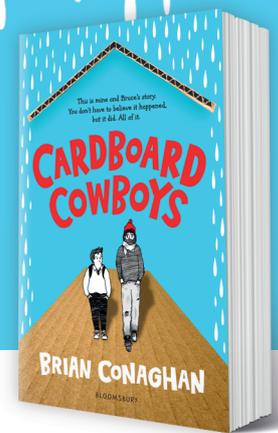


CARDBOARD COWBOYS

BRIAN CONAGHAN

Educational
resource
pack



Dear reader,

This educational resource pack is based on Brian Conaghan's brilliant first novel for middle-grade readers and is the perfect learning resource for children in Key Stage 2 or 3. These notes work as an introduction to the themes within the book, giving suggestions for classroom activities to enjoy across different subjects – from writing poetry, to designing friendship bracelets, to identifying what can be done to help and support homeless people.

The reading questions encourage discussions around themes of bullying, body confidence and homelessness. They invite students to explore the importance of friendships and accepting differences, as well as different methods of expressing feelings.

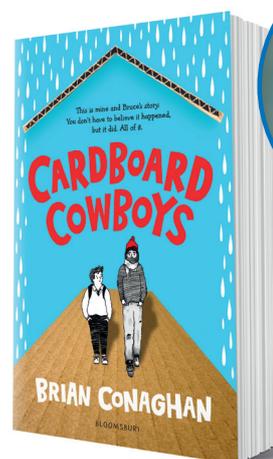
We hope you enjoy reading this wonderful book and working your way through this pack.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Even though I found him living in a house made of cardboard, Bruce is a massive legend. FACT. So this is mine and Bruce's story. You don't have to believe it happened, but it did. All of it.

Nobody at school can see past Lenny's size to the person within. So when lessons get too tough, Lenny always goes to his bench to think. At least there no one can see him. Then one day, midway through lobbing his empty can of Irn-Bru into the canal, he's stopped by Bruce. Bruce lives in a cardboard home hidden away by the banks, and he doesn't approve of kids messing up his front lawn.

But a bumpy start soon gives way to an unexpected friendship – and an epic road trip – that will change both of them for life ...



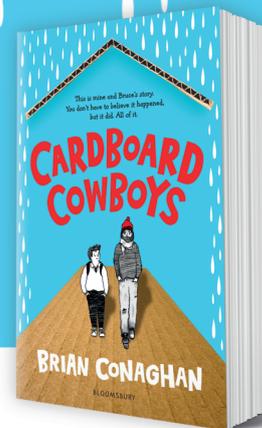
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EXTRACTS AND NOTES FOR **KS2/3 TEACHERS & LIBRARIANS**

Suitable for: Ages 10+

Explore themes of: ✓ Bullying ✓ Body Confidence ✓ Homelessness ✓ Unexpected Friendships

Subject Checklist: ✓ Literacy ✓ Creative Writing: Poetry ✓ Art, Design & Technology ✓ PSHE ✓ Citizenship

CONTENTS

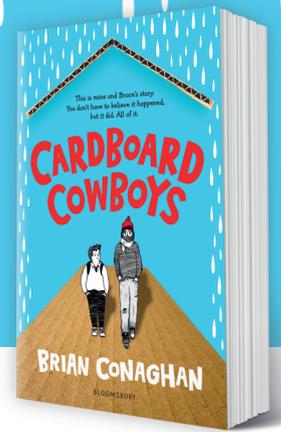
- **EXTRACT 1 Bullying (taken from pages 3–4)**
Objectives: Consider the impact of bullying from Lenny's perspective; analyse three haiku poems and write your own.
- **EXTRACT 2 Body Confidence (taken from pages 183–184)**
Objectives: Discuss the importance of being proud of your body; write your own poem about body confidence.
- **EXTRACT 3 Homelessness (taken from pages 212–213)**
Objectives: Identify what can be done to help and support homeless people; write a persuasive letter to your local council.
- **EXTRACT 4 Unexpected Friendships (taken from page 265)**
Objectives: Reflect on qualities and behaviours that make a good friend; design three friendship bracelets.



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EXTRACT ONE

BULLYING *(Taken from pages 3–4)*

Imagine being trapped in a world with everything you hate. Picture how that makes you feel. Well, that's school for me.

So, today in English Liam McAvoy called me Fatso. Sometimes he's swallowed a dictionary and says Chunky. Other times Blubber. But Fatso is the main one. Teachers have never called me it, but I know the word pinballs around their brain cells. I caught Mr Sutton, the PE teacher, giggling his head off when I was playing dodgeball once. He tried to hide it but I snared him, standing there like a human letter A, arms folded, legs spread and cheese-faced.

Our English teacher, Miss Kane, is quality though. Before the Fatso abuse she told us what a haiku poem was by writing this on the board:

- They came from Japan.
- They must have 3 lines.
- Line one = 5 syllables.
- Line two = 7 syllables.
- Line three = 5 syllables.
- So, they must have 17 syllables in total.

'So, with haikus you tend to do a lot of syllable counting on your fingers,' Miss Kane had said. Then did a wee syllable rap demonstration to show us what she meant, which was supposed to be funny. Nobody laughed. Except me, inside.

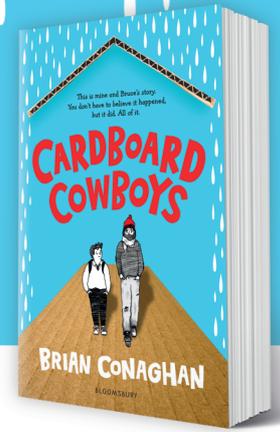
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Which feelings and emotions do you associate with school and why?
- How does Lenny feel about school? Can you understand why?
- What should you do if you witness a classmate being treated like Lenny?
- Why is it important to address bullying? What different forms can bullying take?
- Which teacher does Lenny like? What qualities do you think makes a great teacher?





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ACTIVITY: HAIKU POETRY

- Haiku poetry enables Lenny to express thoughts and feelings that he mostly keeps hidden. The beauty of this particular form is that these poems are made up of just a few words.
- Begin by looking over the rules of haiku poetry in the extract again. Then, read over *three* of Lenny’s poems taken from different points in the text. Beneath each one, write a sentence or two explaining what you like about the poem and what feelings, emotions, or thoughts Lenny expresses in it. Discuss your ideas with a partner or as a class.
- You are now going to use Lenny’s poems as inspiration for your own. Your haiku poem will need to stick to the rules of the extract, but it can be about anything that has been on your mind recently. You might like to use some ideas from the book to get started, for example, school, friendship, and challenging bullying.
- Once you have mastered the form of the haiku poem, you can have a go at writing another! Share your work together and discuss how just a few words can say a lot.

Poem One. (page 5)

Here is what I think:
 People like me won’t find love
 I will not be found

What do you like about Poem One?

.....

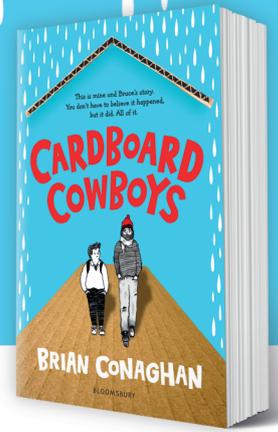
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Poem Two. (page 246)

Man in sand with hair,
North Sea is shouting to you
Hope it's hugging tight

What do you like about Poem Two?

.....

.....

Poem Three. (page 290)

Hero betrayed law,
Some blood spilled for the wee bro
Protecting what's close

What do you like about Poem Three?

.....

.....

Try writing your own haiku poem here

.....

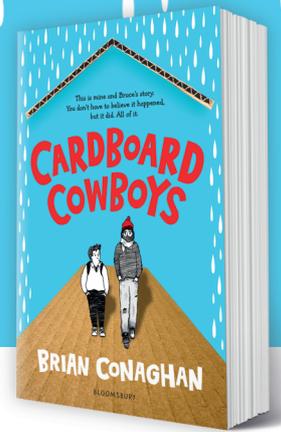
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EXTRACT TWO

BODY CONFIDENCE (*Taken from pages 183–184*)

'If you can't sing, so be it. Who am I to convince you otherwise?'

'I can sing.'

'What was that?' Bruce's hand leaves my head.

I pull myself out of my thighs; my skin is damp.

'I said, I can sing. I'm always singing when I'm alone. It's not that that I'm worried about.'

'Do you want to tell me what it is then?' His voice is gentle. 'Only if you want to, Lenny.'

'It's this.' I point both hands towards my body. 'This is why I don't want to sing in front of people.'

'The way you look?' he asks.

'Yes, the way I look.'

He sits close to me. There's silence. We stare at the dancing trees. Be mega to be a tree, swaying around in the wind without a care in the world. What a life. The water echoes in my ears. I could sleep for a year listening to those sounds. No wonder Bruce chose this place to build his cardboard castle.

It's not that I want to be model-thin or thick with muscles, I just don't want to be bandaged in this body any more. I'm fed up carting it around like a sopping sheep on my back; it being the reason for all the snide things in my life. Why everything's a pile of rubbishness.

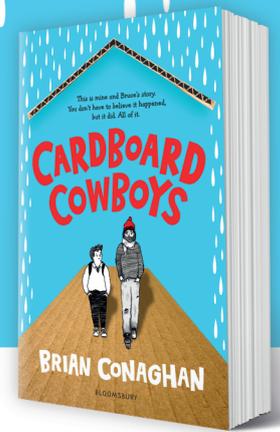
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What does body confidence mean?
- Do you ever feel pressure to look a certain way? Where does this pressure come from?
- What is stopping Lenny from singing in front of people?
- How does Lenny feel about his body and why? Why is he jealous of trees?
- How can we be accepting of each other's bodies and our differences?





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ACTIVITY: DANCING TREES

- With a partner, spend a couple of minutes making notes about why your bodies are amazing. Note: It's really important you only use positive and supportive language! For example, think about the power of your brain as well as all the organs, bones, and muscles and what they enable you to do.
- Then move on to specific features that mean we don't all look the same (which would be very boring!). Perhaps you're tall for your age? Maybe one of you wears glasses or has freckles?
- Next, read over Lenny's poem from page 48. What is the poem about? What do you notice about its form and structure? How does its shape connect to some of the ideas you discussed from the extract?
- It's now time to write your own poem about your awesome body! You could use the shape of a tree to structure your poem to remind you to be free and not care what others may think. Or you could fit your poem into another shape that is important or meaningful to you. Have fun with it and don't worry – you don't have to share it with anyone if you don't feel comfortable.
- Take your poem home and put it on a mirror to encourage you to be proud of your body and who you are.

A radio

A guitar

A rolled-up tent

A stack of books

A small camping chair

A pile of Tupperware boxes

A rucksack (red, to go with his hat)

A heap of newspapers/magazines

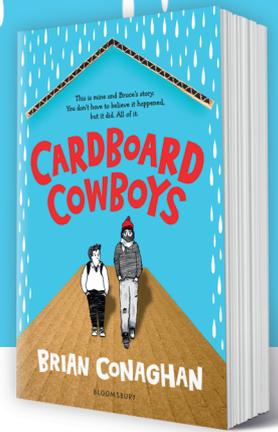
A mattress (same as Mum has for the
yoga she never goes to)



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EXTRACT THREE

HOMELESSNESS (Taken from pages 212–213)

The bus station is full of homeless people shuffling around not knowing where the bejeez they're going. Must be about sixteen of them. Every sex and age. Manky duvets and carrier bags everywhere. These homeless seem very different from Bruce: sadder and more desperate; dirtier and more abandoned. By the dark, sorry look on their faces they seem to have different problems from Bruce. I could be wrong, but I'd wager that these people are in a drug prison. I feel sad for them.

What does someone wrapped in a sleeping bag do all day? Does anyone talk to them? Imagine going the whole day without having at least one decent chat. I know, cos I've done it, and, let me tell you, it's no Disneyland; you don't go to bed feeling all nourished and wanted.

I stare down at the ground, don't want to talk to any of them, don't want them coming over for a friendly beg:

You wouldn't have a pound for the bus, would you?

I haven't eaten in three days, would you have anything small?

Spare any change so's I can feed my baby?

I feel ashamed, but don't want to apologise for something I haven't done. I see them, but I pretend I haven't, like they're ghosts or something. I hear them, but I wish I had headphones on. I'm not proud of myself. I focus on all the chewing gum flattened into the pavement.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

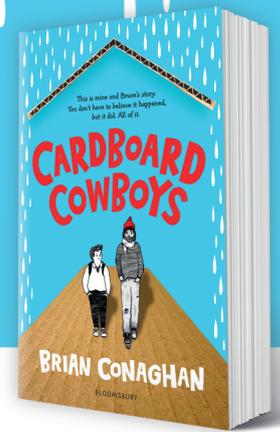
- How does the writer create imagery in this extract? Who and what can you visualise?
- Why does Lenny describe and think of these homeless people as 'different' to Bruce?
- Why does Lenny 'stare down at the ground'? Why do you think he 'feels ashamed'?
- Are there any homeless people in your town or city? In what ways are they like 'ghosts'?
- Can you think of some reasons why someone may end up homeless?



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ACTIVITY: A LETTER TO THE COUNCIL

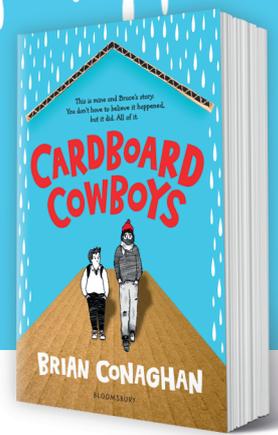
- Through his friendship with Bruce, Lenny learns more about the issue of homelessness in his hometown. For each of the extract ideas in the table, note down what help and support the homeless people in Lenny’s hometown need and why. Discuss these ideas together.
- Spend a few minutes researching work that is being done to address the issue of homelessness in your local area and across the country. Make a note of any charities, schemes, or local community groups and the work they are doing.
- Finally, use all of the work from this lesson to write a letter to your local council. The purpose of your letter is to persuade the council to do more to help and support homeless people in your local area.
- Go through the correct layout of a formal letter before writing it up. An example of a letter format can be found on the next page.

Idea from the text	What challenges do homeless people face? What help and support might homeless people need and why?
There are homeless people living at the bus station of ‘every sex and age’.	
Lenny thinks they seem ‘desperate’ and ‘abandoned’.	
Lenny wonders, ‘Does anyone talk to them?’	
Lenny imagines them saying, ‘I haven’t eaten in three days’.	
Although Lenny feels ‘ashamed’ he pretends he hasn’t seen them.	

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First line of address

Town

Postcode

(Today's date)

Dear (Title) (Surname)

(Introductory paragraph)

(Paragraph two)

(Paragraph three)

(Closing statement)

(Signature)

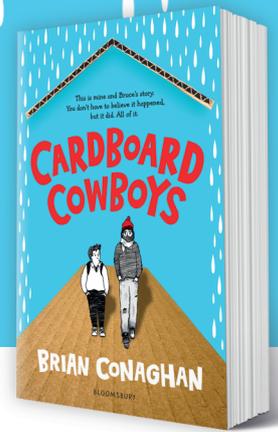
(Name)



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EXTRACT FOUR

UNEXPECTED FRIENDSHIPS (Taken from page 265)

'You know, Lenny, being different is what makes the world exciting. Difference brings joy to our lives.'

'You think I'm different, Bruce?'

'Oh, I think you're very different, kiddo.'

Wow!

This was possibly one of the coolest things anyone has ever said to me. Bruce is basically saying that I'm unique, distinctive, special ... The list is endless. Who wants to be identical when you can be singular? Not me, that's for sure. I don't like football and I love country music. I'd say that sets me apart from the Liam McAvoy's and Mr Suttons of this world.

'So, do I bring you joy then?' I ask.

'Ever since I caught you littering that day, you have brought nothing but joy to me.'

'You mean that, Bruce? You really mean that?'

'Of course I mean it. If only you knew how much.'

Double wow!

I think my heart is about to explode and splatter all over his face, which wouldn't be so joyous for either of us. Damn tooting it wouldn't.

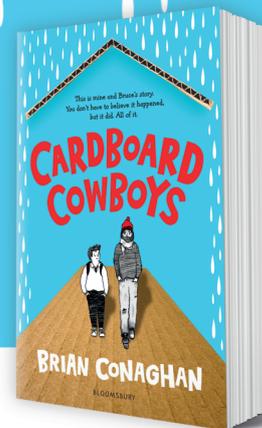
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- According to Bruce, what 'makes the world exciting'? Do you agree?
- Why is the title of the book 'Cardboard Cowboys'? What is the relevance of this?
- How does Bruce help Lenny to patch things up with his family? What does Bruce get in return?
- Why might Lenny and Bruce be described as having an 'unexpected friendship'? Explain your ideas.
- What do you think each character has learned by the end of the text and why?





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ACTIVITY: FRIENDSHIP BRACELETS

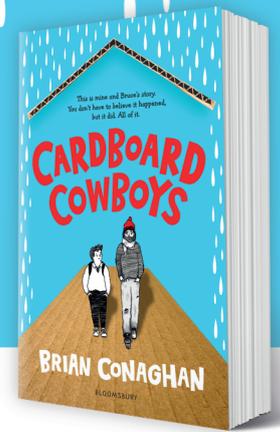
- In small groups or pairs, create an acronym using the word 'FRIENDSHIP', thinking about characteristics and behaviours that make a good friend.
- Then, take a moment to reflect upon any unexpected friendships you have made. What made this friendship unexpected? Are there any people in your class that you haven't got to know yet? Perhaps you could end up becoming unexpected friends.
- Then, take your time designing each of the three friendships bracelets below. One will be distributed to another person in your class by your teacher, another will be to take home and give to a friend or a family member, and another will be for you to keep for yourself.
- Here are some ideas you could include in your designs:
 - ◆ *Qualities that make a great friend/family member*
 - ◆ *Memories you have shared together or shared interests/hobbies*
 - ◆ *Kind messages or compliments to encourage body confidence and self-esteem*
 - ◆ *Ideas or key messages you are left with from the story*
- Once your teacher has distributed the bracelets so that everyone has one, read over the kind and inspirational messages!



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You've now reached the end of this resource pack for *Cardboard Cowboys*!

We hope these notes have proved to be a useful and fun introduction to the themes and ideas found within this book.

We would love to see examples of any work created as a result of this pack, so please do email them over to us on:

childrensmarketing@bloomsbury.com

or share on Twitter tagging us at

@KidsBloomsbury @BrianConaghan

