



# THE BLUE BOOK OF NEBO

## Discussion Notes

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### Pages 1 - 13

#### **'Now is a part of history.'**

How do you feel about Dylan's statement? What aspects of your current life feel as if they are a part of history?

#### **'I try not to think about these people too much.'**

What do you think about Dylan's attitude to people from the past and their habits and pastimes?

Why do you think he doesn't want to think about them?

What do you think it indicates about his character and situation?

#### **'They went away soon after The End, same as everybody else.'**

What do you think Dylan means by 'The End'?

How is Dylan's attitude to the Thorpe's different from his mother's? Why do you think this is?

Why do you think his mother 'closes herself, like a door or a book.'?

#### **'They were old, old enough to have stopped working.'**

Dylan thought how the Thorpes spent their time lacked meaning? What is your view on retirement? How do you think people should spend their time if they do retire?

### Pages 14 – 19

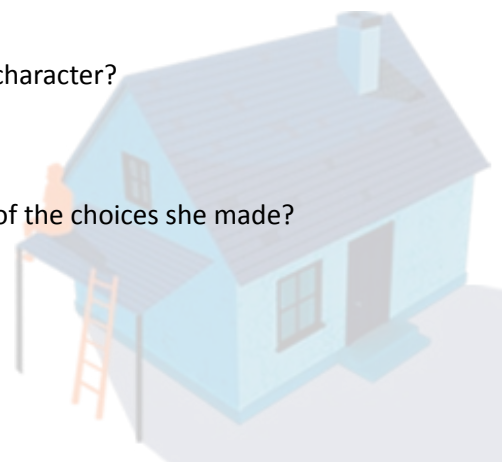
#### **'It never feels like the truth when I read it back to myself.'**

What do the false starts and Rowenna's tone of writing indicate about her character?

#### **'Panic buyers like me.'**

How did Rowenna react to the news of the bombings? What did you think of the choices she made?

What choices would you make, and why?



**'I think I'm hard now.**

**Sometimes, I think about who I was before.'**

How and why do you think Rowenna has changed? What are the implications for her relationship with Dylan?

How do you think you would feel about Rowenna, if she were your mother?

How would you divide your own life into segments?

What happenings do you think have changed your attitudes?

**Pages 20 – 23**

**'It wasn't right.'**

Dylan has mixed reactions to the hare. Why do you think this is and what does it indicate about his character?

What do you think your reaction to the hare might have been?

What do you think is the significance of Wylfa?

**Pages 24 – 25**

**'Sometimes you can read things and not understand them, or you think you understand them, but when you get older, they mean something different to what you thought.'**

How has Dylan gained his understanding of relationships? How do you think this will have affected his understanding?

Why do you think children sometimes have to re-evaluate their understanding?

**Pages 26 – 28**

**'I don't like the characters I'm supposed to like in the story.'**

What does this tell you about Dylan?

What sort of genres do you like reading most, and what sort of characters do you identify with? Why do you think this is?

**'It's hard to talk for a long time without anyone to talk back to you.'**

How do we learn to communicate effectively? Why is clarity of communication important?

**Pages 29 -33**

**'I never liked the smell of our house when I was a girl.'**

How important is the sense of smell? Think of examples when a sense of smell has determined how you feel?

**'Gaynor had the kindness you always hoped for in a doctor, but rarely got.'**

Why are small acts of kindness so important? What small acts make a difference to your well-being?



**'Blood is thicker than water, but there's so much water.'**

What is your interpretation of Rowenna's thoughts on the saying?

What is your own response to the saying?

**'Fear is a different thing since The End. It's softer because it never leaves, and it's not as powerful as it used to be.'**

Do you think the level of fear is determined by whether it is a constant background presence or a quick flash of fear?

What are your fears? How would they compare with people in very different circumstances, such as those who have to make a brand-new start in life in a new setting?

**'My son, who has never stepped foot inside a chapel or church, who was conceived in a hot tangle of unforgiveable sins, knows his Bible.'**

What do you think Rowenna's opinion is of religion?

Do you think it is important to have a knowledge of major religious texts? Why/why not?

**Pages 34 – 39**

**'Every story looks a bit different depending on who you are.'**

Dylan thinks that he and his Mam are telling their truths in different ways. How would it be possible to both tell the truth differently?

**'I have to guess a lot.'**

Why do you think Rowenna keeps information to herself?

Do you think children have a right to know about their background?

**'I wouldn't go back to living like that.'**

Why do you think Rowenna has no desire to return to life as it was before The End?

What do you think matters in life? What do you value most?

**Pages 40 – 47**

**'I'm nobody's daughter.'**

Rowenna uses oxymorons in her writing: 'noisy, awful silence.' What might this indicate about her character?

**'We've done so many bad things to so many people, haven't we, Britain, I mean.'**

Do you think people of a country should be held responsible for the actions of their forebears?

Is it dependent upon the circumstances and context of the actions?

Should there be a statute of limitations?



**'I took what I could.'**

Which books would you take from the library if you found yourself in a post-apocalyptic situation?  
What are the reasons for your choices?

**'I can speak Welsh ... I'd just rather not.'**

Why do you think Rowenna has such mixed feelings about her cultural heritage?  
Which do you feel is more important: colloquial, everyday language or academic language?  
How do you feel about learning languages?  
What is the significance of the three Welsh words chosen by Rowenna?

**Pages 50 - 54**

**'I knew who I was and who I was meant to be.'**

Why do you think Dylan feels like this? What is unusual about him?

**Pages 55 – 61**

**'But that is what makes a person invisible, seeing them every day.'**

Think of someone you see on a regular basis, but who has become invisible. Consider their character as objectively as possible. What do you think you might have been overlooking?

**'Having children is the most selfish act possible.'**

What is your view of Rowenna's opinion? Does social situation affect the purpose of having children?

**'Spending my life watching other lives.'**

What is your opinion about the effects of screen time have on mental well-being?  
How reliable are the communications from screens?  
What do you think the dangers are of doing more observing than actual living?

**'Sometimes he is too silent.'**

How does Rowenna feel about her son? How does her evaluation of his personality contradict or dovetail with the picture you have developed as a result of Dylan's entries in the Blue Book?  
How does the format of their story affect the telling and your interpretation as a reader?

**'His mind is his only hiding place.'**

Why do you think Dylan needs a hiding place? Is this true for everybody?

**Pages 62 – 67**

**'Our taste in books is very different.'**



Why do you think people make different reading choices? Do you think this is a good thing, or is it likely to be problematic for Rowenna and Dylan?

What is your day-to-day taste in reading material?

How do you read?

**'And would you take them in?'**

What are the pros and cons of giving aid to strangers? Whose opinion would you support in this discussion, and why?

**Pages 68 -73**

**'Wylfa'**

How does the author build up the sense of suspense in order to answer the question that has been hanging over the story from the beginning?

What historical parallels can you think of and what effects did they have on local populations?

**Pages 73 – 76**

**'It's lovely to have something small and soft to love.'**

Why do you think this is?

**'A life within four walls isn't enough for a wild animal.'**

How does this fit with Dylan's earlier observation of having something small and soft to love?

How far do you agree with what Dylan is saying here? Do you think it is also true of animals that have been domesticated?

Which animals are suitable as pets?

**Pages 77 – 85**

**'That was the sound that escaped from my mouth when I thought we were dying.'**

Why do you think, despite her attitude towards her Welsh heritage, that Rowenna thought of *Canon Lan*?

Music has strong associations. Which pieces of music are meaningful for you and why do you think this is?

**You have the heart of a warrior, Rowenna.'**

The Thorpes and Rowenna are confronting their own mortality and come to very different conclusions about how to behave. Why do you think this is?

Would you say that the Thorpes are committing suicide?

How do you think you would react, if you found yourself in this situation?

**Pages 81 – 85**



**'I can't protect them from the big things, but some small things can be kept from them.'**

How do you feel about Rowenna's reaction to the hare?

What do you think she would consider as the big things, and which the small things?

**'Everything will come back in the end.'**

Why does Rowenna's positive response to Dylan's question about birds lead her to the thought about fetching Mr. Thorpe's gun?

**Pages 86 – 90**

**'She knew I needed to learn to do things on my own.'**

Think about the way in which many children are often treated by their parents. What do you think are the most important factors in child rearing?

**'I fit here, now.'**

What characteristics and qualities has Dylan developed and how have these affected his self-worth?

**Pages 91 – 96**

**'Once you stop listening, you begin to hear.'**

Rowenna makes use of oxymorons when she compares life before and after The End. Why do you think this is?

**By the time Dylan was born, I'd lost faith in him (Sam).**

What were the positive aspects of Sam that initially attracted Rowenna? What are the negative ones that have altered her feelings?

In what ways does this explain the secrecy she maintains?

**Pages 97 – 100**

**'Her life is completely different, because she wasn't here in the olden days.'**

How is your life different from your parents'/carers'? What things have changed and what effects do you think these have had?

How do you think historical context affects our understanding of life?

**Pages 101 – 106**

**'Mam doesn't know that I come here on my own.'**

Why do you think Dylan keeps his visits to Kate Francis's house secret from Rowenna?

They both have secrets. What effect do you think this has on their relationship?



## Pages 107 – 109

**'In the old days, living was so easy.**

**So easy that we used to play a game with death.'**

Why do you think people chose to flirt with death before The End?

In what ways has Rowenna's view of life altered? Why do you think this is?

**'A gentle voice that hadn't said enough words.'**

How do you feel as you read this entry? Which details have the most effect on you?

What different aspects of Rowenna's character do we discover in her entry?

'It's lovely to have something small and soft to love.' These were words used by Dylan about Pwyll. In what way do they relate to Mona's place in their family?

## Pages 110 – 114

**'And that something, that huge, wondrous thing that made Mona unique.'**

We have learned that Mona is not following the developmental path of 'normal' babies, but Dylan isn't in a situation where he can compare Mona with others. How do you think he perceives her?

How do you think our society generally treats people who do not conform to what is considered the norm?

**'I've never hated anyone before. It's almost as strong as love, but nowhere near as strong as faith.'**

What does this statement tell you about Dylan? Who do you identify with most strongly at this point and why do you think this is?

How has Dylan's faith developed so strongly?

## Pages 115 – 125

**'I don't want Dylan to see you.'**

What's your reaction to Rowenna's secrecy about Gwion?

What do you think about Rowenna's moral scruples regarding theft? How do you think you would behave in her situation?

**'And the things we believe in, the things we have faith in – we have all made the choice to believe.'**

What do you think is the most likely explanation for Gwion's absence?

How is Rowenna's faith different from Dylan's?

Why do people choose to believe? What sort of things motivate the choices they make?

What do you have belief in? What doubts do you have?

## Pages 126 - 131

**'Once I decided that it was okay for us to steal from the houses in Nebo, everything was easier and more difficult.'**





In which ways do you think things were easier, and in which ways were they more difficult?

**'You don't have to believe in order to recite the psalms.'**

Why do you think Rowenna finds the rhythm of the psalms comforting, although she has no belief in the words?

Consider different religions and the importance of recitation of familiar words.

Are there any particular words, secular or religious, that you find comforting?

**Pages 132 – 134**

**'That's how people live forever, I think, in the little memories in familiar places.'**

People react to the grief of bereavement in different ways. How does Dylan deal with his grief?

Why are memories important?

What triggers memories for you?

Do you think memories change over time?

**Pages 135 – 137**

**'My grief made me cruel.'**

Why do you think Dylan and Rowenna haven't written in the Blue Book for a long time?

Why do you think it has taken Rowenna months before she can talk with Dylan?

Why is waking up so difficult for Rowenna?

Sum up the strengths and weaknesses of Rowenna at this point in her story.

**'Silence stretched like time. There was so much more to say, but I hoped there'd be no need.'**

Why is what is left unsaid important in determining the nature of relationships?

How do you think you would have reacted to Rowenna's apology?

**Pages 138 – 140**

**'I am afraid.'**

**'Of the old world, the grey days of technicolour screens.'**

Rowenna uses an oxymoron again when describing her response. Why?

How do you think you would feel if you were Rowenna at this turning point?

How do you think Dylan will feel?

**Pages 141 – 143**

**'It's not just us.'**

Why would Dylan be glad to find out that, before The End, people also heard voices in the night that weren't there?



How does this indicate the importance of books in Dylan's perception of the world?

Are there any dangers inherent in the way in which Dylan is discovering how people used to live?

**'I can feel it coming back, like a cloud.'**

Why is this particular image so pertinent?

What would you choose, if you could only have one luxury? And why would you choose this?

**Page 144**

**'Life.'**

What sorts of things give Rowenna pleasure?

Which other things, not listed here, do you think give her pleasure because of their absence?

What do you think Dylan would list as his best things?

What would you list?

**Page 145 – 146**

**'Her words made it feel as if there was another End in sight.'**

What might this statement be foreshadowing?

**'The lights of Anglesey grinned at us like a fiend.'**

What does this image imply?

What sort of changes do you think will take place?

How do you think Rowenna and Dylan will react and respond to the changes?

**'Are you okay?' I asked, and Mam squeezed my hand, her wet eyes sparkling in the new lights.'**

How could the final sentence be interpreted?

What feelings does it leave you with?

How has the relationship between Dylan and his mother developed during the course of their story?

Do you find this a convincing conclusion to Rowenna's and Dylan's shared entries in the Blue Book of Nebo?

