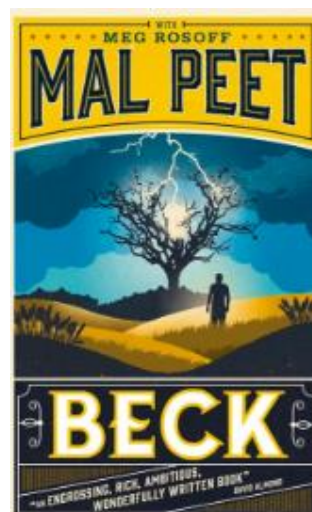


## 2017 Carnegie Medal shortlist Talking Points

Title: **Beck**

Author: **Mal Peet and Meg Roscoff**

Publisher: **Walker**



### TIME AND PLACE

The book is set in a place you probably don't know, and a time you certainly never lived in – how well do you feel these are recreated for a reader today?

Are there details of the way lives at the time are portrayed in the book that you remember helping to make it come to life for you? (There's some of the authors' historical research behind all this, of course.)

The characters have very different dialects or voices – what do we learn about people from the way they speak?

### BECK

Despite all the adversity, Beck keeps fighting to survive, keeps escaping each difficult new situation – what drives him to keep going?

Beck is described as having for a long time “misered the cold coins of disappointment close to his heart.” What do you think that means?

What does he learn about himself, over the course of the story, over the course of his travels?

### RACE

How does the fact that Beck is mixed-race define the way he is treated by different characters along the way?

What about the other characters? Are there other characters whose experience of the world is at least partly determined by their racial heritage? (Or for that matter, are there any characters whose experience is *not*?)



The CILIP Carnegie  
& Kate Greenaway  
Children's Book  
Awards

This story is set in a post-slavery country; are there still relics of a working society that used to be based on slaves in the way that certain people behave towards one another?

### THE BEST AND THE WORST

The book shows us some of the best and worst of human nature; whom do you see at the extremes? Who are the cruellest, the kindest?

Some of the cruelty can make for hard reading, and will shock some readers; how do you think this is handled in the telling of the story? Is it effective? Is it necessary?

Among other things, this is a book about inequality and injustice – is some kind of balanced restored, eventually, some kind of justice done?

### LOVE AND HOPE

Despite the dark times Beck goes through, are there also positive, inspiring messages to be learned from his experiences, about kindness, generosity, strength, love, trust?

Things are better for him towards the end of the book – what is it that makes things better?

Who are the characters who embody the more positive side of the book?

Much of the book is about his attempt to find a place for himself in the world – by the end, has he found somewhere?

### AND FINALLY...

How do you feel about the ending – a satisfactory resolution?

The book could be described as historical, episodic, picaresque, coming-of-age, misery, drama, romance, etc... How would you characterise it?

The book was begun by one writer and completed by another. Can you tell which bits were written by whom – and actually, does it matter?

### AND FINALLY...

Does this Carnegie-shortlisted book deserve to win? Why, or why not?



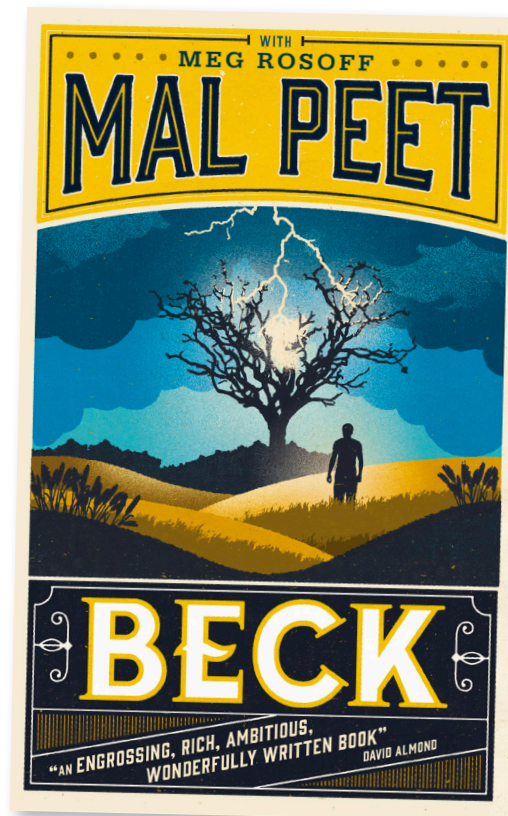
The CILIP Carnegie  
& Kate Greenaway  
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# BECK

by Mal Peet with Meg Rosoff  
Walker Books

Shortlisted for the 2017 Carnegie Medal  
and the Amnesty CILIP Honour

*'Gripping from start to finish, the writing is flawless. A story that reminds the reader that, in spite of discrimination and hardship, there can be love, goodness and hope'* – Judging panel



**No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.**

Article 5, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

### ABOUT THIS BOOK

Beck tells the story of a mixed-race boy who is subjected to cruelty, abuse and degradation, and who loses the only people who have ever been kind to him. It is also the story of his capacity to overcome the trauma of his past and experience love when he finds it. It is Mal Peet's final novel, completed after his death by Meg Rosoff.

“And a determination formed in his head right then not to fall for the ruse of kindness again. It led to nothing but pain.”

**Narrator**

### HUMAN RIGHTS THEMES IN THIS STORY

Racism; right to be safe; right to be protected by adults; right not to be subjected to degrading and inhumane treatment; sexual abuse; right to food; child labour and slavery; right to marry who we choose; women's rights; rights of indigenous people.

### YOU CAN TALK ABOUT...

#### Safety and protection

- Why does nobody stop the Christian Brothers from abusing the boys?
- 'Spare the rod and spoil the child' (Mrs Griggs). How does that make you feel?
- Why doesn't the Inspector listen to Beck?
- How do you feel when Bone and Irma take Beck in? Why won't they let him go with them?

#### Discrimination

- Beck is called racist names. What is the impact on him?
- How can we stop racist language being used?
- What do you think the link is between insults and violence?
- Despite their differences, Grace and Beck share the experience of being discriminated against. In what way? What have Grace's family suffered?
- What rights have been denied at the hands of

European settlers and their descendants?

- Why is Grace described as a ‘troublesome woman’? Is this meant as an insult?

### Longing and belonging, family and identity

- Beck has times of comfort and encouragement. When and by who? How does he react to this?
- How might Beck feel when he is treated with kindness for the first time?
- When he arrives at the farm, Beck seems to have found a place where he can be safe. Why does he leave?
- How do you feel about Beck and Grace’s relationship?
- Does the book make you understand the healing power that humans can have for one another?

The Blackfeet people have occupied the Rocky Mountain region for more than 10,000 years. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the four Blackfeet bands were nomadic, following the seasonal grazing and migration of buffalo. The bands were the North Piegan, the South Piegan, the Blood, and the Siksika – members of the Blackfeet Nation in the United States mostly descend from the South Piegan.

### ACTIVITY

Beck finds it difficult to feel hope. Write a letter of solidarity to Beck telling him how you feel about what he has experienced, what you admire about him and any thoughts that you have about his future.

### RESEARCH

Find out about the history and culture of the Blackfeet Nation. What is the origin of the Blackfeet name? Where do they live? What changes have the people faced?

## We are all born free and equal

The atrocities of World War II sparked a determination to protect the rights of all human beings, everywhere. On 10 December 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The preamble says it must be shared, learned by children and be a part of all our lives.

For a simplified version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights go to [www.amnesty.org.uk/udhr](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/udhr)

For more free educational resources from Amnesty International go to [www.amnesty.org.uk/education](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/education)



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