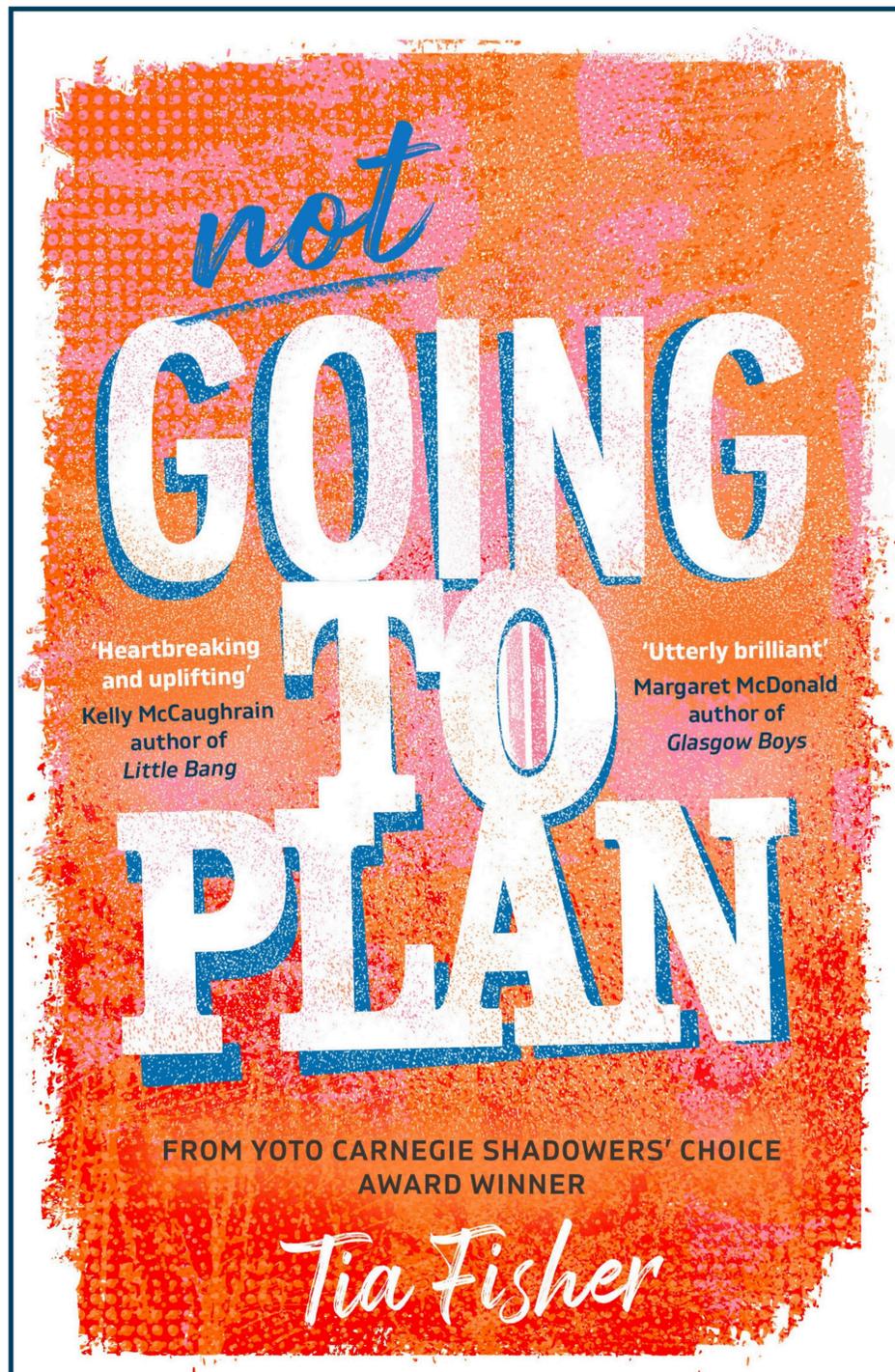


The Carnegies



The Carnegie Shortlist 2026 Shadowing Resources



Not Going To Plan

Carnegie Medal for Writing

Author: Tia Fisher

Age range: 14+

Description:

A romantic entanglement takes a dark turn in this tale of control and consent. Friends Marnie and Zed are left with impossible decisions and difficult consequences. Playful use of language highlights character relationships and the twists and turns that these take and showcases how important the words we use are in determining our identities.

Themes:

- Verse
- Empathy
- Consent
- Identity
- Teenage pregnancy
- Stealthing
- Friendship

Shadowing Ideas:

1. In *Not Going to Plan*, Zed quotes physicist Melvin Schwartz, who was a co-winner of the Nobel Prize in 1988 (p. 346). Is there someone who inspires you? It could be a scientist, as it is for Zed, an artist, musician, politician, humanitarian or even a family member. Think about what makes their contribution special and share these attributes with your shadowing group. You could even create a group anthology of short biographical profiles.
2. *Not Going to Plan* is a verse novel in which Tia Fisher tells Marnie and Zed's stories in different verse forms. Choose one of the following to depict a memorable event in your day (past or present; good or bad): haiku, acrostic, shape poem, rhyming couplet, sonnet, limerick.
3. Marnie's GCSE art exam is described in detail in *Not Going to Plan*; she uses a variety of media, including collage, screen printing and sculpture to create something which is very personal. Either choose one of these to create your own personal piece or find out about the life and artwork of Nnena Kalu, who won the prestigious 2025 Turner Prize.

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

10-20 minutes

- Discuss what you think *Not Going to Plan* 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.

Four and a half years
of being digested in this ecosystem
trapped inside the noisy, smelly gut of Downham High,
pushed along the intestinal tract of education,
by the peristalsis of the syllabi.

2.

Downham smells of disinfectant
and dinners and rubber and armpits and feet.
Close my eyes and I could be back in Wynford
but for a brand-new odour ...
boys

3.

All the white noise in my head
can't cancel out
the sound of Luca's invitation
playing on my mind.

I cannot interpret him.
I do not understand myself.
There is far too much uncertainty
for my liking.

4.

My bag's on the floor.
I open it with a gunshot snap
and scrabble through the mess.
To my relief,
the condom isn't there, it's okay.
There's only a wad of sick-stinky tissue.

During Reading

Warning: Don't read the questions before reading each section.

Read the chapters as directed 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 Hot Key Books edition of the book, first published in the UK in 2025.

Read chapter 1

- What are your first impressions of Marnie and her life? How do you think the story will develop based on this chapter?
- What are your first impressions of how the novel is written in verse? What did you find particularly interesting about how the chapter was written?
- Marnie's art project was about Georgia O'Keefe. Do an image search of her paintings. Why do you think a girl like Marnie might be interested in them?

Read chapters 2 and 3

- What are the differences between Marnie and Zed? Do you think they have anything in common?
- What are the differences between Wynford School and Downham? Which would you rather go to and why?

Read chapters 4, 5 and 6

- What role do you think Harry Borman and his party will play in the story? How is he presented up to this point? What about Luca? How is he presented and what role will he play?
- Flick back through the pages you've read and find an example of what you think is particularly effective use of the verse form. What makes it effective in your view?

Read chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10

- Lots of readers find themselves laughing out loud at some of the early bits of the book. Is there anything you find funny? How does the writer, Tia Fisher, create humour and, in your opinion, how successful is she?
- What are the different parenting styles of Marnie's Mum and Zed's Mum? Which do you think is the most effective and why?
- What are your expectations of the party? How will it go for Marnie and for Zed?

Read chapters 11, 12, 13 and 14

- How are events at the party presented? What are your thoughts and feelings about what happens?
- How is school for Marnie and Zed after the party? How realistic a portrayal do you think it is of school life?
- In these chapters, how does the writer, Tia Fisher, shape her words on the page to represent different events? Which examples do you think work particularly well and why?

Read chapters 15, 16 and 17

- Marnie learns a lot about her body, pregnancy and contraception in this chapter. What does she learn? What are your thoughts about a novel that also acts as a kind of educational tool for young readers?
- Now that Marnie knows she is pregnant, how do you think the novel will unfold? Will she have the baby? Who will she turn to for help? What will be the reaction of different characters when they find out the news? How will it affect her school life?

Read chapters 18, 19, 20 and 21

- What do you think about the different ways Marnie's friends react to finding out she is pregnant, particularly Rakel? Do you think Rakel has a right to react like this, regardless of her religious faith?
- What do you think about Jessica Bates' actions? Should she face any consequences for what she's done? Is she acting out of spite, or might there be something more troubling going on with Jessica? If so, what?

Read chapters 22, 23, 24 and 25

- In what ways are the lives of Marnie and Zed mirroring each other in these chapters? In what ways could the same be said about the lives of the parents mirroring the lives of their children?
- What are your thoughts about Marnie not telling her Mum that she is pregnant?

Read chapters 26 and 27

- What are your thoughts about how Marnie's abortion is presented? What, for example, was the focus of the writing?
- When you learn that what Harry did, known as 'stealthing', legally counts as rape, what do you think should happen to him? Should Marnie press criminal charges? What are the reasons for and against her doing so? Which do you think she'll choose?
- When Marnie talks to Rakel, she thinks about how tough it is to be a girl because 'We're damned if we do/ damned if we don't'. What are your thoughts about this? How are the difficulties of being a girl presented in the book?

Read chapters 28, 29, 30 and 31

- What do you think about Marnie's art project? What do you think her own contribution will say? How do you think it will be received at the school art exhibition?
- What case does Zed make for the beauty of physics? What are your own thoughts about the beauty of different subjects? What case, for example, could you make for English?

Read to the end of the book

- What are your thoughts about Marnie's piece at the art show and how it is received by the mayor and the journalist?
- What are your thoughts about the book not revealing whether or not Zed and Marnie got the results they wanted? What are your thoughts about the writer, Tia Fisher, making this choice?

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 *Not Going to Plan*, how likely are you to read other novels by Tia Fisher?

What's *Not Going to Plan* about?

- Spend one or two minutes writing down a single sentence that begins: '*Not Going to Plan* 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 *Not Going to Plan* relates to your chosen statement.

Not Going to Plan is about ...

- Young women having the right to make choices about their bodies
- The need for proper consent in sexual relationships
- The need for young women to be wary of how some young men behave
- The power of friendship
- The power of art
- How different kinds of people can become good friends
- The importance of following your passion
- The importance of being truthful
- Being careful about who you trust.

Exploring the Novel Further

Other characters

The novel is told in the voices of Marnie and Zed, who are also the main characters. 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 Marnie and/or Zed.
 - Harry Borman
 - Luca Moreno
 - Jessica Bates
 - Mr Challoner
 - Rakel
 - Naomi
 - Sherena
 - Marnie's Mum
 - Zed's Mum

Spend 15-20 minutes on this activity.

Exploring *Not Going to Plan*

A must read for young people

Imagine you are a teacher in charge of your school's sex and relationship curriculum. In role, write a letter to your headteacher explaining why you think every student in Year 9 should be given a copy of *Not Going to Plan* to read. You might like to think about:

- How it presents issues of consent
- How it informs young people about contraception, pregnancy and consent
- What important messages it has for girls and boys.

A well-versed novel

Flick through *Not Going to Plan* and find examples of where you think Tia Fisher has used the verse form particularly well. Write a brief blog entry with the title '5 ways that *Not Going to Plan* uses verse well'.

Spend 20-30 minutes on this activity.

Reading the reviews

The extracts, below, are all from reviews of *Not Going to Plan*.

- 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/

Give yourself 30-60 minutes to complete this activity.

A.

A moving and fantastic story about teenage pregnancy and abortion. With realistic and relatable characters for teenagers I feel this is such an important read. It tackles shame and guilt around abortion and getting pregnant at a young age as well as also looking at a character that chooses not to be sexually active currently and just how difficult both of those paths can be when teenagehood can feel so hellish. I loved the core group of friends in this bringing a different experience, opinion and knowledge to the situation but also showing how important understanding is. Just because you may decide something is or isn't right for you why should you take that choice away from someone else? It promotes each individual having ownership of their bodies and their choices as well as respecting others. I will most certainly be requesting this book into our school library as I think it tells a very important story in a relatable and comforting way.

Evangeline, www.goodreads.com

B.

One sometimes hears blanket criticism of YA fiction for being too 'issues-based' and focused on the challenges of being a teenager, rather than taking young adults into new unfamiliar territory, as if books closely associated with YA worlds, dilemmas and experiences are *de facto* less 'literary' and challenging – not high-quality literature. Tia Fisher's new book, *Not Going to Plan*, is a powerful rebuttal of this simplistic view.

Barbara, www.goodreads.com

C.

A fast-paced, multi-layered delight. Spending time with Marnie and Zed was a pleasure and the suspense was there until the very last page. The prose, with its original verse layout, makes this an easy read, but not at the expense of depth or narrative. A great book for both experienced YA readers as well as those nervous of reading an actual book.

Anonymous, www.goodreads.com

D.

I was more interested in the form of this book than the actual content. Tia Fisher played around with the verse form in various shapes and sizes to keep the narrative moving along at a fast pace, with two contrasting, interesting narrators. I had two small issues with the narrative, though. First, was there enough going on beyond Marnie's pregnancy and abortion? Second, was it acceptable for Harry Borman not to be punished by the law? I'm not sure, but it's certainly something worth considering.

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 *Not Going to Plan* further.

You will need 30-60 minutes for each activity.

Writing in verse

Have a go at writing the start of your own verse novel. You might like to set it in a school, like *Not Going to Plan*, and use two contrasting narrators, with very distinctive voices. You also might like to borrow some of the interesting verse forms that Tia Fisher uses in her book.

What does freedom mean to you?

One theme of the novel is freedom – with Marnie and Zed looking for their own personal versions of freedom.

- Write a manifesto, containing up to 10 points, explaining what freedom means to you.