

Our Class Loves This Book: *The Crossing* by Manjeet Mann *Stephen Dilley & 9C English, Kendrick School, Reading.*

After reading and loving Mildred D Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry* (a powerful account of growing up under the shadow of racism in 1930s Mississippi), my Year 9 English class had three lessons left before the end of term. Inspired by one pupil's question about how racism in the USA compared to the UK, I decided to share Manjeet Mann's *The Crossing* with the class as this explores many similar themes from a contemporary British perspective.

Time and budget constraints prevented us from reading the whole novel together, but I wanted to share enough to allow them to offer a meaningful response, and hopefully to entice lots of them to read the novel independently – and to explore other verse novels too.

I initially only shared Natalie's story with pupils in order to immerse them in some of the novel's themes from a British perspective with which they might already have some familiarity. After looking in detail at Natalie's first two poems, we spent quite a lot of time reading on through her story, which introduces a number of complex relationships and themes including grief, housing insecurity, prejudice and immigration. Only after we'd thought about this did I introduce Sammy's story and share some extracts from different parts of his journey which shed a light on different aspects of refugees' experiences which might be more shocking to pupils.

While we were reading, pupils were given time to record brief written responses to what they had read alongside discussing the book in small groups and as a class. In a final lesson, I gave pupils a choice of creative or critical tasks to complete individually, and we then shared some of their creative responses using a visualiser – pupils were keen that their peers could not only hear but also see their writing.

Despite the near-ubiquity of YA verse novels now, surprisingly few of the class had ever read one before, and many had negative preconceptions about the genre. I expected them to be engaged by Mann's writing style, but I was delighted by how quickly their attitude towards this genre switched. In our first lesson, I shared descriptions of verse novels by Sarah Crossan and Manjeet Mann which focused on both the visual and aural qualities of verse novels. One thing that was striking was how expressively all pupils were able to read Mann's words aloud – it was a pleasure to listen to them. I am hoping they will also carry this enthusiasm forward into our study of poetry next term.

Pupils became deeply invested in Natalie and Sammy's stories, wanting to know how they would eventually intersect and what the chapter titles were counting down towards. At the end of the final lesson, they were queuing up to borrow the three copies of *The Crossing* available in school, with some happy to settle for other verse novels in the meantime – this was the most enthusiastic response I have seen from a class in response to my efforts to recommend high-quality YA fiction. So I took a valuable lesson from this about spending more time sharing extracts from great books in lessons rather than just describing them so that pupils can experience these stories for themselves.

I believe that the work included in this submission, all completed in class in the space of a single week at the end of term, showcases these pupils' emotional investment in Natalie and Sammy's stories and their mature, sensitive and empathetic engagement with the issues Manjeet Mann explores.

Initial responses to Manjeet Mann's descriptions

These responses were written in the first 15 minutes or so of the first lesson after we had read and discussed Natalie's first two poems. Pupils were immediately struck by the power of the imagery Manjeet Mann uses to convey Natalie's emotions.

1. Natalie's feelings are presented as being fragile, distant, and empty with grief threatening to leak out. Manjeet Mann presents this very effectively with the description "Getting too close could cause a puncture" and then we'll see it. The emptiness. The grief, ~~it~~ It'll leak out, or pull us in. Either way, there'll be no escaping it". I really like this description as the short sentences are very impactful and make the reader feel sympathy and sadness for Natalie.

by Romy

^{extended metaphors}
The phrases "but he's broken, we all are" and "we've kept our distance these past few months, keeping our sharp edges to ourselves" are some of the most powerful and impactful descriptions in the poem as it demonstrates a feeling of vulnerability and trying to act strong to hide it.

by Nysha

'Dad's like gingerless gloves. He tries, but he doesn't quite reach your important bits' - I like this because it's a really good, descriptive metaphor about how Nat feels about her dad and how he doesn't quite fill the gaps of her mum.

by Anayah

1) The most effective description of Natalie's feelings is when she says her family 'keep the sharp edges to ourselves. Getting too close could cause a puncture and then we'll see it. She is saying that her family has been quite isolated because if they were to show their grief, then her emotions would consume her and would hurt her family.

by Eleanor

336 days since!

- I think this emphasises Natalie's feelings powerfully because of the metaphor of the gloves. 'Mum was like winter socks. She knew how to keep you warm...

Dad's like gingerless gloves. He tries, but he doesn't quite reach your edges'. I think that this is really powerful because it shows how Nat and her dad do try to hold together and be close, but they're both cold and uncared without the mum to keep them together and warm.

by Lucy

Verse novels

- *"Poetry should be heard, the audience tasting the melody in their mouths and also experiencing the silences within the text. In the white spaces of a poem are moments of rest, breath, where a reader can discover herself. As a verse novelist writing in free verse which mimics speech, nothing I write is beyond the reader's interpretation."* - Sarah Crossan
- *"I found writing in verse quite liberating; It was easier to deal with big emotional subjects by getting straight to the heart of the issue and saying more with very little. I also like playing with structure, and I like how verse novels can bring words to life on a page with the use of white space and by playing with key phrases. It forces you to want to speak the words out loud, which I think appeals to the actress in me."* - Manjeet Mann



I used these two descriptions of verse novels to help pupils think about the visual and aural qualities of this genre and why writers are drawn to it. They then had the chance to have a go at being verse novelists themselves, by rearranging one of Natalie's poems from prose to verse (see next page.)

Experimenting with form: Rearranging Natalie's second poem from prose to verse

336 days before

I should have taken more videos of her. I should have recorded every moment, caught every breath, savoured every laugh. I touch the screen, wanting to grab hold of her – to reach through my phone and pull her out.

I wish she was still here, Dad.

I know, love, I know. Dad's desperate to keep it together, but he's broken, we all are. We've kept our distance these past few months, keeping our sharp edges to ourselves. Getting too close could cause a puncture and then we'll see it. The emptiness. The grief. It'll leak out, or pull us in. Either way, there'll be no escaping it. My heart shifts a little, knowing we'll never be the same. Knowing we won't ever fit like before.

Mum was like winter socks. She knew how to keep you warm. She knew how to hold you. Dad's like fingerless gloves. He tries, but he doesn't quite reach your edges – the important bits – the bits that really matter.

'Watch this, Nat! Watch me!' We stare at the screen as Mum cartwheels straight into the sea and then emerges, coughing and laughing, trying to catch her breath.

That laugh, Ryan says, smiling, and he's right. Mum was small, but she was a powerhouse. Big laugh. Big smile. Big heart. Ryan slides his finger across the screen so we can watch the scene play out again and again.

She was so passionate, wasn't she, Dad? Like about everything.

She was, Nat, he says. She cared too much, your mum.

You know what she'd say to that, don't you?

What, Nat?

There's no such thing. You can't care too much.

I should have taken more videos of her
I should have recorded every moment
caught every breath
savoured every laugh
I touch the screen, wanting to grab hold of her
to reach through my phone and pull her out

by Keya

I wish she was still here, Dad.
I know, love, I know.
Dad's desperate to keep it together,
but he's broken, we all are.
We've kept our distance these past few months,
keeping our sharp edges to ourselves.

Getting too close could cause a puncture and then we'll see it.
The emptiness
The grief
It'll leak out, or pull us in.
Either way, there'll be no escaping it.
My heart shifts a little, knowing we'll never be the same.
Knowing we won't ever fit like before.

by Emily

I should have taken more videos of her.
I should have recorded every moment,
caught every breath,
savoured every laugh.
I touch the screen,
wanting to grab hold of her –
to reach through my phone and pull her out.

I wish she was still here, Dad.
I know, love, I know.
Dad's desperate to keep it together,
but he's broken, we all are.
We've kept our distance these past few months,
keeping our sharp edges to ourselves.
Getting too close could cause a puncture and then we'll see it.
The emptiness
The grief
It'll leak out, or pull us in.
Either way, there'll be no escaping it.
My heart shifts a little, knowing we'll never be the same.
Knowing we won't ever fit like before.

by Lucy

That laugh,
Ryan says smiling,
and he's right.
Mum was small, but she was a powerhouse.
BIG laugh.
BIG smile.
BIG heart.
Ryan slides
his finger across the screen so we can watch the scene play out
again
and again
and again.

by Fatima

2. I know, love, I know. Dad's desperate to keep it together, but he's broken, we all are. We've kept our distance these past few months, keeping our sharp edges to ourselves. Getting too close could cause a puncture and then we'll see it.
The emptiness
The grief
It'll leak out, or pull us in.
Either way there'll be no escaping it.
My heart shifts a little, knowing we'll never be the same.
Knowing we won't ever fit like before.

by Daisy

I wish she was still here, Dad.
I know love,
I know.
Dad's desperate to keep it together,
But he's broken
... we all are.
We kept our distance
these past few months,
Keeping our SHARP edges
to ourselves.

by Izzy

Responding to themes and characters

One of the most important themes in this novel is the feelings of grief and how this feeling may affect another person. We can see how the grief impacts the main character Nat in a way that makes her character more upset and lifeless and she is missing her mother & her brother Ryan seems to experience his grief through anger and we can see as the novel how he seems to have changed after the loss which also brings on a theme of racist and prejudice actions in the novel, particularly towards immigrants or those presumed immigrants through racism. These more serious topics are presented showing the anger towards immigrants with the ideology that they are taken on

opportunities for others. We can see how the character Ryan has changed into thinking this way after the loss. Saying things such as, 'People born in this country should take priority,' which shows his prejudice views and can also show how his grief has led to this change in personality as in a flashback we can see how he says, 'I'm not having anyone spewing any ignorant bullshit and hate' which shows how he has developed from an inclusive character to a racist ignorant one.

by Daisy

I think the most important theme we are exploring in this novel so far is prejudice - in particular particularly prejudice towards other races and immigrants travelling in to Dover through the English Channel. Natalie's mum worked as a refugee support worker and cared a lot about the people she was helping. Natalie seems to have learnt from her mum and also cares about them as she shows sympathy towards them. However, Ryan has recently taken on some very racist views since his mum's death and it seems he is using immigrants as a scapegoat to blame them for all of his problems. This makes the reader feel dislike towards his character, but also sympathy as flashbacks show how he used to be very kind and not prejudiced when he made Nat a rainbow cake when she came out. This demonstrates the huge impact losing his mum had on Ryan and meant he joined a far-right group and picked up horrible, racist views. There is also a boy in Nat's class who travelled across the channel and Kenneth Smith bullies Fazel (the boy) for having lost his family. Everyone just stands there watching and does nothing, as Fazel is the victim of racial prejudice.

Sammy's Journey

'A fifteen-thousand dollar ransom. The cost of a life.'
'We're tied in chains, held at gunpoint and beaten'
↳ It's shocking that they have been kidnapped and forced to call their families to ask for more money which they don't have. Their lives are viewed as worthless and people only care about money.

by Romy

I think that the most powerful moment in this novel is the flashback at the end of this extract. In it, Ryan describes his love and affection for Natalie, saying "I've gotta stick up for my little sis." This is a huge contrast to the racist and prejudiced actions he displayed previously in the novel. This would make the reader have very mixed views of Ryan as his behaviour is so erratic. On one hand, Ryan may be seen as racist and cruel, however some readers may take into account the difficulties he is facing, such as unemployment and possibility of eviction. This is a very powerful moment of it shows both sides of Ryan proving that characters are not always perfect.

by Jemima

I think that homelessness has become a much more clear and understandable concept for me after studying part of 'The Crossing' because I used to not know what homelessness really meant and what causes it. After reading 'The Crossing' I think that homelessness is not necessarily someone's fault and it can be because of a circumstance or an event that happens in someone's life. In Natalie's story, it is her mother's death which leaves them on the verge of being homeless because they have not got enough money to sustain living in their own house. I also think that the stereotype of homeless people being 'bad' people is also quite untrue. This can be seen in Ryan's personality as he is becomes a racially prejudiced character but before he seemed like a very inclusive character.

by Saanvika

Margot Mann makes the reader feel conflicted as to what to think about Ryan. Throughout the novel she presents him as quite angry and spiteful, and he is seen to take this out on migrants and people of colour, doing things that are horrific, or at least going along with them in his gutting, which disgusts the reader. However, some sympathy is created for him, particularly in the flashback Nat has in which he says "I'm not having anyone spew any ignorant bullshit". This shows how much his attitude has changed since his mother died, and the reader can understand that his prejudice is the result of his helplessness in the new circumstances, which helps the reader understand his motivations. This is also touched upon when Nat goes to Sociology, and people list things like unemployment, poverty, education and health care as reasons why poor hate crimes had been committed and most of these apply to Ryan.

by Jo

In these responses, I was very struck by pupils' emotional engagement in Natalie and Sammy's stories and their honesty about how these stories challenged their preconceptions around homelessness and migration.

Making connections with *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

Some of the parallels pupils identified were ones I had thought of already, but they also made other comparisons which hadn't occurred to me, particularly the theme of housing insecurity which affects Cassie's family (who are Black) in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and Natalie's family (who are white) in *The Crossing*

T.J and Ryan -
getting influenced by the wrong crowd and doing wrong things due to their circumstances

Nat and Jeremy -
both have racist, prejudice siblings and want to stand up and do the right thing but are being held back

by Anayah

I think the relationship between ~~Cassie and~~ Jeremy and Lillian Jean, and the relationship between Ryan and Natalie ~~are~~ are similar to an extent because one of the siblings are openly prejudiced, while the other one is a bit confused on why the other one does it and ~~this~~ tries to stop it. Natalie and Cassie are also similar on how they are naive.

by Joanne

We can draw parallels between important themes, characters and their relationships. The theme of financial insecurity is found between both books. The Lennons face eviction and have trouble finding housing when Nat tells us they have 'been on the council list for ages and nothing's come up'. Similarly, the Logans face being unable to pay their rent and lose their land to people like Harlan Granger. However, the Lennons would be forced into homelessness while the Logans would most likely become sharecroppers. There are also clear parallels between characters and their family situation. Both families have an absent ~~parent~~ parental figure, with the passing of mum, or in the Logans case, Papa. Papa left to work on the railroad so that they are not enough money to pay the mortgage. This greatly helps us to sympathise and try to better understand why the siblings from both families behave. Though both sets of siblings face a sense of loss, the Lennons face and experience this on a much greater scale, and this transforms the children into completely different people.

by Eleanor

ROTHMC & the crossing are both similar through the theme of racial prejudice that comes up. For example in *Roll of Thunder*, Cassie is forced to apologise to Lillian Jean for bumping into her and in *The Crossing*, Ryan thinks that people who are not white would not have been born here. This tells us that racism still happens today, not only in the times of 1930s. Characters are also similar in both. We see the relationship between Jeremy & Lillian Jean, one has quite racial views whilst the other is accepting of people of colour. Similarly in *The Crossing*, we have Ryan & Natalie ~~and~~ we have which have that same relationship as the siblings. Although Jeremy & Natalie are quite different, their different views from their siblings make them similar. Cassie and Natalie are also similar where they both have confused at ~~it~~, one has racial views but the other does not.

by Miley

Creative responses: Continuing the story from Natalie's perspective

Ameya and Jemima have both successfully borrowed Mann's device of using italics and centre-alignment to indicate flashbacks or imagined conversations.

23/03/24 The Crossing by Manjick Mann - Poem of Natalie's story

I continue looking at the stars,
Looking at the stars, wondering what they'd do to *me*
Looking at the stars, wondering about they'd do to *Tejraj*
Looking at the stars and seeing *Babu*, and wondering
if it was worth it to be brave.

*'Be brave, Natty,'
she said, 'and remember,
we love you.'*

I sit,
I wonder why I bothered
to come to this pool
after
so many years.

It may not have even been two months,
but
to me
it was ~~et~~
eternity.

Why?
The water ripples,
a circle of life
slowly
spreading out.

I think of Ryan
and what he'd done.
I think of Ryan
and how he's changed
I think of Mel
and how I

could never be enough.

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Mel: Where are you? Been waiting for nearly half an hour,
Are you okay?

And that was that.

by Ameya

I wake up.
Heaving my head from the pillow.
Echoes of my dream play out in my head.
got your back you tell me
I mean it stick up
my little sis...
I pick up my phone -
3 texts from Mel.

I can't talk right now.
Can't do anything. ~~anything~~
Ryan's voice.
again
and again
and again.
But this isn't my dream.
I am awake.
On my door he R n o c k s.

I'm awake!
I scream.
Anything to silence the knocking knocking knocking
Ryan bursts into my room.

*I'm sorry! He cries, arms
wrapping around me as he
apologises.*

I'm going out
I'm brought back to reality.
Tell dad, he's still asleep.
And with a slam, he leaves.

Tears.
fall.
down.
my.
face.

Why would I believe his *apology*?
Just my mind.
Fantasies.
To distract me from the truth.

by Jemima

Fazel's sat alone
at the back of the class
as usual.
He doesn't talk much,
only watches observes
as usual.

His eyes say more than
words ever could.
The pain.
The loss.
The desperation.
The hope.
I wonder how he does it,
he must've been through ~~so~~ ^{so} much
but he still has
hope.

He catches my eye.
I look away.
I'm too much of a coward
to go over and talk to him.
I only watch
as Kevin
s n a t c h e s
Fazel's bag
and
runs
away
laughing.

by Romy

Creative responses: Imagining Natalie and Sammy's meeting

Then I see it
the blood soaked body
the red water coating my pale skin
screaming terrors
the sound of death.

I can taste the raw iron in my mouth
as I submerge my head under the ice cold of the English channel
Forcing my limbs to move past the horrors of the water.
Trying to look forward into the endless stream of grey

My heart I can feel my heart pounding through my bones
My frozen veins running cold blood through my body
My head mind racing as ~~the water flows~~ as I continue to see it

A boy, roughly 17 years old
my age
a body, no movement

lying still in the water
lifeless, dead.

Then a boat, sort of
an orange pile of rubber
sinking into the abyss of water
another boy, ^{now management} alive this time
but drowning.

My heart tripled its pace
I through myself further towards the water
clawing myself to this scene
Desperate to save him
desperate to save someone, anyone
just to feel the relief of a life
not another death, my endless cycle of death

by Daisy

Poem of Sammy meeting Nat ~ e Bold words

Orange. Sea of orange.
I'm taken back to
that night.
And I see Tesjay so far from me
except it's not Tesjay it's
me
and I'm fighting
and I'm disappearing
and I
I
and I'm gone.
Gone ~~to~~ beneath the waves.

The waves feel like they're pulling me away
keeping me from France from her dream.
But then they move,
more apart as if to show me the way
But the way is someone, some boy
disappearing
into
the blue
and I hear her
"Be brave Nat"

He pulls me down but I pull him up
up to the sky and fresh air, fresh air

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Air fills my lungs
and I'm soaking
and I'm drowning
but I'm not.
and I'm alive
and oh god
I'm alive.

by Emily

Emily has picked up on and mirrored the way that Mann uses bold words at the start and end of each poem, not only to signal the change of voice but to establish parallels and contrasts between Sammy and Natalie's perspectives – this is also a feature of Grace's writing on the next page.

Creative responses: Imagining Natalie and Sammy's meeting

Because Grace uses a computer in class, she was able to incorporate other typographic features of Mann's writing into her own work, such as italics for dialogue and different fonts for Natalie and Sammy.

0 Days before

I ran and I ran
My breath fled from me
Mel called out behind me

Come back Babe

But I was done abandoning everything
It was a year
More than a year
Since Mum passed
She always wanted me to be a swimmer
And so I would be

I'm sorry Mel

A reached the cliff edge
My swimsuit felt tight against my skin

And I jumped

I jumped into the water
The ship had crashed
Into the rocks on the way
Everyone sat there helplessly

I felt fit to burst
But I had to swim

I had to swim
I just had to
It had been too long
I just needed to honour her dreams
Her dreams for me

So I kept going

The waves tried to pull
me
down

But they failed
I swam for my life
I already knew I could do this
My mother believed in me

My mother believed in me

She believed in my ability
My ability to escape
Many things tried to block the way

I
o
c
k

I couldn't give up
I had to do it for her
I had to reach the other side

I had to reach the other side
I needed to prove to her
To her memory
I needed to make
That if she were alive
She'd say **I'm proud**

I'm proud to be his son
The man who died
Defending what was right

My life was no longer for me
It was for them
People helpless on the rock
Waiting hopefully for my return
My return with help
Help for **everyone**

Everyone must be so worried
Mel, Ryan, Dad
Dad...

He'd lost his wife already
And now maybe his daughter

Ryan...
Mum's death hit him hard
What if the same fate fell to me

Mel...

by Grace

Creative responses: Writing from Ryan's perspective

Like other students, Lucy has included centre-aligned text, which Mann uses for memories of conversations with Natalie and Ryan's mum. Bringing this into Ryan's story as well as Natalie's is an effective way of reminding us that Ryan, too, is grieving.

How dare they get us evicted
How dare they blame me separate us
How dare they say I need a job and then
How dare they not employ me
How dare they let mum
die

But who are they?
The ones to blame?
The people who don't belong here
They're the ones my mother worked for
They're the ones to blame

I
Need
To
Escape

Nothing works...
sleeping all day out all night
 drinking smoking weed
 getting inkerd

I don't know who I am
who I've become.
~~But I can't~~

But I can't just sit back
I need ~~something~~ ~~anything~~ something, anything
I can't just stay
I need
REFUGES

by Nysha

From Ryan's perspective:
I don't know how to cope.
She,
Mum,
Mum and Nat,
They were my lifeline.
They both held me.
And now,
Mum,
Mum, is gone.
I'm falling.
And Nat is just hanging on.
And Dad.
Dad has already hit the bottom.
How do I cope?
Do I cope?
My friends.
Friends.
Friends who make fun of you.
Friends who make fun of other.
Hey... Nat!
What?
Remember not to listen to what others say. Tell me about it.
You're my sister
I love you.
And I'll fight for you if you need me to. OK?
OK...

~~But~~ I said I'd fight for Nat.
Mum said she'd fight for us too.
And I said we'd fight.
Fight for her life.

Now Mum's gone gone.
My lifeline and balance gone gone.
Now I don't know how to fight.
So what use.
What use can I be?
In the battles
The battles that are being fought around me?

by Lucy

Creative responses: More writing as Ryan

366 days before

I have a lump in my throat,

it won't go

It's ~~it~~ been living in my throat.

it won't go.

~~And~~ ^{But} I ^{don't} want it to go.

It's a painful reminder

Of all those seconds

That I missed

Those seconds where I quite ne

NO THOUGHT.

I was ~~wasn't~~ too self-absorbed

TO NOT MISS MAE...

Maybe

Maybe

The treatment wouldn't work

and the hurt digs deeper

The more I think

ABOUT

HER.

And my eyes

Swing.

Swing.

My eyes are now waterfalling

And there's no ~~big~~ dam.

For

It.

To.

s i o p

My dad's voice is ringi
ngi
ng

in my ear.

The cracks in his voice

are like the cracks in my heart.

"Katherine Kate... Merry.

Her laugh ACTIVIST

joy for life

BIG

me... wonderful MOTHER

beautiful wife..."

MY

MUM.

gone.

And now there's rain

in my waterfall

and it

over.

Flows.

And anger

flows over

flows

by Nina

everything is ruined

our family is broken

broken

broken

I never realised how Mum held us together

now lost we are without her

Now you take care of Nat.

when I'm gone.

promise that you will Ry.

I promise Mum.

I shudder as the memory

sinks

back

down

I was trying.

I wear.

by Keya

I really like the way that Nina has picked up on the water imagery was a recurrent feature of Mann's writing and brought this into Ryan's perspective.

Creative responses: Writing from Fazel's perspective

I was the boy who sank on a boat
I was the boy who never looked anyone in the eye
I was the boy who accepted the bullying
I was the boy who had n o t h i n g
I was the boy who had n o o n e
I was the boy who was
a l o n e

They all look at me,
watch as Kevin pushes me off my chair
say nothing
do nothing
just stare

my parents words ring in my ears
strong people don't hide how they feel
strong people stick up for others
strong people stick up for themselves
You are strong Fazel.

I wish I was strong like they said
instead I keep my emotions all ^{up} waiting
for the moment
when I
b u r s t

by Rauda

Again, Rauda is using the centre-aligned text to reflect Fazel's memories of his parents' words, reminding us that Fazel is another character marked by grief and loss. Rauda has also thought carefully about how to use spacing between letters and white space to communicate meaning.

I wake up.
A sick feeling in my stomach,
I had dreamed about me...and
my
family.
My mum, Dad and brothers
they were all there,
now I don't even know if they are alive.

Some people cry
after having a nightmare,
Some people panic
after having a nightmare,
Some people break down
after having a nightmare,
I'm scared...
and I'm living in my nightmare

School is even worse,
A devil in disguise,

They say school is a safe place,
well they haven't seen my school then.
I've only been to this school for a year now.
A year longer than I have wanted to.
The stares EAT me alive.
I know what they are thinking,
look at the kid who doesn't know where ^{home} his home is
look at the kid who had to flee his country,
look at the kid who is now scared of water.

by Suki

Critical responses: Interviews with the author

1) Why did you include two perspectives in the book?

The book is focused quite a lot on refugees and their struggles, so including Sammy's point of view was essential so that the reader can get a more in-depth understanding of the struggles they go through and not just an outsider's opinions. Some things, like when Tefsay dies and Sammy is crossing the channel, where he eventually dies too would be difficult to narrate from Natalie's perspective but they are very important parts of a refugee's journey and hearing it from two people itself makes the story more impactful. Natalie's point of view is included so that we can see how their journeys are well linked and how her actions have impact on refugees.

2) Why did you choose to set the story in modern day Britain?

Lots of people believe that racism and prejudice is something from the past and they like to blame previous white leaders for it and accuse them of being cruel and inhuman. But I think that's racist attitudes are still incredibly relevant to today and in developed societies, like Britain, too they remain present. It also shows the reader how someone who initially was very accepting of differences, becomes resentful and harsh towards refugees, and how it's not always fully their fault. So overall, I think that setting the story in modern day Britain makes the story much more impactful and interesting to read.

by Jenna

How do you think the structure and layout of your novel impacts the story?

I layout my writing in a way that makes the words and message more impactful to the reader. For example, using different spacing or joining shapes with these words ~~makes sense~~ allows me to emphasise certain phrases that connect to the reader. In an extract from Sammy's story I put emphasis on the word 'everyone' by repeating it, starting a new line everytime the word is used and leaving a gap between 'everyone' and the next phrase. In this particular example, the aim is to show 'everyone' is united in the way that they feel about the experience of their country and the emotions that this brings out.

What attitude ~~is the reader~~ did you aim to make the reader feel towards Ryan?

Ryan is a very complex character and the reader should experience a range of emotions towards him. The two most prominent attitudes should be sympathy and anger. After losing his mother, Ryan's character the reader is told that Ryan's character and personality has changed dramatically from calm and light-hearted to cruel and cruel. Despite his actions, the reader should try to empathise and understand the reasons behind his behaviour. On the other hand, Ryan is shown in later scenes to have joined far right groups and being discriminating against a woman. At this point, the reader may begin to feel that Ryan is going too far and starting to unfairly project his anger onto

other innocent people.

by Eleanor

How did you want the reader to feel towards the character of Ryan?

I wanted Ryan to be a complicated character and for the reader to have emotions that vary throughout the story. For example, when I wrote 314 days before, I wanted the reader to feel shocked by Ryan's racial views regarding refugees. As well as this, those emotions of anger and a recognition that Ryan's words were wrong should also be felt by the reader. It shows the reader that racism still exists, not only in the past. In modern day, there have been many incidents relating to racism, it did not only exist in the 1970's. I would like the reader to notice this. However, there should always be some sympathy for him. After his mum had died, he has changed into a different person and doing actions that are wrong. The reader should still have sympathy as they think about the circumstances for him that he has his own way of grieving, it's not his fault that his mum died, so, this is what I think.

Why is the poem/story set in Dover?

In the story, I explore themes such as refugee and I also make Natalie's mum someone who really cares about refugees. As well as this, Natalie loves to swim and later on in the play, we see her take actions relating to that. In Dover, it is located near the English Channel and many people go from here towards France by boat. However, it's also the place where many refugees dock.

by Miley

Some pupils chose to write an interview with the author - the answers are obviously their own, not Manjeet Mann's but this was a great way of getting them to think about the choices that Mann makes as an author and the reasons for these.

Final thoughts: Did you enjoy *The Crossing*? Why/ why not?

I have enjoyed reading 'The Crossing' as I think shows a really interesting and relatable perspective of a young, British teen, who had lost her mother recently, and shows how she copes with her grief. Also, even though the story was very intriguing and self, the way Mann presents her & writing structure

by Shanaya

This was a very brief final response task – pupils only had a couple of minutes to write down their thoughts but many of them commented on how it had changed their attitudes both towards the issues Mann explores and verse novels as a genre.

I quite enjoyed the themes and issues explored as it ~~shows~~ relates to ~~present~~ so many current affairs that actually not many people know about. It raises awareness not only about the experience people face when losing a parent or your home but also how refugees are treated unfairly.

by Nysha

I have really enjoyed reading 'The Crossing' because I love the style in which Manjeet Mann writes. I also think that it is interesting to study a text that is written in modern day Britain because we can relate more to the characters and themes.

by Jemima

I think I have enjoyed reading 'The Crossing'. I enjoyed the style, which surprised me, because in a way, I've avoided those books in the library, so due to the poem style, so maybe I'll try out some of them. I thought it was really interesting how it tackled some prominent issues in a really ~~interesting~~ ~~and~~ engaging way.

by Lucy

I enjoyed reading 'The Crossing'. At first I thought I wouldn't like it, because I'd never read a verse book before. However, I really enjoy the structure and show of emotion in verse.

by Emily

I have enjoyed and appreciated reading 'The Crossing'. The style of poetry is very different to anything I have read before and I liked the way words were configured. I think the plot was eye-opening and impactful to me.

by Eleanor