

The Carnegies



The Carnegie Shortlist 2025 Shadowing Resources

Glasgow Boys

Margaret McDonald

Content warning: strong language, violence, mentions of drug taking and child abuse, attempted suicide, PTSD, panic attacks, chronic illness, abandonment, depression, self-harm, hate.

About these resources

All of these resources are designed to be completed in small discussion groups, ideally your school's Carnegie Shadowing Group. However, they can easily be done individually. 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 Glasgow Boys 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?

1. When they turn to each other in the middle of the night, they whisper to keep quiet. They twist on to their sides and face one another at either end of the room, muffling their words into the pillows. They put a hand on the wooden dresser that sits between their beds. The room is small enough that this is the only thing that separates them. It's their way of touching each other without having to touch each other.

2. No matter how much time passes, Banjo can't see his parents as bad parents. As bad people. It's a psychological thing. Comfort is in the familiar, even though Banjo's never known anything that could be described as comforting. He's wired all wrong.

3. Finlay watches him all night. He realises they're two foreigners in this world. Two people who have nothing. They've travelled without ever knowing a place, they're men inside children's bodies, they're soldiers who have no awareness of war and yet understand its horrors. But they've found one another across the bloody barracks. Not even a lover could care the way Finlay does.

4. "I wanted to be a nurse so I'd have proof I'd be a good person."

5. Because he understands now. The minute he was born, the second his lungs breathed, he wanted this tender love. He wanted someone to come along and adore him, and he wanted to adore them in return.

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 Faber and Faber edition of the book, first published in the UK in 2024.

Read to the end of page 15

- What are your first impressions of Banjo and Finlay? What are their similarities and differences in terms of circumstances and personalities?

Read to the end of page 60

- What do you like or find interesting so far about the different narratives – Banjo's and Finlay's?
- What's been revealed so far about Banjo and Finlay's past lives? What do you think will be revealed as you read on?
- How many different characters can you remember from the book so far, apart from Banjo and Finlay? What different roles do you think they will play in the novel?

Read to the end of page 118

- What is the experience of Banjo and Finlay of living in care? How is it presented in the book?
- How are the lives of Banjo and Finlay developing up to this point? What is positive about their recent experiences? What aspects of their past lives seem to be troubling them?
- Occasionally the narrative takes the reader three years back into the past. Why do

you think it does this? How do you expect this narrative strand to continue?

Read to the end of page 186

- What parts of the novel up to this point explore issues around violence and self-control? How are violence and self-control presented?
- Up to this point the novel offers several examples of people living in ways that bring them happiness. What examples can you think of? What do you think the book is saying about how people should try and live their lives and about why people sometimes behave in ways that lead to unhappiness – in themselves and in others?

Read to the end of page 238

- Lots of the novel is about Banjo and Finlay avoiding emotional attachments. How is this avoidance presented? What are your thoughts about the relationships between Banjo and Alena, and Finlay and Akesh that develop in this section? What are the similarities and differences in these two relationships?

Read to the end of page 286

- What are your thoughts about Banjo's reaction to finding out that Finlay is gay? How is this presented in the novel?
- How is Finlay's suicide attempt presented? What are your thoughts about this part of the novel?
- What's revealed about Banjo's past life in this section? How effectively does this explain his current behaviour?
- What are Banjo and Finlay's lives like at this point in the novel? What do you think will happen in the final parts of the novel, both in terms of their relationship with each other and their relationships with other people?

Read to the end of the book

- What are your thoughts about how Banjo and Alena's relationship is presented in this section?
- What are your thoughts about how Finlay and Ashak's relationship is presented in this section?
- What are your thoughts about how Banjo and Finlay meeting up again is presented?
- What are your thoughts about the way the novel ended?

After Reading

Initial Thoughts

Spend 10-15 minutes discussing 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 *Glasgow Boys*, how likely are you to read other novels by Margaret McDonald?

What's *Glasgow Boys* about?

- Spend one or two minutes writing down a single sentence that begins: '*Glasgow Boys* 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 ordering 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 *Glasgow Boys* relates to your chosen statement.

Glasgow Boys is about ...

- How childhood trauma can shape behaviour
- The importance of human contact – both physical and emotional
- The importance of being open and sharing
- How there is more good in people than bad
- The importance of friendship
- How love can help people rebuild their lives
- The importance of giving people a second chance

Exploring the novel further

Other characters

The novel focuses mainly on Banjo and Finlay. There are lots of other characters who play a significant role in the novel.

- Write two or three sentences in the voices of 3-4 of these characters, expressing their thoughts and feelings about Banjo or Finlay.
 - Alena
 - Akash
 - Paula
 - Rhonda
 - Derya
 - Kyle
 - Devlin
 - Carlos

Spend 15-20 minutes on this activity.

Evaluating *Glasgow Boys*

- Imagine that you work for an examination board that is exploring possible new novels to add to its GCSE syllabus. *Glasgow Boys* has come up for consideration and you have been asked to write a short report about its suitability. Your report needs to be completed in the form of a grid like the one below.

Aspect to evaluate	Mark of 10 in terms of suitability for GCSE study	Comments justifying mark
Quality of the writing		
Quality of the narrative		
Suitability for GCSE study		
Appeal to GCSE students		

Spend 20-30 minutes on this activity.

Reading the reviews

The extracts, below, are all from reviews of *Glasgow Boys*.

- Read all the reviews and discuss which comes closest to your own view of the book.
- Working individually, write your own paragraph expressing your views.
- If possible, share your reviews with others.

You can submit your reviews to the Carnegie Shadowing Scheme website. This can be accessed at: <https://carnegies.co.uk/books/glasgow-boys/>

Give yourself 30-60 minutes to complete this activity.

A.

Be aware this is not a romance. Yeah, there are love interests, but falling in love is not the main theme. *Glasgow Boys* is about love though. It's about finding your place in the world, finding your people, and, most of all, finding yourself and loving yourself for who you are.

The writing and the story are quite unique and it's difficult to compare this beautiful story to any other YA book. But if I had to, I'd choose *When You Call my Name*. A completely different story but somehow those two books both brought up the same feelings in me.

The last page of *Glasgow Boys* gave me goosebumps. Of happiness. And a part of me now longs for a sequel to follow those two boys into adulthood and see their dreams come true.

Marieke, www.goodreads.com

B.

I really connected with Finlay's anxiety and I think everyone has met someone from Glasgow who is a bit like Banjo!

I loved the slow build-up to the ending. A conversation years in the making, that was absolute perfection. It truly showed the magic in being vulnerable, open, and honest with the people you love. I just wish they were braver to do it earlier.

Hannah stressedreader, www.goodreads.com

C.

This is a stunning debut novel that is so tender, so beautifully crafted with such a strong story that I'm still thinking about it a week later! The boys absolutely pop off the page and I was rooting for both of them to survive and thrive and was willing all those around them to see their true potential to love. As a teacher, as a mum of a teenage boy, as a Glaswegian and ex Glasgow Uni student I found something to think about, cry about and smile about. An absolute must read, it'll be the best hours you spend in another wee world.

Rachel, www.amazon.co.uk

D.

I can definitely see what the author was trying to do with this one and I also completely understand all the rave reviews but personally, I believe that the story would've worked much better if done a different way. I felt like for both protagonists, the instant-love was a bit too on the nose to be believable (as believe as an insta-love can be), so I wasn't that on board with the romance. Moreover, I think the story would've had more of an emotional impact if we followed Banjo and Finlay's relationship more closely. The little flashbacks at the end of the chapter were not enough for me to get a sense of how the deep bond between them was formed and they were not enough for me to care that much about the characters as individuals either.

Catalina, www.goodreads.com

Writing Activities

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

You will need 30-60 minutes for each activity.

A different point of view

Glasgow Boys is told from the perspective of Banjo and Finlay in alternative chapters.

- Write a short chapter based on a part of the novel you found particularly interesting, from the perspective of a different character.

Standing up for *Glasgow Boys*

- Imagine your school has received a complaint from a parent, arguing that the novel is not suitable for school readers because of its adult subject matter. In role as an English teacher, write a response to the parent arguing why you think it is important that students in your school have the opportunity to read the book.

Glasgow Boys in the future

Banjo and Finlay are both on the cusp of adulthood. Banjo is in his final year at school and Finlay has started his nursing degree.

- Write a few paragraphs or a short chapter in the style of *Glasgow Boys* which take the story on five years from where it ended. You can write about Banjo or Finlay.

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.

Glasgow Boys by Margaret McDonald

1. Do you have a friend who feels more like family, like Banjo is to Finlay? Can you think of any other fictional duos who have similar bonds?
2. What did you think when you found out what happened three years ago? Did you think it justified their fall out? Or was it an overreaction? Think it through from both boys' points of view.
3. Different identities are explored in the novel- such as LGBTQ+, children in care or care leavers and those with Crohn's disease. Why is it important that different identities are included in fiction for young people?
4. Banjo speaks with a strong regional Scottish accent and dialect. Do you have a strong accent or know someone who does? Can you do any accents other than your own? Play around with your own accent. Try making it stronger and then weaker. How does it feel? How does it sound? Do people respond to you differently?
5. Finlay and Banjo both start their first jobs in the story. What would you like your first job to be?
6. Rewrite a part of the story as if you are one of the characters writing a diary entry. You could be any character in the story.
7. Alena in *Glasgow Boys* and the author, Margaret McDonald, both suffer from Crohn's Disease. Put together a poster to raise awareness for this condition using your own research. What are common misconceptions about the disease? How can we help others to understand it better?
8. Mr Black is Finlay's worn teddy bear. Did/do you have a childhood teddy like Finlay? Create an artwork depicting Mr Black or your own childhood teddy.
9. Pick your favourite dramatic moment from the story and write your own play script for that scene. Practise and perform it to the rest of the group or share it on social media using the hashtag #Carnegies2025
10. Create your own 'my family is...' piece like Finlay sees in the primary school. You can include family and friends in this and design it however suits you best.