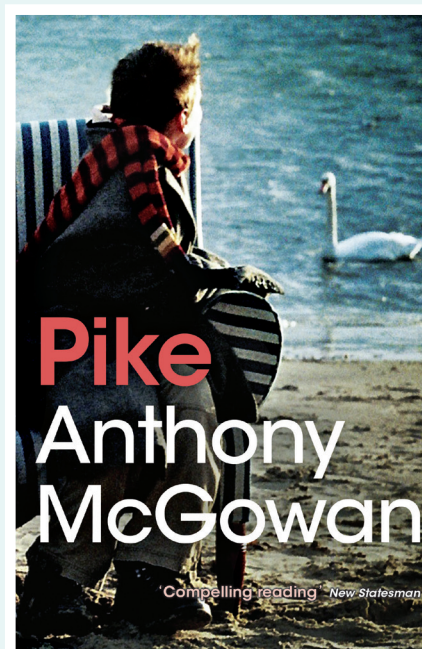


Barrington Stoke

CLASSROOM RESOURCES



PIKE

Anthony McGowan

PART 1 Synopsis and Themes

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PART 1 SYNOPSIS AND THEMES

SYNOPSIS AND THEMES

This guide has been produced to provide ideas for guiding readers through Anthony McGowan's **Pike**, a brilliant short novel with powerful themes. 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.

Pike is the second 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.

Pike begins with the boys taking a trip to the infamous Bacon Pond to go fishing – but the excursion takes an unexpected turn when Nicky spots a glint of gold beneath the murky waters. If it's really the treasure Nicky suspects, it means money; money for his family to live a better life. Nicky knows it's a bad idea – yet he can't let go. So together with Kenny, he concocts a plan to retrieve the treasure ...

Pike is written in a gripping, accessible style that is both humorous and moving, while covering a wide range of themes. This book is perfect for class discussions as it will help readers engage with topics around family relationships, class differences, growing up and storytelling.

PART 2

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS TO DEVELOP READING STRATEGIES

The minnow was gone, engulfed, swallowed. And with it, the tip of a little finger, severed by the teeth of the pike. [page 2]

Discuss the first chapter:

- How is this chapter different from the rest of the book?
- Why do you think the author chooses to start the novel like this?
- What sort of scene does this set for the book?
- Look at the language the author uses – what kind of atmosphere does it convey?
- How does it portray the setting?
- Do you like how the book opens? Why?

She was our dog and we loved her, so I waded out into the water to help her. [page 28]

All day I'd been feeling like I was wrapped in a thick blanket of nothingness. But now I felt the rage and hopelessness and despair burst out of me. [page 87]

And I thought about his son, Jez Bowen, who was a bully and a thug, and cruel with it. But I guessed that his dad loved him, the way that my dad loved me. And Jez probably loved his dad as well. [page 106–107]

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 despite his flaws. Give another example of Nicky's kindness or empathy.
- Do you think Nicky's voice is realistic? Why?
- Nicky often struggles to convey his feelings or to talk about the things that are troubling him. Why do you think this is?

- What sort of language does the author use to convey Nicky's feelings?
- Give examples of some language or imagery used to convey Nicky's feelings. Are they effective? 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.

If I got my hands on that watch I could sell it. I could give my dad the cash, and then all our money troubles would be over. [page 35]

I'd got so obsessed with the gold watch that I'd forgotten about the rod, a precious thing from my dad's past. [page 96]

I wore the watch. It's a reminder of how low you can let yourself slip, of how low you can go. [page 122]

- Nicky becomes obsessed with retrieving the watch from the Bacon Pond. Do you think this obsession is justified?
- Can you empathise with his actions? Why?
- Give an example from the text when Nicky's obsession overcomes his logic – when his actions are foolish or rash.
- Do you feel sorry for Nicky when things go wrong? Or do you think he deserves to face the consequences of his reckless decisions?



All the foul things that I'd been thinking and feeling fell away, and I was just here with my brother, and we had a job to do. [page 87]

And maybe something in me, something scared, wanted my big brother with me. I know I'd always taken care of Kenny, because he was special and not that brainy and so I kind of acted like I was his big brother. But the truth was that he was my big brother, and sometimes I needed him more than he needed me. [page 90]

Examine the relationship between the brothers in the text:

- How would you describe the relationship between Nicky and Kenny? Do you like the relationship they have?
- Does the relationship change throughout the story? How?
- Nicky looks after and protects Kenny – but in what ways does he also rely on Kenny? Give examples from the text.

My dad had been a bit messed up a while ago, when he couldn't get a job, and after our mum left us. Back then he wouldn't have noticed that I was wet, or he would have started yelling [...] We were still skint, but me and Kenny had clean clothes and proper dinners. [page 37]

Then I thought about how I could sell it, and the things that we could buy with the money. We could buy peace and happiness and the end of worry. [page 106]

Think about Nicky and Kenny's home life:

- What impression do you get of their home life from the quotes above?
- It's clear that life at home has improved for Nicky and Kenny – but do you think they are still struggling in some ways? Why?
- Look at the way the text presents the family's financial situation. What kind of tone and language does Nicky use when he talks about money?
- Does this make you sympathise more with Nicky's determination to retrieve the watch?

His hand on the back of my neck was heavier. It didn't hurt – Dad never hurt us – but I could feel the weight of it [...] That makes it sound like a bad thing, but I knew it was a good thing. It was the weight of love, and you can't fight that. [page 40]

I had a sense that my dad was waffling a bit because what was coming up was hard for him to say. [page 112]

- Why do you think Nicky and his dad struggle to talk about their feelings?
 - Even if the characters aren't good at talking about their feelings, they express them in other ways. Can you find an example of a scene in which one of the characters expresses his emotions without words?
-

It was worse.

There was a black shape looming above me, dark against the light streaming in the window. [page 3]

His hood had fallen back and I could see his face. It was sort of blank, but you got the feeling that he was trying to control some strong feelings that boiled up inside him. It felt kind of creepy, and I wondered if he was one of them bad men, you know, that bothers kids. [page 22]

There it was. The black monster, running as fast as a racehorse. And behind it, the guard, a bit of a fatty, puffing and panting. [page 61]

Examine the way the author builds fear and a sense of danger in the text:

- What kind of language is used to convey Nicky's fear? Give examples.
- Is Nicky's fear always justified or is it the result of an over-active imagination?
- Give an example of a moment in the text when Nicky's imagination makes him perceive something as scary or dangerous when it turns out not to be.
- Give an example of a moment in the text where Nicky is fearful of something that really is dangerous or scary.
- What other methods does the author use to create fear and suspense? Pick a scene from the book and give examples of methods used – for example, repetition, similes or metaphors.

There were other stories. Some kid at school told me that the Russians had got him and chopped him up into bits so he didn't grass on them. [page 34]

I'd heard that if kids were mucking about in the Bacon Factory when the guard turned up, he'd set his dog on them [...] I don't know if it was always the same guard, or the same dog, but that's how the story went. The dog was called Zoltan, and it was some kind of killer dog, fast and black. Everyone said all its teeth were fangs, and if it got hold of you then you were dead. [page 50]

I began to wonder if I'd really seen the watch and the arm and the heavy body reaching up from the murky depths. I'd been panicking, splashing round, gulping a frothy mix of air and water. All I'd really seen was that glint of gold. [page 95–96]

Think about the role rumours, stories and perception play in the text:

- Do you think Nicky is always a reliable narrator?
- Does he make a clear distinction between the truth and made-up stories?
- What stories in the book do you think are true, and what ones do you think are exaggerated or invented? Find another example of a story Nicky tells and explain whether you think it's true and why.
- What role does fear play in these stories? Is the sense of fear imagined or real?
- Is it difficult to identify the truth in this text?
- Do you think the author intentionally leaves it up to the reader to decide what is true and what isn't? Why?

One of the things about Kenny is that he likes to hear the same story over and over again. [page 6]

The truth is I liked telling stories to Kenny, because he really, really listened. He listened with every bit of him, as if he could hear you with his legs and his hands as well as his ears. [page 7]

- What role does storytelling play in Nicky and Kenny's relationship? Why?
- Why do you think Nicky and Kenny enjoy telling/hearing stories so much?

I tell people it's a fake. And they believe me [...] Unless you know the truth – the truth about watches, the truth about stories, the truth about time. [page 127]

- Look at the last line of the book, shown above. Why do you think the author chooses to end the with this emphasis on the truth?
- Does this make you re-consider your opinion of the various stories told throughout the text?

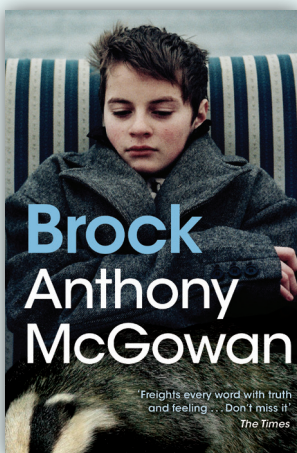


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

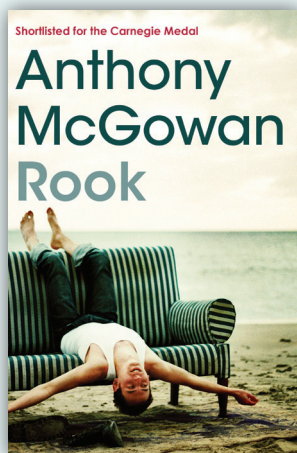


ANTHONY MCGOWAN is the author of many critically acclaimed and award-winning YA novels including *The Knife that Killed Me* and *The Truth of Things* quartet. In 2020 Anthony won the prestigious Carnegie Medal for *Lark* and was previously shortlisted for *Rook* in 2018. He was born in Manchester, attended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

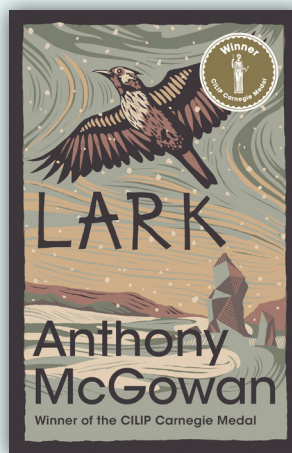
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