

CLPE and Cheltenham Festivals: Reading Teachers=Reading Pupils

These teaching notes have been designed to support schools using [The Final Year](#) as part of the Reading Teachers=Reading Pupils project in 2024–25. The ideas in the sequence of sessions will support teachers in reading aloud and talking about the selected texts with their children, allowing children to respond to and understand the text in greater depth.

A full teaching sequence for this text with extended opportunities for talk, reading and writing with cross-curricular links is freely available on [CLPE's website](#).

Title: *The Final Year*

Author: Matt Goodfellow

Illustrator: Joe Todd-Stanton

Publisher: Otter-Barry Books

The highly anticipated debut verse novel from poet Matt Goodfellow, and the winner of the CLPE Poetry Award 2024 (CLIPPA). The action takes place over the course of Nate's final year at Primary school, a time of stress and change for many students. On top of this, Nate is frequently caring for his two younger brothers while his mum's out of the house, grappling with the changing dynamics of his friendships, managing his internal anger which he refers to as 'The Beast', and his world is further rocked by a disaster that befalls his family.

Session 1: Part 1 – Before We Begin

Focus: Predicting, questioning and looking at language

Share the front cover of the novel with the children. Read the title, the name of the poet Matt Goodfellow and the illustrator, Joe Todd-Stanton. Have the children heard of either of these people before? Do they know any other books written or illustrated by either of them? Provide a picture of both for the children to see and add these to the display alongside the front cover of the text.

Give out a copy of the front cover to mixed pairs or groups of children and allow them time and space to respond to what they see, gathering their thoughts, ideas, observations and questions about the title text and cover image. You could provide supportive questions to frame discussions, if necessary, such as: *What does the title, The Final Year, mean or suggest to you? What do you know or think you know about the characters, setting and potential storyline from the title and cover art? What do you notice about the main character seen on the cover? What do the wings make you think about or feel? Why do you think this character might have been shown in this way? What ideas do you have about the story that might lie ahead?*

Take some time for pairs or groups to feed back their initial impressions, noting prevalent ideas around a copy of the cover that can be displayed on the working wall. *What ideas were common in all the discussions? Why do you think this was?*

Now, listen to author Matt Goodfellow read Part 1 of the book, [Before We Begin \(p.4-9\)](#).

Allow time for the children to discuss what they have heard, to gather their initial responses to the text, using supportive questions to guide discussions, such as: *How did it feel to hear the author read the text aloud? What did you notice about the way in which he read the text? What might you infer about him or the story from this? How did what you heard link to your initial ideas from the front cover? Were there any words or phrases that you didn't understand or want to clarify the meaning of? What more did you learn about the characters and where the story is set? What other thoughts does this first section give you about the story that might unfold?*

Take time to look at Joe Todd-Stanton's illustration throughout this section. *What has he chosen to focus on? What further ideas do you gain of the setting and characters from these illustrations?*

Provide children with a copy of the book to share in pairs or groups, or a copy of this section of the text to re-read for themselves. In the printed text, they will notice that Matt Goodfellow has made pragmatic decisions about the way he represents words on the page to mirror the authentic spoken accent and dialect of the main character, Nate.

Without revealing this, encourage children to consider this for themselves as they read the text, provoking their thinking with supportive questions: *What do you notice about the way in which the words are represented on the page? How does this connect with how they heard Matt Goodfellow reading the text? Why might he have chosen to write certain words in the way he has?* Investigate the choices that Matt has made and how he has altered the standard spelling of these words to reflect how they are spoken by the character. Continue to encourage the children to do this, and to identify any vocabulary that they don't know the meaning of, or would like to clarify the meaning of, throughout the text.

Listen to Matt talk about the decisions that he has made in a [video where he discusses writing in dialect](#). *How does what he said compare to the thoughts they had? Do they know any other authors who choose to write in a way that reflects the authentic voices of the characters in their stories, or poets that write in authentic voices? Who are they?*

It is important for teachers to understand that, although a push for Standard Spoken English is prevalent in the curriculum, their authentic voices, accents and dialects are part of their identity, part of who they are, just as Nate's is in this book. Talk about some of the different accents and dialects that children have in the class, or that we see across the UK, including voices from other parts of the world. Some children may have moved from another region or country or have past generations of family members who have. Celebrate the languages, accents and dialects shared, linking these two writers, authors and poets that share their voices in their work. You might watch performances and explore poetry from Benjamin Zephaniah, Valerie Bloom, Manjeet Mann, Steven Camden, Nikita Gill or Jackie Kay, all of whom have videos on [CLPE's Poet pages](#), to explore a range of spoken accents and dialects and languages.

Use this as a basis for a focus on creating a culture of respect for different voices, being clear that voices different from their own are equally valid and valuable and that judgements should not be made about the way in which people speak, just as we should not make judgements about the way people look, and that accents are not to be parodied or people stereotyped because of the way in which they speak.

Session 2: Part 2 – Some Stuff Ya Need to Know: The Family

Focus: Building understanding of characters and their lives, developing empathy.

Begin by reading aloud the first part of **Part 2: Some Stuff Ya Need to Know: The Family**, from **Me (gonna do mine in rhyme)** (p.11) up to **Dylan** (p.19), taking time to ask the children to identify and clarify any unfamiliar or dialect-specific vocabulary after reading. *Which poems do you remember most vividly? Why do you think this was? What did you notice about the poems in this section?* The children may have found some of the poetic forms and devices interesting or memorable, such as the rhyme used in **Me (gonna do mine in rhyme)** (p.11), the alliteration prevalent in **No.2: Brandon – Jaxon’s dad** (p.16) or some of the figurative language used to create strong imagery across the poems.

Now take time for the children to re-read and reflect on what they have heard in this new section. *What more do they learn about Nate and his family? What impression do they gain of them from what they have heard?*

Use this as an opportunity to begin a [Role on the Wall](#) for the character of Nate. This could be done as a whole class, or groups, pairs or individual pupils could work together to make their own. Either draw an outline of a general boy shape or copy an outline using one of Joe Todd-Stanton’s illustration as a guide. On the outside of the outline, summarise what you know about Nate from being directly told in the text. On the inside of the outline, use what has been learned to infer what he is like as a character. Encourage the children to keep referring to the text and illustrations, from what they have read so far, to evidence and justify their opinions.

Come together to discuss what the children have surmised, being prepared to mediate discussions with the children around the concepts and themes explored in the novel to avoid judgements being made on characters and their situations, which may arise from stereotypical portrayals seen and heard about in the mainstream media and popular culture. Navigate these conversations sensitively, exploring how certain characters might be perceived and why this might be, and using discussion to draw out the realism in the lives of the characters and their situation with understanding of the challenges they face.

Think back to the footnote at the end of **Me (gonna do mine in rhyme)** (p.11): (Just swear I’m scared I’ll lose control of The Beast that sleeps within my soul.) *What do you think this means? Why do you think The Beast is presented as a proper noun? What might this reveal to us about Nate?*

Now, listen to Matt Goodfellow read [Oh, so ya wanna know about The Beast, right? \(p.20-21\)](#). *What more does this tell you about Nate?* Allow time for the children to add to their initial thoughts on the Role on the Wall, before looking at the poem on the page. It would be beneficial to give children a printed copy of the poem to text mark and annotate with their thoughts, feelings, observations, ideas and questions. Use supportive questions to help them gather their thoughts: *What do you notice about how the poem is laid out? How is it different from other poems you’ve read so far? Why might Matt Goodfellow have decided to lay the poem out in this way?*

How do you respond to Joe Todd-Stanton’s illustration of The Beast? What does it make you think about? Does it remind you of anything you have seen before? What sense does it give you of how it

exists and behaves? Why do you think he may have chosen to represent it in this way? What does it make you think about? How does it make you feel? What makes you feel this way?

Take time for the children to feed back, drawing thoughts on the language and layout choices made and what effects these have on them as readers.

Now read aloud to the end of Part 2, up to **PS** (p.27). Once again, consider what we more we learn about Nate and his life, and add new thoughts, observations and inferences to the Role on the Wall.

Invite the children to create a visual organiser to share the key relationships Nate has in his life, that he introduces us to in this section. They can choose any format for this, as long as it is a device to allow them to become clear on the characters and their relationships, which can be added to as the story continues to unfold. Use supportive questions to encourage their thinking: *Who is in his direct family? What are they like? Who is he closest to? Who is he most distant from? Who else is important around this?*

Consider the characters of Auntie San and PS. *Why do you think he calls her Auntie San, even though we know she is 'no blood relation'? What might this tell us about her and their relationship? Why do you think he describes PS as 'family too.'?*

Session 3: Part 3 – End of Year 5

Focus: Clarifying, summarising, inferring and deducing – exploring similarities and differences between characters

Begin by looking at the title page of the next section of the book – **Part 3: End of Year 5**. *What might we expect in this next section of the story? What might happen at the end of Year 5 in a primary school? What might be introduced in preparation for Year 6?* Allow children to connect this with their direct experience of school, talking about transition processes and what they know and have experienced about Years 5 and 6. *How might you expect Nate to be feeling at this point of his school life? Why might he be feeling this way?*

Read on until **PS** (p.35). *How are you left feeling at this point in the story? What made you feel this way? What more do we learn about Nate from this section of the book? What is he likely to be thinking or feeling at this point?* Encourage the children to continue to record their thoughts on the Role on the Wall. They could also produce a thought bubble for Nate to summarise their ideas.

Using a shared copy of the book, or by placing the book under a visualiser, re-read this section so that the children can clearly see how the poems have been presented on the page. *How does the layout help to emphasise what happens? What do you feel as you see the poems on the page? Which poems resonate with you the most strongly? Why do you think this is?*

Now, listen to Matt Goodfellow read the next poem, [Mr Joshua \(p.36-37\)](#). *What do we learn about Nate's new teacher? What sort of a person do you think he is? How do you think Nate feels about him? What makes you think this? What are we told directly and what are we left to infer?*

Re-read this poem, sharing once again how the poem is laid out on the page. *How does the layout help us to understand how Nate is feeling at this point of the story? Why might certain choices of line breaks and spacing have been made?*

Consider the re-appearance of The Beast. *Why might it have chosen this point to emerge? Why do you think it withdraws? What does The Beast signify for Nate? Do you believe him when he says he's fine? Why or why not?*

Read on, up to **He stops me as I leave** (p.46). *What more do we learn about Mr Joshua here?*

Give each child a copy of the illustration of Mr Joshua and Nate at the bottom of p.37. *What words or phrases would you choose and use to describe Mr Joshua from what you've heard about him so far?* Invite the children to scribe these around a copy of the illustration. Now, encourage them to think about why they have chosen these particular words, justifying these opinions with evidence from what has been read so far.

Come together to encourage the children to summarise what they have read so far, before reading on from **At lunch** (p.47) to **On the last day of Year 5** (p.56-57), taking us to the end of Part 3. Take time to clarify any unknown or dialect specific vocabulary, such as: banter, muppets, man-bags.

Take some time to reflect on what more we learn about Nate, PS and their relationship. *How are they similar? What's different about them? What do you think makes them best friends? Do these poems give you any more insights as to why Nate thinks of PS as 'family too'?*

Now, reflect on the new character that has been introduced - Turner. *Who is he? What do you know or think you know about him? How do you think Nate and PS feel about him? What tells or shows you this in the text?*

Give children copies of this series of poems to re-read, text mark and annotate for themselves, along with a visual organiser to be able to compare the three boys. There will be another character to add to this as the story progresses, so a four-way Venn diagram, will be ideal for this, with Nate, PS and Turner's names added to three of the circles at this stage.

As they read the text for themselves, encourage the children to consider what the words chosen directly tell us about the characters and what they might allow us to infer without directly telling us. Encourage them to use the visual organiser to note down their similarities and differences on the diagram, using each character's solo space to identify features unique to them, and overlapping areas to identify similarities between them.

They may, at first find it easier to find similarities between Nate and PS, but more difficult to see similarities with Turner. Encourage the children to think deeply, drawing inferences and evaluations from what they've heard so far – one similarity between them all, for example, which could be noted in the centre overlap, is that they are all in Year 5 and going into their final year of primary.

Session 4: Part 4 – Summer Holidays

Focus: Visualising, predicting and empathising

Important notes for teachers:

In this section of the text, we learn more about Nate's mum. It is important here for conversations to be open, but also to support children's understanding of some of the activities Mum engages in and why this might be, rather than making generalisations about her, based on a surface reading of the text. **As a teacher**, you will need to be clear on the likely reasons behind some of her behaviours to be able to mediate and extend conversations and to sensitively but constructively challenge any discriminatory comments. For example, in understanding why she and Auntie San play Bingo, it's important to understand the links between gambling and poverty. Research shows that gambling can be twice as likely in communities with the highest levels of concentrated poverty, compared to communities with the lowest poverty levels, and that gambling may be viewed as one of the few opportunities for financial advancement, and perhaps provides the lure as a means for easily gaining money. This could also be countered or extended to relay that Bingo can serve as a community touch point and offer social opportunity, experience and interaction. Therefore, Mum is likely doing this with the intention of bettering the life of the family, rather than frittering their money away, as evidenced when Nate tells us: 'Mum says we'll go somewhere fancy like Las Vegas when she wins big at Bingo'. Likewise, in conjunction with PSHE lessons around drug and alcohol education, it is important, alongside learning about the dangers of smoking and alcohol, to understand the influences that encourage people to engage in smoking or drinking. The [PSHE Association has very helpful resources](#) that can support such learning in the classroom. It's important, rather than simply demonising these behaviours, that children understand the reasons why she may choose to smoke or drink, and the addictive nature of these substances that may make it difficult for her to stop.

Begin the session by re-reading the final poem in Part 3 ***On the last day of Year 5*** (p.56-57). Consider what you heard in this poem about the Year 6 leavers assembly. *What do these experiences make you think about what might happen in Year 6 for Nate? What do you think might happen in the rest of Nate's story, based on what we have read so far?* Give each child an A5 piece of paper or large sticky note and invite them to make their predictions about what might be likely to happen in the next part of the story, based on what they've read and their own knowledge and experience. Stick these up around a copy of the poem on the working wall or in a shared journal and look at the similarities and differences between the children's predictions and what has contributed to these.

Now read on, from ***I love the smell*** (p.59) up to ***As I'm leavin the library*** (p.66). *What more do we learn about Nate here, that we might add to the role on the wall? What else do we learn about his family, in particular his brothers, Jax and Dylan?*

In the same way as you did with Nate, PS and Turner, give the children a visual organiser – a three-way Venn diagram is ideal - and copies of the text to be able to compare the three brothers. As before, this would be useful to print out large on A3 paper, so that the children can continue to add to these as the story progresses. *In what ways are they similar? What is unique about them? What do we know about the relationships they have with each other?*

As before, encourage them to use the visual organiser to note down their similarities and differences on the diagram, using each character's solo space to identify features unique to them, and overlapping areas to identify similarities between them.

Come back to re-read and think about the final poems, from ***I read everythin I can find*** (p.63) to ***As I'm leavin the library*** (p.66). *Have the children heard of David Almond before? Have they heard of any of the books by him that are mentioned in the poems? Do they know any others? Why is it that Nate likes his writing? How do these ideas relate to his own life?*

You may wish to share the first few pages of *The Boy Who Swam with Piranhas* and ask the children to consider what it might be about the text that 'hooked' Nate. Ask the children if they have a favourite author or book(s) that 'hook' them. *Who are they? How does their work resonate with you in the same way David Almond's work does with Nate? If you don't have one, why? What would you like to read that you haven't found yet?* Invite the children to record their thoughts in writing, display these in the book corner and use these to update stock to both reflect and widen children's choices, based on their tastes and preferences. You should also look to the importance of the cultural relevance and voice of David Almond's work on Nate as a reader, ensuring that there are texts in your book stock that allow all children to see their lives reflected in what they read.

Continue reading the book aloud, from ***Text from Spain***: (p.67) to ***Every now and then*** (p.78-79). Reflect on the poems read to add more information to Nate's role on the wall, particularly considering the emotional connections and relationships he has with his family. The children may also choose to add more information to their visual organiser exploring the characters of Nate, Jax and Dylan and the relationships between them. Here, we begin to gain further insights into Nate's mum, consider these alongside what's already been read, flipping back to poems about her in previous parts of the book, to discuss and build a picture of her as a character. *What do we know or think we know about her from the text? What do we learn about her relationship with Nate, Jax and Dylan? What do we know about her relationship with Auntie San?* Encourage the children to pick out specific parts of the text that:

share the love she has for her sons: repeated use of the phrases 'my boys', 'yer a good un' and 'love ya', the fact she has stayed with them throughout their lives when their fathers have not, that the boys have a home of their own, are fed, have playtime and things to play on/with – such as their bikes, Dylan's Spiderman costume and their games console.

show her ambition to do her best for the family: going to the Bingo in the hopes of a financial win for them, that she borrows money to ensure Dylan has a birthday party, her admission that 'I try my best, Nate I really do.', her continuing ambition that 'things'll be different one day'.

show her caring and positive nature: that she's 'always tryna fix someone', that she 'laughs a lot loud proper head back snortin', how she went to school to support Nate with exploring his 'issues', the

solidarity she gains from her friendship with Auntie San and the support they provide for each other, the fact she's 'always dead nice'.

highlight the hardships she's faced in her life: that she 'ran away at 15', she had Nate 'at 17', that she has been affected by Nick's (Nate's dad's) disappearance 'she's always been lookin for Jesus it's just that now she only sees his face at the bottom of a bottle or the back of a bingo card.', that she 'stresses out' at the idea that the landlord will put the rent up or sell the house, the talk of her 'lost loves and bad luck, missed opportunities, near misses'.

As per the teacher's notes above, spend time through carefully mediated whole class discussion to really get under the surface of her character, beyond some of the initial generalisations that might be made, to highlight her love and strength amidst the challenges faced by the position she finds herself in.

Now, listen to Matt Goodfellow read: [Summat I worry about over the last few weeks of summer \(p.80\) to Text from PS to me \(p82\)](#). What do these poems tell you about the relationship between Nate and PS and how Nate feels about this at this point of the story? Look back over the poems read so far. Can you identify a point at which the change might have started occurring? What was the reason for this? What other clues are there in other poems in this section that show that there might be a change in their relationship?

Look back at these poems on the page to encourage the children to find evidence for their ideas. They might note:

The choice of the word 'worry' in the title of the first poem – directly showing Nate's feelings and the choice to say that this is 'over the last few weeks of summer', showing that this is an ongoing worry and has been happening for some time.

The way Nate points out that not answering his phone is something PS has 'never done before', showing a significant change.

The changes in PS behaviours evident in the language chosen; 'he gets proper twitchy', 'he's lyin', 'he can't look at me', 'he hisses', the choice to end the speech *Get off my case man!* with an exclamation mark, and what this tells us about the way in which he says this.

The impact of the final lines, and the presentation on the page of the final word 'disappear' – and what this leaves us thinking and feeling.

The contrast between Nate's tentative question, and PS's abrupt reply in their text messages.

Session 5: Part 5 – The Final Year (Pages 84-108)

Focus: Understanding characters and their motivation in relation to story events

Begin the session by looking at the title of the next section of the book; **Part 5: The Final Year**. Revisit the thoughts they had previously about what they might be expecting for the rest of the book. *Did the poems in Part 4 give you any additional predictions? What are these and what gives you these ideas?*

Read aloud the poems from The first day back (p.84), up to Three little birds (p.88). *What more do you learn from the text and illustration about how the relationships between Nate and PS and PS and Turner are developing? What connections have been created between PS and Turner? How does this affect Nate and*

his relationship with PS? Use the visual organiser for the three boys to record further thoughts and ideas. How might these developments affect Nate as the story moves on? What makes you think this?

Now, read on from **On the playground** (p.89) to **When the bell goes** (p.96-97) *What more does this section tell you about Mr Joshua? What role do you think he plays in Nate's story?* Give the children time and space to add more thoughts and ideas around their copy of the illustration of Mr Joshua, where they recorded their initial ideas about him. Encourage them to refer to the poems to provide evidence for their ideas from the text.

Now, read the next two poems, *I catch a flash of PS's bag* (p.98) and *The Beast begins to stir* (p.99). *How do you feel about Nate at this point in the story? What makes you feel this way? What more do we learn about the relationship between Nate and Jax here? Why do you think it is at this point that The Beast begins to stir? What has triggered this? How does Nate keep it under control?* Add any more thoughts about Nate, Jax and their relationship to the brothers' visual organiser.

Finish the session by reading aloud from **What the next few weeks teach me about Mr Joshua** (p.100-101) to **A poem I write in my ideas book about PS but would never EVER show anyone in the world let alone him** (p.108). *What more do we learn about Mr Joshua and his role in Nate's story? What does he notice in Nate? How does he support him? How does poetry and writing help him?*

Session 6: Part 5 – The Final Year (Pages 109-133)

Focus: Making personal connections with texts and characters.

Read aloud the next series of poems, from **One mornin** (p.109) to **I don't notice Mr Joshua has walked into the library and is readin the poem over my shoulder** (p.. Continue to reflect on the things that trigger Nate's emotions and the support systems he has for managing them. *What does Mr Joshua do to support all the children, and particularly Nate, to be calm and confident? Why do you think The Beast stays asleep when Turner picks on him? Who supports him to control and manage his emotions as well as from Turner's provocation? How do they do this?*

Encourage the children to reflect on these events, by making connections to their own personal experience, so that they can begin to relate events to their own lives, using supportive questions to stimulate their thinking, such as:

Has anything like this ever happened to you, or have you ever seen anything like this happen – in real life, on TV or in a film or in something else you have read?

What do you think about the way each of the characters conduct themselves and react? What does this teach us about them as characters?

Can you empathise with any character in particular? Who and how?

Add Caleb's name to the final circle of the Venn diagram and discuss what we learn about his character, recording their thoughts and ideas on the visual organiser. Revisit his first appearance in **Year 6J** (p.93), as well as the poems that have just been read. Encourage the children to reflect on Caleb and the relationships that are developing between all four boys, using supportive questions to scaffold their thinking, such as:

What do we know about Caleb? What are our initial impressions of him? How is he similar and different to Nate? Why might they have struck up a relationship? How does Caleb compare to PS and Turner? What role do you think he might play as the story progresses?

How has PS and Turner's relationship developed? How does this affect Nate's relationship with PS? How has PS changed? Why do you think this is?

Now, read on from **DYLANNNNNNN! COME DOWN FOR TEA!** (p.121) to **At school Mr Joshua goes** (p.131).

What more do we learn about Nate and Caleb from the text and illustrations in this section of the book?

How is their friendship developing and why do you think this might be? What experiences do they share?

Encourage the children to add their thoughts and ideas to Nate's role on the wall and the 4-way Venn diagram.

Consider together the book that Mr Joshua introduces to the class, *Skellig* by David Almond. *Have any of the children read this book? What do we learn about it from this part of the text? How might it connect with Nate's life and experiences?* Re-read the final poem, **At school Mr Joshua goes** (p.131). *Why do you think Mr Joshua takes them to the park to play? Why do you think this leaves him with 'a big smile on his face'? What more do we learn about him? What do you think about him as a teacher?*

Read aloud **When we get back to class** (p.132-133). *Have you ever been on a school trip before? Where did you go? What was it like?*

Investigate together where the children are being taken on the trip, The Lake District, and more specifically, Windemere. *Has anyone heard of or been to the Lake District before? What do they already know or think they know about this place? What might the children do on a trip there?*

Find The Lake District and Lake Windemere on a map. Explore the distance between there and East Manchester and look at the differences between the two locations in terms of environment and physical and human geographical features.

Session 7: Part 5 – The Final Year (Pages 134 -173)

Focus: Developing intratextual connections

Now, read on from **Wednesday 8.55am** (p.134-135) up to and revealing Joe Todd-Stanton's double page illustration on p.144-145. *How do you think Nate is feeling about the trip? What in the text or illustration tells you this? What are you shown without directly being told? Why might he be feeling this way? How does this compare with the predictions we made about what he might be thinking or feeling in the previous session?*

Now, consider the actions of Mr Joshua in these poems, linking back to what we already know or think we know about him. *What does he do that shows us the care he has for the children on the trip? Why do you think he stops to tell Nate and Caleb to 'Soak it in... Feel it. Draw it... Write it'? What might he see in the boys and their relationship? Do you think it was 'lucky' that Nate and Caleb got the only room with two beds? What makes you think this?*

Think now about Nate and Caleb's reactions to the trip. *What do they notice that all the other 'muppets miss'? What might this reveal about them? What do you think it is about the place that they're staying in that makes Nate describe it as 'mint'? What does it offer to him?*

Discuss the double page illustration on p.144-145. *Why do you think Joe Todd-Stanton chose to insert a whole double page spread at this point, solely focussed on Nate, Caleb and the landscape? Where is your eye drawn to first in the illustration? Where does it move to next? What do you notice when you closely read the illustration? What does it leave you thinking about? How does it leave you feeling? What makes you feel this way?*

Give plenty of time and space for the children to closely read the image, before coming back to discuss together, looking at the similarities and differences in the children's responses.

Now, read on to **The Coach Home** (p.158). *What were the highs and lows of Nate's trip? How did we gain a sense of the emotions he felt throughout through the language used and the way in which poems were presented on the page?* Give children time and space to re-read and discuss the poems in this section, in mixed pairs or groups, looking at when Nate is feeling threatened by Turner's behaviour in opposition to the calm he feels when engaging in the natural environment. Encourage them to make notes of their thoughts, feelings, observations, ideas and questions as they read, to make their thinking visible.

Read aloud from **Now, you've never seen Christmas til you've seen it in a primary school** (p.159) to **The three of us** (p.168-169). Take time to reflect on the Christmas Nate has this year, compared to his usual Christmases, noting any new reflections on Nate's role on the wall. *What are the high and low points for him? How does Nate's birthday compare to Dylan's birthday, which we saw in the poem on p. 71? How does the break-up of his friendship with PS particularly affect him at this time? What support does he gain from his brothers? What more do you learn about their relationship from this series of poems?* Invite the children to note their responses on the brothers' three-way Venn diagram.

Spend time comparing the two poems **Missin dad sketch me and Jax do** (p.22-23) and **Midgame dad act** (p.162-163). *What are the similarities and differences in the two poems? What is significant about Dylan's actions in Midgame dad act? What does this tell you about their developing relationship? Why might Christmas be a time where they reflect on their fathers?*

Spend time looking at the two illustrations in this section. *What more do they share about this time and the relationship between the brothers? Re-read the final poem, The three of us, again What are you left thinking and feeling at this point in the story? What makes you feel this way?*

Now, read on, from **A coupla weeks into the new term** (p170-171) up to **Outside, Caleb's sittin on one of the benches by the field** (p.173). Reflect on what Nate said at the end of **The three of us** – 'A New Start? Nah, man.' *How has the new year at school started for him? Do you think it will offer new possibilities for him? Why or why not?*

Consider Mr Joshua's reflection on Caleb in ***A coupla weeks into the new term*** – 'He's a good kid. You're a good match. You'll always find your people, Nate.' *Why do you think he says this to him now? Do you agree that he and Caleb are a good match? Why is this?* Look back to the four-way Venn diagram to look at the evidence for this, adding any new information gained from these new poems.

Session 8: Part 5 – The Final Year (Pages 174 - 201)

Focus: Recognising and understanding authorial intent

NB: This session involves reading scenes where Dylan, Nate's youngest brother falls ill and is taken into hospital. At one point, children may infer that Dylan has died. The scenes will be read straight through, until the children realise that he is, in fact stable and alive, but these scenes will likely trigger a significant emotional response. Be aware of this before reading this section with your children, particularly any children who have directly experienced familial loss or serious illness. Sometimes reading will allow us to make sense of experiences from our own lives, but at other times this may be too upsetting to confront directly. You will need to make decisions as to how to approach this section based on the knowledge of your own children.

Begin the session by re-reading ***Outside, Caleb's sittin on one of the benches by the field*** (p.173) before listening to Matt Goodfellow read the next poem in the novel, ***The noise*** (p.174-176). *What is happening here? Is this what you were expecting on the page turn? What does it make you feel? How does the way the poem is written and read enhance our emotional response to the poem?*

Introduce the term foreshadowing to the children – where an author gives their audience gives their audience hints or signs about events that happen in the future. These do not directly give away the outcome but suggest it. *Was there anything that we could look back on that now were suggesting this seemingly sudden event?*

The children may or may not remember the comments about Dylan that Matt Goodfellow has used to foreshadow Dylan's collapse. Flick back through previous poems to find these in:

Dylan comes down pale (p.122)

Christmas Day night and ***Midgame dad act*** (p.161-163)

Yo, Nate, whassup with Dyl at the min?, I go upstairs and make sure Turbo Terror's done his teeth and ***The three of us*** (p.165-169)

Continue reading right up until ***When we land*** (p.193) – it's important for the children to read this right through, as in ***A 4am simple lesson in tenses*** (p.177) many of the children may infer that Dylan has died. Matt Goodfellow leaves this deliberately ambiguous for the reader, and it is important to unpick this after the children are safe in the knowledge that Dylan is alive. *What did this section of the text leave you thinking at feeling at various points? Look at how and why Matt Goodfellow may have done what he does in this section of the text. What does this make them think about how they can use language, layout and pacing in their own writing for impact on a reader?*

Now read aloud from ***We're sittin round the kitchen table*** (p.194-195) up to ***And then he's off spirallin away down the street shoutin*** (p.201). What has happened to Dylan? Do you know what a Congential

Heart Defect is? Clarify this term with the children, along with other medical terms in Mum's explanations in ***We're sittin round the kitchen table*** (p.194-195) and ***There's no cereal left so I butter some toast for me and Jax*** (p.198-199), such as 'valves', 'infection', 'drip', 'antibiotics', to clarify and understand why Dylan collapsed and what is being done to treat him. Dylan's official diagnosis from the doctor (revealed in p.) is endocarditis. Endocarditis is a rare and potentially fatal infection of the inner lining of the heart (the endocardium). It's most caused by bacteria entering the blood and travelling to the heart. As a teacher, you can find out more about this on the [NHS website](#).

Re-read the final poems, ***On the way to school, Jax starts to talk*** (p.200) and ***And then he's off spirallin away down the street shoutin*** (p.201). *What do we learn about Jax here? How does this compare or contrast to what we've noticed about him in the poems before this? How might Dylan's hospitalisation have affected him? Why do you think he chooses to thank Nate at this point of the story?*

Session 8: Part 5 – The Final Year and Part 6 – The Final Poem (Pages 202 -257)

Evaluating characters' actions and motivations and empathising with characters and their lives

Begin the session by listening to Matt Goodfellow read ***Have ya ever felt lost, Sir?*** (p.202-203). *How does this poem reveal to us how Nate is feeling at this point in the story? How does this compare to how Jax is feeling as shown in the previous two poems? Why might he have chosen Mr Joshua to talk to about this at this time? What do you think Nate might be learning about himself because of the experiences he's had? How does this connect with what Mr Joshua tells him when he says: 'in order to really find yourself you first have to be lost out there in the wilderness', 'it's the darkness that switches on the lights' and 'in the darkness you will find yourself and your people.'?*

Read on up to ***At night I walk in the rain*** (p.222-223). What more do we learn from this section of the text about:

Nate

Dylan's condition

The importance of the book Skellig

Mum

Jax

PS and Caleb

Now listen to Matt read, ***Tonight I dream of you*** (p.224-225), alongside looking at the accompanying illustration in the text. *What does this poem make you think about? How does it make you feel? What makes you feel this way? What do you notice about the accompanying illustration, what sense or feelings do you gain from it? Why is this? What are we left thinking or feeling about Nate after reading this? Add any new thoughts, observations and conclusions to Nate's role on the wall.*

Read aloud from, ***Auntie San's gonna move in for a bit, boys*** (p.226) to ***Me and PS and Caleb are sittin in the dinin hall*** (p.244). *What do we learn about PS from this section of the story? Do you think his actions are justified, in how he reacts to Turner? Why or why not? What do you understand about why he went off with him in the first place? How do you think he feels about his actions now? What tells you this?*

Now, encourage them to consider the events from Nate's perspective. *Were you surprised that he forgave PS so easily? Why do you think he did this? What does PS mean to him?*

Encourage the children to reflect on these events, in connection with their own lives. Create a space for the children to feel safe to share personal experiences, with agreed rules that they do not have to share if they do not wish to do so, that they should not share things which might embarrass, shame or ridicule others, and that conversations should support us to explore, make sense of and resolve issues and dilemmas and discuss strategies for which we can address and resolve conflicts with our friends when these arise. *Have they ever experienced times where they have faced issues in friendships they've had? How did these arise? How were they overcome?*

Sensitively mediate conversations to be able to use points raised to explore common friendship issues and how these might be overcome. Relate this back to what happens in the text, and how Nate deals with the fall out of PS's actions by forging a new friendship with Caleb, confiding with a trusted adult in Mr Joshua when he finds things tough, and being forgiving of PS when he returns.

Read aloud from ***The phone call*** (p.245) to ***The Beast says*** (p.251). *What do you think has triggered The Beast to rise within Nate again? What is going on around him? Which of these things are in his control and which are not? How might these things have affected him? What do you think he could do now to try to 'keep The Beast at bay'? What has worked from him previously?* Encourage the children to flip back through the text to come up with a series of potential ideas, relating these back to previous events.

Now, listen to Matt Goodfellow read [The concrete cracks and crumbles \(p.252-253\)](#). *Is this what you expected to happen next? Why or why not? What do you think has triggered his anger? Why do you think that it is at this point that he doesn't manage to control The Beast? Why might he think that 'it's not OK' and 'everything's not gonna be alright'? What might the consequences of Nate's actions at this point be? What support might he need to manage his emotions?*

Now, read on from ***Auntie San takes a big drag or her fag*** (p.254) to ***The little machine*** (p.256-257). *How do Auntie San and school support him after this? What has happened or is happening that might affect Nate's emotions from this point? Are these likely to be positive or negative effects? What makes you think this? What might you say to Nate, or what advice might you offer him at this point in the story?*

Session 9: Part 5 – The Final Year (Pages 258 -281) and The Final Poem (Pages 282 – 285)

Reflecting on and evaluating a text

Read on from ***I miss the grammar, punctuation and spellin test on Monday*** (p.258) to ***I watch a pair of swifts rollercoaster in the skies above the hospital*** (p.268). *What happens in this part of the story? What shows us how Nate is feeling at each point?* Encourage the children to look back at the poems to draw on specific language, form and layout choices based on what they have learned throughout the sequence to evidence their responses.

Take time to consider the character of Auntie San. *What do we learn about her in this series of poems? How does this connect to what we already know about her?* Think about Nate's initial description of her, that she's 'no blood relation but family, y'know?' Reflect on what this means now. *Why do you think Nate describes her in this way? Do you think she thinks of them in the same way? What shows or tells you this?* Consider the role she plays in Mum's life as well as the boys. *Why is her friendship important to Mum? What do they bring to each other's lives?*

Allow time for the children to reflect on the relationships they have in their own lives. *Why are friends and family important? Who are the most important people in your life? Why is this? What do you bring to each other's lives? How do you support each other?*

Read aloud from **Me and Caleb and PS** (p.269) to **As we wade through the stream** (p.281). *How do you think Nate is feeling about the journey that lies ahead of him in High School? What makes you think this? How are you left feeling about Turner? What does Nate have in his support network that Turner might not? How might this affect Turner and his ability to control his emotions, make sensible choices and deal with issues and dilemmas he faces?*

Consider the role that Mr Joshua has played in Nate's story. *What has he brought to Nate's life? What might have been different if he'd not been Nate's teacher? Why do you think he chose to write 'Never forget to do what you must' in the copy of Skellig he gave to him? Why might he have chosen to give this gift to Nate? How do you think Nate feels about the gift he's been given and why might he feel this way?*

Read aloud the last part of the book: **The Final Poem** (p.282-285). *What are you left thinking and feeling after reading the last poem? Was it a satisfying conclusion for you? Does it leave you with any questions? Why do you think Matt Goodfellow decided to end the story here?*

Consider the character that is introduced as the poem ends. *Who do you think the man might be that shouts Nate's name and walks towards him? What makes you think this? What might the impact of this person be on Nate and his life?*

Take time to reflect on the verse novel as a whole:

What did you like about the story?

Was there anything you disliked?

What questions are you left with after reading the book?

What connections do you make with it, either with your own life or with other things you've read or seen?

Open this initial discussion up into a more extended conversation around the text:

Which were your favourite parts of the book?

Do any particular poems stay in your mind? Why do you think this is?

What have you learnt about poetry or verse novels that you didn't know before?

Would you be encouraged to read more verse novels or poetry after reading The Final Year? Why, or why not?

What might you want to ask the author Matt Goodfellow, or the illustrator Joe Todd-Stanton after reading the book?

Take time to reflect on what they've learnt about verse novels and poetry from looking at this collection:
What were you expecting when we first looked at the front cover? Was the book what you expected it to be? Why/why not?

Was there anything in the book that surprised you?

How would you describe this book to someone else? What would you tell them about it? What might you keep back so as not to spoil their experience?

Other books by or featuring Matt Goodfellow:

Let's Chase Stars Together, Matt Goodfellow (Bloomsbury Education)

Bright Bursts of Colour, Matt Goodfellow (Bloomsbury Education)

Chicken on the Roof, Matt Goodfellow (Otter-Barry Books)

Caterpillar Cake, Matt Goodfellow, illustrated by Krina Patel-Sage (Otter-Barry Books)

The Same Inside, Liz Brownlee, Matt Goodfellow and Roger Stevens (Macmillan)

Be the Change: Poems to help you save the world, Liz Brownlee, Matt Goodfellow and Roger Stevens (Macmillan)

Being Me: Poems about Thoughts, Worries and Feelings, Liz Brownlee, Matt Goodfellow and Laura Mucha (Otter-Barry Books)

Shu Lin's Grandpa, Matt Goodfellow, illustrated by Yu Rong (Otter-Barry Books)

Other texts and poetry collections linked to the styles and themes in The Final Year:

Skellig, David Almond (Hachette)

Everything All at Once, Steven Camden (Macmillan Children's Books)

My Big Mouth, Steven Camden, illustrated by Chante Timothy (Macmillan Children's Books)

Little Light, Coral Rumble (Troika)

The Weight of Water, Sarah Crossan (Bloomsbury)

Love That Dog, Sharon Creech (Bloomsbury)

Fight Back, A.M. Dassu (Scholastic)

Every Cloud, Ros Roberts (Little Tiger)

Running on Empty, S.E. Durrant (Nosy Crow)

A Kind of Spark, Elle McNicholl (Knights Of)

There's a Boy in the Girl's Bathroom, Louis Sachar (Bloomsbury)

The Unforgotten Coat, Frank Cottrell-Boyce (Walker)

Michael Rosen's Big Book of Bad Things, Michael Rosen, illustrated by Joe Berger (Puffin)

Overheard in a Tower Block, Joseph Coelho, illustrated by Kate Milner (Otter-Barry Books)

Werewolf Club Rules, Joseph Coelho (Quarto)

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