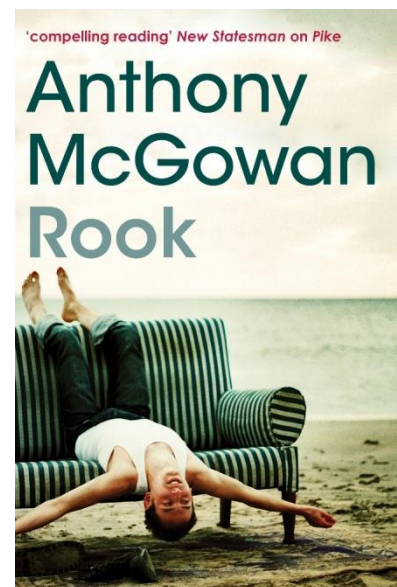


2018 Carnegie Medal shortlist Talking Points

Title: **ROOK**

Author: **Anthony McGowan**

Publisher: **Barrington Stoke**



THE CHARACTERS

Nicky tells us about the ways in which Kenny is different, including his special ability to understand some things that others wouldn't. Can you think of examples of this?

We learn early on that Nicky has a secret, but aren't told immediately what it is – could you guess?

Do our views of a character change as we understand *why* they behave as they do? (Think of Stanno/Pete, for example.)

Why does Nicky *not* want to talk to Sarah, even though he also *does*? When he finally does talk to her, he doesn't stop! (About his family, about himself – and it's very surprising!) What makes him change? (Our own view of her as readers might be different from his to begin with, but does that change, too?)

REAL LIFE

Many of the family troubles of the two preceding books seem to have gone now – why is Nicky still resentful, still angry with his dad?

What do you make of Jenny's character, and her role in the story?

The author carefully avoids using one particular swear word, then it appears surprisingly and abruptly (page 78, if you're wondering) – what's the effect he achieves in doing this?

ROOKY AND THE HUMAN WORLD

What did you think of the opening chapter? Here the bird isn't just the subject, but it's all seen from the bird's point of view – what's the effect of this?

In the opening, we see predator turned prey. (Just as later, when he's fed worms, Rooky becomes predator again.) So we are introduced early on to the sometimes cruel laws of nature – how do they apply in Nicky and Kenny's human world?



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Does the way the more powerful animals treat their weaker prey make us think about issues like bullying that we see in Nicky's school?

The book is about the bird, but it's also not about the bird – so what exactly *is* the bird doing in the story? In what ways does each of the boys identify with it?

QUOTATIONS

How does each of these quotations relate to the book more widely?

- “you shouldn't mess with the law of nature, because you can't change it”
- “There's a good part to anger. Anger is a kind of energy, and it makes you want to do stuff, not just curl up and die”
- “our lives are all about the stories we tell. In fact, our lives are a story. And it's up to you how you tell it.”

RESPONSIBILITY, FAIRNESS

Are the consequences of Nicky's behaviour *fair*? Do all the characters ultimately get what they deserve?

Sometimes Nicky lies to Kenny in order to make him feel better – does this make the lying OK?

THE TRILOGY

If you've read *Brock* and *Pike*, the books that came before this, how do the three connect? What, apart from the characters, do they have in common?

If this is the first Nicky & Kenny book you've read, you may have noticed that McGowan refers to various moments in those earlier books here (including several references to the badger episode, for example) – does reading this one make you want to go back and read them now?

Do you like books that bring you back to characters or worlds you know already, or do you prefer something totally new each time? Why?

Rook is being billed as the end of a trilogy. Is it a tidy, conclusive end, or is it still open to the possibility of more to come? What would you like to see happen next?

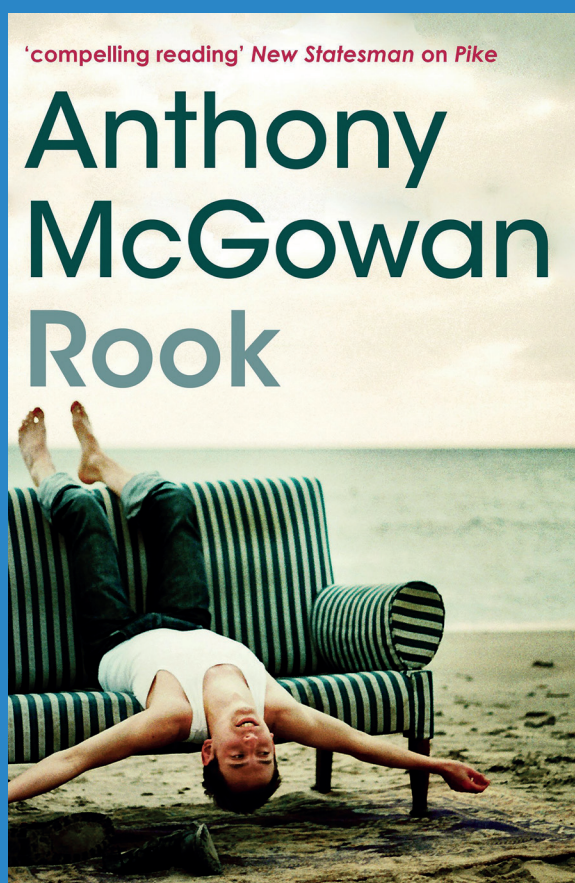
AND FINALLY...

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



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Awards

The Carnegie Shortlist 2018

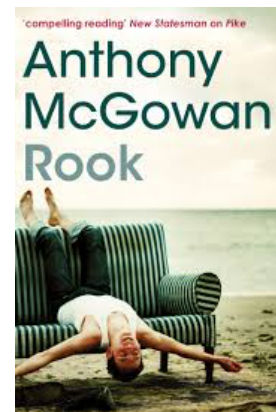


EMC Resources: *Rook*



Rook, by Anthony McGowan

Before reading



1. Look at the picture of a rook, above. Have you seen one before? What other birds is it similar to?

Why might a novel be called *Rook*. What characteristics, for example, are suggested by this bird, that might appear in human characters?

2. Now look at the book's front cover. What do you expect the book to be about based on this cover? You might like to consider why it features:

- the sea and beach
 - a sofa on a beach
 - this particular boy, wearing these particular clothes, in this particular position.
- Does the image seem to have anything to do with the book's title?
 - You might like to come back to the cover after reading to see if you have changed any of your initial opinions.

During Reading

A focus on chapter 1

Chapter one offers some of the richest descriptive passages in the whole novel. It also establishes some of the key themes and ideas that are explored afterwards. Work your way through the chapter as follows:

Who or what might the rook represent?

- Read the whole chapter. As you read, imagine a human equivalent of the rook. What age are they? What are they called? What are they like? Where are they? What happens to them that is similar to what happens to the rook?
- Discuss your ideas as a whole class. It might surprise you to learn that the rest of the novel is mainly about human characters. With this in mind, why do you think the writer has chosen to start the novel in this way?

The structure of chapter 1

- You are now going to think about how the chapter is **structured** to create a sense of drama. In a pair, or three, re-read the chapter and select 5-10 moments in the description of the rook. You should then explain how each moment creates a particular effect and/ or moves the action on. E.g. at the beginning the rook is happily scratching for worms – this creates a sense of peace and calm (perhaps waiting to be broken).
- Discuss the moments you have chosen and your ideas about them with the rest of your class. Discuss how effective you think the structure of this chapter is.

Language in chapter 1

- Finish by focusing on the **language** of the chapter. Working in pairs skim the chapter and select words and phrases used to describe both the rook and the sparrowhawk. Write these down in two separate columns.
 - Drawing on the words and phrases, one of you should write a poem about the rook, the other about the sparrowhawk.
 - When you have finished your poems, try to reduce them in length by about 10 words as part of a redrafting process.
 - Listen to a range of poems around the class, then discuss together what kind of language has been used in this chapter, and how effective it is.

Working through the remaining chapters

We think you should read through the novel without pausing too often, then do some more substantial work on it afterwards.

There are lots of important parts of the book to consider while reading, so keep a journal, pausing to write down your reflections about each of the following.

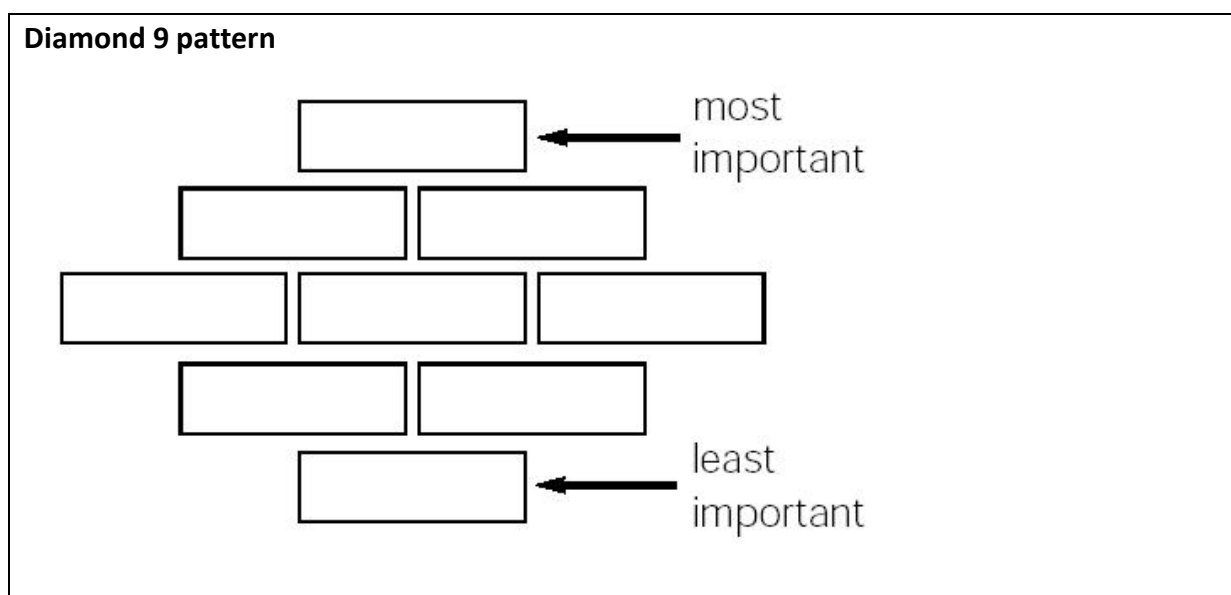
- Nicky and his relationship with Kenny
- The portrayal of Kenny, and of disability in general, especially after Stanno has had an epileptic seizure
- Nicky and Sarah's relationship and what the novel is saying about first love
- How the novel portrays bullying. Who, at different points in the novel, are the bullies and the bullied? How does this relate to the first chapter in which the rook is attacked by the sparrowhawk?
- Nicky's behaviour in Ms Kemp's office
- The ending.

After reading

What is the novel about?

- Below are nine suggestions for what *Rook* is about.
- Working in a pair, or small group, rearrange them into a 'Diamond 9' formation, as shown below.
- Compare your arrangement with another pair or group and discuss any differences.

<i>Rook</i> is about ...		
Treating people with disabilities with respect	The difficulties of being a teenager	Learning to cope with setbacks
Understanding the differences in all people	Taking care of the vulnerable	Standing up for what you believe in
The traumas of first love	A typical teenage life	The complexities of family life



Nicky in the middle

Nicky narrates all the chapters with the exception of the first, and is at the centre of all the action in the novel. To help you remember everything he was involved with, and to prepare for more substantial writing about Nicky's character, you should produce a diagram of Nicky's relationships in the novel as follows.

- In a small group, draw Nicky in the middle of a large sheet of paper. Label the picture with words or phrases that describe him.
- Write the names of key characters in the novel, or draw them, around the edge of the sheet: Kenny, Sarah, Stanno, Nicky's Dad, Jenny, Ms Kemp (the head teacher), Tina (the dog). Label each with words or phrases that describe them.
- Draw arrows between Nicky and the characters and write along them the nature of their relationship, including key moments described in the novel.
- Draw arrows between other characters where links exist. E.g. between Sarah and her brother, Stanno. Write along them the nature of their relationship, including key moments described in the novel.
- Compare what you have identified with different groups.

Lessons for Nicky

Drawing on the previous activity, write a journal entry in the voice of Nicky, reflecting on what he learned from his experiences. Before you write, identify four or five areas of focus. E.g. family, love, care, behaviour etc. and brainstorm ideas around each.

Cards for Literary Analysis

These cards have been designed for use with any short story or novel. You can select a particular card to work with or rely on your teacher to give you a particular area of focus. You could then work through the bullet points on your card or select a few that seem most interesting or relevant for a particular text.

Setting

- In which different settings does this story/novel take place? What part does each setting play? Which setting is most significant and why?
- How important is setting to the story/novel as a whole? Does the setting have a particular impact on the story/novel, or could it be set almost anywhere?
- What difference would it make if this story/novel was set somewhere else? E.g. another country, a rural rather than urban setting, in space!
- How effective do you think the writer has been in creating a sense of place? Are there any particular examples of setting you think are particularly well written? If so, why?
- Is there anything particularly interesting or special about the way setting is used and presented? In what ways is it similar or different to stories/novels that explore similar themes and ideas, or that are written in the same genre?
- Find one or two bullet points from other cards that add to what you have discussed about setting. Explain the connections.
- Is there anything important that you've noticed that isn't raised on this card? What is it? Why do you think it's important?



Characters

- Who is your favourite character, and why?
- Who do you think is the most important character, and why?
- Who are the other significant characters? What different roles do they have?
- What is special or unusual about the way one or more of the characters is presented?
- Which character would you most like to be friends with, and why? Which character might significant adults want you to be friends with, and why?
- Are characters paired or grouped in any particular ways? E.g. friends, rivals, etc. What ideas are raised by these pairs or groupings?
- Are the characters typical of ones found in this kind of story/novel? Are they distinctive and individual, or stereotypes? Explain your answer.
- Find one or two bullet points from other cards that add to what you have discussed about characters. Explain the connections.
- Is there anything important that you've noticed that isn't raised on this card? What is it? Why do you think it's important?



Form and structure

- What do you think is interesting about the way this story/novel begins?
- What were the key moments in this story/novel? How did they shape the story/novel as a whole?
- If you had to describe the path of this story/novel, what would it be? E.g. journey from childhood to adulthood, from grief to happiness etc.
- What did you notice about the end of this story/novel? Was it what you were expecting? Did it tie up loose ends, or leave some things unresolved?
- Does this story/novel belong to a particular genre? If so, how does it fit in with other stories that you know in the same genre?
- Does the story/novel use just one form or does it include more than one E.g. letters, diary entries, poems, newspaper reports
- Find one or two bullet points from other cards that add to what you have discussed about form and structure. Explain the connections.
- Is there anything important that you've noticed that isn't raised on this card? What is it? Why do you think it's important?



Themes and ideas

- What, to you, are the five most important themes and ideas in this story/novel? If you had to narrow your list down to one theme or idea, what would it be and why? In what ways is this theme presented? E.g. if the theme is love, what exactly does the story/novel have to say about love?
- Does this story/novel deal with big issues that affect the whole world, or small ones that affect individual lives? Give reasons for your answer.
- Does this story/novel contain any themes or ideas that have made you look at the world in new ways? If so, what are they, and how have they changed your views?
- Does this story/novel contain any themes and ideas that explore how people should act and behave? If so, what are they and do you agree with how they are presented?
- Are the themes and ideas presented in ways similar or different to other stories you have read, including stories of the same type, or in the same genre?
- Find one or two bullet points from other cards that add to what you have discussed about themes and ideas. Explain the connections.
- Is there anything important that you've noticed that isn't raised on this card? What is it? Why do you think it's important?



Language

- Identify one or two of your favourite passages in the story/novel where language is used particularly well? Explain how it is used.
- How would you describe the language used in this story/novel overall? E.g. poetic, plain, chatty etc.
- Would you say the language in this story/novel is original or creative in any particular way? If so, how?
- Are there any patterns in the language used? If so, what are they, and what is their effect? Are there any other patterns, such as of imagery and symbolism?
- How is dialogue used in the story/novel? Do characters, for example, speak in particularly distinctive ways?
- Is the language similar to how it is used in similar kinds of stories/novels? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?
- Find one or two bullet points from other cards that add to what you have discussed about language. Explain the connections.
- Is there anything important that you've noticed that isn't raised on this card? What is it? Why do you think it's important?



Narrative

- How does the writer try to capture and keep the reader's attention? How successful are they in doing this?
- Is the narrative told in order from beginning to end (a linear narrative), or does it move backwards and forwards in time? What is the effect of the order in which events are told?
- Can you think of any other ways the story/novel could be told? For example, by a different character, or in a different order? How would this affect your experience of reading?
- Would you say that this story/novel is told in a particular original or creative way? If so, how?
- Is this story/novel told in a way that is typical for its genre?
- Find one or two bullet points from other cards that add to what you have discussed about narrative. Explain the connections.
- Is there anything important that you've noticed that isn't raised on this card? What is it? Why do you think it's important?



Point of view and voice

- Through whose eyes do we see the events of the story/novel? Do readers get just one point of view or several?
- What do you find interesting about the point or points of view presented?
- If the story/novel is told from different points of view, how does the writer do this?
- What would the story/novel be like if told from someone else's point of view? Whose point of view would you choose, and why?
- How would you describe the tone of voice used to tell the narrative? Does the narrative draw attention to itself by using a particular tone, or is the tone pushed to the background? What is the effect of the choice made by the writer?
- Find one or two bullet points from other cards that add to what you have discussed about point of view and voice. Explain the connections.
- Is there anything important that you've noticed that isn't raised on this card? What is it? Why do you think it's important?



Audience and overall personal response

- Who do you think this story/novel was written for, and why? Are there any other groups of people who you think should read it?
- What was your experience of reading this story/novel?
- What would you recommend about this story/novel to other people?
- Which parts of this story/novel did you most enjoy? Were there any parts that you didn't enjoy?
- Do you think this story/novel could be improved in some way? If so, how?
- What other stories (or films, TV, plays etc.) does this story/novel remind you of? In what ways?
- Who do you think should read this book and why?
- Find one or two bullet points from other cards that add to what you have discussed about personal response and audience. Explain the connections.
- Is there anything important that you've noticed that isn't raised on this card? What is it? Why do you think it's important?



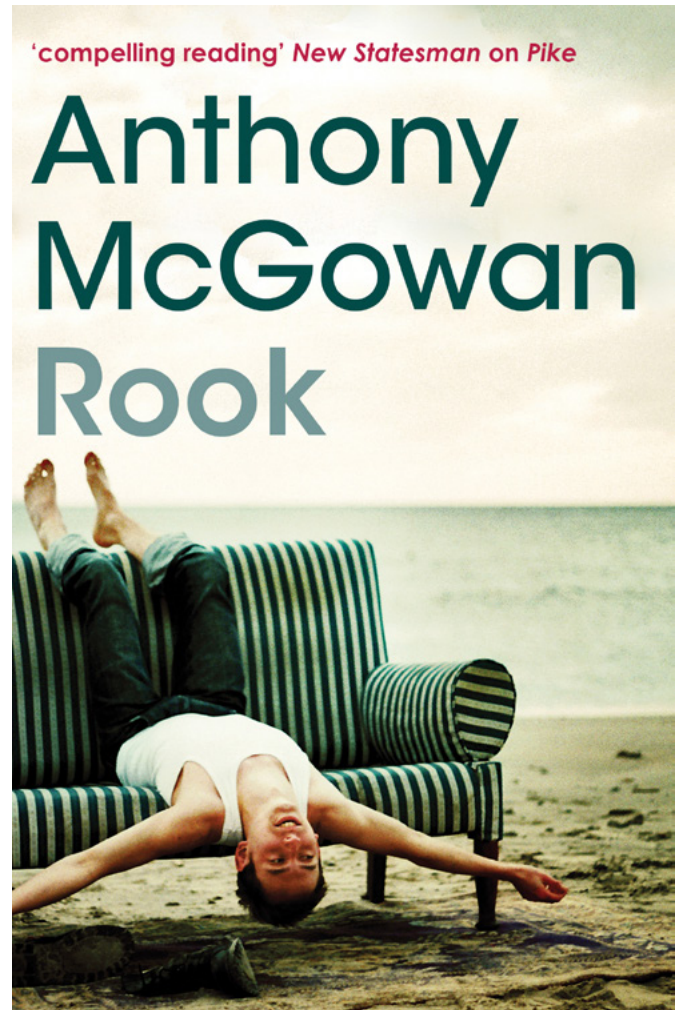
ROOK

By Anthony McGowan

Barrington Stoke

2018 Carnegie Medal shortlist,
eligible for Amnesty CILIP Honour

'Every word used is apposite. The novel deals thoughtfully with themes of bullying, first love, faith and what it means to be part of a family. Undeniably gritty and authentic.' *Judging panel*



UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Article 5: No one has the right to hurt us or to torture us

Article 26: Everyone has the right to education

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Life has got better for teenager Nicky. His dad has a girlfriend, and his brother Kenny, who has learning difficulties, has made new friends. But after Nicky and Kenny rescue a rook left for dead, life starts to unravel. *Rook* is a story about coping with a bully, not bottling things up, kindness and looking after those closest to us. It enables us to see things from other people's perspectives and recognise that everyone has individual experiences and rights on an equal basis.

HUMAN RIGHTS IN THIS STORY

The right to education; to a good life with enough food, clothing, housing and healthcare; to equality; to safety; to freedom from cruel or degrading behaviour; to be treated fairly.

YOU CAN TALK ABOUT...

The rook

- What does it symbolise?
- What are the parallels between Nicky and Rooky?

The right to education

- What do you think of the decision to expel Nicky?
- How would you feel if you went to Milton Park?
- Do you think the school's reputation is justified?
- Is it OK for students to be afraid to go to a particular school?
- Why is education so important that it is included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

Money

- Nicky's family is short of money. What impact does this have?

Family

- ‘My dad was in a bad way’ (Nicky). How does that make you feel?
- Why does Nicky hurt Kenny on purpose?
- What holds the family together?

Communication and friendship

- Is Nicky a good friend? What do you like about him?
- Nicky struggles to communicate his true feelings. Kenny possesses no filters and says what is true. Discuss.
- Sarah is a great listener. Who can you talk to? How can we help people feel safe enough to talk about their experiences and feelings?

Bullying and discrimination

- Derogatory language is used in the book. What is the impact?
- How can we stop this type of language being used?
- What lies beneath Stanno’s bullying? How does your opinion of him change by the end of the book?

Doing the right thing

- Kenny says ‘You shouldn’t say things that you don’t know cos saying stuff you don’t know is lying’. Do you agree?
- At the point Nicky walks out of school, what advice would you give him?
- What does Nicky learn about doing the right thing?

Equality and respect

- Why is it a surprise to Nicky that ‘Kenny existed all by himself’?
- Kenny has the right to be independent and treated with respect. Why is this overlooked?
- How can we ensure that disabled people are not discriminated against?

ACTIVITY

Rook tells the story of Nicky’s bad week. Write the story from Kenny or Sarah’s perspective, in the first person.

RESEARCH

Find out about the medical model of disability versus the social model. What do you learn about disability rights and how people campaign for them?

‘I’d spent my whole life not talking about the things inside me, and now I’d spilled them all over the table, all over her, this girl that I didn’t even know.’ Nicky

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.

When using these notes, you can download for reference:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights simplified version, especially useful for younger children [amnesty.org.uk/udhr](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/udhr)
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [unicef.org/crc](https://www.unicef.org/crc)

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



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