

On the Edge Teacher Pack

Questions after reading

Empathy

1. The narrator describes Rhys as 'half-hero, half-villain, half-good, half-bad, half-this, half-that and half-of-the-other' What do you think of Rhys?
2. What do you think of Phil? Is he a good parent, or irresponsible?
3. *On the Edge* explores grief. How have each of the Fisher brothers dealt with the loss of their mother?
4. 'At school, boys like Rhys are always either too big or too small; too big when they move and too small when they open their mouths.' School exclusions are four times more prevalent among students eligible for Free School Meals. Discuss how schools treat economically disadvantaged children.
5. Think about the title *On the Edge*. How many literal and metaphoric 'edges' can you think of in the story?
6. Which stereotypes of working class boys and men are challenged in the novel?
7. When Jakey bullies Dav, Mitch says, 'Cut it out, son ... I'll have none of them phobias on my boat.' In what ways is homophobia challenged in the novel?
8. What do you think of Rhys and Jakey's behaviour on the dating app and when talking about girls. Is it serious or a bit of fun? Why do some people behave differently online? What does Rhys learn when he meets Caroline?

Social Issues

1. What do you think of Lythcombe? Would you like to live there? What are the positive and negative things about living in a beautiful place where tourists go?
2. The UK government's 2024 report into coastal poverty found double the national average rate of drug use in coastal communities, higher rates of hospitalisation for drugs and alcohol, and a higher death rate for drug poisoning. Rhys and his friends take dangerous illegal drugs in the novel. Why do you think they take these risks?
3. After reading the Historical Note:
 - Can riots and civil disobedience be justified? Draw up a sliding scale of protest strategies from writing emails to riots.
 - Compare two violent protest movements. Were their tactics divisive or effective?
 - Which protest movements after 2010 will we look back on as justified?
 - How will social media and disinformation change how people protest and what they protest about?
 - Dav asks Rhys, 'Why can't you write to our MP like a normal person?' How can people legitimately protest or complain when they are unhappy about political decisions?

- Connor's nan asks Rhys, 'Have you seen what they've done to the swings? Took us a year to raise the money for that rubber. Now what are kiddies supposed to fall on?' Why do you think rioters often damage their own communities?
 - Find out about a protest movement not mentioned in the Historical Note. For example: Palestine peace demonstrations, Stop the War Coalition marches (2003), anti-vaccination protests, or the Capitol Riots in the US. How have the government, media and public responded to these protests?
4. What is the effect of second-home ownership on communities in tourist areas like Lythcombe?
 5. In court, 'Dodo was given some stern words. Rhys was given six months.' Why do you think they were treated differently?
 6. 'How much land does a man need?' is a question asked in a story by Leo Tolstoy. What is your answer to this question?

Exploring the novel further

1. Who do you think the narrator of *On the Edge* could be? Find arguments to support the following possibilities:
 - A local Lythcombe fisherman
 - Rhys himself
 - The 24/7 Guest Ready cleaning lady
 - An omniscient narrator
2. In what ways is the narrator unreliable?
3. Early drafts of the novel were written in poetry. How many poetic techniques (such as alliteration, personification and similes) can you find in the prose?
4. Rhys admires Dodo's mastery of language, but in what ways are Rhys and Phil the real poets?
2. Can you find William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930) in the narrator's use of language in *On the Edge*? (answers in the Teacher's Pack)
 - Metaphor: when two things are said to be alike which have different properties.
 - Two metaphors resolved into one.
 - Two ideas, connected through context, given in one word simultaneously.
 - Two meanings that do not agree but combine to make clear a complicated state of mind.
 - When the narrator seems to discover an idea in the act of narrating.
 - When a statement says nothing and the readers are forced to invent a meaning of their own.
 - Two words that, within context, are opposites that expose a division in the narrator's mind.

Shakespeare Treasure Hunt

There are 14 quotations from Shakespeare's plays hidden throughout *On the Edge* in dialogue and description. How many can you spot and which plays are they taken from? Find the solution on nicola-garrard.com from 15th September 2025.

Other hidden quotations in the novel. Did you spot them?

"Let us take a knife and cut this world in two and see what worms are eating at the rind"

Langston Hughes

"From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs." Karl Marx

"There is no basis to property..." Maximillien Robespierre, French Revolutionary

"There lies a sleeping giant. Let him sleep for when he wakes he will shake the world"

Napoleon Bonaparte