



## The Carnegie Shortlist 2025 Shadowing Resources

# Little Bang

## Kelly McCaughrain

Content warning: teenage pregnancy, references to sex, abortion, strong language, panic attacks, religious differences.

### 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 *Little Bang* 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. No way I'm spending tonight at a karaoke party with a load of old people asking what I want to do at university, then looking pityingly at Lucille when I say I'm not going to university – I'm starting a band.

2. I can't concentrate, and it's nothing to do with the cheesy quasi-religious pop music playing by my ear. It's not even to do with Smug Nigel, who I'm used to. It's because it's eight p.m. on the very last night of the year, and I am *at the wrong party*.

3. The buzz in my head

The buzz in my skin

From the things you said

From the way you leaned in

4. Here it is then. The future. Just before midnight the rain stops. The clouds stretch thin and glow like torches under bedclothes. When they part we're lit by moonlight

and everyone goes, ooooooh. Mel smiles up at the sky, like she's fully aware of this mad, cosmic ride that the rest of us don't even know we're on.

5. She looks at me like I'm exactly the same as last time she saw me, while every molecule in my body is yelling 'I'm not her! Your real daughter is gone! She's in a parallel universe and you will never see her again!'

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

### Read to the end of page 27

- What are your initial impressions of Sid and Mel? How are they different? What is distinctive about them? How do you think they will interact after they meet on Carnclare Hill at the end of the chapter?
- How do their narrative voices differ within the chapter? What does this tell you about them?
- What are Sid and Mel's parents like? What roles do you think they will play going forward? How will they affect Sid and Mel's relationship?
- Why do you think McCaughrain chooses to begin the novel on New Year's Eve?
- What particularly interests you about the book so far? How do you think it will develop in the next few sections?

### Read to the end of page 77

- Have Sid and Mel changed since the first chapter? How has their relationship developed? How do you think the confirmation of Mel's pregnancy will affect it?
- What else have you learnt about their families?
- Why do you think McCaughrain seems to be emphasising the theme of time?
- At this point in the novel, McCaughrain has introduced the topic of abortion and its being illegal in Ireland at the time. Now that Mel is pregnant, how do you think she will feel about this law, particularly within the context of her religious family?
- Do you think Sid and Mel's opposing ambitions and prospects for the future will clash at some point in the novel?

- How has teenage life been presented so far? Do you think the tone of the book will shift somewhat in light of the serious dilemma now on Sid and Mel's hands?

**Read to the end of page 154**

- What are the emotional states of Sid and Mel now? How have they been dealing with the pregnancy? Do their reactions match what you expected?
- How does having two narrative voices help your insight into the characters' thoughts and feelings? What do their increasingly different frames of mind tell us about the nature of pregnancy?
- How is Leah's character used to contrast Mel?
- What does Mel's conversation with Lucille reveal about motherhood and abortion?
- What do Mel's 'conversations' with 'Little Bang' tell us about female body autonomy?
- How do you feel about the parents' involvement so far?

**Read to the end of page 201**

- What is the state of Sid and Mel's relationship now? How have their lives and mental states changed since the last section?
- What role has Cassie played since her introduction? What do you think will happen between her and Sid?
- Why do you think the writer chooses to play up Becca's apparent insensitivity to Mel's situation? What is she trying to say by this contrast?
- With Sid's music career showing signs of promise, where do you think this will leave Mel? Do you think Sid will stay true to his word?

**Read to the end of page 226**

- What do you think of the contrast between narrative voices at this point in the novel? What does it say about each character? What does it say about pregnancy more broadly?
- Can you describe the emotions going through Mel's head, especially after she was bullied at school and argued with Sid? Where do you think this is leading? Has your impression of Sid changed?
- What do you think of Mel's panic attack and conversation with Lucille? How do you feel about Lucille's advice and the relationship they have developed?
- In light of their conversation and Mel's new-found clarity, do you think Mel will go through with an abortion?

**Read to the end of page 252**

- At last Mel has been able to decide what she wants for herself – why do you think this has taken so long? How have other people influenced her?
- How does McCaughrain present the abortion process?
- Think back to the first few chapters – how has the tone of the novel changed?
- How do you feel about Sid's reaction to Lucille suggesting that Mel might have disappeared to have an abortion? Do you think he is at all justified in his reaction? What does it say about him?
- How do you feel about Sid seeming to prioritise his gig and Cassie over Mel?
- What do you think about Mel's newfound stability in her conversation/argument with Sid? Where do you think their relationship will go now? How do you think Mel will deal with this going forward?

**Read to the end of the novel**

- How have Mel's parents reacted to her abortion?
- How was the abortion procedure for Mel? How has she dealt with it?
- How do you feel about the reactions of both students and teachers at Mel's school? Why do you think they feel sorry for Sid and hate Mel for 'what she did'?
- How do you feel about Sid's character now that you have reached the end of the novel?
- How has McCaughrain used the referendum on abortion in Ireland throughout the novel to reflect Mel's situation?
- Lastly, what do you think of the ending – the final conversation between Sid and Mel on Carnclare Hill? How does it link back to the beginning, and how does it look ahead to the future? What do you foresee for Sid and Mel – how have they learnt, grown or changed from this experience?

## 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 *Little Bang*, how likely are you to read other novels by Kelly McCaughrain?

### What's *Little Bang* about?

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

### *Little Bang* is about ...

- Complex relationships with parents
- The consequences of your actions
- How pregnancy is experienced differently by men and women
- How the opinions of others can cloud your judgement
- The abortion debate
- Women's right to decide what to do with their bodies
- How society views motherhood and pregnancy

- How difficult it can be to make the decision that's right for you
- The importance of sex education in schools

## Exploring the collection further

### The main characters

The novel is told in the voices of Sid and Mel.

- Discuss what is distinctive about each of their voices? How do they use language differently? How are their personalities reflected in their voices?
- Try to write two or three sentences in the voices of these characters, expressing their thoughts and feelings about *Little Bang*. Read out your examples to the other members of your group and see if you can identify each other's attempts at replicating the different voices.

Spend 15-20 minutes on this activity.

### Parents and friends

Sid and Mel's parents and friends (Cassie and Becca) all play significant roles in the main characters' lives. Write a few paragraphs exploring these questions:

- How are the different parents presented in the novel and what do you think of them?
- How do Cassie and Becca influence Sid and Mel?
- What do you think the novel as a whole is suggesting about the roles of parents and friends in the lives of young people?
- When you have finished, share your writing with others.

Spend 20-30 minutes on this activity.

### Time travel

Throughout the book, Mel is thinking about the nature of time as she tries to write her essay for her Cambridge University application. She and Sid also discuss ideas about time travel and parallel universes.

- Discuss why McCaughrain refers to these ideas in the novel. Use the statements, below, to help you to get your discussion started if you wish:
  - A. The extracts from Mel's essay show what a waste it would be if she didn't go to university.

- B. Mel and Sid express their anxieties in wishful thinking about time travel and parallel universes.
- C. Mel's academic intelligence is not useful for solving this very real and practical problem.
- D. McCaughrain uses ideas about time to bring home important points in the book. For example, in referring to Schrödinger's cat when they are waiting to look at the pregnancy test.

Spend 20-30 minutes on this activity.

## Reading the reviews

The extracts, below, are all from reviews of *Little Bang*.

- 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/little-bang/>

Give yourself 30-60 minutes to complete this activity.

A. This book highlights how important access to abortion is, as well as proper sex education which we really fall behind on in Ireland. It reads very young/teenagey, which is great because I think it makes the book accessible to younger people, and also further highlights how young and naive the characters are in the book.

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

B. Mel and Sid could not be more different and the dual POV really added to the reading experience. I really enjoyed being simultaneously in both characters heads at the same time.

This book really does not shy away from the details and I really appreciated that, it's shocking that Mel had such difficulty accessing information to make her decision in such recent times. For me this book also really highlighted the differences faced by both females/males and how they experience and are treated during pregnancy.

becks\_andthebooks, [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com)

C. Ultimately, given the fact this is now a historical novel – set in the years leading up to the 2019 law change – this is not fully about abortion. It is about watching a girl gain (or



simply prove) the strength of character that should be evident in all teens mature enough to have sex (in an ideal world at least). And yet as I say this has to find a way to say everything possible about abortion, and those who are in the position to choose it. The fact it manages that without ever fully entering polemic mode is one minor miracle, as is probably the fact that this, for all its flaws, is still of interest and readable to the end. But this is not a read for everyone, and I don't think ultimately it was enough of a success for me.

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

D. McCaughrain here certainly has her view and she presents it well and emphatically. I don't expect everyone to agree with her conclusions but it must be said that she covers a lot of ground in her arguments and without being too direct for most of the book. It certainly was important reading in my opinion.

Sometimes IRead, [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 *Little Bang* further.

You will need 30-60 minutes for each activity.

- The final chapter sees Sid finally apologise to an at-peace Mel, whose parents eventually make up with her, too. Write a few paragraphs in the voice of Mel or Sid (or both) 8 years later, when they meet again on Carnclaire Hill.
- *Little Bang* handles the heavy topic of abortion not just through its main characters, but its wider context of the vote going on in Ireland. Write a few paragraphs on why you think McCaughrain chose this time period and what she is trying to say on the topic through her characters.
- Think about a moment in your life where things might have gone very differently if you had/hadn't done a particular thing or had/hadn't met a particular person. Write an alternative universe version of this event.

# 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.

## ***Little Bang* by Kelly McCaughrain**

1. Why do you think the book is called 'Little Bang'?
2. What did you think of the ending of *Little Bang*? Did it shock you? Do you think Mel made the right choice? Think about all the people and factors that were involved in her decision. Explore the difference between Pro-Choice and Pro-Life abortion arguments.
3. Mel loves science, particularly quantum physics. Research famous women in science. Create posters showcasing their achievements.
4. On page 15 there is a description of a view of Belfast from a hill. Think about a scenic lookout where you live and write a short description of it. You could turn this into a poem or song, or recreate it in an art form of your choosing. Showcase your work at a talent show or exhibition in school or local community.
5. Sid loves writing song lyrics. In Chapter 18 he writes 'The Indelible Girl' for Cassie. Write your own song or poem for one of the characters in the book.
6. Create a playlist for Mel and/or Sid inspired by the emotions in this story.
7. How many songs can you find about space?
8. The book discusses the legalisation of abortion in Northern Ireland. Look into the historical context and the significance of what happened in 2018. Research this issue within your group and discuss both sides of the argument.
9. Create a solar system for Mel and Sid using papier mache with words describing their personalities on each planet. Share the end result on social media using the hashtag #Carnegies2025
10. Mel and Sid are an unlikely couple. Can you think of any other unlikely couples in books? How did their stories end?