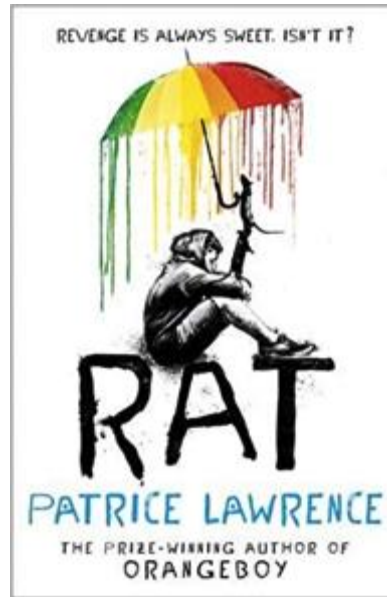
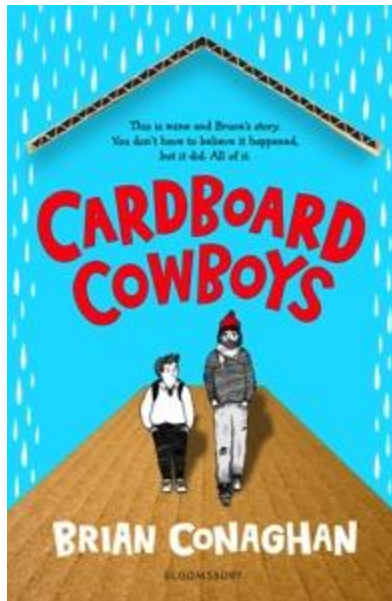


## Inside Your Head with Brian Conaghan and Patrice Lawrence

Explore how stories can help us see people differently  
with *Cardboard Cowboys* and *Rat*.



**Level:**

Second Level / Third/Fourth Level – KS2/3

**Explore themes of:**

✓ Community ✓ Different Perspectives ✓ Friendship ✓ Empathy ✓ Loneliness ✓ Connection

**Subject Checklist:**

✓ English Language ✓ Social Studies ✓ Expressive Arts ✓ Well-being and Health

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**At a Glance**

*Before watching the event or reading the extracts!*

1. Can you see any similarities between these two covers? What might they have in common?
2. Who do you think the protagonists might be in these two stories? Do you think they'll face similar challenges? Why or why not?
3. Whose 'voices' or 'perspectives' do you think you will hear in these stories?

### Book Cover Activity: Inner Monologues

Consider how these covers explore the idea of characters being 'inside their own heads'. Do you think they present lonely characters, or do they also explore the theme of connection and friendship?

Look at the characters on the front cover of each book and consider what they are thinking and feeling. Choose one and write down their inner monologue in a speech bubble. Then have a go at performing your monologues with your classmates.

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### Read the Extracts

*Taken from pages 1–8 of 'Cardboard Cowboys' and pages 1–3 of 'Rat'*

### Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think *Cardboard Cowboys* and *Rat* have both been written from the first person perspective?
2. Do you have empathy for the narrator, Lenny, in the first chapter? Why or why not?
3. How does Lenny feel about school? Why?
4. What does Lenny's haiku on page 5 reveal about his character and his feelings?
5. What is the significance of the bench for Lenny?
6. Why is the opening of *Rat* impactful? *'I'm hungry. Really hungry.'*
7. Al doesn't want to go in the kitchen, why? List at least two reasons.
8. What do you learn about Al and his situation in the first three pages? How does he feel about his situation?
9. Why does Al like rats? What is significant about this?
10. Can you see any similarities between the two openings by Brian Conaghan and Patrice Lawrence?



## Get to Know the Authors and the Books!

### Activity 1: Exploring Loneliness

*Both of these stories explore the idea of being isolated or lonely and feeling disconnected from others.*

- In *Cardboard Cowboys* and *Rat*, the main characters face feelings of isolation due to their circumstances or the way they are treated by others. Can you find examples of this in both extracts?
- For the characters involved, write down their thoughts and feelings in these moments. How do they react? Consider the people that surround each character; how do they make the feelings of isolation worse? As an extension, consider how those other characters feel – what are their motivating fears and anxieties?
- For each character, make a list of their coping mechanisms. For example, for Lenny you might include the bench, or an example of his poetry.
- Then, take a moment for yourself to think about times you have felt lonely or disconnected from the world. What did you do to cope with this feeling? Do you have a place (like Lenny's bench), a pet (like Al's rats) or an activity that helps you? Write your own haiku to explore the theme of disconnection.
- Discuss the statement below together – do you think it is true or false?

**It is never possible to truly connect with another person, we all live inside our own heads.**

### Activity 2: Difficult Circumstances

*'Cardboard Cowboys' and 'Rat' tell the stories of people with difficult circumstances. Reflect on why it is important to tell these stories.*

- What challenges do you read about in these two books? What challenges do Lenny and Al face or come up against? Who do they meet?
  - Consider the themes below, how are they explored in *Cardboard Cowboys* and *Rat*? Why do you think are they important to the authors?
    - *Homelessness*
    - *Difficult Home Life*
    - *Bullying*
    - *Prison*
    - *Poverty*
  - Do you know of anyone who has faced difficulties in their life, or can you think of a difficult circumstance that you have experienced or encountered? Make some notes about it or discuss it with a classmate.
  - Imagine what a single day is like for a person facing one of the difficult circumstances or challenges listed above. Write a diary entry in role as that person. When you have finished, reflect on how this activity made you feel. Why is it important to read and write about the experiences of everyone in society, no matter their story?
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## Your Turn: Develop Your Community Spirit

### Activity 1: Showing Empathy for Different People in Your Community

*These two books explore the idea of empathy or overcoming barriers to truly see the experiences of others. Is this an important thing to do? Why?*

- Define the word 'community'. What does it mean to you? Why is it important? Create a collage to show your ideas.
- Think about your local or school community, not just the people you speak to every day, but also those who you speak to less. How many people make up your community? How many of their names do you know / not know?
- Make it your mission to find out the names of all of the people in your community who you don't know. What would it be like to walk in their shoes for a day?
- Create a 'Community Map' or similar to show the different people in your local or school community.
- How can you make sure that you show empathy and compassion towards everyone in the community? How can you ensure that everyone in the community feels that they are valued, respected, and listened to? Note down some ideas.
- Then, write two reflections, the first being about a time someone showed you empathy. What happened and why were you in need? What did the person do or say to show you empathy? Why was this important to you at the time?
- Write your second reflection about a time you showed someone else empathy. Consider: was it towards someone you knew or a stranger? What event(s) had occurred and how do you think they were feeling at the time? What did you do or say to support and reassure them? What did you learn from this experience? How did you feel afterwards?

## Activity 2: The Importance of Friendship

Both 'Cardboard Cowboys' and 'Rat' explore themes of loneliness and isolation, as well as the power of friendship and connection.

- In small groups or pairs, create an acronym using the word 'FRIENDSHIP', thinking about characteristics and behaviours that make a good friend. How is the theme of friendship explored in these two books?
  - Then, take your time designing three friendship bracelets. 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 self-esteem*
    - *Ideas or key messages you are left with from the stories you have read*
  - Once your teacher has distributed the bracelets so that everyone has one, read over the kind and inspirational messages!
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## Reflection and Further Questions

### Reflection Activity

Think over all that you have learned today. What have you realised about the power of telling stories? What have you learned about the importance of empathy and community?

*Act out an important scene from one or both of these books (you might choose something from the extracts provided). Create a freeze-frame to show the dynamics in the scene and the characters' feelings. Then, create monologues for all of the characters involved to show their inner thoughts – what is going on inside their heads?*

Lastly, do you have any final questions you would like to ask Brian and Patrice if you got the chance? Try to think of at least two and make a note of them.

Keep your eye out for more awesome books from Brian Conaghan and Patrice Lawrence, as well as the other authors from the Edinburgh International Book Festival!



Actual Investors