

# The Carnegies



## The Carnegie Shortlist 2026 Shadowing Resources



# Ghostlines

## Carnegie Medal for Writing

**Author: Katya Balen**

**Age range: 9+**

### Description:

Compelling world-building brings the luminous community of Ayrie to life. Everyone on the small island knows one another and their stories but as a newcomer, Albie has yet to feel accepted. There's a classic adventure feel with ample intrigue as Tilda takes Albie on a journey to the old island. Every character feels real and rounded and Tilda and Albie have adventure and agency.

Themes:

- Nature
- Themes
- Friendship
- Community
- Outsider
- Adapting to change
- Emotion
- Home

### Shadowing Ideas:

1. In Ghostlines, Tilda dreams of having her own sea kayak. She wants hers to be decorated as a dragon, Finn's looks like a shark and Flora's is decorated as a sea eagle. If you had your own sea kayak how would you want it to look? Design your ideal sea kayak then share it with your group.
2. The children on Ayrie play lots of games together. Hold a games party and play Uno, Who Am I with Post-It notes or Wink Murder as they do in Ghostlines, or bring along your own favourite card games. You could also bring cakes to share, just like the characters in the book.
3. Tilda and Albie name the old island 'Alda Isle' as it's a mashup of their names. They draw a map of it and invent names for different parts of it. In pairs or as a group, draw or design your own island. Mark the interesting places and name them. Can you invent a name for your island that uses parts of all your names? Who names real life places? Think of places in the world where the names have been changed or where different people have different names for the same place. Why is this? What is the significance of naming physical places?

## For Students

### About these Resources

All of these resources are designed to be completed in small discussion groups, ideally your school's Carnegie Medal for Writing 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

- Discuss what you think *Ghostlines* 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?

Spend 10-20 minutes on this activity.

1. The shout is caught by the wind and splinters on to the stone ground. It could have come from anywhere but it comes from the boat and I know because I've heard it a thousand times before and I'd know that voice even if it was pulled apart by a hurricane.

2. The boy gulps a mouthful of seasalt air and boat fumes. He is the greenest thing I've ever seen. Greener than frogs and pond scum and meadow grass and lime gummy worms and the apples Dad grows for pies and scrumpy.

3. We peel off one by one as everyone scrambles through heather and gorse and rocks and uses a thousand different shortcuts and hidden steps and secret twisting paths to take them home. The houses here are scattered across the island like they've just been dropped by a giant hand or blown in by the wind.

4. I am not sure what I am feeling but I just want to be alone. I never want to be alone.

5. It doesn't look very haunted. It doesn't feel very haunted.

## 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 Bloomsbury Children's Books edition of the book, first published in the UK in 2024.*

### Read the introductory chapter which ends on page 6

- What do you think the narrator will be like, based on these pages (we do not know her name yet)?
- What picture of life on the island is given in this chapter? How significant do you think the setting will be to the novel as a whole?
- At the end she mentions seeing a boy, a shape against the sky. Who or what do you think this is?

### Read chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4

- What are your first impressions of Albie? How is he presented by the writer, Katya Balen?
- What do we learn about the geography of Ayrie? What impact do you think this might have on the story?
- There are several references to people leaving the island or no longer being on the island. Who do you think is being referred to and what do you think has happened?
- Why does Tilda love the island so much? Why does she not mind the tourists and why does she particularly like 'Silent Season'?
- What do you think it would be like to live in a place with so few people, especially children at school?

### Read chapters 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9

- What happens when Tilda goes to visit the newcomer, Albie? What does this make you think about him – both the way he is behaving now, and what there might be in his past that has made him like this?
- Tilda thinks that in some ways Albie is behaving like Rowan used to. What does she mean by this? Do think there will be a link between Albie and Rowan? If so, what could it be?
- What does Finn say which makes Tilda want to be alone? How do you think she might change as the book continues?

### **Read chapters 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14**

- What happens when Tilda first takes Albie out on the island? What do you think of Albie? In what ways is the writer, Katya Balen, creating a sense of mystery around him?
- How do your thoughts about Albie develop once he starts talking to Tilda? How does what he says meet with what you expected?
- Tilda has two days to convince Albie to like Ayrie. What do you think she will do with him? Do you think she will be successful?

### **Read chapters 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19**

- What is Albie's reaction to all the sights that Tilda shows him? What do you think your reaction would be if you were in the same situation as Albie?
- What are your thoughts when you hear about the secret haunted island? What kinds of things do you think will happen when Tilda and Albie go there? What do you think happened there in the past?
- What are 'ghostlines', as explained in chapter 19? Now that you know what they are, why do you think the word has been used for the title of the book? Has this knowledge shifted your expectations of what will happen at all?

### **Read chapters 20, 21, 22, 23 and 24**

- What's the kayak journey to the secret island like for Tilda and Albie? Are there any clues about what might happen later in the story?
- Why do you think Tilda doesn't tell Albie about Rowan when he asks about him?
- Tilda says that Rowan left the island because of her. What do you think might have happened?
- What does Tilda say happened on the secret island in the past? Do you think the story she tells is true or a myth?

### **Read chapters 25, 26, 27, 28 and 29**

- How would you summarise Tilda and Albie's trip to the secret island? Do you think they will go back? If so, what do you think will happen?
- How would you say Tilda is changing as the novel goes on? Does she have a different focus now than at the start of the book? Does she see things differently? If so, how?

### **Read chapters 30, 31, 32, 33, 34 and 35**

- What's stopping Tilda and her dad talking about Rowan? What do you think they should do about this and how should they go about it?
- How is Tilda and Albie's relationship developing? What do they have in common? How are they different?

### **Read chapters 36, 37, 38, 39 and 40**

- What's Puffin Night and how does it help Albie feel part of the island community? Do you know of any other unusual encounters between humans and animals like this?
- When it's revealed that a storm is coming, what do you expect to happen in the story? Come up with a likely scenario.
- When Maggie bursts into Tilda's cottage and asks if Albie is there, how does this change your experience of the book?

### **Read chapters 41, 42, 43 and 44**

- What are your first thoughts about why Albie might have taken the kayak when a storm is on its way?
- When Tilda says she has two choices – run back to the house and tell everyone what has been going on, or go and fetch Albie herself – which do you think she should take? Which do you think she will take? Which makes the better story and why?
- When Tilda says that she sees a ghostline when she is kayaking to Alda Island to find Albie, what do you think is happening?

### **Read chapters 45, 46, 47 and 48**

- When the green light appears during the storm, what are your first thoughts about what it is? How does it add to the atmosphere of the story?
- How is the incident when Moses falls off the cliff presented?
- How does the writer, Katya Balen, build tension in this section? What are the different stages of tension developing?

### **Read chapters 49, 50, 51, 52 and 53**

- In Tilda's mind, what do Rowan and Albie have in common?
- What's the significance of Tilda and Rowan calling each other puffins?
- What do you find out in these chapters about Alda Island and all of its other names? How does this relate to the book's title?
- What was the green glow that Tilda and Albie saw? Do you know of any other natural phenomena like this?
- What are your thoughts about how the book ends?

## 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 *Ghostlines*, how likely are you to read other novels by Katya Balen?

### What's *Ghostlines* about?

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

### *Ghostlines* is about ...

- The importance of feeling that you belong
- The close links between the human and the natural world
- The links that exist across generations
- The importance of giving adolescents their own space
- The importance of letting young people experience danger
- Recognising that people change as they grow up
- Accepting that there is not one correct way to live a life
- Accepting people for who they are
- Talking about problems.

## Exploring *Ghostlines* Further

### Other characters

The novel is told in the voice of Tilda, who 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 three or four of these characters, expressing their thoughts and feelings about Tilda.
  - Tilda's father
  - Albie
  - Elspeth
  - Moses
  - One person out of Finn, Lucas, Eilidh, Flora, Issy, Ramsay (all of Tilda's classmates)
  - Jenny (the headteacher)
  - Maggie (Albie's Mum)
  - Michael
  - Rowan

Spend 15-20 minutes on this activity.

### Making space for adventure

- Write a few paragraphs exploring your thoughts about how *Ghostlines* promotes the importance of giving young people the freedom to explore the world on their own. You might like to focus on:
  - What Tilda and Albie get up to
  - The role and attitudes of adults on the island
  - Your own thoughts about what happens on the island
  - Your own thoughts about acceptable risk.

Spend 20-30 minutes on this activity.

## Reading the reviews

The extracts, below, are all from reviews of *Ghostlines*.

- 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:

[carnegies.co.uk/writing-shortlist-2026/](http://carnegies.co.uk/writing-shortlist-2026/)

Give yourself 30-60 minutes to complete this activity.

### A.

Gorgeous book for older children, with themes of home and belonging. I loved Balen's writing style – it's not patronising and paints her world beautifully with words. The use of a first-person narrator and present tense added a sense of urgency, which worked with the atmosphere of adventure and the frisson of danger in the forbidden secret boat trips and impending storm.

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

### B.

I really enjoyed this story. The author's lyrical prose perfectly captures the wildness, beauty and freedom of Ayrie, and made me want to live there. Katya Balen is a master of first-person present tense. I totally believed I was in the head of a twelve-year-old girl, and I felt all her pain, her anxieties, and especially her love for the beautiful environment she lives in. The friendship which grows slowly and painfully between Tilda and Albie is done very well, and I felt for him, torn from the life he knew and all his friends, to be brought to a such a small close-knit community.

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

### C.

Again, Katya Balen stuns me as a reader with her poignant, gentle approach to the difficult transitions in life. She is SO good at carrying a reader through foreign, yet oh-so-familiar territory. The beautiful (sometimes terrible) steps we take as we traverse between childhood and adulthood, the push and pull of saying goodbye, the terror and joy of change... She walks both sides, shares each perspective and helps us see ourselves and others, which is a GIFT.

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

### D.

I really liked the characters in this story, but I wasn't convinced by the freedoms the children were allowed. Would adults really be happy for young people to go out kayaking in the open sea with no supervision? They didn't even seem to mind that Tilda and Albie travelled to Alda Island in a storm and nearly got killed. Surely no one thinks that rescuing a puffin or two is worth a child's life?

**Anonymous**

## Writing Activities

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

You will need 30-60 minutes for each activity.

### Mapping the secret island

- At the front of the novel is a map of Ayrie Island. The secret island (Alba Island) is set alongside it, but no landmarks are provided. Draw your own map of Alba Island, including the different places visited by Tilda and Albie, and marking where different events took place.

### An adventure of your own

- Write an adventure story of your own set on a secret island. You might like to think about:
  - Where it is, why you go there and how you get there
  - What is distinctive about this island
  - What happens on the island.

### A letter to the writer

- Write a letter to Katya Balen expressing your thoughts about the world she has created in *Ghostlines*. You might like to write about:
  - How she describes the island
  - The community she creates
  - What you particularly liked about life on Ayrie Island.