



Exploring Junior Cycle Texts

Noughts and Crosses by Malorie Blackman

Noughts and Crosses by Malorie Blackman is a novel included as part of the Prescribed Material for Junior Cycle English (For the student cohorts commencing Junior Cycle in 2023, 2024, 2025, 2026 and presenting for examination in 2025, 2026, 2027 and 2028).

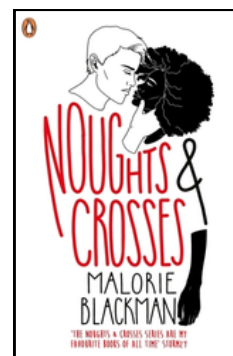


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Please note:

- The following tasks might be completed over a series of lessons.
- You may like to adapt and adjust the tasks to suit your context.
- *Noughts and Crosses* covers themes which could be considered sensitive and controversial. You may wish to consult with our READY Framework to support you in your study.



Scan the QR code or click here to
access a Getting Started with Guide
for this Text

Before You Read... (Teacher Guidance)

1. Belonging and Exclusion Mind map

On the board, write the words inclusion and exclusion. Ask students: When have you seen or heard of people being excluded — in school, in the news, in history, or even in fiction? Collect their ideas and discuss patterns (who has power, who is silenced, how people react).

2. Role on the Wall

Divide students into small groups. Give each group a large outline of a person. Label it “A student starting at a new school where they’re not welcome.” Inside the outline: students write how the person might be feeling (fear, excitement, determination). Outside the outline: write what others around them might say or do (whispers, stares, encouragement, insults). Share and compare across groups.

3. Exploring Prejudice in Language

Write the chant on the board: “No blankers in our school.” Ask students to guess: Who might be saying this? Who are they against? Why might a school become the focus of such anger? In pairs, ask students to discuss: How do insults work? Why can they be so powerful or damaging?

Feedback together: what does it mean if a whole crowd is chanting such words?



Extract

This scene is from chapter five of the novel. In this story, society is divided: the Crosses (dark-skinned rulers) hold power, while the Noughts (light-skinned underclass) face prejudice and discrimination. Sephy, a Cross, is best friends with Callum, a Nought. In this scene, Callum and a small group of Nought students are starting at a prestigious Cross school for the very first time. The decision has caused anger and protests, and Sephy finds herself caught in the middle of the chaos outside the school gates.

At the far end of the road, there was a huge crowd outside my school. And they were shouting and chanting. I froze for a moment, then started to walk towards them. Then I started to run. What on earth was going on? It didn't take me long to find out.

'NO BLANKERS IN OUR SCHOOL. NO BLANKERS IN OUR SCHOOL.'

The slogan was shouted out over and over again. Callum and three other noughts were surrounded by police officers who were trying to push their way through the crowd to get to the school entrance.

'Callum! CALLUM!'

'NO BLANKERS IN OUR SCHOOL . . .'

The police officers were still trying to push through the crowds of adults and Heathcroft pupils who in turn were determined not to let them pass.

'BLANKERS OUT . . .'

I forced my way up the steps to the school entrance ahead of the crowd and the police, watching as the police battled to hold back the crowd, watching as Callum and the others looked neither to the right nor the left but straight ahead without even blinking.

'NO BLANKERS IN OUR SCHOOL . . .'

I spotted Julianna and Adam and Ezra in the crowd, all of whom were my good friends. But worst of all I saw my own sister Minnie in the crowd. And she was shouting just as hard as all the others.

'NO BLANKERS IN OUR SCHOOL . . .'

There was a roaring in my head which matched the roaring all around me. I was in the middle of chaos. Callum and the other noughts tried to make their way up the steps to the school entrance. The crowd surged forward at that, the palpable wave of their anger hitting me almost like a punch. Suddenly a cry went up. Callum's head dipped down, followed by the heads of the police officers.

'One of them is hurt!'

Callum . . . it wasn't Callum, was it?

'A blanker's hurt.' The news spread through the crowd like a virulent disease.

'HOORAY!' Spontaneous cheers filled the air. The police lines trying to hold the crowds back were knocked to the ground as the crowd rushed forward like air into a vacuum... And I've never felt such fist-clenching, teeth-gritting fury. A policewoman stepped to one side, and I saw Callum squatting down by a nought girl who looked like she was in a bad way. Blood trickled from her forehead and her eyes were closed. Mr Corsa, the headmaster, emerged from behind me. He stared at the crowd – the mob before him – looking shocked and ashen.

'Mr Corsa, we have to help that girl,' I pointed. 'She's hurt.' Mr Corsa didn't move, even when I repeated what I'd just said. I was caught up in a hurricane, with all the noise and madness whirling round me until my head was about to explode. 'Stop it! Just stop it!' Nothing.

'STOP IT! YOU'RE ALL BEHAVING LIKE ANIMALS!' I shouted so hard my throat immediately began to hurt. 'WORSE THAN ANIMALS – LIKE BLANKERS!'

The sounds of the crowd slowly died away. 'Just look at you,' I continued. 'Stop it.' I glanced down at Callum. He was staring at me, the strangest expression on his face.

Callum, don't look at me like that. I didn't mean you. I'd never mean you. It was just for the others, to get them to stop, to get them to help. I didn't mean you . . .



Activities Based on Extract (Teacher Guidance)

These prompts are designed to support close reading and personal response. They may be used orally or in writing, individually or in groups.

1. Hot-seating Sephy or Callum

In pairs, have student take the role of Sephy or Callum; the other asks questions about what they were thinking and feeling during the scene. Instruct to swap roles, then share some of the most revealing responses with the class.

2. Language Zoom-In

Ask students to highlight an example of a simile, metaphor and personification and annotate the lines with what they make students think or feel. Students should then write an analysis paragraph answering the question: *How does Blackman use language to create an impact on the reader?*

3. Diary Entry

Ask students to write a short diary entry from Sephy's perspective the evening after the riot. They should include what happened, how she feels about her friends and her sister being in the crowd, and her guilt about shouting "*like blankers*."

Reflect and Respond (Teacher Guidance)

These activities extend engagement with the extract and invite creative and personal responses. Use individually, in pairs, or in groups.

1. Historical connections

Ask pupils to consider what real-life historical events might be mirrored in the scene. If they cannot think of any, suggest some examples for them to research: The Little Rock Nine (1957, USA), Apartheid in South Africa etc. Ask pupils to answer the following questions on their research: What happened in this historical event? How is it similar to the school riot scene in the extract? How is it different?

Instruct pupils to write a short paragraph: *Why do you think Malorie Blackman chose to write a school riot scene like this? How does connecting it to history change the way you read it?*

2. Scene conclusion

Invite pupils to discuss how they think the scene concludes. Then individually, they write an extension paragraph showing their thoughts.

3. Text-to-Self

Ask pupils: have you ever seen or read about a situation where a group of people treated others unfairly (in history, current events, or another book/film)? How does it compare to what happens in this extract? Instruct pupils to write their ideas as a one-page response.

4. News Report

Prepare pupils to write a short news report describing the events at the school from the perspective of a journalist who was there.