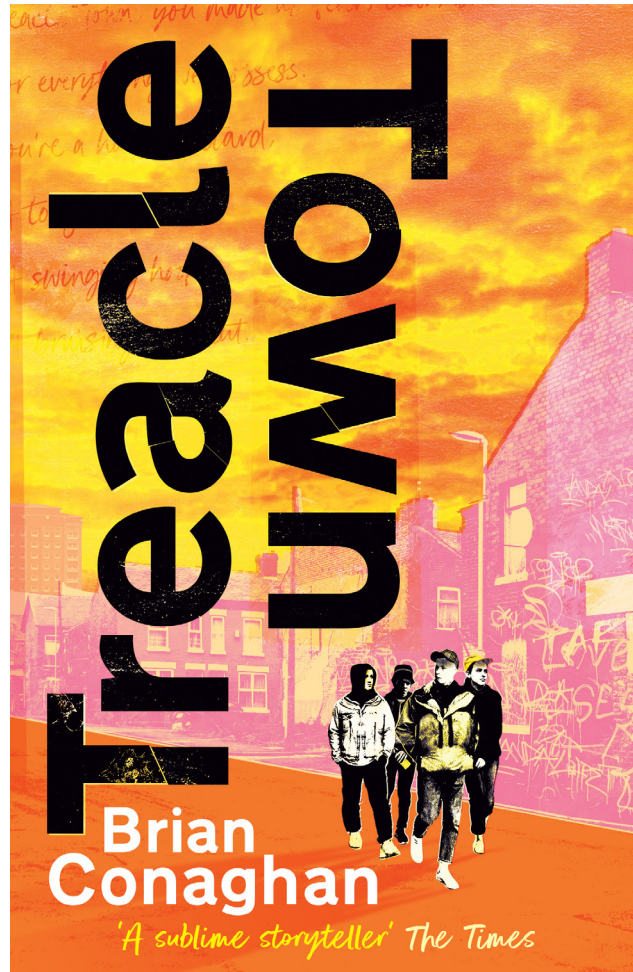


The Carnegies



The Carnegie Shortlist 2025 Shadowing Resources

Treacle Town

Brian Conaghan

Content warning: strong language, drug taking, some violence, sectarianism, suicide, death, murder, mental health, knife crime.

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 *Treacle Town* 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.

You could be faced with chains, blades and bricks, but the first rule of being in a young team is that you never bolt from your comrades. No matter what army you're facing, you always charge in. But there's charging in en masse, and then there's what happened to Biscuit; that was a pure liberty and nothing else.

2.

YeahYeahYeah95

If hes 18 and fighting everything that moves then theres absolutely no debate if your into that way of life. Its just inevitable. He knew the consequences and hes now paid the ultimate price. Wee dick.

3.

I puff up my chest and blow out. It's only £7.99. Peanuts. Buttons ... But three dinners for some I know. Or three days' worth of living. I could find it on a torrent site when I get home. But books have to be bent, knackered and worn out, don't they. They need to reek of something. No download can touch that. I reach into my jacket as if I'm about to yank out a 9mm Glock, and pull out my phone. As a decoy I snap the front cover of another couple of books. Then shove the phone and Slam them to the ground back inside my jacket.

4.

Your job now, son, is to cobble together a plan of action and drag yourself out of this quicksand. Don't allow this town to drown you in its giant tank of treacle like it's done with countless others.

5.

But mibbe, just mibbe, your experience is equal to theirs. Your life as valid as theirs, that's for sure.

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 Andersen Press edition of the book, first published in the UK in 2023.

Read to the end of page 25

- What are your thoughts about how the lives of Con, Wee-Z, Nails and Trig are presented in the opening chapters? What different personalities does each of them have?
- What are your thoughts about Con's narrative voice? How do you think he will present life in his 'Treacle Town'?
- What do you think about the language the novel is written in, including the swearing?
- What do you understand about the rivalry between Celtic and Rangers? Is it just about football?

Read to the end of page 61

- How is Con's home life presented? You might like to think about his relationship with his father and what has happened to his mother.
- What's your own knowledge of slam poetry? What role do you think it will play in the novel?

Read to the end of page 109

- What's your impression of daily life for Con and his friends in Coatbridge, where they live?
- How is Con's interest in slam poetry presented? What about his resistance to it?

Read to the end of page 158

- What are your thoughts about Mrs McVitie's conversation with Con? What do you think is in the bag that she gives him?
- Trig wants revenge for Biscuit's murder, while Con wants everyone to get on with their lives. Nails and Wee-Z are somewhere in between. Do you think there will be an attempt at revenge? If so, how will it play out or be prevented?

Read to the end of page 212

- What's your impression of the poem that Con reads online, written by one of the boys he saw earlier on a train?
- What are your thoughts about Con's poem? You should think about its quality as a poem, but feel free to discuss your ideas about his swearing.
- What do you think has happened to Con's Dad? How has their relationship developed during the course of the novel?

Read to the end of page 252

- What do you think the book has to say so far about the impact that parents have on children's lives? You should think about the different experiences of Con and his friends?
- How are the parents themselves presented in the book?

Read to the end of the novel

- What are your thoughts about the ending, both the poetry slam and what happens to Trig and Wee-Z?
- Now that you have finished the book, what do you understand by the term 'Treacle Town'? In what ways is Coatbridge a 'Treacle Town'?
- What are your thoughts about the poem at the very end of the book? How effective is it as an ending?

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 *Treacle Town*, how likely are you to read other novels by Brian Conaghan?

What's *Treacle Town* about?

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

***Treacle Town* is about ...**

- How young people with no prospects often turn to violence
- The despair that exists in Britain's 'treacle towns'
- The power of poetry
- The importance of following your own path
- The senselessness of violence
- The importance of talking to others and caring for them
- The possibility of people changing
- Coping with grief
- Finding hope in difficult circumstances

Exploring the novel further

Other characters

The novel is told in the voice of Con. 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 Con.
 - Con's dad
 - Trig
 - Nails
 - Wee-Z
 - Mrs McVitie
 - Vicky Rooney

Spend 15-20 minutes on this activity.

Exploring *Treacle Town*

A suitable novel for young people?

Treacle Town features a lot of swearing, including some words that are rarely seen in books aimed at a YA audience. This swearing will inevitably upset some readers, who don't feel it is appropriate for such language to be included in books aimed at young people.

- Imagine you were given the manuscript of *Treacle Town* before it was published and asked to write a report for the publishing company, Anderssen Press, about whether or not to go ahead with publication. Write your report, which should include a response to the following questions given to you by Anderssen Press:
 - Is the swearing integral to the story?
 - Could the story work if some swearing remained but not so much?
 - Can young readers cope with this level of swearing?
 - Would school libraries be comfortable having this book on their shelves?
 - How are the wider public likely to respond to the book?

Spend 20-30 minutes on this activity.

Reading the reviews

The extracts, below, are all from reviews of *Treacle Town*.

- 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/treacle-town>

Give yourself 30-60 minutes to complete this activity.

A.

Couldn't put this down or stop thinking about it! Powerful look at youth gang violence in Scotland as we follow Connor and his mates after the murder of one of their gang members. Loved that it was first person and so in depth about one thing, rather than trying to cover a timeline of events. The slam poetry narrative was so well-done and enhanced the read, both as an element of the storyline and as another creative form for the reader to enjoy.

Ellie, www.goodreads.com

B.

Was given this book as a gift and I wasn't sure if I wanted to read what appeared to be a YA book. However, it quickly became clear that this powerful and unflinching account of life on a bleak Central Scotland estate packs more than enough of a punch for any adult. Raw, realistic and fast-paced, this bruising book will bulldoze its way into your heart.

Alex, www.goodreads.com

C.

This is that rare thing – a book for teenagers that actually engages with the reality of teenage lives, at least the teenage lives that are often not written about. Con's first person narrative offers a harrowing, realistic tale of the violence that dominates the lives of so many youngsters living in Britain's forgotten 'treacle towns', while still showing the possibility of hope and redemption.

Darren

D.

I can't believe that this book is being marketed for young people. The swearing is extreme to say the least, totally unsuitable for young readers. The same goes for the violence. I know that violence exists, but do we really need to offer it up to teenagers? I was constantly irritated by this book and actually struggled to understand Con's extreme dialect and accent much of the time.

An irate reader

Writing Activities

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

You will need 30-60 minutes for each activity.

- Write a slam poem of your own exploring your own life or your own area.
- Write a letter to Con offering your thoughts about how he dealt with his difficult situation.
- Write a blog by Con five years into the future after the book ends. The blog should be called 'How I turned my life around and escaped 'Treacle Town'.

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.

Treacle Town by Brian Conaghan

1. Connor's group of friends have nicknames. The reason for Biscuit's nickname is obvious but consider the stories behind the other nicknames – Trig, Nails, Wee Z. Why do you think Connor doesn't have a nickname? Do you or your friends have nicknames? What is the story behind them? What nicknames would you choose for each other? Why?
2. In the book, we learn that a "*Treacle Town*" is a town that is difficult to leave. Why do you think the phrase *Treacle Town* is used? Do you think that your hometown is a *Treacle Town*? Is that a good or a bad thing? Do you think you will move away in the future? Where would you like to go?
3. Connor discovers slam poetry and uses it to express himself and deal with his feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. Is there a social issue that you feel strongly about? Have a go at creating your own slam poem to share your thoughts/feelings/beliefs. You could perform it for your fellow shadowers or organise a slam poetry competition in your library. Share your performances on social media using the hashtag #Carnegies2025
4. Invent a slam performance name for Connor. What are the reasons for your choice?
5. Research the origins of slam poetry and take a look at the work of other slam poets or spoken word artists. Is there a particular piece, performance or poet that resonates with you?
6. When Mrs McVitie talks to Connor about the night Biscuit died, she tells him she doesn't want any revenge, doesn't want another parent going through what she is going through. She gives Connor a bag containing two items that belonged to Biscuit. We don't find out the nature of those items until we are almost at the end of the story. Why do you think Mrs McVitie gave those two particular items to Connor?
7. *Treacle Town* deals with a number of sensitive issues – gang culture, suicide, bereavement, peer pressure, family relationships. Can you think of other books that deal with similar issues? What about books that feature slam poetry or a similar form of performance? Create a book list of recommended reads and slip it into the back of the book for its next reader to discover.
8. What advice would you give to Connor at the start of the story?
9. Map Connor's journey through the story. What is his life like when we first meet him? Who is he as a person? What about when we leave him? How has he changed? What obstacles has he faced? What lessons has he learnt? Who helped him and who hindered him?
10. Research *Treacle Town*'s author, Brian Conaghan. Find out as much as you can about his writing process, his career and the books he has created. Can you spot any common themes amongst the stories he writes? Which of his other works appeals to you the most? Are there any other authors who explore similar themes?