

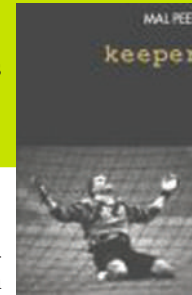
## Catalyst Newsletter Answers:

- In both (un)arranged marriage and Rani and Sukh, you use the surname 'Sandhu'. Is this just a coincidence or is this surname important to you?  
The name Sandhu is very common amongst British Punjabi's but it was purely coincidental. I just thought that Rani Sandhu had a good ring to it. Like Liverpool FC and Premiership Champions might have one day!
- 2004 was a very successful year for you, including you winning the Catalyst Book Award. What are your goals for 2005 and beyond?  
My goals for 2005 are the same as last year really. I want to carry on writing stuff which I enjoy and which passes the 'reader' test when I try it in schools. And I want to go and talk to as many school pupils as I can because it helps my writing and I enjoy it so much. Other than that, my writing goals are quite varied. I'm doing non-fiction this year as well as fiction and I want to try a younger age group too. I don't think the year will be long enough for what I want to do!
- Congratulations on being shortlisted for the Booktrust Teenage Prize for Rani and Sukh. When one of your titles is so successful, does that put pressure on you to write a 'better' book next time or do you not think like that and just get on with the writing and let readers decide?  
Thanks! Book awards are great things although I never win the ones that adults vote for. Being on the Teenage Book Trust was fun and winning the Catalyst was wonderful. But I don't ever feel pressured when a book of mine wins something. I write the way I write and I'm happy that so many young people see what I'm trying to do with fiction. Hopefully each book will be a bit better than the last because I'm self-taught and on a learning curve. But at the end of the day the readers will decide and I'm happy with that. They're the people I write for, young and not-so-young (as well as myself that is!). I couldn't give a stuff what anyone else thinks, if I'm honest.
- Is it easy getting a publishing company to publish your books and how long does the process take?  
No, getting your book published is very difficult. It all depends on how good your writing is, whether the publisher thinks they can sell it etc...Once you've got past the first barrier it does get much easier, however, but that's still no guarantee of future publication. As for how long it takes - there is no set time. Every book is different and every publisher their own way of doing things.
- What were you feeling when you wrote (un)arranged marriage?  
Feeling? I don't know, really. I had all this stuff about being British and Asian to get off my chest and I wanted to talk about real Asians in Britain, not the inaccurate caricatures that we mostly see in the media. I wanted to show how similar and also how different British Asians are from other distinct groups of people in the UK. I also wanted to write a book that I would have read when I was at school, not just because it was about Asians, but because it was real and honest - warts and all, with language that teenagers actually use rather than the language that graduates of Oxbridge use. I think that there is a barrier to reality in fiction and I wanted to try and break it down a bit. That's one of the major goals in my career. To get ordinary, every day people writing and reading, and to make sure that they are written about. So that books aren't just about middle class white kids from Southern England. What's wrong with writing, for example, about working class white kids on an estate in Glasgow? Nothing, I know. But who's doing it? You've got me all wound up now...!
- Do you think you will write about different themes than the ones you initially based your books on?  
I don't really pick my themes. They pick me. Once I get an idea about something I have to see it through and my books so far, especially Rani and Sukh and The Whisper (which is out in May) have all swum around in my brain for ages before I wrote them down. I hope to explore as many themes as my writing will allow me to.
- What encouragement did you receive to become an author?  
Loads from my agents and my friends but not so much from my family. My mum thought what I was doing was silly because it was a strange career choice. She was happiest when I was working as a manager for ASDA but that's mum's for you. She probably missed the 10% staff and family discount card! I didn't get much encouragement at school either but I wasn't the best behaved person back then so I can understand that. Most of my old teachers were amazed when I went back to the school with (un)arranged marriage. They love me now though - the two faced \*\*\*\*s. I also got loads of encouragement from a guy called Fran Doohar, an ex-girlfriend's dad! He was a massive influence on my life. Unfortunately he died on the night that I won my first award, The Angus Book Award, but I dedicated The Crew to him and I still remember all the stuff he told me about doing your best and trying to justify your existence everyday, in some small way or another. It's a motto that I try to live by.

# Catalyst

## Change for fiction

Title: Keeper  
Author: Mal Peet  
Publisher: Walker books  
ISBN: 0744590256  
Reviewer: J. McMillan



Genre: Like-Life

### What's the story?

The story of "El Gato"- The Cat. It's about a young boy who meets a goalkeeper in the rainforest. His mum gets suspicious about her son being in the rainforest so often and thinks he wants to be a biologist. Eventually the boy becomes a World Cup winning goalkeeper thanks to the Keeper. But there's more than just the story of the boy. The mystery of the Keeper is revealed.

### What are themes and issues in book?

Through the story of Keeper, the boy explores issues such as the desire to succeed at something in life.

### Is it for me?

If you like football but don't like books, then this book is for you. This book has the power to turn book-haters into people who read often.

Title: Saving Francesca  
Author: Melina Marchetta  
Publisher: Puffin  
ISBN: 014131799X  
Reviewer: K. McGivern



Genre: Like-Life

### What's the Story?

Francesca can't compete with her mum; she is funny, strong and deeply critical of her shy daughter. Frankie's new school isn't really helping her find a place in the world either - she is one of 30 girls in an all boy school. It is only when her mum falls ill that she realises what true friendship is and how it is up to her to save Francesca.

### What are themes and issues in book?

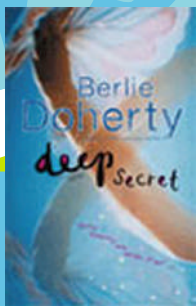
Francesca has to cope with peer and family pressure and this is explored in a humorous way. The issue of her mother's depression is covered sensitively and you can sense the helplessness of the family as they try to understand this illness.

### Is it for me?

If you feel that nobody in the world understands you then you will find an ally in this book. If you like your gritty drama smoothed over with humour then you will also enjoy this book.



Title: Deep Secret  
Author: Berlie Doherty  
Publisher: Puffin Books  
ISBN: 014131740X  
Reviewer: S. Brownlie



Genre: Like-Life

#### What's the Story?

Deep Secret is a story based around the real event of flooding of some small villages to make a reservoir in the 1930s and 1940s. It centres on a set of identical twins, Madeleine and Grace and their family and friends. An accident and the news the village is to be flooded changes the course of what is to come for everyone involved. Not only do the twins' family have to face up to a traumatic situation, but also the whole close-knit village community could be torn apart through the flooding of their homes and land. Although they will be re-housed, their way of life will change dramatically.

#### What are themes and issues in book?

There are a number of key themes in the book, but it is mainly about all kinds of love and loss that people suffer. The villagers are going to lose their homes - and way of life - and an accident brings great sorrow to the twins' family. The book is also part love story and the title, Deep Secret, shows the heavy hold secrets and lies can have over a person.

#### Is it for me?

If I had to describe this book in one word, I'd say it was 'haunting'. Not in a spooky sense, but there's so much description in the writing that you really get a feel for the story and the characters. Well worth reading, even if you say you don't like historical fiction.

Title: Come Clean  
Author: Terri Paddock  
Publisher: Harper Collins  
ISBN: 00071172478  
Reviewer: K. McGivern



Genre: Like-Life

#### What's the Story?

Come Clean is a facility to help teens who are drug abusers. Come Clean is a brutal regime that forces people to stick to their harsh and inhumane rules. Come Clean is where Justine has to confront the issues that her family refuse to face. Come Clean forces people to face their addiction. There is one problem - Justine is not an addict. In a place where to leave you have to conform, how will Justine escape?

#### What are themes and issues in book?

Drug addiction and coping with grief are the major issues covered in Come Clean. The book is hard hitting and Justine suffers because of her refusal to admit she is addicted. However the main theme of the book is survival and how being true to yourself is what is ultimately important.

#### Is it for me?

This book may be too traumatic for some but if you wish that teenage books would deal with real issues in an honest way then read this.

Title: Acceleration  
Author: Graham McNamee  
Publisher: Hodder Children's Books  
ISBN: 0340882018  
Reviewer: S. Brownlie



Genre: Like-Life

#### What's the Story?

Duncan, 17, has a deadly dull summer job working in the lost property of the Toronto Underground. He's had a difficult time of it, caught stealing with his friends Wayne and Vinny, and he's still feeling guilty over an accident in which a girl died. He finds a diary, left by someone on a subway train, which turns out to belong to a serial killer he nicknames Roach. The police aren't interested and Duncan knows it is only a matter of time before Roach kills again. It is up to Duncan to stop him.

#### What are themes and issues in book?

There are lots! Guilt about past actions, friendships, secrets, families, growing up are the main ones.

#### Is it for me?

If you like horror books and thrillers then you might like Acceleration. Like the title, the book starts off slowly and gets quicker in pace towards the end, as the action unfolds. One of the characters likens their adventure to 'The Hardy Boys meets Hannibal Lecter' and that sums it up pretty well.

Genre: Like-Life

#### What's the Story?

Unique is a great story of a boy at 15 who discovers his past has been hidden from him by his manipulative father. Dominic discovers he had an older brother who died before he was born. He realises why he is such a disappointment to his father when he learns his brother was a very promising scientist but Dominic prefers painting. Dominic goes to Cambridge to find out more about his brother, but he finds out much more than he thought he would. He has to then learn to live with what is a huge, life-changing discovery.

#### What are themes and issues in book?

There are three important issues in this book, secrets, family and the exploration of ideas and opinions on the subject of human cloning.

#### Is it for me?

I would recommend this book if you like thrilling, fast-paced stories. It is a book if you start reading, you cannot put down.

Title: Feed  
Author: M.T. Anderson  
Publisher: Walker  
ISBN: 074459085X  
Reviewer: K. McGivern



Genre: Like-Life

#### What's the Story?

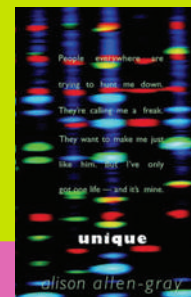
Titus and his friends went to the moon - but the moon sucked - in fact much of Titus' life is spent looking for and purchasing new pleasures. This is because he has got a Feed, an Internet implant linked directly into his brain. So has everybody else and Titus doesn't question this, until he meets Violet, a girl who forces him to question everything.

#### What are themes and issues in book?

Anderson examines consumerism and the rise of the multi-nationals in Feed, this is a bleak view of the future. He also looks at the difficulties of fighting against what everybody else believes in.

#### Is it for me?

If you have ever stood inside a shopping centre and wondered what all this stuff was for then this book will scare you. If you always think 'what if...?' then read this book

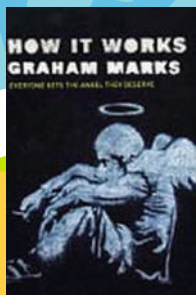


Title: Unique  
Author: Alison Allen-Gray  
Publisher: Oxford  
ISBN: 0192753355  
Reviewer: C. McDonald

# Catalyst



Title: How It Works  
Author: Graham Marks  
Publisher: Bloomsbury  
ISBN: 0747570159  
Reviewer: S. Brownlie



Genre: Like-Life

#### What's the Story?

Seb feels like his life is falling apart and things come to a head when he's badly beaten up. Once his injuries heal, he becomes obsessed with tracking down the person who saved his life, Jay Brill. But just how do you thank a person who has disappeared off the earth? In his quest to find his 'guardian angel', Seb finds out a lot about himself and makes a few changes in his life.

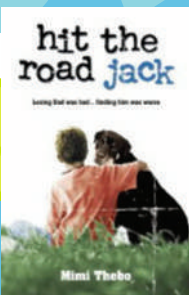
#### What are themes and issues in book?

The story makes you question your beliefs about whether guardian angels might exist or not. It also makes you think about events in people's lives that cause them to look at themselves and change for the better. There're also themes of friendship and family relationships in the book as well.

#### Is it for me?

This is a book you just can't put down. It is fast-paced and whether you are male or female, you can identify a lot with Seb, the main character. You actually care what happens to him and how his life turns out, which is the sign of a good book.

Title: Hit The Road Jack  
Author: Mimi Thebo  
Publisher: Harper  
Collins  
ISBN: 000714279X  
Reviewer: K. McGivern



Genre: Like-Life

#### What's the story?

Jack's mum is just about to marry a teacher at his school. He is finding it hard to cope and longs to find his father. Trouble is that the gap between the fantasy that Jack has constructed and the reality of his father is huge. Jack has to undergo a difficult journey in order to find out what is truly important to him.

#### What are themes and issues in book?

The relationship between father and sons is a central theme to this book. What makes a father and the importance of friends are all explored in this book.

#### Is it for me?

This book is an easy read that deals with hard issues. Jack is a really loveable character and when he hurts so do you. If you like your characters to jump out of the page then I would recommend this book.



Title: The Broken Bridge  
Author: Philip Pullman  
Publisher: MacMillian  
ISBN: 033039794  
Reviewer: L. Innes (S3)

Genre: Like-Life

#### What's the story?

A 16 year old girl who has lived with her father all her life, then she starts to realise her father has kept from her a huge secret, which will change her whole life.

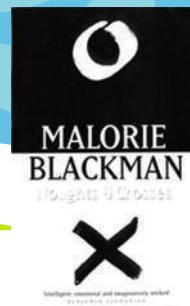
#### What are the themes and issues in the book?

It shows how uncomfortable the girl is living with her father, he is white, she is black and how she sees the world differently from the way we do.

#### Is it for me?

Yes. I really enjoyed this book. I found it almost impossible to put down. Im sure any teenager would enjoy this book.

Title: Noughts and Crosses  
Author: Malorie Blackman  
Publisher: Corgi  
ISBN: 0552546321  
Reviewer: S. Chen (S3)



Genre: Like-Life

#### What's the story?

The story is about a world where there are two types: normal - Noughts - and high class people - Crosses - and how the two don't mix. Then Callum, a Nought, falls in love with Stephy, a Cross and they are forced to hide their love with terrible consequences.

#### What are themes and issues in book?

Love, power and class

#### Is it for me?

14 - 17 year olds should read this book.

Title: Big Mouth and Ugly Girl  
Author: Joyce Carol Oates  
Publisher: Collins  
Flamingo  
ISBN: 000714573X  
Reviewer: K. Beaton (S3)



Genre: Like-Life

#### What's the story?

In Big Mouth and Ugly Girl, Matt realises that flippant, throwaway comments can have serious implications when two detectives escort him from school. Ursula doesn't normally get involved in other people's business but she can't stand by and watch this injustice.

#### What are themes and issues in book?

Although the main storyline looks at the social implications for someone who is wrongly accused of a crime, Big Mouth and Ugly Girl also examines the underlying hatred of contemporary America.

#### Is it for me?

An absorbing book that is funny in parts, touching in others and draws the reader in from beginning to end.



Title: The Man Who was Hate  
Author: Paul Shipton  
Publisher: Oxford University Press  
ISBN: 0192718143  
Reviewer: K. Beaton (S3)

Genre: Like-Life

#### What's the story?

The Man Who Was Hate is set in a present-day city where two very different young people (Danny and Hope) find themselves battling against a very different enemy. But can Danny and Hope beat the clock to save themselves, their neighbours and the world as they know it?

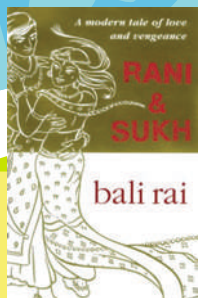
#### What are themes and issues in book?

The Man Who Was Hate mainly looks at the issues involved in modern urban life such as solitude and mistrust. The novel does this by looking at the character of Victor Grundy and how his loneliness grows into hatred.

#### Is it for me?

The Man Who Was Hate manages to make the crossover from a like-life novel to fantasy in a convincing way and the mixture of interesting characters makes for a good read.

Title: Rani and Sukh  
Author: Bali Rai  
Publisher: Corgi  
ISBN: 0552548901  
Reviewer: K. McGivern



Genre: Like-Life

#### What's the story?

Rani and Sukh are two teenagers living in Leicester and when they fall in love they have no idea of the tragic similarities that they have when their families lived in Punjab. Despite their best efforts the two families find out about their love affair with tragic consequences.

#### What are themes and issues in book?

Rani and Sukh is a novel that deals with falling in love with the wrong person. When choosing between whom you love and your family is a bigger decision that you can handle. When bigotry and hatred spills into real life and violence.

#### Is it for me?

Bali Rai won last year's Catalyst Book Award because his books are relevant and well written with characters that are like your friends. Rani and Sukh is no different! It is a blend of hard hitting plot, believable characters wrapped up in Rai's storytelling skill.

Title: Inventing Elliot  
Author: Graham Gardner  
Publisher: Dolphin Paperbacks  
ISBN: 1842552082  
Reviewer: K. Beaton (S3)



Genre: Like-Life

#### What's the story?

Elliot is the victim of a brutal gang of bullies at school so when he has the chance of a new start he is understandably nervous that the same thing will happen again. At his new school he is again singled out by a vicious gang but this time it is for slightly different reasons.

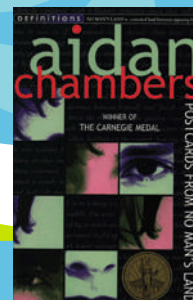
#### What are themes and issues in book?

Inventing Elliot closely examines the issue of bullying, looking at the human cost for both the bully and the victim.

#### Is it for me?

The characterisation in Inventing Elliot is excellent and the reader gets an amazing insight into the issue of bullying that has true resonance for anyone who has ever been a victim.

Title: Postcards from No Man's Land  
Author: Aidan Chambers  
Publisher: Red Fox  
ISBN: 009940862  
Reviewer: K. Beaton (S3)



Genre: Like-Life

#### What's the story?

This book is set in present day Amsterdam with flashbacks to wartime Holland. The novel is about a teenager, Jacob Todd, who travels to Amsterdam to visit his grandfather's grave, a British teenager who died during the war. However, he meets a variety of interesting characters and discovers a secret in his family's past.

#### What are themes and issues in book?

The novel explores many themes, from the horrors of war and euthanasia to teenage love. The convincing characterisation allows the reader to think about the themes from new perspectives.

#### Is it for me?

If you like real stories about real life things this is a really good book. It is sad and worrying, as people don't know how to cope with really bad things done by children. It is really good as you learn how the girl copes with her new life.

Title: Sloppy Firsts  
Author: Megan McCaffrey  
Publisher: Three Rivers Press (CA)  
ISBN: 0609807900  
Reviewer: K. McGivern



Genre: Like-Life

#### What's the Story?

Jessica Darling is a funny, smart girl who is distraught when her best friend moves away. How will she cope with the jocks, and dopey girls that now make up her social circle? Added to that, why is Marcus, the class odd ball, talking to her, and why is she so interested in him?

#### What are themes and issues in book?

This book is all about being a teenager, how you want to fit in, even when you despise the people that make up your friends. The main issues that Jessica deals with are growing up and trying to decide what you want to do with the rest of your life.

#### Is it for me?

If you like the bitter comedies of the eighties, such as Heathers and Pretty in Pink, then I would read this book. If you feel like a square peg in a round hole then you will emphasise with Jessica and she will make you laugh!

Title: Transplant  
Author: Malcolm Rose  
Publisher: Scholastic  
ISBN: 0439982057  
Reviewer: K. Beaton (S3)



Genre: Like-Life

#### What's the story?

Transplant is set in present-day Sheffield where Cassie undergoes a pioneering operation after a terrorist attack leaves her disfigured. In hospital she meets Wayne, a kid whom Cassie feels she has nothing in common with. However, as the terrorists catch up with Cassie she finds an unlikely ally.

#### What are themes and issues in book?

Transplant looks at the ethics involved in modern medicine and raises the question of where the line between reconstructive surgery and cosmetic surgery should be drawn. The book also looks at terrorism and the futility of trying to find peace where people are full of hatred.

#### Is it for me?

Although the novel looks at complex issues the author manages to examine them on a personal and thought-provoking level. A fast-paced thriller that keeps the reader guessing.

Genre: Like-Life

#### What's the Story?

The story is about a boy called Shorty and his best friend Alberto. Where they live in South America, there are gang wars and children carry guns. When Alberto is captured, Shorty makes it his mission to find him. He'll do this even if it means putting his own life in danger. There's quite a bit of violence but it isn't over the top and is realistic within the story.

#### What are themes and issues in book?

I'd say the main themes were friendship, gun crime and children's rights.

#### Is it for me?

It's definitely not for younger readers, but good for ages 14-16.



Title: Boy Kills Man  
Author: Matt Whyman  
Publisher: Hodder Headline  
ISBN: 0340881941  
Reviewer: C. Maxwell (S3)