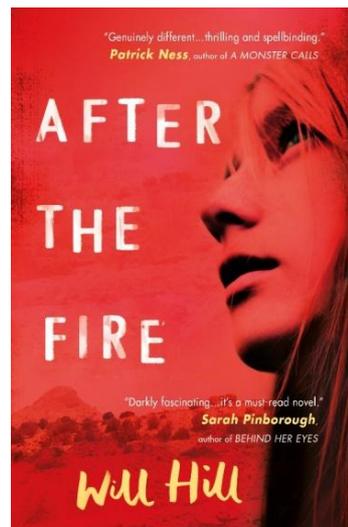


2018 Carnegie Medal shortlist Talking Points

Title: **AFTER THE FIRE**

Author: **Will Hill**

Publisher: **Usborne**



CULTS

Father John, the 'prophet', is a totally repellent character, so how does the author make us believe that this community comes to trust him and put their faith in him? What makes people *want* to believe?

If you've never lived in a community like this yourself, does reading this book help you to imagine what it might be like?

A lot of writers are interested in cults. What do you think the appeal is?

FAITH AND TRUTH

Why does Moonbeam's seemingly unshakeable faith first start to falter? And yet why isn't that enough for her to break free of Father John's control?

We see Moonbeam living in her lie (before), and we see her facing up to the terrible truth (after) – was she happiest, actually, when she was most deceived?

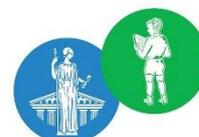
Can you imagine what it would be like to discover your entire world was based on a deception, that everything you'd been told wasn't true? How do you think you'd cope with that yourself?

CHARACTERS

Some characters are mostly good, some are seriously bad. But can you also think of some about whom your feelings change significantly as you learn more about them and their stories?

What about Dr Hernandez and Agent Carlyle – does our view of them change as Moonbeam's view changes? (And for that matter, does Agent Carlyle himself change over the course of the story, too?)

And what did you make of Moonbeam herself? She's complex, unpredictable, strong, realistic – would you say she's *likeable*? Is she supposed to be?



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Moonbeam is recovering from trauma – *The things I've seen are burned into me, like scars that refuse to fade...* – does the way her psychology is portrayed seem realistic?

HOW IT'S TOLD

The story begins with a prologue describing the siege – what did you think of that as an opening?

The book has a very clear and distinctive structure, moving back and forth between before and after; why do you think the author chose to tell the story this way? And does it work?

Will Hill is known as the author of a scary fantasy thriller series, and fantasy writers have to be good at world-building. In what ways do you think Hill had to “build a world” for this novel, even though it's realistic rather than an alternative fantasy world?

After the Fire is an incredibly tense, constantly suspenseful book – how does the author manage to maintain the tension? (Especially since we think at first we know how it's going to end...)

Hill is in very tight control of how information is released to the reader, particularly building up to Moonbeam's big secrets – could you see it coming, or did the plot twists take you by surprise?

And what about the ending – is it an optimistic, forward-looking end to the story? Is it what you'd expected?

Did the Author's Note, and an understanding of the ways in which true stories affected the author's fictions, make you think differently about what you'd read?

TRUST AND RESPONSIBILITY

Why does Moonbeam find it hard to trust Hernandez and Carlyle at first? What is it that makes Moonbeam gradually feel more able to tell Dr Hernandez and Agent Carlyle her story? Why is telling her story important to her?

The cult community seems to be a world of totally innocent, powerless people being manipulated by totally guilty, powerful people. Is Moonbeam a totally innocent and powerless character?

Does this book challenge our views about trust, about who rightfully earns our trust?

AND FINALLY...

Does this Carnegie-shortlisted book deserve to win? Why, or why not?



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