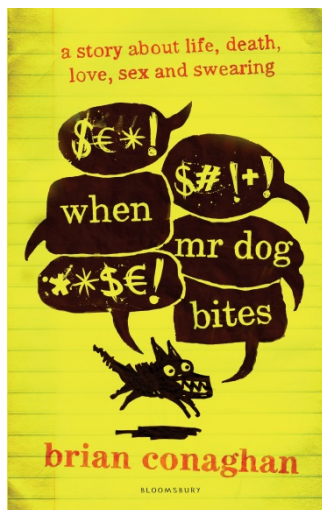


B L O O M S B U R Y

Discussion Guide *When Mr. Dog Bites* by Brian Conaghan

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Dylan Mint has Tourette's. For Dylan, life is a constant battle to keep the bad stuff in – the swearing, the tics, the howling dog that escapes whenever he gets stressed. And, as a sixteen-year-old virgin and pupil at Drumhill Special School, getting stressed is something of an occupational hazard. But then a routine visit to the hospital changes everything. Overhearing a hushed conversation between the doctor and his mother, Dylan discovers that he's going to die next March. So he grants himself three parting wishes: three 'Cool Things to Do before I Cack It'. It isn't a long list, but it is ambitious, and he doesn't have much time. But as Dylan sets out to make his wishes come true, he discovers that nothing – and no-one – is quite as he had previously supposed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian Conaghan was born in 1971. He was raised in the Scottish town of Coatbridge but now lives and works as a teacher in Dublin. He is the author of *The Boy Who Made It Rain* and has a Master of Letters in Creative Writing from the University of Glasgow. Over the years Brian has made his dosh as a painter and decorator, a barman, a DJ, an actor, a teacher and now a writer. He currently lives in Dublin with two beauties who hinder his writing: his wife Orla and daughter Rosie.



VOCABULARY

Some terms cited in the story will likely be unfamiliar to most readers. Ask readers to use reference books or electronic research sources to find out about the following: banal, cockney, facile, futile, incontrovertible, milieu, obtuse, sacrosanct. **L 4.9-10,[11-12]**

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Ask readers to share what they know about Tourette syndrome.

If you heard someone described to you as “having a disability,” describe what image immediately comes to mind.

Discussion Questions:

Chapters 1-10

- What prompts Dylan to make out a “Cool Things to Do before I Cack It” list?
- According to Dylan, what are Amir’s “mental problems”?
- Why does Dylan carry a green stone?
- What makes Doughnut “the most horriblest person at Drumhill”?
- How does Dylan feel about Michelle Malloy? Why does she go to Drumhill?
- What does Dylan enjoy about English class? If you don’t know the meaning of any of Dylan’s top five new words, look them up in the dictionary. What are your top five words and why?
- What is the meaning of the book’s title? Under what circumstances does Mr. Dog come out?
- The Drumhill Special School Dylan goes to is one where all students have some sort of disability. Explain why you think it is or isn’t best for someone with Tourette’s like Dylan to go to a “normal” school. How do you think someone like Dylan would be treated at your own school? What would be his greatest challenge?

Chapters 11-20

- What convinces Dylan he has only a short time to live?
- According to Dylan, what’s the difference between “buds” and “acquaintances”? Who do you consider to be your “best bud”?
- What kind of relationship does Dylan’s mom have with Tony? What does Dylan think of him?
- How would you describe the relationship between Dylan and his mum?
- How does Dylan react when he finds out his mom reads the letters he writes to his dad? What does Dylan write in the letter that upsets his mom?
- What happens between Dylan and Michelle Malloy at the school dance? What kind of help does he offer to her?

Chapters 21-30 and Concluding Discussion

- How does Dr. Colm want to treat Dylan’s Tourette’s? What does Dylan discover he’s had all wrong?
- What does Dylan’s mom reveal to him about his dad and Tony?
- In the concluding chapter in his letter to “Mr. Mint,” what does Dylan reveal about how he has changed in the course of the story?
- Aside from his Tourette’s, how different is Dylan from yourself or any other teenager you know? What are some of the interests, concerns, and issues you and your friends have in common with Dylan?
- Describe the friendship between Dylan and Amir.
- What are some examples of bullying in the story? What are examples of characters using language to bully and demean others?
- Describe how the author uses humor in this story.
- What is your favorite scene in the novel?

- Would you be able to be friends with someone like Dylan who has Tourette's? What do you think might be the toughest challenge in such a friendship?
- How has this story affected the way you think of people with learning or physical disabilities?
- In what ways do you think Dylan serves as a positive role model?
- If you were to recommend this book to someone, how would you describe it?

POST-READING ACTIVITIES

Write your own "Cool Things To Do Before I Cack It" list.

Use electronic and print resources to research the following topics: autism, Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), and Tourette's syndrome. Share your findings. **L 4.9-10,[11-12]**

Write a review of the novel critiquing the following literary elements: plot, setting, character(s), point of view, conflict(s), and theme(s). Cite specific examples from the story to support your critiques. **W 1.9-10,[11-12], W 4.6-12**

Write an additional chapter to this story in which you tie up loose ends any way you want. **W 3.9-10,[11-12]**

This guide was written by Edward T. Sullivan, a librarian and writer.