



The Carnegie Shortlist 2025 Shadowing Resources

All That It Ever Meant

Blessing Musariri

Content warning: Car accident, death (including of a parent), child death, grief, references to drugs, sexual relationships and abortion

About these resources

All 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 *All That It Ever Meant* 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.

Here is the short version. Chichi swore at Baba and he went mental.

2.

At home we went from room to room looking for her – Chichi thundering through doors and cupboards – as if she would find mama hiding in a chest of drawers any minute.

3.

Metacais makes a very dramatic sigh, clanks the bangles around their wrist, and waves their hand across their face as if a fly has bothered them. They settle into the bottom of their dramatic huff and disappear.

4. 'Listen up comrades,' Baba says with a flourish. This surprises us. What in the #wer-egoingtoZimbabwedontcallmellicallyoulmtiredofalltheshenanigansnottalkingtoyou new parent is this? 'What I have here is called Wildlife Bingo. There is a card for each one of us. Twenty slots. First one to spot all the animals yells out BINGO!'

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 Zephyr edition of the book, first published in the UK in 2023.

Read to the end of page 20

- How do the different characters respond to the news about Mama?
- Why do you think Baba decides to take the family to Zimbabwe?

Read to the end of page 42

- What do you think about Metacais? What's strange or unusual about them? Why do you think only Mati can see or hear them?

Read to the end of page 67

- What's your impression of Zimbabwe?
- What are the differences between the siblings? How realistic do you find the relationship between them?
- Is there anything you find mysterious, puzzling or confusing so far?
- What do you think Mati means by 'Once I finish telling this story everything is going to change.'

Read to the end of page 101

- Mati says, 'We can't go too far beyond our upbringing, it's always there'. What do you think she means for her and her siblings? Do you feel like that about your upbringing?
- How does Mati feel about her parents' relationship?
- How does Metacais respond to Mati? Why do you think they keep pressing Mati to go

further with her story?

Read to the end of page 141

- What do you think Mati means when she says 'I just don't defeat my thoughts with logic. If they come into my head, I accept them. That's the simple instruction on how to look behind things.'
- What are some of the complex feelings Mati has about her mother?
- Are you noticing any changes in the family as they continue their trip?

Read to the end of the book

- What's your response to the big reveal? How does it change your view of the rest of the novel?
- What does the epilogue add to the book?

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 *All That It Ever Meant*, how likely are you to read other novels by Blessing Musariri?

What's *All That It Ever Meant* about?

- Spend one or two minutes writing down a single sentence that begins: '*All That It Ever Meant* 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 book 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 *All That It Ever Meant* relates to your chosen statement.

***All That It Ever Meant* is about ...**

- *The impact of loss and bereavement on a family*
- *What it's like to be of dual heritage, living between two cultures*
- *What might happen after you die*
- *The importance of family*
- *The importance of telling our stories*
- *The complexities of family relationships*
- *Understanding your roots*
- *Being able to accept things the way they are.*

Exploring *All That It Ever Meant* further

Metacais

Write a few sentences about Metacais, using one or more of the prompts below if you wish:

- I like/dislike Metacais because...
- Something mysterious about Metacais is...
- I think the reason only Mati can see Metacais is...
- I think Musariri included this character because...
- I think this character is...
- I think this character is important in the novel because...
- I think the relationship between Mati and Metacais is...
- The epilogue did/didn't help me to understand Metacais better because...

In an author interview on <https://www.bookbrunch.co.uk>, Blessing Musariri was asked about the character.

- Read what she said, below, and then discuss how it adds to or challenges your own ideas about Metacais.

Metacais was and still is an enigma of sorts. Just like how They appear in Mati's life in the story, They appeared in my mind as I began to write. Initially I had considered that Mati might be interacting with the ghost of her mother to sort out whatever issues they might have had, but Metacais, with Their ganky pipe, just made an appearance. At first, I thought They were Mati's conscience, kind of like Jiminy Cricket in *Pinocchio*, and then I thought, maybe a kind of guardian angel. But They defied all labelling, and I just let Them be and followed Their lead. I think the ultimate message Metacais might be conveying is that some things just are, and that's the truth we know even when the world says otherwise.

The Settings

- Do your own research on the family's journey in Zimbabwe. Find some of the real Zimbabwean places, below, on a map and find photos or videos of them on the internet.

Robert Mugabe Airport; Harare; Bulawayo; Kwekwe; Matobo National Park; Hwange National Park; Victoria Falls; Lookout Café (Victoria Falls); Benga; the Zambezi River; Kariba Town; a rural village.

- What different sides to Zimbabwe do we see through the settings? For example, Harare, the rural village, the backpackers, the tourist hotel.
- Discuss some of the reasons Baba might have decided to get the children to sleep in the back of the truck for most of the trip rather than staying in hotels.
- Discuss why you think Musariri moves between scenes in Zimbabwe and scenes in England and between the past and the present?

Spend 20-30 minutes on this activity.

A story with a twist

Many readers have said that this is a book which only makes sense when you've finished reading. Some people found that interesting and satisfying, some found it frustrating and confusing. What do you think?

- Brainstorm some other stories or films you know which have a surprise twist. What do they have in common? Do you generally enjoy stories with a twist? Why/why not?
- Read some typical features of stories with a twist, below. Discuss which ones you notice in *All That It Ever Meant* and how successfully Musariri has used them.

Misdirection

The writer deliberately leads the reader to believe something before revealing the truth. If there are no hints at all, the reader may feel cheated, but sometimes the clues that are dropped only make sense at the end of the tale and this can be very satisfying.

Unreliable narrator

The reader tends to automatically trust a first-person narrator. But the writer might cast some doubt about how reliable the narrator's story really is.

Red herrings

A writer might drop in a lot of information and detail which seems important, but is actually there to distract from the twist.

Identity reveal

A character's true identity is unveiled, often shattering preconceived notions and challenging the reader/audience's assumptions.

Spend 20-30 minutes on this activity.

Reading the reviews

The extracts, below, are all from reviews of *All That It Ever Meant*.

- 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/all-that-it-ever-meant/>

Give yourself 30-60 minutes to complete this activity.

A. The pacing was a little slow, but the characters were so lovable that I was hooked. Watching this family come back together, and learning so many things about them through the eyes of someone so young yet wise beyond her years drew me fully into this plot, and that twist at the end was the cherry on top that truly won me over. And the lewks that Meticais was serving throughout had me waiting on the edge of my seat for how they would slay again!

Jaylyn, www.goodreads.com

B. Grieving the untimely death of her mother, 14-year-old Mati keeps company with an enigmatic spirit only she can see.

With emotionally rich, evocative prose from Mati's astute point of view, Musariri deftly avoids melodrama to deliver a cast of wholly original characters facing tragedy with raw vulnerability and humour. A stunning, heartbreaking twist at the end will have readers turning back the pages to immediately reread this remarkable novel.

An inventive, exquisitely written story of family, love, and loss.

<https://www.kirkusreviews.com>

C. I'll admit that at the beginning of the book I felt like I was a bit lost in the swirling mind of a teen, jumping from one thought to the next. But the book kept me reading and thinking as the pieces of this puzzle slowly came together. There were multiple times where I had to stop to process paragraphs that felt especially enlightening, not just for this story but for life in general. Over the course of the story, I had a lot of my own theories about what the core of the story really was. There were lots of hints along the way, but it was hard to put together all the pieces in a way that made sense. In the end, the outcome wasn't at all what I expected, but it was like finding the missing piece to a puzzle that made it all come together.

This was truly a book you weren't meant to fully understand until the end, but when you get there, you see it for the masterpiece that it is.

Danita, www.goodreads.com

D. *All That It Ever Meant* is a unique road-trip novel of grief and cultural discovery. There is an air of magical realism to the tale. The reader is as unsure as Mati as to who or what Meticais really is – a ghost, an invisible friend born from trauma, or an ancestor spirit guiding a broken family.

Themes of identity and finding your own path in life run throughout the book. Mati goes on a deep inner journey as she travels across the evocative Zimbabwean countryside. The twist at the end of this short but compelling tale will have readers flicking back through the pages to spot the subtle signs.

All That It Ever Meant is a clever, heartfelt tale that will appeal to confident older readers and fans of Elizabeth Acevedo and Angie Thomas.

<https://schoolreadinglist.co.uk/childrens-book-reviews>

Writing Activities

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

You will need 30-60 minutes for each activity.

- The family learn so much from their road trip. Plan a journey for you to take by yourself, or with friends, or with family. Where would you go? What might you learn? Include a map, traveling instructions and a few sentences explaining the purpose of the trip.
- Re-read the extract Chichi reads at the funeral (page 165) and think about why she chose it. Imagine you have been asked to choose a poem or an extract for a special event such as a wedding, funeral, birthday, or a party for someone who is moving away. Find a suitable text and write a few lines explaining why it would be particularly suitable for the occasion.
- Write your own story from an unusual point of view. If you wish, you could keep your narrator's true identity a surprise.
- Mati's conflicting feelings about saying sorry to her mother run through the novel. Write a story called 'The Apology'. If you wish you could base it on personal experience, for example a time when you found it hard to say sorry, or a time when you wanted someone to apologise to you, but they didn't.

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.

***All That it Ever Meant* by Blessing Musariri**

1. There is more than one twist in *All That It Ever Meant*. What do you think about the concept of an unreliable narrator(s)? Have you read any other books where you've been misdirected or misled? Can you write your own story (250 words tops!) with a twist, misdirection or unreliable narrator?
2. Make and play a local version of Animal Bingo, describing the creatures you can see from your home or school (seagull, dog, cat, pigeon, sheep!)
3. Did you have an invisible friend? Would you like one? Write about your memories of your invisible friend or describe how you might want one to look. Would they be helpful or annoying?
4. Have a go at singing in a round – do you know what this means? Have you done this before? Research songs that can be sung in a round and practice with friends.
5. Describe a journey that you've made with family or friends. How did you travel? Where were you going? Did you want to go? How long did it take? What did you eat and drink? What were the best and worst bits?
6. Where would you prefer to sleep? On a boat? In a tent? In a van? Where is the most unusual place you have slept?
7. Have you listened to Afrobeat music before? What kind of music do you listen to at home or with your family? Make a playlist with each person suggesting a song
8. What flowers and plants could you find in Zimbabwe? Are any of them endemic? Do some research and create a poster to display your findings.
9. What is a 'ganky pipe' and what do you think it smells like?
10. Research clothes and jewellery worn in Zimbabwe and create your own version on paper, using textiles or other craft materials. Share your creations on social media using the hashtag #Carnegies2025.