



## The Carnegie Shortlist 2025 Shadowing Resources

# *King of Nothing*

## Nathanael Lessoré

Content warning: references to crime and violence, misogyny, arson, death, anaphylaxis, gang violence, vandalism, domestic violence.

### 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 *King of Nothing* 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. 'Your father is the biggest mistake I ever made, but from that came the one greatest gift I ever received. And you can bet I'll guard that gift with my life. I won't let my baby become a failure. My job is to take care of you.'

2. Out of all the mandem, Kehinde thinks he knows the most about talking to girls. These YouTubers got him gassed up, he thinks he's a MOBO award but he ain't even Eurovision quality, nil points, fam.

3. As I enter the main hall, my world comes crashing down even further. It's worse than I thought. A group of kids are sitting on the floor in the corner. They're silently concentrating on their sewing. Another group are sat around a fold-out table, shouting and squealing while they play cards. One girl is eating asparagus from a little food bag she just took out of her pocket and nobody is calling her out on it.

4. The kids come over, chasing the ball. Caleb reaches it first. With a scowl on his face, he picks it up, calmly walks over to the fence and kicks it over into the street. Kehinde's bare cackling like a Macbeth witch. The kids start protesting, but as soon as me and Marcus stand up, they pipe down and accept the ball is lost.

5. 'Just drop it. Please. I wanna live my life in peace.' This guy won't let me be a lone wolf. Lone wolves aren't besties with fuzzy koala bears, they eat their dinner in peace and pretend they're not on some dead camping trip.

## 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 Hot Key Books edition of the book, first published in the UK in 2024.*

### Read to the end of page 28

- What are your first impressions of Anton and how he tells his story?
- What is the relationship between Anton and his other friends, Kehinde, Caleb and Marcus? What are the differences between the friends, both in terms of their personalities and their circumstances?
- What do you think about the way the boys behaved in the football cage? Do you think this was a one-off incident, or do you think the unnamed boy who stood up to Kehinde will appear again?

### Read to the end of page 60

- What are your thoughts about Anton's behaviour when he first goes to Happy Campers?
- What are your thoughts about Matthew's behaviour at Happy Campers?
- Nathanael Lessore writes novels that combine serious topics with comedy. In what ways is this novel funny so far? How are the lives of the young people presented in order to generate humour?

### Read to the end of page 95

- What are your impressions of Matthew? Are they similar to Anton's impressions? If not, how has the writer managed to create a different picture of Matthew for the reader compared to his narrator – after all everything we read in the book comes from Anton?

**Read to the end of page 147**

- How was the camping trip presented?
- How has Anton changed since the start of the novel? What has driven that change?
- What role do you think Anton's father will play in the rest of the novel, if any?
- How do you think Anton and Matthew's relationship will develop now the camping trip is over?

**Read to the end of page 184**

- In what ways is Matthew's influence helping to change Anton? In what ways is Matthew changing? Who do you think needs to change the most and why?
- What does the book have to say about feminism? Why do you think it introduces ideas about feminism when it is a book mainly about boys?
- How does the book present Kehinde? Does the way he is presented allow the reader to feel any sympathy for him?
- At the end of this section, Anton's dad contacts him. What do you think Anton should do?

**Read to the end of page 240**

- What are your thoughts about Anton's meeting with his father? What do you think the book has to say about parents in general and their impact on the lives of their children?
- What do you think will happen in the rest of the book? You might like to think about Anton's relationships with: his mum, Kehinde, Matthew, Rochelle.

**Read to the end of the book**

- What emotional events are presented in this section? How well are they presented by the writer?
- What are your thoughts about the ending? Was everything tied up in a way that you found satisfying? Would you have preferred anything to be different?

# 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 *King of Nothing*, how likely are you to read other novels by Nathanael Lessoré?

## What's *King of Nothing* about?

- Spend one or two minutes writing down a single sentence that begins: '*King of Nothing* 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 *King of Nothing* relates to your chosen statement.

## *King of Nothing* is about ...

- Finding your own path
- Resisting peer pressure
- True friendship
- How hard it is to make the right choices
- How you are shaped by your family background
- Being respectful of difference
- The importance of community
- Standing up for what you know is right
- The importance of working hard

# Exploring the novel further

## Other characters

The novel is narrated by Anton, who is also the main character. There are several 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 Anton.
  - Marcus
  - Kehinde
  - Caleb
  - Anton's mum
  - Anton's nanna
  - Anton's dad
  - Mr Young
  - Mr Wall
  - Rochelle
  - Joshua Nikos
  - Matthew

Spend 15-20 minutes on this activity.

## Evaluating *The King of Nothing*

- Complete the following grid to help you evaluate *The King of Nothing*. Do this on your own then, if possible, compare what you have written with other readers.

Qualities of a good novel	Marks out of 10 for <i>King of Nothing</i> , plus comments
Gripping narrative	
Engaging characters	
Makes you think	
Original story	
Quality writing	
Great twists	
Tension and suspense	
Cleverly structured	
Emotionally powerful	

- Drawing on your grid, write a blog aimed at readers your age, trying to convince them to give *King of Nothing* a go. The blog should be called 'Five reasons *King of Nothing* is King of Novels'.

Spend 20-30 minutes on this activity.

### Reading the reviews

The extracts, below, are all from reviews of *King of Nothing*.

- 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/king-of-nothing/>

Give yourself 30-60 minutes to complete this activity.

A.

King of Nothing by Nathanael Lessore is a sharp, funny, and heartfelt coming-of-age story about reputation, friendship, and self-discovery. Anton, the self-proclaimed ruler of Year 9, enjoys his feared status until his mum forces him to join the Happy Campers, an activity group filled with “losers”—including Matthew, the least popular kid in school. But when Matthew unexpectedly saves Anton’s life, an unlikely friendship forms, forcing Anton to rethink what truly matters.

With witty dialogue and relatable characters, this novel blends humour with deeper themes of growth and identity.

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

B.

I have never laughed and cried so vivaciously at a book. Anton is a brilliantly written character and his development in the book is beautifully orchestrated. I was recommended it by a friend and I’m so happy I chose to read it! One of the best books I’ve read this year and I truly couldn’t recommend it more.

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

C.

I work in a secondary school and the year 7 students are reading this as part of their library lessons, so I thought I would give it a try so I could talk to them about it.

The characters are well developed and realistic. It is written exactly how gangsta teens speak - which I actually found annoying to start, but as I got further into the book I got more used to it and it seemed right for the character, Anton.

It’s a typical ‘change for the better’ story but with sweet morals and messages. Matthew is really over the top and the author is pushing stereotypes quite a lot which can seem a bit too much, but he’s still likeable.

I actually enjoyed it a lot more than I expected.

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

D.

I’m clearly in the minority here but that didn’t work for me at all. I didn’t laugh once, I didn’t like the writing and the characters annoyed me to no end.

I know the main character is supposed to be going through huge character development but I just didn’t care. And all the sexist crap his friend spewed, I really could not. I ended up skimming through most of the book and what I saw didn’t change my mind.

Maybe I just didn’t get it, but this really wasn’t for me.

Manon the Malicious, [www.goodreads.com](http://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 *King of Nothing* further.

You will need 30-60 minutes for each activity.

- Write a journal entry in the voice of Matthew about the opening of the centre at St Luke's.
- Imagine Anton has just finished Year 11 at school. Write a report by his headteacher, Mr Wall, about Anton, reflecting on his time at school.
- Write the dialogue for a conversation between Rochelle and Fernanda about Anton, to take place just after the end of the novel.

# 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.

## King of Nothing by Nathanael Lessor

1. Does your school have a group like Anton and his friends who rule the school? Do you belong to a large friendship group or are you more comfortable with one or two close friends? What are the advantages and disadvantages of both?
2. Think about your family and your friendship group. Who is the most embarrassing person you know? What is it about them that makes you feel this way? Can you think of a time when you did something embarrassing? How did you deal with it?
3. Do any of you belong to a hobby or activity inside or outside of school, like Anton and the Happy Campers? Is there a skill you can teach others? In pairs or groups, research three activities you have never tried before. Review your findings and choose one to try out together.
4. The author uses slang and colloquial language to help the reader get inside Anton's head. How do you think this helps the reader? Do you notice anything else about the language in the book and how it helps to convey humour and feeling?
5. Do you think Anton's school and mum have been fair with how they have managed his/his friends' behaviour? Do you think that their punishments worked? How would they be treated in your school? How would your family react if you were Anton?
6. Has anyone been camping or had a go at outdoor activities like those the *Happy Campers* do? If you can, hold one of your Shadowing group meetings outside and enjoy the nature around you. You could run a treasure hunt, create a nature trail or share extracts of the book in different outdoor locations.
7. Anton and Matthew's friendship is unlikely and surprising. Have you ever had a friendship like this with someone unexpected? Can you think of any other unexpected friendships in books?
8. What does the word 'misogyny' mean to you? Where can you see it explored in the story and what messages are being communicated? Think about Anton's friends and their attitudes towards women, and compare this with Anton's attitude towards his mum and grandmother.
9. Anton is on a journey of personal growth in *King of Nothing*. Plot how his behaviour and character changes as the story progresses. You could create a story map for this as a group and discuss the turning points in his development.
10. Despite its themes, there are some very funny and awkward moments in this story. Authors often do this to create 'comic relief'- what is this and how does Nathanael Lessor do this with *King of Nothing*?
11. Pick a favourite funny moment from *King of Nothing* or from your own experiences, and act it out to the group. You could have judges and rate the moments out of ten for 'cringe factor'. The winner could be crown the 'King/Queen/Ruler of Nothing'. Share your performances on social media using the hashtag #Carnegies2025