

The Carnegies



The Carnegie Shortlist 2026 Shadowing Resources



Twenty Four Seconds From Now

Carnegie Medal for Writing

Author: Jason Reynolds

Age range: 14+

Description:

Told in reverse, there's an emotional honesty to the story of Neon and Aria and the build up to their first time having sex. Boys' emotions are uncovered with candid honesty and warmth. The importance of being thoughtful and true to yourself, as well as considering how one's own actions impact on others are key themes in this innovatively told and intimate story which invites readers to consider what masculinity is rather than dictating this.

Themes:

- Emotional literacy
- Family
- Friendship
- Love
- Vulnerability
- Sexual intimacy
- Intergenerational bonds and trust

Shadowing Ideas:

1. What was happening 24 minutes ago? How about 24 hours ago? 24 days? 24 months? 24 years? Decide whether you want to research this on a global, local or personal scale and investigate. Share your findings with the rest of your shadowing group.
2. There is a form of synaesthesia which causes a person to associate colours with other senses such as smell, taste, music. Research some other forms of synaesthesia. What words might you associate with certain colours – Red, Blue, Yellow etc. Don't dwell too much on the why – follow your instincts. Talk about your associations as a group and turn them into a poem/picture/poster, either together or individually.
3. This book addresses some mature issues, including sexual activity, relationships, consent and contraception. Is this something you feel is addressed adequately in your school and curriculum? Do you know where to go for advice and support if you need it? Do you feel this book portrays young adult relationships in a healthy, realistic and inclusive way? Can you think of any other books which achieve this? Have you experienced any books that don't quite manage this?

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 *Twenty-Four Seconds From Now* 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 belong to?
 - 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. But ... that favourite daughter is not Aria. Because she's the oldest. And the title of favourite kid always goes to the baby. Her name's Rosin, but they call her Turtle.

2. I'd always imagined that this me-and-Aria thing, this connection, would happen at my house, which now seems like the most unromantic thought ever. And the fact that we'd fooled around there so many times feels like a miracle now that I think about it, and like an act of desperation now that I really think about it.

3. If this were a movie, then this would be when it would begin to rain. The black umbrellas would appear, blooming like flowers of gloom. And the black sheep of the family would be standing far away from everyone else, looking on, taking swigs from a pint bottle. But I wasn't no black sheep. I was just a fifteen-year-old boy standing back ...

4. I hadn't recorded mine yet, but if, for some reason, I had to do it in that moment, my three words probably would've been about the one thing I was constantly trying to avoid. Homework. Homework is trash.

5. Me, I'm not going to college. At least not regular college. And that's fine too. School ain't really my thing, not because I'm not smart, but because nobody can convince me *The Canterbury Tales* is somehow going to help me pay rent.

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 Faber & Faber edition of the book, first published in the UK in 2024.

Read the chapter called 'Right now'

- Who is the narrator, Neon, talking to in this chapter? What's the effect of this on you as a reader? You might like to think about tone of voice, how easy the story is to follow, how it compares to other books you've read, and so on.
- What do you think of the subject matter? How is the book approaching it?

Read the chapter called 'And twenty-four seconds before that'

- What are your thoughts about reading a story that is going backwards in time? What's your experience of it so far?
- How are Neon and Aria (plus members of their families) presented by the writer, Jason Reynolds? In what ways do you think you are going to be interested in these characters? Which are your favourites at the moment?

Read the chapter called 'And twenty-four minutes before that'

- What are the differences between Neon and Aria's families? What impact do you think the differences will have on their relationship?
- Turtle, Aria's sister, has synaesthesia. Is this a condition you've come across before? What do you think it would be like to have synaesthesia? You might like to consider potential benefits and disadvantages.

Read the chapter called 'And twenty-four hours before that'

- What are your thoughts about Neon's relationship with his sister, Nat?
- What are your first impressions of Dodie? Why do you think he and Neon are friends?
- What are your thoughts so far about how the book approaches sex and boys' attitudes to sex?
- What interesting things do you learn about the backgrounds of different characters in this chapter? What picture of life do you think Jason Reynolds is creating?
- What image of an American high school do you get from this chapter?

Read the chapter called 'And twenty-four days before that'

- At this point, what's your experience of reading a novel that goes backwards in time? How is the writer, Jason Reynolds, helping the reader to keep track of what's already happened in the future?
- What are your thoughts about Gammy?
- How realistic do you find Neon's conversation with his Mum over breakfast? How would you feel about a significant adult in your life talking to you in this way?
- What are your thoughts about Nat dating different men on different days of the week?
- What are your thoughts about Spank?

Read the chapter called 'And twenty-four weeks before that'

- What are your thoughts about Neon's Dad and the relationship between the two of them?
- What do you think about the friends' ideas for their school yearbook, especially the filmed three-words format. What would your three words for school be?

Read the chapter called 'And twenty-four months before that'

- How does Neon's Grandad compare with other members of the family? What is Neon's relationship with him like?
- What are your thoughts about how Neon and Aria met and about how Jason Reynolds portrays it?
- The end of this chapter says, 'But this ain't no movie. This was real life!' To what extent do you think it's a realistic portrayal of life?

Read the chapter called 'And back to now'

- What are your thoughts about how the book starts and ends in the same moment?

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 *Twenty-Four Seconds From Now*, how likely are you to read other novels by Jason Reynolds?

What's Twenty-Four Seconds From Now about?

- Spend one or two minutes writing down a single sentence that begins: '*Twenty-Four Seconds From Now* 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 *Twenty-Four Seconds From Now* relates to your chosen statement.

***Twenty-Four Seconds From Now* is about ...**

- The impact of family on young lives
- The importance of talking about things
- The different ways to show you love someone
- How everything happens for a reason
- The value of being your own person
- Not having sex until you and your partner are ready
- How different generations can learn from each other
- Following your own path
- The intensity of first love.

Exploring the Novel Further

Other characters

The novel is told in the voice of Neon, 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 Neon.
 - Gammy
 - Aria
 - Turtle
 - Mr Wright
 - Mrs Wright
 - Neon's Mum
 - Neon's Dad
 - Nat
 - Dodie
 - Denzil Jeremy Washington

Spend 15-20 minutes on this activity.

Exploring *Twenty-Four Seconds From Now*

Reader report

- Imagine you work as a reader for a publisher. Your job is to read manuscripts sent to the publisher and then write a report about why they should or should not be published. Write a short report explaining what makes *Twenty-Four Seconds From Now* an interesting book and why you think it should be published.

Spend 20-30 minutes on this activity.

Defending the book

- Imagine your school has received a letter from a parent complaining about *Twenty-Four Seconds From Now* being in the school library. Their complaints centre around three things:
 - The book's focus on Neon and Aria having sex
 - The references to sexual abuse in Aria's mother's past
 - The use of American vernacular (it's written how Neon talks).
- Write a reply to the parent as your school's head of English, justifying the book's presence in the library, including addressing the three areas of complaint.

Reading the reviews

The extracts, below, are all from reviews of *Twenty-Four Seconds From Now*.

- 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.

I loved the positive vibes that came from this book. It was so refreshing to read about a young black man that is not focused on race, but instead on relationships. These aren't always straightforward, but they're always interesting and act as an example of what a thoughtful, respectful life can look like.

B.

Well done to Jason Reynolds for yet again coming up with a stunning structure within which to tell a stunning story. He did it before with *Long Way Down*, in which each chapter takes place between different floors of a lift's journey to the ground floor and this, if anything, is even better. Normally you read a book to find out what happens next. It was a real thrill to read a book to find out what happened before!

C.

This is a book that all teenage secondary students should read, especially boys – a perfect antidote to the claims that all boys have been indoctrinated with toxic masculinity. This book shows that there is a different way to be a young man, one in which it's okay to show feelings, to talk things through, to love and to respect.

D.

I thought I was going to love this book. The first three chapters seemed really interesting and unusual, and there was a real thrill to reading a story that goes backwards in time. However, as the leaps to the past got bigger and bigger, I began to lose interest. I knew what was going to happen in the lives of the characters and I could guess how they were going to get there. A good try from Jason Reynolds, but ultimately he doesn't quite pull it off.

Writing Activities

On your own, or with a partner, complete one or more of these writing activities to help you develop your thoughts about *Twenty-Four Seconds From Now* further.

You will need 30-60 minutes for each activity.

- Write a poem in which each line is made up of three words that make sense on their own. The whole poem could be about your experience of school.
- *Twenty-Four Seconds From Now* has a very unusual structure because it is written backwards. Come up with an interesting structure for a story of your own and write the first few paragraphs.
- Write a diary entry in the voice of Neon or Aria, three years after the end of the book, giving some clues about what life has been like for them in that period.