

DISCUSSION GUIDE



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The internationally bestselling author of *Beetle Boy* writes a thrilling mystery adventure about friendship, bravery and the wonderful world of birds, starring a birdwatching detective called Twitch.

Twitch has three pet chickens, four pigeons, swallows nesting in his bedroom and a passion for birdwatching. On the first day of the summer holidays, he arrives at his secret hide to find police everywhere: a convicted robber has broken out of prison and is hiding in Aves Wood. Can Twitch use his talents for birdwatching to hunt for the dangerous prisoner and find the missing loot?

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WALKER
BOOKS

Twitch by M. G. Leonard

Discussion Guide

ABOUT THE BOOK

Twitch is a delightful mystery, wrapped up in the trials of childhood, and all explored through the character Twitch's effervescent and infectious love for birds. With a home full of chickens, swallows and pigeons, and a secret birdwatching hide in the woods, Twitch is ready for the summer. But when a mysterious and dangerous robber is spotted in the woods, things don't turn out as planned. As Twitch tries to discover what is really happening, he must navigate the perils of bullies, friendship and trusting in others, in M. G. Leonard's glorious page-turner.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

M. G. Leonard is an award-winning, bestselling writer of children's books, as well as a member of Authors4Oceans. Her Beetle Boy series has sold in 37 countries and she is currently writing the screenplay for a TV series based on the trilogy. Her first picture book, *The Tale of a Toothbrush*, is out now. Before becoming a writer, M. G. Leonard worked as a digital media producer for the National Theatre and Shakespeare's Globe. She is also a trained actor, dabbling in directing and producing as well as performing. She lives in Brighton with her husband and two sons.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This enthralling novel is packed with things to discuss and opportunities for further exploration. It also features many themes, topics and experiences that may resonate with group members, including parental loss or absence, bullying, loneliness, isolation and criminal activity. Care should be taken when discussing these themes that members feel supported to voice their opinions and feelings in safety, and that appropriate support is in place should any members be upset or affected by any episodes in the book.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Getting started:

To begin with, ask what the group thought of the book. Did everyone enjoy it? What did anybody particularly like? Would anyone like to expand on their answer? Did it remind anyone of anything else they've read or seen?

1. Introductions

'The main thing was the bird was alive.' - p.15

Look back at the first chapter (if you have time, you might like to read it again all together) – what does the reader learn about Twitch in those first few pages? What about Jack? Discuss how Leonard sets up the dynamic of the novel in this one incident – what impressions is the reader left with? Do they remain throughout the novel?

2. Twitch

'He was happy on his own, building his hide, watching the birds...' - p.62

Discuss the character Twitch. Where does his love of birds come from? What do the group think of the idea of sleeping in a giant bird box, or having swallows in their



bedroom? Look at the quotation – do members think Twitch is really happy on his own? Why does anyone think he avoids trying to make friends?

3. Birdbrain

“Corvus, that’s your name. It means ‘crow’, doesn’t it?” - p.92

Did anyone notice anything about the language in the book, particularly the names of places and characters? How do the many references to birds, or words associated with birds, affect the reading of the book? Does it draw the reader in to the world, or does it make the reader stop and think? You might like to consider Twitch’s real name, but also the town, Briddvale (contains an anagram of bird), Aves wood (Latin for ‘birds’), Ava and Tippi (both mean ‘bird’ in other languages), Kittiwake Cliff, the locks along the canal, etc.

4. Bullying and friendship

“Please?” Jack’s face was open and unguarded. “Let me make things even.” - p.96

How does Twitch’s relationship with Jack and the other bullies change over the novel. Is it a straightforward process? Did members of the group change their opinion of the bullies as they were reading? If so, how? Why might some of the bullies in the novel bully people? What’s their reason?

5. Trust and understanding

‘Leopards didn’t change their spots and he didn’t understand people at all.’ - p.169

Why does Twitch find it so hard to understand people? Why does he trust Billy, at first? Why is he suspicious of others? What helps him to develop trust in the right people?

6. Dawn chorus

“It’s like having an invisible orchestra in your back garden.” - p.116

How does the author make the reader side with Twitch, and with the birds? What does Leonard do in her writing to make the reader sympathise with them, and like them? You might like to read either of the dawn chorus passages on pages 66 and 116. You might also like to think about the names Twitch gives to all of the birds, or the way the reader is often ‘alone’ with Twitch and the birds. From whose perspective does the reader see the novel? What effect does this have?

7. Birds, birds, birds

“Birds make me happy. They’re good company...” - p.87

Did anyone in the group learn anything about birds while reading the book? What bird facts or details can anyone remember? Has anyone ever been birdwatching? Would anyone like to, having read the book? What do the group think are the key skills you need as a birdwatcher? Throughout the book there are lots of birdcalls, and Twitch often imitates birds. You might like to find some recordings of bird calls before the session starts – can anyone identify any of the birds by their song?

8. Unravelling the mystery

‘As Twitch walked away from Billy, he told his heart to quieten down. It was louder than his brain and he needed to think.’ - p.216

How does the mystery unfold in the novel? Why does the author tell the story from Twitch’s point of view? What effect does this have, as new facts emerge, or as he discovers new details? Who in the group suspected Billy? Who didn’t? What did the group think of the way the children worked together to capture Billy/Fergal? Discuss how the unravelling of the mystery is also the catalyst for Twitch spending time with lots of new people – Jack, Amita, the Kingfishers, friends at school, etc. What has the mystery done for Twitch?

