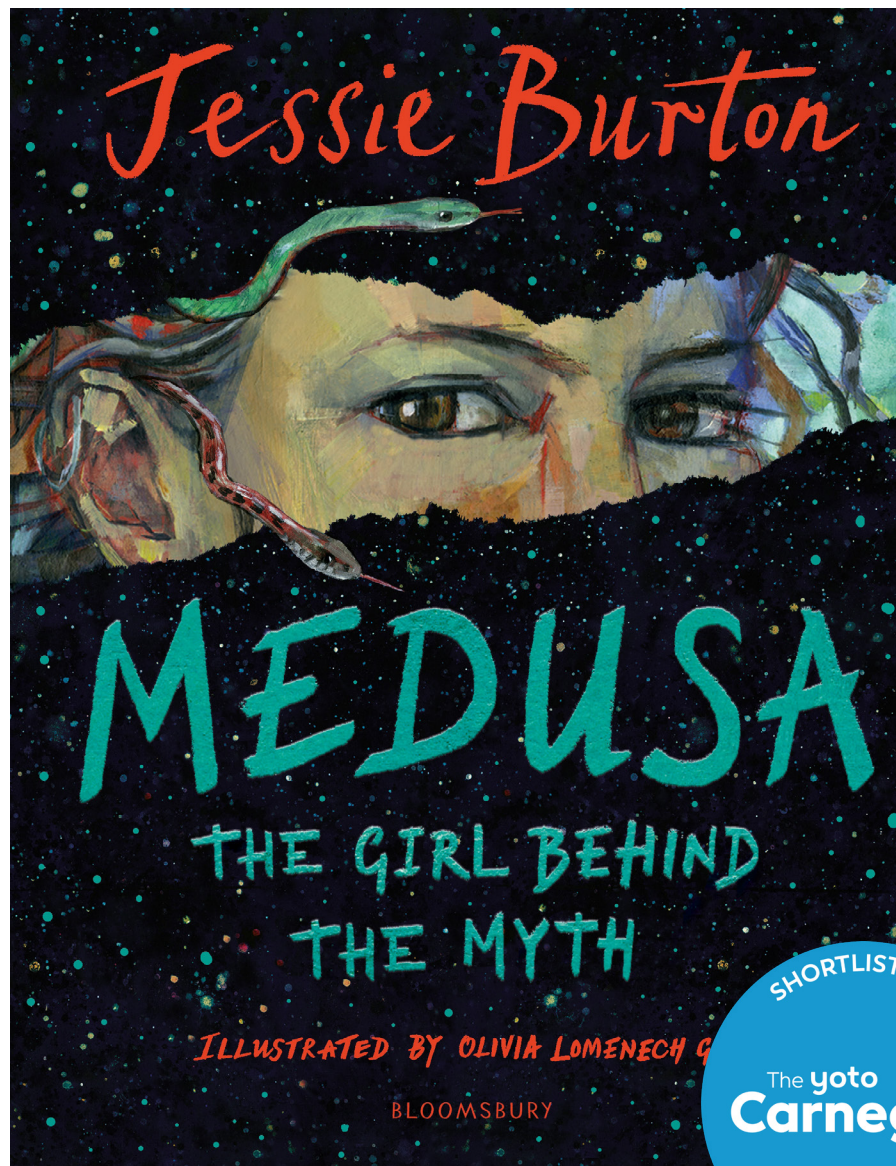


# The yoto Carnegies



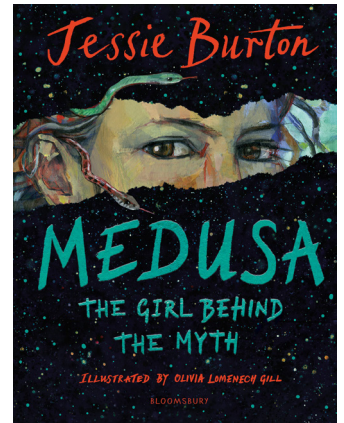
## The Yoto Carnegie Shortlist 2023 Shadowing Resources

## Activities for *Medusa*

**Author:** Jessie Burton

**Publisher:** Hodder Children's Books

**Age:** 13+



### 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.

### Warning

Contains content relating to sexual assault, violence and death.

## General Activities for the Full Shortlist

1. Imagine each of the shortlisted titles as a dessert! Do you think the book you read is a Lemon Sorbet with a light and tangy plot or a Sticky Toffee Pudding with a complex, multi-layered narrative?
2. Take the last line of one of the shortlisted books and use this as the opening line for your own story or poem.
3. Taking each of the shortlisted books in turn, think about the characters and the way they navigate the plot and various subplots. If you were going to wake up inside each book, which character would you choose to be and why?
4. Imagine that two characters are sitting on a bench. Only two people can sit on that bench at any given time, so when a third person arrives, the first person has to make up a reason to leave. Shadowers should think carefully about the different characters from their chosen book; what reasons might they have for being near to or sitting on a park bench. They must then become the character and interact with the other person/people on the bench. You could base this activity on a single title or have some real fun by using characters from across the shortlist. What will happen when characters from different worlds collide?
5. 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 create a playlist that reflects a particular character.
6. Play charades, using non-verbal communication to act out the title of each book and get the rest of your group to guess which book you are presenting.
7. Think of some questions you would like to ask the shortlisted authors and share them on social media using the hashtag **#YotoCarnegies23**
8. Redesign the cover of a shortlisted book. How would your creation differ from the existing cover? What would you include and why? Explore colour, shapes and themes.
9. Think about who would play the main characters in a film or TV adaptation of one or more of the shortlisted titles. Create a cast list and explain your choices.
10. Create your own book trailer for one of the books, or work together to make a trailer for the entire shortlist. This could be a TikTok style 'sell' of the book or a more traditional thematic video.
11. Take the first line from each of the shortlisted novels and create a poem or story by combining them with words and phrases of your own.

## Book Activities

1. What do you know about Medusa already? Research the original myth; exactly what is a Gorgon? And what does the original myth tell us about when Medusa first met Perseus?
2. You might have already come across depictions of Medusa in popular culture. Have a think about where you've seen her before: was it as a motif for a fashion house, in a video game or a comic book character? Why do you think her image persists?
3. Consider the opening lines: "If I told you that I'd killed a man with a glance, would you wait to hear the rest? The why, the how, what happened next? Or would you run from me..." - what are your first impressions of this book and its narrator? Would you want to know more?
4. When Athena curses Medusa she says, "Woe betide any man fool enough to look upon you now!". Medusa's sister Euryale, however, believes that Medusa's snakes are a "gift from the gods" – what do you think? Are Medusa's snakes a punishment or a prize?
5. "So let me tell you about the water" (page 27): Perseus describes Medusa as a 'sailor poet'. Can you compose a poem about the sea? Think about how it can be both beautiful and dangerous.
6. Try creating a collaborative portrait: Look at Olivia Lomenech Gill's illustration on page 208, and the passage where Medusa describes her head of snakes on page 8 ("Yellow snakes and red snakes, green and blue and black snakes, snakes with spots on and snakes with stripes. A snake the colour of coral. Another one of silver. Three or four of brilliant gold"). Illustrate your own individual snake and then assemble them together to make a Medusa head. Share your creations on social media using the hashtag **#YotoCarnegies23**
7. Medusa wishes that she were "Merina, with normal hair" (page 102) – how important is hair in how we perceive ourselves and others?
8. Medusa says "I know a lot about beauty. Too much, in fact". Consider the statement "attractive women are more likely to succeed". How do you think Medusa's story might factor into this debate?

### **Wellbeing/mindfulness:**

Go on a mindfulness walk. Medusa cherishes the freedom to roam and be herself. Try walking with no particular destination in mind. If you are near the water, try gazing out to sea. Much of Medusa's story takes place on or by the sea and any time spent in "blue" places is known to reduce stress and anxiety. Notice the physical sensations of walking, the way your body moves. Look around and notice the colours and shapes around you. Listen to the sounds, nearby and in the distance, notice the sound of your own steps. Notice the smells, what do they make you think of?

### **About these resources**

All of these tasks are designed to be completed in small discussion groups. However, they can easily be done individually. Instead of talking about the tasks, students can write down and keep a record of their ideas.

## **Before Reading**

**10-20 minutes**

- Discuss what you think Medusa 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 and when it will be set?
  - If you had to identify three likely themes, what would they be?

### **Extract 1**

If I told you that I'd killed a man with a glance, would you wait to hear the rest? The why, the how, what happened next? Or would you run from me, this mottled mirror, this body of unusual flesh? I know you. I know you won't leave, but let me start with this instead: a girl, on the edge, a cliff, her strange hair blowing backwards in the wind. A boy, down below, on his boat. Let them spill themselves out to each other ...

### **Extract 2**

I looked out to the horizon. Nearly dusk. Stheno and Euryale, my sisters, would be back soon. What would Perseus say when he saw them looming from the sky – and what would they make of him? We could have a dead boy on our hands. I was going to have to make a decision. Fast.

### **Extract 3**

I felt the clash of my two selves, new and old, burdened and carefree, hideous and beautiful. How was it possible to be all these things at once?

### **Extract 4**

The gods are mad at best.

### **Extract 5**

... there's only so long you can wear the mask before the skin beneath it starts to curdle. Before you contort into a half-self. And you can't go back. Time doesn't work like that.

## 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 will probably need to spend about 5-10 minutes answering each set of questions.

*The page numbers are based on the Bloomsbury YA edition of the book, first published in the UK in 2021.*

#### **Read to the end of chapter 2 (page 18)**

- Based on your reading so far, what genre would you say the book belongs to? How can you tell? Are you familiar with any of the characters already, perhaps from what you've read in the past? If so, which? How do they differ here?
- What are your thoughts about Medusa's voice, as the narrator? How does she come across? How does she tell her story?
- What are your thoughts about Medusa having snakes in her hair? Why might Athena, who turned her hair into snakes, have said: 'Woe betide any man fool enough to look upon you now'?
- As a reader, what do you want to know more about after reading the first two chapters? What do you think will happen next?

#### **Read to the end of chapter 4 (page 54)**

- This novel is based on the Greek myth of Medusa. Your reading of it will be altered by whether or not you already know this story. Do you want to search the story up after reading this far, or do you want to wait until the end? Discuss which you would rather do and why. If you do decide to search for the story, then discuss your reaction to it afterwards.
- What do Medusa and Perseus have in common when they talk about their backgrounds?
- Mention of Poseidon, the Greek god of the sea, makes Medusa almost cry and shudder. Why do you think this is?
- How do Medusa's snakes behave? What are your thoughts about how they are presented in the novel so far?
- At the end of chapter 4, Medusa says, 'I thought of what it might mean to have a boy admire you, not for how you looked, but for who you were.' Do you think she will experience what this is like with Perseus? What are your thoughts at this point about how the novel will develop further?

#### **Read to the end of chapter 6 (page 92)**

- What are your thoughts about the passage in which Athena turns the three sisters into gorgons. What do you think a gorgon is? How do you feel for the sisters?
- What are your thoughts about the way Medusa talks about beauty and how others focused on her appearance? How does this relate to your own experience of the world today and how girls and women are judged on appearances, how this makes them feel etc.?
- How does Perseus's back story compare to Medusa's? Do you think the writer is positioning you as the reader to feel sorry for one of them more than the other? If so, which and how?



***Read to the end of chapter 8 (page 130)***

- Medusa asks of Perseus: 'Why did he have this sword, this helmet, this shield – all these accoutrements of war with which to dress himself?' What are your thoughts? What mission is Perseus on?
- In this section Medusa reveals why she hates and fears Poseidon so much: the god sexually assaulted her. How does the writer present this section? Is it obvious what happened? Is this suitable material for a book aimed at teenage readers?
- At the end of chapter 8 Medusa and Perseus reveal that they are in love with each other. What are your thoughts about their revelations and about what will happen next?

***Read to the end of chapter 11 (page 170)***

- What do Medusa and her sister, Stheno, talk about? What are your thoughts about what Stheno says to Medusa?
- What does Perseus reveal his mission to be? What is your reaction to this revelation?
- What do you think will happen once Medusa reveals her true self to Perseus?

***Read to the end of the novel***

- What happens to Perseus when he looks at Medusa? What are your thoughts at this point in the story?
- Medusa tells her own story and says to her reader, 'You should be careful who tells your story?' Why do you think the writer chooses her to have this emphasis? How else might her story have been written - in Greek mythology, for example?
- How is Medusa living her life at the end of the novel? What are your thoughts about this, and about her state of mind?

## After Reading

### **Initial Thoughts?**

Spend 10-15 minutes discussing some or all of the questions below.

- What are your overall impressions of this novel?
- Which moments stick most in your memory and why?
- Which characters do you like best and why?
- Which other novels does it remind you of and why?
- How gripping did you find the story?
- What are your thoughts about how the book was written?
- Based on reading of Medusa, how likely are you to read other novels by Jessie Burton, or other stories based on Greek myths?

### **What's Medusa about?**

- Spend one or two minutes writing down a single sentence that begins: 'Medusa is about ...'
- If you are working in a group, 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, 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 Medusa relates to your chosen statement.

#### **Medusa is about...**

- Never trusting anyone.
- The abusive nature of powerful men.
- The importance of telling your own story.
- The ability to recover from terrible events.
- The importance of being truthful.
- The triumph of good over evil.
- The complexity of human relationships.
- The curse of beauty.



## Exploring the book further

Use one or more of these tasks to explore *Medusa* further.

### Other characters

The novel is told through the voice of Medusa and her thoughts and memories take up most of the narrative.

Write two or three sentences in the voices of 3-4 of these characters, expressing their thoughts and feelings about Medusa.

- Perseus
- Athena
- One of the snakes. E.g. Artemis, Echo, Callisto, Daphne
- Stheno
- Euryale
- Argentus

**Spend 10-15 minutes on this activity.**

### An adaptation

The story of Medusa has been told by many different writers in many different ways. There are significant differences in the way Jessie Burton has chosen to tell the story compared to most other versions, as set out in the box below.

- Talk or think about why Jessie Burton might have chosen to make these significant changes.
- Write a few sentences as Jessie Burton, explaining some of your thinking.

In most versions	In Jessie Burton's adaptation
Perseus cuts off Medusa's head	Medusa turns Perseus to stone
Medusa's head is placed in the centre of Athena's shield: looking at it turns men to stone	Medusa places Perseus's statue on a cliff top, looking out to sea
The story is not told from Medusa's perspective	Medusa tells her own story
No blame is attached to Poseidon's actions – he is acting as a god, wronged by a wilful girl	It's clear that Poseidon is guilty of sexually assaulting Medusa
Perseus triumphs and goes on to live the life of a hero	Perseus dies

**Spend 10-15 minutes on this activity.**

### **A feminist novel**

Discuss or write a few sentences about these three statements, each of which is about *Medusa* as a feminist novel – in other words, a novel that directly addresses the historical oppression, silencing and abuse of women and actively seeks to change this.

- *Medusa* is a powerful portrayal of what happens when victims of abuse do not let themselves be defined by what has happened to them.
- *Medusa* clearly shows that any relationship has to be on equal terms if it is to be meaningful.
- *Medusa* explores the terrible consequences of judging women primarily on their appearance.

**Spend 15-20 minutes on this activity.**

### **The illustrated novel**

You can attempt this activity if you have read the version of the novel that is illustrated by Olivia Lomenech Gill.

- Flick through your copy of the book and pause when you come across a picture that you like or find particularly interesting. Write down a few words or phrases that come to mind when you look at this picture.
- Use your words and phrases as a starting point for a piece of writing in the voice of the publisher of the book. You want to nominate *Medusa* for an award for 'Best Book Illustrations of the Year'. Write a few paragraphs for the award's judges, explaining why you think *Medusa* should win.

**Spend 15-20 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.
- If possible, share your reviews with a group.

Submit your reviews to the Carnegie Shadowing Scheme website. This can be accessed at:  
[https://yotocarnegies.co.uk/?post\\_type=books&p=12668](https://yotocarnegies.co.uk/?post_type=books&p=12668)

**Give yourself 30-60 minutes to complete this activity.**

A. Really enjoyed Jessie Burton's take on this myth, especially the sisterly bond. It has the overhanging sense of dread throughout when you know it's not going to go as hoped, the foreboding really shone through. But piecing Medusa's story together through the course of this book, a story fractured by monstrous myths, proved to be at once satisfying and heartbreaking.

**Ashleigh, [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com)**

B. Wow this book is another in a Medusa mythology retelling and it was needed! This tells Medusa's story and gives her a voice which very few mythology tellings give notice to.

Most importantly this book looks at self-acceptance, accepting and owning who you are despite very dark periods and your mistakes. This made me love Medusa even more and was just so wholesome and happy to read these parts.

**Lucy, [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com)**

C. [A] beguiling, lyrical, but also relatable retelling of the myth of Medusa ... [that] reclaims her both as an ordinary teenage girl who was exploited, brutalised then punished and also as a feminist icon who refuses to be a victim when she can be a proud survivor ... Medusa is a must read for women of all ages

**Red magazine**

D. This is an interesting story, well told, but I do wonder about changing a Greek myth to this extent. In the original Perseus kills Medusa by chopping off her head. Yet in this version, Perseus turns to stone when he looks at Medusa. This is going to be very misleading for young people. How will they know what the real story is?

**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 *Medusa* further.

***You will need 30-60 minutes for each activity.***

- Write a diary entry in the voice of Perseus, based on his first encounter with Medusa (or Merina, as she calls herself at this point).
- Rewrite part of the story from the perspective of one of the snakes.
- In the voice of Jessie Burton, write a blog entry with the title: 'Why I wanted to tell this story.'
- Select words and phrases that you particularly like from different parts of the novel. Use these as the inspiration for a poem about Medusa.