

STINK



MELVIN
BURGESS

DISCUSSION GUIDE



**IT WAS A LOVE STORY. ME, GEMMA AND JUNK.
I THOUGHT IT WAS GOING TO LAST FOREVER.
IT WAS THE BIGGEST ADVENTURE OF MY LIFE.**

Tar loves Gemma, but Gemma doesn't want to be tied down – not to anyone or anything. Gemma wants to fly. But no one can fly forever. One day, somehow, finally, you have to come down.

Junk is a powerful, unflinching novel about a group of teenagers caught in the grip of heroin addiction. Once you take a hit, you will never be the same again.

ABOUT MELVIN BURGESS

Melvin Burgess was born in London and brought up in Surrey and Sussex. He has had a variety of jobs before becoming a full-time writer. Before his first novel, he had short stories published and a play broadcast on Radio 4. He is now regarded as one of the best writers in contemporary children's literature, having won the Carnegie Medal and the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize for his acclaimed novel *Junk*.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

'It was a love story. Me, Gemma and junk.' Do you agree with Tar? What kind of story is *Junk*?

'Yeah. It was life. A big, fat slice of life.' Discuss the reasons why Gemma and Tar run away, and how Gemma defines freedom and adventure.

Discuss Gemma's punk makeover. What does this episode tell us about her character?

'Heroin begins as mother, lover, best friend – and ends up like a soldier holding a gun to your head.' Discuss the different ways in which heroin, and the other drugs that feature in the novel, are portrayed.

In chapter 18, Tar and Rob discover the dead bodies of Alan and Helen. Discuss this moment and its impact.

We meet Gemma and Tar before they run away from home, and follow them through addiction and on to an uncertain future. Discuss in what ways these two characters are transformed by addiction and getting clean.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

'Everything is free. That's a secret. The only thing that isn't free is you.' Discuss the character of Lily, her beliefs, and her influence on Gemma and Tar.

The novel is told in multiple voices, giving all sides of the story. Why do you think Melvin Burgess chose to tell *Junk* in this way? Do you find it effective?

Consider the role of lies and deception in the book.

Discuss the different parents in *Junk*. What do you think of how parents are portrayed in this novel? Do you blame the older generation in any way?

Talk about how music creates atmosphere and a sense of time and place in *Junk*.

'The book isn't fact; it isn't even fiction. But it's all true, every word.' Melvin Burgess partially based the novel on the experiences of real people he knew. Discuss how this affects your reaction to the book. Does it make it more authentic?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

FOR READERS WITH THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Your edition features 'The Story of Junk' (pages 327-342) which explains Junk's controversial history. Read this section and consider the questions below.

'I suppose a book like this opens up some discussion on what actually constitutes children's literature.' Melvin Burgess acknowledged that *Junk* would push the boundaries of what is considered writing for young people. Discuss how and why *Junk* divided opinions.

While writing the novel, Melvin considered having one or both of the main characters die. He also changed the setting, voice and length. Discuss how these differences might have affected the ending, and try writing an alternative ending yourself.

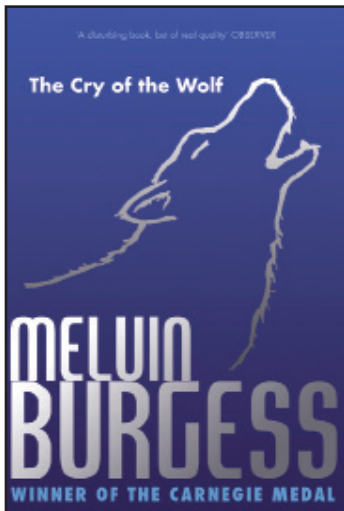
'It's not books which corrupt people; it's other people.'

Do you agree with this statement from a teenage reader in the nineties?

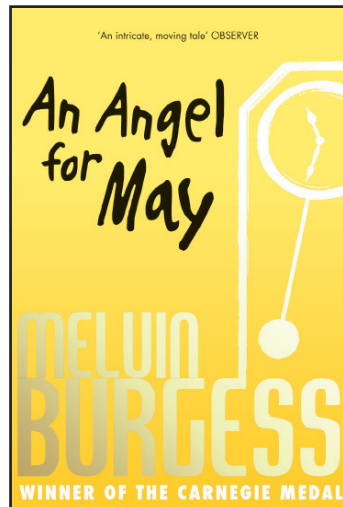
Do you think *Junk* would create the same controversy if it were published now?



OTHER BOOKS BY MELVIN BURGESS



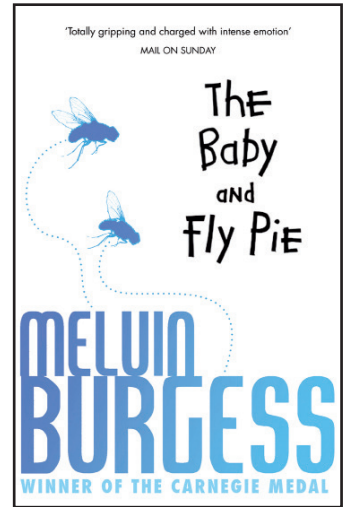
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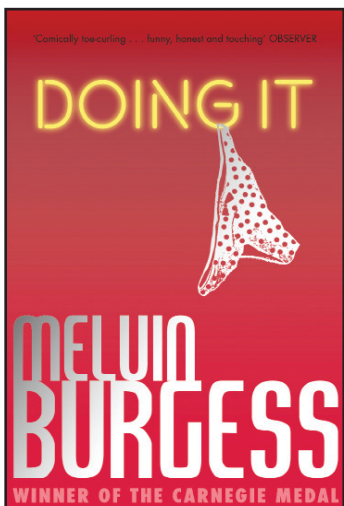
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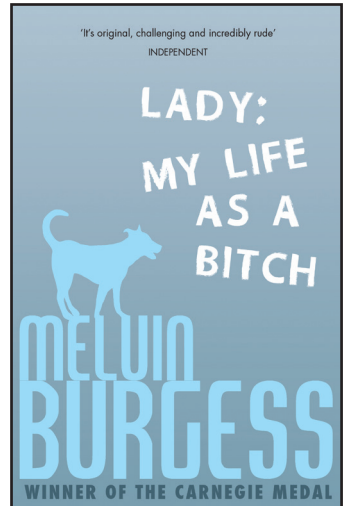
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