removes her hood to comfort Fearfall's small son. The others are worried because she has put herself at risk. Letta allowed sentiment to overcome fear. What do you think about this?

Read Chapters 19–21.

- Letta heads back to Tintown, to find the old scientist and ask about Nicene. What does he tell her? Does this explain why Benjamin warned her not to drink the water?
- Solem, the scientist, asks about the three Deer sisters. Can you take a guess yet at who they are?

- When Carver throws Letta into a prison cell—she is rescued by John Noa. Why do you think he does this?
- Leyla is also in a prison cell, but John Noa is not so kind to her. What happens?
- John Noa send Letta off with a promise to send her bottles of water. Why does he do this? Is this confirmation of his plan? How does Letta feel about John Noa now?
- Letta has had strange conversations with Leyla, with hints about 'the women in her family'. What might she be talking about? What does Amelia confirm?
- What does Letta learn about Leyla and Finn—and why has Finn given Leyla a blade?
- Next morning, Letta sees a flock of birds set off across the ocean. What does this remind her of?
- How does Letta discover that her mother, Freya, was the third Deer sister, alongside Amelia and Leyla?

Read Chapters 22–25.

- Finn, Marlo and Letta set their plan in motion to foil John Noa's attempt at poisoning the water supply. How is Letta going to get inside the water tower? Do you think they will succeed?
- Do you think the author's description of Letta's rough journey in the water barrel was good? How?
- Why does Letta find the height of the water tower and the narrow ledges so difficult? How does John Noa use his knowledge of her frailty to his own advantage? Does it work?
- As Letta and John Noa face their final confrontation—he tries to unnerve her with words. What does he say, and what effect does he hope to have? How does Letta counter this?
- How well do you think the chaos of the battle scene is described? Does the author get the tension right in the final struggle between Letta and John Noa?
- What do you think of the idea that it is a deluge of water that saves them in the end?
- In the aftermath, Letta wonders what the future will bring? What do you think will happen?
- Are you surprised that Amelia has taken power in Ark?
- Letta is happy to be re-united with Marlo. Do you think they have a future together?
- Do you think the ending leaves things open for a sequel? What type of story might it be?

The Broader Questions:

- The author uses Word Cards as chapter headings—some words from List, some Non-List. Have a look at the words chosen as chapter headings and see if they tell you anything about the most important themes of the story.
- What do the Non-List words tell you about life in Ark, and what is valued, and not valued, there?
- Discuss the importance of water in Ark and surrounding world. It is often used as a type of currency in the story—can you find any examples of that?
- Many of the events in the later chapters of the book, and even the plot devices, are foreshadowed by smaller, seemingly insignificant events in the early chapters. Did you notice this as you read? Was it intrusive? Or was it something that led you naturally along as the story

unfolded? See if you can come up with two or three examples of this happening.

- One aspect of the story was the tentative, blossoming romance between Letta and Marlo. Do you think this thread of the story was handled well? Did you think Marlo and Letta would end up together? Do they have a chance at happiness? What might their lives be like?
- When we finally learn of John Noa's plan to make humanity wordless—some would say, to bring humanity to an end—are you convinced by the storyline? Did you guess the plan before it is revealed in the book? Did you 'know' before Letta does? How does the author manage the juggling of concealing/revealing his final plan?
- The land where Letta lives is called Ark—and its ruler is John Noa. Do these words remind you of another story? What other parallels are there between these two stories? What other religious references and symbolism did you notice in the story?
- Letta, as the Wordsmith, is sometimes asked to create boxes of special words e.g. the word boxes for apprentice plumber and gavvers. What is different about these word boxes? She is also asked, on occasion, to get rid of certain specialist word boxes, e.g. insect names, fruit varieties and even colours that are deemed no longer needed. Discuss why this might be, and what it means for the world of Ark. Are there any words you would like to get rid of?
- There are many examples of 'hidden spaces' in the book; from the Monk's Hole in Benjamin's house, to the trapdoor under the Pumphouse. Find examples in the text, and talk about why these are used so much in the story.
- Despite the lofty ideas behind the setting up of Ark, at the end, the success or failure of the plan was heavily influenced by the relationships between a small group of people; John Noa, Benjamin, Letta's father and the three Deer sisters, Amelia, Leyla and Freya. Discuss.

Suggested Activities:

In telling the story of *The Wordsmith*, the author does not use a restricted vocabulary like List—in fact, the writing is very descriptive and beautiful at times. What would this book be like if it was written in List? Could it be done? What would be lost? Take a piece of writing—perhaps a children's story—and retell it using List type vocabulary. How many words can you get rid of, and still keep the sense of the story? Does using a restricted vocabulary change the story in any way? Which story would a child prefer?

Tally sticks are mentioned in *The Wordsmith*. The children wear them around their necks, and the teachers put a notch in them for each breach of the language rules, i.e. each use of a non-List word. Find out what tally sticks were originally used for. Also, there was a specific use for tally sticks in education in Ireland during the middle of the 19th century. Find out what that was and consider if this use could have inspired the story of the Wordsmith? Had you heard of tally sticks in this context before? Do you think tally sticks would work in schools now, to discourage use of one language, or encourage another?

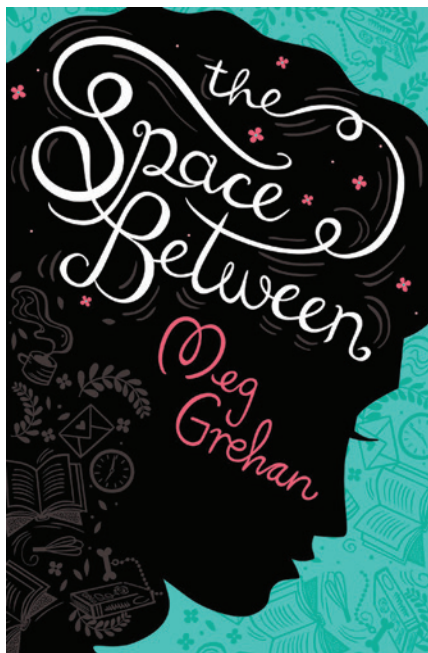
One of the themes of *The Wordsmith* is how humanity was let down by the use and misuse of words. We hear how writers, journalists, politicians and even some scientists misrepresented what was really happening around climate change and the dangers facing the world. Do you think this is happening now? Have you come across this type of writing in print or online? If so, bring some examples into class for discussion. Or, write an article or speech as if you were a writer or politician using words to deceive the public.

Look at the word cards used as chapter headings. Does the order and timing of how the words are revealed to us say anything about how the story is moving and where it is going? Look through the chapter headings and the text and find all the words we are told are Non-List i.e. forbidden to use in Ark. What does this say about life in Ark and about how people are supposed to live their lives? About what type of aspirations they are allowed to have?

Amelia is an enigmatic character. Her motives remain unclear, and we never see inside her head. Write a piece from her point of view, perhaps as a series of diary entries she keeps during the time covered by the story.

The future described in *The Wordsmith* has come about partly because people did not act quickly enough to counteract the effects of climate change. Do you think your school is doing enough to highlight the issues around climate change? Design a poster to display in your school or write an article for the school magazine that draws attention to this issue.

What if John Noa had succeeded in his plan to make what was left of humanity wordless? Write a possible alternative ending to the story. What would happen to the human race?



The Space Between

Meg Grehan

Little Island Books

ISBN 9781910411599

Summary

It's New Year's Eve, and Beth plans to spend a whole year alone, in her snug, safe house. But she has reckoned without floppy-eared, tail-wagging Mouse, who comes nosing to her window – followed shortly by his owner, Alice. As Beth's year of solitude rolls out, Alice gently steals her way first into Beth's house and later into her heart. And by the time New Year's Eve comes round again – who knows?

A tender and delicate love story in verse, *The Space Between* is a tale of how warmth, support and friendship can overcome mental anguish

Judges' Comments

Meg Grehan's debut novel offers an honest and tender chronicle of new love between two young women and explores the complexities of sustaining mental health in contemporary society. The story ebbs and flows and is enhanced by intriguing layout of text, which expresses the tumult of the protagonist's life and experiences. Skilfully rendered in verse and elegantly written and presented, Grehan's narrative is a significant new addition to Irish children's literature.

About the Author

Meg Grehan is an author from Donegal. She works as a stage manager and theatre technician. She has also written for online newspapers and journals. *The Space Between* is her first novel.

QUESTIONS

BEFORE YOU READ

1. *The Space Between* is a novel written in verse, like a poem. Have you ever read a verse novel before? What do you think it will be like? What do you expect from such a book? Why do you think an author would choose to write a story like this in verse as opposed to prose?
2. Look at the cover. What do the images tell you? What do the colours evoke? Think about the positioning of the title.
3. What do you think the title might mean? What does 'the space between' refer to?

AS YOU READ

1. In a way, *The Space Between* is a bit like a diary. As you read the book, record how you feel about what you read and how those feelings change as you learn more about the central characters.
2. What kind of poetry does the author use to tell Beth's story? Is it a kind of poetry you're familiar with?
3. Pay attention to the imagery the author uses to convey Beth's anguish and unhappiness. Does this imagery change when she meets Alice?
4. Do you think the novel could have been written in the first person? How would it have changed the story?
5. The book can be seen as an exploration of mental illness. Does it feel authentic to you? Can you relate to Beth's experiences?
6. What other issues does the novel explore? Think about these words in relation to Beth's life and consider what they mean to you: safety, home, routine, love, connection, loneliness, faith, fear, trust, isolation, acceptance.
7. Think about the characterisation of Beth and Alice. Do they feel real to you? Can you get a sense of who they are from the novel?
8. Pick the poem that speaks to you the most and rewrite or translate it into a prose piece. In what ways does it change?
9. Make a list of the names of each of the poems that make up Beth's story. Can you make sense of the story just by looking at these titles?

THE POEMS

1. The novel's first poem talks about the shadows that Beth watches crossing her room. Is it significant that these are the first images we are presented with? Why?
2. Why do you think Beth might come to such an important and potentially life-defining decision on New Year's Eve? What do you think might have brought her to this decision?
3. Beth tells herself that she is still Beth, that she is still herself – but she doesn't seem sure. What do you think is happening to her as she wonders where the bits and pieces of her identity have gone?

4. A long poem called 'Dark and Quiet and Cold' describes Beth's everyday routine. Analyse what is happening in this poem. Is this routine beneficial for Beth?
5. Poems about the past are written in italics. Why do you think this might be? Collect all of these poems together and analyse them as a whole. What do they tell you?
6. Consider the poem 'Armour'. What does this word mean in relation to the way Beth is living her life?
7. Another long poem called 'Heavy' describes a panic attack Beth experiences. How successfully does the poem articulate her sense of fear and hopelessness? Consider not only the imagery used but also the way the poem looks on the page, its visual as well as verbal effect.
8. The poems 'Tired' and 'Unprepared' use Beth's physical and emotional state to explore how she is feeling. Is this a theme throughout the story? Does the physicality of certain poems help you to connect to Beth as a character? Or are the emotional poems more accessible?
9. Read the poem called 'OK'. Do you think the moment described in the poem marks a breakthrough for Beth?
10. In the poem 'Meeting Mouse', we hear Beth speaking aloud to another person for the first time. Do you think this is significant? Why? How is it handled within the poem? Why do you think the author chooses to let Beth speak rather than describing what she says?
11. Look at the poem 'Rubber Gloves'. Does it strike you as different from the other poems about Beth's state of mind? Why?
12. How do the poems change when Beth meets Alice and Mouse? Does the structure become looser? Does the type of imagery change? Do you think meeting Alice allows Beth to see herself from a new perspective?
13. Think about Mouse's place in the story. What does taking care of the dog do for Beth? Does this chime with your experience of caring for animals?
14. Read the poem 'One Step'. Discuss the role that nature begins to play in the story.
15. What does the poem entitled 'Alice' tell you about Beth?
16. The poem 'Hers' is situated almost at the heart of the novel. Why do you think this is? How do things change after this poem?
17. Take the poems that you think best describe the life Beth and Alice build together. Why have you picked these particular poems?
18. The poem 'The End' isn't actually the end at all. Why do you think the author chose to give it this title? Look at it in relation to the very last poem, '31st December II' and see if the former contributes to the sense of closure in the latter.



Plain Jane

Kim Hood

The O'Brien Press

ISBN 9781847178541

Summary

At nearly sixteen, Jane has lived in the shadow of her little sister Emma's cancer diagnosis for over three years. Not that she was ever in the limelight; it is her sister who is the talented one, a dancer who at ten had been outgrowing her small town teachers' skills. Jane had never resented her sister's talent; without any interests herself, it had always kept the pressure off her. Now, though, with her parents struggling to cope financially and emotionally, Jane's life in her rural mining village seems to be a never-ending monotony of skipping school, long bus rides to the hospital and hanging out with a boyfriend she doesn't even know why she is going out with. Nobody really cares that her life is stuck in neutral; she is finding it difficult to care herself ... Ultimately, Jane begins to understand the real parts of her life that are good; her sister Emma's chances of recovery begin to improve; and the two sisters try to rebuild the relationship they shared before the illness took over.

Judges' Comments

Jane's little sister Emma has cancer and for the last three years has occupied all their parents' attention. Jane loves and worries about her little sister but still can't help resenting her parents for not noticing the impact that Emma's illness is having on her. Kim Hood's novel sensitively and movingly explores what it is like to struggle with a mental illness, the push and pull of family dynamics, the turbulence of young adulthood and the difficulties of seeing someone you love suffer.



About the Author

KIM HOOD grew up in British Columbia, Canada. After earning degrees in psychology, history and education, she wandered through a few countries before making the west coast of Ireland home. Her eclectic work experience in education, therapy and community services has presented endless opportunity to observe a world of interesting characters. She has always had a passion for trying to understand life from the perspective of those on the fringes of society.

Before you begin the book

- Look at the cover of the book – the silhouette with title and subtitle enclosed. Does it attract your attention? Does it suggest anything to you regarding what the book is about?
- Would the title – *Plain Jane* – entice you or put you off reading the book?
- The typeface of the title is unusual – does it remind you of anything?
- Read the blurb on the back cover. It is short and to the point. Does it make you more or less interested in reading this book?
- Taking all the above into account – cover, title design, blurb – what age group would you estimate the book is aimed at?

This book is divided into five sections, and each section is given a title, beginning with 'Grave Morendo', translated as 'very slow, dying'. Any of you who study Italian will recognise the language, and any of you who study music may recognise that Grave Morendo and the other section headings are musical terms. You will notice also that some pages, and all chapter headings, are decorated with musical notation.

First section: Grave Morendo = Very slow, dying

1. Opening sentences are important – what does the opening sentence of *Plain Jane* tell us about the story and the characters, Jane and Dell?
2. Dell is described as being 'good at sport' and 'established as cool', yet Jane says he also lacks confidence – is there any reason given why this might be so?
3. Dell has already 'quit school' – why was this not unusual for boys in the small town of Verwood? And was there any reason why Dell in particular might leave school early?
4. Jane imagines what herself and Dell would be like at age forty – is this usual for a fifteen-year-old? Have you ever tried to project yourself twenty-five years into the future?
5. Jane's encounter with Dell's dad, Alan, does not go well. What do you think about the way Alan speaks to his son, Dell? And also to Jane? Does this description make you uncomfortable? Why?
6. How is the character of Emma, Jane's sister, introduced into the story?
7. Some of the townspeople view Emma as a 'Living Angel' – why does Jane think this is sometimes hypocritical?
8. Verwood has a population of only 423 people – why does Jane think that the situation with Emma might be different if they lived in a large city? Do you agree?

9. Jane describes herself as 'a class-skipping, pot-smoking, hang out in my boyfriend's basement playing games kind of 15 year old'. Do you think this is a full and accurate description of Jane? Why? Why not?
10. Several times during this early part of the book, Jane compares how their family operated before Emma's cancer diagnosis with how they are after the diagnosis. What are the main changes, and how are they affecting Jane?
11. The descriptions of Emma's illness and her punishing treatment regime are quite graphic. Did you find this upsetting to read? Was it necessary in order to tell the story?
12. Jane and Emma's grandad has recently died. How is he introduced into the story? What is Jane's opinion of her grandad?
13. What is your opinion of Eva Hartigan, the school counsellor, based on what Jane tells us about her? Why did the counsellor suddenly disappear?
14. Jane complains that, when Emma was diagnosed with cancer, 'nobody told me – everyone knew, except me'. Why might this happen, and how does it make Jane feel?
15. Next, we meet Jane's loyal friend Tracey and two other classmates, Brenda and Ashling. What is the relationship like between all four girls?
16. Jane begins to skip classes at school – why might she do this?
17. Jane refers to her increasing alienation from her former friends – how does she describe their conversations?
18. While visiting the Granola Cafe in Kendal, Jane bumps into a new guy, Farley. Is the character of Farley going to be significant in the book? How does the author signal this?
19. Jane has an upsetting experience in the convenience store when she overhears a customer say (of Emma) 'perhaps she didn't make it, poor thing'. This allows Jane to explain how she feels about Emma. How have her feelings changed since 'the diagnosis'?
20. Jane doodles a lot. Do you doodle? Is there a difference between doodling and drawing?
21. Jane refers to Emma and her mom as 'speaking Cancereeze'. What does she mean?
22. Jane describes Emma, because of her illness, as being stuck as 'a perpetual child'. How does Jane describe herself?
23. We meet Dr Jonathan Ballerini – an approachable doctor with a holistic approach to medicine. What does Dr Jonathan put on Emma's rash to make it better?

24. Jane's mom spends most nights at the hospital with Emma. For once, Jane wanted her to come home and spend time with her. Was Jane being selfish? Jane's disappointment prompts her to say something mean to Emma. What do you feel about Jane at this point?
25. Jane thinks about emulating Victorian women who 'withdrew' from life when there was no possibility of their lives changing. Why? Is Jane hitting rock bottom here?
26. From the bus, Jane and her friends see the remnants of Tent City, a summer 'hippy' camp trying to save the grizzly bears. The topic polarises opinion between Jane, Tracey, Brenda and Ashling. What stance does Jane take? Why? What other attitudes and opinions separate Jane and her friends?
27. The description of Jane's days gets repetitive and Jane appears to be leading a very passive life, mostly observing others. How is this conveyed?
28. Jane's friends make her birthday special with cupcakes on the bus and even a suggested trip into town with Tracey. Why doesn't Jane go into town with Tracey?
29. What other birthday presents does Jane get, and what do they say about the people and their relationship with Jane – e.g. Tracey, Dell, Emma, Farley, her parents?
30. Jane skips class again – and wonders if fate has sent Farley to the Red River bus. What do you think? Is the interaction between Farley and Jane on the bus believable? Is it romantic?
31. Jane tells Farley she is getting tired of 'cryptic talk' and asks him to properly introduce himself. What does Farley tell Jane?
32. What does Farley think of Jane's doodles? What advice does he give her to improve her skill?
33. Back at the hospital, Jane notices that Emma is 'proper glaring' at Mom. Do we find out why? What does Jane notice about her mom?
34. Emma has a dramatic nosebleed – and Jane feels again that she is being left out regarding Emma's illness. This results in a rant – 'I hate this place' etc. Does Jane regret the rant? Is Jane's behaviour appropriate? Is it understandable?
35. Dr Jonathan is the one to explain Emma's situation to Jane: not good, but no panic – it's a reaction to the drugs. What is Jane's reaction to this?
36. Dell texts 'Happy Birthday' messages to Jane and invites her over. What are Jane's mixed feelings about this? What does she do? What does Jane find when she arrives at Dell's house? Is she pleased?
37. We discover that Jane and Dell started going out together while Emma was in a period of remission. Is this significant? How has Emma's cancer journey shaped Jane's own journey through life?

Second section: Vivace Gioioso = Lively and fast, joyfully

38. This section of the book opens with falling snow. Authors often use weather to convey mood – what is the author telling us with this snowfall? How does it affect Jane?
39. Following Farley's suggestion, what does Jane buy with her birthday money?
40. Jane feels more hopeful this week – more energised. She is even magnanimous when Mom apologises for her missed birthday, and we witness the first positive exchange between Jane and her mother. What is different? The weather? Farley? Something else?
41. Emma has a heart-to-heart with Jane – the first proper teenage sister-to-sister talk they have had. 'I can't believe they fucking forgot!' says Emma about Jane's birthday. Why is the swearing significant here?
42. The meeting with Farley's 'new' grandparents reminds Jane again of the difficult relationship she had with her own grandfather. 'You know how it is, when you love someone even though you don't like them?' Does this describe the complicated relationship well?
43. Jane asks Farley if it really was his dad's fault that his mom died. 'Maybe,' he says. Given the details, do you think it was his dad's fault? Or something else?
44. Farley suggests they use the car to visit Red River and meet Emma. This makes Jane very angry – why? How does Farley respond?
45. Jane wants to hear Farley play violin – and he plays her a note-perfect classical piece. Jane realises that he doesn't 'feel it' and asks Farley to play what he really loves – what does he play? How does Jane react to this? Is this an important point in their relationship? In the story?

Third Section: Presto Patetico = Very, very fast; with great emotion

46. What does Jane have to say about time? Do you notice a relationship between Jane's perception of time and the section headings in the book?
47. Jane opts out of meeting Dell as arranged on Friday. How does she spend the weekend instead?
48. Jane often talks about some incident or person 'ruining' a happy time or thought. Why is her happiness so fragile? Is it because she feels guilty for feeling happy? Or is she avoiding confrontation? Or both?
49. Jane and Tracey have a fight. Jane reports that she sees images/photos changing in her head, even when she doesn't want them to. What could this mean?
50. Why does Jane perceive Dell's messages of concern as him 'hassling' her? When Farley notices, Jane explodes with a tirade against small-town Verwood and small-town Dell. But Jane is not mad at Dell. Jane is not mad at Farley. Who, or what, is Jane mad at?

51. How have Jane's sleeping, eating and drinking patterns changed? Is this contributing to her feeling out of control? Jane says she is 'trying to grab thoughts and make them stay'.
52. What secret about her grandfather does Jane reveal to Farley on the bus ride. Why might Farley have thought that Jane had just now witnessed her grandfather's death?
53. 'If you tell yourself a story enough times, you make it true. That's what happened,' says Jane. What became the 'true story' of her grandfather's death? But the pictures in Jane's head told a different story.
54. Jane outlines to us how Emma's cancer diagnosis has unfolded, bit by relentless bit. Jane compares it to war – how? Who does she describe as 'casualties of war'?
55. During the doctors' rounds, Jane overhears the words 'limb salvage', 'tertiary sarcoma' and 'impaired fertility'. Again, Jane reacts with a rant – this time at the doctors. As Jane's rant becomes increasingly inappropriate, at what point might we lose sympathy for her? What eventually makes Jane stop?
56. Jane ignores Dell again and spends hours and hours obsessively writing down every aspect of Emma's cancer treatment from the beginning. Jane also leaps about, cleaning the house 'like Annie and all of her orphan side-kicks'. What is going on?
57. Jane finally decides it is time to visit Dell. What changes does she find when she gets there?
58. At Dell's, more memories of the day her grandfather died come flooding back. Why does the visit to Dell trigger these memories? Why is Jane so angry at how Dell acted?
59. The images crowd Jane's brain and time continues to feel 'speeded up' so much that she cannot sleep. What does she do instead?
60. Emma, no longer the 'Angel Child' but a maturing young woman, has called for a family meeting in the hospital the following morning. What does Jane do when she gets there? What does Emma want to say to Jane?
61. Jane sets off by herself to try to calm down, walking in one direction. Farley comes in Kaitlyn's car to pick Jane up. As Jane goes over the day's events, it becomes clearer that she is very confused. Which parts of the day do you think are real? And which are not?
62. Farley drives Jane back home to Verwood, where she brings him to the local café. What happens there? Who comes in the door of the café? How does Jane react?
63. Jane appears to be getting increasingly paranoid about her research and about the medical and pharmaceutical establishment 'destroying the evidence'. How likely is this?

64. Even Farley tells Jane 'you are not making sense'. She fears this means she will lose him too. In the car again, Jane kisses Farley, but he pushes her away. Why do you think he did this?
65. The next morning, Jane creates a scene with her friends on the school bus, and the driver asks them to leave. What does Jane do? Where does she go?

Section Four: Prestissimo Saltando A Tempo = As fast as possible, to jump, to dance

66. Jane seems to be hallucinating in the snow – she is dancing – floating – the light is beautiful – the white softness is the warmest blanket ... Who rescues Jane from the snowstorm?
67. Back at the hospital – it is Jane's turn to be the patient. What do the doctors think is wrong with Jane?
68. Jane cries and sleeps. She is given pills and throws them away. Everything is poison. Eventually she starts to take the medicine. What happens?
69. Jane describes the next six weeks as 'the most horrible of my life'. As Jane recovers, she begins to realise what she has done and said – whom she has hurt, including herself. What helps Jane begin to recover?

Section Five: Moderato Tranquilla Mente = Moderately, calmly

70. There is no fairytale ending to this story – Emma has had her leg amputated, and Jane is on life-long medication for bipolar disorder. Does the ending seem positive to you? Why?
71. As the family reconnect, Jane realises that it will be her and her mom that will take the longest to reconnect. Why?
72. Some of what Jane reported to us as real wasn't actually real, or at least was exaggerated. Can you tell, at this stage, which parts of the story are real and which were confused and contorted by Jane's over-active mind?
73. Dr Jonathan is encouraging to Jane. What advice does he give her?
74. Tracey comes to see Jane and they hang out in Jane's room. What changes have been made? What does Jane say to Tracey about Dell?
75. Farley comes to visit Jane. He takes her for a drive to a favourite place he has found. What does Farley admit to Jane? Do you think the honest way they speak to each other will help them maintain a good relationship?
76. Then ... beside the magical frozen waterfall ... they kiss. THE END. Was this the ending you hoped for? Would you change it?

Questions

- Every narrator is, to a greater or lesser degree, unreliable: discuss. How reliable is Jane as a narrator? Why? How? Have you read other books that have an unreliable narrator? What are the merits and/or difficulties of using an unreliable narrator?
- The author of this book, Kim Hood, is Canadian, living in Ireland. The book, *Plain Jane*, is set in a small town in Canada. The setting and people are similar to a small town in Ireland, but there are some differences. What are the main differences you can see between Jane's life in Canada and what Jane's life would be like if she lived in Ireland?
- Jane tells us that there are two kinds of people living in her area – Earth Ravagers and Earth Savers. How did this divide come about? What is different about the two lifestyles? Emma complains that, being under eighteen, she and her friends had no say in which camp they belonged. What aspects of your life do you, as an under-eighteen-year-old, not have control over?
- At one point in the book, Farley says, 'It's a funny thing, where you were born ... You don't have a choice about it, yet it has a way of determining the rest of your life if you let it.' Discuss.
- Compare the way Jane and Dell interact as a couple to how Jane and Farley interact with each other. What does this tell you about the three people involved and their relationships?
- Jane tells us the history of how sexual/non-sexual her relationship with Dell is and has been. What aspect of this history demonstrates that Dell is indeed 'a good guy'. This is mirrored in Farley's later reaction to Jane's kiss. Both young male characters are respectful and considerate and, at least in this context, mature. Would this story be a useful basis for a discussion on issues of consent?
- Grandparents feature significantly in this story. Neither Jane's dead grandfather nor Farley's absent 'new' grandparents are 'typical' grandparent figures: they are flawed human beings – warts and all. What role do the grandparent figures play in this story?
- We hear a lot about how life for Jane and her family has changed pre-diagnosis/post-diagnosis, including how they spend their time after school/at weekends/ on birthdays. This gives us an insight into how families cope with extreme stress. How does Jane explain what happens?
- How do you think the two types of illness – Emma's physical illness and Jane's mental illness – are depicted in the book?
- Jane tells us that this book is 'not about look-at-the-sick-kid' – so, what is it about?

Creative Writing Suggestions

- *Plain Jane* is written entirely as a first-person narrative. The only viewpoint we get is Jane's own account. Do you usually like books written this way? What are the advantages of writing a novel like this? What are the drawbacks? Write an entry or piece from the novel from the perspective of one of the other characters: Emma, Farley, Dell or Tracey.
- Another, slightly different form of first-person narrator would be a diary-style book, like *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* by Sue Townsend. Rewrite an episode from the book as if Jane were writing her diary. What differences might there be between the two pieces of writing?
- Throughout the story, Jane is constantly doodling and drawing. Would you like to see an illustrated version of *Plain Jane* which would include some of these drawings? Try your drawing skills by producing an illustrated version of one of the chapters in this book.
- As the book is set in Canada, some of the words and phrases used are different from words and phrases we would use here in Ireland. Can you find some examples of this from the text of the book? Think about the way English is used in England, in Ireland, in the United States, in Canada or even Australia or New Zealand. From your other reading, or watching TV/movies, can you compile a short list of words and phrases in English that are different, depending on which English-speaking country the speaker is living in?



FLYING TIPS FOR FLIGHTLESS BIRDS

Kelly McCaughrain
Walker Books
ISBN 9781406375657

Summary

Twins Finch and Birdie Franconi come from a long line of circus performers. While the pair are stars of the flying trapeze, their unconventional lifestyle and eccentric personalities makes them outcasts at school. When the family circus school runs into trouble, Birdie starts a blog to attract more members and a bigger audience. However, a terrible accident soon jeopardises the big show and Finch must decide whether to pair up with a new partner. Not only is the twins' act in trouble, but their relationship also begins to unravel as numerous secrets come to light and Finch must reconsider everything he knows about family, friends, and even himself.

Judges' Comments

From the high wire of the Big Top to the high wire of teenage sexuality, this warm and funny story of adolescence is a delight to read. It explores family, friendship and first love with an authenticity that is both engaging and emotionally satisfying. Through the eyes of the two main characters – one through very clever use of a blog – we learn the pros and cons of being different and of managing life in the margins.

About the Author

Kelly McCaughrain lives in Belfast, where she works with disabled students in further education, and has just completed a degree in English and creative writing at Queen's University Belfast. She was shortlisted for the 2013 Times/Chicken House Children's Fiction Prize. When she isn't writing, she volunteers with Fighting Words Belfast and takes long holidays in her 1967 classic campervan, Gerda. *Flying Tips for Flightless Birds* is her first novel.

QUESTIONS

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. Look at the front cover and back cover carefully. What sort of book do you think this will be? Consider the title, design, image, blurb, etc. What impression does each give you? Are they effective?

AS YOU READ

Chapters 1–5

1. What are your first impressions of Birdie and Finch? Which character do you prefer, and why?
2. Describe their fashion sense. Why do you think they dress this way?
3. What is your first impression of Hector? Why do you think he makes Finch cringe?
4. Describe how each of the twins treats Hector when they first meet him? What does this tell us about each character?
5. What do you think a 'gingham' is?
6. What do you think of Finch's attitude towards new friendships? Why do you think he feels this way?

Chapters 4–6

1. Why do you think James acted this way towards Finch? How do you think this experience has affected Finch?
2. What is your impression of Lou? Do you think she would be a good grandparent? What might her positive and negative qualities be? Does she have anything in common with the twins?
3. Have you heard any of the circus terms used before? Which is your favourite term? Why?
4. Why do you think the circus folk developed their own lingo?
5. According to Lou, 'Trying to fit in is pointless; you just end up getting squished.' Do you agree?

Chapters 7–8

1. Why do you think Hector is so drawn to the twins?
2. What does Hector consider to be the benefits of the library? Do you agree? Do you think there are any other benefits?
3. In what ways does Finch struggle with his sexuality? In what ways is he comfortable with it?
4. What do you think of the Franconi parents' handfasting ceremony? What is Finch's view of it?

Chapters 9–10

1. Research the bird that each of the Franc children are named after. Does the bird match the personality?
2. Draw the Franconi family tree. Which member do you think seems the most interesting? Why?
3. Why do you think the older Franconis retired?
4. Why does Birdie consider stage names so important?
5. Why do you think Hector wears the school uniform?
6. What do you think Mr Cooper means by 'ordinary' clothes?

Chapters 11–19

1. According to Finch, newly formed couples often turn into 'two-headed monsters.' What does he mean by this? Do you agree?
2. Why does Hector save the bee? What does this tell us about his personality?
3. What do you think motivates Kitty to treat Finch and Hector the way that she does?
4. How might Finch's feelings towards Hector be beginning to change?

Chapters 20–21

1. An extract from Birdie's blog reads: 'But the person in the spotlight isn't real, that's what you have to remember. She or he is just a shiny surface, a collection of polished tricks designed to entertain. And where there's a spotlight, there's a shadow. Another self that the girl on the high wire or the boy on the trapeze is trying to distract you from.' How might this apply to Birdie? Do you think it applies to many people?
2. What 'shadow' might Birdie have, if at all?
3. Do you think Birdie likes working on the show?

Chapters 22–26

1. What do you think is the truth of the infamous family accident?
2. Do you think the circus will be forced to close? What do you imagine will be the future of the circus?
3. Why does Finch feel he is betraying Birdie? Do you think he is?
4. Do you think Finch knows everything about Birdie?
5. What is missing from Finch's outfit?
6. In what ways is Finch's identity tied up with Birdie?

7. Do you think Finch and Birdie feel the same way towards each other? In what ways might their feelings differ? Do you think they have a healthy relationship?
8. In what ways is Finch confident? In what ways is he insecure?

Chapters 27–30

1. According to Finch's mother, 'You're not supposed to like your parents, you're supposed to hate them because they stop you doing dangerous things.' Do you agree?
2. Do you think Birdie would want her family to cancel the show?
3. In what ways does Birdie compare double-acts to married couples and/or siblings? What does this tell us about her relationship with Finch?
4. Why do you think Finch is so reluctant to team up with Hector for a double-act?
5. Do you agree with Finch that Birdie's blog has become more morbid? If so, why do you think this might be?
6. Do you think James was at the scene of Birdie's accident? Do you think he was involved in the accident in any way?

Chapters 31–33

1. Why do you think Hector's dad is so disapproving of Finch? Is he being fair?
2. What hopes do you think Hector's dad has for him?
3. How does Finch feel about labelling? Do you agree?
4. Why do you think Hector is helping Finch investigate James?
5. According to Finch, 'It doesn't matter how annoying your mates are, when it comes to parents, you lie through your bowler for them.' Do you agree?

Chapters 34–37

1. Hector calls Finch a 'coward' for avoiding the trapeze since Birdie's accident. Do you think that Finch is cowardly? Why do you think he has avoided the trapeze?
2. According to Hector, 'humans have a deep psychological need to deal with difficult issues through comedy.' Would you agree?
3. In what ways might clowns and priests perform similar functions?
4. Do you think Finch should have reported Mr Duggan? Why doesn't he?

Chapters 38–41

1. According to Mr Cooper, Finch's accusations about James are 'unfounded.' Do you agree? What evidence does Finch have?
2. According to Hector, Finch 'always [has] to turn [himself] into a target.' Do you agree? If so, why do you think Finch does this?
3. What are the pros and cons of being socially 'invisible'?

Chapters 42–43

1. Why do you think James visits Birdie in the hospital?
2. What does Finch fear the most – public humiliation or physical hurt? Which do you think most people fear more?
3. '[B]ut maybe that's like a costume – you give them something to laugh at so they never get a chance to laugh at the real you.' Do you think Hector is correct in this assessment of Finch?
4. How do both Hector and Finch feel after their performance in the children's ward? How do you think this will affect their relationship moving forward?

Chapters 44–46

1. What can clowning teach you, according to Birdie? Do you agree?
2. According to Tony, 'Seven-year-olds are smart. Teenagers, less so.' What exactly do you think he means by this? Would you agree?
3. Lou seems to think that children are protected too much these days. Do you agree with her?
4. How does Finch feel about the idea of a travelling circus? How does Birdie feel about it?

Chapters 47–49

1. What do you think Birdie made Hector promise not to tell Finch?
2. How does Finch react when he overhears Hector's private conversation with Birdie? Do you think he is being reasonable?
3. Why do the Franconis not have animals in their circus? Do you agree with their views?
4. Were you surprised by Birdie's secret relationship? Do you think she was right to keep this relationship a secret?
5. How does Finch react to the discovery of Birdie's secret relationship? What does he learn about his own relationship with Birdie as a result?

Chapters 50–55

1. What are the pros and cons of circus life, according to Birdie? What does this tell us about her character? Can you think of other pros and cons?
2. Do you think Finch fully understands himself? What issues does he need to resolve, if any?
3. Do you think Finch should accept James's apology?
4. What issues do Finch and Birdie address in their relationship? Do you think their relationship will be different from now on?
5. What fears does Finch have regarding the new double-act?
6. Sinead claims that Finch is always 'stand-offish.' Would you agree?
7. According to Sinead, Birdie would 'never do anything to upset [Finch].' How might this trait be both positive and negative?

Chapters 56–59

1. How does Finch's view of Hector change?
2. Who do you think is the hero or heroine in the story?
3. According to Finch, 'parents think they should be involved in everything.' Do you agree with Finch? And do you think they should be?
4. Do you think Hector's punishment is fair?
5. Finch claims that Hector's dad is punishing him because he doesn't approve of Finch and his family. Do you think there is any truth in this claim? If so, why do you think Hector's dad feels this way?
6. Finch comes to the view that 'If you care about someone, you just have to do what makes them happy.' Do you agree?
7. In what ways might Hector's relationship with his father be similar to Birdie's relationship with Finch, if at all?

Chapters 60–63

1. According to Hector, Finch 'never really [gave him] a reason to be his friend.' Would you agree? Why do you think Hector put up with this treatment?
2. How supportive are Hector's parents? What concerns do they have for Hector? Do you think these are valid concerns?
3. According to Hector, what are Finch's positive and negative traits? Do you think this is a good assessment?
4. Did you expect any of the disclosures Hector makes to Finch? Why or why not?

5. 'When experiencing stage fright, Finch claims he would rather suffer anything – death, failure, the wrath of every performer at Franconis.' Why do you think stage fright has such a powerful effect on people?
6. How does Finch feel after his clown performance? How does it compare to how he usually feels following his trapeze performance?
7. How do you think Hector's and Finch's relationship will change from now on?
8. How do Finch's family react to his disclosure?
9. What fears does Finch have following his disclosure? Do you think they are valid fears?
10. What do you think of Birdie's final post? How does it reflect upon some of the themes of the novel? Do you agree with the views she expresses here? Why or why not?
11. Did you find the ending satisfying?

ACTIVITIES

1. Write a review of the book, recommending a suitable age group.
2. Draw an alternative cover for the novel.
3. Design a poster advertising the Franconi Family Circus.
4. 'Try it. Pick your act. Pick your costume. Pick your name.' Imagine you have your own circus act. Choose your name, design your costume, and plan your performance. Make a poster advertising your act.
5. Devise a title for your own autobiography.
6. Write an interview with an imaginary circus star.
7. Write a list of your favourite mottos and/or life lessons. Share them with your shadowing group.
8. Write your own blog entry, discussing a lesson you have learned.
9. Write a diary entry from the point of view of Hector at any point in the novel.
10. Write a newspaper report speculating on the infamous accident involving Carlos, Evelyn and Avis.
11. Research and map your own family tree.
12. Research some famous circus acts and old showbiz stars. Present a project on your favourite act or star.
13. Debate one of the following:
 - 'Love has no limits.'
 - 'Honesty is always the best policy.'
 - 'Animals should be kept in captivity.'
 - 'School uniforms should be compulsory.'
14. Design an alternative cover for the book. What would you like to show on it?



A Dangerous Crossing

Jane Mitchell

Little Island Books

ISBN 9781910411582

Summary

Ghalib Shenu is a thirteen-year-old boy of Kurdish origin who lives in Syria. He doesn't want to leave his home, but Kobani has become too dangerous. His family has no choice but to leave everything behind and try for a new life elsewhere.

Together, they start out on a terrible journey that leads them through dark and dangerous places. Ghalib comes under fire, is caught in a tear-gas attack, experiences the wretched and hopeless life of a refugee camp and he still has to face the perils of a voyage in a boat that is far from seaworthy.

Based on the experiences of real Syrian families, this is a story of bravery and solidarity in the face of despair.

Judges' Comments

This tense and gripping novel is layered with compassion, insight and psychological authenticity in its powerful evocation of the chaos of the Syrian civil war. Ghalib doesn't want to leave his home but he and his family have no choice but to flee. Based on the experiences of real Syrian families, Jane Mitchell has crafted a deeply empathetic exploration of the plight of refugees and the intense challenges posed by embarking into the bewildering unknown.

About the Author

Jane Mitchell is an award-winning author of books for children and young people. Her novel *Chalkline* was endorsed by Amnesty International Ireland for contributing to a better understanding of human rights and also won the CBI Book of the Year Awards Children's Choice award in 2010. She lives in Dublin.

QUESTIONS

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. Do you like the cover? Why or why not? What do the colours signify to you? What do you think about the figure of the child? Is it important that we can't see the child's face? What do you think about the flowers that are featured? Do you think they bring an element of hope to the scene? Why?
2. Before you begin reading, make a list of the things you know about Syria and the conflict there. Make a list of the sources of these pieces of information. When you have finished reading, check this list again and see if you feel differently about any of the things you have seen or heard about Syria.

AS YOU READ

Chapter 1

- What type of childhood is presented to the reader in this opening chapter?
- How does the author convey how much life in Syria has changed in the years since the war started?

Chapter 2

- This is the first time ISIS is mentioned in Ghalib's story. What do you know about ISIS? From what sources did you learn this information?
- Why do you think Ghalib and Hamza's night-time journey across the city is important? What does it tell us about the two boys and their life in the city?

Chapter 3

- What do you think of the description of the helicopter strike? Is the author's portrayal of the violence accurate?
- Examine the exchange between Ghalib's mother and father when Ghalib is brought home injured. Can you see both sides of the argument?

Chapter 4

- Even at this early stage in the story, the visit from Dima and Mahmoud from the Protection Unit is very significant. Why does this change everything? Do you think Ghalib is in danger at this moment?
- Bushra says she is not afraid to fight. What do you think of Bushra's character? Keep thinking about the role of women and girls in the story as you read on.
- Towards the end of this chapter Ghalib talks about his bad dreams. Do you think he is frightened to leave Syria, even though it is such a dangerous place?

Chapter 5

- Discuss the things that Ghalib wants to bring with him. Why do you think he considers these his 'essential' items? Make a list of what you would bring with you if you had to pack up your life at short notice?

- Describe this initial part of the journey. Do you sense danger for the family even at this early stage?

Chapter 6

- Ghalib says he has never seen anything like the people of Aleppo. What does this tell you about the cultural differences in the region?
- What do you think about the lives of the women Ghalib sees? How do his female relatives react to the changes they must make as they journey through Aleppo?

Chapter 7

- As a group, discuss the sniper incident. What are your initial assumptions about the person who is shooting at the family? How does this incident make you feel?

Chapter 8

- Are you surprised that the sniper is revealed to be a young girl? Why?
- Do you think Safaa is justified in her actions?

Chapter 9

- Discuss Ghalib's observations of Safaa. What does her relationship with her brother reveal about her?
- Describe the landscape the family are walking through. What does it tell you about what has happened to the country?
- The oldest and the youngest of the group, Tata and Aylan, seem to suffer the most. Discuss what this means in terms of how conflict is experienced by different generations.

Chapter 10

- Describe the scene at the border. How does Ghalib feel as they try to find a place among all the people waiting to cross?

Chapter 11

- Analyse the moments leading up to the violence at the border crossing. Can you explain the actions of the soldiers?
- What do you think will happen to Ghalib now? If you were in this situation, what would you do? Do you think he is more vulnerable without his family?

Chapter 12

- As night falls and he finds himself alone within this new group, Ghalib thinks to himself that his family feeds his soul, that he is stronger when he is with them. Talk as a group about the importance of family in the story so far. Think about the importance of family in your life.
- Talking with the men, Ghalib finds himself confused as to who is fighting whom, who is sending bombs, who is sending aid. Roughly halfway through the story, do you feel as confused as Ghalib when it comes to making sense of the Syrian conflict? Do you think the situation is confusing for everyone experiencing it?

- Ghalib says that he is not brave, yet Musab tells him that he has made a brave decision to stay at the camp to try to look for his family. What does bravery mean to you? Has Ghalib taught you anything about bravery?
- At the children's centre, Ghalib cries, even though he tells himself he is too old. Why does he cry now and not earlier in the story?

Chapter 13

- What do you think of the children's centre? Do you think it is a safe place for Ghalib? Why or why not?

Chapter 14

- Why do you think Ghalib feels such anger when he sees Safaa again?
- Do you think telling Muhammad everything that has happened to him since he lost his family is good for Ghalib? Why?
- What reason could Safaa and Amin have for not speaking since they have arrived?

Chapter 15

- Describe the school Safaa and Ghalib start to attend. How does it differ from your school? Even though it feels strange to them, do you think it's good for the children to write stories about their difficult memories?
- Learning about his grandmother's death, Ghalib says that he wants to go back to the time before the war, that he wants to go back home. What does home mean to Ghalib? What does it mean to you? If Ghalib can never go back to Syria, do you think he will ever have a home again?

Chapter 16

- Listening to the details of his family's experience while he was separated from them, Ghalib says that he wants the story to be happy again, that he wants to 'feel bright through [his] blood again'. Ghalib often refers to a darkness in his blood. What do you think he means by this? Talk about the power of images and how they can sometimes help to explain how you're feeling.
- The issue of communication comes up in this chapter when Ghalib's father tries to contact his aunt and uncle back in Syria. How would you cope with a lack of technology?
- Why do you think Safaa pulls away from Ghalib when he is reunited with his family?

Chapter 17

- Ghalib and Aylan decide that they don't want to leave the refugee camp. Why do you think they might feel like this? Talk about the importance of safety and stability during childhood.
- Talk about Bushra's speech and what it means to be a girl in these circumstances. Is this experience familiar to you? Can you identify with what Bushra is saying?

Chapter 18

- Do you think it's significant that as the family are leaving the countryside reminds Ghalib of Syria before the war?
- Analyse what Ghalib and Bushra say about the normality of Reyhanli. Can you understand why it makes them feel so strange?

Chapter 19

- The incident in the café is very traumatic for the children. Why do you think the café owner acts the way he does? Does the way he treats the family remind you of any other historical incidents of discrimination?

Chapter 20

- The conversation with Baraa Reteb is very honest and stark. What do the reactions of Ghalib's family reveal about them as a group?
- At this point, with your knowledge of the Syrian refugee crisis, do you have any misgivings about the ocean journey Ghalib and his family are about to embark on?

Chapter 21

- Describe the movement from Izmir to the port town where the boat will depart. Consider Ghalib's story as a series of movements from one hostile environment to another. How do you think these journeys are affecting him? Do you see him growing up as his story progresses?

Chapter 22

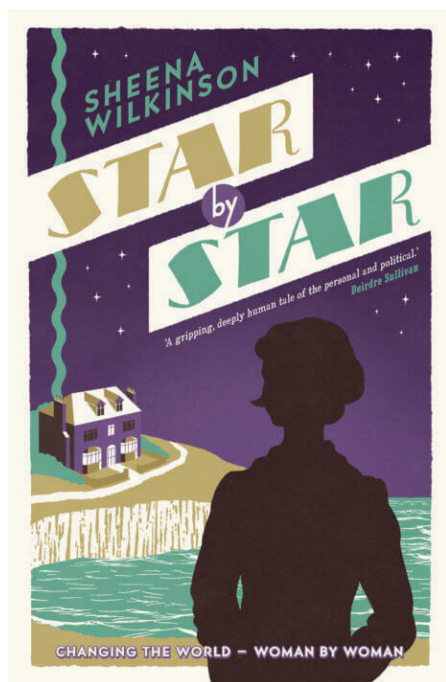
- Do you think the description of the refugees boarding the board is convincing? Do you think it successfully highlights the dangers faced by everyone trying to journey to Europe?
- Do you think the moment Ghalib and Aylan are strapped into the same life jacket is significant? Why? What do you think it means for their relationship as brothers?

Chapter 23

- What do you think about the ending to the book? Is it actually a beginning?

AFTER YOU HAVE READ

1. The Amnesty International logo is printed on the back of the book. This shows that Amnesty recommends the book. What do you think this means? What do you know about Amnesty and their work? Does their endorsement make you read the book differently?
2. This book is a fictional account of a young boy's journey out of Syria, but we are told that it is based on the experiences of real Syrian families and that every name featured belongs to a Syrian child who was killed in the conflict. Do you think this makes the book more powerful?
3. Jane Mitchell is an Irish writer. Do you think she handles the story of a Syrian child well? Why might an Irish writer want to take on a project like this?
4. What do you think should happen to Ghalib and his family? Discuss what you know about these terms: asylum, refugee, immigrant, detention centre, human trafficking, border, humanitarian aid. How do they apply to Ghalib's story? Use online resources or your school or local library to do some more research in this area and share what you find.



Star by Star

Sheena Wilkinson
Little Island Books
ISBN 9781910411537

Summary

The year is 1918 and Stella, having lost her mother in the flu pandemic that is sweeping Europe, is travelling alone from Manchester to live with her aunt in Ireland. Although grieving the loss of her mother, Stella was raised to be independent and ambitious and is determined to challenge the prevailing view of womanhood. Amidst the complex political situation – woman's suffrage, The Great War and the fight for Irish independence – Stella wants to change the world. Sometimes impatient and often afraid, Stella bravely keeps on trying but she knows she can't do it alone. She takes inspiration and comfort from the night sky, feeling part of something bigger – 'Just as stars come one by one to brighten the night sky, so history is made person by person, girl by girl, vote by vote.'

Judges' Comments

It's 1918, the Great War is coming to an agonising close, women are on the verge of being able to vote and the determined and vulnerable Stella resolves to change the world. This assured and bold tale of heroism, courage and survival skilfully draws the modern reader into its vividly rendered early-twentieth-century setting. Sheena Wilkinson offers an inspiring, humorous and insightful proclamation of each individual's potential to enact change and create a more just society, vote by vote and star by star.

About the author

Since the publication of her first multi-award-winning novel, *Taking Flight*, in 2010, Sheena Wilkinson has become established as one of Ireland's most acclaimed writers of contemporary realistic fiction for children and young adults. Her book *Grounded* won the Children's Books Ireland Book of the Year Award in 2013. She lives in County Down and travels extensively in Ireland and beyond, talking about books, mentoring emerging writers and writing. Every time she votes she remembers the women who fought, suffered and even died for this right.

QUESTIONS

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. What do you think of the cover of *Star by Star*? Do you think the chosen colours have any significance?
2. Do the typeface and the illustration on the back cover help you to identify the time the book is set, even without telling you the date?
3. Does the illustration on the cover make you feel a particular way (e.g. sad, happy, thoughtful, excited)?
4. Does the cover make the book inviting and make you want to read it?
5. Read the author's historical note to help you imagine the time.

AFTER YOU HAVE READ

Chapter 1

- What is your first impression of Stella when you meet her on the train?
- How does she feel when she is left alone at the station?
- What does she imagine has happened to her aunt?
- She tries to take inspiration from two heroines – who are they?

Chapter 2

- As Stella makes her way to her aunt's house, she sees a group of young men sitting in a row under blankets – who do you think they are and why are they here at Sunny View?

Chapter 3

- When Stella meets Helen again at her aunt's house, why do you think she hopes they might be related?
- What kind of impression is Stella trying to make? Think back to Chapter 1 and what they have in common with each other.

Chapter 4

- Why does Stella find herself in Ireland?
- Can you imagine what kind of woman her mother was from what Stella thinks and says?
- What do you think about Stella's imagination from the picture she invents about Sandy Reid? See if her attitude changes as she gets to know him through the book.

Chapter 5

- What is Stella's first impression of her mother's family home? How does it compare with the ones she has lived in before?
- What do you think this says about the lives of women and their ability to earn an income at the time?
- What do Stella's photographs convey about what she values?

Chapter 6

- Stella is given a set of Jane Austen novels that once belonged to her mother. From this and past chapters, how do you know that Stella likes to read?
- Would all girls of her age at that time have access to books or time to read them?

Chapter 7

- In this chapter Stella thinks about the complex political situation. What does she say about the Irish War of Independence in 1916, and who does she name as one of her heroines?
- Why does Nancy describe Stella as radical, and what does she say about her sister Peggy's character and educational ambition?

Chapter 8

- Land girls were part of a civilian organisation called the Land Army, which was set up during the war and allowed women and girls to take the place of men called up for service. How did Stella feel while working in the garden, and why was she so hurt by Nancy's comments?

Chapter 9

- What is your first impression of Captain Reid?
- Why does Stella seem to have taken a dislike to him?

Chapter 10

- Why is Stella excited at the prospect of the new lodger?
- What thoughts come into Stella's mind when there is talk of church around the breakfast table?

Chapter 11

- This chapter starts off with a humorous incident – Stella is trapped in the bathroom – but quickly takes a turn when talk turns to the flu epidemic. What has happened to Minnie's family?
- What do you think is going to happen to Minnie now?

Chapter 12

- What wakes Stella in the night?
- What does she see when she goes to Captain Reid's room?

Chapter 13

- What piece of personal information does Stella tell Kit to make her stop treating her as a child?
- What is Kit's reaction?

Chapter 14

- Stella is determined to work for a living but feels stuck. What is she hoping for out of life?
- Why does she feel depressed by her visit to town, and how do we know her feelings have changed towards Sandy?

Chapter 15

- Sandy opens up to Stella about the war. What kind of picture does he paint?
- Why won't he visit his family? What does he think they need him to be?
- What is Nancy's reaction to finding the two of them in Stella's bedroom?

Chapter 16

- News of Minnie's mother's death from flu reaches the house. What is the reaction of the group at dinner?
- What age is Minnie's sister, Sissy, who is being suggested as a replacement maid?
- Why is Stella so excited by a political argument breaking out around the table? What topics are they discussing?

Chapter 17

- What are Sandy's views on Home Rule?
- How do he and Stella differ on fighting for political outcomes?
- What makes Stella draw back from the argument?

Chapter 18

- What do think is preventing Sandy from making the short journey to post the letter?
- How does Stella resolve the situation?
- Once she's on the road, what plan comes into her mind?

Chapter 19

- Stella describes herself as 'not a turning back sort of girl'. Do you think she displays impulsive behaviour, and is it always the right course of action?

Chapter 20

- What does Stella feel on her reunion with Rose?
- As a political activist, Rose has been involved in more than one struggle. Which ones do you learn about here?
- What does she say nearly came between her and her marriage to Charlie?

Chapter 21

- What reception is awaiting Stella when she returns home with the bicycle?
- Do you think her desire to help makes her think she knows what's best for people? How does she feel when others do this to her?
- What does she imagine for the future at the end of the chapter?

Chapter 22

- The mood changes rapidly in this chapter from the emotional celebrations at news of the end of the war to the delivery of the telegram for Sandy. What news do you think it may contain?

Chapter 23

- Sandy learns that Helen is dead from flu and Stella remembers her own mother's death. How is Stella's behaviour different in this chapter from her usual response to helping people?

Chapter 24

- Why does Nancy think Stella should not attend Helen's funeral?
- What images does this news bring up for Stella, and how does she describe her reaction to her mother's death?

Chapter 25

- Why did Charlie react in the way he did to the *Belfast Telegraph*? How did he describe it? In his view, which is the only acceptable newspaper?
- What does Stella encounter on her way home and how does she react?
- Do you think Sandy's response to her is justified?

Chapter 26

- Do you think Stella has learned from the previous experience about trying to fix people?

Chapter 27

- As the general election approaches, what are the differing views around the table on voting?
- What are the voting restrictions relating to age and property?
- What does Stella see as the difference between British and Irish voting patterns?
- What does Rose feel about not being able to vote?

Chapter 28

- When Stella sees Minnie, how does she compare their lives?
- Why do you think Nancy changes her mind about driving Rose to vote?

Chapter 29

- How does Rose explain politics?
- What influences people to vote for a candidate in Northern Ireland?
- What does Stella discover about Joe and Kit, and what does she see the threepenny bit symbolising?

Chapter 30

- What is Stella's mood as election day approaches?
- What are her immediate thoughts when Nancy seems unwell?
- What surprise has Miss McKay made for Stella?

Chapter 31

- How does Stella finally reveal her fears?
- How does Sandy comfort her and try to allay them?

Chapter 32

- What does Stella wake up to on election day?
- With Nancy ill, how does Stella plan on getting Rose to the polling station?
- Why is it so important for her to get one woman to vote?
- How does she try to convince Sandy to drive her there? What helps him decide?

Chapter 33

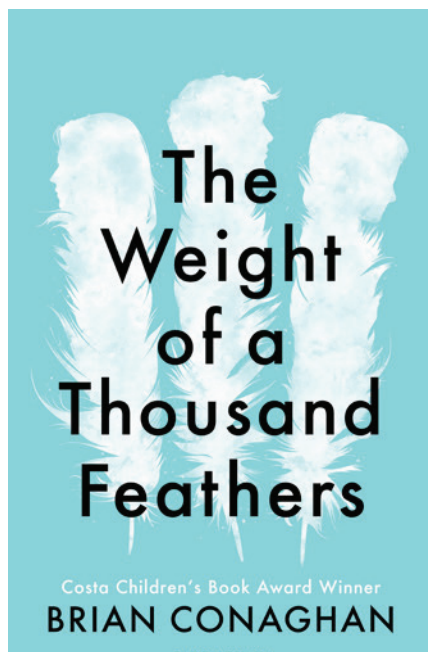
1. Why do you think both Stella and Sandy overcome their fears to drive Rose and Charlie to vote?
2. What does Sandy say they have in common?
3. What thoughts cross Stella's mind as she watches them go into the polling station?

Chapter 34

- How does Stella describe Rose's face after she has voted?
- How does she describe the effect of all the women voting on this day?
- What personal changes has the day brought about for both Stella and Sandy?
- Do you think the book ends on an optimistic note, despite all the suffering still around?

ACTIVITIES

- Can you imagine a world where women could not vote? Research the history of women being granted the right to vote. Which countries were the first to grant women's suffrage? Are there still countries that exclude women or other people from the right to vote? Discuss as a group how that could be changed.
- The colours of the suffragette badge and banners symbolise particular values. What values do the colours stand for? Would you still use them if you were designing one today? Design your own badge, banner or poster for a women's rights issue past or present, globally or locally.
- As we can see from *Star by Star*, not all people were in favour of women getting the vote. Organise a debate in your class or club. Divide the group in two, with one side arguing for women's right to vote and the other arguing against. Remember, you don't have to agree with what you're proposing, just put forward a convincing argument. It may be hard to take the opposing side but it could also be great fun!
- What means did the suffragettes have to publicise their cause in their time? Create a plan of how would you organise a campaign today with all the resources available to you.
- Education and employment were not always a given for all girls and young women. What did Stella's grandfather mean when he refused Peggy permission to go to Queen's College and said he hadn't raised them to be 'blue stockinged old maids'? Why was Winnie Carney such an inspiration to Stella? Research the history of women's rights to education and employment in Ireland and create a timeline of progress from 1918 to the present day.
- Think about communications in 1918. Stella talks about sending a 'wire' or telegram and how an extra word costs more. Try not using your mobile phone to call or text or use social media for a day and see how you manage to communicate without it. Write down all the ways you used to contact people instead and how you had to think differently.
- The Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) and the Women's Land Army (the Land Girls) were just two ways women and girls were involved in World War I. Look at other jobs typically done by men that women kept going through the war, and write a diary entry from a day in one of these women's lives during the war.
- Stella mentions writers and characters from novels in *Star by Star*. Can you remember who they are? Pick one of the novels to read. When you have finished, write two reviews: one from your own point of view and one from the point of view of a girl your age in 1918.



THE WEIGHT OF A THOUSAND FEATHERS

Brian Conaghan
Bloomsbury Publishing
ISBN 9781408871539

NOTE FOR SHADOWING LEADERS This book deals with a number of sensitive issues including euthanasia, drug use, and a main character who struggles with his life as a young carer for his mother while coming to terms with his emerging sexuality. CBI is aware that this content will not be suitable for some readers, and advises shadowing leaders to be aware of this content before selecting the book to read with your group.

The questions and activities that follow are suggested ways of interrogating difficult topics in a responsible and appropriate way for young readers. You do not have to go through every question with your group, and should feel free to add your own questions and activities.

Summary

Bobby Seed will soon be eighteen. But he is still seventeen – and the weight of the world lies on his shoulders. He is the carer for his mother who is in the final stages of Multiple Sclerosis. His younger brother, Danny also needs to be cared for. But Bobby longs for a normal life where he can enjoy himself, do daft things – and explore his own identity – and do what is right for his mother. Uncompromising, gritty, laced with a black humour this is a novel that you live. Told by Bobby and almost all dialogue the narrative is direct and immediate. There is an authenticity that ensures the reader completely believes in Bobby and what he faces. And at times it seems overwhelming – but truth will certainly be stranger than any fiction and the world of the young carer rarely receives the spotlight. This is a book to make its readers think. It is not the easy read, we know leaving the book that Bobby and Danny have a difficult future. But the overarching theme – family love, family support – promises that they will survive.

Judges' Comments

Plenty of philosophical questions are raised here, as seventeen-year-old Bobby faces issues of life and death. With Bobby as a convincing, authentic and ever-so-human narrator, we are with him all the way as he cares for his mother and younger brother and deals with questions and decisions no young adult should have to face. This is a brave, masterful and powerful look at the lengths to which we'll go for someone we truly love.

About the Author

Brian Conaghan was born and raised in the Scottish town of Coatbridge but now lives in Dublin. He has a MLitt in creative writing from the University of Glasgow. For many years Brian worked as a teacher and taught in Scotland, Italy and Ireland. *When Mr Dog Bites* was shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal and the CBI Book of the Year Award in 2015 and attracted both praise and controversy for its honest, moving and humorous depiction of a teenage boy with Tourette's syndrome. *The Bombs That Brought Us Together* won the Costa Children's Book Award in 2016. *We Come Apart*, a verse novel co-authored with Carnegie Medal winner Sarah Crossan, was published in 2017 to widespread critical acclaim.

QUESTIONS

BEFORE YOU READ

1. Think about the title of the book – what image does the 'weight of a thousand feathers' evoke? How can something light weigh someone down?
2. Who are the characters depicted in the feathers? Do you think it's important that they're not all facing in the same direction?

AFTER YOU HAVE READ

1. The opening paragraph is a mix of truly shocking and very mundane content – why do you think Brian Conaghan began the book in this way? What does it make you think about the lifestyle that Bobby, his Mum and brother are forced to live?
2. Bobby's mum has Multiple Sclerosis (MS). What are the symptoms of this disease? Is there any cure?
3. Bobby and his mum have a very close relationship – how do they negotiate the more difficult aspects of her care while making sure she still has her dignity?
4. Can any of the adults in Bobby's life, his teachers for example, ever truly understand the situation he is in? How could they better try to help?
5. Why do you think that Bobby was initially against the idea of attending Poztive meetings?
6. Is Bobby struggling with the situation he is in?
7. Why does Bobby try to protect Danny from the truth about their mother?
8. Why does the author not tell us Bobby's mother's given name?
9. What does Bobby mean when he says, 'I morph into care mode again'?
10. What role does Lou start to play in Bobby's life?
11. Bobby begins to understand his own sexual preferences, 'I just ... I don't fancy girls', he says when thinking about Bel. Do you think that these characters' sexuality is becoming less or more important as more book progresses?
12. Why does Bobby's mum ask him for drugs?
13. When the doctor visits, she tells Bobby that his mother's condition is deteriorating. What effect do you think this has on a young person? Is Bobby old enough to be given responsibility for the kind of decisions that he has to make?
14. What impact do you think it has on Bobby's mum that she has to ask him for help to end her life?
15. How did you feel when Lou revealed his secret? Do you think he did the right thing in keeping the secret? Do you agree with Bobby's initial thoughts when he finds out?
16. Why is Lou pushing Bobby to make a decision about his mum?

17. Do you think that Bobby and Danny were right to help their mother die on her own terms?
18. Euthanasia can be a difficult topic to discuss. Do you think that this book has added to the debate? Have you learned anything while reading it?

ACTIVITIES

1. Write a poem about an aspect of your life, in the style of poetry Bobby uses.
2. This book has difficult subject matter and is suitable for more mature readers. Write a short summary of the book that is appropriate for younger readers to understand.
3. Design an alternative cover for the book – what would you represent on the cover?
4. In 200 words or less, write what you think is the central message of this book.
5. Break into pairs and play the alphabet game yourselves.
6. Write a chapter from the perspective of one of the other young people who go to the Poztive meetings.
7. Write a chapter from the perspective of Bobby's mum.
8. Write a chapter from the perspective of Danny.
9. Do a presentation on young carers in Ireland. What supports are available for young people caring for family members?
10. One of the themes of this book is the right to die on one's own terms. Research cases in the Irish courts that have dealt with this. In particular look at the case of Marie Fleming, who brought a Supreme Court challenge for the right to an assisted suicide.
11. Have a classroom debate on euthanasia. Research other countries' attitudes, and their legal approaches to the right to die. Stay away from emotive arguments, instead focus on the legal and ethical arguments.



ONE

Sarah Crossan

Bloomsbury

ISBN 9781408863114 (HBK)

Summary

Grace and Tippi are twins – conjoined twins. And their lives are about to change.

No longer able to afford homeschooling, they must venture into the world – a world of stares, sneers and cruelty. Will they find more than that at school? Can they find real friends? And what about love? But what neither Grace or Tippi realises is that a heart-wrenching decision lies ahead. A decision that could tear them apart. One that will change their lives even more than they ever imagined.

From Carnegie Medal shortlisted author Sarah Crossan, this moving and beautifully crafted novel about identity, sisterhood and love ultimately asks one question: what does it mean to want and have a soulmate?

Judges' Comments

A novel as unique as its title suggests, *One* chronicles the story of Grace and Tippi, conjoined twins under constant medical and psychological care. At age sixteen when they can no longer afford to be homeschooled, they have to go to school for the first time and negotiate a world of prejudice, friendship, first love and gossip. Crossan's signature blend of lyricism and realism addresses complicated dynamics of family, identity, sisterhood and difference. Told in verse and in the first person, this elegant, sensitive story will stimulate reflections and conversations about discrimination, diversity, difficult choices and the bonds of love.

About the Author

Sarah Crossan is originally from Dublin and now lives in London with her family. She graduated with a degree in Philosophy and Literature before training as an English and drama teacher at Cambridge University. She has been working to promote creative writing in schools since. She taught English at a small private school near New York until she became a full time writer. Her first novel, *The Weight of Water*, won the CBI Eilís Dillon Award in 2013. *Apple and Rain* was shortlisted for the CBI Book of the Year Award 2015.

Reading Journal

The suggestions below highlight some important things to look out for as you progress through the book. Try to make notes and record your changing responses to the story, as this will be useful when you come to tackle the questions and activities featured on the following pages.

Before you begin the book:

What do you notice about the two girls on the front cover? Read the blurb. Were you correct? What, do you think, will be the 'heart-wrenching decision'? Give some reasons why you might /might not be interested in reading this book.

Read 'August' (pages 3–33)

- What do you notice about the writing style? Do you like reading this type of book?
- Grace is the narrator. Who does she live with?
- Grace and Tippi are conjoined. What do we learn about their condition?
- What will happen in September? Compare the girls' reactions to the news.
- Why is the home schooling arrangement coming to an end?
- Discuss the relationship between the twins and Dragon, their younger sister.
- What preparation is made for September?
- How does each girl preserve confidentiality at the session with the therapist?
- What is the result of their first visit to Dr Derrick?

Read 'September' (pages 37–150)

- What happens to the jigsaw?
- 'I feel so ugly' Tippi says. How did Grace respond?
- Do you agree with Dragon's advice about high school? (page 46)
- Is Grace aware of what is happening to the adults in the house?
- Why, do you think, did Mrs James pick Jasmeen to be the twin's guide in their new school?
- How do the other pupils, besides Jasmeen and Jon, react to Tippi and Grace?
- Grace wonders if they have found two friends in Jasmeen and Jon. What do you think?
- What happens in the church?
- Why do the girls lie about the fall in the bathroom?
- Why does Grace keep her feelings for Jon a secret from everyone?
- Three new voices are introduced in this section and their thoughts are shown in italics.
- Who are they and why do you think the author deviated from the single voice narrative?
- At the end of this section what concerns do you have for the members of the family?

Read 'October' (pages 153–197)

- Should Jon have taken pity on Grace and let her win the badminton match?
- Could you identify three pieces of evidence that the twins' health is declining?

- 'Normal is the Holy Grail and only those without it know its value.' What did Grace mean by this?
- Why is reading such a particular pleasure for Grace?
- How could the twins ease the financial pressure on the family and why do they resist this course of action?
- Is Margot's attempt at friendship and her offer of tic-tacs appreciated by Grace?
- What does Tippi say they can never do?

Read 'Early November' (pages 201–248)

- Should Tippi and Grace have endangered their health by smoking and drinking and spending the night out of door?
- Grace wonders whether Science and Progress 'could prevent people like us ever being born again.' What do you think is her opinion on this?
- How do you think Tippi feels about Grace's developing relationship with Jon?
- Why does Grace think that very soon the family will be destitute?
- Why do the girls finally decide to sell their story to the media?
- Is there a difference between models making money on the catwalk and the twins cashing in on their conjoined bodies?

Read 'Mid November' and 'Late November' (pages 251–305)

- Two family members will not be in the documentary. Why is this?
- What is it about the twins that inspires Caroline?
- What do you think they make of their increased popularity when it becomes known they will be the subjects of a documentary?
- Do you agree with Tippi that Caroline is 'a very decent human being'? Why?
- What does Dr Derrick recommend and what are the implications for each of the girls?
- Why is the proposed operation offered free of charge?
- When Grace says she is a parasite what does she mean?

Read 'December' (pages 309–362)

- What words does Grace use to explain to Dr Murphy her feelings about the operation?
- What causes tension between the four on the trip to Long Island?
- How do they spend their time on Long Island?
- Why is they choose Jasmeen to discuss their funeral arrangements with?
- What causes Grace to say that she hates Jon?

Read 'January', 'January 21st' and 'January 29th' (pages 365–416)

- What preliminary procedure must be done prior to the operation to separate the girls?
- Identify the speakers:
'I'll outlive you all'
'You're both lovely'
'It's always been complicated, you know'
'I want you to know –'
- Why does Tippi paint Grace's nails before surgery?
- Grace says 'Luck is a lie'. What does she mean?

- What is the significance of the two dates: January 21st and 29th?
- When Dr Derrick says he will do his best to keep the girls together, what does he mean?
- What is the result of the operation? Was this expected?
- What is the significance of the Tippi page? (page 409)
- Do you think Grace will survive?

Read 'February' and 'March' (pages 419– 430)

- If Dragon wrote a page at this point of the novel, what might she write?
- How does Grace know what happened at the funeral?
- Does Grace recover?
- Why does she say 'I have been a coward'?
- In your opinion, which of these themes is strongest in the story: love, friendship, family, respect?

Questions

1. Compare the personalities of Grace and Tippi. Because the story is told, mainly, by Grace do we have greater insight into her personality?
2. Do Grace and Tippi want to be separated? Why do you think this is so? Consider each girl's need for privacy, health, love, identity, career, and friendship.
3. To what extent did having conjoined twins in the family affect the others in the house? Select one (the mother, father, grandmother or Dragon) and imagine they have a session with the therapist Dr Murphy. Write or record what was said.
4. Why did Jon and Jasmeen see beyond the difference when most classmates did not? What was the relationship between Jon and Jasmeen? Did Tippi and Grace benefit equally from their relationships with Jon and Jasmeen? How would the twins like to have been treated by their classmates and by the public?

Activities

This story is fiction but the author has based Tippi's and Grace's story on the amalgamated stories of real-life conjoined twins, both living and dead. Research the lives of other conjoined twins:

Abby and Brittany Hensel, Minnesota, USA (born 1990)

or

Chang and Eng Bunker, Thailand (born 1811) formerly known as Siam. (Conjoined twins used to be known as Siamese twins after the original Siamese twins – the Bunker brothers.)

or

Masha and Dasha Krivoshlyapova, Russia (born 1950)

or

Hassan and Hussein Benhaffaf, Ireland (born 2009 and successfully separated when they were four months old)

Jon is an avid reader and their shared love of reading creates a bond between him and Grace. Make a list of all the books referred to throughout the novel.

The jigsaw on which the family work together creates a picture of the painting entitled *Friendship* by Picasso. Google the image.

Grace says:

'I like Picasso. He paints the essence of things and not only what the eye can see.'

Create a new cover for the book integrating this painting into the design.

The story is written in blank verse, each section comprising a series of poems. Do you like this style of writing? Read Crossan's other verse novels: *The Weight of Water* and *Apple and Rain*. Verse novels are more common in Young Adult Fiction in America. Google other titles e.g. *Out of Dust* by award winning author Karen Hesse.



Moonrise

Sarah Crossan

Bloomsbury Publishing

ISBN 9781408867808

Summary

They think I hurt someone.

But I didn't. You hear?

*Cos people are gonna be telling you
all kinds of lies.*

I need you to know the truth

Joe hasn't seen his brother for ten years, and it's for the most brutal of reasons. Ed is on death row. But now Ed's execution date has been set, and this might be the last summer they have together. From one-time Carnegie Medal and CBI Book of the Year Awards winner Sarah Crossan, this poignant, stirring, huge-hearted novel asks big questions. What value do you place on life? What can you forgive? And just how do you say goodbye?

Judges' Comments

Joe hasn't seen his brother Ed for ten years and is determined to see him, regardless of the formidable obstacles in his way. For Ed is on death row and his execution date has been set... This intense and formidable novel, told in blank verse, combines beauty and starkness in its depiction of family ties, love, mistrust, forgiveness, capital punishment and incarceration. Crossan's lyrical, compelling and heartbreaking novel will be an unforgettable reading experience for its young adult readers.



About the Author

Sarah Crossan has lived in Dublin, London and New York, and now lives in Hertfordshire. She graduated with a degree in philosophy and literature before training as an English and drama teacher at Cambridge University. Since completing a master's in creative writing, she has been working to promote creative writing in schools. *The Weight of Water* and *Apple and Rain* were both shortlisted for the CILIP Carnegie Medal. In 2016, Sarah won the CILIP Carnegie Medal as well as the YA Book Prize, the CBI Book of the Year Award and the CLIPPA Poetry Award for her novel *One*.

QUESTIONS

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. Look at the cover of the book and the inside page – why do you think the cover is designed like this? What does it make you think about?
2. Sarah Crossan often writes in verse. Have you read a book in verse before, or any poetry?

AFTER YOU HAVE READ

1. From the very first page, poverty is a huge part of the lives of these characters. How does poverty affect the lives of each character? Think about the options that they're faced with due to circumstances.
2. Why is Joe so angry with his mother? Why does his mom behave in the ways she does?
3. What race do you think Joe and his family are? Why do you think this? Examine your preconceived views on race, poverty and violence in America and globally.
4. Discuss the fact that Aunt Karen believes Ed might be guilty, whilst the family relies on her financially. What impact does this have on Joe and his sister Angela?
5. Is Aunt Karen a villain or a saviour?
6. When Joe arrives in Wakeling, he quickly starts work repairing a car at the local diner. Why do you think the author wrote this subplot? Think about Joe's relationship with his brother.
7. This book addresses the many potential victims of crime, such as Joe's family. Why do you think that this isn't seen in many books or TV shows?
8. Early on, Joe's brother Ed is given an execution date of 18 August. This puts an endpoint on the book – why did the author do this? How does it affect the storytelling?
9. How does media coverage of the case represent Ed and affect his ability to get a fair trial? Contrast the types of photographs used to represent Ed with those of the victim of the crime, cop Frank Pheelan.
10. Why is the prison nicknamed the 'farm' in Wakeling?
11. Joe finds it hard to understand why Sue is being so nice to him. Why do you think he finds it difficult to accept kindness? Why is Sue being so kind?
12. The author presents certain words on specific parts of the page – why? Find some examples and discuss.
13. Joe says, 'It's better to be guilty and rich' – what does he mean? Do you think this is true of the Irish court system?
14. Both Ed and Joe have committed some petty theft in the past. Does this make them bad people? Why does the author have us see Joe steal a girl's purse?
15. Nell and Joe are drawn together and become more than friends. Why is this?
16. Crossan switches between the present day and the past. What effect does this have on the storyline?

17. Joe thinks about bystanders, people who are 'just doing their job' – list some other examples of this.
18. Governor McDowell lives a nice life – functions and parties and chauffeur-driven cars. How does this affect his ability to view Ed's case?
19. Joe feels like Ed left him behind when he took off. How does this affect Joe's relationship with Ed, now that he's visiting him in Wakeling?
20. Why did Nell keep her father's identity a secret?
21. Nell's father is depicted as a complex character – he is conflicted about Ed's execution but aware that if he doesn't administer it someone else will. It would be easier to paint him as completely evil – why does the author choose to portray him as a father first?
22. Contrast the stillness and inaction of Joe's family with the action of the prison on 17 August – why has the author depicted it this way?
23. Why do you think the prison system in America gives the death row prisoner a final meal of their choice?

ACTIVITIES

- Write your own additional chapter to the story in free verse.
- Research prose, free verse and poetry. Try writing the same storyline in each style.
- Write two chapters of a story of your own – one in the past and one set in the present day. Can you explain someone's motivation to behave a certain way by their past experiences?
- This book has difficult subject matter and is suitable for more mature readers. Write a short summary of the book that is appropriate for younger readers to understand.
- Design an alternative cover for the book. What would you like to show on it?
- In small groups, discuss the death penalty and its alternatives. Why do you think some states in the USA have retained the death penalty? What alternative systems might you put in place?
- Find the paper that Nell talks about, by Harry Harlow, and give a presentation on the results found in the study into rhesus macaques and emotional isolation.

TOFFEE

Sarah Crossan

Bloomsbury YA

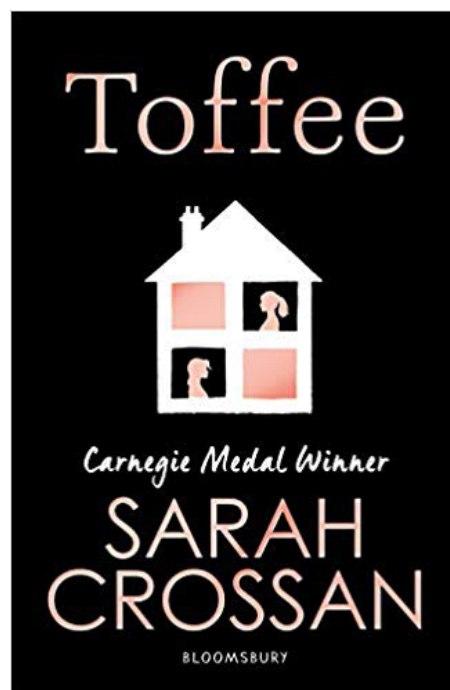
ISBN 9781408868133

Note for Group Leaders This novel touches on topics such as dementia and emotional and physical abuse. There are also a few incidents of mild alcohol and drug intake, as well as some profanity – courtesy of Marla. If these topics make you uncomfortable, perhaps it is best to carefully read some online reviews of *Toffee* first.

Summary Allison is a girl trying to forget. Marla is a woman trying to remember. Allison has run away from home. With nowhere to live, she finds herself hiding in the shed of what she thinks is an abandoned house. Except the house isn't empty. An elderly woman, Marla, lives there. She is lonely and confused. She mistakes Allison for a friend from her past called Toffee and invites her in. Used to hiding who she is and trying to be someone else, Toffee is who Allison becomes. But as she realises how much Marla needs a real friend, she begins to ask: where is home? What does family mean? And who am I really?

Judges' Comments A lyrical and moving portrayal of the relationship between a teenage girl, who has run away from her abusive father, and an elderly woman with dementia, who mistakes her for a close childhood friend. Every note in this first person verse narrative rings true. Each poem is a gem in itself and they combine in a series of vignettes, employing a subtle interplay between information given and deferred that allows space for readers to reflect while savouring the beauty of the language. Through deft storytelling and masterful characterisation, complex themes of identity, child and elder abuse, memory loss, loneliness and connection are explored with sensitivity, honesty, warmth and respect

About the Author Sarah Crossan has lived in Dublin, London and New York and now lives in Hertfordshire. She graduated with a degree in philosophy and literature before training as an English and drama teacher at Cambridge University. Since completing a master's in creative writing, she has been working to promote creative writing in schools. *The Weight of Water* and *Apple and Rain* were both shortlisted for the CILIP Carnegie Medal. In 2016, Sarah won the CILIP Carnegie Medal as well as the YA Book Prize, the CBI Book of the Year Award and the CLiPPA Poetry Award for her novel *One*



QUESTIONS

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. Take a look at the cover of this book without reading the blurb. What do you think this story could be about? What might the title *Toffee* mean?
2. There are two versions of the cover. You can see them both in this pack. Which one do you prefer? Why?
3. This book is written in blank verse – have you ever read a book in blank verse before? Would the use of blank verse normally put you off reading a book? What do you think of poetry in general? Have you ever read any books by the author, Sarah Crossan, before?
4. Read the book's blurb: 'I am not who I say I am. Marla isn't who she thinks she is. I am a girl trying to forget. Marla is a woman trying to remember.' What do you think this could mean? What genre would you guess this book is?

AS YOU READ

'Her Name Is Marla'

- Who do you think Allison and Marla are? Who is Toffee? What sort of relationship do they seem to have? Does this beginning make you want to read on?

'At the Bus Station'–'Breakfast on the Beach'

- Allison describes herself as a runaway, a liar and a thief – do you think this is fair?
- What kind of home life does Allison have? Why do you think she might have run away?
- What are your first impressions of Allison's father? Do you think Allison can really make her father happier?
- Why didn't she leave with Kelly-Anne?

'The Empty House'–'Victory'

- What are your first impressions of Marla? Is Marla what you would usually expect an old woman to be like?
- What do you think of Allison's new identity?
- Do you think Allison is taking advantage of Marla by staying in her home and stealing her money?
- Why is it such a victory for Allison to avoid contact with her father?

'Alarm Bell'–'Home Help'

- What kind of life do you think Marla leads?
- Why might she be acting in such a confused way towards Allison?
- What do you think of the way others like Peggy might treat Marla?
- Why does Allison not tell Marla what happened to her face? At this point, what do you think happened to it?

'I Check My Phone'–'Birthday'

- Allison is now completely alone, with no money or phone: what do you think she should do? What would you do? Do you think she will be able to find Kelly-Anne?
- Allison says people 'untighten when they aren't required to care' – do you think this is true? Why might Allison believe this?
- Do you think Kelly-Anne cares about Allison? Are they really on the same side?

'Disregard'–'Fruit'

- Do you think Allison could really be a genuine companion for Marla? Does Marla need a companion? Does Allison need one?
- Can you see any similarities between Allison's and Marla's situations?
- Allison says she 'knows what happiness should look like from the outside' – do you think either she or Marla is truly happy?

'The System'–'Friends'

- How do you think Allison's father's behaviour might have affected how Allison treats other people? Why might Allison's father not have wanted her to have friends?
- What are your first impressions of Lucy? What might Allison mean by 'Lucy speaks as though the world has always listened'?

'Waiting'–'Strictly'

- Allison says she could never work out her father – why do you think he acts this way towards his daughter? Do you think Marla is easier to figure out?
- Marla shows Allison her dance routine – were you surprised by this behaviour?

‘The Hunt’–‘Research’

- Who do you think Toffee might be?
- Allison thinks about scars in this section – do you think she may have emotional as well as physical scars?
- Why do you think Allison lies about her name to Lucy? Allison suspects that Marla may have dementia – what do you know about dementia?

‘Good Girl’–‘OK So’

- Do you think social services did enough to make sure Allison’s home life was OK?
- Do you think Allison’s father or Kelly-Anne is trying to find her?
- How is living in Marla’s different to living at home, do you think?

‘Miscalculations’–‘What Is Left Over’

- What do you think of Allison and Lucy’s friendship so far?
- Is Allison used to showing and receiving love?
- What do you think of the ways in which Allison cares for Marla? Allison feels she is always walking on eggshells – do you think this is true?

‘Mercy’–‘Scabby’

- What do you think Allison means when she says that sometimes her father could be ‘merciful’?
- Allison laughs at Lucy’s jokes to avoid being alone and says she must try harder to be loved – why do you think she feels this way? How might her father’s behaviour have affected this feeling?

‘Allowed’–‘Giant Rock Dummy’

- Here we get a glimpse into Allison’s past and her family situation through the years. How might the death of Allison’s mother have affected her father? Do you think this is a good enough excuse for him to act in the way he does?
- How might this bereavement have affected Allison?
- Allison says Kelly-Anne ‘dumped us’, instead of dumped her father – is this true?
- What do you think might have happened in Marla’s past?

‘Screaming’–‘Planning’

- In this section Marla does not recognise herself in the mirror – how do you think this might feel for her?
- We are introduced to Marla’s son, Donal. What do you think of his behaviour towards his mother? Do you think he understands Marla’s illness?
- Why do you think Allison reacts so strongly to Donal’s actions towards Marla?
- Why do you think Allison puts the ‘Toffee’ reminder in Marla’s phone?

‘Make-Up’–‘Funny Thing Is’

- Do you think Lucy is taking advantage of Allison? Do they have an equal friendship?
- What do you think of Allison’s previous friendship with Jacq and Sophie?
- Do you think anyone is ever ‘normal’, like Allison and her friends insisted they were? What kinds of things does everyone hide?

‘Hot Bread’–‘Slippers’

- In this section Allison sees a missing person report for another teenage girl – how do you think she feels knowing that her father has not reached out publicly in the same way as this girl’s parents?
- How do you think Marla feels about her only connection with the outside world being through her phone reminders?
- Do you think Lucy is paying Allison fairly for the work that she does? Does Lucy need money?
- What do you think of Lucy’s other friends? Allison talks about Marla and her father’s fears – do you think everyone has a secret fear?
- Allison talks about the pain of loving her father – do you think love has to hurt? Is Allison talking about physical or emotional pain?

‘Who Did That to Your Face?’–‘Hangover’

- Do you think if Allison could forget her memories of her father’s treatment she would be able to go home? Marla tells Allison she is good enough as she is, which Allison says is the kindest thing anyone has ever said to her – how might this make Allison feel towards Marla?
- How do you think Marla and Allison’s relationship is developing? Why do you think Marla calls for Toffee when she arrives home?

‘Any Jewels?’–‘People’

- Does Marla have the same expectations of Allison as her father did?
- Are you surprised by Lucy’s home and lifestyle? How does this affect how she treats Allison?
- Were you surprised by how Lucy acted in Marla’s house? Allison is confused about what people want – do you think she tries to please others too much? Why might this be?

‘Bath Time’–‘Before Bed’

- Why do you think Allison still does not try to make contact with her old life?
- Marla reacts violently when she is unable to make fairy cakes – can you understand her frustration? Can you understand why Allison is frightened by this behaviour? Why do you think Marla can remember so much about her youth but so little about the present?
- Marla says Allison could make anyone love her – do you think Allison agrees? Was her father really showing love on Valentine’s Day?
- Do you think Allison really wanted to kiss Jason Clean? Who has shown Allison the most love, do you think?

‘Behind the Butcher’s’–‘Stuff’

- How does this section make you feel?
- Why does Allison not stop Lucy from taking Marla’s belongings? Why do you think Lucy stole Marla’s clock?
- Do you think Allison’s father left the Lion Bar in the fridge on purpose?
- Do you think Marla’s possessions are what is important to her?

‘Concern’–‘Police’

- Are you surprised by Allison’s story of her neighbour’s dog?
- After Donal leaves, Marla disappears into herself – why do you think this happens? Why does Allison not ‘push her to be happy’?
- Why do you think Allison finally decides to activate her phone? Are you surprised by the messages waiting for her?

‘Loitering’–‘Power’

- Why do you think the author includes this story of the blackbird?
- Can you understand why Allison feels she wasted time waiting for her father to be better? Can you understand why she spent so long waiting in the first place?
- What does the section dealing with Allison and the butterfly remind you of?

‘Beach Day’–‘Breakfast’

- Why do you think the author includes this trip to the beach in this section?
- How did the story of Iris the goldfish make you feel?
- Why do you think Donal reacts the way he does about his birthday?
- Were you surprised to finally learn about Mary?
- What do you think of how Allison reacts to Marla’s grief? Do you think Marla was always a good mother?
- Do you think Allison’s father could change?

‘Imbalance’–‘Hamless’

- This is a major section of the book. Why do you think Allison let the others into Marla’s house? Were you surprised by Allison’s actions?
- Why do you think Marla stays in bed?
- Why do you think Allison finally opens up about what happened to her face? Were you shocked to finally learn the truth? Marla tells Allison she didn’t deserve what happened to her – do you think anyone has ever told her that before? Do you think she believes it?
- What lessons should Allison have been taught in school, do you think? How is Marla’s experience similar to Allison’s?

‘The Beach’–‘The Sea’

- Why does Allison not reply to Kelly-Anne?
- Does Allison believe the things her father says about her?
- Why does Allison tell Marla her real name?
- Why does Allison want to be like the sea?

‘Fallen’–‘Free-Falling’

- Marla has had a bad fall. What does this incident show us about how Allison feels about Marla?
- Were you surprised by Allison’s choice to call her father? Were you surprised by her father’s attitude and revelation?
- What do you think of Donal’s phone call? Why does Allison think of him as an intruder?
- Do you think Allison will be able to hang on?

‘Jazz’–‘Demi-Sister’

- How did you feel when Marla remembered Allison? What does this section tell us about their relationship?
- What do you think of Allison’s confrontation of Donal? How has Allison changed as a person?
- What do you think of Kelly-Anne’s treatment of Allison? Do you think there could be hope for their family?

‘Louise’–‘Enrolment’

- Marla does not want to leave for Portsmouth. Do you think she fully understands what is happening? Do you think this is for the best? Do you agree that no goodbye is forever?
- Do you agree with Allison’s theory that Marla comes in and out of herself?
- What do you think of Allison’s confrontation of Lucy?
- Allison makes a second phone call to her father – are you surprised by this? Do you have hope for Allison’s future?

‘What Happened to Toffee?’–‘Tail Lights’

- What do you think of Marla’s revelation of what actually happened to Toffee?
- Allison and Marla perform their dance for Kelly-Anne. Why do you think the author includes this performance at this point?
- Marla and Allison say goodbye. How did this farewell affect you? Why doesn’t Allison return Marla’s book? Marla says she misses Allison even though she is right there – what might this mean? Do you think the author captures the sadness of this moment well?
- The author ends this chapter saying it will be fine again – why do you think the book closes in this way? Is it a good resolution?

AFTER YOU HAVE READ**CHARACTERS AND PLOT**

1. What did you think of this book? What were your favourite or least favourite parts?
2. What did you think of the ending of this story?
3. Were there any aspects of the story’s narrative that you did not expect?
4. What did you think of the character of Allison? How did she change over the course of the story? Did you feel that the author represented Allison’s experience well? Was there anything about her behaviour you found surprising?
5. What did you think of the character of Marla? Was she what you expected? Did the ways in which Marla’s dementia affected her surprise you?
6. What did you think of Allison and Marla’s relationship? How was it different to Allison’s relationship with Kelly-Anne?
7. Allison and Marla both have difficult family lives with Allison’s father and Marla’s son Donal – could you see any similarities in these situations? Did you feel these characters were realistic?
8. What did you think of Allison’s friendship with Lucy? Do you think the class difference between the two girls allowed for Lucy to manipulate Allison? Why do you think Allison gave in to Lucy’s demands so much?

THEMES

1. Families are complicated in this book, and a lot of the characters struggle with processing their emotions and showing love. How well do you think the author shows different types of families? How do you think different characters develop their ability to show love to those around them?
2. Marla has dementia – what did you know about this illness before you began and what have you learned since?
3. Allison’s father is both emotionally and physically abusive towards her – how did you find reading about these topics in the story? Do you think Allison’s father could be redeemed? How does his behaviour affect her in other ways? Do you think that Donal’s behaviour towards Marla is also abusive?
4. How do you think this novel comments on the idea of ‘home’?

STRUCTURES

1. Sarah Crossan writes in blank verse, with each poem telling a small story in a different length, shape or form. How did this affect your reading of the book? Would you be willing to read a verse novel again? What did you like or dislike about this approach?
2. When the characters speak in the story, italics are used – did you find this stylistic approach helpful?
3. The author chooses to repeat two titles of poems more than once, ‘Who Did That to Your Face?’ and ‘I Am Allison’. Why do you think the author chose to repeat these parts? Why might these parts be significant?
4. Did you read part of this book aloud? If so how did this change your experience of reading the novel?

ACTIVITIES

1. Marla experiences a lot of loneliness and isolation. Why not reach out to senior citizens in your area by starting an oral history project? You could speak to members of senior citizen groups or contact a local nursing home about collecting memories from the elderly about their lives growing up.
2. Dementia and abuse are big topics in this novel – why not raise funds for those who experience these life events by doing some fundraising for charities, such as the Alzheimer Society of Ireland, Understanding Together, ADAPT and Women’s Aid, who deal with these issues.
3. This novel is written in blank verse – why not try to narrate an experience from your own life using a similar poetic approach to the author’s?
4. Marla loved to dance – now it’s your turn! Get some dance lessons in jazz, tap or foxtrot and host your own *Strictly Come Dancing* at school!

FURTHER RESOURCES

- Sarah Crossan’s other verse novels include *One*, *The Weight of Water* and *Moonrise*. Sarah also co-wrote *We Come Apart* with author Brian Conaghan.
- Sarah Crossan is the current Laureate na nÓg with Children’s Books Ireland. Her project We Are the Poets involves showcasing the voices of young people. You can get involved here: <https://childrenslaureate.ie/wearethepoets> or look up the Laureate na nÓg YouTube channel for tips.
- Go to Sarah’s publisher’s website and look at their teaching resource around this book <https://media.bloomsbury.com/rep/files/Toffee%20Teaching%20notes.pdf>
- One of the wonderful things about this book is the intergenerational friendship between Marla and Allison. Why not look up the Bealtaine Festival, Ireland’s national festival that uniquely celebrates the arts and creativity as people age, and see if any events are happening in your area: www.bealtaine.ie
- For more information on Dementia see: www.alzheimer.ie
www.understandtogether.ie
www.dementia.ie
- If you have been affected by any of the issues raised in *Toffee*, you can find a list of helplines here: <https://www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/mental-health/supports-for-young-people.html>



TUESDAYS ARE JUST AS BAD

Cethan Leahy
Mercier Press
ISBN 9781781175644

NOTE FOR SHADOWING LEADERS This book deals with a number of sensitive issues including mental illness, suicide, sex and contraception. CBI is aware that this content will not be suitable for some readers, and advises shadowing leaders to be aware of this content before selecting the book to read with your group.

The questions and activities that follow are suggested ways of interrogating difficult topics in a responsible and appropriate way for young readers. You do not have to go through every question with your group, and should feel free to add your own questions and activities.

Summary

When troubled teenager Adam wakes in hospital after a suicide attempt, he finds that he has company. A ghost. Or perhaps it's something else. This 'ghost' is as confused as Adam about the whole situation. Narrated from the point of view of this 'ghost', *Tuesdays are Just as Bad* follows Adam as he attempts to return to normal life – whatever that is. When Adam makes new friends via his counselling sessions, he ends up developing a relationship with one of the gang, Aoife. Surrounded by these friends, Adam starts to feel happy again. The 'ghost', however, becomes jealous. In the end, he decides that the only way he can be free of this feeling is to isolate Adam so he can have him all to himself, with catastrophic results.

Judges' Comments

A challenging exploration of the difficult issues surrounding suicidal ideation, bullying and coming of age. The relationship between Adam and the ghostly inner voice that becomes his constant companion following a failed suicide attempt is handled with great tenderness and understanding. This is a thought-provoking and moving novel about teenage depression, male friendship and young love, all bound together with sensitivity and an occasional touch of black humour.

About the Author

Cethan Leahy is a writer, filmmaker, and editor of Irish literary magazine *The Penny Dreadful*. His short stories are published in *The Looking Glass*, *Wordlegs* and *Five Dials* and he has written two Fiction Express ebooks for middle grade, *The Chosen One (and his mum and his dad and his sister)* and *Prince Charming and his Quest for a Wife*. Cethan's animation short *The Beast of Bath* was broadcast on national television. His short film *The Amazing* appeared in Cork film anthology *Cork, Like* in 2013. His radio programmes, including children's drama *Tales from the Fairy Fort*, have appeared on national radio. He has also contributed illustration work to Cork comics press Turncoat Press.

QUESTIONS

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. Consider the title of this book; *Tuesdays are Just as Bad* what do you think this might mean? Does this give you any hints about what the book might be about?
2. Take a look at the cover; is the design appealing to you? Do you think the storm clouds might symbolise something? There is a white outline of a boy being followed by a black outline of a boy – what does this make you think of? Is it simply a shadow?
3. Read the blurb of this book; Adam has recently attempted suicide, how do you feel about reading a book on this topic? Do you think enough books for young adults cover themes of mental health and suicide? Do you think Adam's 'ghostly companion' sounds friendly?
4. The blurb asks, 'What would you do if you were haunted by yourself?' Why might Adam be haunted by himself? How do you think you would feel in this situation?

AS YOU READ

Part 1 – The Stranger Song

Chapter 1–6

1. The story begins with a glimpse into Adam's life. Who is telling this story? What kind of a person do you think Adam is? What kind of a person do you think the narrator is? Are they similar?
2. Our narrator tells us how they came to exist because of Adam's suicide attempt. How did you feel reading about this incident? Why might the narrator have appeared then?
3. At Dr Moore's office we are introduced to Douglas, what are your first impressions of this character? Do you think Adam finds it easy to open up to people?
4. Adam struggles with insomnia, why do you think this is? Our narrator discovers they can leave Adam's side when he is sleeping, why do you think this happens?
5. Chris Hurly has died by suicide. Do you think Adam's school handles his death and Adam's mental health after this sad event well? How do Adam's peers process the loss of a school friend? Are you surprised by some of their reactions? How do you think Adam's parents feel when they hear about Chris?

Part 2 – Everybody Knows

Chapter 7–12

1. Adam is told by Dr Moore not to attend Chris' funeral but goes anyway, why do you think he feels the need to go? How do you think he feels when he realises it is an alternative peek at how his own funeral might have been? Dr Moore reminds Adam that all suicides are tragic – do you think Adam believes this?

2. How do you think Adam's parents are coping since his suicide attempt? What sort of a relationship do they have? How do Adam's mother and father's approach to tackling Adam's mental health differ?
3. Douglas introduces Adam to his friends by telling them about his suicide, why do you think he does this straight away? Is it a good or bad thing? Were you surprised by how Adam handles this?
4. The narrator encourages Adam to go for a walk by annoying him and also encourages him to speak to Douglas and his friends, at this point, is the narrator a positive or a negative force in Adam's life?

Chapter 13–17

1. Why do you think Douglas is trying so hard to include Adam in his group of friends? How do you think Adam fits into the group dynamics?
2. On a nightly exploration the narrator encounters Philip and his friends. Does seeing Philip in this setting change your opinion of him? How do you think Philip is coping with his grief? Are his friends helpful in this situation? Do you think it is difficult for teenage boys to discuss emotions, mental health and grief and why do you think this might be? What do you think of the subject 'copycat suicides'?
3. Philip blames Adam for his brother's death, why might he lash out in this way? Do you think he is considering Adam's mental health? What do you think of Adam's school's mental health initiative?
4. What do you think of Adam and Aoife's short story? Do you think Adam's story is shaped by the fact Adam collaborated with the narrator? Do you agree that creative writing and the writing group might be a good outlet of expression for Adam?

Chapter 18–23

1. Adam's parents approach talking about Aoife in an awkward way, what do you think of the way the author includes this in the story?
2. Adam mentions previous friends have disappeared and fears he is boring, do you think he has a lot of self-confidence? Why do you think self-esteem becomes so complicated for teenagers?
3. As we learn more about Douglas what kind of a character do you think he is? How is Douglas' life different to Adam's life do you think? Why might Douglas be seeing Dr Moore?
4. How has Adam's friendship with Aoife progressed? What kind of a person do you think Aoife is? Do you think she has a good understanding of Adam? Aoife experiences racism at the gig, how do she and her friends handle this? What do you think Adam should have done?

Chapters 24–27

1. Adam has developed feelings for Aoife, do you think it is a good or bad idea for him to get involved in a romantic relationship at this point? Do you think the narrator is really concerned about Adam's mental health and would having a girlfriend affect this? What do you think the means about being 'neglected' by Adam? How has having new friends changed Adam's outlook on life?
2. Adam and Aoife go on a date. How do you think the narrator feels about Aoife and Adam's relationship? Do you think the ghost is a useful voice for Adam to listen to? Do you think the author handles teenage romance in an accurate way?
3. Aoife says one of the reasons she writes is to see herself in stories as characters are often simply assumed to be white. What do you think of this? Do you think there is enough diversity and representation in books and throughout the media?
4. What do you think of Adam's Ghost Sickness story? Dr Moore describes the 'supernatural figure' as 'the villain'. Do you think the narrator is a villain? Is the narrator a metaphor for Adam's mental illness? Why hasn't Adam told Dr Moore about his own experience of being haunted? What do you think of the narrator's reaction to this story?
5. Adam drinks while underage for the first time at Linda's party, do you think there is a lot of pressure on young people to drink alcohol? How do you think the author handles this subject?
6. Adam doesn't like to talk about his suicide attempt, Linda doesn't like to talk about her sister who died, Barry doesn't like to talk about his sexuality and Aoife doesn't like to talk about her mother. Do you think that everyone has something they like to keep to themselves and how might this affect their relationships with others? Is it always easy to open up?

Part 3 – Ain't No Cure for Love

Chapter 28–33

1. Do you think things have really changed for Adam at school? Why do you think Adam is treated differently due to having a girlfriend? What do you think of Adam's reaction to the note he receives?
2. Adam meets Aoife's family for the first time and discovers her mother suffers from severe anxiety and panic attacks. How do you think this might affect Aoife as a person and the dynamics of her family? Does Aoife's story help you to understand the situation a bit better? Do you think Aoife and Adam use creative writing in a similar way? How are the dynamics between Aoife's parents different to Adam's?
3. Adam and the narrator are in conflict. Why might the narrator want things to go back to the way they were? Adam is beginning to believe the narrator isn't real and that listening to it might not be the best idea, why do you think he has come to this conclusion? Do you agree?

4. Adam and Aoife take things further in their relationship. What do you think of their attitude towards contraception? Do you think teenagers and young people receive enough information on practicing safe sex?

Chapter 34–39

1. The narrator lists all of the elements that have contributed to Adam being in a good place, how do you think each of these affect mental health? Do you think the narrator will be capable of undermining all of these?
2. During Adam and Aoife's date the narrator's constant negativity undermines the date and affects Aoife's behaviour. How important do you think the voices in our own head are at affecting our emotions and how secure we feel? Is there any logic behind the things the narrator says to Adam?
3. Christmas is a difficult time for Adam, why do you think this time is particularly difficult for people with mental health issues? The ideas the narrator has put in Adam's head have grown and grown, how do you think this has happened and how does the Mental Health Day at school contribute to this? What do you think of Philip's outburst and were you surprised by Adam's response? Adam and Aoife have an argument, do you think it is okay for Adam to treat Aoife in this way because of how he is feeling?

Part 4 – Hey, That's No Way to Say Goodbye

Chapter 40–42

1. Adam has become an expert in telling people what they want to hear, do you think there is sometimes a sense that we must pretend to be okay even if we are not? How do you think Douglas handles this change in Adam? What do you think you would do in a similar situation?
2. A number of incidents contribute to Adam attempting suicide again. Is it clear how he has reached this point? Even though Linda reminds Adam his friends still care for him, Adam believes taking his life will act as an apology for his existence, did you think the author demonstrates how someone in this position might feel in a way that is easy for the reader to understand or sympathise with? Did you find it difficult to read this particular chapter? Why do you think the narrator changes their mind and is able to grab Adam's arm?

Epilogue – The Future

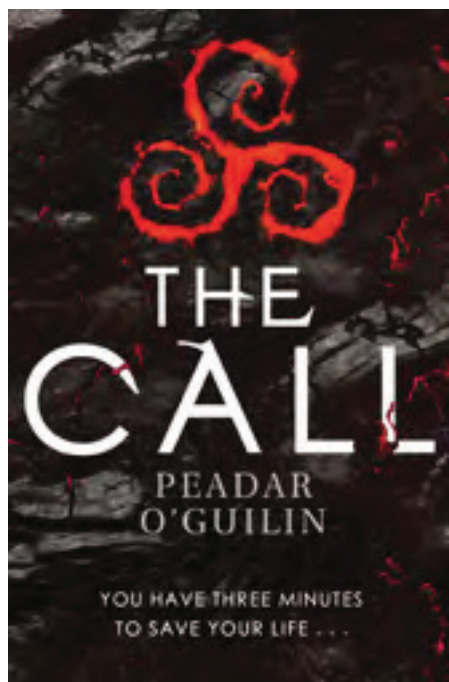
1. At what point did you realise the narrator had changed? How do you think Adam deals with confronting Philip? How has Adam changed as a person from the beginning of the book?
2. Adam begins taking medication for his depression and is fearful at first. Do you think there is still a lot of stigma and misunderstanding surrounding the treatment of mental illness?
3. For the first time the reader is given a description of the narrator's appearance, knowing this now how do you think Adam felt having this image following him around all the time? What do you think the narrator represents? Do you feel this story has a realistic or a hopeful ending?

AFTER YOU HAVE READ

1. The author gives many suggestions as to what the narrator's purpose in Adam's life is; which one did you agree with most? Why do you think the author chose to tell this story from this perspective? How does the author show the power of our inner voice on our state of mind? How does the relationship between Adam and the narrator change throughout the story?
2. Mental health, mental illness, grief and suicide are central themes of this novel for Adam, Philip and Aoife's mother. How do you think the author handles these themes, is it in a believable or relatable approach?
3. No one suspects Adam or Chris will attempt suicide, do you think that boys and men often bottle up or conceal their emotions? Why does this happen and how can this change?
4. Philip struggles to cope with his grief following his brother's suicide, what do you think of the ways the author handled this topic? What do you think life is like for those who lose a loved one to suicide?
5. How do you think living with a parent who suffers from a mental illness is handled in this story?
6. Douglas has a different attitude towards attending a psychiatrist than Adam's? Do you think there is still a stigma attached to seeking help for mental illness?
7. 'Adam was trapped in this horrible logic, which assumed the worst of everyone' – how important do you think the way we use our inner voices to talk to ourselves is on our mental health?
8. Making friends with Douglas and the gang has a positive effect on Adam's life; how important do you think it is to have friends around you when dealing with mental health issues? What do you think of Adam's relationship with Aoife? Is it a healthy one?
9. What did you think of the ending of this book? Until the epilogue we only hear from the ghosts perspective, did you notice a change in the voice of the book once Adam took over? Why do you think the author chooses to end the story in this way?

ACTIVITIES

1. How does your school deal with the subject of mental health? Host your own Mental Health Day to create awareness. Encourage your classmates to talk about some of the issues and themes explored throughout this book.
2. Hold a fundraiser to raise money and awareness for suicide prevention charities such as Aware and Pieta House.
3. Adam and Aoife use creative writing as a form of expression. Host a creative writing workshop and explore ways of expressing your stories in implicit and explicit ways.
4. When Adam is in a bad place Douglas gives him a 'Get Out of Jail Free Card' as a pass for acting badly towards his friends. Design your own cards to use with your friends and family to explain when you are feeling low.
5. Read this article by author Dave Rudden about his own mental health issues: <https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2016/apr/19/why-teenage-boys-are-told-not-to-feel-bullying-dave-rudden> In it, he says 'The parts of me they targeted – being sensitive, being bookish, being the kid who handed in essays five pages too long because I loved words – are the parts of me I am proudest of now, the parts that allow me to do what I do.' Make a poster with a photo of you at the centre and ten words that describe positive qualities or skills you have. You can include images cut out from magazines that represent who you are.
6. Self-care is anything you enjoy doing that helps make you happy and maintains your physical, mental or emotional health. Make a 'self-care' list of all the ways you can think of to look after yourself. Work as a group to come up with your top twenty self-care suggestions. These might include playing sport, reading, having a bath or creative writing.
7. Research Niall Breslin, also known as Bressie, who set up www.alustforlife.com, a wellbeing movement, and wrote a book about his own mental health.
8. Look up www.SpunOut.ie Ireland's youth information website created by young people, for young people.



The Call

Peadar Ó Guilín

David Fickling Books

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Summary

On her birthday, Nessa finds out the terrible truth about her home in Ireland – the truth that will change her future forever. She and her friends must train for the most dangerous three minutes of their lives: the Call. That any day now, without warning, they will each wake in a terrifying land, alone and hunted, with a one in ten chance of returning alive. And it is Nessa, more than anyone, who is going to need every ounce of the guts, wit and sheer spirit she was born with if she – and the nation – are to survive.

Judges' Comments

Cut off from the rest of the world by carnivorous Sídhé, Irish children over the age of ten wait in fear to be abducted and hunted by these vicious faery folk. Following the travails of several teenagers, including Nessa (unlikely to survive the Call due to being permanently disabled from polio), this intense story does not flinch from exploring the price of survival. Ó Guilín has created an engrossing young adult novel with rich world-building and a distinctive evocation of dread, suspense and resilience.



About the Author

PEADAR Ó GUILÍN's *The Call* was inspired by the beautiful northwest of Ireland where he grew up. In September 2007, Peadar published his first novel, *The Inferior*, which the *Times Educational Supplement* called 'a stark, dark tale, written with great energy and confidence and some arresting reflections on human nature'. It has now been translated into eight languages, including Japanese and Korean. His fantasy and science-fiction short stories have appeared in numerous venues, including *Black Gate* magazine and an anthology celebrating the best of the iconic *Weird Tales*. He is currently working on a sequel to *The Call*.

Chapters 1 and 2

- Why do you think Nessa's parents are reluctant to tell her about the three minutes? How does knowing the truth change Nessa? Do you think she suspected something beforehand?
- What do you think of the statistics that only one in ten children survive their teenage years?
- The sergeant tests people boarding the bus with iron to make sure they are not fairies. What do you know about the *Sídhe* and Irish fairy folklore?
- What are your first impressions of Nessa and Megan's friendship?
- The boy from Omagh is called on the bus. How do the reactions of older people on the bus compare to Nessa and Megan's reactions?

Chapters 3 and 4

- Nessa says she has 'rebuilt the dam of her emotions stronger than ever'. Why do you think this is and what are your initial impressions of her relationship with Anto?
- Why do you think students like Megan and Antoinette risk their lives by ignoring the rules of the school by smoking etc.?
- Nessa's books include *The History of the Sídhe*, *Testimonies* and *Dánta Grá* in Irish, a language that few people speak. What do you think these books say about her personality?
- What are your impressions of Taaft? How does her attitude towards Nessa's training with a disability compare to Nessa's attitude?
- In this chapter we get our first proper overview of the Boyle training college, including the teachers. Are they what you would expect for a college of this nature?
- We witness the effects of the Welcome Tea. Do you think this is unnecessarily cruel for ten-year-old children?
- We learn about the dynamics of year five. What are your impressions of Conor and Anto's fight? Are the roles held by the students similar to those in a regular school?
- Are you surprised by Nessa's night-time trip to the boys' dormitory? How does this shape your opinion of her physical abilities and her relationship with Anto? Why do you think she chose that particular poem?

Chapter 5

- How does the tone change in this chapter?
- Antoinette encounters spider trees and human dogs. How does the author create the world of the *Sídhe*?
- In this chapter we get to know Antoinette and she is also taken very quickly from us. Why do you think the author takes this approach? What do you think of the nature of her death?

Chapters 6, 7 and 8

- We see how the students react to Antoinette's death. Why do you think they react in this way?
- Megan and Conor have an argument. Do you think Conor is a dangerous character?

- Nessa floors Rodney in her sparring session. Do you think she has faith in her abilities? What do you think are her chances of survival?
- On learning the story behind Nessa's teacher 'Frankenstein', what impression do you get of the Ireland Nessa lives in?
- Conor holds court as the self-appointed leader of 'The Knights of the Round Table'. From this and his attitudes towards his fellow students, why do you think he has developed such a high opinion of himself?
- Are you surprised by Conor's attitude toward Nessa?
- Do you think Anto's interruption is intentional?

Chapters 9 and 10

- Cahal is called and we learn more about the Grey Land and the tricks of the *Sídhe*. How does his experience differ from Antoinette's?
- Why do you think the *Sídhe* send Cahal back in this form? Are you surprised by Cahal's friends' attitudes towards the beast that claims his body?
- How does these events affect Conor? What do you think this might mean for the future?

Chapters 11 and 12

- Nessa, Anto and Taaft have very different attitudes towards the necessity of Javelin Day. Which attitude do you agree with most?
- The school's cruel-to-be-kind methods are enforced from a young age. How does this shape your opinion of teachers like Taaft?
- A school in Mallow is wiped out. What theories at this stage do you have about the cause of this?
- What does Nessa's flushing away of her poetry symbolise?
- We learn more about the Irish banishment of the *Sídhe* to the Grey Land. What do you think of the ethics behind this? Is it reminiscent of any other times in history?

Chapters 13 and 14

- Nessa is targeted on the hunt. Why do you think Conor publicly victimises her so much when he has secret feelings for her? What does this say about his character?
- What do we learn about Nessa and Megan's friendship from this scene? How do you think they will cope if one of them is called?
- What do you think of Nabil? Why do you think the students favour him so much? Do you think his approach to the students is wise?
- The girls find a fairy corpse in a fairy fort. What do you know of fairy forts from Irish folklore? What significance do you think this might have for the school?
- Why do Megan and Nessa's attitudes towards the rules of the school differ so greatly? Why do you think Megan is so eager to share her secret?

Chapters 15 and 16

- Why do you think the discovery of the fairy fort drives such a wedge between Nessa and Megan? Is Nessa's jealousy and worry revealing of her feelings towards Megan? Do you think Megan takes advantage of Nessa's friendship?
- Nessa accepts help from Anto – do you think this is a big step for her? Do you think they interact like normal teenagers?
- Nessa always fashions crutches from branches as she will not have them in the Grey Land when she is called. Do you think she is extra hard on herself because of her disability?
- What do you think the revelation of the shrunken fairy body could mean?

Chapters 17 and 18

- Do you think Conor's desire to harm Nessa is due to his training? What similarities does Liz Sweeney have to Conor?
- How do you think Nessa's takedown of Conor will alter year five's dynamics?
- Emma's death differs hugely from the others. Why do you think the author offers this view?

Chapters 19 and 20

- Anto's internal monologue gives us a glimpse of his true opinions. Were you surprised that his training kicked in so effectively when faced with the Sídhe?
- Chuckwu honestly reveals that he would not have saved Anto. What would you have done in a similar position? Are you surprised by Chuckwu's later sacrifice?
- What do you think the windows in the Grey Land could symbolise?
- Nessa is not sent to the cage as punishment. Do you think that her lack of punishment is worse? Later Conor is punished for attacking her when she has a disability – what do you think of the school's attitudes towards disability? Are they reminiscent to past attitudes in Ireland?
- Conor forcefully kisses Nessa without consent. What are your opinions on his actions? Why do you think he acts this way after their fight in the forest?

Chapters 21 and 22

- We see the direct aftermath of Kieran being called. What do you think the life of a veteran would really be like?
- Bangor College has been taken along with Mallow. What could the shrinking Sídhe mean?

Chapters 23 and 24

- Marya suddenly reveals a romantic interest in Anto, much to Nessa's horror. She later chastises someone who mocks Anto, saying, 'you don't talk about a Survivor like that'. How do you think surviving the Call might affect your position in this society?
- The Knights, ordered by Conor, purposefully victimise Nessa. Why do you think she doesn't react to their extreme treatment? What knowledge do we gain from Nessa's interaction with Liz?

- How do you think the loss of Keith, Cahal and Chuckwu, Anto's survival and Nessa's rejection of Conor will affect the Knights' morale and Conor's confidence? Why is Conor expending so much time and energy on torturing Nessa?
- From his interaction with Marya, how do you think the Call may have altered Anto?

Chapters 25 and 26

- 'The problem is the lack of funerals.' How do you think the students cope with death as a daily reality? Aoife is in mourning for Emma throughout this chapter – did you feel this was a realistic portrayal of grief? What does the other students' treatment of Aoife at this time say about them?
- Nessa plans to visit Anto but is beaten to it by Aoife who is seeking his help. How has Anto changed from how he was during his Call and before it? Are you surprised by how deeply hurt Nessa is by this revelation?
- Why do you think Nessa doesn't simply tell Ms Breen about Conor's plans?
- Frank appears to be on a downward spiral in this chapter – how do the coping mechanisms of the different teachers vary?

Chapters 27 and 28

- All of year seven has been wiped out, failing to meet their one-in-ten quota. How do you think living in such a reality would affect your outlook on life?
- Do you believe that the magic of the fairy fort can truly be destroyed? Is it wise to return to the mound now?
- Despite the ordeal face by her brother Kieron, Liz Sweeney is focused completely on harming Nessa – why do you think that has happened? Do you think she has personal reasons for targeting Nessa?

Chapters 29 and 30

- Bruggers reveals he isn't sure why they are harassing Nessa, as she is as good as dead when she is called. Why do you think Conor and Liz are so obsessed with this task?
- The author uses very descriptive and emotive language to describe Nessa's sickening journey into the undergrowth of the fairy realm. How does this shape your understanding of the Grey Land? Why do you think they are able to make this journey so easily? What could this mean for the school?
- Anto makes a reappearance to defend Nessa. Why do you think the Sídhe have altered him physically?
- Only Tony's skeleton returns from his Call. How do you feel about the author's descriptions of these incidents? Do you find the violence too graphic or gruesome?

Chapters 31 and 32

- Mr Hickey is trying to map the Grey Land – do you think this is a feasible task?
- What does this chapter reveal about the characters of Mr Hickey and Ms Breen?

- Ms Breen offers a theory that the Sídhe can shrink and that their world could be minuscule. How does this theory stand up against other incidents in the book?
- Nessa reveals she has never read the testimony regarding her older brother's death. How do you think families cope when faced with the Call? How do you think survivors can continue to have children, knowing the fate they will face?
- Anto and Nessa meet face to face for the first time. How are their actions at odds with how Ness usually acts? Why do you think she acts this way?

Chapters 33 and 34

- In this chapter we learn more about Melanie and the deal she made with the Sídhe. What do you think would drive someone to make a deal with the enemy? What could this mean for the school? What kind of quality of life do you think the veterans lead after the Call?
- Why do only 'the runt of the litter and the girl who wants to be his consolation prize' remain loyal to Conor? How do you think the loss of followers will affect him? Are you surprised he risks everything he has worked for to attack Nessa?

Chapters 35 and 36

- Conor is called. How is his account different to the other students' accounts. Does he react differently to the world of the Sídhe? Why is he so calm, so sure of his leadership and belonging?
- Are you surprised Conor makes a similar deal to Melanie? What do you think his 'dearest wish' will be?
- 'We do what we have to to survive. For the nation to survive.' What is revealing about Conor's mix up of the school mantra? What could be the cost of a false testimony?
- Although Conor has survived, the Sídhe have marked him – why do you think that is? Why do you suspect Conor really wants to remain in the school?

Chapters 37 and 38

- How does Conor's absence change the dynamics of year five?
- In our world, teenagers are constantly forced to look to their future and make important decisions when young. Here it is taboo to discuss what might happen if one survives. How do you think this would affect the students?
- Megan is called. Do you think Megan's attitude in the Grey Land is in keeping with her character so far? Did you assume she would survive?

Chapters 39 and 40

- Are you surprised by Megan's chilling last actions?
- Nessa's reaction to Megan's death is the first time we see her express genuine, unfiltered emotion. How does she cope with this loss and how does it affect her desire to survive?
- The author hints of an impending bloodbath – at this stage, who do you believe will survive?

- When the action comes to a head, were you surprised by the revelation of which characters have made a deal with the Sídhe?
- In the past, it was church bells that awoke people from the spell of the Sídhe. In this case, Ms Breen's fast thinking and a fire alarm save the school. How did Conor underestimate her?
- This chapter is particularly violent. How does the author frame the narrative of the battle? How does this reality compare with the violence we have already witnessed during the Calls?

Chapters 41 and 42

- Nessa is called. As with Megan's death, her desire to survive, which has always been her goal, vanishes. Why do you think she loses this determination? What do you think allows her to normally be such a driven character?
- It is revealed that Nessa will not be killed by the Sídhe. Are you surprised that this was Conor's wish?
- Nessa's hiding place is almost perfect for her due to her strong arms. It is because of this hiding place that she is given the power of resisting flames. Do you think her disability has been her secret strength all along?
- Conor is to be King of Ireland if he revokes the treaty banishing the Sídhe. How do you think Ireland would change under Sídhe rule? Does Ireland rightfully belong to the Sídhe?
- Nessa kills Conor with a kiss. Why do you think the author chooses this method to end Conor's life?

Chapters 43 and 44

- The Sídhe are destroyed and prevented from gaining access to Ireland. Do you think this is the best conclusion, even though people may continue to be called? Would you like to read a sequel to this story?
- 'People don't see women as killers.' Nessa alters her testimony, omitting her murder of Conor, despite the fact that it allowed her to save the country. Why do you think this would still be the case in a country where teenagers are trained to be killers?
- Despite misgivings in the beginning of the novel, Nessa is a survivor. Did you find her an inspiring character? Were you satisfied with the conclusion?

Questions

1. From the outset we are thrown straight into Nessa's world with information revealed slowly and sporadically. What do you think of the introduction of this story – is it confusing or gripping?
2. Nessa mentions that she contracted polio as a small child. What do you know about this disease and its effects?
3. From your initial introduction to the characters, were there any that you were surprised did or did not survive? Which students did you think the author characterised best? Did characters have a variety of depth in terms of being good or evil?

4. The mantra of the school is 'The Nation must Survive'. Do you think this collective ideology for the good of the country could be dangerous?
5. Aoife reveals her fears of having to marry into a heterosexual relationship. Not too long ago, this was the case for many LGBT people in Ireland. Why do you think this practice has reverted in the world of the Call?
6. The students, teachers and the fairies themselves speak the language of the Sídh. What do you think this language would sound like?
7. The author often ends a chapter by hinting at some impending doom. Do you think this an effective plot device or does it act as a spoiler?
8. What do you think of the multiple points of view used in this book? How does this method shape the plot? Who was your favourite perspective to read from?
9. How does this book compare to similar dystopian books such as *The Hunger Games*? Did you enjoy the Irish elements to the story?
10. This book is recommended for young adults. What do you think of this rating? Do you think the violence and explicit content make it less suitable for teenage readers?
11. Did you know that women in Ireland were burnt to death for being fairies? What can you find out about the last of these, Bridget Cleary? What comparisons could you make between these incidents and the Salem Witch Trials in America?

Activities

- The students often swear by the old gods of Crom, Lugh and Dagda. Research some of these ancient gods and see what you can find.
- Many of the descriptions of the Grey Land are nightmarish. Use a description from your own nightmares to create your own version of the calling of a student.
- Ireland has a long history of fairy folklore, including the theory that the fairies stole babies, replacing them with changelings. What information can you find on this? Write a creative story where a family raises a changeling child.
- The Boyle training college is almost the exact opposite of Irish secondary schools. Teachers punch students, students are encouraged to be aggressive and the weak are preyed upon. Write a diary entry imagining how a ten-year-old student would adjust to life in this school.
- Create an obstacle course and scavenger hunt in your school yard and compete to see who in your class has the best survival skills.
- What do you know about *The Book of Conquests*? Research the book and see if it alters your views of *The Call*.
- Do you think Irish children in our world could benefit from being more aware of their own folklore? What folklore tales are you familiar with? Have a folklore storytelling session in school with each student presenting a different story.

NÓINÍN

Máire Zepf

Cois Life

ISBN 9781907494949

***Nóta do mhúinteoirí agus do cheannairí grúpaí/
Note for teachers and group leaders** Tá go leor téamaí tromchúiseacha sa leabhar seo (féach an liosta thíos), agus tá deireadh tragóideach ar an scéal. Seans go spreagfadh an leabhar mothúcháin dheacra i léitheoirí mothálacha./*There are several serious and difficult themes in this book (see list below), and the end of the story is tragic. The book might trigger powerful emotions in sensitive readers.*

Téamaí/Themes Cairdeas, titim i ngrá den chéad uair, féin-íomhá (ag glacadh na mílte féiníní go dtí go bhfuil tú sásta), an saol sa mheánscoil, bulaíocht ar scoil (an chumhacht atá ag daoine áirithe agus an chaoi a n-úsáideann siad í chun daoine eile a ghortú); tugann Nóinín ‘an córas feodach’ air seo, caidreamh idir tuismitheoirí agus déagóirí, caidreamh rómánsúil, sábháilteacht ar líne, mealltóireacht ar líne, foréigean gnéasach agus dúnmharú, an chaoi a gcuirtear an milleán ar an duine atá tar éis fulaingt, seachas ar an gcoireach, bás agus brón, obair na nGardaí: cén chaoi a bhfiosraítear coir.

Friendship, falling in love for the first time, self-image (taking thousands of selfies until you're happy), life in secondary school, bullying in school (the power that some people have and how they use it to hurt others); Nóinín calls this ‘the feudal system’, relationships between parents and teenagers, romantic relationships, online safety, online grooming, sexual violence and murder, victim-blaming, bereavement and grief, the work of the Gardaí: how a crime is investigated

Achoimre/Summary Tá Nóinín ‘cúig bliana déag d’aois is chomh comónta le nóiníní’ mar a dhéanann sí cur síos uirthi féin. Tá sí an-mhór lena cara is fearr, Eimear. Cuireann Nóinín aithne ar bhuachaill darbh ainm Oisín ar líne. Cé nach bhfuil siad tar éis bualadh le chéile go fóill, titeann sí i ngrá leis agus caitheann sí go leor ama ar a fón ag cur teachtaireachtaí agus féiníní chuige. Tá a máthair an-bhuartha faoin méid ama atá á caitheamh aici ar an bhfón, ach ní thugann Nóinín aird ar bith uirthi. Ceapann sí nach dtuigeann a Mam dada mar nach raibh an t-idirlíon ann nuair a bhí sí óg. ‘Mamaí-na-Clochaoise’ a thugann sí uirthi. Tá Nóinín go hiomlán gafa le hOisín, agus titeann sí amach le hEimear mar gheall air. Ansin, lá amháin, téann sí chun bualadh le hOisín. Ag an bpointe seo, tosaíonn Eimear ag insint an scéil dúinn, agus tuigimid go bhfuil rud éigin uafásach tar éis tarlú. Tá Nóinín ar iarraidh, agus cuireann Eimear an milleán uirthi féin. Is úrscéal véarsaíochta é an leabhar seo, an chéad leabhar dá leithéid do léitheoirí óga na Gaeilge.

Nóinín (which is the Irish for Daisy) is fifteen years old and as ordinary as daisies’ as she describes herself. She and her best friend,



Eimear, are inseparable. Then Nóinín meets a boy called Oisín online. Even though they haven't met yet, she falls in love with him and spends all her time on her phone sending him texts and selfies. Her mother is very worried about the amount of time she is spending on the phone, but Nóinín doesn't pay any attention to her. She thinks her Mum doesn't understand because there was no internet when she was young. Nóinín calls her 'Stone-Age-Mum'. Nóinín is completely obsessed with Oisín, and she falls out with Eimear because of him. Then one day she goes to meet Oisín. At this point, Eimear begins to tell us the story, and we realise that something terrible has happened. Nóinín is missing, and Eimear blames herself. This book is a novel in verse, the first of its kind for young readers of Irish.

Tuairiscí na Moltóirí/Judges' Comments

A compelling verse novel that depicts, with beguiling subtlety and nuance, the online grooming of a shy teenage girl, the slow build-up to a shocking crime and the aftermath from the perspective of her best friend. The insidious nature of grooming through flattery, exploitation of teenage insecurities and isolation from friends is very convincingly portrayed. The effects of violent crime on the family and friends of the victim are shown and questions of blame considered, but the novel ends with an empowering manifesto on the right of young girls to full life and liberty. Rich imagery, poetic language and intertextual references to fairy tales and Irish myth lend resonance to this very modern and accessible tale of the dangers of social media. An artful and gripping narrative that will reward multiple re-readings.

Úrscéal véearsaíochta iontach ina léirítear go caolchúiseach an mhealltóireacht ar líne a dhéantar ar chailín óg atá sna déaga, an réiteach do choir uafásach agus an tráth ina dhiaidh, ó dhearcadh a cara is fearr. Cuirtear síos go héifeachtach ar fhealltacht na mealltóireachta trí phlámás, teacht i dtír ar éiginnteachtaí i ndéagóirí agus scoiteacht ó chairde. Taispeántar na héifeachtaí a bhíonn ag an gcoireacht fhoréigneach ar theaghlach agus ar chairde an duine atá ag fulaingt, agus breathnaítear ar cheisteanna a bhaineann le locht, ach cuirtear deireadh leis an scéal le forógra cumhachtaithe faoin cheart atá ag cailíní óga saol agus saoirse iomlán a bheith acu. Cuireann na híombánna saibhre, an fhilíocht agus na tagairtí idirthéacsúla do scéalta sí agus do mhiotaseolaíocht na hÉireann go mór leis an scéal nua-aoiseach sothuigthe faoin gcontúirt a bhaineann leis na meáin shóisialta. Scéal sciliúil fionspéisiúil é arbh fhiú a léamh arís is arís eile.

Faoin Údar/About the Author

Máire Zepf's first book for children, *Tubaiste ar an Titanic*, was published in 2012. It was shortlisted for the CBI Book of the Year that same year. *Lá leis na Lochlannaigh* features the same two characters, Cormac and Brídín, and a new historical event. It won the first prize for children's fiction at the Oireachtas in 2015 and was also nominated for Gradam Réics Carló in 2016. As well as her historical series for the 9–11-age-group, she writes picturebooks for younger children. Her first picturebook, *Ná Gabh ar Scoill*, was nominated for the Children's Books Ireland Book of the Year Awards and for Gradam Réics Carló in 2016.

Foilsíodh an chéad leabhar de chuid Mháire Zepf, Tubaiste ar an Titanic, sa bhliain 2012. An bhliain sin, cuireadh ar an ngearrliosta é do ghradam Leabhar na Bliana ó Leabhair Pháistí Éireann. Tá an dá charachtar ón leabhar sin, Cormac agus Brídín, le fáil ina leabhar dar teideal Lá leis na Lochlannaigh, ina bhfuil imeacht nua stairiúil freisin. Bronnadh an chéad duais d'fhicsean do pháistí ar an leabhar sin ag an Oireachtas in 2015 agus ainmníodh é freisin do Ghradam Réics Carló in 2016. Chomh maith lena sraith stairiúil do pháistí san aoisghrúpa 9-11, scríobhann sí pictiúrleabhair do pháistí níos óige. Ainmníodh an chéad phictiúrleabhar dá cuid, Ná Gabh ar Scoill! do ghradaim Leabhar na Bliana ó Leabhair Pháistí Éireann agus do Ghradam Réics Carló sa bhliain 2016.

CEISTEANNA/ QUESTIONS

SULA LÉANN TÚ AN SCÉAL/ BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. An dtuigeann tú teideal an leabhair? Mura dtuigeann, féach san fhoclóir cad is brí le ‘nóinín’. Cad a cheapann tú faoin teideal sin? An dtugann sé leid ar bith duit faoin scéal?

Do you understand the title of the book? If not, look up ‘nóinín’ in the dictionary. What do you think of the title? Does it give you any hint about what happens in the book?

2. Féach ar chlúdach an leabhair: na dathanna, an cló, na léaráidí. An gcuireann sé aon leabhar eile i gcuimhne duit? Cé air a bhfuil an leabhar dírithe, an gcheapann tú? (Cén aois, cailíní nó buachaillí?)

Look at the cover of the book: the colours, the font, the illustrations. Does it remind you of any other books? Who do you think the book is aimed at? (What age, girls or boys?)

3. Ar léigh tú aon leabhar as Gaeilge roimhe? Cad a thaitin nó nár thaitin leat faoi bheith ag léamh as Gaeilge?

Have you read any books in Irish before? What did you like or not like about reading in Irish?

4. Is úrscéal véarsaíochta é an leabhar seo. Ar léigh tú aon úrscéal véarsaíochta eile roimhe? B’fhéidir ó pheann Sarah Crossan, Meg Grehan nó Kwame Alexander? Cad a cheap tú?

This book is a novel in verse. Have you read any other novels in verse before? Maybe books by Sarah Crossan, Meg Grehan or Kwame Alexander? What did you think of them?

5. Cén fáth a roghnódh údar véarsaíocht mar mheán scríbhneoireachta, meas tú?

Why do you think an author would choose verse to tell the story?

AGUS AN SCÉAL Á LÉAMH AGAT/ AS YOU READ

1. Cad a cheapann tú faoi thús an leabhair? An bhfuil fonn ort leanúint ar aghaidh?

What do you think about the beginning of the book? Do you want to keep reading?

2. Má tá focail nua ann, faigh amach cad is brí leo agus scríobh síos é.

If there are words that are new to you, find out what they mean and write it down.

3. Cé na leideanna a fhaigheann muid sa chéad leath go bhfuil rud éigin uafásach chun tarlú sa dara leath?

What clues do we get in the first half that something is terrible is going to happen in the second half?

4. Cén chaoi a gcruthaíonn an t-údar teannas sa leabhar?

How does the author create tension in the book?

5. An bhfuil na carachtair sa leabhar inchreidte?

Are the characters in the book believable?

6. Dá mbeifeá i do chara ag Nóinín agus ag Eimear, cad a déarfá leo faoi Oisín?

If you were a friend of Nóinín and Eimear, what would you say to them about Oisín?

7. Anois is arís, léigh an leabhar os ard chun ceol na teanga a chloisteáil.

Now and again, read the book out loud to hear the music of the language.

AGUS AN SCÉAL LÉITE AGAT/ AFTER YOU HAVE READ

1. An scéal réalaióch atá sa leabhar seo?

Is the story believable?

2. Cén fáth ar scríobh Máire Zepf an leabhar seo, meas tú? Cén teachtaireacht atá á cur in iúl aici?

Why do you think Máire Zepf wrote this book? What message is she communicating?

3. Dá mbeifeá ag dearadh clúdach nua don leabhar, cad a chuirfeá air?

If you were designing a new cover for the book, what would you include?

4. Cén fáth ar roghnaigh Máire Zepf an t-ainm ‘Nóinín’ don phríomhcharachtar, meas tú?

Why do you think Máire Zepf chose the name ‘Nóinín’ for the main character?

1. An mholfaí do dhaoine eile an leabhar seo a léamh? Cén fáth?
Would you recommend the book to others? Why?
2. Seo mar a dúirt údar an leabhair seo: ‘Tá mé dóchasach go n-imreoidh an t-úrscéal véarsaíochta an draíocht chéanna sa Ghaeilge is a d’imir sé cheana féin sa Bhéarla ... Tá úrscéal véarsaíochta sciobtha agus furast le léamh in ainneon – nó mar gheall air – é a bheith scríofa i bhfilíocht. Bíonn na focail, gníomhartha agus mothúcháin gonta glinn. Tiontaítear leathanaigh go gasta. Léitear úrscéal véarsaíochta go minic taobh istigh de chúpla uair an chloig.’
The author of this book said: ‘I am quietly hopeful that the verse-novel genre works its magic in Irish just as it has in English ... Verse-novels are quick and easy to read, despite – or because of – being written in poetry. Words, action, emotion are vivid and condensed. Pages turn quickly. Readers often describe reading verse-novels in one or two sittings, taking only an hour or two to finish the book.’
3. Agus an leabhar léite agat, an aontaíonn tú leis an tuairim sin?
Now that you have read the book, do you agree with this opinion?

5. Dá mbeifeá ag déanamh scannán nó sraith teilifíse bunaithe ar *Nóinín*, cé na hamhráin nó píosaí ceoil a d’úsáidfeá mar fhuaimrian?
If you were making a film or TV series based on Nóinín, what songs or pieces of music would you use as the soundtrack?
6. Tá Nóinín cinnte nach dtuigeann a Mam í mar go raibh saol difriúil aici nuair a bhí sí ina déagóir. Déan comhrá le do thuismitheoirí nó le duine éigin eile den aois sin, agus déan iarracht teacht ar na rudaí a bhí mar an gcéanna nuair a bhí an duine sin ina d(h)éagóir.
Nóinín is convinced that her Mum doesn't understand her because life was different when she was a teenager. Talk to your parents or someone else of their age and try to find out some things that were the same when that person was a teenager.

GNÍOMHAÍOCHTAÍ/ ACTIVITIES

1. Tá go leor comhrá sa leabhar. Ag obair i mbeirteanna, roghnaigh mír amháin ón leabhar agus déan dráma gearr as. Léirigh an dráma do na daoine eile sa ghrúpa.
There is a lot of dialogue in the book. Working in pairs, choose one scene from the book and turn it into a short performance. Perform it for the others in the group.
2. Tá go leor focal nua-aimseartha sa leabhar seo. Cuir gluais le chéile chun cuidiú le léitheoirí nach bhfuil mórán Gaeilge acu.
There are a lot of new, modern Irish words in this book. Compile a glossary to help readers who don't have much Irish.
3. Scríobh dán bunaithe ar eachtra ó do shaol féin.
Write a poem based on an incident from your own life.
4. Tá éifeacht dhifriúil ar fad ag dán nuair a léitear os ard é. Léigh do dhán os ard do na daoine eile i do rang/do ghrúpa.
A poem has a different effect when read out loud. Read your poem aloud to the others in your class/group.

TUILLEADH ACMHAINNÍ/ FURTHER RESOURCES

1. Sábháilteacht ar líne:
 - www.webwise.ie Eolas, comhairle agus acmhainní do dhaoine óga, múinteoirí agus tuismitheoirí faoin tsábháilteacht ar líne.
 - <https://www.webwise.ie/ga/muinteoiri-ga/scileanna-litearthachta-digiti-sabhailteacht-ar-line/> Acmhainní as Gaeilge
 - <https://www.cogg.ie/teastas-soisearach/osps/notai/dara-bliain/sabhailteacht-phearsanta-ar-an-idirlion/> Comhairle chun fanacht sábháilte ar an idirlíon

Safety online:

- www.webwise.ie *information, advice and resources about online safety for young people, teachers and parents.*
 - <https://www.webwise.ie/ga/muinteoiri-ga/scileanna-litearthachta-digiti-sabhailteacht-ar-line/> *Irish-language resources*
 - <https://www.cogg.ie/teastas-soisearach/osps/notai/dara-bliain/sabhailteacht-phearsanta-ar-an-idirlion/> *Advice in Irish about how to stay safe online.*
2. Údair eile Ghaeilge a scríobhann faoi shaol an duine óig sa lá atá inniu ann/*Other authors who write in Irish about young people's lives today:*
 - Siobhán Parkinson (*Dialann sár-rúnda Amy Ní Chonchúir, Mairióisce*)
 - Éilís Ní Dhuibhne (*Hurlamaboc, Dordán, Aisling nó Iníon A*)
 - Ógie Ó Céilleachair (*Cúpla, Katfish agus scéalta eile*)
 3. Údair eile Ghaeilge a scríobhann scéalta lán le haicsean do dhéagóirí/*Other authors who write action-filled books in Irish for teenagers:*
 - Áine Ní Ghlinn (*Daideo, Fuadach, Tromluí*)
 - Órna Ní Choileáin (*Ailfi agus an vaimpír agus na leabhair eile sa tsraith sin*)
 - Anna Heussaff (*Hóng, Vortex agus Sárú*)
 4. Údair Bhéarla a scríobhann úrscéalta véarsaíochta/*Some authors who write novels in verse in English:*
 - Sarah Crossan (*The Weight of Water, One, Moonrise, Toffee, We Come Apart* (with Brian Conaghan))
 - Meg Grehan (*The Space Between, The Deepest Breath*)
 - Elizabeth Acevedo (*The Poet X*)
 - Kwame Alexander (*The Crossover, Booked, Rebound*)
 - Dean Atta (*The Black Flamingo*)

ALL THE BAD APPLES

Moira Fowley-Doyle

Penguin Books

ISBN 9780241333969

Note for Group Leaders This particular title addresses sensitive issues such as emerging sexuality, physical and sexual abuse, as well as the idea of historical and systemic state abuse in Ireland. These may be potentially triggering for readers, particularly for personal reasons. However, the title deals with these issues sensitively and in a manner that promotes openness, inclusion and healing.

Themes Silence and secrecy, trauma, religion, diversity

Summary Dublin, 2012, and Deena, the central character in *All the Bad Apples*, has just been traumatically outed as a lesbian at school. Now the subject of homophobic bullying and abuse and intolerance from her conservative and religious father, Deena turns to her older sister Mandy. Mandy is the cool one, the one she can always talk to. But this time, Mandy is the one who panics, telling Deena about a family curse that is coming to pass again. When Mandy disappears, Deena sets off across the country to find her, searching for answers in the present and realising that the key to everything lies in the past – the past of her family and of the country.

The novel deals with numerous hard-hitting and graphic themes, ranging from homophobic intolerance to sexual abuse, but but by filtering these through Deena's experiences and revelations, Fowley-Doyle presents them in a sensitive and considered way. The use of the road trip motif keeps the pace moving, with the reader barely able to draw breath before the next secret is uncovered. Deena's story is interspersed with the histories of the women in her family, ranging from the late 1880s to the 1930s. For readers who are aware of the ways in which the Irish State has treated and failed the women of the country for generations, the experiences of Deena's female relatives will come as no surprise. But Fowley-Doyle's main aim with this narrative is to illustrate how close the past always is to the present, and to highlight the painfully slow rate of change that has occurred since women first found their voices.



Judges' Comments An atmospheric and powerful story tracing trauma through three generations of the same family. Alternating between the contemporary first-person narrative of Deena and the haunting story of her ancestors, it draws on dark aspects of Ireland's history that have come to light in recent years relating to attitudes towards female sexuality and callous treatment of single mothers and their babies by the Catholic Church and wider society. After disastrously coming out to her family, Deena embarks on a road trip with friends in a quest that leads her to find her mother, her own voice and, ultimately, freedom from the family curse. The apple motif is cleverly woven into the story, in which themes of witchcraft and healing are linked with female agency and power.

About the Author Moira Fowley-Doyle is half-French, half-Irish and lives in Dublin where she writes magic realism, reads tarot cards and raises witch babies. Moira's first novel, *The Accident Season*, was shortlisted for the Waterstones Children's Book Prize and received widespread critical acclaim. Her second, *Spellbook of the Lost and Found*, was shortlisted for an Irish Book Award.

QUESTIONS

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. Before you start reading *All the Bad Apples*, think about the novel's title. What does it evoke for you? What connotations does the phrase 'bad apple' hold for you?
2. Do you think the definition of a bad apple printed on the back cover of the book is the traditional meaning of the phrase?
3. Examine the cover, front and back. What symbols has the designer used? Do they have historical or mythological meanings?
4. The tagline reads 'Shatter the Silence'. What does that mean to you? Why would silence need to be shattered?

AS YOU READ

1. Are there issues or events in the book that you have never heard of before? Research the historical context of the periods Deena's ancestors lived through to enrich your understanding of the narrative.
2. This is a first-person narrative; is Deena's voice authentic? Does it work when she tells someone else's story through her words?
3. At one point Deena says, 'I don't need fixing – this doesn't make me a bad apple,' referring to her sexuality. Is the curse a metaphor for how Irish society has sought to control those who don't conform? What do you think the rules are in Irish society today? Is it easier to be yourself?
4. Consider this quote from the book: 'You won't see us in the photographs. In the history books. But the landscape remembers.'
5. How do you think we can bring the stories of women and men who have been forced into silence out of the past and into the present? Do you think that's what Fowley-Doyle is trying to do here?

AFTER YOU HAVE READ

1. Having read the novel, think about these words in relation to the central characters. What do they mean in the context of the narrative?

- Conformity
- Freedom
- Censorship
- Diversity

- Belonging
- Family
- Heritage
- Selfhood
- Friendship
- Stigma

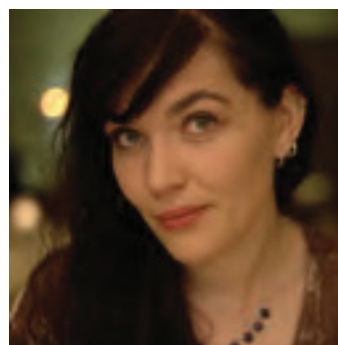
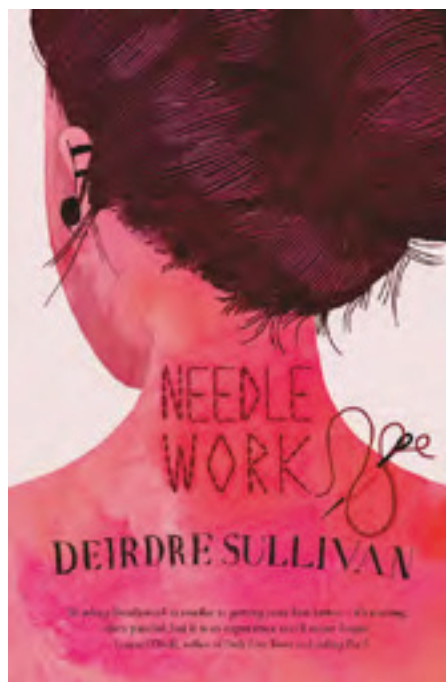
2. The novel hinges on the relationships between its central characters. Are Deena's sisters, Mandy and Rachel, believable? Are their interactions well written? Can you sympathise with the ways in which they have dealt with their experiences?
3. Fowley-Doyle structures the narrative using fairy-tale imagery and symbolism. Why do you think she does this? What do you think of her treatment of the traditional banshee figure? Did it make you question the ways in which women have been represented in mythology and folklore? What does the banshee mean in Irish culture and folklore?
4. Consider this quote from the book: 'It needs to be told like a story in order to be heard.' Do you agree with this idea of history? In light of this, consider the relationship between history and story: if we belong to a family, to a community, to a society, can a family's history function as a microcosm of a nation's history?
5. What do you think of the author's note included in the book? Do you remember much about the year the book is set in? What does 2012 mean to you? Do you think Ireland has changed since then?
6. Silence and secrecy: almost every female character in the novel is forced to keep something a secret or to maintain an unhealthy silence about her experiences. Is this part of the larger story of the Irish State in the historical periods explored in the book?
7. Trauma: trauma is explored on different levels in the narrative. Personal traumas fill the book but trauma also occurs on a larger level, to women as a group within Ireland. Has this historic trauma healed?
8. Religion: consider how religion is treated within the novel. Deena's father is extremely conservative and perceives women in a certain light because of his traumatic experiences as a child. Do you think Fowley-Doyle's portrayal of him in the book is a fair one? Is he redeemed by its conclusion?
9. Diversity: Deena, Ida, Finn and Cale are all very different characters. Do you think they are representative of the lives of teenagers in Ireland today? Could you relate to them? Were their experiences and attitudes believable?

ACTIVITIES

1. Visit a local museum or library and see how accessible the history of the Magdalene Laundries is to you as an individual.
2. Research a pioneering female figure in your area or locality.
3. Examine the section of the Irish constitution mentioned in the narrative that refers to the woman's place in the home and the nature of the family in Ireland. Do you agree with what is written there?
4. Explore the role of women in Ireland's history. When did women receive the right to vote? The right to own property? When the Marriage Bar end? How much do you know about reproductive rights in Ireland?
5. Choose a classic fairy tale such as 'Cinderella', 'Sleeping Beauty' or 'Snow White'. Where does it originate? What does it tell you about the ways in which women were treated and thought of in this period?

FURTHER RESOURCES

1. Children's Books Ireland themed reading lists:
Rainbow Reads
<https://childrensbooksireland.ie/reading-list/>
2. Look up the following websites for further information:
Mental health: www.spunout.ie
National Folklore Collection:
<https://www.ucd.ie/folklore/en/>
Women's culture and history:
<https://www.herstory.ie/home>



Needlework

Deirdre Sullivan

Little Island Books

ISBN 9781910411506

Summary

'I would like to make things beautiful, but a tawdry and repulsive kind of beauty. A braver sort than people have from birth. Sexy zombies on a bicep. That sort of thing.'

Ces longs to be a tattoo artist and embroider skin with beautiful images. But for now she's just trying to reach adulthood without falling apart.

Powerful, poetic and disturbing, *Needlework* is a girl's meditation on her efforts to maintain her bodily and spiritual integrity in the face of abuse, violation and neglect.

Judges' Comments

Needlework by Deirdre Sullivan is a poetic and eloquent exploration of violation, abuse and neglect, testifying to the transformative power of art. Starkly genuine and sincere, Sullivan's powerful use of the metaphor of tattooing invites reflection about identity, difference, self-protection and self-invention. This searing yet delicate representation of adolescent experience will resonate deeply with teenagers and is a story that needs to be told and needs to be read.

About the Author

DEIRDRE SULLIVAN is a writer from Galway now living in Dublin and working as a teacher. She has established a reputation for herself as a leading Irish YA author with her trilogy on the teenage years of Primrose Leary, which has been widely acclaimed (Ireland's much-respected YA critic Robert Dunbar said it 'sparkles with authenticity'); two of the Prim books were shortlisted for the CBI Awards; and the final one, *Primperfect*, was also shortlisted for the European Prize for Literature – the only YA novel to be nominated for this award from any European country.

The questions below highlight some important things to look out for as you progress through the book. Try to make notes and record your changing responses to the story, as this will be useful when you come to tackle the questions and activities featured on the following pages.

Before you begin the book:

Look at the front cover. What do you see? Is it important that Ces's face is left blank and featureless on both the front and back covers? What do you think of the colours used? What might they signify?

General Questions

1. *Needlework* is aimed at an older teen audience, ages fifteen and over. Do you think this is accurate? Why?
2. What do you think of the book's preface?
3. Tattooing is an extended metaphor that runs throughout Ces's story. What do you think it stands for? Do you think it has multiple meanings in the text?
4. *Needlework* is a first-person narrative. That means that the central character's voice has to be believable. What do you think about Ces's voice? How does she tell her story? Can you relate to her?
5. What do you think of the book's title? It's a play on words, referring to both tattooing and sewing. Does it work as a title? Does it suit the story that Ces tells?
6. Do you think the book should have been illustrated? Or is it better that you can imagine the tattoos Ces talks about? Is it important that the only picture of a tattoo is the picture of the heart at the very end of the book?
7. Think about the author's use of italics in the story. What effect does that have on the way you read?
8. The book is predominantly written in the present tense – why do you think the author made this choice? How does it affect your reading experience?
9. There are a lot of little stories within Ces's larger story, like the story of the red road. Are these stories important? Do you think there's a connection between the way Ces thinks about tattooing and the little stories that emerge throughout the text?
10. All the chapter or section titles are definitions or descriptions of tattoos. Which do you think is the most accurate? Why do you think there are so many definitions or descriptions of the one word? Do you think it reflects what tattoos might mean to different people?
11. If you chose to have a tattoo, what would it be? Why? Would it have to be meaningful to you before you'd commit to it?
12. Consider the colour red and its dominance throughout the text. What does it stand for within Ces's story?

13. What do you think about Ces's relationship with Tom? What does she get from it – why does she need him? Are Ces's relationships with the people in her life (and the people who aren't in her life anymore) important in trying to understand her as a character?
14. What kind of character is Laura? Think of words you might use to define her, and ask yourself what those words mean in relation to her life – words like mother, wife, sister, woman, victim, child, adult, survivor.
15. What do you think of the book's ending? Is there a sense of closure to Ces's story? Is there a feeling of hope at the conclusion?

A Pretty Stain You Choose to Keep Inside You

- Is routine important to Ces? Is it one of her coping mechanisms?
- What are your initial impressions of Ces? What kind of girl do you think she is?
- Why is the story of Athena significant?

A Bruising Little Etch

- Is drawing a form of expression for Ces? A form of empowerment?
- What sense do you get of Ces's self-image?
- Do you think the story of the publican and his wife is important? Is it part of a theme that runs throughout the story?
- Ces mentions her father's violence for the first time in this chapter. How does the author handle this moment? Is it sensitively done, or is it meant to shock the reader?

The Kind of Hurt You Pay For

- During this chapter Ces elaborates on the cultural significance of tattoos. Do you think this imagery functions as a kind of a language in the text?
- How would you describe the kind of language Ces uses to talk about the violence of her childhood?

A Picture that You Love and Made You Bleed

- Ces talks about herself in terms of being a victim in this chapter. Do you think she fulfils the traditional role of the victim in her story? Talk about what being a victim might mean, how a victim might be expected to act.
- Consider Ces's relationship with her mother. Who is the functioning adult in their house?
- Ces mentions a long list of powerful women from folklore and mythology in this chapter. What do these women mean to her? What do they mean to you? What kind of women do you think are powerful in today's society? Do you consider yourself to be one of them?

- The biblical story of Lilith connects femininity with the demonic, with the monstrous. Do you think the author is making a comment on the way women are treated in society today?

A Choice You Made and Now You Have to Live With

- Consider the nature of secrecy in Ces's story. How does it function in her family, particularly in relation to the way her grandmother behaves towards her and her mother?

Indelible Identifying Mark

- This chapter engages particularly with the ways in which Ces tries to cope with what has happened to her. Do you think telling someone close to her who is outside of her family circle would help? What happened when she revealed something of what happened to her to her friend Anna?
- The significance of Ces's name comes to the fore here. She used to be known as Fran, and it's revealed that her mother wanted to call her Catherine. Why is it significant that she has the same name as her father?

Something that You'll Probably Regret

- This is one of the shortest chapters in the book, and it unfolds almost like an imaginary dialogue between Ces and her father, based on her memories. What picture of her father and their relationship does this create? Do you think it functions as a turning point within the story?

A Cool Way to Be Hurt

- When Tom breaks up with her, Ces starts to consider the meaning of their relationship and what having sex with him meant to her. What does it mean to her? Is it a form of release? Empowerment? Does it help her cope with the abuse she suffered or do you think she entered into the relationship because of the abuse?
- Ces self-harms in this chapter. Is this moment dealt with sensitively by the author? Talk about her feelings around this moment. Why does she think there is nothing else she can do to help her deal with what has happened?
- Do you think that Ces's ambitions to be a tattoo artist are a sign that she can come through the trauma of her childhood, that she thinks of the future and a time when she can come to terms with what has happened?

A Story on Your Skin that Helps You Live

- This chapter features a visceral fight between Ces and her mother. Consider what her mother says about the 'little tricks' Ces might have played in the past in relation to her father. Do you think her mother really means what she says? Or is she struggling to cope with the reality of the situation she was living through?

A Hidden Patch of Skin

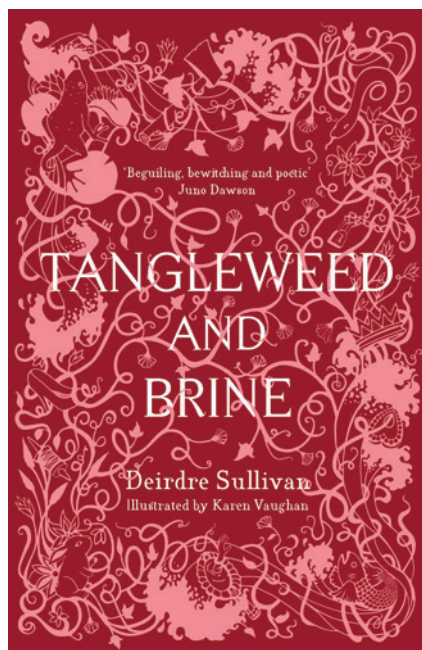
- Think about the concept of catharsis and what it means. Is that what Ces experiences when she finally gets the opportunity to tell her uncle and her grandmother what really happened?

A Capsule of Your Younger Adult Self

- In this final chapter Ces thinks of tattoos for the people in her life. Do you think her choices are accurate? Does this bring a sense of closure to her story?
- At the close of the novel, Ces hints at the idea that tattoos are not always permanent. What do you think this means?

Activities

1. Design a tattoo for a) yourself, b) a friend, c) a complete stranger. Explain why each one is meaningful.
2. Have a group discussion about the support systems available to survivors of abuse in this country. Explore how accessible these systems are and their effectiveness.
3. Contemplate these words in relation to Ces's story, and explore what they mean to you:
 - Friendship
 - Relationships
 - Family
 - Truth
 - Support
 - Betrayal
 - Childhood
 - Adulthood
 - Shame
 - Blame



Tangleweed and Brine

Deirdre Sullivan

Illustrated by Karen Vaughan

Little Island Books

ISBN 9781910411926

Summary

A collection of thirteen dark, feminist retellings of traditional fairy tales, from Cinderella to Rumpelstiltskin. Bewitching tales of blood and intrigue, betrayal and enchantment, that challenge us to rethink how women and girls have been depicted in fairy tales, intricately illustrated with black-and-white line drawings by a new Irish illustrator. With elements of brutality and eroticism, this collection is best suited to mature readers.

Judges' Comments

This remarkable book is a significant and timely contribution to Irish young-adult literature and feminist literature for young people. Deirdre Sullivan's simultaneously rich, delicate and stark text is powerfully enhanced by Karen Vaughan's haunting black-and-white illustrations. Combining the timeless allure of dark fantasy with subversive explorations of female embodiment and systems of women's suffering and triumphs, this incisive, exquisite collection promises an enthralling and unsettling experience.



About the Author

Deirdre Sullivan is from Galway now living in Dublin and working as a teacher. She has established a reputation as a leading Irish YA author following her hugely praised *Needlework*, which won the Honour Award for Fiction at the CBI Book of the Year Awards and was shortlisted for the Bord Gáis Energy Irish Book Awards. Her Primrose Leary series was also widely acclaimed: two of the Prim books were shortlisted for the CBI Book of the Year awards, and the final in the series, *Primperfect*, was also shortlisted for the European Prize for Literature. In 2017 *Tangleweed and Brine* won the Dept 51 @ Eason Teen/Young Adult Book of the Year at the Bord Gáis Energy Irish Book Awards.

About the Illustrator

Karen Vaughan is a designer and illustrator with a particular love for pen and ink. Since receiving her BA in Illustration from the North Wales School of Art and Design at Glyndwr University in 2013, Karen has worked as a freelance graphic designer and illustrator, producing covers, illustrations and designs for numerous publishing companies and newspapers. Her intricate illustrations are very much inspired by folk tales, nature and the elaborate patterns and fashions of bygone eras. *Tangleweed and Brine* is her first book.

QUESTIONS

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

- Look at the front cover and back cover carefully. What sort of book do you think this will be? Consider the title, design, image, blurb, etc. What impression does each give you? Are they effective?
- What do you expect from a fairy-tale collection?

AFTER YOU HAVE READ

1. Do you think the exterior features reflect the interior content? What features of each story do you recognise in the cover design?
2. What is the significance of the title? Why is the collection divided into the corresponding sections?
3. Which story is your favourite? List five reasons why.
4. Which is your favourite illustration? List five reasons why.
5. What do the illustrations add to the stories?
6. Were you already familiar with some or all of these fairy tales? Why do you think fairy tales are continuously retold?
7. What do you think are the necessary ingredients for a fairy tale? List them.
8. How does the author evoke a fairy-tale atmosphere? How does the illustrator evoke a fairy-tale atmosphere?
9. Many of the stories make use of second-person narration. What effect does this have?
10. Do you like the writing style? How would you describe it? What writing techniques does Sullivan make use of?
11. Which fairy-tale retelling surprised you the most? Why is this?
12. Use online or library sources to find the original versions of the fairy tales in *Tangleweed and Brine*. You may be familiar with the Disney versions of some, which differ a lot from the originals! In your opinion, how does each story differ from the original version? Think in terms of plot, tone, viewpoint, etc. Why do you think the author made the changes that she did?
13. Why do you think the author chose to focus on the experiences of the female characters rather than the male characters? Did she always pick the protagonist (main character) you expected?
14. What type of expectations are placed on women in the world of these stories? How does this impact on them personally? How does each protagonist cope and/or resist? Do you think any of these expectations exist in contemporary society?
15. Do you admire and/or empathise with any of the protagonists? Why or why not?
16. How is motherhood depicted in the stories? Why are so many of the protagonists desperate to become pregnant? How is the experience of pregnancy itself portrayed? What sort of relationships do the protagonists have with their mothers? What types of things do the protagonists inherit from their mothers and grandmothers? Why are so many mothers absent from the stories? What effect does this have on the protagonists?
17. How do fathers treat their daughters in these stories? What do they value most in their daughters?
18. How is marriage depicted in these stories? What differing expectations are placed on husbands and wives in this society? Do any of the characters have loving relationships?
19. What sort of relationships do the various characters have with food and the act of eating? Why do you think this is something the author focuses on?
20. What powers and skills do the various protagonists have?
21. Why do you think many of the female protagonists are so closely allied with animals and nature?
22. What do you think of the use of violence in the stories? What function and/or effect does it have?
23. In what ways might you consider each of the protagonists to be heroic? Would you consider any of them to be a strong female role model?
24. How is witchcraft depicted in these stories? Why do you think there is such an emphasis on it?
25. Traditional fairy tales divide the characters into victim and villain; however, in these retellings some of the characters act as both. Do you think most women in fairy tales fall into either one category or the other? If so, why do you think this is?
26. How do you feel about the ending of each story? In what ways does each protagonist suffer and/or triumph?
27. In what ways does the collection challenge us to rethink traditional fairy tales?
28. Do you think this is a 'feminist' collection of fairy tales? Why/why not?
29. Consider some of the following themes: power; obedience; punishment; sacrifice; beauty; desire; hunger; love; knowledge; secrets; body; voice; craft; nature; home. Find examples of each in the stories.
30. What other themes can you identify?
31. What images and motifs recur throughout the stories? What is their significance?
32. Have you read any other fairy-tale retellings? How does this collection compare?

ACTIVITIES

- Write a review of the book, recommending a suitable age group.
- Draw an alternative cover for the collection.
- Draw alternative illustrations for each story. Try using the same techniques as illustrator Karen Vaughan.
- Use online or library sources to research how different illustrators and animators have depicted a fairy tale of your choice. Make a poster displaying the different representations.
- Research the origin of the fairy tales that are reworked in this collection. Present your findings on a poster. Which country did each fairy tale come from? Who originally wrote it down?
- Contrast and compare a selection of retellings of the same fairy tale.
- Write your own fairy tale.
- Write an alternative ending for one of the retellings in *Tangleweed and Brine*.
- Write a story detailing the aftermath of one of the tales in this collection.
- Rewrite one of the stories from the point of view of a male character.
- Rewrite a fairy tale of your choice. Consider altering the plot, setting, tone or viewpoint. Accompany it with your own illustration.
- Write an essay exploring what you consider to be the greatest challenges faced by women and girls today.
- Think about what feminism means to you. Share your ideas with your shadowing group.
- Pick one female whom you admire – real or fictional, historical or contemporary, familiar or unfamiliar. Write an essay explaining why you admire her.
- Debate the following statement:
 - 'Fairy tale princesses are good role models for young girls.'



ASKING FOR IT

Louise O'Neill

Quercus Books

ISBN 9781784295868 (HBK)

Summary

It is the beginning of the summer in a small town in Ireland. Emma O'Donovan is eighteen years old, beautiful, happy, confident. One night, there's a party. Everyone is there. All eyes are on Emma. The next morning, she wakes on the front porch of her house. She can't remember what happened, she doesn't know how she got there. She doesn't know why she's in pain. But everyone else does. Photographs taken at the party show, in explicit detail, what happened to Emma that night. But sometimes people don't want to believe what is right in front of them, especially when the truth concerns the town's heroes.

Judge's comments

Reading *Asking For It* is a harrowing, intense and thought-provoking experience. O'Neill skillfully draws the reader into the world of privileged teenage queen bee, Emma, and then ruptures both Emma's and the reader's complacency by exposing the violence, misogyny and hypocrisies shrouding the idyllic facade of her Irish town and the wider world. This is an important novel for twenty-first century Irish Young Adult literature and for youth culture in Ireland. Examining issues of consent, victim blaming and rape culture, O'Neill's scalding exploration of sexism, scapegoating, sexual assault and the ethics of using and abusing social media offers immense crossover appeal for young adults and adults alike.



About the Author

Louise O'Neill is from Clonakilty, in west Cork. After graduating with a BA in English Studies at Trinity College Dublin, she went on to complete a post-grad in Fashion Buying at DIT. Having spent a year in New York working for the senior Style Director of *ELLE* magazine, she returned home to Ireland to write her first novel, *Only Ever Yours*. This debut novel went on to win the 2014 *Sunday Independent* Newcomer of the Year Award, the YA book prize and the 2015 CBI Éilís Dillon award. *Asking for It* won the Specsavers' Children's Book of the Year Senior award.

Before you begin

- Reading the title, give your opinion as to what you think the book might be about.
- The cover image features a female form reminiscent of a Barbie doll. Do you think this may indicate any of the themes the book might contain? What are these themes? Do you think this image is striking?

Questions

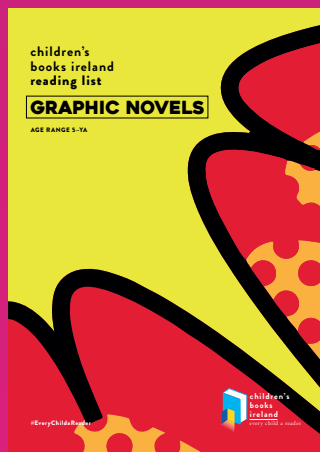
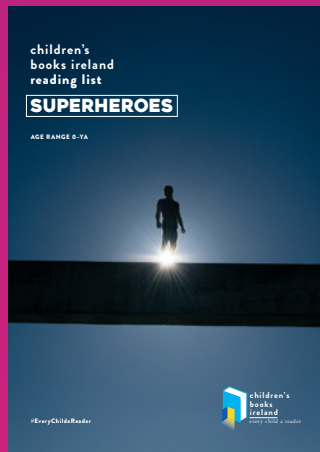
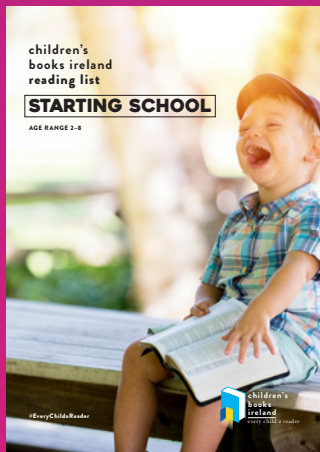
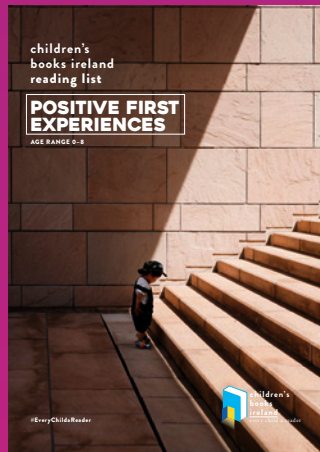
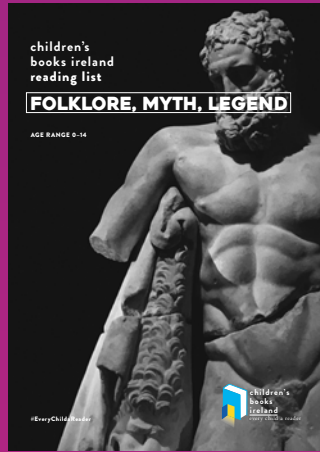
1. In many novels on the topic of rape culture the victims are often portrayed as being sweet and innocent in character. Did the author's portrayal of Emma's character affect your ability to be able to empathise with her?
2. Do you think that the Author's portrayal of Emma was honest?
3. Have you read any book that was like *Asking For It* before? Did you think the book was suitable and appropriate for your age group?
4. The book is recommended for ages 16+. Do you think this is an appropriate age to read this story? Do you think that adults would benefit from reading this book also?
5. Similarly, do you think both boys and girls should read *Asking For It*? Explain your answer.
6. In this novel, O'Neill is said to be taking on extremely big issues and themes such as rape culture and the issue of consent. What are some of the other wider issues that this book also deals with?
7. Did you ever feel shocked or depressed by themes in the book? Why do you think this is?
8. Do you think that the circumstances that befall Emma in *Asking For It* are realistic? Do you think situations like this happen?
9. Does the world of *Asking For It* feel familiar in any way? List examples of this.
10. At many points throughout the story, the community of Ballinacoom seem to be siding with the young men accused of rape. What are your opinions on this?
11. Do you think that the tone of voice the author uses when Emma talks to her friends is accurate? How does this tone differ from Emma's thoughts about her friends?
12. Do you think the author did a good job in capturing the voice of an Irish teenager? Give reasons for your answer.
13. Do you think it is important that books like *Asking For It* discuss the topic of rape and consent?
14. Emma's parents feel it might be best that Emma drops the charges. Why do you think they feel this way?
15. Discuss the relevance of O'Neill's use of social media, press and family responses in the telling of this story.
16. How do you think Emma's obsession with her own body image affected her throughout this story? Do you think it affected the way other people viewed her?

17. Do you think Emma remained confident throughout the story?
18. What did you think and feel about the book's ending? Was it what you expected?
19. What does the book have to say about how men should behave in society? Do you think this book reflected well on men?
20. The author, Louise O'Neill describes herself as a feminist, as do many other writers. Discuss what the word feminism means to you.
21. Discuss the influence you feel Emma's brother Brian had in Emma's life, both before the rape and after.
22. Ballinacoom is a very small town and close-knit community. How do you think growing up in a small town affected Emma in this story?
23. What kind of relationship does Emma have with her mother and father at the beginning of the story? What kind of relationship does Emma have with her parents towards the end of the story? Discuss the changes to this relationship both before and after the rape.
24. If you were a parent, how would you feel about your child reading this book?
25. The author, Louise O'Neill undertook a lot of research before deciding to write this book, what do you think this research involved?

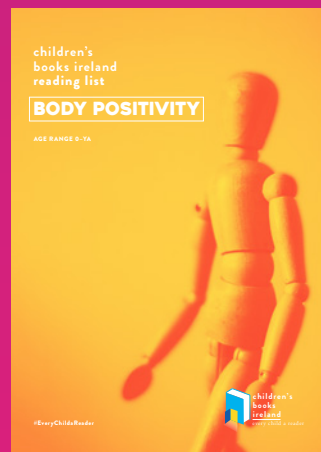
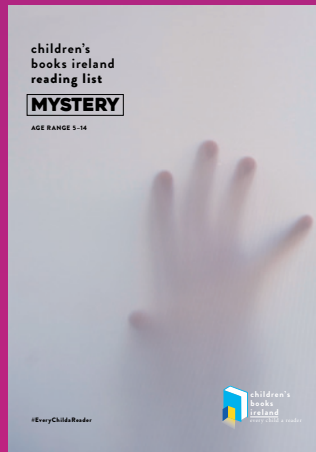
Activities

- Imagine you are Emma's mother or father and write a diary entry for each, to be set a few weeks after the rape.
- Imagine you are Emma's brother and you have just found out what happened to your younger sister. Write a short diary entry detailing how you feel.
- This book is described as one with a strong message to share with younger audiences. In 200 words or less, detail this message in your own words.
- Write a conversation between Emma and her mother. Write a conversation between Emma and her father. Highlight the differences in the way Emma interacts with both her parents.
- Design an alternative cover for the novel, portraying the theme that you consider to be the most important in the story.
- Find a news article, either online or in a newspaper, covering the topic of consent. Ask the students to present and discuss the articles.

READING LISTS

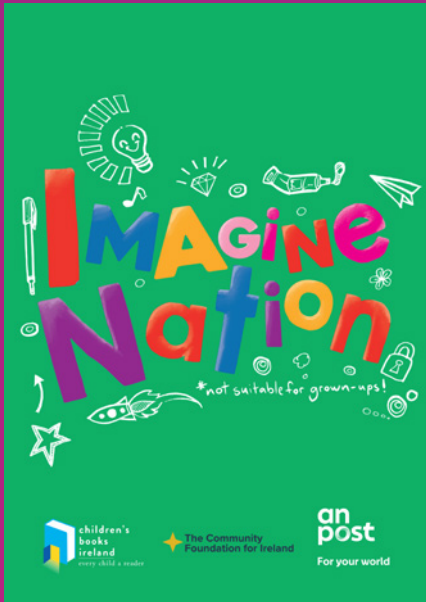


READING LISTS



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FURTHER RESOURCES

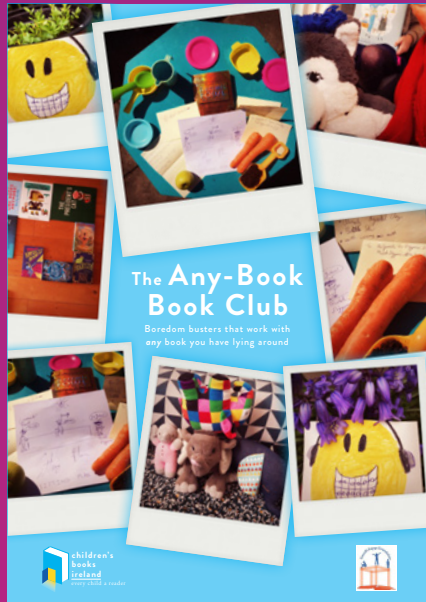


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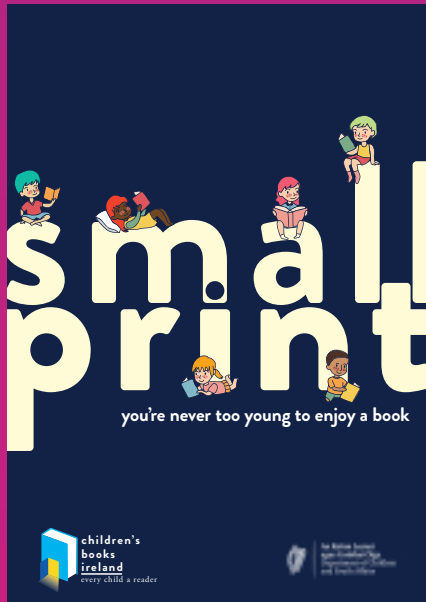
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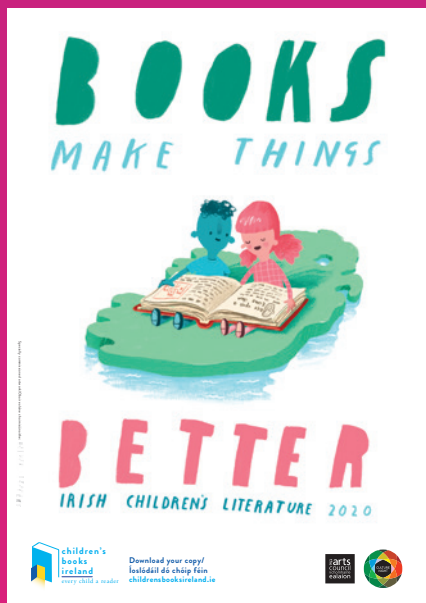


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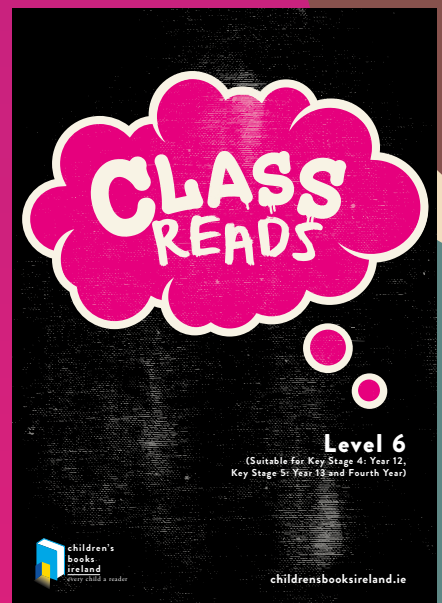


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