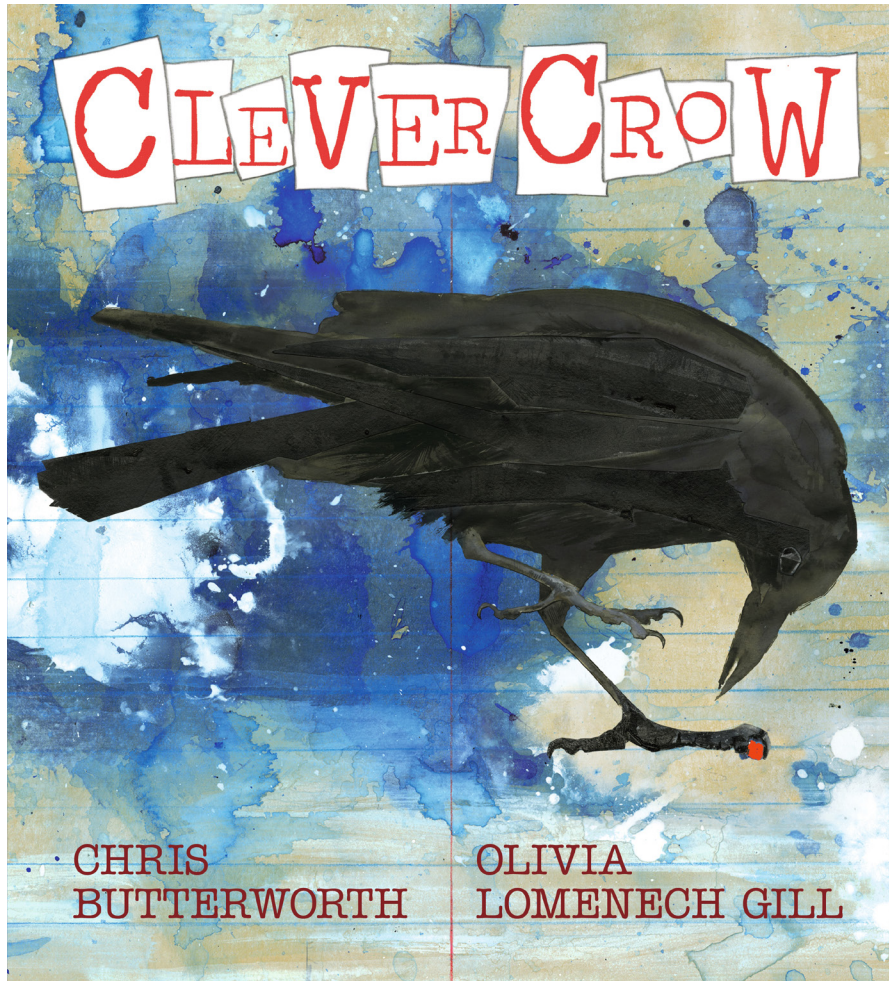


# The Carnegies



## The Carnegie Shortlist 2025 Shadowing Resources



# Teaching Ideas for the Carnegie Medal for Illustration Shortlist 2025

**Title: Clever Crow**

**Illustrator: Olivia Lomenech Gill**

**Author: Chris Butterworth**

**Publisher: Walker Books**

These notes have been written by the teachers at the CLPE to provide schools and settings with ideas to develop comprehension and extended provision around the Carnegie-shortlisted picturebooks and illustrated texts for children of all ages. They build on our work supporting teachers to use high quality texts to enhance critical thinking and develop creative approaches in art and writing. We hope you find them useful.

This book is particularly suitable for children aged 5–11.

## Introduction:

- *Clever Crow* is the only non-fiction title on this year's shortlist, a wonderful example of how it is not only in fiction that text and pictures can combine to offer an extremely stimulating, satisfying and enjoyable reading experience. It provides rich opportunities to explore how Olivia Lomenech Gill's illustrations go beyond the text to show why a bird we think we may know "may not be graceful to look at, or lovely to listen to" yet rewards the close and careful observation Olivia has clearly undertaken.

## Reading the book and close reading of illustration:

- Begin by looking together at the front cover illustration, inviting the children to share their first impressions. *What kind of bird is this and what do you think you know about it? What does it seem to be doing and where might it be? What kind of book do you think this will be? What makes you think that? How does the title fit with what the bird is doing or what you think you already know?*
- Turn to the front endpapers (and after reading, don't forget to visit the back endpapers to see the adult birds that hatch from these eggs!). *What do you notice about the illustrations on these pages? Why do you think Olivia might have chosen to open the book with this image, why might this be an effective way to introduce this book? Children might observe the great beauty and variation across the eggs and begin to think that although not all are called crows, these eggs are where all corvids begin. Share the bird's eye view of the nest on the title page: *What do you notice about the nest, how does this support what you may already be thinking about the book and its subject? From where are we placed as the reader here? What affect does this have?**
- Read and explore the first spread. *What do you learn about crows and where they live? How does Olivia's illustration convey how widespread they are - and how resourceful?*

Children might recognise features of different cities — the Eiffel tower of Paris, the pyramids outside Cairo, minarets and domes, tower blocks and gardens — but decide this is a composite designed to show each and every (or **any**) city. *Why do you think she has shown the crow perched on the waste bin, what might this tell you about its behaviour and relationship to humans?*

- Share the next two spreads. *What more do you learn about crows, from the text and from Olivia's illustrations?* Encourage the children to be detectives, looking forensically at every detail for clues she might be offering to the bird's behaviour or character: every mark made is intentional. *What does the close-up of nest-building in the treetops show you about the communities they build? How does the wide shot farm scene suggest how crows live alongside Man?* Throughout the book, invite the children to reflect on why Walker might have commissioned Olivia to illustrate the book, where a publisher might once have used photographs: *what do Olivia's illustrations add to the reading experience?*
- After reading the next three spreads, about plumage, flight and song, discuss: *what do you think the author and illustrator want you to think about crows from the rather dismissive account they offer of how these birds look, fly and call?* Children might comment on even the flash of colour on the jay being the exception; or how their "steady flap" across the whitewashed background is shown as somehow sketchy or unfinished; or how the "Caw!" they make doesn't even sit on the lines of the page against which it is drawn. *If crows are as unexceptional as Olivia's illustrations suggest, why do you think we should be interested?*
- Read and respond to the rest of the book, as we discover just how social, "smart, clever, crafty and playful" crows are, how deserving of our interest. Encourage the children to scrutinise each illustration and discuss every detail, and consider why Olivia might have chosen her focus. For example, not just the close-up of the head and its skull facing, but the background of a whitewashed found paper; the roly-poly tumble down the roof, where — as in the previous spread — newspapers are used; or the crow padding through ink across the page they may recognise from the cover. Continue to reflect together on the different methods she uses throughout to communicate information to the reader about crows, how she shows their intelligence and collaboration and captures their personality.

## Engaging in illustration:

- Olivia Lomenech Gill has a highly distinctive style, strongly influenced by her background in fine art. Children may know her from her work on Michael and Clare Morpurgo's *Where My Wellies Take Me*, shortlisted for the Greenaway Medal in 2014; on Jessie Burton's *Medusa*, shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal for Writing in 2023; or on J.K. Rowling's *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*.
- Many spreads have the flavour of a sketchbook, from the painted and found papers used as backdrops or collaged into mixed media scenes; the sketched wing outlines visible beyond the birds in flight; or the subdued palette of greys, browns, greens and of course black. Invite the children to consider and speculate about the materials she uses. *What can you see in the spreads that gives a sense of the different media used?* You might visit Olivia's website to gain further insights into her process.

- For further inspiration you might share sketchbooks and examples of observational drawing by other illustrators, such as previous nominees Mini Grey or Beth Waters, or scientists such as Mary Anning. Then give each child access to sheets of cartridge paper or found papers, to which they could apply a wash, as well as a range of drawing pencils, coloured pencils and/or watercolours that mirror the materials used in *Clever Crow*.
- Decide where to engage in some observational drawing with the class. You could go outside and find leaves, twigs, or small objects to draw. Alternatively, you might stay in the classroom and provide small objects already gathered. If children are interested in drawing birds you can provide photographic references to draw from. Explain and demonstrate that observational drawing is all about looking as carefully as possible. Encourage the children to try to see the shapes, patterns, perspective and shadows, and how each of these interact. Explain that they might produce a series of short sketches quite quickly before spending time on a more detailed drawing. Once they have a drawing they like, they could add a little colour using pencil or watercolour.
- Afterwards, reflect on the work together. *What did they like about drawing in this way? Were there any challenges in drawing like this? What were these and how could you overcome them?*

**This sequence of activities was designed in partnership with CLPE, a UK-based children’s literacy charity working with primary schools to raise the achievement of children’s reading and writing by helping schools to teach literacy creatively and effectively, putting quality children’s books at the heart of all learning. Find out more about their work, and access further resources and training at [www.clpe.org.uk](http://www.clpe.org.uk).**



# Carnegies Shadowing Resources 2025

These resources have been created by the following YLG librarian representatives: Alison Brumwell, Maura Farrelly, Kelly Greenwood, Mary-Rose Grieve, Margaret Griffin, Cassie Hands, Tanja Jennings, Jenny Jones, Ellen Krajewski, Ruth Keys, Alison King and Lizzie Ryder.

## General Ideas for all books

1. Take some time to look at the judge's criteria for the Carnegie Medal for Writing and for Illustration. Pick out one or two points and discuss them with one of this year's shortlisted books in mind. Remember, not every criteria will be relevant for every book!
2. Document your journey through the 2025 Shadowing period either on paper or in a shared digital space. You can record the books discussed and activities undertaken in each session, as well as offer a creative platform for reviews, reflection, artwork and anything else you might like to add.
3. Choose a character from one of the shortlisted books and reinvent them in the art style of your choosing. You could create your character digitally, draw them by hand, paint them or even make a sculpture. You could try creating the same character in a variety of styles - Manga, Pop Art, Disney - using different materials.
4. 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 BookTok style pitch to sell the book to a viewer, or a more traditional thematic video.
5. Redesign the front cover or endpapers of one of the shortlisted titles. Compare yours to the original. What makes it different? Why did you make these changes?
6. Choose one of the books and reflect on the themes it presents. Could any of these themes be considered an issue of social justice? Which resonates with you most strongly? Create a leaflet or flyer highlighting one of the issues and the ways people can help, as individuals and collectively.
7. Celebrate the shortlisted books with themed food. You could bring in snacks that are inspired by the locations or cultures featured in the books, or choose foods that link to themes, illustrations or a particular character or event.
8. Recommend one of the shortlisted books using just three words. You could write these on sticky notes to put inside the book's jacket for others to find, or create a display for other readers to add to on a noticeboard, clothing line or bunting.
9. Use a jar or shoebox to create a 'book in a box' or diorama. Your box or jar should include key items which reflect the themes, plot, characters and mood of the book.
10. Host your own judging meeting where you decide which book your Shadowing group thinks is the best. Think about why you are voting for the book, link back to the judging criteria where you can and make sure the process is democratic.

## Clever Crow by Olivia Lomenech Gill

1. The first double-page spread, and the back cover, of *Clever Crow* features a cityscape with some well-known and iconic buildings. How many can you identify? Choose one and create a mini-fact file. Why do you think Olivia Lomenech Gill chooses to depict an urban background in this way and what effect does the perspective have on you visually as a reader?
2. The back endpapers depict 18 different species of crow. Choose one and find out a bit more about its habitat and key characteristics.
3. Take a walk around your neighbourhood and see if you can capture crow activity, either on paper or by filming on your phone. Where do crows tend to gather? How do they interact with other birds? What sorts of things do they eat? For more prompts/ideas, take a look at the Crow Notebook at the back of *Clever Crow*.
4. In many of Olivia Lomenech Gill's illustrations black and shades of grey predominate, but she occasionally uses vibrant colour (red, yellow, cobalt blue) for contrast in *Clever Crow*. Discuss what impact this has on the reader by looking at one spread of your choosing.
5. Examine the detailed crow's nest illustration on the title page of *Clever Crow*. Can you make your own facsimile nest from small, everyday objects? You can use twigs (soak them first so they bend more easily), newspaper or a shallow container, like a plastic bowl, as the base and then add "collectibles". Share your creations on social media using the hashtag #Carnegies2025
6. Newspaper images and lined foolscap are used very effectively in *Clever Crow* as a background. Make a collage of your own by gluing newspaper or lined paper onto card, then add your own details. Think carefully about colour, contrast and texture when you are creating your collage.
7. Other animals are represented in *Clever Crow*, apart from members of the corvid family (i.e. farm animals, insects). Why do you think Olivia Lomenech Gill has chosen not to represent people in her illustrations? What difference (positive/negative) do you think this makes to the reader?
8. Crows and ravens feature in many myths and legends, including North American creation myths and even the Bible. Do some research into one and share this with your Shadowing group.
9. Write a short story, poem or comic strip about a clever crow of your own creation. Give your crow a name and explain its background to your group.
10. What other creatures are known to be 'clever'? Create a display in your library or classroom showcasing nature's cleverest creatures.