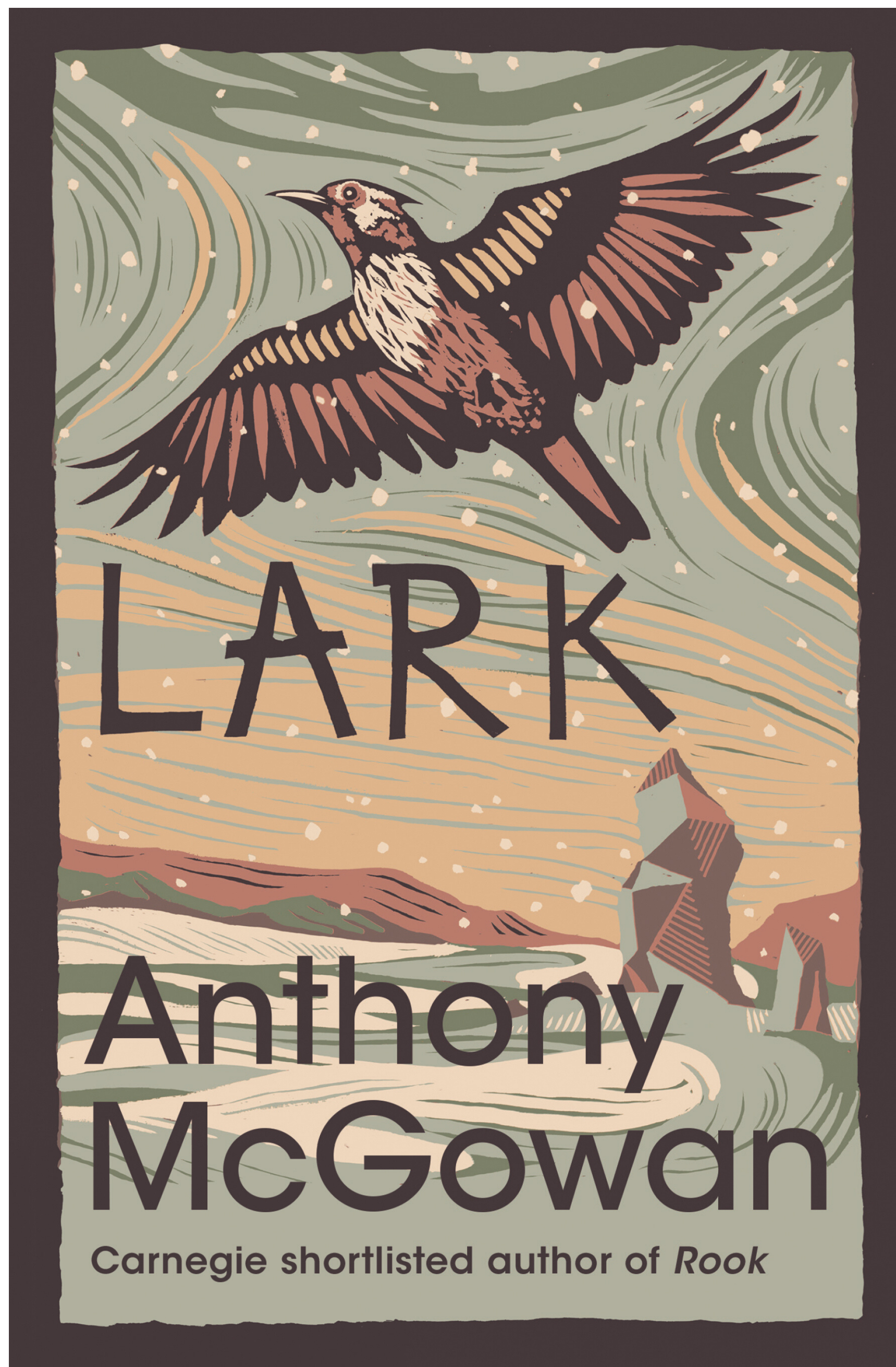


CILIP CARNEGIE SHORTLIST 2020

SHADOWING RESOURCES



CILIP Carnegie Medal 2020

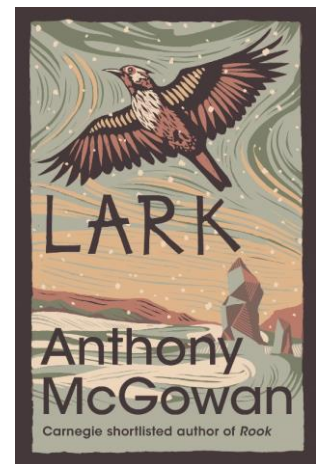
TALKING POINTS

Title: **Lark**

Author: **Anthony McGowan**

Publisher: Barrington Stoke

Age: 11+



STARTING OUT

- You might have read previous books in this quartet, or you might have come directly to Lark first – in either case, what did you expect from this book? (And what difference might it make to a reader's enjoyment if they have or haven't read the previous ones in the series?)
- The book starts right in the middle of the action – why do you think the author chose to do this? Is it effective?
- In what ways do things in Nicky and Kenny's home life seem to be going well, when the story starts? And what are the problems they still have to face?
- They're about to be visited by their mum – what has changed since she was last here? How do the boys feel about the visit?

THE WALK ON THE MOORS

- The boys need to get out of the house to take their minds off things – why do they choose this particular walk?
- When do the boys first realise they might be in trouble? Is there something you think they should have done differently to keep themselves safe? Who – if anyone – do you blame for the position they find themselves in, or is it all just an unfortunate accident?
- This crisis puts a lot of pressure on Kenny – how does he respond to the situation?
- Did you worry, as you read, that one of them might not make it out of this adventure alive?

NATURE

- One of the things that all four books in the series share is an engagement with nature – how important is the love of nature in these boys' lives?
- And what do you think they get out of it? What kind of change does it offer them from their day-to-day lives?
- But is nature always presented as just a welcoming, pretty, picturesque setting? Do the boys feel differently about it – and do you – after they have experienced nature as a terrible danger, threatening their very lives?
- How vivid are the author's descriptions of the natural world? Can you picture the scenes as you read?

BROTHERLY BONDS

- Nicky is the book's storyteller ("Tell me a story," Kenny always asks him). But how would you describe the voice with which he tells the story? Is it poetic and sophisticated, or clear and accessible? Is it very fancy, or direct, every-day and realistic? Is it funny or serious? (Maybe you know somebody who talks a bit like him?)
- Do you get a good sense of what Nicky is like – of his character – from the way he talks, the way he tells the story?
- What do you learn about each of the brothers from the way they treat the other?
- The brothers' relationship is at the heart of this book, but does it change in any way as the story develops? By the time you see them again in the epilogue, is it still the same, even then?
- It is surprisingly unusual to find a book portraying a relationship between two teenage boys that is so simply honest and tender and vulnerable (as well as – yes – sometimes awkward, sometimes grumpy, sometimes brash, etc.). What else have you read that portrays this kind of relationship so well?
- If you're a teenage reader yourself, how well do you think the author has captured what it's like to be your sort of age? Do the teenage characters he creates feel true and familiar?
- The boys are the heroes of these four books – but are they actually "heroic", or just regular, ordinary boys? Is there something that makes them special?

THE LARK

- Why do the boys hope to see a lark on their walk?
- When they do finally hear and see one, it's one of the most memorable moments in the book. What did that moment feel like, for the characters? But, also, how did it feel for you, reading about it?
- The lark is obviously a very positive presence – what might it symbolise in this story, and in the boys' lives?
- Since the bird makes only such a brief appearance in the actual story, why do you think the author chose it for the title for the book? (The trilogy that comes before this book has been published all together under the title *The Truth of Things*. Would that title suit this book, too?)
- And incidentally, what else does that word "lark" mean, apart from the name of a kind of bird?

WRITING STYLE

- The book is only 100 pages long, with short chapters and a very small number of characters, so in one sense it's quite simple, but it still feels rich and interesting and intense. How does the author manage to keep the reader so engrossed in his story? Is it just a fast-developing plot, or is there something else that pulls you in?
- It's not a sentimental book – because the characters themselves aren't sentimental – but it is certainly a book about love, and a reading experience that can be quite emotional. What are the most powerful moments on the emotional journey that reader is taken on over the course of the story?

ENDINGS

- How surprising did you find the ending of the book – the epilogue, especially?
- McGowan has said he wrote Lark because he wanted to give the boys “one last adventure”. Does this feel like an ending to you?
- Would you like to have more stories of Nicky and Kenny, if you could? Will you miss them? (This is a book that makes a lot of readers cry.) Or are you happy for it to be ending where it does?

AND FINALLY...

- Some books stay with you long after you’ve read them – they change the way you see the world. Was this one of those books, for you?
- Does it deserve to win the Carnegie Medal?

FURTHER THINKING

CILIP works in partnership with Amnesty International and Inclusive Minds to raise awareness and understanding of the importance of human rights, inclusion and representation in children's literature. The discussion points below are intended to further stimulate reader's thinking on the themes explored in the shortlisted books.

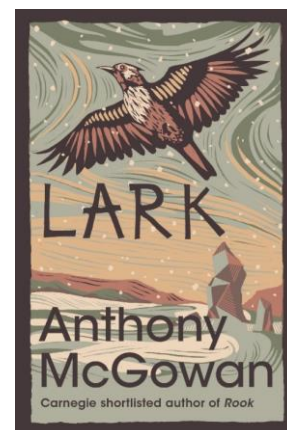
CILIP Carnegie Medal 2020

Title: **Lark**

Author: **Anthony McGowan**

Publisher: Barrington Stoke

Age: 11+



Discussing human rights in this story:

Right to safety; right to education; right to a good life with enough food, clothing, housing and healthcare.

- Who could have helped Nicky, Kenny and their Dad?
- What did Jenny do to 'put all the things back in our lives that we'd been missing'?
- How do Nicky and Kenny look after each other?



Discussing inclusion and representation in this story:

- In what ways does the author ensure a feeling of equality, love and mutual respect between the two brothers?
- Consider the various pressures that the family have been experiencing in the lead-up to the event - why does the boys' dad suggest a walk to the moors? Who is responsible for the disaster and how do the boys behave - would you say there is a clear 'hero' and a 'victim'?
- Consider the way in which the two boys' lives panned out at the end - did Kenny achieve what he wanted to with his life and if not, what do you think prevented this?



***Lark* by Anthony McGowan**

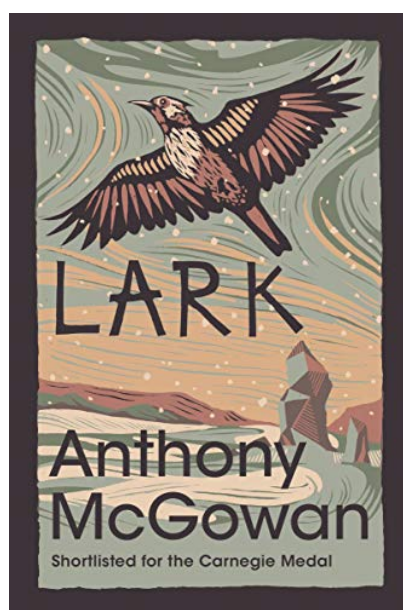
Before reading

Making predictions

- Working on your own, in a pair, or in a small group, complete the three prediction tasks below.
- If possible, discuss your ideas with other readers.
- Keep a note of your ideas so that you can refer back to them as you read.

The cover

- Working on your own, in a pair, or in a small group, examine the book's front cover.
 - What do you think the book will be about?
 - What is the likely audience for the book?
 - Does it remind you of any other books? Does it make you want to pick the book up and start to read?



A taster

- Read the extracts from the novel, below.
- How do they add to your ideas, questions and predictions about the novel, including what genre of story you might expect?

1

'These bad words Milo told you, let's hear them.'

'You won't tell Dad or Jenny that I know them?' Kenny asked.

'Course not. I'm not a grass.'

'You told them where I hid the turkey.'

'I had to,' I said. 'Otherwise there'd have been no Christmas dinner.'

Kenny nodded. He could see the logic in that.

2

'We're off to see the larks,' Kenny said. 'We've got cheese and jam sandwiches. And pop.'

'Aye, well, watch yourselves,' the driver replied. 'It's gonna be filthy up top.'

He used a fat finger to point up towards the treeless hills.

'You're not dressed for it, neither,' he added.

'We'll be fine,' I said. 'There's a footpath.'

The bus driver nodded. 'Stick to it.'

3

It's a funny thing, pain. When it happens, it's the most important thing in the world – a stubbed toe, a burned finger, a bad tooth. You live inside the pain. The pain becomes you. If it's bad enough, you'd do anything to make it stop. You'd even betray your friend (or your brother). And then it goes away and you forget it.

3. Information about the setting

- Read this information about the setting and then answer the questions that follow.
 - What types of characters might appear in a novel set on the Yorkshire moors?
 - Why might a writer choose to set a novel on the moors?
- *Lark* takes place on the Yorkshire moors in winter. A moor is a big, open, wild space.
- The North Yorkshire Moors National Park covers an area of 554 square miles (1,430 km²) but only four roads cross the park.
- The North Yorkshire Moors National Park has this advice for visiting in the winter: 'It's true that the moorland weather in winter can be forbidding... We recommend warm clothing, shorter walks and finding a cosy spot in one of the North York Moors many traditional pubs and coffee shops, with hearty food, beer, or a steaming mug of hot chocolate and often a roaring fire.'
- There are steep hills, rocky rivers and pine forests on the moors.
- Sheep graze on the moors, but they are also well known for wildlife such as badgers, deer and hawks.

During reading

We recommend reading the novel without pausing too often, then doing some more substantial work afterwards.

Keep a journal while reading, pausing to write down your reflections about each of the points below. Where possible, have a discussion with other readers before putting your thoughts down on paper.

First impressions. After reading Chapter 2

What is your first impression of Nick? What is your first impression of Kenny? What made you think this?

What could go wrong? After reading Chapter 4

Right from the start, Anthony McGowan hints that things will go wrong on the walk. However, the boys do have some resources as well.

- List all the reasons things could go wrong, for example, the fact that the map is a bit blurry.
- Now list the resources the boys have that might help them, for example a warm hat.

Now that you have considered their resources, how well prepared do you think they are for their trip to the moor?

Keeping up the hope

- What information does Nick hide from Kenny? Why?
- How does Nick keep Kenny going when things start to go wrong? Is this just for Kenny's sake? Or does it help Nick as well?

The setting

- Choose a place in the novel where McGowan really helps you to imagine what it would be like to be outside on the moors in the snow without much in the way of warm clothing. Think about how he has put this across.

Brothers

- Nick and Kenny have had some difficult times. How do they help each other?
- Do you find their relationship as brothers realistic? If so, in what ways? If not, why?

Mum and Dad

Nick explains that his Mum left and that his Dad did not cope very well when she did. This led to a hard time in Nick and Kenny's lives.

- Think about how Nick feels towards his Mum and Dad at different points in the story.

What happens to Kenny?

We never find out exactly what happens to Kenny when he goes off to get help.

- Why do you think McGowan doesn't explain this part of the story in any detail?

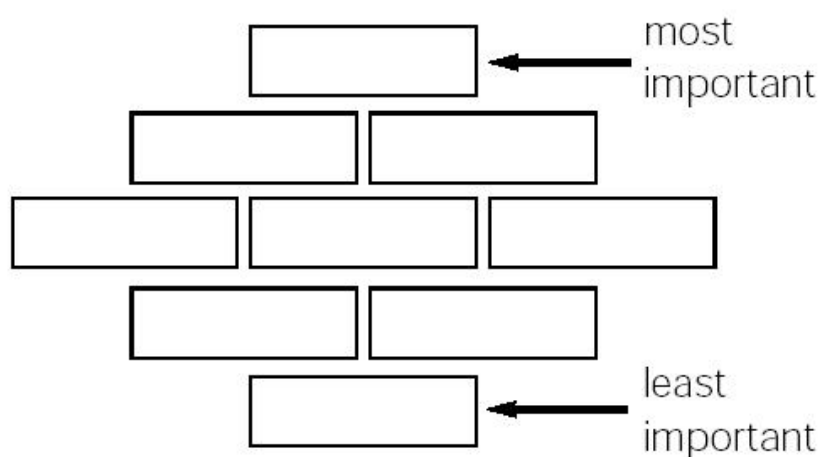
After reading

What is the novel about?

- Below are nine suggestions for what *Lark* is about.
- Working in a pair, or small group, rearrange them into a 'Diamond 9' formation, as shown below.
- If possible, compare your ideas with other readers and discuss any differences.

<i>Lark</i> is about ...		
... family bonds.	... what a hard life some children have.	... the relationship between brothers.
... two foolish boys getting themselves into trouble.	... a neglectful Dad.	... survival against the odds.
... the power of nature.	... different kinds of bravery.	... forgiveness.

Diamond 9 pattern



Nick in the middle

Nick is the central focus of the narrative. To help you remember and think about everything Nick was involved with, and to prepare you for more substantial writing about his character, produce a diagram of his relationships in the novel.

- Working on your own, in a pair, or in a small group, draw Nick in the middle of a large sheet of paper. Label the picture with words and phrases that describe him.
- Write the names of key characters in the novel, or draw them, around the edge of the sheet: Kenny, Dad, Jenny, Mum.
- Draw arrows between Nick and the other characters and write along the arrow the nature of their relationship, including key moments described in the novel.
- Draw arrows between other characters where links exist. For example, between Mum and Dad, Jenny and Dad, Jenny and Mum. Write along the arrow the nature of their relationship, including key moments described in the novel.
- If possible, compare your ideas with other readers.

Lessons for Nick

- Drawing on the previous activity, write a journal entry in the voice of Nick, reflecting on what he learned from his experiences. Before you write, identify four or five areas of focus and brainstorm ideas around each. For example:
 - His own strengths and weaknesses
 - His relationship with Kenny
 - How to cope in difficult weather
 - How he feels towards his parents.

Prologues and epilogues

A prologue is an opening which comes before the first chapter. Often it gives background details or explores an earlier event which connects to the main story.

An epilogue appears after the last chapter. It is often used to explain what happens to the characters much later, after the end of the events in the main story.

- Look back at the prologue and the epilogue. What do they add to the main story? It might help to think about the fact that *Lark* is the last book in a series of four about Nick and Kenny.

The three-act structure

The 'three-act structure' is a way to think about how the story develops in many books and films. Writer Stephen King describes it like this:

Act 1 – put your character up a tree

Act 2 – set the tree on fire

Act 3 – get them down again

- Use these ideas to help you to think about the way Anthony McGowan structures the story in *Lark*. For example, you could think about where you would divide the story for Act 1, 2 and 3.

Who's to blame?

- Do you think anyone is to blame for what happens on the moor? Or is it just bad luck?
- Do you think Nick and Kenny's parents deserve forgiveness for putting the boys through such a difficult time?

Death on the moor

One reader said:

At one point I thought Nick was going to die, but of course he can't because he's telling the story, and then I thought Kenny was dead. I know it sounds heartless, but when I realised that it was Tina, the dog, who had died I felt that the writer was a bit cowardly. The story would have been more powerful if one of the boys had died.

- Consider how far you agree.

Defending the novel

Imagine that your school has decided to ban *Lark* from its school library because a parent has complained that it contains swearing, as well as the sentence, 'A sod is a man who digs up dead bodies to have it off with.'

- Write a letter to the headteacher challenging their decision, explaining to them why this is a book that should be made available to your school's students.

Reading the reviews

The extracts, below, are all from reviews of the book.

- Working on your own, in a pair, or in a small group, consider which reviewer comes closest to your own view of the book.
- Working individually, write your own paragraph to express your views. You can draw on the review extracts you have read if you wish.
- If possible, compare your ideas with other readers.

I cried and cried and cried. But I also smiled and laughed. Lots. I don't know what it is about Anthony McGowan, but he can write about the inner lives of young people with such wonderful detail and can tap into the deepest wells of emotion without ever being saccharine or coy.

www.thebookbag.co.uk

Nicky and Kenny are so real that by the end of the book you keep expecting to bump into them in the street. McGowan's ability to create a gripping, terrifying, emotional book that will leave the reader wrung out in so few pages is akin to magic. The fact that this book is printed on just the right paper and in just the right (specialist) font to make it a comfortable read for those with dyslexia is of course brilliant, but this is simply an amazing book, ending an amazing series, and I am heartbroken that I will never again meet Nicky or Kenny.

'Giraffe' on www.amazon.co.uk

Chapters are short, adjectives and adverbs are used sparingly. On the other hand, Nicky's strengths as a storyteller include his own inventive, comic voice: 'Kenny was dragging his feet, going slower than a sloth with three legs walking in treacle.'

www.booksforkeeps.co.uk

I didn't really like this book. It did not make much sense. Just today I realised that Nicky was a boy. The way it was explained makes me think a really really young person with not much experience wrote this. I know plenty that will disagree with this, but it is my opinion. Many kids in my class loved this and are excited to read more of Anthony McGowan's books!

Alexandra on www.goodreads.com

A painful, though uplifting conclusion.

Imogen Russell Williams, Guardian

Cards for literary analysis

These cards have been designed for use with any short story or novel. You can select a particular card to work with or rely on your teacher to give you a particular area of focus. You could then work through the bullet points on your card or select a few that seem most interesting or relevant for a particular text.

Setting

- In which different settings does this story/novel takes place? What part does each setting play? Which setting is most significant and why?
- How important is setting to the story/novel as a whole? Does the setting have a particular impact on the story/novel, or could it be set almost anywhere?
- What difference would it make if this story/novel was set somewhere else? E.g. another country, a rural rather than urban setting, in space!
- How effective do you think the writer has been in creating a sense of place? Are there any particular examples of setting you think are particularly well written? If so, why?
- Is there anything particularly interesting or special about the way setting is used and presented? In what ways is it similar or different to stories/ novels that explore similar themes and ideas, or that are written in the same genre?
- Find one or two bullet points from other cards that add to what you have discussed about setting. Explain the connections.
- Is there anything important that you've noticed that isn't raised on this card? What is it? Why do you think it's important?



Characters

- Who is your favourite character, and why?
- Who do you think is the most important character, and why?
- Who are the other significant characters? What different roles do they have?
- What is special or unusual about the way one or more of the characters is presented?
- Which character would you most like to be friends with, and why? Which character might significant adults want you to be friends with, and why?
- Are characters paired or grouped in any particular ways? E.g. friends, rivals, etc. What ideas are raised by these pairs or groupings?
- Are the characters typical of ones found in this kind of story/novel? Are they distinctive and individual, or stereotypes? Explain your answer.
- Find one or two bullet points from other cards that add to what you have discussed about characters. Explain the connections.
- Is there anything important that you've noticed that isn't raised on this card? What is it? Why do you think it's important?



Form and structure

- What do you think is interesting about the way this story/novel begins?
- What were the key moments in this story/novel? How did they shape the story/novel as a whole?
- If you had to describe the path of this story/novel, what would it be? E.g. journey from childhood to adulthood, from grief to happiness etc.
- What did you notice about the end of this story/novel? Was it what you were expecting? Did it tie up loose ends, or leave some things unresolved?
- Does this story/novel belong to a particular genre? If so, how does it fit in with other stories that you know in the same genre?
- Does the story/novel use just one form or does it include more than one E.g. letters, diary entries, poems, newspaper reports
- Find one or two bullet points from other cards that add to what you have discussed about form and structure. Explain the connections.
- Is there anything important that you've noticed that isn't raised on this card? What is it? Why do you think it's important?



Themes and ideas

- What, to you, are the five most important themes and ideas in this story/novel? If you had to narrow your list down to one theme or idea, what would it be and why? In what ways is this theme presented? E.g. if the theme is love, what exactly does the story/novel have to say about love?
- Does this story/novel deal with big issues that affect the whole world, or small ones that affect individual lives? Give reasons for your answer.
- Does this story/novel contain any themes or ideas that have made you look at the world in new ways? If so, what are they, and how have they changed your views?
- Does this story/novel contain any themes and ideas that explore how people should act and behave? If so, what are they and do you agree with how they are presented?
- Are the themes and ideas presented in ways similar or different to other stories you have read, including stories of the same type, or in the same genre?
- Find one or two bullet points from other cards that add to what you have discussed about themes and ideas. Explain the connections.
- Is there anything important that you've noticed that isn't raised on this card? What is it? Why do you think it's important?



Language

- Identify one or two of your favourite passages in the story/novel where language is used particularly well? Explain how it is used.
- How would you describe the language used in this story/novel overall? E.g. poetic, plain, chatty etc.
- Would you say the language in this story/novel is original or creative in any particular way? If so, how?
- Are there any patterns in the language used? If so, what are they, and what is their effect? Are there any other patterns, such as of imagery and symbolism?
- How is dialogue used in the story/novel? Do characters, for example, speak in particularly distinctive ways?
- Is the language similar to how it is used in similar kinds of stories/novels? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?
- Find one or two bullet points from other cards that add to what you have discussed about language. Explain the connections.
- Is there anything important that you've noticed that isn't raised on this card? What is it? Why do you think it's important?



Narrative

- How does the writer try to capture and keep the reader's attention? How successful are they in doing this?
- Is the narrative told in order from beginning to end (a linear narrative), or does it move backwards and forwards in time? What is the effect of the order in which events are told?
- Can you think of any other ways the story/novel could be told? For example, by a different character, or in a different order? How would this affect your experience of reading?
- Would you say that this story/novel is told in a particular original or creative way? If so, how?
- Is this story/novel told in a way that is typical for its genre?
- Find one or two bullet points from other cards that add to what you have discussed about narrative. Explain the connections.
- Is there anything important that you've noticed that isn't raised on this card? What is it? Why do you think it's important?



Point of view and voice

- Through whose eyes do we see the events of the story/novel? Do readers get just one point of view or several?
- What do you find interesting about the point or points of view presented?
- If the story/novel is told from different points of view, how does the writer do this?
- What would the story/novel be like if told from someone else's point of view? Whose point of view would you choose, and why?
- How would you describe the tone of voice used to tell the narrative? Does the narrative draw attention to itself by using a particular tone, or is the tone pushed to the background? What is the effect of the choice made by the writer?
- Find one or two bullet points from other cards that add to what you have discussed about point of view and voice. Explain the connections.
- Is there anything important that you've noticed that isn't raised on this card? What is it? Why do you think it's important?



Audience and overall personal response

- Who do you think this story/novel was written for, and why? Are there any other groups of people who you think should read it?
- What was your experience of reading this story/novel?
- What would you recommend about this story/novel to other people?
- Which parts of this story/novel did you most enjoy? Were there any parts that you didn't enjoy?
- Do you think this story/novel could be improved in some way? If so, how?
- What other stories (or films, TV, plays etc.) does this story/novel remind you of? In what ways?
- Who do you think should read this book and why?
- Find one or two bullet points from other cards that add to what you have discussed about personal response and audience. Explain the connections.
- Is there anything important that you've noticed that isn't raised on this card? What is it? Why do you think it's important?



These cards are from the *EMC Curriculum Plus Card Collection*. Each box includes eight decks of three different sets of cards – enough for pupils to work in groups of three or four.

The cards are for: Literacy Analysis; Poetry Analysis; Critical Literacy

For full details visit <https://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/publications/emc-curriculum-plus-card-collection>