



Exploring Junior Cycle Texts

The Call by Peadar Ó Guilín

Junior Cycle
English

The Call by Peadar Ó Guilín is a novel included as part of the Prescribed Material for Junior Cycle English. For the student cohorts commencing Junior Cycle in 2024- 2027 in second and third year and presenting for examination in 2027.

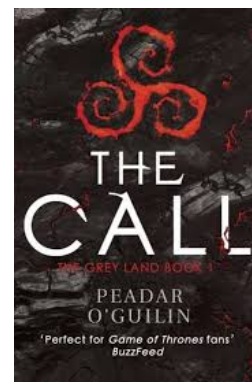


Image courtesy of
David Fickling Books

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.
- *The Call* 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)

These activities help students connect with the novel's survival themes to real historical experience and helps students understand genre conventions and thematic relevance. Adapt as appropriate for your class.

1. Dystopian Literature:

Discuss the history of dystopian literature (e.g., *Lord of the Flies*, 1984, *Brave New World*). Help students identify the historical context that influenced these novels and predict how Peadar Ó Guilín's novel might reflect contemporary societal anxieties.

2. Moral Dilemmas:

Encourage students to create a Post-It Wall or mind map linking historical events involving survival or moral dilemmas with strategies characters might use in *The Call*. Groups then discuss how these connections help predict character choices and challenges in the story.

3. Listen, Reflect and Create:

Ask students to listen to the recording of *The Listeners* by Walter De La Mare.

Direct them to discuss the themes of isolation, fear, and the unknown in the poem and how this mirrors the sudden danger of the Call. Students read the poem and identify language and imagery that creates tension, then predict how characters in *The Call* might feel in a similar situation.

Click here to listen to
performance of "The
Listeners" by Freddie Fox





Extract

Background to the Novel:

***The Call* is a dystopian novel set in Ireland, where children are suddenly “Called” to the Grey Land, a dangerous parallel realm where they must fight to survive. In this extract, ten-year-old Nessa overhears her parents debating whether to tell her about the Call, marking the moment she first confronts the fear that will shape her life.**

Four Years Ago:

The Three Minutes

On her tenth birthday, Nessa overhears an argument in her parents’ bedroom. She knows nothing about the Three Minutes yet. How could she? The whole of society is working to keep its children innocent. She plays with dolls. She believes the lies about her brother, and when her parents tuck her into bed at night—her grinning dad, her fussy mam—they show her only love. But now, with ten candles on a cake in the kitchen behind her, that’s all supposed to change. Dad can’t know his daughter is right outside the door, and yet he whispers. “We don’t need to tell her,” he says. “She... she isn’t able to run anyway. She’s a special case. We could give her a few more years to be our baby.”

Baby! Our baby! Nessa bristles at the thought. She’s struggling to stand still because with her twisted legs she makes quite a racket when she walks. However, once her mam, Agnes, starts sobbing, she decides she’s had enough.

“Oh, for Crom’s sake,” she says, “I’m in the hall. I’m coming in and you’d better not be kissing!” She means that last part as a joke, but it falls flat.

“Come in then,” Dad says. He still possesses enough greying hair to cover his scalp. Almost. He’s even older than Mam, and on a bad day, Nessa wonders if that’s why she was born weak enough to catch polio. Her cousin told her that once, and Nessa often thinks of it.

“I know about Santa Claus,” she says, walking in. “If that what this is about. I’ve known for years already, but...” Agnes starts heaving like she’s been punched in the stomach. She shakes hard enough to rattle the bed beneath her. Dad wraps her tight with his long, skinny arms, and for a moment it’s like this hug is the only thing stopping bits of her from flying off. A chill steals up Nessa’s spine. She can’t know it, but this is the first hint of the fear that will never leave her again; that will ruin her life as it has ruined the life of everybody in the whole country.

Now Dad is crying too. His tears barely show a hint of moisture about the eyes, his sobs thick, as though squeezed through a wad of cloth. Nessa takes a ragged breath. “Whatever it is...,” she says—and deep inside a part of her is begging her to shut up, to stop, to turn around! “Whatever it is, I want to know.”

(Peadar Ó Guilín, *The Call*, 2016, P3)

Activities Based on Extract (Teacher Guidance)

The following may be completed in written or oral format, as individuals or as part of a group activity. Students may like to complete the following activities individually or collaboratively.

1. Discussion / Debate Questions:

- Guide students in a **discussion** (For example the spiderweb discussion) to consider the moment when Nessa overhears her parents discussing 'The Call' in this extract. Encourage them to discuss whether they think the parents made the right decision to protect her from the truth.
- Direct students to refer to the text, focusing on Nessa's age, her physical disability, and the parents' emotional reactions. Prompt them to explore both sides of the dilemma; protection versus honesty and relate their ideas to the broader themes of fear and loss of innocence.

2. Foreshadowing Fear:

- The extract says this moment is "the first hint of the fear that will never leave her again." Encourage students to imagine they are Nessa at this moment. Ask them to write a **short creative piece** either a letter, or an inner monologue (or their preferred response) highlighting her thoughts, feelings, and fears as she overhears her parents.
- Finally, facilitate a follow-up discussion to prompt them to explore **foreshadowing** used in this extract: how does this moment hint at challenges and fear she will face later?

3. Theme:

- Direct students to explore the themes of fear, protection, and innocence in the extract.
- In small groups, ask students to choose one **theme** and find two quotes that support it, then discuss what this reveals about Nessa's life and the wider society.

Reflect and Respond (Teacher Guidance)

The following questions may be based on the extract included or form part of your extended study of the novel. Students may like to complete the following activities individually or collaboratively.

1. Diary Entry- Surviving the Call:

Invite students to imagine that they are in their own home town when The Call sounds. Ask them to write a **diary entry** describing their experiences in the first hour after The Call.

2. First-Person Narrative:

Ask students to assume the role of a person that has survived the initial Call. Students should write a **first-person narrative story** describing the character's experiences over the following 24 hours in the world of the Harvesters.



3. Scene Writing:

Students could write a scene in which their character must work with others to survive. Encourage them to include:

- Dialogue showing teamwork or conflict.
- Contrasting personalities and how the character responds.
- Actions that show leadership, trust, or betrayal.

4. Language Focus: Creating Tension in The Call

Select a short extract from *The Call* that depicts a tense or dangerous moment. Ask students to analyse how Peadar Ó Guilín uses language to create suspense and tension. Students may want to.

- Identify techniques such as short sentences, repetition, vivid verbs, imagery, and punctuation.
- Explain the effect of these techniques on the reader, focusing on how they build tension, pace, and atmosphere.

5. Collaborative Story-Building:

Divide the class into small groups. Provide each group with the opening lines of a scene where a character faces a difficult moral choice during *The Call*. Groups take turns adding 100 words to continue the story. Rotate pages until complete, then read aloud and compare interpretations.

**Check out the Podcast from Arts in
Junior Cycle with the author
Peadar Ó Guilín** 