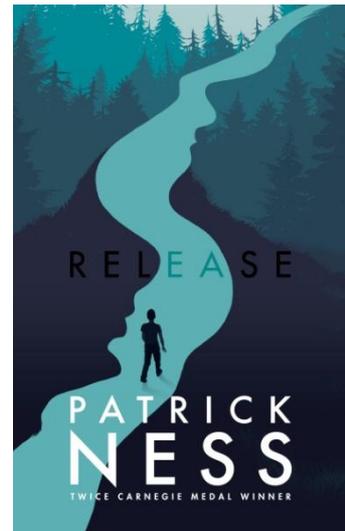


2018 Carnegie Medal shortlist Talking Points

Title: **RELEASE**

Author: **Patrick Ness**

Publisher: **Walker Books**



Release begins with an epigraph from Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, a book from which Ness draws some inspiration. If you've read it, can you see the links between the two? And if you haven't, are you curious to try it now?

ONE DAY

Release – like *Mrs Dalloway* – takes place over the course of a single day. How does this affect the pace and tension of how the story unfolds?

What makes this seemingly ordinary Saturday so life-alteringly different from every other?

The day in question is filled with revelations of all kinds – how do they leave our complex central character changed by the time his day has ended?

FAMILY AND RELIGION

Early in the book we're introduced to Adam's parents – how have their conservative, homophobic views affected him? How is he still in thrall to the "Yoke"?

Have Adam's parents been forced to confront – or even to change – some of their views by the time the day is over? (There's even a direct confrontation between Adam and his father – what did you make of this scene?)

We see there can be hypocrisy mixed with the religion when we learn Marty's secret, and Marty proves not to be quite as straight-forward and perfect (in his parents' eyes) as he seemed. Why do you think Ness uses him in this role?

LINUS AND ENZO

Are Adam and Linus in love, do you think? Does Adam *want* to love Linus? How is Adam's second love – Linus – different from Enzo, his first?



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Enzo always resisted 'labels', he used physical contact more than words, and Adam wonders now why he'd accepted this. "Without argument or demand. Without even apparent self-respect." Why did he, do you think?

What role does Enzo still have in Adam's life – and why?

WRITING SEX

Along with *Mrs Dalloway*, the other book Ness has cited as an inspiration is Judy Blume's *Forever*. (Blume even gets a mention in *Release*.) One of the connections made between these books is the uncomplicated frankness with which teenage sex and intimacy are written about. Blume's book is thought to have opened the way for much of the writing/reading that came after it. Do you think *Release* might be boundary-breaking in some ways, too?

Are the descriptions of sex (and Adam's conversations about it with, for example, Angela) one of the ways Ness shows us the differences between Adam's two relationships?

Sex between Adam and Linus is described, in some detail, as an act of physical intimacy, but there's a lot more to it than just the physical, too: it's emotionally complex, awkward, funny. Have you seen other writers attempt – successfully or not – to tackle the complexities of this subject so fully and so frankly before?

Alongside the positive evocations of mutual sexual desire and pleasure, we also see very ugly sexual harassment from Adam's creepy boss. What do he and his ultimatum add to the story Ness is telling us?

RELEASE

What do you think of this one-word title? What are the different things it might be referring to?

Which characters, other than Adam, might be said to be looking for 'release' of some kind?

The book is about – among other things – being freed from the shackles of other people's expectations, of barriers, of lies. Does the desired 'release' from all these things come by the time the day is over?

ANGELA

What does Adam get from his relationship with Angela that he doesn't get from anyone else?



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The news that Angela is moving abroad is an earthquake in Adam's life. Why does he depend on her so much?

In what ways is Angela – like Adam – a sort of outsider? (And who isn't?)

THE PARALLEL STORY

This might have been a simpler book if it told only Adam's story; so what do you think the parallel supernatural story of the queen, the faun and the murdered girl add to it?

Could you see the connections between the two stories as you read? Was there a moment near the end when it suddenly made sense? Or if you felt they never did connect very clearly, did you mind?

Do you feel these supernatural aspects of the book are more or less incidental to Adam and the "main" story, or attempting to convey something profound about the kind of forces at play beyond what we can see in our everyday world?

SURVIVING

Patrick Ness has written that he thinks it a miracle that anybody survives the difficulties of their teenage years at all. What, on this day, helps Adam to survive and grow?

In many of Ness's books we see how our survival depends on facing up to *truth*. How does that idea relate to *Release*?

How did you feel about the ending? Satisfying? Frustrating? Tidy? Hopeful? Complex? Appropriate? Could the book plausibly have ended differently? (And now that you've read it, what sort of reader would you recommend this book to?)

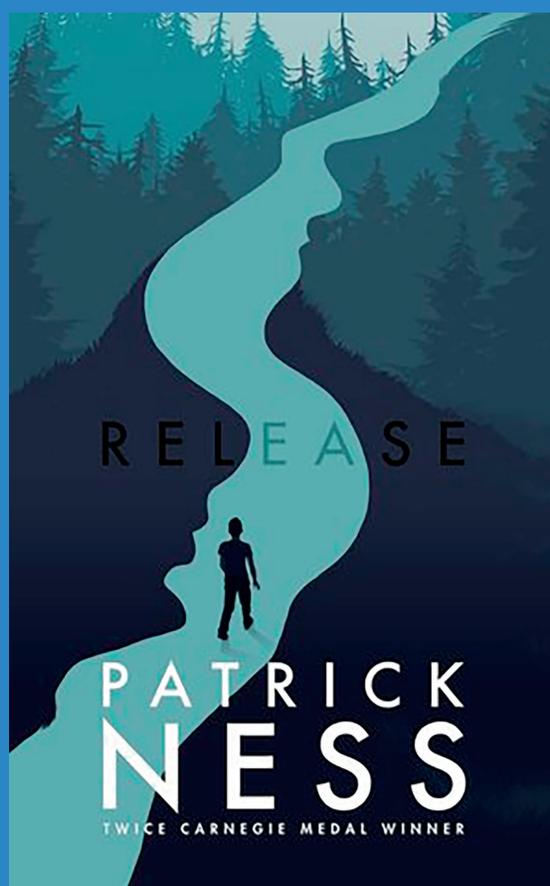
AND FINALLY...

Does this Carnegie-shortlisted book deserve to win? Why, or why not?



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The Carnegie Shortlist 2018



EMC Resources: *Release*

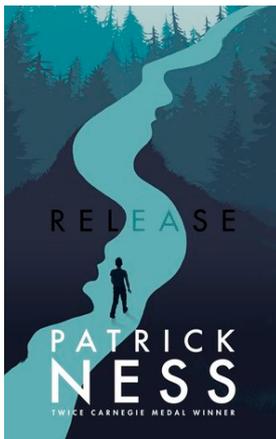


Release, by Patrick Ness

[For your teacher: This book contains some challenging material that is not suitable for some younger students. Teachers should, therefore, make sure to read the book carefully before teaching it or recommending it to students.]

Before reading

1. In a pair, or three, think about the title, *Release*. What are the different meanings and connotations of this word? See how many different meanings and connotations you can come up with and share your ideas as a whole class.
2. Look at the two different versions of the book cover below. Discuss in your pair or three what you think the novel will be about based on the covers. Which cover would most encourage you to read the book and why? Share your ideas as a whole class.



3. The novel has a strong focus on the part played by sex and sexuality in young people's lives. Is such content suitable for young readers? If so, at what age?. Discuss as a class whether YA fiction has a responsibility to present these issues in particular ways. If so, what are they?

During Reading

We recommend working through the novel without pausing too often, then doing some more substantial work afterwards. The novel does offer lots of opportunities to pause for reflection, particularly about the different relationships described and the issues raised.

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.

- Adam's sexuality and sex life: for example, how is this portrayed? Is this suitable for YA fiction? Does the novel ever go too far? What is the novel trying to say?
- The portrayal of Adam's relationship with Angela: for example, do you find this realistic? Can boys and girls be best friends like this?
- Adam's mother, father and brother: for example, what do you think about their treatment of Adam? Do you find them sympathetic in any way? Do they develop in any way as the novel progresses?
- The portrayal of the town of Frome: for example what is life like in this town? What is the experience of living there for young people?
- The title: for example what are the different kinds of 'release' explored in the novel?
- The portrayal of religion: for example, how is religion and the role of religion portrayed? Do you think this is realistic or fair?
- The parallel narrative structure: for example, what is happening in the fantasy narrative? What is its relationship to the main narrative? Do the two parallel narratives intersect at any point?

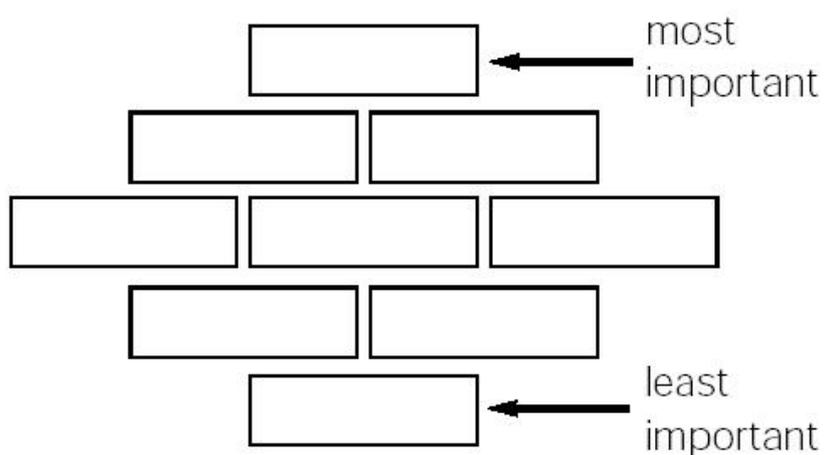
After reading

What is the novel about?

- Below are nine suggestions for what *Release* is about.
- Working in a pair, or small group, rearrange them into a 'Diamond 9' formation, as shown below.
- Compare your arrangement with another pair or group and discuss any differences

Release is about ...		
The importance of friendship over family	The difficulties of growing up in a small town	The difficulties of growing up as a gay man
The joys to be found in first love	Learning to accept people for who they are	The importance of understanding your own self
The traumas of first love	Typical teenage lives	The complexities of family life

Diamond 9 pattern



Adam in the middle

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

- In a small group, draw Adam in the middle of a large sheet of paper. Label the picture with words or phrases that describe him.
- Write the names of key characters in the novel, or draw them, around the edge of the sheet: Angela, Enzo, Linus, Marty, Mrs Darlington, his father, his mother, Wade.
- Draw arrows between Adam and the characters and write along them the nature of their relationship, including key moments described in the novel.
- Draw arrows between other characters where links exist. E.g. between Marty and his parents. Write along them the nature of their relationship, including key moments described in the novel.
- Compare what you have identified with different groups.

Defending the novel

Imagine that your school has decided to ban *Release* from its school library for what the headteacher calls its 'inappropriate portrayal of teenage life'.

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.

The parallel narrative

Alongside Adam's story is a parallel narrative. This is written in a *magical realist* style. This means that elements of realism are blended with fantastical elements that could not take place in real life. This one features a dead woman, the man who murdered her (also dead) and a fawn!

- In a pair, or small group, flick through the novel and read a selection of the parallel narrative sections.
- Discuss what you think is going on in each and how they fit together.
- Write a short piece with this title: *What is going on in the parallel narrative and how it adds to the novel.*

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 take 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?



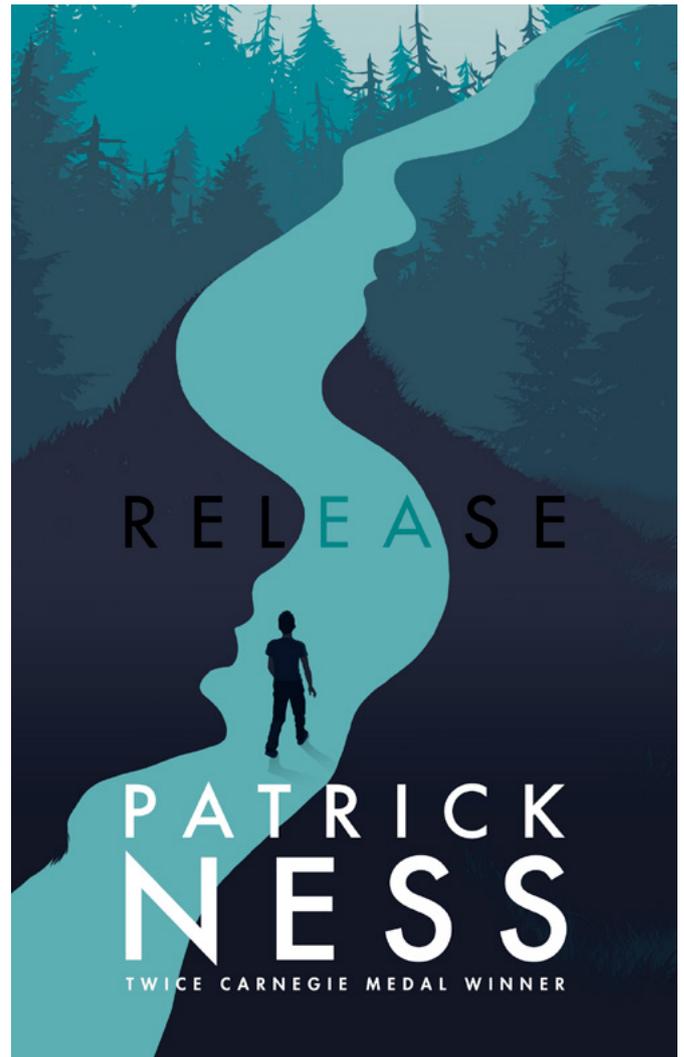
RELEASE

By Patrick Ness

Walker Books

2018 Carnegie Medal shortlist,
eligible for Amnesty CILIP Honour

‘Ness demonstrates his profound understanding of the complexities of being a young adult and what it means to live secretly, in fear of disapproval and burdened with shame. Elegant, flawless writing.’ Judging panel



UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Article 3: We have the right to life, and to live in freedom

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book takes place over one day – a defining day for Adam Thorn, 17, who is getting ready for his ex-boyfriend’s going-away party. As the day unfolds we learn his family, job and relationships are at risk and he won’t come out of it unchanged. Meanwhile a second story across town follows a ghost who has risen from the lake.

Release explores the impact of discrimination, cruelty and violence but also the potential to find ways beyond that. Human rights belong to all of us – although some people are denied them because of their gender, sexuality and class. This book speaks up for anyone made to feel inferior and says that other people’s opinions of you aren’t always that important.

HUMAN RIGHTS IN THIS STORY

The right to equality; to safety; to be free from cruel and degrading treatment; to be protected and cared for; to have opinions and to be heard; to have enough money to live on; to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

YOU CAN TALK ABOUT...

Sexuality

- Adam says ‘Sometimes a guide or history or a long-established literature would have been useful’ (page 19). Why do we need characters we can identify with? What message does it send if people like us are missing?
- ‘Why do you have to call yourself anything?’ (page 43). What would you say to Angela?

- Adam believes that saying he is gay is ‘not a reduction. It’s a key’ (page 44). Do you agree?

Religion

- Adam worries he will be sent to an ‘ex-gay camp’ (page 36). What impact does this have on him?
- What would you say to Marty when he says ‘It’s not real love’ (page 60)?
- We have the right to believe in what we want and to practise our religion. We also have the right to be safe, free from degrading treatment and to be treated equally. How can these different rights be balanced with each other?
- How do you want Adam’s parents to behave?
- What does Adam’s father mean when he uses the word ‘healing’ (page 216)? What does the word mean to Adam?

Family

- Marty and Adam are treated differently. Double standards within family – how does that make you feel?
- ‘They’re your parents. They’re meant to love you *because. Never in spite of*’. Discuss. How do you want Adam’s parents to treat them?
- Are you surprised when Adam’s dad says ‘I wish you felt you could be completely honest with me. It hurts my head that you’re afraid’ (page 207)? How can families ensure that people feel it is safe to be honest?
- What do you think about Marty’s behaviour? Do you believe it will change?
- What might happen next for the Thorn family? What do you hope for?

Violence against women

- Is anyone surprised by what happened to Katie? Do you think people who use or are addicted to drugs are vulnerable?

- Angela rages against any, even slight, suggestion that Katie brought it on herself. Why?
- What was Katie/The Queen going to do to Tony? How should we respond to men who are violent to women?
- Who could have protected Katie?

Sexual harassment and assault

- Why does Katie’s mother beat her when she reveals her boyfriend has assaulted her?
- Adam’s dad blames Adam for leading Wade on. How often do adults really listen and pay attention? What difference might it make?
- After Wade assaults him, Adam thinks ‘maybe it didn’t even happen’. Why?
- Why didn’t anyone try to stop Wade? What should happen to him?

ACTIVITY

Imagine a Thorn family dinner one month after the events of *Release*. Write a scene, chapter or set of four diary entries (one for Adam, Marty and their mum and dad). Think about the impact of the day’s events, and how the pregnancy, planned marriage and revelation about Adam’s relationship are thought about and talked about.

RESEARCH

Research Amnesty International’s campaign for LGBTI rights including equal marriage in Northern Ireland. www.amnesty.org.uk/issues/lgbti-rights

‘You have no idea how hard I work to love you.’
Adam’s dad

WE ARE ALL BORN FREE AND EQUAL

The atrocities of World War II sparked a determination to protect the rights of all human beings everywhere. On 10 December 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The preamble says it must be shared, learned by children and be a part of all our lives.

When using these notes, you can download for reference:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights simplified version, especially useful for younger children amnesty.org.uk/udhr
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child unicef.org/crc

For more free educational resources from Amnesty International go to amnesty.org.uk/education



The CILIP Carnegie & Kate Greenaway Children’s Book Awards

