

Glasgow Boys by Margaret McDonald

Discussion Notes

Ages 14+



The activities, notes and reading questions included here are suitable for classroom, library or book group sessions with ages 14+.

Note: This book covers some sensitive issues including suicide, self-harm, homophobic abuse and violence. It is advised that teachers/parents/carers read the book before sharing with students.

Part 1 – Pre-Reading Ideas

Book Cover Analysis

- What do you notice about the front cover? How does it draw you in?
- Who do you think the main character(s) might be? What can you tell about them?
- Can you make any predictions about what might happen in the novel?
- What genre do you think the book might fit within?
- Can you compare this book cover to any others you have seen?
- Are there any clues about where the novel is set?

Setting Prompts

- The novel is set in Glasgow, Scotland. What do you know about Glasgow? Have you ever been there?
- How do you predict the setting might be important to the story?
- What does the phrase ‘working class’ mean?
- Can you think of any other novels set in working class communities? What sort of ideas or themes do you expect to find in these novels?

Scots Glossary

The characters in *Glasgow Boys* speak in a Scots dialect. What is ‘dialect’? How does it help to make the characters come alive on the page, presenting the reader with the raw realities of their lives?

Look up the following Scots words: Aboot; Cannae; Didnae; Dinnae; Kidden; Kindae; Oan; Oot; Some’dae; Wan; Wasnae; Wrang; Wisnae; Wouldnae; Yersel.



Part 2 – Themes

Themes are the main ideas that lie beneath the surface of a text. There are many themes in *Glasgow Boys*. Use this 'theme sheet' to record ideas as you read. How is each theme explored in the novel? Which are the most important? Why? Try to add at least two themes of your own.

Theme	Notes
Friendship	
Sexuality	
Love	
Hope	
Loss	
Identity	
Class	
Community	
Masculinity	

Part 3 – Reading Questions

- What are your first impressions of Banjo and Finlay? What do you learn about each of them in the opening chapters?
- Why do you think the author chose to write *Glasgow Boys* in alternating chapters between the two boys' perspectives?
- How do you get the impression throughout the story that the boys are connected?
- How are Banjo and Finlay different from each other?
- What are Banjo and Finlay's experiences of the care system? How have their experiences shaped them?
- How is the theme of trauma handled in the story? What traumas have both Banjo and Finlay experienced in their lives?
- What are the obstacles for Banjo and Finlay in their present lives?
- 'Neither Banjo or Finlay are able to move on from what happened to them in the past.' How far do you agree with this statement?
- How does Banjo express his emotions? Why do you think he expresses emotions this way?
- How does the novel explore the theme of masculinity? How does it challenge some of the tropes or expectations of masculinity that young boys grow up with?
- Aside from the central relationship between Banjo and Finlay, what other relationships are important in the story?
- What is the significance of the chest of drawers between Banjo and Finlay at St Andrews? What does it symbolise for the two boys?
- How does it make you feel when Banjo and Finlay finally talk to each other (p. 311–318)? Why is this such a powerful scene?
- What is homophobia? In what ways have both boys been exposed to homophobic ideas? How has this affected them?

Part 3 – Reading Questions (cont.)

- Why is the theme of forgiveness so important in the story? How do the characters forgive not only each other, but also themselves?
- How does Finlay love Banjo? What type of love does he feel for him? (p. 317)
- How is the theme of sexuality explored in the novel? What do each of the boys discover about their sexuality?
- ‘My family is . . . who I allow it to be.’ What does Finlay realise about the idea of family? (p. 326)
- Did the novel end as you hoped it would? Why or why not?
- When you reflect on reading *Glasgow Boys*, how do you feel? What main messages do you take away from your reading experience?
- What do you hope for Banjo and Finlay in the future?
- If you could ask the author Margaret McDonald five questions about writing this novel, what would they be?