

Yoto Carnegie Shortlist

2022 Shadowing Resources



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AWARDS



EMC
English & Media Centre

#CKG22

Yoto Carnegie Medal 2022

Activities Pack



Title: **Punching the Air**

Author: **Ibi Zoboi and Yusef Salaam**

Publisher: HarperCollins Children's Books

Age: 12+

Note to Group Leaders

Shortlisted books may contain material that may not be suitable for some students. We recommend that group leaders read the books carefully before sharing or recommending them to students and/or seek parental guidance. We trust that Shadowers and other young readers will be guided by their group leader, librarian, teacher or parent to help them select suitable, enjoyable and age appropriate material from the lists.

General Activities

1. Create a HAIKU POEM of three lines using a syllabic structure [WORDS CUT UP INTO SOUNDS] of 5-7-5 to describe your experience reading each book.

o Example:

Fantastical shapes (Line 1- 5 syllables)

create patterns for the eye (Line 2- 7 syllables)

to become amazed (Line 3- 5 syllables)

Share your HAIKUS on Social Media using the hashtag #CKG22.

2. Search for book trailers for each of the shortlisted titles online. Use these as inspiration to create your own trailer to celebrate the book you are currently exploring through shadowing.
3. Create your own playlist to accompany a shortlisted book - you might want to highlight a particular theme, tap into the geography or time period of the book or choose a character and create a playlist that reflects them.
4. Create a moodboard for the shortlisted titles. Think about materials and colour palette, texture, shape and perspective. What do you want your moodboard to suggest or represent? Why?

5. Create a cake that reflects one of the shortlisted titles. Perhaps you will make one large cake, dozens of smaller cakes or a combination of both. Don't forget to share your bookish bakes on social media, using the hashtag #CKG22.
6. Have a go at building book spine poetry using the shortlisted books. Arrange the books in different ways, with the spines visible so that the titles can be read in a certain order. Share your poems on social media using the hashtag #CKG22.
7. Play charades, using nonverbal communication to act out the title of each book.
8. Use a shoebox to create a diorama inspired by a shortlisted title. Your diorama should include key items which reflect the themes, plot, characters and mood of the book.
9. Think of some questions you would like to ask the shortlisted authors and share them on social media using the hashtag #CKG22 and tagging the author.
10. Take one of the shortlisted titles and use it as a springboard to create a recommended reading list for wider reading. Your list should include books that will enhance the reader's experience of the shortlisted title by offering further information, exploration of the subject through a different medium - nonfiction or poetry, perhaps - or a different perspective. Share your lists on social media, using the hashtag #CKG22.
11. Redesign the cover of a shortlisted book. How would your creation differ from the existing cover? What would you include and why?
12. Make a list of the new words you've learnt when reading the shortlisted titles and add a definition for each one.
13. Give each of the following elements a mark out of 5:
 - Title
 - blurb
 - opening line
 - appeal of the cover
14. Now score each book out of 20 and rank the books accordingly. You could use this exercise to determine the reading order.

Book Activities

1. Talk in a group about who you feel has your back in your life, family, friends...
2. Think of a mistake you have made in your life and write it down, put it in a box and then pull someone else's out. Read it aloud and share your thoughts. Read page 287 together and discuss as a group.
3. Create an acrostic poem using the name of someone you know.
4. Research Chaos Theory and the Butterfly Effect. Discuss these ideas as a group.

5. Choose a passage to read aloud. How does it differ when spoken instead of read silently? What happens if you add music? Can you introduce a beat using your voice?
6. Make a mural inspired by the themes of *Punching the Air* and display it in a prominent part of your building. Wait a few days before removing it. How do you feel about the removal? Did others notice?
7. Research the work of Basquiat and share your thoughts and impressions with the group.
8. Think about the things you would miss if you were confined to the four walls of a cell.
9. What does the word 'truth' mean to you?
10. Research the author, Yusef Salaam, and look at news articles from a range of sources. What do we learn about the media from Yusef's story? How do you think he felt? What impact might his conviction have had on his family? How can we, as members of society, help to prevent miscarriages of justice from taking place?

Wellbeing Activity

Keep a journal for a week and write in it at least once each day. Experiment with freewriting, writing anything and everything that springs to mind without worrying about spelling, punctuation, grammar. Don't read over what you've written, just let the words flow. How do you feel before/after?

Punching the Air

by Ibi Zoboi and Yusef Salaam

Punching the Air, which contains some mild swearing and scenes of violence, is about the wrongful imprisonment of the 16-year-old narrator, Amal Shahid, convicted on the basis of the colour of his skin rather than an actual crime. It deals with racism in a sensitive way but, as with any text, we strongly advise teachers to be familiar with the book before recommending it to students.

Punching the Air

by Ibi Zoboi and Yusef Salaam

All of these tasks are designed to be completed in small discussion groups. However, they can easily be done on your own too. Instead of talking about the tasks, you can write down and keep a record of your ideas.

Before Reading

10-20 minutes

- Discuss what you think *Punching the Air* will be about based on these extracts. You should structure your discussion around the questions below.
 - What other novels do you think it will be like?
 - What genre of novel do you think it will be?
 - What sense do you get of where it will be set?
 - Identify three likely themes?

Extract 1

Mr Clyde Richter, my defence attorney
is supposed to save my life
is supposed to create reasonable doubt
is supposed to let that judge and jury know
the truth

But he is part of the white space
on my page

Extract 2

My face must be
the ugliest in the world

Monster Predator Animal
You walk on two legs, not four, Umi said

And since that night
I haven't heard anyone call me boy like she does
call me little man

Extract 3

Here, there's no music
the silence and the closing of metal doors
and that buzzer like at the end of
a quarter in a basketball game
An alarm telling us that the game is over
again and again over and over

Extract 4

The walls
the floor
the desk
my sheets
my hands

are all covered in
red, black, and green
ink

During Reading

WARNING: DON'T READ THE QUESTIONS BEFORE READING EACH SECTION!

Read up to the page number listed and then answer the questions. You should spend about 5-10 minutes answering each set of questions.

The page numbers are based on the HarperCollins paperback edition of the book, first published in the UK in 2020.

▪ Read to the end of page 40

- What is interesting or surprising about the book so far?
- What do you think is the significance of these words from Amal: 'It's as if the this event in my life/ was something that was/ supposed to happen all along.'

▪ Read to the end of page 93

- The words used for the title of the book, 'punching the air', are used on page 63. What do they refer to in this context? Based on what you've read so far, why do you think they've been chosen for the book's title?
- What do you think life for Amal will be like in prison?
- At various points the book mentions the history of black people enslaved in America. Why do you think the writers include these references? How does this make you think about Amal's situation?

▪ Read to the end of page 143

- What is life like for Amal in prison? You might like to think about physical conditions, but also about his reaction to being in prison.

▪ Read to the end of page 202

- Amal is badly beaten up by a group of other young prisoners. Why do you think he is a target for them? Why do you think the novel has not yet made the reason for their attack clear? How does this affect your experience of reading? What, for example, were you thinking when you read this passage? Do you think what happened will be revealed in full later on?
- What was life like for Amal at East Hills High School for the Arts? What about Ms Rinaldi? What do you think Amal means when he writes: 'She failed me/ over and over again. Until – / she thought she could save me.'
- We still don't know exactly what happened to Jeremy Mathis. Why do you think the writers have chosen not to reveal this yet? How does it affect your experience of reading the novel?

▪ **Read to the end of page 231**

- What do you think about Imani Dawson, the poet educator? What do you think she means when she says that she's 'a prison abolitionist' who is 'fighting to abolish/ the prison industrial complex'? What are your thoughts about how Amal reacts to her teaching?
- You've now been given some details of events that led to Amal being arrested and imprisoned. What do you know so far and what are your thoughts about still not being told everything?

▪ **Read to the end of page 296**

- What impression does Dr Kwesi Bennu make on Amal?
- Why do you think Dr Bennu shows the boys the 13th Amendment from the US Constitution (the document underpinning the law in the US)? What's its relevance to the novel as a whole? Why do you think the writer has chosen to include it? (You can find it on page 277.)
- The narrative finally reveals most of the events from the night when Jeremy Mathis lost consciousness and Amal was arrested. How did the events compare to what you were expecting? Now that you know what happened, how do you feel about Amal being in prison?

▪ **Read to the end of page 313**

- What's interesting about this section? You might like to think about the butterflies and the appearance of Amal's father. What exactly is going on? What is Amal thinking?
- This section explains the title 'punching the air' further. What is your understanding now of what the phrase means in the context of the book?

▪ **Read to the end of the book**

- When Kadon sees the mural, he calls Amal 'Young Basquiat'. Basquiat was a famous painter from New York, who started out making graffiti art. Search for some of Basquiat's paintings online. What do you think of them?
- What were your thoughts when you found out that the mural had been painted over?
- What do you think about the ending of the book? Was it what you were expecting? Why do you think the writer chose to end the book in this way?

After Reading

Initial Thoughts?

- Spend 15-20 minutes discussing some or all of the questions below.
 - What are your overall impressions of this novel?
 - Which moments most stick in your memory?
 - Which characters did you like best and why?
 - Which other novels did it remind you of and why?
 - How gripping did you find the story?
 - What are your thoughts about the way it was written?
 - What are your thoughts about how the difficult subject matter is handled in this novel?
 - Based on reading *Punching the Air*, how likely are you to read other novels by Ibi Zoboi and Yusef Salaam?

What's *Punching the Air* about?

- Spend one or two minutes writing down a single sentence that begins: '*Punching the Air* is about ... '
- Share your different sentences and discuss.
- Next read the sentences below that give further ideas about what the novel is about.
- If you are working in a group, spend 5-10 minutes sorting the sentences out, from the one you agree with most to the one you agree with least.
- Finally, decide on the statement you agree with most. It can be one from the list or your own. Write down a few ideas about how *Punching the Air* relates to your chosen statement.

***Punching the Air* is about...**

- The reality of life as a young black man in the United States.
- The racism that is ever-present in American society.
- The value of art in giving meaning to life.
- The prison industrial complex in the United States.
- The impossibility of ever knowing the absolute truth about the world.
- How some people are punished for being who they are rather than what they do.
- Doing what you think is right no matter what the consequences.
- What it feels like to be wrongly judged.

Exploring the book further

Use one or more of these tasks to explore *Punching the Air* further.

A Note from the Authors

Read the 'Note from the Authors' at the end of the book and discuss the following:

- How does Yusef Salaam's story coincide with Alam's?
- What does this extra knowledge make you think or feel about the book as a whole?
- How effective do you think this book is at highlighting injustices?

Spend 10-15 minutes on this activity.

Researching the book's influences

Towards the end of *Punching the Air*, Amal's Uncle Rashon brings him lots of books. The authors are: James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Toni Morrison, Octavia Butler, Ibram X. Kendi, Michelle Alexander and Ta-Nehisi Coates.

- Search for the authors on an online bookselling site, or in a general search.
- Discuss the books by these authors that look particularly interesting.
- Identify which of these books you would most like to read. Perhaps you could get this book out of the library and give it a go.

Spend 30-60 minutes on this activity.

Exploring the ending further

Many readers might have expected the book to end with Jeremy Mathis admitting that Amal did not put him in a coma and with Amal being released from prison. This doesn't happen and the book ends before Jeremy makes a statement.

- Discuss the statements below to help you think about why the writers chose to end the book in this way.
- When you have discussed each statement, write down your own thoughts about the ending.

It's a brilliant ending because it recognises that injustices are not always put right. It leaves open the possibility that Amal will remain in prison for the whole of his sentence.

It's a frustrating ending and, ultimately, the wrong one. The reader enters a kind of unspoken contract with a writer when they commit to a book. Part of that contract is that the writer ties up loose ends so that the reader finishes with a clear sense of what happened. This book does not tie up the loose ends

It's a superb ending, if unexpected, because it really makes you feel worried about Amal's future. After all he has gone through, it's still possible that Jeremy Mathis might not tell the truth and so he will remain in prison.

Spend about 30 minutes on this activity.

Reading the reviews

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

- Read all of the reviews and discuss which comes closest to your own view of the book.
- Working individually, write your own paragraph expressing your views about the novel.
- Share your reviews with a group.

Submit your reviews to the Carnegie Shadowing Scheme website. This can be accessed at:

<https://carnegiegreenaway.org.uk/books/punching-the-air>

Give yourself up to an hour to complete this activity.

A. Sometimes you read a novel that is so beautiful and aching and phenomenal, that you must just sit in silence and absorb it. *This is that kind of novel*. It's told in verse, about a Black teen artist named Amal Shahid, who is facing court and jail time for throwing a punch. A white boy lies unconscious in hospital and a white court is building a case of what they *think* happened. It's so much about racial profiling, about misunderstanding, about blatant and cold racism. Amal is a boy of emotion and raw pain and feelings and explosive art – and the entire world has coded him as bad for it.

The poetry is so beautiful, the imagery, the lines that just hit so hard. It will haunt some readers and encourage others. There's so much emotion on every page (also illustrations) and the storytelling style just added so many layers to it.

C.G. Drews, www.goodreads.com

B. Powerful yet devastating. *Punching The Air* is about the institutional racism and systematic oppression that kids of colour experience in school, trials, and even once they reach jail or prison. This book is so important, especially during these times as it's so relevant. It's written in verse so it's a quick read. However, not an easy one in the least. Even when the world tries to throw you in a boxed description, there is a chance to break out and find purpose, hope, and art. It's amazing how popular verse is becoming and that it manages to say so much in so little. Beautiful collaboration between Zobo and Salaam. I hope they write more books together in the future.

Sheena, www.goodreads.com

C. I rarely write reviews online or even buy books! But this book was simply amazing and I felt the need to share my enthusiasm and emphatic support! I resonated with its simplicity. It was so full of light and darkness and loss and faith and triumph and hope. It helped me grieve and then heal. This book is certainly a feat and it's a reminder to young people of colour of the greatness and potential that lies within them. A reminder that – despite the twisted ways of our social system – they have a fire inside them that cannot be extinguished. That we must take the gifts God has blessed us with to educate, advocate, and fight against injustice. That our gifts are appreciated and have the potential to change so many lives. This book was nothing short of life-changing for me. It has soul, to say the least. You certainly won't regret supporting these authors and delving into the beautiful work they've created

Randa, www.amazon.co.uk

D. I really wanted to like this book, but the ending let me down. I want to know one way or the other: is Jeremy Mathis going to tell the truth or not? And what exactly is the truth? What did happen to him?

Anonymous

Writing Activities

On your own, or with a partner, complete one or more of these writing activities to help you develop your thoughts about *Punching the Air* further.

You will need 30-60 minutes for

each activity.

- In the combined voice of Ibi Zoboi and Yusef Salaam write a blog outlining your thinking about some of the important decisions in this book. You might like to think about:
 - Writing in verse form
 - The use of art
 - Amal's distinctive voice
 - The ending.

Imagine that 5 years have passed. Jeremy Mathis explained that Amal is innocent and he was released from prison. Subsequently he has gone on to be a successful artist.

- Write a magazine article in the voice of Amal outlining how you draw on your experiences for your art. You might like to write about:
 - How you draw on your sense of injustice
 - How you learned about yourself and others from your time in prison
 - What you want to achieve with your art.

- Flick through the novel and find a section of poetry that particularly interests you. This might be because of the way it uses language, how it is set out, and so on.
- Write some poetry of your own that draws on your chosen section. You might like to write about:
 - Fighting against injustice
 - Staying strong even in hard times
 - Believing in yourself

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