



Exploring Junior Cycle Prescribed Fiction

The Choice by Philly Mc Mahon

The Choice by Philly McMahon is a novel included as part of the Prescribed Material for Junior Cycle English (For the student cohorts commencing Junior Cycle in 2025, 2026, and 2027 and presenting for examination in 2028, 2029, and 2030).



Image courtesy of
Gills 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 Choice* covers themes which could be considered sensitive or controversial. You may wish to consult with our READY Framework to support you in your study.



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access a Getting Started with Guide
for this Text

Before You Read... (Teacher Guidance)

Pre-reading Activities - Discussion Starters:

1. Theme Prediction: “What Does The Choice Mean?”

Write the title *The Choice* on the board and ask students:

- What kinds of “choices” might be important in someone’s life?
- What choices can change a person’s future?
- What does a “good” or “bad” choice look like?

2. Philly McMahon: Quick Background Brainstorm

Without giving away story details, give students a few factual points about McMahon (sportsman, community ambassador, Dublin GAA, youth work).

Then ask questions such as:

- “Based on this background, what kind of story do you think he might tell?”
- “What challenges might he have faced growing up?”

3. Anticipation Statements (Agree/Disagree)

Students respond to statements related to themes in the book, such as:

- “Where you grow up shapes your opportunities.”
- “Everyone deserves a second chance.”
- “Sport can change your life.”
- “Families influence the choices we make.”



Extract

This is extract is taken from opening chapter of *The Choice*. *The Choice* is set mainly in the suburbs of Dublin, with a strong focus on Ballymun and the now-demolished flats where Philly McMahon grew up.

I got my head out of the way just in time. The skin of his knuckles brushed the side of my cheek, like your mam might do if you had a bit of dirt on your face, and missed. I didn't want a fight. But I didn't have much of a choice now. So I took a step towards him and took a swing back.

A spark of electricity shot through the crowd. There must have been forty lads there watching us, fencing us in in a circle so that even if we wanted to leg it we couldn't, and once they saw those first punches, they knew they were going to get what they came for. Game on.

Eddie Moran bounced around on his feet like a boxer, shouting at me, shouting at himself, trying to figure out his next move. And for what? Eddie Moran was from Shangan. I was from Sillogue. He slagged my ma. I slagged his da. And now we had to fight.

The school yard wasn't the place for it, and even if, earlier in the day, the two of us had wanted to go back inside to the classroom, sit down and forget about it, we weren't allowed to. The fuse had been lit, and the news had spread like wildfire, desk to desk.

'Scrap up at the Monos after school. Eddie and Philly. Pass it on.'

'Eddie's going to batter him. Pass it on.'

'Philly's da's in the 'RA. Pass it on.'

When there was a fight, the best spot to watch it from was on top of one of the Monos, these two long rows of tall, round stones and concrete cubes of different shapes and sizes. They were supposed to be art, I think, but for us, they were a ready-made boxing ring. If you were up on top, you had a great spot to see everything, and there was much less risk of being dragged into the middle of it.

Because even though these things started as a one-on-one, it didn't take much for them to end up as something bigger. It was a bit stupid that you had to be Sillogue or Balcurris or Balbutcher or Shangan because that was where you lived and that was who you hung around with. Stupid that lads who lived two minutes around the corner from each other and went to school together were told they hated each other. At the end of the day, we were all from Ballymun, and Ballymun was bigger than everywhere.

(Philly Mc Mahon, The Choice, Chpt 1, 2018)

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.

1. Guide students to interpret the figurative language, e.g., "a spark of electricity shot through the crowd," and what it reveals about excitement or tension.
2. Encourage them to analyse how body language (bouncing, shaping, shouting) builds atmosphere.
3. Invite students to consider Eddie's perspective. How might he be feeling, and how might his version of events differ?



Reflect and Respond (Teacher Guidance)

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

1. Personal Narrative: “A Time I Felt Under Pressure”

Students write about a time when:

- they felt pushed into something
- a crowd influenced their behaviour
- they made a choice they didn't fully want to make

2. Eddie's Perspective: Rewrite the Scene

Students retell the fight from Eddie Moran's point of view:

- How does he feel about the crowd?
- Does he want to fight?
- What does the fight say about his place in Ballymun?

3. Letter Writing: A Letter to My Future Self

Connected to the book's themes of choices and possibilities, students write about:

- the goals they have
- the choices they hope to make
- the challenges they want to overcome

4. Poem: “The Choice I Carry”

Students write a free-verse poem about:

- a responsibility
- a decision they hold in front of them
- something they are deciding daily

5. Reflective Paragraph: “The Choice No One Sees”

Students explore:

- silent or unseen decisions they make
- moments when they choose kindness, courage, or resilience
- how private choices shape identity