



The Carnegie Shortlist 2025 Shadowing Resources

The Things We Leave Behind

Clare Furniss

Content warning: strong language, drinking, some violence, racism, child refugee experience, authoritarianism, xenophobia, dementia, police brutality, death, terrorism, extremism.

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 Things We Leave Behind* 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.

And now she notices the girl hovering nearby, lank-haired, an unwashed look about her clothes, her limbs too thin inside them.

The woman stiffens. There have always been beggars in Edinburgh of course, as there are in all big cities.

2.

The girl saw there was a small keyhole at the bottom of the clock's face, near the number six. She took the little key, fitted it into the hole and found it was a perfect match. She turned the key three times. As soon as the clock began to tick again it was as if a spell was broken.

3.

'My dad said one of his journalist friends is moving to France. He told my dad he should get out of the country too if he could.'

4.

As we walked up the steps from the shadowy Underground station, past the line of armed guards at the entrance and out into the sharp, spring light, the world felt new. There was the hum and chatter and shout of the crowd, the smell of frying onions and cigarette smoke and something else in the air too. Even on the Tube on the way there we could feel it. Something different. Something crackling in the air and for once it wasn't anger or fear, although those hadn't gone away.

5.

For a few more days I slept and woke in the sunlit room. The pale blue candle was always burning and the scent of herbs was always in the air. Sometimes Billie was there ...

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

Read to the end of page 7

- What mood is being established in these pages?
- What is the novel suggesting about stories themselves at this point?

Read to the break on page 40

- What are your thoughts about the novel up to this point? You might like to think about: what it makes you think and feel; Clem's narrative voice and how she tells the story; what is happening in the country; what you think has happened to Clem's family.

Read to the break on page 62

- What are your thoughts about what has happened to Claudia? How is her arrest presented?

Read to the end of page 113

- What are your thoughts and feelings about what you've just read?
- What do you think about the political situation in the book and how it is presented? Do you think events like this could happen in England today or in the near future?
- What is the role of Polly in the novel, particularly in terms of how it is told?

Read to the end of page 163

- What are your thoughts about life in Clem's grandfather's village? You might like to think about: the village shop; Imogen Glass and her children; Shaun; the forest.

Read to the end of page 209

- Based on your reading up to this point, what do you think about the following aspects of the novel and how do you think they will develop further?
 - Clem's relationship with Jonas

- Clem and Billie's time in the forest
- Clem's feelings about her birth mother, Seren.

Read to the break on page 248

- What are your thoughts and feelings about Clem and Billie's escape to Scotland? What happened and how was it described?

Read to the end of page 275

- What did you learn in these pages about the way the novel is being told? Were there any surprises for you? What are you expecting to find out about in the final section?

Read to the end of the book

- What parts of the story are tied up in the final pages and what loose ends remain?
- What are your thoughts about what happened to Billie?
- What are your thoughts about the ending in general?

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 Things We Leave Behind*, how likely are you to read other novels by Clare Furniss?

What's *The Things We Leave Behind* about?

- Spend one or two minutes writing down a single sentence that begins: '*The Things We Leave Behind* 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 *The Things We Leave Behind* relates to your chosen statement.

The Things We Leave Behind is about ...

- The possibility of hope in the most difficult of circumstances
- The importance of standing up for what you believe
- The dangers of standing up for what you believe
- The importance of community and helping people
- How political decisions can tear apart families
- How the past always lives on in the present
- Coming to terms with grief
- The power of stories

Exploring the novel further

Other characters

The novel is told in the voice of Clem, who is also the main character. There are several other characters who play a significant role in the novel.

- If you are working in a group, take one character at a time and discuss their role in the novel and your thoughts about them.
- Write two or three sentences in the voices of 3-4 of these characters, expressing their thoughts and feelings about Clem.
 - Shaun
 - Huw
 - Mischa
 - Jonas
 - Polly
 - Bridie
 - Imogen Glass
 - Claudia
 - Billie

Spend 15-20 minutes on this activity.

Evaluating *The Things We Leave Behind*

- Complete the following grid to help you evaluate *The Things We Leave Behind*. 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>The Things We Leave Behind</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 *The Things We Leave Behind* a go. The blog should be called 'Five reasons why you should read *The Things We Leave Behind*'.

Spend 20-30 minutes on this activity.

Reading the reviews

The extracts, below, are all from reviews of *The Things We Leave Behind*.

- 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-things-we-leave-behind/>

Give yourself 30-60 minutes to complete this activity.

A.

★★★★★ - A Heart-Wrenching, Beautiful Story

Clare Furniss's *The Things We Leave Behind* is an emotional journey that deeply explores grief, healing, and the complex nature of family relationships. Clem's story of dealing with various personal losses – of her birth mother, of her home, of her best friend - along with coming to terms with the political world she is so opposed to, is both heartbreaking and beautiful. The pacing is perfect, and the writing is rich with emotional depth. This book stayed with me long after I finished it. Highly recommended for anyone who loves poignant, character-driven stories with a dystopian edge.

Jayden

B.

★★★★★ - A Heart-Wrenching, Beautiful Story

This was one of those special books that took me to unexpected places, both in terms of the content of the story and the way it was told. In terms of content, I found it fascinating to imagine an England in which these dystopian events could happen. How far away are we from treating people so poorly? Scary stuff! In terms of the way it was told, that twist will live with me forever. I really hadn't seen it coming, which shows what a skilful writer Clare Furniss is.

Natalie

C.

★★★★ – Hope out of despair

I think this is a really important and powerful book because of the message of hope that

emerges in the final pages. Clem's life might well have been turned upside down, with key aspects still unresolved, but she recognises that life goes on and, in some ways, it is happy and positive. She lives in a dystopian world, but she does not have a dystopian viewpoint. She can and will get better; the world too can and will get better.

Sara

D.

★★★- Disappointing and Slow

Unfortunately, *The Things We Leave Behind* didn't quite live up to my expectations. I found the pacing to be slow, and it was difficult for me to connect with Clem. I think the main problem was to do with representing Billie. Even though I didn't guess the twist, I did feel that the book wasn't flowing naturally. The way the author explored grief, loss and forced migration was interesting, but I felt like it was trying to do too much at times. The emotional weight of the story didn't fully resonate with me, and I found myself losing interest several times. To my mind, there are better dystopias out there.

Xi

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 Things We Leave Behind* further.

You will need 30-60 minutes for each activity.

Imagined journal

At the end of the novel, the whereabouts of Clem's father and of Jonas are unknown. Her father might be in prison or might have escaped across the border to Scotland; Jonas might be in Scotland.

- Write a journal entry in the voice of either Clem's father or Jonas. You might like to include details about:
 - Where they are and what they are doing
 - Their thoughts about Clem and what they think or hope she is doing
 - Their hopes for the future.

A fairy story

- Write a fairy story of your own in the style of the story told by Clem that features in the novel.

How to avoid a dystopia

The England portrayed in the novel is dystopian: a place where you can be arrested for holding particular views, where people disappear and where the police shoot protesters.

Scotland remains a democracy with freedom of speech and laws that protect the vulnerable.

- Imagine you live in Scotland and are worried that your country might follow England's example and become a dictatorship. Write a blog with the title: *How to avoid a dictatorship*. You might like to write this as a list, with a title like *7 ways to avoid a dictatorship*.

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 Things We Leave Behind by Clare Furniss

1. What parallels can you find between Clem's fictional journey in *The Things We Leave Behind* and the experiences of real-life refugees? Think about why the decisions to take these journeys are made and by whom.
2. The two sisters have different ideas about happy endings. Clem thinks 'happy endings are boring', but Billie believes that 'happy stories are the best stories'. Who do you agree with? What did you think of the ending of this story?
3. Reflect on your first reading of the book. What thoughts went through your mind when you first discovered what happened with Billie? How did it impact you as a reader? Was the outcome something you had predicted? If not, what did you think was going to happen? What clues did the author leave for us? Did you spot them or did you miss them?
4. The story in *The Things We Left Behind* is not linear- it's told in flashbacks and the present tense. How did this affect the storytelling experience, and your reading experience? Create a timeline to track the different points of the story. You could use different coloured inks to denote different characters, internal vs external journeys, etc.
5. There are echoes of current and historical political figures and events in *The Things We Leave Behind*. What elements do you recognise? How do these cultural reference points affect your experience of the story?
6. What do you think of the short fairytale-like stories featured in the book? How do they add to the reader's experience? Imagine the book without them - does it still work as a story? How is it altered?
7. There are no chapters in *The Things We Leave Behind* but the story is split into four sections: Story, Flight, Lost, Hope. Write the headings on a piece of paper and list the events of the book under each one. What do you notice? How do the headings relate to the events which occur? Did the lack of chapters impact your reading experience? In what way?
8. "Once there was a girl who..." is the line in Clem's birthday storybook. Use it as a starting point to create your own piece of writing.
9. Clem and Billie make origami paper cranes. Try making some of these yourself. When you've had some practice, time yourself to see how long it takes to complete a single crane. How long do you think it would take you to make 1,000 to earn a wish? Share your creations online using the hashtag #Carnegies2025.
10. Explore dystopia as a genre. What does 'dystopian' mean? List all the ways this book conforms to the common features of this genre? Can you think of any other books that are similar to this one?
11. If you were going to create a political party or run for school council, what issues would you focus on? Put together a short manifesto with your group about issues that matter to you and your school or local area.