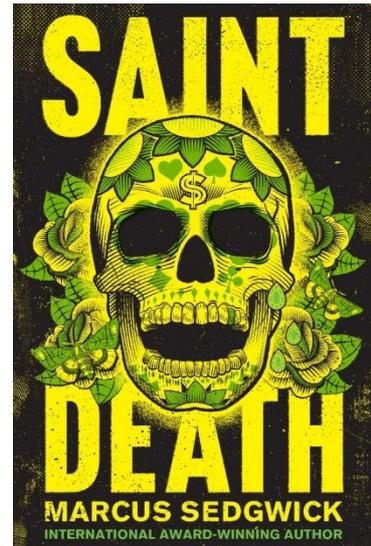


2018 Carnegie Medal shortlist Talking Points

Title: **SAINT DEATH**
Author: **Marcus Sedgwick**
Publisher: **Orion**



IN MEXICO

The brief opening scene is shocking, in part because of how normal it's made to seem – what is Sedgwick telling us about the society in which these people are living?

Most of this book's readers will never see its setting in real life – how vividly (and how *visually*) does Sedgwick manage to conjure it up for us?

What makes this particular setting interesting to a reader who hasn't been there?

THE CHARACTERS

How important is knowing Arturo and Faustino's tragic backstories to understand their characters today?

Arturo and Faustino are still only teenagers – do they still have any childhood innocence, or have their circumstances and experiences made them totally corrupted, cynical?

What do we know about Faustino's namesake?

What do we learn about Faustino from the sacrifices he makes and the risks he takes for others? (For Eva and her child, for example.)

What's Carlos's role in this book?

How does Arturo change – his faith in Santa Muerte, for example – over the course of the story?

CROSSINGS

So many people try to cross the border – why has Arturo never tried before?

Does Sedgwick help you understand why so many people risk the lives of their families and themselves to cross borders in search of a better life?



The CILIP Carnegie
& Kate Greenaway
Children's Book
Awards

“When you cross a bridge, there is always a price to pay” – do you think this book is about symbolic transitions (e.g. between childhood and adulthood) as well as literal crossings?

SAINT DEATH

Sedgwick often weaves folklore into his novels, as he does here with Santa Muerte – does this make it easier for the reader to bring a place to life, or harder because it’s so unfamiliar? (Or some other effect entirely?)

Had you heard of Santa Muerte before? Traditionally Mexico has had a very different relationship to Death than we’re used to in the English-speaking world. (If you’ve seen *Coco* you may know about it from there, too.) Are there signs of it in this book?

Why do you think he chose her not just as a feature of the book but to use as its *title*?

Does Santa Muerte bring any morality to the story? Any justice?

COMPLICITY AND POLITICS

What does the book have to say about how those of us in wealthy consumer societies (like the neighbouring US) are complicit in what’s happening in poorer countries? Is it, as some have said, an “anti-capitalist” novel?

We’re also made to feel complicit with the Mexican experience – it’s “our” town, there’s an “us” in the narrative, we’re part of it – but does it ever *glamorise* the gangs, the violence?

Does this make you think differently about your own life, your own society, and the kind of world *you* want to live in?

HOW IT’S WRITTEN

Sedgwick uses language very dynamically – mixing slang, Spanish words, etc. What’s the effect on the reader?

The story is intercut with brief one-page pieces in different fonts – what do they add to the experience of reading the story?

The narrative is present-tense – what’s the effect of this as you read?

This isn’t a story with a tidy happy ending in which everyone’s going to be OK – it’s more realistic than that. But is there a positive message to be found in it, too?

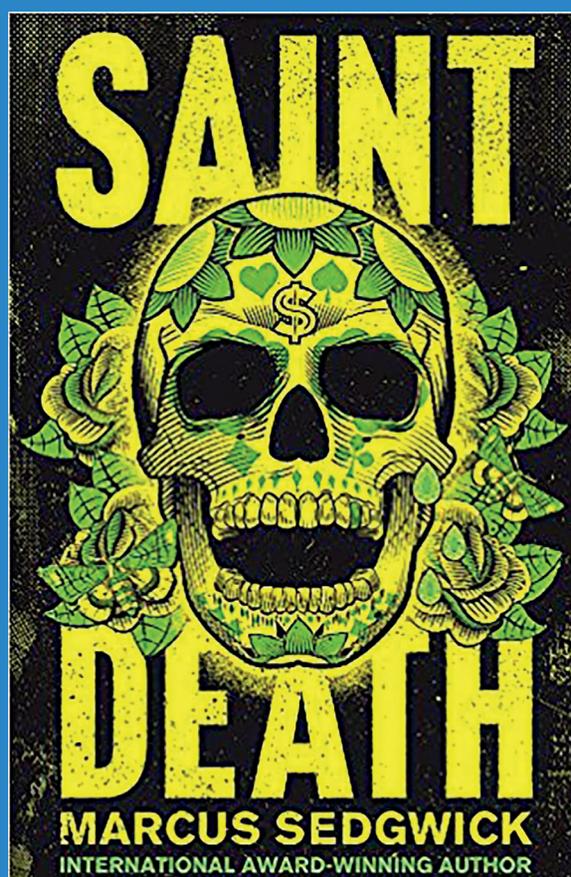
AND FINALLY...

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



The CILIP Carnegie
& Kate Greenaway
Children's Book
Awards

The Carnegie Shortlist 2018



EMC Resources: *Saint Death*



- Read this information about Juarez and then answer the questions that follow.

Juarez is a city in Mexico of about 1.5 million people. It sits on the border with the United States, opposite an American city called El Paso. Four bridges link the two cities. About 25 million crossings are made over the bridges each year, making it a major point of entry and departure.

The city contains over 300 *maquiladoras*. These are assembly plants (factories where goods are put together), largely owned and run by American corporations. They are based in Mexico to take advantage of cheap wages and less strict employment regulations.

Juarez is notorious for violence related to drug cartels. In the recent past it was the most violent city in the world, based on murders per head of population. The murder rate moves up and down depending on rivalry between gangs. In 2010, for example, there were 3500 murders, but in 2014 the figure was 430.

Between 1993 and the mid-2000s, the city was notorious for murder and violence against women. In this period over 370 girls and women were murdered and over 400 were reported missing.

In the recent past there has been widespread corruption in the city's police force. One year, for example, over 800 police officers were dismissed for corruption. The army was drafted in to combat the drug cartels, but subsequently the general in charge and many of his officers were arrested.

- What do you think life is like for an average person living in Juarez?
- What types of characters might appear in a novel set in Juarez?
- What themes and ideas might a novel set in Juarez explore?
- Why might an English writer, like Marcus Sedgwick, choose to set a novel in Juarez?

During Reading

We think you should read *Saint Death* without pausing too often, then do some more substantial work afterwards. The novel does offer several opportunities for reflection, particularly on the different relationships described and the issues raised. The following are useful areas to focus on. You should draw on them to keep a journal while reading, and for whole class discussions about the book.

- Thoughts about the inclusion and portrayal of violence in the novel
- Thoughts about an English novelist writing a novel about Mexican characters, set in Mexico
- Thoughts about Arturo's relationship with Faustino
- Thoughts about the portrayal of the city of Juarez
- Thoughts about the different writing that appears between chapters
- Thoughts about the portrayal of religion and superstition
- Thoughts about the portrayal of members of the drug cartel
- Thoughts about the narrative structure. E.g. how effectively does it combine a time-driven linear narrative (Arturo must come up with the money to a deadline), with flashbacks to previous events?

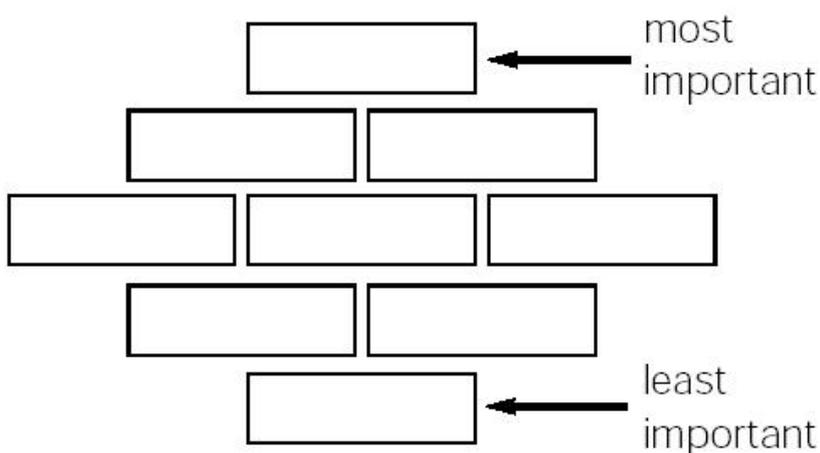
After reading

What is the novel about?

- Below are nine ideas for what *Saint Death* 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

<i>Saint Death</i> is about ...		
Loyalty to family and friends	The battle between good and evil	The importance of money
The problems created in Mexico by corporations from the United States	The dangers of gambling	The complexities of human existence
The dangers of superstition	The corrupting influence of drugs	The possibility of escape

Diamond 9 pattern



The character of Arturo

Arturo is the central focus of the novel. He is a complex character, acting at various times in ways that might be considered good and bad.

- In a small group, discuss the following moments in Arturo's life. What do they make you think about him? Why do you think the writer has chosen to include them?

He agrees to help Faustino find \$1000.

He keeps gambling against El Carnero and loses \$4000.

He doesn't want to take \$500 from Siggys and Carlos, even though they offer it.

He holds up a woman at knifepoint after she has been to a cashpoint, but then lets her go.

He slept with Eva, his best friend's girlfriend.

He gives the \$1000 he has collected to Faustino.

He chooses to die rather than work for El Carnero.

- Now discuss his character in relation to the following two quotations from the novel.

And is it better, Arturo has wondered, to be a fly who spends the whole of its short life banging against a close window, buzzing crazy, buzzing, buzzing until its life runs out and drops to the windowsill, slowly twitching, or to be a fly who finds an opening, a gap in the window frame.

He dies for everyone. He dies for the world.

But does he die for those things?

Is it a noble death, a meaningful sacrifice, one to make us recall our dark-cave promises? Will statues be erected in his honour; will the gods themselves bow down and say, There goes Arturo, Arturo the King?

Or does he die for nothing?

- Finally write your thoughts about Arturo. You might consider:
 - The different sides to his character
 - His background, including his relationship to his mother and father
 - The world he lives in
 - The moral choices he makes
 - The nature of his death

Defending the novel

Imagine that your school has decided to ban *Saint Death* from its library for what the headteacher refers to as 'inappropriate content, including extreme violence, drugs, sex and swearing'.

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

Between the chapters

Marcus Sedgwick has chosen to put short pieces of text between most of the chapters. These are not directly linked to the narrative itself, so do not alter the storyline. In a way, the novel could do without them.

- With a partner, skim through the book, looking closely at a few examples of these texts.
- See if you can find a link between any or all of them, or come up with a reason as to why each one has been included.
- Finally, write down your responses to the following questions:
 - What do you think the extra texts are for?
 - Why has the writer chosen to put them in?
 - What do they add 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 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?



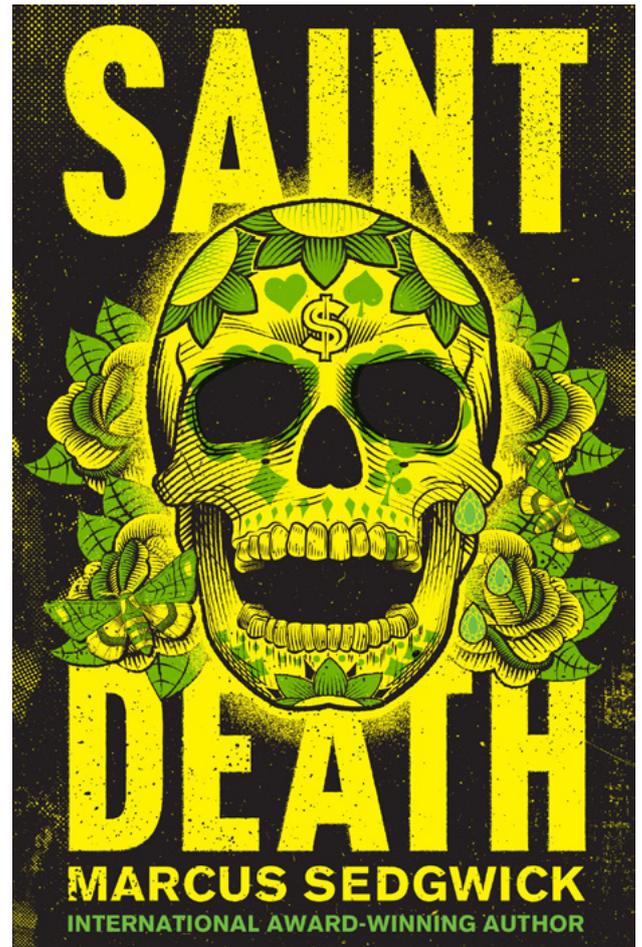
SAINT DEATH

By Marcus Sedgwick

Orion Children's Books

2018 Carnegie Medal shortlist,
eligible for Amnesty CILIP Honour

'A gripping, fast-paced narrative... Sedgwick's beautifully-crafted novel reflects upon the nature of friendship, faith and those "breaches of brotherhood" which makes us flawed and very human.' *Judging panel*



UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

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

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This compelling novel is set near the US-Mexican border where violent gangs rule, police officers do nothing and corporations make money. Loyalty is rare. Arturo does his best to keep his head down until now... he only has 36 hours to save his friend's life and risk his own in the process.

This book highlights the relentless economic and social inequalities people face in their struggle for better lives. It shows the conditions that allow the drug trade and human trafficking to flourish – and that rather than demonise migrants and refugees, and build walls, we should act to protect them.

HUMAN RIGHTS IN THIS STORY

The right to life; to safety; to freedom from cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment; to equality before the law; to freedom of movement; to freedom of belief;

to a good life; to healthcare; to housing; to a job and a fair wage; to education; to peace and order.

YOU CAN TALK ABOUT...

The beginning

- The author prefaces the novel with a quote from Charles Bowden: 'The way to understand these stories is to say they are about us.' What point is he making?
- What was your first thought when you saw the question 'What have we lost?'
- Talk about the cover. Who is saint Santa Muerte and how does she dominate Arturo's world?

Gangs

- Why won't the police investigate gang murders?
- Why does Faustino join a gang?
- Why does Arturo choose death over working for El Carnero?
- The author describes Eva's body and Arturo's death in detail – for what purpose?

Women's rights

- What has happened to the disappeared girls and women?
- 'Girls, young women, just being fed into the horror machine of the drugs wars and the murders.' What impact does the violence against women have on the community?
- How do you feel about Margarita's decisions?
- Why are girls and women more vulnerable to having their rights violated?

Relationships

- Why did Faustino stop contacting Arturo?
- Arturo wins enough money to help him – why doesn't he stop?
- What would you do if you were Arturo, Faustino and Eva?
- Why didn't Eva return to talk to Arturo?
- Does Arturo die for nothing?
- Is it better to die a good man than live as a bad man?

Migration and refugee rights

- What do you think countries are for?
- What are the arguments for and against border control between countries?
- The book explores different causes for the refugee crisis. Which causes do we see illustrated in Faustino and Eva's cases?
- Why don't they have legal and safe options?
- Why does Faustino risk everything despite the dangers?
- How can you find solutions to change things?

Corporate responsibility

- Both Eva and Arturo's mother are sacked unfairly. What rights should workers have? Who should be responsible for ensuring these rights are protected?

- The ASARCO plant caused pollution across the border and resulted in stillbirths. Who should be responsible for preventing this happening, and holding companies to account?

Society

- Carlos believes in 'community' and 'togetherness'. Siggie believes people 'serve themselves'. What do you think?
- The author uses the phrase 'polite embarrassment' to describe how people react when human rights violations are discussed. Why isn't everyone outraged and calling for change?

ACTIVITY

Pick the last item of clothing or electronic device that you bought. Where was it made? Find out about working conditions, human rights and levels of poverty in that country.

RESEARCH

Find out about the issues impacting Mexico today, and research what Amnesty is doing in that country.

Pick another issue that the book covers and research it, eg free trade, globalisation, climate change.

'Remember this: every man has to find out for himself in what particular fashion he can be saved. I believe that. You just have to find out what it is you're looking for.' Siggie

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](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/udhr)
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [unicef.org/crc](https://www.unicef.org/crc)

For more free educational resources from Amnesty International go to [amnesty.org.uk/education](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/education)



The CILIP Carnegie & Kate Greenaway Children's Book Awards

