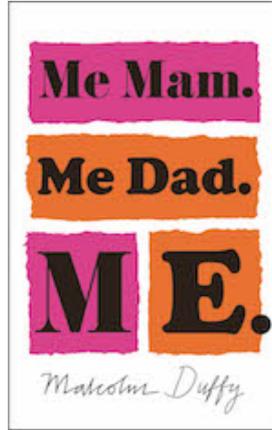


Readers'/Teachers' Notes

Me Mam. Me Dad. Me.

By Malcolm Duffy



Publication date: March 2018

Fiction/ Children's 12+ • £10.99

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Writing Style



Structure

The title: *Me Mam. Me Dad. Me.*

Discuss: What sort of book do you think it will be? Which genre? Think about the possessive pronouns. What do they imply? Should we be possessive of people? What about the punctuation? Why has the author used full stops rather than commas? The title isn't in Standard English. What accent/dialect do you think it is written in?

Writing Style Dialect/Accent

The book is written in a Geordie vernacular. We sometimes say people speak with an 'accent' or in a certain 'dialect'. What is the difference between an accent and a dialect?

An accent is the way someone's voice sounds when they talk, the way they pronounce the words.

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A dialect is the words someone uses when they talk. For example, in Geordie they use the word 'aye' instead of 'yes'.

Standard English is the formal version of English in which most novels are written.

Discuss: Did you find it harder to access the book because of the dialect? What effect did the Geordie dialect have on you? What does it contribute to the novel as a whole?

Some people say that texts written like this have an 'aural effect' so that you first perceive the words as sounds. Do you agree?

Activity: Try reading a passage from the book out loud. Does it feel difficult/normal/easier?

Do you think you have an accent or use a certain dialect? Listen to the following video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8mzWkuOxz8>

Which accent do you like best? This video is the same person doing the different accents, but listen carefully to each one. What impression do they give you?

Writer George Bernard Shaw said in the preface of *Pygmalion*, a play in which a professor teaches a cockney street seller to speak as a member of high society: "It is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman hate or despise him."

Discuss: Do you agree with this? Why do you think he said this?

Why does Danny say:

"Geordie wasn't allowed in her [Aunty Tina's] house." (Page 35)

What does this imply about Danny, but also about Aunty Tina?

Using Dialect to Express Character

Using dialect for a character in a novel gives them a specific geography, class, social background or culture straight away.

Discuss: Think about instances in which other writers have used dialect.

Look at Walter's speech in *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee:

"Reckon I have. Almost died first year I come to school and et them pecans - folks say he pizened 'em and put 'em over on the school side of the fence."

And the servant Martha in *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett:

"Canna' tha' dress thysen!" and "I'll help thee on with thy clothes if tha'll get out o' bed. If th' buttons are at th' back tha' cannot button them up tha'self."

And Hagrid, from *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* by JK Rowling:

"A wizard, o' course," said Hagrid, sitting back down on the sofa, which groaned and sank even lower, "an' a thumpin' good'un I'd say, once yeh've been trained up a bit. With a mum an' dad like yours, what else would yeh be?"

What does each tell you about that character?

In *Me Mam. Me Dad. Me*. Duffy uses the Geordie accent to place Danny geographically.

Discuss: What else does it tell you about him? Does it make it feel more personal? Does it feel more authentic?

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“The authenticity of the piece rests on getting this dialogue right.” Stephen Kelman, author of *Pigeon English*

“When I first read slang in fiction I thought, ‘wow’. The thing I found fascinating was that on the one hand, it is authentic, but it is an invented authenticity.” Gautam Malkani, author of *Londonstani*

Discuss: What does Malkani mean by an ‘invented authenticity’? Is this a contradiction in terms?

Activity: Can you have a go at writing a first person account with a dialect? Which dialect have you chosen and why? What have you done to the words to make the language appear to be written in a dialect? Have you removed pronouns, changed vocabulary, left off letters?

Vocabulary

The Geordie dialect replaces Standard English words with Geordie vocabulary.

Activity: Have a look through the book and see if you can find five words that aren’t ‘Standard English’. Make two columns - one of Geordie vocabulary, and in the other column, convert the word into Standard English.

For example: ‘marra’ (Page 2)

Brevity

Much of Danny’s narrative cuts out pronouns, or is extremely brief in detail.

Look at this passage, and spot the missing pronouns:

“Go away, Danny, please.’

Wanted to.

Didn’t.” (Page 3)

Discuss: What effect does this have? Does it make the feelings more powerful? Does it give you an insight into Danny’s personality? Where else in the book can you find examples like this?



First person narrative

The book is written in first person narrative, so that everything is seen through Danny’s eyes, and everything is in his dialect, except when direct speech is used by others.

Discuss: Who else in the novel talks with an accent or dialect? Explore what that says about their character?

“Howway, Danny, let’s gan hyem,’ she said. I hadn’t heard her talk like that in ages, like she didn’t care about her words no more.” (Page 242)

Discuss: Why has Danny’s mam lapsed back into her Geordie accent at this point in the novel?

Opener

Look at the first sentence:

“It was the day the clocks went back.” (Page 1)

Discuss: Why do you think the author uses this conceit? What does it tell you about marking time?

Look at the structure of the book. Does the author use important dates to mark time? For example, Chapter Six, Chapter Seven, Chapter Ten. Have you ever come across any other books that do that?

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The first line of *The Crow Road* by Iain Banks: “It was the day my grandmother exploded.”

Activity: Write a story starting ‘The day that...’ what effect does it have on the reader?

First Chapter

Discuss: What devices and techniques does the author use to create dramatic effect?

Think about dialogue, the length of the sentences, the number of verbs.

Now look at the last line of the first chapter: “That’s when I knew I had to kill him.” (Page 6)

Look back at the second line of the book – what is the effect of this repetition?

The last sentence is a cliffhanger – it leaves the reader wanting to know more. Have you read other stories that do this, or seen TV programmes that do this? Does it build suspense?

Look at other chapter endings. (One example is page 117) How often does Duffy leave a chapter on a cliffhanger?

Discuss: Why does he do this?

Ending

“You can’t turn the clocks back.” (Page 310)

Discuss: How does this link to the beginning of the book? Do you think the book has a happy or unhappy ending? Do you think it is realistic?

Characters



Danny

The story is written from Danny’s point of view in what’s called a first person narrative. First person means that everything is written from that person’s point of view.

Discuss: Is Danny a reliable narrator? Does Danny lie to other people? Does Danny lie to the reader? What in the text makes you trust or distrust him?

On the jacket flap it says “Things I learned when I was fourteen: Never keep secrets from your girlfriend. Never get into a scrap with a bigger lad. Never play football with a black ball when it’s dark. And never let anyone hurt your mam. Ever.”

Discuss: Do you think Danny really learns those things? Why is something like “playing with a black ball when it’s dark” next to “never let anyone hurt your mam”? What does this tell us about Danny? What does Danny wish for at the start of the novel? How has this changed by the end?

Activity: Can you make a list of ten things you have learnt in the past year? Are these the sort of things you learn in school or are they what’s called ‘life lessons’?

Danny’s big passion is football. Look at how often Duffy weaves football into the text, using football to describe Danny’s feelings:

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“I ran like a winger all the way down the street, with a grin as wide as the Tyne.” (Page 86)
and

“It was like scoring the winning goal for Newcastle in the Champions League Final, only better.”
(Page 215)

Discuss: What does it tell you about Danny’s character? Why does Duffy do this? Think about how football can give someone a sense of belonging to a group, like a tribe or a family.

Activity: Is there a community group that you belong to, separate from your family? It may be a club, a hobby, a religious group. Make a poster enticing someone to join it. Is there an emblem you can use, a logo, photos? Use persuasive language.

Danny often uses humour or self-deprecating humour in his descriptions of scenes.

“Do you want a cup of tea, Mam?”

Never heard her say no to a cup of tea.

‘No.’

Weird.” (Page 3)

Look at the date with Amy in Chapter Four and the humour in their conversation.

Discuss: Why does Duffy make Danny funny? What effect does this have on the reader?

Callum

“It was good, at first. He seemed sort of ordinary, just a normal bloke.” (Page 11)

We only see Callum through Danny’s eyes.

“Which team do you support?” I said.

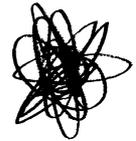
‘Don’t.’

Explained everything.” (Page 25)

Discuss: What does Danny mean by ‘explained everything’. What does this short conversation tell you about both Danny and Callum? Why does Danny said it was good at first. Does Callum have any good features?

Look at when Danny starts calling him FB. (Page 87)

Discuss: Why does he do this?



When Danny’s mam’s family first meet Callum:

“And I think they liked what they saw. He chatted away like me gran.” (Page 34)

and with Callum’s own family:

“Everyone seemed to really like Callum. Maybe it was the beer that was doing it.” (Page 41)

Discuss: Why does everyone else seem to like Callum? Why does Danny say “it was the beer”? Do you think the book would be different if written from Danny’s mam’s point of view? What would she say are Callum’s good features?

“Callum quite liked a drink,’ said Louise.

No, he *loved* a drink. Couldn’t get enough of it...

Louise joined in. ‘Police said someone heard them arguing. Callum’s not the argumentative type.’

Talking clap-trap. He’d argue with a lamp post when he was drunk.” (Page 250)

When Callum dies, the paper features a picture of him: “Made him look like a normal bloke, not one

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with spit on his lips and angry fists.” (Page 263)

Discuss: Why does Callum’s family have such a different impression of Callum from Danny?

Activity: Think about how you act around different people. Do you behave or even talk differently in front of your friends than you do with your parents/caregivers? Write a paragraph describing yourself from your parents’ point of view. Then do the same, but from your friends’ point of view.

Me Mam

“I saw her shout at a bloke in the supermarket once. Was next to the crisps. He had tattoos all over his bald head. He’d bashed her trolley but never said sorry, just eyeballed her. She shouted at him and crossed her arms. Wouldn’t back down. I was dead proud of her.” (Page 3)

Discuss: Why does Duffy have Danny describe her like this so early on, as “not a cissy”.

“I’d loved to have been able to look inside me mam’s head and see what she was thinking. *I still love him, in spite of everything? Now he knows what it feels like? I won’t get hit this week? Bang goes our holiday to Tenerife?*

But her face was giving nothing away.” (Page 249)

Danny finds it hard to empathise with his mam. He doesn’t understand why she can’t walk away from Callum, and after Callum has been hurt, he fails to understand why she’s upset.

Discuss: Do you find it hard to feel empathy with Danny’s mam? Why?

Themes



Wealth/Poverty

“It wasn’t like me gran’s house. No garden. No upstairs. It just had four rooms. Five, if you count the toilet. It got that cold in the winter me mam and me would get dressed for going out, even when we were stopping in.” (Page 9)

“Aunty Tina’s different from our mam. She’s got a car, a swanky house and a posh voice. Aunty Tina doesn’t live round here. She lives over the Tyne in a place that’s that big they need a cleaner.” (Page 9–10)

“Was belter. Callum had a double garage, a garden front and back, and nobody living on top or right next to him. Reckoned he must have the world’s fastest computer fingers to afford a place like that. I could tell me mam loved it too, opening and closing all the shiny drawers and cupboards, grinning, like she was watching kittens on the internet.” (Page 14)

“Aunty Tina and Uncle Greg live in Darras Hall, near the airport. It’s where people with tons of

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money live, like footballers. Some of the houses are that big you can't even see them from the road. You don't see any rubbish in the street either, and people bend down to pick up their dog poo. It's that sort of place." (Page 34)

"We went straight from outside into the front room. The flat was even smaller than the place me mam and me used to live in." Page 119

"After the funeral, we all went back to Callum's brother's house. It was even bigger than ours. It had three garages, a garden that looked like a park, six toilets, and a telly the size of a ping-pong table." (Page 267)

Discuss: Danny describes people's houses by how big they are. Why does it matter to him so much? Look at the absence of colour or aesthetics in his descriptions. Does where people live make a difference to how you see them?

Activity: Make a list of what's important in your life. Now tick how many need money to make them happen. Do the majority have ticks?

Danny asks his mam if he can go on school trip, when she says no, he goes to Callum. "He's got plenty of money." (Page 102)

Discuss: Do you think Danny conceives ideas of power from how much money people have? Does wealth give Callum power?

Megan says to Danny:

"Your ma sent you here. You're after money, it's always about money.' Megan looked around the flat and laughed. 'What bloody money?'" (Page 148)

Discuss: Is money more important when you're rich or when you're poor?

Activity: Imagine you have won the lottery. Make a list of what you would spend it on. Are you giving any money away or buying something for someone else?

Mother and Son

"I reckon she'd do anything for me. Always got something lush to microwave for me tea. Always lets me go on her laptop. Always makes sure me football kit's clean. Socks the right way round. Always buys me the top thing off me birthday list, even though I know she's not minted. And always gives me a goodnight hug, even when I've done nowt to deserve it. Bet there's not many mams do all that." (Page 7)

Discuss: What makes a good mother? Is Danny's mam a good mother in the book?



"Me mam was doing something at the sink. The way mams do." (Page 87)

"Mams are like detectives. They can spot things normal people can't." (Page 89)

"She knows. Mams always know." (Page 151)

"Me mam's got six different ways of saying me name, there's the 'You've-been-good Danny', the 'You've-been-bad-Danny', the 'That-was-stupid-Danny', the 'Thanks-very-much-Danny,' the 'I-don't-know-what-you-mean-Danny' and the 'You're-in-big-trouble-Danny'." (Page 233)

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Discuss: Does Danny's mam always 'know' as Danny describes? Can she spot things others can't?

Activity: Write a poem about mothers and caregivers. Does your poem describe any of the same attributes that Danny describes?

Father and Son

"Apart from Gavin, who said the SAS, and Tony, who said his mam was dead, everyone came up with the same answer - their dad." (Page 67)

"My dad wasn't the only one in shock. I was too. He was nothing like I'd expected him to be. I thought me dad would be big - everywhere. Big head, big arms, big body, the lot, like the other dads you see at school." (Page 118)

"I work in a sandwich shop.' Stevie spotted me face wasn't happy. 'Not what you thought your dad would do, eh?'" (Page 137)

Discuss: Why does Danny think his father would look a certain way? Is it because he has a pre-conceived idea of what he wants him to do, rather than who he wants him to be? What is an ideal father? Does it matter what he looks like?

Activity: Create a list of positive and negative attributes of fathers.

Activity: Re-write the scene in which Danny meets his Dad for the first time. (Page 118 onwards). Think about how Danny would have liked the meeting to be? Or how Stevie would have liked the meeting to be? Whose point of view are you writing the scene from?

"I'm not just somebody, I'm your son.'" (Page 171)

"Was good to get a compliment from him. Better than nothing, I suppose." (Page 183)

"Stevie could be quite strict, like some of me mates' dads. Considering he'd never really been a dad before he seemed to know what dads should do. I think he'd make a canny one if he put his mind to it." (Page 191)

Discuss: What makes a good father? How does Danny's relationship with his biological father change over the course of the novel?

Activity: Try to find other father/son relationships in books and the media. Look at Homer and Bart in *The Simpsons*, for example, Arthur Weasley and Ron in *Harry Potter*, William and Danny in *Danny, the Champion of the World*. Explore the representation of the relationship, and look at positive and negative attributes of a father. Compare with your classmates to pick the best relationship.



"The trip had been a total disaster." (Page 188)

Discuss and Activity: Do you agree with Danny? List ways in which he is wrong. Look at the whole week with Danny and Stevie - when do you feel they are more like 'father and son'. Is there an ideal family moment?

"It was me dad's mam.

Me mam didn't know what to say next. But Stevie's mam did.

'Like father, like son,' she said." (Page 301)

Discuss: Danny asks his mam what she means by this. What do you think she means by this?

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Stevie writes to Danny from prison and promises when he gets out he'll be "a proper dad to you".

Discuss: What does he mean by this? What do you think Danny would want a "proper dad" to do?

Gender

"Also, I felt a bit bad that Amy had gone and asked me out. I mean, isn't that the lad's job?" (Page 19)

When they go to get fish and chips, Callum has a road rage incident with a driver.

"And that, Danny, is why a woman will never win Formula One,' he said, laughing." (Page 27)

"Us boys have got to stick together." (Page 45), Callum says to Danny.

And when Amy discusses her parents having a disagreement, Danny queries that her father doesn't win:

"Well, he's the bloke, isn't he?"

'What planet are you on, Danny? Have you not heard of equality?'" (Page 77)

Discuss: How do characters in the book 'gender stereotype?' What is gender stereotyping? Which characters do and which don't? Why is that?

Think about other places you might pick up on gender stereotyping - on the TV, in adverts, in books. Try to find examples. What are some of our ideas about how different genders should act or be?

Activity: In groups, take a large piece of paper and draw two columns, labelled boy and girl.

Brainstorm ideas of gender stereotyping: for example, 'girls like pink'. When you have filled both columns, have a group discussion about how each student feels they do or don't conform to the stereotyping, and why it might be a positive or negative thing.

Strength

"The way he knocked me into that pool, like I was a paper cup." (Page 56)

"I normally give her a hug, but not today. Didn't deserve it.

She looked at me, confused, then wrapped her arms round me. I wanted to break free, but didn't. Couldn't. I just felt weak, like all the muscles in me body had been removed. Hugs from me gran. Now from me aunty. Never thought I'd miss them. But I did." (Page 83)

"I need to find out how strong he was.

'How many press-ups can you do?'" (Page 142)

"Stevie put out his little hand. I shook it. Strong handshake for a skinny bloke." (Page 160)

"Danny, you came up all this way on your own. You're a strong laddie, a clever laddie, now you've got to be a brave laddie. Please, I'm asking you, be strong, Danny, for yourself, for your mam.'" (Page 205)

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“‘Yeah, Callum will be fine,’ she said. ‘He’s as strong as an ox.’” (Page 257)

“But me mam just told me to be strong and tell them [the police] everything.” (Page 287)

Discuss: Why does Danny need his father to be strong? Is physical strength important? How else can a person demonstrate strength? Sometimes we use the word ‘strength’ when we mean the word ‘courage’. Is Danny strong? When in the story is he strong, and when is he weak?

Think about the word strength in conjunction with how you just thought about gender. Does Danny think men should be stronger than women?

Activity: What does courage look like? Draw a picture of courage in action. Title the picture ‘Courage is...’ Now make a list of scenarios or comic book scenes that exemplify the following types of inner strength: resilience, positive mindset, self-confidence, ability to manage setbacks.

Power of Words

“Battered. Bashed. Beaten. Biffed. Mullah’d. Twatted. Smacked. Punched. Kicked. Thumped. Hit. Smashed. Walloped. Lamped. Mugged. Stabbed. Burned. Bullied.” (Page 59)

Discuss: Why does the author/Danny list these verbs in this way when he looks up domestic violence on the Internet?

“‘That bum of yours. I’ve seen elephants with smaller backsides.’
And me and Callum laughed.” (Page 16)

Discuss: Look at ways in which what people say in the novel can be hurtful. Can you bully someone just by using words? Is it more hurtful when more than one person agrees with the bully?

“‘You don’t know her, not like me. You don’t know him, you don’t know about domestic violence, you don’t know anything. You just make sandwiches.’
Stevie looked like he’d been punched.” (Page 172)

Discuss: Why does Duffy use the language of physical violence here?

“His words were the equivalent of a hug.” (Page 192)

“Finally, he moved towards me. I thought he was going to hug me again. But what he did was even better. He said two words.

‘Night, son.’” (Page 201)

Discuss: Think about different phrases and how they make you feel inside. Does it depend who is saying them, and how?

Activity: Role play with a partner a situation in which something good is said that makes the other person feel happy, or in which it makes the person feel sad. Which words did you use? Why were they so effective?

“Didn’t think it was possible for Amy to annoy me, but she had. Just like everyone else she didn’t want to hear what I had to say. Like all me words were worthless.” (Page 222)

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Discuss: Look again at this whole conversation between Danny and Amy. Do you think that's true, that Amy didn't want to hear him? Do you think his words are powerful?

Activity: Which words in history have been powerful? Look at one of the following powerful use of words and explore what impact they had on the world:

- The first words uttered when Neil Armstrong stepped onto the moon: "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind."
- Karl Marx "The proletariats have nothing to lose but their chains... Working men of all countries, unite!"
- Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream' speech
- Anne Frank's diary
- Malala Yousafzai's speech to the United Nations in 2013: "One child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world."

Lying

Look at the following examples of lies within the book.

When Danny goes on the car journey with Callum, he isn't truthful about whether he enjoys it.

"Not scared, are you, General?"

'No.'

Yes.

'Bet you can't wait till you can do that?'

Bet I can." (Page 13)

When they get back, he lies to his mam too, telling her it was 'canny':

"But me laugh was made up." (Page 14)

When Amy asks Danny out on a date:

"I hoped she might have gone for a later screening. Newcastle were live on telly, twelve-thirty kick off.

'Aye, perfect.' I lied." (Page 18)

When Amy asks if something is wrong:

"Yes, Amy, I'd tell you." (Page 70)



"If there's anything wrong, you'd tell me?"

'Yes, Mr Hetherington.'" (Page 95)

When his mam asks him if he's excited about the school trip:

"Lying again. I was that nervous I'd barely swallowed half a dozen cornflakes. I'd also lied to Callum. I'd told him I needed cash for the school trip." (Page 105)

When Stevie admits not telling Megan about having a son:

"I just kept her in the dark, that's all. I'd never lie to her." (Page 156)

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When Danny's mam tells him she's okay:
"Me mam was a bigger liar than me." (Page 106)

When Stevie calls in sick to work:
"Maybe I got me lying from him." (Page 137)
and when Danny lies about what he thought Stevie would be like:
"Lie number six million for that week." (Page 137)

"It's easier to lie when you've got time to plan. But when you get caught, like at school, it's hard to lie right?" (Page 145)

When Danny lies to Stevie about the phone conversation with his mam:
"I was now officially the world's biggest liar." (Page 195)

"I'm sorry I hit you, Danny.'
'It's okay, Mam.'
It wasn't. But this was one lie I didn't mind telling." (Page 284)

Discuss: Are there different types of lies?

- White lie
- Broken promise
- Fabrication
- Bold-faced Lie
- Exaggeration
- Omission
- Half-truth
- Error
- Cover-up

Activity: Can you fit the lies in the book into these different categories?

Discuss: Is it ever right to lie? Is Danny ever right to lie? Is it lying to keep a secret?

Activity: Have you ever told a lie? What was it about, who did you tell it to, and did you get found out? Think of a list of reasons as to why people lie.

Look at the story of *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*. Why do people tell this story as a parable? What lesson does it teach? Is it effective?

Are some people better liars than others? Often people give away that they are lying by their body language - can you make a list of body language that shows you when someone is lying to you?

"Oh, hi, Danny,' said me mam, in her nice call-centre voice.'" (Page 150)

Danny's mam puts on a special voice to disguise her upset, in the same way that she dresses a certain way for Callum, and covers her bruises with clothes or makeup.

Discuss: Lies also manifest in appearances. Think about how you present yourself with a selfie. Do you edit it? When do you present a 'fake' appearance of yourself to the world? Is this always wrong?

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Danny doesn't tell anyone about Callum's abuse. Not Amy, no authority figure, and no family member.

Discuss: Why doesn't he? Is he just like his mam because he won't tell either?

"You're my boyfriend. We're meant to tell each other stuff. You don't solve problems like this by keeping them to yourself." (Page 292)

Discuss: There are two parts to what Amy is saying here. Should a boyfriend and girlfriend tell each other everything? Is she right in saying that you can't solve a problem if you don't share it?

In the end, Danny has to divulge the full truth:

"I do solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm that the evidence I shall give shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth." (Page 296)

Discuss: Why does Duffy include this? Look at the wording - explore why this exact wording is used in court.

Relationships



The book is mainly about relationships. Early on in the book, Danny's mam meets Callum:

"Always holding hands and stroking each other's arms and legs, gazing at each other, like they'd discovered something amazing. When he wasn't there, she'd call him, putting on that phone voice she's got, like you hear on the adverts, making people buy stuff they don't really want. And at night they'd lie on our little sofa with their legs and arms all tangled together like wrestlers or octopuses or ropes." (Page 12)

"I was that happy being with Amy I'd even forgotten to check how the Toon had got on. Amy grabbed a table and I went and got us two hot chocolates. After taking a sip, Amy stared into me eyes, like she was trying to hypnotise me. Amy had the most beautiful eyes of any girl in Year Eight." (Page 21)

Discuss: Compare the way Danny describes early moments in the two relationships. Do you think the author wants the reader to compare the two relationships?

Think about other relationships in the novel. Is there an example of a good relationship? Which one and why.

Activity: Make a list of what makes a good relationship. Think about equality and respect. Now look again at which relationship in the book you feel is a positive one. Does it display these characteristics?

Can you write a diary of the relationship between Danny and Amy from Amy's point of view? Does she feel frustrated that he doesn't confide in her?

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Power dynamic

Most of the relationships in the book have a power dynamic. This means that often one person is dominant in their behaviour towards the other. Sometimes the power shifts.

Activity: Examine the power dynamic in the various relationships, and look at scenes that display the 'power' of one person over another (the first two are highlighted for you):

- Callum and Danny (Look at pages 232-233 where the dynamic shifts)
- Danny and his mam (Look at page 281 where the dynamic shifts)
- Amy and Danny
- Callum and Danny's mam
- Lanky Dave and Danny



Discuss: Where does the power shift, and does it see-saw back and forth? Look at the language involved. Is there intimidation, persuasion, aggression, manipulation?

Activity: Pick a relationship and imagine a scene that is described as having happened but isn't written on the page - perhaps Amy telling her parents about Lanky Dave, Aunt Tina's voice messages to Danny's mam over the course of the novel, Stevie's statement to the police. Write it out.

Violence

There is lots of violence in the book, not only instances in which Callum is abusive to Danny's mam, but also instances in which Danny, his mam, and Stevie are violent too.

"I jumped up, grabbed him round the neck and pulled him backwards." (Page 96)

"Stevie had nothing to hit them with. He was only armed with fish and chips. So he put the other parcel on a car roof, picked up a traffic cone and swung it at the fat bloke." (Page 167)

"The best bit was the War Museum. Seemed like the Scots had been in loads of battles. Really must like fighting...Stevie was turning Scots, I wonder why he didn't like fighting? It wasn't like I was asking him to go to war. All I wanted was him to kill one person." (Page 179)

"There was a stack of dustbins by the front door. I kicked them over. Then I picked up a dustbin lid and threw it. It hit a car in the street, and set the alarm off." (Page 195)

"I tried to run for the door, but mam caught me by the wrist and threw me hard on the sofa. She was breathing so heavy that she couldn't speak, like when Callum grabbed her in Spain." (Page 281)

Discuss: Do you feel the book condones violence? Does violence lead to more violence? Are there different kinds of violence? Why does Danny resort to violence himself? On the one hand Danny is impressed with Stevie's violence, but appalled by Callum's. What's the difference? Is it gender based? Is it okay for men to fight each other, but not a man and a woman? Is violence ever justified?

Activity: Set up a debate between members of your group or class. One side should argue that violence can sometimes be justified, and the other argue against. Take a vote afterwards.

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Domestic Abuse

Callum is abusive towards Danny's mam. Domestic abuse manifests itself in many ways, not just violence, and many of these ways are exemplified in the text.

"I want you to tell me if she's speaking to people she shouldn't be speaking to. Going places she shouldn't. Planning things when my back's turned." (Page 44)

"Through blurry eyes I could see him, his arm still around her neck, me mam on her knees." (Page 48)

"Me mam never stops thinking about her weight. FB sees to that." (Page 90)

"It's his place, Danny.'

'Thought it was our place.'" (Page 233)

Discuss: What sort of behaviour do you consider to be abusive? List them, (for example, insults, name calling, isolation, controlling behaviour, jealousy, making the victim feel responsible for the abuse), and then find examples in the text of where Callum displays abusive behaviour towards Danny's mam.

Activity: Watch this video that explains the different types of abuse.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/education/clips/z3xdnbk>

See if you can find other examples of these different types of abuse in the text: physical, emotional, financial, psychological.

"And I noticed me mam didn't go out as often. She used to go down the Quayside with her mates or spend the day with Gran or meet Aunty Tina for a coffee. Now she only goes out with Callum." (Page 42)

Look at Chapter Ten in which Danny looks up domestic abuse.

Activity: In small groups note down the signs that someone might be experiencing abuse. Think about isolation from friends, loss of work, emotional effects such as anxiety, depression, low self-worth, poor health, physical injury. Signs may include change in appearance, depression or anxiety, isolation, argumentative, fearful, bruises, use of alcohol, cancelling of plans. Then find examples in the text in which Danny's mam shows these signs. You could make a domestic abuse wheel to spot signs that a relationship is abusive.

"'It'll be better when we're married,' she said softly." (Page 234)

Discuss: Why does Danny's mam stay in the relationship with Callum? Think about the reasons given on page 91. Can you think of any others that aren't mentioned here? Think about how domestic abuse affects others around the victim too.

Activity: Now think about what a healthy relationship looks like. Refer to the notes you made earlier. Write down some of the qualities of a good relationship. Examples may include: mutual encouragement, spending quality time together...Take a relationship you currently have and give some example situations of each positive attribute.

Seeking Help

"I sometimes went round Amy's house after school. Liked going there. There was a good feeling to the place. It felt safe. Like nothing was ever going to kick off." (Page 76)

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“Why didn’t she tell them about the fights?...Why didn’t she tell them what an evil bastard he was? I wished with all me brain for me mam to say it, but she didn’t, just silence, like nothing had ever happened in our house.” (Page 254)

“Our silence had come back to punish us.” (Page 284)

Discuss: Should Danny or his mam have told someone earlier? Who can help you? Think about the following: Police, friend, doctor, family, neighbour, teacher, helpline, website. What other action could you take if you are being abused? Look at the following list:

- Remember it is not your fault
- Find a support network
- Talk to people
- Find a safe place
- Have a mobile charged for emergencies
- Have a safe code word with a trusted friend

“Auntie Tina held me mam tight, and they both started crying.” (Page 301)

Discuss: Think about the sensitivity you need to show if an abuse victim confides in you: believe them, don’t judge, tell them they are not alone, acknowledge it is not their fault, acknowledge how hard it is to speak about it, help to recognise that what is happening is unacceptable, come up with a safety plan, build their confidence and be patient. Ending a relationship can be hard.

Activity: Listen to the following songs: ‘Luka’ by Suzanne Vega, ‘Cherry Wine’ by Hozier. How do they make you feel? Do they express abuse in a certain way?

Activity: Can you write an advice column from a magazine or blog exploring what to do if someone is being abused at home?

Draw a mind-map of all the people in your life who could give you help.

Further Reading

Secrets by Jacqueline Wilson

The Light Jar by Lisa Thompson

YA

The Liar’s Handbook by Keren David

Brixton Rock by Alex Wheatle

Paper Butterflies by Lisa Heathfield

Tell Me No Lies by Malorie Blackman

Breathing Underwater by Alex Flinn



Organisations that can help

Free National Domestic Violence Helpline

0808 2000 247

<http://thehideout.org.uk/>

<http://www.respectnotfear.co.uk/>

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