

The Carnegies



The Carnegie Shortlist 2025 Shadowing Resources



The Final Year

Matt Goodfellow

Content warning: some references to drinking, child carers, hospitalisation of sibling, neglect, poverty, alcoholism, bullying.

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 *The Final Year* 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.
that next year will be tough
that we'd better be prepared for it
that it's a stepping stone to high school
that it's time to show what we can do

2.
Turner and PS
got up the top pitch
and start passin a ball about,
like me and PS have done
since we went into the juniors.

3.

see in the New Year by watchin kids
chuckin fireworks about on the street outside,
Dyl's still proper tired
get his teeth cleaned
story
bed

4.

I catch Caleb's kind eyes	but I'm gone, man,
I push back my chair	and the table's turned

5.

This is not a place of labradors and lattes
and electric Audis
this is a place of staffies and cider
and exhaust-pipe smoke

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 Otter-Barry Books edition of the book, first published in the UK in 2023.

Read to the end of page 35

- What are your first impressions of Nate's life? You might like to think about where he lives, his family, his interests, what he's like?
- What are your thoughts about reading a novel in verse like this one? How has the way the novel is written affected your reading so far?

Read to the end of page 65

- Nate and his friend Parker are put in different classes for Year 6. Do you think friends should be allowed to stay together in school, or do you think it is good for them to be separated?
- Do you think 'The Beast' that lurks in Nate is there by chance, or is it something to do with his personal circumstances? How does the book present this?
- What are your first impressions of Mr Joshua? What kind of teacher is he presented as and how can you tell?
- What aspects of school life do you think will be explored in the rest of the book based on what you've just read?

Read to the end of page 90

- Why does Nate like David Almond's books so much? If you've read any, what did you think of them? If you haven't read any, what do you think they're like?
- Dylan does a lot of the caring for Jax and Dylan. How is this presented in the novel?
- What clues are there about why PS's behaviour towards Nate has changed? How do you think their friendship will develop when they are in Year 6?

Read to the end of page 141

- Based on what you've read so far, what kind of student would you say Nate is? What about Caleb?
- What did you notice about Dylan in the pages you've just read? Do you think he'll be a key part of the story moving forward, or will he stay in the background?

Read to the end of page 185

- What are your feelings for Nate during this section? You might like to think about his experience of the Lake District, Christmas and New Year; his friendship with Caleb; his relationship with PS; his time at school; what happens to Dylan.
- What happens on page 185 is unexpected. How do you think this will affect the rest of the novel?

Read to the end of page 233

- What are your thoughts about the pictures in the book? How do they add to the reading experience?
- Look at the full-page image on page 233. What do you think is going on here? Why are there so many references to angel wings in the book? Is there a link to David Almond's book, *Skellig*, in any way?
- If you were Matt Goodfellow, where would you take the book in its final pages?

Read to the end of the novel

- What are your thoughts about how the novel ends? What strands of the book have been tied up, and which left open?
- What was your experience of reading a verse novel? Did the verse form add to your enjoyment of the novel in any way?
- Who do you think the figure who appears at the end of the novel is?

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 *The Final Year*, how likely are you to read other novels by Matt Goodfellow?

What's *The Final Year* about?

- Spend one or two minutes writing down a single sentence that begins: '*The Final Year* 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 collection 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 *The Final Year* relates to your chosen statement.

The Final Year is about ...

- The importance of friendship
- How it is possible to control your anger
- The power of writing
- Putting family above everything else
- How teachers can be inspirational
- Growing up
- How tough life is for some young people
- Putting a brave face on things
- The importance of kindness

Exploring the collection further

Other characters

The novel is told in the voice of Nate. He 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 Nate.
 - Nate's mum
 - Dylan
 - Jax
 - Auntie San
 - Parker Smith (PS)
 - Mr Joshua
 - Turner
 - Caleb

Spend 15-20 minutes on this activity.

Tackling difficult issues

The Final Year tackles several difficult issues relevant to young people's lives.

- Rate how effectively you think the book deals with the issues listed in the chart below, with reasons.

Issue dealt with in the book	How effectively the issue is presented (mark out of 10)	My thoughts about how the issue is presented.
Anger management		
Absent parents + child carers		
Broken friendships		
Bullying		
Illness		

Spend 20-30 minutes on this activity.

Reading the reviews

The extracts, below, are all from reviews of *The Final Year*.

- 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/the-final-year/>

Give yourself 30-60 minutes to complete this activity.

A. This is an extraordinary book - written in free verse, it's plotted like a novel, but was obviously written by a poet. In Matt's hands, the story of Nate, his friends, family and school are involving, real (there are three pages around the middle of the book which will tear your heart out), and beautifully written. Everyone who's ever worked in a school has met children like Nate and teachers like Mr Joshua. The descriptions of the residential trip and SATS preparation ring totally true. It's brilliant. A must-read for Year 6 pupils, and a great book to introduce all kinds of themes - young carers, bullying, friendship, grief, redemption, writing, art - and Skellig. Did I mention it's brilliant? If you have a child in your life aged around 10-11 (especially boys - there don't seem to be any girls in Nate's class), and due to go to secondary school, buy it for them, then read it yourself. You won't regret it.

Adrian Thompson www.amazon.co.uk

B. Highly accessible, lyrical and life affirming, this is must-have novel that will authentically resonate with so many under-represented children and perfectly captures what this crucial transition period feels like. As such, it is a must-read for adults as well as the children who will devour it. It will also resonate with children who have made that transition and perhaps help them with their own feelings, as well as encouraging them to write for themselves.

Joy Court, www.LoveReading4Kids

C. The book has enormous energy and the story moves on at helter-skelter pace, each section of one or two pages topped with a title in bold. Some pages may be full, though with a lot of white space, and some may comprise two or three words. I've chosen to write 'each section' not 'each poem' and you can get a hint of the style from the quote above. I like the style and I think it will appeal to a lot of readers who would not readily pick up a book relating this story if it was written in a conventional prose style.

Trevor Millum, National Association of Teachers of English

D. Maybe it's because I'm not a big fan of verse novels, but *The Final Year* didn't really do it for me. The action moved on too quickly, so I never got a real sense of depth in what the characters were thinking of doing. One minute Nate was starting his final year, the next

he was on a residential in the Lake District, the next he was having to deal with a difficult family situation, then suddenly his final year was over. I was also a bit confused by the references to David Almond and *Skellig*. I haven't read that book or any other by Almond so didn't really know what those bits were about.

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Writing Activities

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

You will need 30-60 minutes for each activity.

Pitching the sequel

The sequel to *The Final Year* is due to be published in 2025. It is called *The First Year* and is about Nate's first year at secondary school.

- Write a letter to Otter-Barry Books, publishers of *The Final Year*, outlining your ideas for *The First Year*. You might like to think about:
 - How Nate gets on in his new school
 - Whether 'the beast' is still with Nate
 - His friendship with PS and Caleb
 - Dylan's health
 - What Jax is up to
 - His mum
 - The mysterious figure who appears at the end of *The Final Year*.

Writing your school year

How would you write about a school year? What would be the highlights and lowlights? Who would you include from friends, family and teaching staff?

- Have a go at writing the opening section to a book about your year. If you are feeling adventurous, you can try to write it in verse, like Matt Goodfellow.

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.

The Final Year by Matt Goodfellow

1. In *The Final Year* Nate gives the reader a very clear idea of what Mr. Joshua is like, not just how he looks, but his attitude and values. What qualities does he have that make him a good role model for Nate and his friends? Can you write a short poem about a teacher you admire/respect?
2. The poem on page 134 entitled "Wednesday 8:55 am" describes when Nate's school is setting off on a residential trip to The Lake District. Can you write a short piece about a memorable school trip you've taken part in? Describe where you were going (it could be a sports trip, a museum visit or a theme park), how you felt when you left school and what your highlight of the trip was.
3. Mr Joshua says that The Lake District is his favourite place on earth. What is yours and why? Take a close look at the Joe Todd-Stanton double-page illustration of Lake Windermere on pages 144-145. Recreate your favourite place on earth using just lead pencil (or charcoal) and plain white paper. Share your creations on social media using the hashtag #Carnegies2025
4. On page 45 of *The Final Year* Bob Marley's song "Three Little Birds" is mentioned. Listen to it, or watch the official video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HNBCVM4KbUM>. Describe how the song makes you feel and discuss this with your Shadowing group. Find out more about Bob Marley. Why is he musically and culturally important? Can you think of any current singers or artists whose work has been influenced by Bob Marley and the Wailers?
5. Mr. Joshua says that songwriters do what poets do: "they talk about their life, in their own voice." Discuss this idea with your Shadowing group. Consider the image of Mr. Joshua on page 101. Why do you think his face is framed by these words "I kiss goodbye the howling beast on the borderline which separated you from me" (lyric from the Bob Dylan song "Idiot Wind", 1974)?
6. At the beginning of *The Final Year*, Nate mentions three different strategies- talking, drawing and breathing- that he practises and uses for anger management (controlling "The Beast"). Discuss each one with your Shadowing group and why they can be effective to help cope with anger, stress and anxiety.
List any other strategies/activities you think might also be helpful.
7. Nate is introduced to David Almond's classic novel *Skellig* in Year 6. Borrow a copy from your school or local library and read, or re-read the first three chapters. Discuss it with your Shadowing group, thinking in particular about use of imagery in both *Skellig* and *The Final Year* and the importance of wings. Why do you think Mr Joshua gives Nate his personal copy of *Skellig* at the end of the school year?
8. Mr. Joshua writes "never forget to do what you must" in his copy of *Skellig*. Why are these words significant and can you think of instances in *The Final Year* when Nate remembers to do what he must?
9. Compare and contrast the cover image of Nate and the interior illustration on page 279. Have a go at recreating this image yourself, perhaps with yourself as the character.
10. Family, both blood and "built", is central to *The Final Years*. Discuss the different family relationships Matt Goodfellow develops throughout the verse novel (i.e. Nate and his brothers, Nate, PS and Caleb, Nate and Aunty Jax, Nate and his mum, Nate and Mr. Joshua). Discuss these with your Shadowing group.