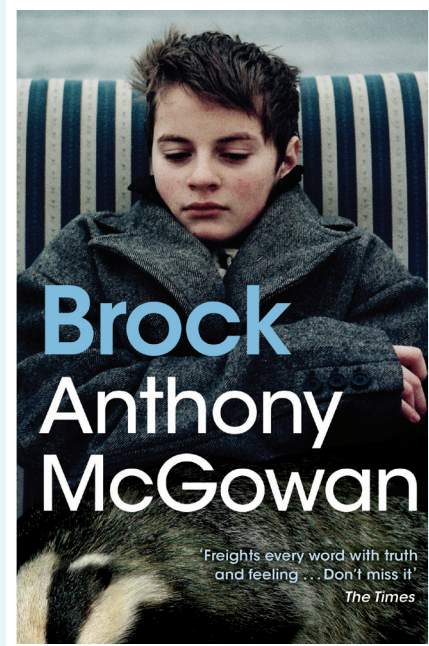


Barrington Stoke

CLASSROOM RESOURCES



BROCK Anthony McGowan

- PART 1** Synopsis and Themes
- PART 2** Suggested Questions to Develop Reading Strategies
- PART 3** About Anthony McGowan

PART 1 SYNOPSIS AND THEMES

SYNOPSIS AND THEMES

This guide has been produced to provide ideas for guiding readers through Anthony's McGowan's **Brock**, a powerful short novel that is perfect for class reading. The guide is written to be used after reading the full text in order to discuss the book as a whole.

A synopsis is followed by quotes from the book with suggestions for discussion points designed to help readers engage with the topics the book covers. The topics assigned to each quote are intended to further understanding of the text and provide opportunities for classroom discussion or written work.

We hope you enjoy using these materials with your students.

Brock is the first book in **The Truth of Things**, a series that follows brothers Nicky and Kenny, teenagers in a rural working-class town, as they navigate family life and growing up. Although things can be tough, the brothers stick together, sharing adventures and finding humour even in the most difficult times.

Brock begins with Kenny dragging Nicky out of bed one dark morning to witness a terrible act of destruction and the senseless killing of an innocent animal. Even though Kenny is the older brother he needs a lot of looking after and sometimes doesn't really understand what he's getting involved with. When Nicky manages to save something special that has escaped the disaster, his and Kenny's lives are changed forever ...

Brock is written in a moving, instantly accessible style that is humorous and powerful in equal measure. This book is perfect for class discussions as it will help readers engage with topics around violence, family relationships, and the power of nature.

PART 2

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS TO DEVELOP READING STRATEGIES

The first winter was hard, and he had frozen and he had starved. But he had endured. And now here he was. The old king, asleep in his sett. Strong still, but fading. [page 2]

Discuss chapter 1:

- Why is this chapter unusual? How does it differ from the rest of the book?
- Why do you think the author chooses to start the novel like this? Why does he choose to personify the badger?
- What effect does this personification have on our experience of the eventual violence and the feelings it conjures? Do you think you feel more for the animal because you have gotten to “know” it?
- Do you like how the book opens? Do you find this style of opening engaging? Why?



Calling Moorgate the main street makes it sound a bit too grand. There was a Spar, and two pubs – The Oddfellows Arms, where my dad goes, and The Red Bear, where he doesn't, cos he's barred. Then there's a hairdresser's, and the closed-down social club, and that's about it. At the traffic lights we went down Kirk Lane, which has the fish-and-chip shop on it, and another pub called The Foresters, and at the end, the church. [page 7–8]

[...]

Like I said before, all I'd ever seen when I looked at the countryside were the bare fields. But that was wrong. I'd lived there all my life but all of a sudden now I could see loads of things that I never even knew were there. There were little streams and, more importantly, woods. [page 95]

[...]

It was beautiful under there. The trees were much taller and fatter and more ... I don't know what the best word is ... majestic, yeah, much more majestic than the trees in the Copse. And it all just felt older, as if there had never been a time when this wood didn't exist. [page 100–101]

Explore the sense of place within the novel:

- What does Nicky choose to focus on when describing his hometown? What do his descriptions suggest about the setting? What sort of place is it?
- Does Nicky like his hometown? What about the language he uses tells us this?
- Look at the differences between the description of the natural landscape and the town.
 - Is one more positive than the other?
 - What can this tell us about Nicky and his relationship to his home?
- Why do you think Nicky struggles to find the words to describe the woods when he visits them for the first time?
- Do you think the setting is realistic or authentic? Does it feel real to you as a reader? Why?
- Descriptive passages aren't the only things that help create the setting of the book. What other aspects of the novel help build the world in which Nicky lives? What else can give the reader clues about where the book is set? Give examples from the text.

But there were a couple of long jagged ones left, and now he fastened them around Slag's throat. I think I knew at that moment that the big dog was as good as dead. [...] It didn't matter that Satan was free now – not even this badger could bite two dogs at the same time. Satan sank his teeth into the badger's back, and at last he cut through the tough pelt and drew blood. He snapped and snarled and bit down and pulled and twisted and tossed, but the badger just ignored him. The badger had a job to do. A hard job. A painful job. A job that would kill him. But he was going to do it. The job was just to hold on. [page 46–47]

[...]

Jezbo stopped laughing and looked at me. All of a sudden he wasn't like a kid at all. He was something older and darker and more coldly evil. "Look at where you are, poof," he said. "Go on, look around. There's no one here. We could do what we want to you. No one would ever know. We could kill you here. Cut you up. Feed you to the dogs." And when he said it, with Rich and his psycho brother watching, I knew that they could. [page 118]

Discuss the violence within the novel:

- Is there a difference between the animal acts of violence and the human acts of violence in the book? Give examples from the text.
- What does Nicky's response to the violence tell us about his character? Do you feel the same as him?
- Examine the language the author uses when describing these acts of violence. What techniques does the author use to make these passages stand out?

For the past couple of years all my softness had been saved for Kenny. The rest of the time, I'd made myself hard. I mean hard as in not feeling stuff, not thinking about stuff, not caring about stuff. I could never be hard like Jezbo or Rich and Rob. I didn't even want to be. Anyway, I hadn't felt much about anything for a long time. But now I stood and looked at those two little creatures in that scuzzy old box and it made me feel ... something. [page 74]

Examine the role of animals within the story:

- What do Tina and Snuffy offer to Nicky and Kenny? How do these animals help them?
- How does Nicky, Kenny and their Dad's treatment of the animals differ from the other characters? What does this tell the reader about their family?
- In what ways do the animals in the book mirror the behaviour of their owners or the other human characters? What can this tell us about these characters?

I know you're not meant to say 'simple-minded' any more, but it seems to me that it's the exact right word for Kenny. He hasn't got all the stuff going on that messes up other people's heads. He isn't always trying to work out the angles, or how to stitch you up. He thinks other people are as kind as he is, and he only has one idea at a time. [...] Sometimes I wish I was simple, and happy, like Kenny
[page 4–5]

Discuss Nicky and Kenny:

- How would you describe the relationship between Nicky and Kenny?
 - Do you like the relationship they have?
 - Is their relationship unconventional? Why?
 - Do you agree with Nicky's understanding of Kenny's 'learning difficulties'? What does this view of Kenny show about the way Nicky sees himself?
 - How would you describe Nicky and Kenny? What do you think are their most prominent characteristics?
 - Take each brother in turn and describe them in your own words.
 - Think about the ways that Nicky and Kenny show that they love and care for each other. Do they use words or actions? Give examples from the text.
 - Nicky looks after and protects Kenny – but in what ways does he also rely on Kenny? Give examples from the text.
-

*Even though he looked tired, like I said, there was something a bit different about Dad tonight. He didn't look happy, but he looked a tiny bit less sad than normal. I mean that thing he said about the North Pole – it was almost a joke. I couldn't remember the last time he had tried to make a joke. I wanted to ask him about it, but I didn't know how to put it into words. So I made us each a cup of tea and waited for him to tell me. **[page 83–84]***

Explore Nicky's relationship with his dad:

- Do you think their dad is a likeable character? Why?
- Why is Nicky's relationship with his dad strained or complicated? What elements of their family life might impact this? Give examples from the text.
- Why do you think Nicky and his dad struggle to talk about their feelings? How does the author convey this struggle to the reader?

- Do you think Nicky sometimes takes on the role of 'Dad' in the family? How might this make his dad feel? Does it have an effect on their relationship or their relationship with Kenny?
- Like the brothers, their dad doesn't really express his love using language. Can you find three examples where he shows his affection through actions instead?

The old badger was still there. He looked even bigger dead than he'd looked alive. He was as long as both my arms, stretched out. It didn't seem right to just leave him there. [...] It was a rubbish grave, but it was better than nothing. I even thought about saying a prayer, but then I felt stupid. So I just said 'sorry', you know, for the part I played in killing him. [page 52–53]

Consider the character of Nicky and his actions throughout the story:

- Do you think Nicky is a likeable character? Why?
- Throughout the story Nicky repeatedly shows that he is a kind and empathetic character. Give another example of Nicky's kindness or empathy.
- What does the quote "all my softness had been saved for Kenny" tell the reader about Nicky?
 - Why do you think he chose to act differently when not around Kenny?
 - Do you think he had to?
- Do you think Nicky's voice is realistic? Why?
- Do you think Nicky develops as a character throughout the story? How?
 - Give an example of one way he changes between the start and the end of the novel.

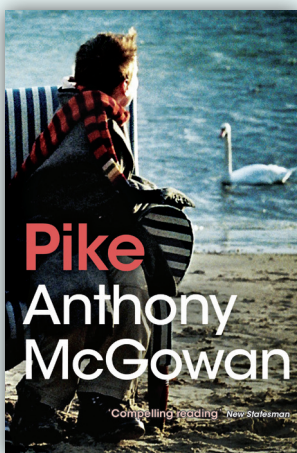


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

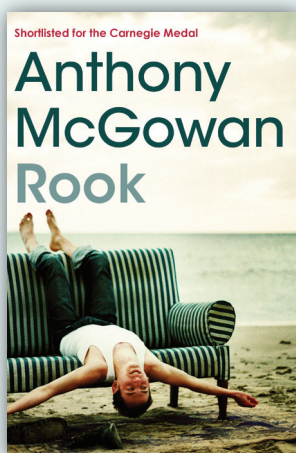


ANTHONY MCGOWAN is the author of many critically acclaimed and award-winning YA novels including *The Knife that Killed Me* and *The Truth of Things* quartet. In 2020 Anthony won the prestigious Carnegie Medal for *Lark* and was previously shortlisted for *Rook* in 2018. He was born in Manchester, attended school in Leeds and now lives in London.

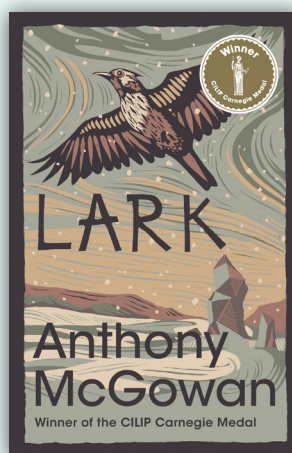
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