

## 2017 Carnegie Medal shortlist Talking Points

Title: **The Stars at Oktober Bend**

Author: **Glenda Millard**

Publisher: **Old Barn Books**



### ALICE

Alice's traumatic back-story isn't all clearly explained to the reader at first – do you think this withholding of information is an effective choice by the author?

Despite her trauma, what are the things that inspire Alice in her writing?

Do you think she's weak or strong, fearful or brave? Why?

Alice's "soul is filled with songbirds" – what do you think this means?

### ALICE'S VOICE

What did you make of Alice's poetry? Why do you think the author has chosen to write in her voice in this way?

**Why does Alice herself choose to express herself like this? What's the connection between her speech and her writing?**

Alice's vocabulary isn't always quite conventional – can you identify some examples of language that's particularly distinctive to her voice?

### ALICE (AS OTHERS SEE HER)

How is Alice seen by

- her grandmother?
- her brother?
- Manny, when he first meets her?
- the people in the town?

And whose views of Alice change over the course of the book?

How important is Bear in Alice's life, and in the book?



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## MANNY

What do we know about Manny's feelings about his past?

In Sierra Leone, apparently "stories are not written on paper" – what do you think this means?

How settled and happy is Manny in his new family?

Why does he run?

What's the significance of Manny's name? And Alice's?

## FRIENDSHIP

What do Alice and Manny have in common?

What do they each gain from their relationship with the other, what do they learn from each other?

How does their friendship give them strength, and what does it teach them about how to deal with the world?

## THE ENDING

What do you think of the flood – why might the author have chosen to include this episode in the story, and does it work for you?

The author has described herself as a "*mostly happy, hopeful and optimistic person*" – *is this the world-view you'd guess from the ending to the book?*

## AND FINALLY...

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



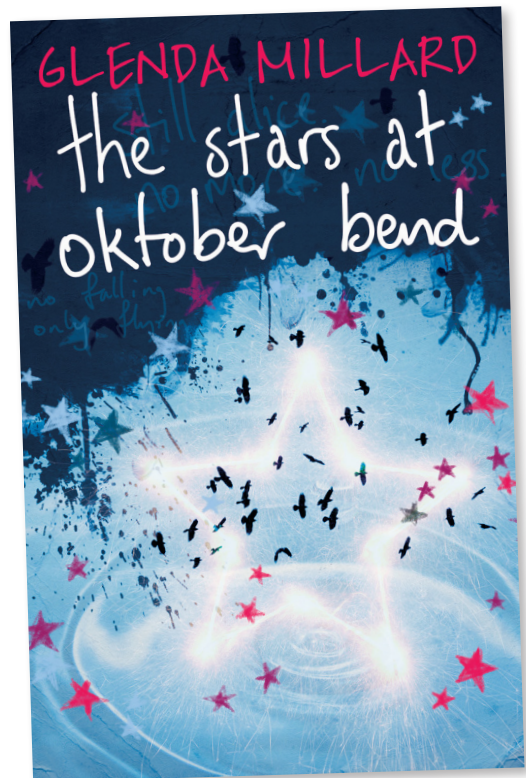
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# THE STARS AT OKTOBER BEND

by Glenda Millard  
Old Barn Books

Shortlisted for the 2017 Carnegie Medal  
and the Amnesty CILIP Honour

*'A wonderfully evocative tale of two damaged young people who find redemption and hope in their love for each other. The use of poetry works extraordinarily well'* – Judging panel



**We all have the right to life, and to live in freedom and safety.**

Article 3, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

## ABOUT THIS BOOK

This is a powerful story about two broken children dealing with loss. Alice, 15, has a brain injury after a terrible assault and expresses herself through beautiful poetry. Manny, 16, was once a child soldier in Sierra Leone and has lost all his family. They find solace in each other and try to move on with trust and hope.

‘Once upon a time, a boy with no yesterdays asked a girl with no tomorrows for something no one else wanted.’

**Alice**

## HUMAN RIGHTS THEMES IN THIS STORY

Right to be safe; right to privacy; right to asylum; children and women in conflict; right to be a child and to be an adult; sexual violence; racism; forgiveness; justice and a fair trial; young carers; child soldiers.

## YOU CAN TALK ABOUT...

### Young carers and the right to healthcare

- Joey is the youngest in the family but takes on a lot of responsibility. Who should have looked after Alice, Joey and Gram?
- Why is Gram afraid to go to the hospital?

### Respect

- How do you feel when Alice is described as ‘a retarded girl with no prospects’?
- Why does O’Leary behave the way that he does?
- Who treats Alice with respect? How is their behaviour respectful?

### Love

- We see different types of love – love between siblings, the protective love of parents and grandparents, the love between friends. What is the author trying to make us understand?

### The impact of trauma

- 'I know what it is like to have no hope. I have been that way,' says Manny. What does he mean?
- While Alice is trying to be herself, Manny is trying to live with himself. What would you say to him when says 'I did not have a soul, but if I did, I was sure there was nothing there worth letting out'?
- Disability and poverty have an isolating effect on people. How is this played out in the book? What can we do to stop this happening around us?

### Confronting identity and belonging

- Alice thinks of her writing as a 'means to freedom beyond her circumstances – to flying'. Discuss.
- How does Manny cope trying to fit in to a new community?
- How do Alice and Manny connect?

### The right to a family

- What do the tables belonging to the families of Alice, Manny, and Bull and Louisa represent?
- Why might Alice and Joey's mother have left them?
- What motivates Louisa and Bull to welcome Manny into their family?

### The right to be a child and to grow up

- What is the difference between being 12 and 15? Does it change what rights Alice should enjoy?
- How do you think people should treat Alice?
- Are children's rights respected in this story?

### Living with courage and hope

- The book is filled with ignorant people who bully both of the characters. How does this make you feel?
- Talk about incidents of courage, compassion, conviction (Alice and Manny standing up for other people and in their relationship; Alice when the flood comes).
- Why does Alice rescue O'Leary? Are you surprised when she forgives him?
- What enables Alice and Manny to be courageous?

### Finally...

- How would you respond if someone told you the secrets that Manny and Alice tell each other?

### ACTIVITY

Inspired by Alice, write anonymous poems or notes to leave around your house, library or school. Write for yourself or think about what would make people feel happy or moved and let that shape what you write.

### RESEARCH

Find out about child soldiers, particularly in the Sierra Leone civil war.

## 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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