



A Reading Leaf for The Final Year by Matt Goodfellow

This Reading Leaf has been endorsed by Otter-Barry Books. We would like to extend our warm thanks for their ongoing support.



Reading Leaves - a book-based Comprehension resource Creating Critical Readers through Whole Books

- Vocabulary explicitly taught
- Non-fiction and poetry links made
- For use in guided or whole-class reading

National Curriculum comprehension coverage

Pupils should be taught to maintain positive attitudes to reading and understanding of what they read by:

- **continuing to read and discuss an increasingly wide range of fiction, poetry, plays, non-fiction and reference books or textbooks**
- **reading books that are structured in different ways and reading for a range of purposes**
- increasing their familiarity with a wide range of books, including myths, legends and traditional stories, modern fiction, fiction from our literary heritage, and books from other cultures and traditions
- **recommending books that they have read to their peers, giving reasons for their choices**
- **identifying and discussing themes and conventions in and across a wide range of writing**
- **making comparisons within and across books**
- learning a wider range of poetry by heart
- preparing poems and plays to read aloud and to perform, showing understanding through intonation, tone and volume so that the meaning is clear to an audience

Understand what they read by:

- **checking that the book makes sense to them, discussing their understanding and exploring the meaning of words in context**
- **asking questions to improve their understanding**
- **drawing inferences such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying inferences with evidence**
- **predicting what might happen from details stated and implied**
- **summarising the main ideas drawn from more than one paragraph, identifying key details that support the main ideas**
- **identifying how language, structure and presentation contribute to meaning**

Discuss and evaluate how authors use language, including figurative language, considering the impact on the reader

Distinguish between statements of fact and opinion

Retrieve, record and present information from non-fiction

Participate in discussions about books that are read to them and those they can read for themselves, building on their own and others' ideas and challenging views courteously

Explain and discuss their understanding of what they have read, including through formal presentations and debates, maintaining a focus on the topic and using notes where necessary

Provide reasoned justifications for their views

Content domain coverage

Sessions	2a	2b	2c	2d	2e	2f	2g	2h
1		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
2		✓		✓			✓	
3				✓	✓			
4				✓	✓	✓		✓
5	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
6		✓	✓			✓		
7	✓		✓	✓		✓		
8		✓	✓			✓	✓	
9	✓				✓		✓	✓
10	✓	✓		✓		✓		

Guidance notes: Please be advised that the content within this book and resource make reference to alcohol, grief, loss and trauma. We recommend reading the text and the resource in their entirety before teaching with it. Guidance notes have been provided where relevant for your reference.

Book summary

Ten-year-old Nate lives with his mum and two younger brothers, Jax and Dylan. Jax is eight and Dylan, who is 4 and thinks that he is Spiderman. Nate takes care of his younger two brothers when his Mum is out at the bingo with Aunt San, drinking a few ciders. The book begins at the end of Year 5 and quickly moves to the summer break, followed by the beginning of Year 6 (The Final Year), when Nate and his best friend PS are put in different classes. PS begins to hang out with Nate's nemesis, the school bully, Turner. Nate has a new teacher, Mr Joshua, who notices how much he enjoys reading and writing, encouraging him to write to process the world around him. We are aware of 'The Beast' within that Nate works hard to control. Nate's world is turned upside-down when his youngest brother, Dylan, is rushed to hospital. How will he cope if his brother doesn't pull through?

Approach to use for whole class reading

Take a group who are less fluent for reading to support decoding but work through the same passage as the whole class. If books are purchased individually, children work independently. If books are purchased for pairs, then pair together most children in mixed ability pairs to work on questions and read together.

Approach to use for guided reading

Each session can work in isolation and could form part of a carousel using one session at a time for pre-reading on one day, focussed reading with teacher the following day and then finally as a follow-up task on day 3.

Vocabulary development

Where relevant, sessions will begin with a short list of words to define before reading. This is an important part of each session as children will be encountering new and/or subject-specific vocabulary throughout the book which will be crucial to their understanding. Defining words could be as simple as matching words to definitions written on post-it notes but will be an essential step not to skip

Recording responses to text

The children need a book to record responses in, ideally a workbook which is marked for understanding of text (rather than writing) This can be called a Reading Response book or a Reading Journal, though many schools use this term for the book the children take home to record thoughts about their home reader.

Fluency in focus

Each session develops children's reading fluency progressively; building accuracy, automaticity and enjoyment. Reading Leaf texts have been chosen deliberately in order that pitch and pace are appropriate to the year group. Teachers should model reading often as part of the sequence, including appropriate pauses and prosody, encouraging echo reading and choral reading as appropriate, and allowing children to develop comprehension skills while becoming increasingly fluent readers.

Session notes

Session 1 – Feathers and Wings (2b, 2d, 2e, 2g, 2h)

Words to define before reading: suburban, disfigured, flyovers, cladding

Book Talk

Give out copies of the book and direct children's attention to the front and back covers. *What can we learn about the book before we even read it? Who is the author? Illustrator? What is the main character's name? How old is he and which year is he in? What can you tell about his family?*

Symbolic Wings

Discuss why the main character in the story, Nate, is depicted with wings. Make reference to David Almond and the cover of *Skellig*, which is similar. *Are children familiar with this text or any other David Almond texts? Tell the pupils that Matt Goodfellow is a huge fan of David Almond. What might this suggest about how the story will develop or the character of Nate?*

*What do wings/feathers often symbolise? Collect ideas and vocabulary from this discussion on the **feather templates** for display on the **working wall**. Search online and in dictionaries for vocabulary and idiomatic phrases. Children might note down: **trust, honour, wisdom, strength, hope, spirits of loved ones, angels; white feather representing cowardice**; idioms: **birds of a feather, ruffle one's feathers, light as a feather, feather in one's cap, feather one's nest**. *Have you read a story told in verse before? What do you think this will be like to read?**

Read aloud up to the poem entitled 'These are my streets' as a class, modelling expression and prosody. In order to check comprehension, ask these quick-fire questions:

- *What are his two brothers called?*
- *Which school does Nate go to?*
- *What is Nate scared that he will lose control of?*
- *What is Jaxon's dad called?*
- *What is Dylan's nickname?*
- *When did The Beast first appear?*
- *What was the name of the counsellor?*

Look at the page 'Me (gonna do mine in rhyme). Why might this text be in brackets and far away from the rest of the text?

(Just swear I'm scared I'll lose control
of The Beast that sleeps within my soul.)

What are our first impressions of the book? What is it like reading a novel in verse? Do you like it? Why? Why not? What predictions can we make about the story? **I think that... because...** Watch a video of the author, Matt Goodfellow, and hear him read some of the poem in his own dialect. Ask the children if it matters whether words are spelt correctly, why/why not?

Discuss dialect and accent. *Are stories and poems often written in a northern dialect like this?* Depending on where your setting is, spend some time reflecting on the impact of hearing stories read in different accents. *Why is this important?*

Session 2 – Some stuff ya need to know (2b, 2d, 2g)

Words to define during reading: deny, biceps, balaclavas

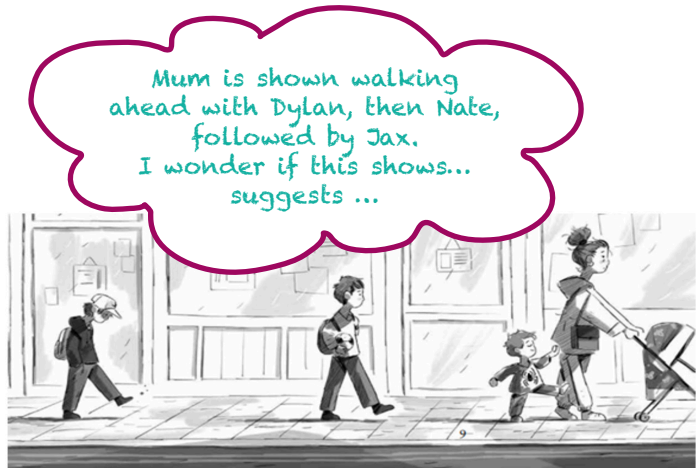
Give pupils access to this illustration by Joe Todd Stanton.

Explain he is an award-winning illustrator. Illustrations play a key part in telling us more about the characters and events in the story. *What can you infer by looking at it?*

Read from the poem 'Mum' to the end of 'Dylan'.

Ask the pupils to write their thoughts in their books as wonder bubbles or display on the **working wall** and share some.

Share the title of the next poem 'Oh, so ya wanna know about The Beast, right?' *Why does the author refer to "The Beast" as a proper noun? Is it a person? What does this make us think? 'The Beast' is capitalised so I think that...*



Read the poem aloud to the class. Ask them to track and pay attention to your prosody. The children can have a go at reading it aloud in pairs together. *What does this poem tell us about The Beast and how Nate controls it? Answer these questions in Reading Response books:*

- When did The Beast first appear?
- How does it feel for Nate when The Beast appears?
- Who is Nate's counsellor?
- How does she help him?
- Is this successful for Nate? How do you know?
- What strategies do the pupils use to manage their own feelings?
- How successful are they?
- What advice might they give Nate?

Using the subtle images/clues given by Joe Todd Stanton's illustrations, ask the children to imagine what the rest of The Beast might look like. Give them time to draw it using just black/white/grey and one other colour. Once they have finished, share each other's responses in small groups, providing an opportunity to develop oracy through book talk. The responses could make an impressive display.

Session 3 – The Split (2d, 2e)

Words to define: terraced, dole, banter

Read up to the poem 'I only hear two names', then focus on the poem 'All through Year 5 they've been tellin us'. *How does Nate feel about this message about Year 6? Does the class empathise with this? What message did they have about being in Year 6? Use the sentence stems to support with this:*

When I was in Year 5...

At the start of Year 6 I was told...

Look at how the poem **'I only hear two names'** is set out. *What is the impact on the reader? Why does the page finish with "the.....end"?* Predict what might happen.

Now read up to the poem 'Mr Joshua' and look at the illustration. *What might this illustration represent?*

Read up to Part 4 – *why does Nate not show his poem to PS?* Drama & oracy opportunity: hot seat – give the children the opportunity to explore Nate's feelings in role.

Links to PSHE, class discussion point: Nate should 'get over it' that he isn't in a class with Parker. *To what extent do you agree with this statement? Share experiences of being separated from a best friend. Reflect on what this feels like and how you might get through it.*

Session 4 – Three’s a crowd (2d, 2e, 2f, 2h)

Words to define before reading: grass verge, smirk

Read up to Part 5. What other characters have we been introduced to? Focus on the three boys.

Reflect on Nate’s summer holiday. Ask: why was he at the library so much? What books did he read? Who is his favourite author? Did he miss PS? How did he feel about PS not responding? Ask the pupils to reflect on their last day of Year 5. What was it like for them? What feelings did they have going into the summer break? Discuss in groups: “PS hasn’t done anything wrong.” To what extent do you agree with this statement? *Although I think that PS should be allowed to make new friends, I also think that...*

Ask the children to go to two sides of the room depending on whether they believe PS has done something wrong or not. You could have a class discussion on this. Alternatively, show responses on a continuum:



Drama & Oracy opportunity: Teacher in role as PS. What would PS say if we could ask him? The children can ask PS why his friendship with Nate has changed, how he feels about this and what he thinks Nate is feeling about the situation. Predict what the start of Year 6 will be like for Nate, PS & Turner. *I predict that in Year 6...*

Consider how views of characters can change over time in a book. Make links with other books where characters’ actions have changed the way you thought about them, you may choose to record these either in a Reading Response book or in speech bubbles and put these on display.

Session 5 – The Beast begins to stir (2a, 2b, 2c, 2d, 2h)

Words to define before reading: ‘bust a groove’, pristine, aftershave, snigger

Summarise the events in the poem so far in pairs. **Read from Part 5 to the poem ‘Typical Beast, eh?’.** Discuss and answer the following questions in Reading Response books.

1. **“Three little birds we ain’t...”** Why does Nate say this?
2. Why does Nate say, “Muuuuuuuuuum!” in the poem **‘NAAAAATTTTTEEEEEYYYYY, look!’**?
3. What does Jax’s response in **‘The Beast begins to stir’** tell you about Nate’s brother?
4. What do we learn about Mr. Joshua in the poem **‘What the next few weeks teach me about Mr Joshua’**?
5. After reading **‘One mornin’** consider: What do Caleb & Nate have in common? Do you think they will become good friends? Why?
6. If you had a special notebook, what would you use it for? Poems, stories, diary entries, drawings, cartoons?
7. Look at the illustration accompanying the poem **‘Typical Beast, eh?’**. What does it suggest about how Nate is feeling?

Show Nate’s poem about PS, ‘A Poem I write in my ideas book about PS but would never EVER show anyone in the world let alone him’

It’s funny how ya move in the same way
kick the ball the same
the way ya tie yer laces and laugh
the way yer bag moves as ya run
all still the same.

The only thing that’s different
is everything’s changed.

What do you think the words, ‘The only thing that’s different, is everything’s changed,’ mean? What does the poem say about their friendship?

Review what we know about the boys so far. The children work in small groups or pairs, with each allocated a character to explore (Nate, PS, Turner or Caleb). The children fill a circle with adjectives to describe their character so far and add some facts about them. You may choose to use post-it notes so that all children are involved in populating the ideas or the **character exploration resource** provided. Encourage rich discussion of the character.

Once complete, the children share their ideas with the class. Others can add to the vocabulary and facts captured. Finally, add these to the **working wall**.



Discuss with the children where any of the characters share similar qualities by identifying repeated vocabulary. Explore this as a class, what is similar about each of them? What do you notice? You may like to create a Venn diagram with the vocabulary.

Session 6 – Wings and Words (2b, 2c, 2f)

Words to define before reading: knackered, gawpin, rickety, shoreline


Read to the poem **'A poem I draft in my head before bed'**. Answer the following questions in Reading Response books.

1. What does Nate mean when he says "Wings and words, sir, wings and words."?
2. Where are the class going on their residential?
3. What time of year is it? How do you know?
4. What do you think of Nate's description of what he can see from the coach window?
5. Think about the final couplet in the poem **'We leave the city behind'**, "like someone's laid down feathers on the shoulders of a new world." What do you think this means?
6. Look at the illustration after the poem **'The afternoon'**. Why is this given a double page spread?
7. How does Nate deal with *The Beast*? How does the snow help him do you think? (**'I'm on the ground with my blindfold round my neck'**)
8. Explore enjambment in the poem **'A poem I draft in my head before bed'**. Matt Goodfellow uses this a lot. Why do you think that is? What is the effect on the reader?

Read the poem 'And the words just pour out of me, man'. How does Nate feel about his residential? How do they know? Ask the pupils to reflect on their own residential visit. (If they haven't been on one, ask them to think about any trip and the impact it had on them.)

Having read almost half the novel, what do the class think about it being written in verse? Does it matter that the novel is written in this way? Would it be better as a straightforward narrative? What do they like/dislike about its format so far? **Read to 'The Coach home'.**

Session 7 – Emotions (2a, 2c, 2d, 2f)

 In this session there may be sensitivity regarding absent parents and Christmas gifts. Please also be mindful of grief and loss, specifically around the potential loss of a sibling and adjust your approach according to the needs of your cohort.

Words to define before reading: skint, mingin

Read to the poem titled 'I walk the playground lines'. Discuss the following questions:

1. What does Mr Joshua mean when he says, "you'll always find your people" in **'A coupla weeks into the new term'**?
2. Look at the poem titled **'The noise'**. What might have happened to Dylan? What makes you think this?
3. What is the effect of the repetition of the word "and" in the poem? What impact does it have on the reader?
4. What is the purpose of the two blank pages?


 PSHE – if appropriate, discuss or share what it might be like to experience loss. This could be of a grandparent, pet or friend. Give as much time as is necessary to this and be mindful of your cohort's experiences, adjusting as appropriate.

Ask the pupils to summarise Nate's emotions in the story so far using the **Emotions Graph**. Children consider the emotional journey of a character through a story. A character's emotions are plotted on a positive/negative scale against the main story events. Model the use of this.

Share the graphs and add one to the **working wall**. What do they think will happen next in the story? How will Nate react? Will *The Beast* make an appearance? Do emotion graphs always follow the same pattern? Across books? For individual characters? Each character has their own journey. If time, repeat for different characters.

Session 8 – Dylan (2b, 2c, 2f, 2g)

Words to define before reading: aspirin, arthritis, fledglin, pendant, antibiotics, swag

 You may choose to warn the children a twist is coming. (Dylan is not dead as they might have inferred but do not reveal this.) During this session there is reference to Congenital Heart Defects, you may choose to discuss this with the children. The author has included information on their research on this at the back of the book. Please be mindful of the personal experiences of children in your class as you explore the poems in this session.

Re-cap events and check in with pupils. How are they feeling? **Read to 'Just as the lunch bell goes'.**

1. Why does Mr. Joshua "wipe tears from his beard" in **'I walk the playground lines'**?
2. Mr. Joshua says, "All is not lost." Do you think this is true?
3. What is the Sunshine Room?
4. **Read from 'Mrs Jones and some others' to 'A little while before lunch'** – explain Michael & Mina are characters from 'Skellig'. How does this help Nate keep *The Beast* at bay?
5. How does Nate feel when PS comes in? How might PS be feeling? Why?
6. Do you think Nate is right to fist bump him? Why?
7. Why does Nate say "we're flyin'" in **'Just as the lunch bell goes'**?

Reflect on the emotional journey they have been taken on by Matt Goodfellow. How do they feel about that?

At the start of the book I felt... now I feel...

Read to 'On the way to school, Jax starts to talk'. What does Jax think about his big brother? Give the children time to talk about people who make them feel safe. Ask them why they think that Matt Goodfellow included this poem.

Session 9 – BIDMAS (2a, 2e, 2g, 2h)

Words to define before reading: ditherin, navigate, strobed, mirage, stabilise, guarantee, pore, paediatric, cardiologist

In pairs, orally summarise the story so far. *How do we think things will develop for Nate and his family next?*

Read up to 'The Beast Says' and answer the questions below in Reading Response books.


1. Have another look at **'Talk to him Natey'**. *What is wrong with Dylan?*
2. In **'And then Jax is gone'**, *why does Jax run away?*
3. **Read 'A message to Dylan across the universe' again.** *What does Nate say he will do?*
4. Feathers and wings constantly feature in the book. Look at back the symbolism we discussed earlier in the sequence about feathers. **Read 'Tonight I dream of you'.** *Can we add any more now?* Use template provided but in a different colour to make the new inferences on the **working wall** visible.
5. In **'One night after Jax goes to bed'** Auntie San mentions Nate's dad. *Why do you think he is mentioned now?*
6. *Was PS right to have hit Turner in 'I didn't see where it came from'? Why/Why not?*
7. *What do you think is meant by "In the darkness we find our people" in 'My blood brother is back'?*
8. **Re-read the BIDMAS acronyms.** *Why do you think that Matt Goodfellow has placed these two poems side-by-side? What is the impact of this? Write some alternatives following the pattern in the book. This could be done in pairs and you may like to use the examples. You could create poetry bookmarks. How many different ones can the class come up with?*

The book is almost finished. In groups of 3 or 4, make some predictions for how it will end. Record & share your predictions!

Session 10 – Jesus (2a, 2b, 2d, 2f)

Words to define before reading: scalpel, gauze, wade, silhouette

Recap predictions for the ending of the book. **Read until the end.**

1. The Beast is released. Reflect on this event in the book and think of a time where you might have lost your temper or behaved impetuously. *Is it ever ok to react like this?*
 2. *What do you think the words, 'our eyes are full,' mean?*
 3. *What happened to Turner? Do you think his punishment is fair?*
 4. *How do you think Nate & his friends feel about the transition day and starting secondary school?*
-  **PSHE:** If appropriate, expand the discussion to how they are feeling and explore ways to manage feelings of apprehension, anxiety, excitement successfully.
5. *Why did Mr. Joshua give Nate his copy of Skellig? What did he write in it? Why?*
 6. Explore the last page of the book again. *Who could the mysterious figure be? Why do you think that?*
 7. *Were our predictions correct? Does it matter if they weren't correct?*

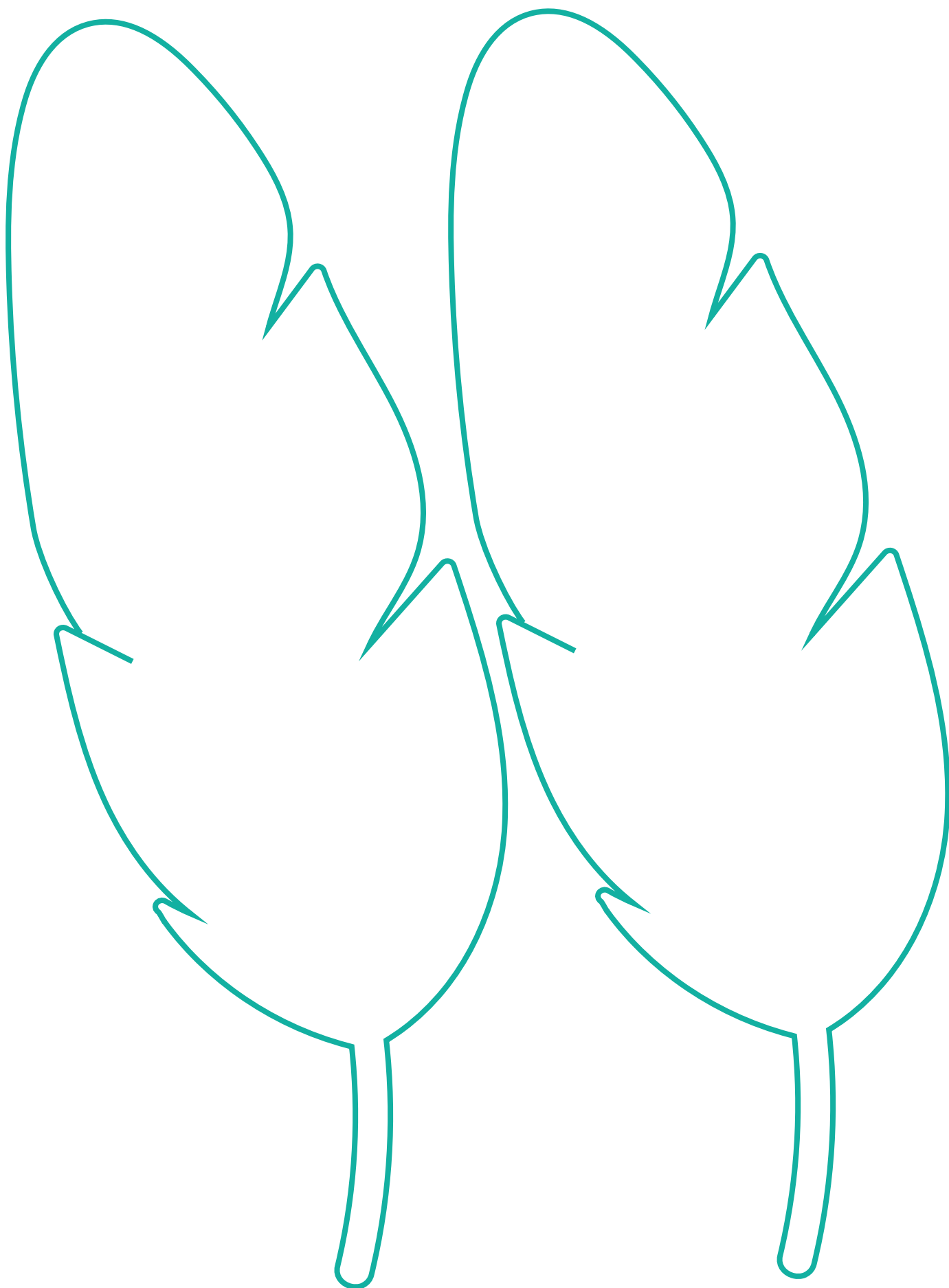
Likes, Dislikes, Puzzles, Connections:

Now they have finished the book, ask: *what do we think and how do we feel about it?* Ask the pupils to record words/phrases as responses on large flipchart paper or using the resource for **likes, dislikes, puzzles and connections**. You could use ICT for these if you prefer.

Discuss the emotional impact of the book, the rollercoaster of emotions, it's urban coolness, clever poetry, relevance, how it reflects real life, friendship, family etc. *Have they read a book like it before? Would they choose a verse novel in the future? Would they read more of Matt Goodfellow's books?* You may choose to introduce the children to more from his collection! Share that the sequel is out – 'The First Year' and that another book 'Six Weeks' is published in the Summer of 2026.

Complete a book review to display in the school library to encourage others to read the book and remember to upload any work samples to Literacy Tree!

Feather templates



Character exploration

Nate

PS

Turner

Caleb



BIDMAS

Before

I

Do

More

Ask

Self

Brave

Intelligent

Deliberate

Methodical

Aware

Steady

Breathe

Ignore

Distractions

Move

Ahead

Slowly

Likes, dislikes, puzzles and connections

Likes

I like the part when... because...

Dislikes

I dislike it when... as...

although
however
despite

Puzzles

I wonder why...

Connections

This reminds me of...

