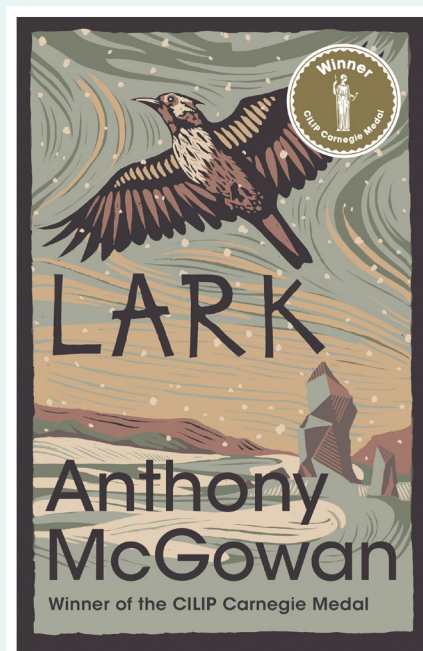


Barrington Stoke

CLASSROOM RESOURCES



LARK

Anthony McGowan

- PART 1** Synopsis and Themes
- PART 2** Suggested Questions to Develop Reading Strategies
- PART 3** Writing Style and Structure
- PART 4** About Anthony McGowan

PART 1 SYNOPSIS AND THEMES

SYNOPSIS AND THEMES

This guide has been produced to provide ideas for guiding readers through Anthony McGowan's **Lark**, 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.

Lark is the fourth and final 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.

Lark begins with the boys anxiously awaiting a visit from their estranged mum. They haven't seen her in years and their nerves are high. To escape and release some tension, they head off for a walk on the moors with their Jack Russell terrier, Tina. But the adventure takes a deadly turn when a blizzard hits and suddenly it's not such a lark.

With life on the line and their courage put to the test, will things ever be the same again for Nicky and Kenny?

Lark is a gripping, moving and truly accessible story that covers a wide array of themes including nature, family relationships and working-class life. This book is perfect for class discussions as it will help readers engage with various topics and examine writing techniques while also remaining appealing to and suitable for readers of all abilities.



PART 2

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS TO DEVELOP READING STRATEGIES

THEME 1 – NATURE

So, yeah, I was in a state, too, and when my dad said I should take Kenny up for a walk on the moors, I was well up for it. [page 7]

Think about the reason why Nicky and Kenny go for the walk on the moors. What does this tell you about their relationship with nature?

We got her after she'd been left for dead by some bad lads. They'd been using her to hunt badgers. I suppose we'd saved Tina's life. [page 10]

Kenny was talking about the rook we'd rescued from getting eaten by a sparrowhawk last year [...] The year before that we looked after a baby badger. Caring for the animals probably helped us more than it helped them. [page 18]

Animals and nature feature constantly in Nicky's and Kenny's adventures. How important do you think nature is for the two boys? Why?

- What role does nature play in the relationship between the brothers?

The stone walls were like the remains of ruined castles, and the black trees were monsters, frozen by the spells of a good wizard. It was almost like when you start reading a book, and from the moment you open it, you live there and not in the real world. [page 17]

Examine the language the author uses to describe nature and the landscape throughout the book.

- How is nature conveyed in the text? Is it beautiful? Awe-inspiring? Dangerous? Give examples from the text to support your answer.



There's something about walking along by the side of a stream or river that takes away your sadness and eases your fears. [page 45]

Kenny's tread became less tired, and he got a bit more of the old bounce back in his stride. Even the snow seemed to ease off. [page 46]

The way nature is conveyed changes throughout the boys' walk on the moor.

- Can you find two examples in the text where the way nature is conveyed feels different? Why is this?

Look at the quotes above. What do you think the significance is of the link between the description of the landscape and the boys' feelings? Does one affect the other?

- Can you find two more examples from the text where a description of nature is linked to Nicky or Kenny's feelings?

The lark

*It was meant to be a stroll, a laugh.
A lark. [page 5]*

I looked at Kenny. His eyes were shining as he saw the larks soaring up into the blue sky of his mind. [page 9]

- What role does the image of the lark play in the story? What do you think the bird symbolises?
- What else does 'lark' mean, apart from the name of a kind of bird?
- Why do you think the author chose 'Lark' for the title of the book?

The lark's flight was all effort, as if hauling itself up by sheer will – a wanting, a yearning. To fly and to sing was work, it was grit. And it was beautiful. [page 96]

Look at the above quote and reread chapter eighteen [page 95–96].

- What do you think the lark is symbolising in this chapter? Why do you think the author chooses this moment in the book for the lark to appear?
- What characteristics are shared between Nicky and the lark? Do you think this image of the lark can tell us anything about Nicky's life?

Examine the author's choice of language:

- What do the words 'hauling', 'yearning', and 'grit' convey? Could these words also be used to describe Nicky? Why?
- Think about the phrase 'And it was beautiful'. How does it compare to the description of the lark's flight? Do you find it impactful? How does it make you feel?

THEME 2 – FAMILY

I was just as messed up about our mum coming as Kenny, but I'd got good at hiding my feelings. Years ago, I'd hidden my feelings about my mum and everything for Kenny's sake. [page 6]

My dad didn't talk much about his mum and dad. [page 7]

Consider the quotes above. What can you learn from them about the relationships between Nicky and his family?

- Do you think Nicky's family are comfortable talking about their feelings? Why?

Nicky and his family are not sentimental characters – they don't express their feelings towards one another very often. Yet the book is still full of love and emotion. How does the author convey this?

- Can you find three examples in the book where the characters convey their emotions in other ways?
- Did you think the book was emotionally moving? Why?

The relationship between the brothers

I felt an idiot. It was my job to keep Kenny safe. [page 23]

I started to panic. What if I couldn't find Kenny? What if he was lost on this stupid hill, wandering around? I looked at my watch. It was nearly four. It was growing darker all the time. Kenny, alone and lost, in the dark. [page 40]

Examine the language used by Nicky in the narrative when he's talking about Kenny. How do you think he feels about his brother?

It's clear that Kenny relies on Nicky to look out for him, but does Nicky rely on Kenny too? Give examples from the text to support your answer.

He put the hat and gloves on, and I helped him with the scarf.

"I can do it!" he snapped, and pulled away.

[...] Then Kenny said, "Ta." And then, after another pause, "You'll be cold now." [page 23]

The interaction above is brief but still provides an insight to the relationship between Nicky and Kenny. What does this exchange tell you about them?

- Find three more examples of interactions between the brothers and explain what they show about the relationship between them.

"Tina loved it there on the moors. She didn't want to come back to our town." [page 101]

Why do you think Nicky chooses not to tell Kenny the truth about Tina? Do you think he's right to do this?

Does the brothers' relationship change as the story develops?

- Is their relationship any different when we see them again in the epilogue, forty years later?

THEME 3 – STORYTELLING

"Tell us a story," Kenny said.

I always told stories to Kenny. [page 46]

What role does storytelling play in the relationship between the brothers?

- Is it an important part of their relationship? Why? Give examples from the text to support your answer.

Nicky is the book's storyteller – how would you describe the voice with which he tells the story?

- What kind of language does he use?
- Do you think his voice is relatable?

Do you get a sense of what Nicky's character is like from the way he talks and tells the story?

PART 3

WRITING STYLE AND STRUCTURE

“Nutter,” I said, and I tried not to smile. Then I had another bite of my sandwich.

“I’ve had worse things for dinner,” I said.

I was remembering some of the things that Dad used to try to cook when he was still on the booze and not coping. [page 52–53]

Find the full scene above in the book and read it again. The author weaves together past and present, following up on the funny moment with the sandwiches by linking it to one of Nicky’s memories.

- What does the memory tell us about Nicky and Kenny’s home life earlier in their childhood?
- How would you describe the tone throughout this scene? Does it change as we move from the sandwich incident to Nicky’s memory?
- How does this scene make you feel? Do you feel differently about the funny sandwich incident after reading the memory that comes next?

Can you find another example of a scene where the author links a moment in the present to a memory? What effect does one have on the other?

Find another example of a scene where the author combines humour with something darker, serious or more emotional. Why do you think he does this? What effect does it have on you as a reader?

Could I have fallen asleep down here? No, not quite asleep. But in a weird trance – remembering and thinking. [page 77]

Read the scene that follows this quote in chapter fourteen and consider the language and style of narration here.

- Does it feel different to Nicky’s narration earlier in the story? How?
- How does the writing style used here convey Nicky’s state of mind?

*The bank took two steps down, and this was the worst part of the awful journey.
I mean the worst in terms of physical pain.
The real worst part was yet to come. [page 88]*

In the dramatic final chapters, how does the author build suspense to make the narrative gripping?

- How are the pacing and structure used to control the way events unfold?
- Apart from the quote above, can you find two more examples where the author hints at how things are going to go?

Opening

The prologue opens in the middle of the action, while the boys are on their walk, then it flashes back to explain how they got there. Why do you think the author chooses to start the story like this?

- What does this scene tell you about the relationship between the brothers?
- What tone does the prologue set for the book – does it give you the impression that things are about to go wrong? Why?

Ending

Were you surprised by the ending of the book? Did you like how it ended?

Why do you think the author decided to include the epilogue?

- Do you think this provides a satisfying ending to Nicky's and Kenny's adventures?

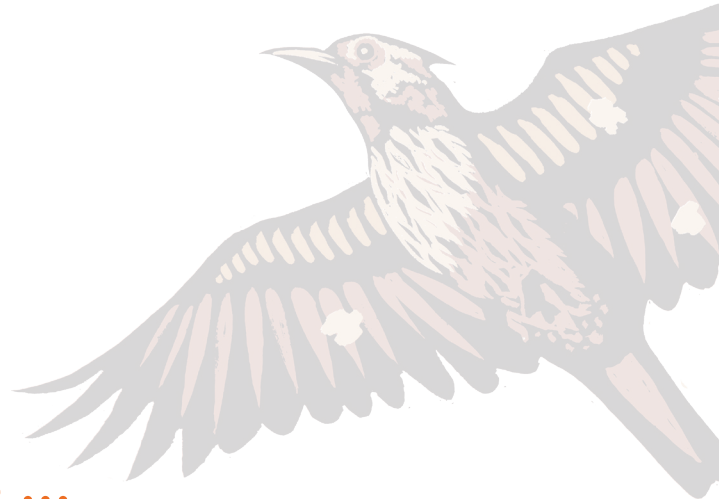
Look at the final line of the book: 'Tell me a story.'

- Why do you think the author chose this as the final line?
- What effect does this line have on the context of this book and the rest of Nicky and Kenny's story?
- Do you find this an impactful final line? Do you like it? Why?

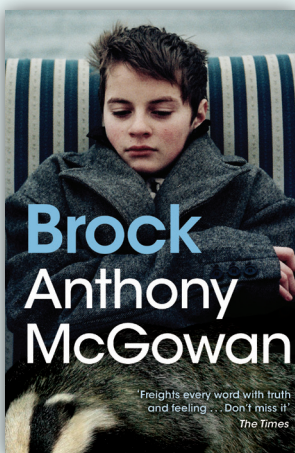
ABOUT THE AUTHOR



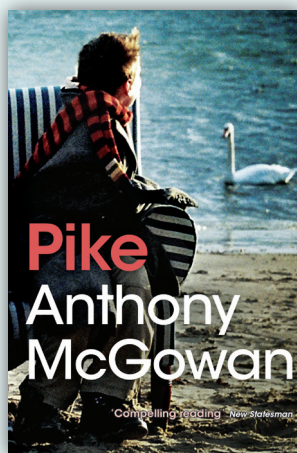
ANTHONY MCGOWAN is the author of many critically acclaimed and award-winning YA novels including *The Knife that Killed Me* and *The Truth of Things* quartet. In 2020 Anthony won the prestigious Carnegie Medal for *Lark* and was previously shortlisted for *Rook* in 2018. He was born in Manchester, attended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



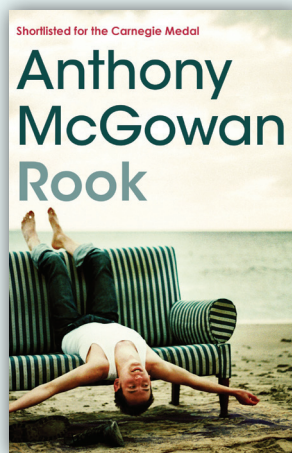
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