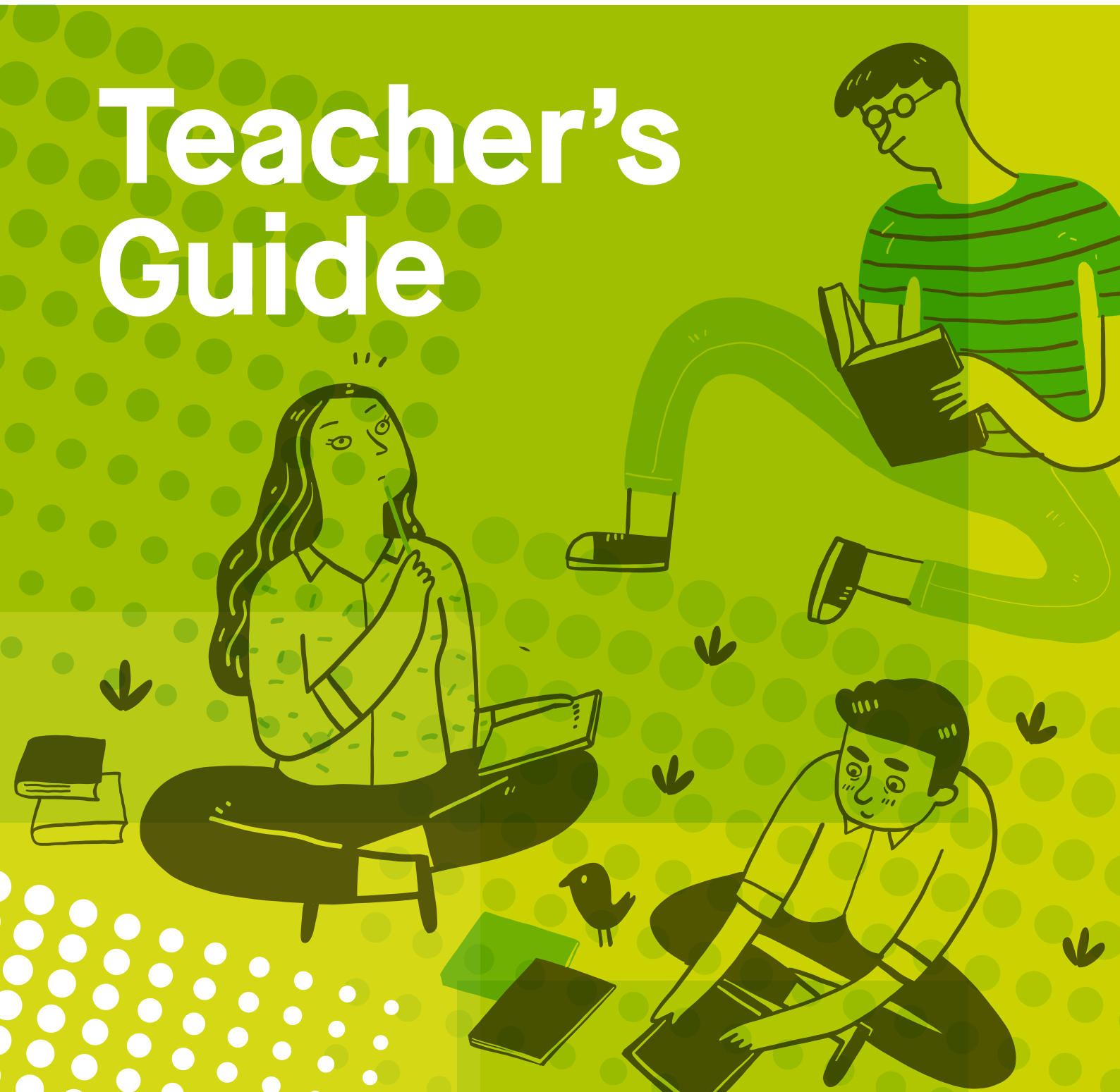


BBC

Student Critics

with Cambridge University

Teacher's Guide



Challenge your students to join the judges of the BBC National Short Story Award to read and critique exciting new fiction.

What is BBC Student Critics?

Aimed at 16–18 year olds, BBC Student Critics with Cambridge University allows students to flex their critical muscles by reading, listening, discussing and critiquing the stories shortlisted for the annual BBC National Short Story Award with Cambridge University.

Taking place each year in September, BBC Student Critics can form a fun introductory or bridging unit for the beginning of the year. Read the BBC National Short Story Award shortlisted stories, discuss them as a group, choose your favourites, and then host a listening party to hear the winner announced live on BBC Radio 4's *Front Row*.

Students will have the chance to gain an understanding of the short story form, develop their skills in literary criticism, build confidence and encounter a diverse range of new writing.

As well as addressing key learning objectives in English Language and English Literature, taking part helps to develop communication and critical thinking skills.

Taking part is easy – Student Critics is not onerous or demanding and there is no written work to

submit. You'll find lots of ideas and resources to help you, but you can make it your own, and decide how you want to take part. There are also opportunities to link with your community through involving parents or carers, other local schools or colleges, bookshops and libraries.

'I really, really liked the discussion – the teacher was one of us, rather than telling us.'

Participating student

How can we take part?

Student Critics allows for a flexible approach. All you need to do is get together a group of students in September to read or listen to the stories on the BBC National Short Story Award shortlist. Discuss them as a group and choose your favourites. Then tune into the announcement of the winner on BBC Radio 4's *Front Row* – did the judges agree with your choice?

Student Critics can take place in the classroom or you can meet informally in the school library. It can be led by teachers or librarians, or students can work independently with more light-touch support.

Find out more at:

bbc.co.uk/teach/student-critics/zxhqdp3

Visit the website to find a host of resources tailored to facilitate critical thinking around the BBC National Short Story Award, including:

Links to audio readings of the shortlisted stories and interviews with the authors

A discussion guide for the shortlisted stories

Stories from previous years to read and discuss

Teaching resources for the short story

Please note that the shortlisted stories for the BBC National Short Story Award may contain adult themes.



Sign up for more

If you'd like a greater level of engagement, we're delighted to offer the chance of an enhanced experience for up to 600 students.

Each year, teachers and librarians are invited to express an interest in signing up groups of 20 or more students to take an active part. Successful groups will receive:

- an invitation to attend the premiere of an online BBC Student Critics event where there will be the opportunity to put questions to our panel of judges and writers
- a free copy of the BBC National Short Story Award anthology for each student
- an opportunity to receive a visit from a shortlisted writer or a judge for this year's BBC National Short Story Award, or BBC Young Writers' Award – this may be filmed

All you have to do is tell us how you think your students will benefit from being part of BBC Student Critics, and to give us some feedback on the experience of participating to help us inform future activity.

Find out more at:
bbc.co.uk/teach/student-critics/zxhqdp3

Timetable

SUMMER TERM

Sign up your group if you're interested in an enhanced experience.

SEPTEMBER

BBC National Short Story Award shortlist announced.

Visit the website for links to audio recordings, interviews with authors, a discussion guide, and new resources.

Read, listen and discuss the stories with your students and choose your favourites.

OCTOBER

Tune into BBC Radio 4 Front Row to listen to the winner announcement and find out who the judges chose.

For more information and the dates for this year's shortlist and winner announcements, see bbc.co.uk/nssa

Why take part

Student Critics provides a real-life opportunity for students to read and listen critically and develop skills in literary criticism.

Taking part is a great way to build understanding and knowledge of the short story form, and to encounter a diverse range of exciting new writing. It's a valuable opportunity to access the very best new short fiction, beyond what students may encounter within the curriculum.

Student Critics can help inspire reading for pleasure, building enthusiasm and a sense of excitement around literature. Through linking into creative writing activities, it offers a holistic approach to reading and writing, through short stories.

Understanding key elements of the short story (such as characterisation, structure or imagery) will help students elsewhere in their study of literature – as well as in other disciplines such as film or media.

Discussing the shortlisted stories offers the chance for lively debate. Students will have the opportunity to express themselves, forming their own opinions, honing their communication skills and building confidence to communicate their ideas and perspectives. They will also build analytical and critical thinking skills which are valuable across a whole range of humanities subjects.

Student Critics offers an opportunity to bring together different groups of students across age groups or subject areas, who might not normally mix – or to bring together students and teachers to discover new texts side-by-side.

Taking place at the beginning of the autumn term, Student Critics can form a fun bridging or introductory unit, setting the tone and helping the transition to studying at A Level.

Student Critics gives young people a valuable opportunity to engage with the current literary landscape, and to see that literature is active, responsive and always evolving. Instead of being something 'of the past' students can see that literature is very much of the moment.

Both students and staff will have an exciting opportunity to be part of a national book club – taking part in a prestigious event run by the BBC and Cambridge University, engaging in contemporary culture, and becoming aware of contemporary writers.

Taking part may inspire students interest in studying literature at a higher level, or even help to envisage themselves as writers or creatives. They will have the chance to learn about the business of writing and publishing, which may lead them to consider a career in the arts.

Student Critics can help to enhance students' university applications and CVs, and is particularly valuable for students who want to study English or another humanities subject at degree level. Participating

is an ideal way for students to demonstrate their engagement with their subject beyond the examination curriculum.

Taking part also offers an inspiring CPD opportunity for teachers and librarians.

'This was such a tonic for students who have been jaded by public examination and sedated by a summer holiday. It energised them and imbued them with a vigour for academic debate that we are still running off weeks later.'

Inaayat Hashim, Head of English at Pocklington School, York, worked with a group of sixth-formers on BBC Student Critics in 2018.



Supporting the curriculum

Student Critics provides students with access to high quality, challenging contemporary literature and enables them to make critical comparisons between stories.

Supporting the demands of A level specifications in English language and English literature, the Award helps students:

- read independently for challenge, interest and enjoyment;
- articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts;
- draw on their understanding of the significance and influence of context in which texts are written and received, including social, historical and cultural context and literary traditions, to inform analysis and interpretation;
- analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts, exploring aspects of plot, characterisation, themes, imagery and settings, the relationships between them and their effects, and seeking evidence in the text to support a point of view;
- analyse a writer's choices of vocabulary, figurative language, allusion, grammatical and structural features, and form, evaluating their effectiveness and impact;
- explore connections across literary texts, making critical comparisons, referring to the contexts, themes, characterisation, style and literary quality of texts, and drawing on knowledge and skills from wider reading;
- make an informed personal response, informed by different interpretations.

analysis
context
interpretation
language
literature
evidence
understanding
connections
comparisons



How can we get the most out of Student Critics?

In the classroom

Use the **'Shortlist Discussion Guide'** to analyse and talk about each story. You could compare the way the stories use particular elements such as imagery, dialogue and setting, making a grid or spreadsheet where you record your impressions and opinions under those headings.



Read and listen to each of the shortlisted stories together. How does the experience differ when you listen to or read each story? Do some things come over better on the page, or are some things better heard?

Choose a shortlisted story and then look together at a work of art in another medium – film, music, visual art, dance – that deals with a similar topic or theme. Compare and contrast the two forms, analysing the different choices the artists have made, and the effect these have on the work as a whole.

Working in pairs, have one student take on the role of the author of a story, while the other interviews them. The 'interviewer' should ask the 'author' about what they were aiming to do with their story, what inspired it, which other writers have influenced them, and what issues in the world they are passionate about. This doesn't necessarily have to be researched but could instead be an act of imagination.

Link up with another school or college taking part in Student Critics. Arrange a video conference session where you compare ideas about the stories or vote together to choose a favourite.

Vote for your favourite stories. Ask students to defend their stories, making an informed personal response. Talk about favourites and compare different opinions.



Set a designated time where you can 'drop everything and read' a short story for 20 minutes.



How can we get the most out of Student Critics?

Out of the classroom

Set up a weekly short story reading group in the library, where students read or listen to a short story, then discuss it together.

Once you've read all the stories on the BBC National Short Story Award shortlist, you could move on to other new or classic short stories.

Get parents and carers involved by letting them know about Student Critics and inviting them to read or listen to the shortlisted stories. You could even set up a parents' reading group where adults can get involved in the discussion and share ideas alongside students.

Encourage students to look at literary websites, research new short story releases, or look online for interviews with short story writers.

They could also check out short story prizes, listen to podcasts about short stories, or follow favourite authors on social media for an insight into the creative process.

Look for short story themed events offered by literary festivals or organisations that students can attend – whether online or in person.

Challenge students to visit local bookshops or libraries to look at new short story collections and anthologies. Which books grab their attention and why?

Challenge students to create a short story podcast, posting their reviews or discussions of short stories they have read, which can be shared with parents and carers, or other students.



What next?

Challenge students to write their own short story

The BBC Young Writers' Award with Cambridge University invites young people aged between 14–18 years to submit original short stories of up to 1,000 words.

Each year, a shortlist of five stories is chosen by the judging panel, which includes well-known writers and broadcasters. The shortlisted young writers have their stories narrated by an actor and recorded for a BBC broadcast, as well as being published in anthology. They are also invited to take part in a creative writing workshop with a leading writer – and the winner receives a special one-to-one mentoring session with an author.

Launched as part of the tenth anniversary celebrations for the BBC National Short Story Award the BBC Young Writers Award aims to inspire and encourage the next generation of writers

Find creative writing resources for students and teachers, the latest news and how to enter at www.bbc.co.uk/ywa

LISTEN UP

Short Stories on BBC Sounds

Listen to hundreds of short stories on BBC Sounds including timeless classics and stories shortlisted for the BBC National Short Story Award with Cambridge University.

Subscribe to the BBC Short Story Podcast for brand new stories written by today's writers, brought to you by BBC Radio 4.

bbc.co.uk/sounds
(search: 'short story')



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