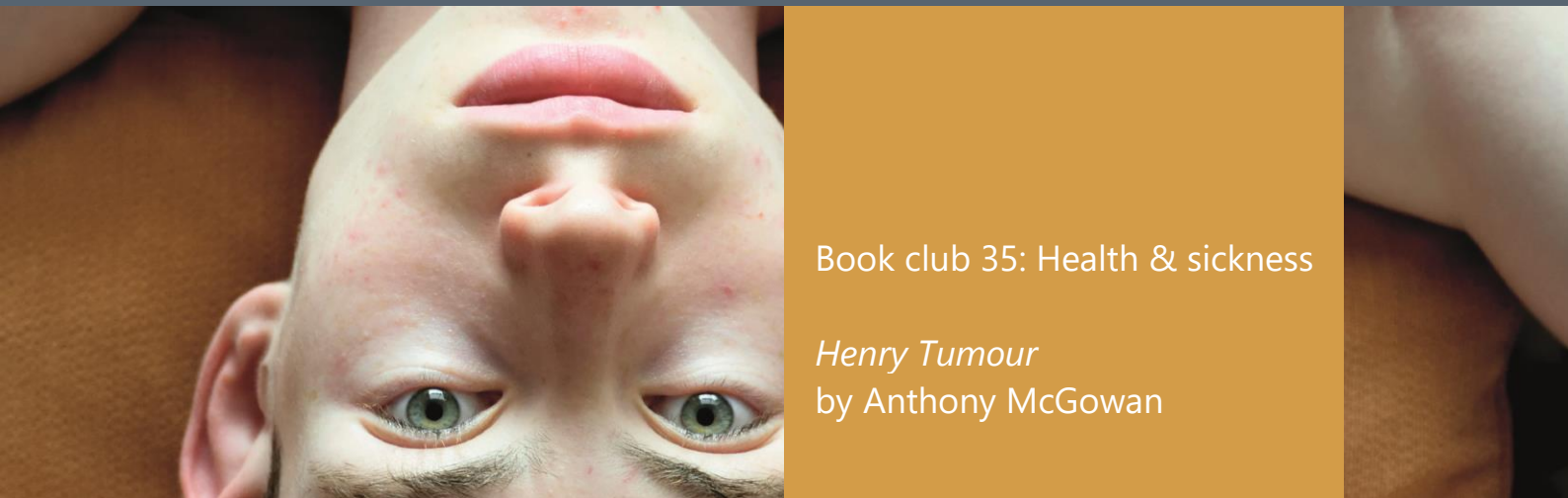




Book club 35: Health & sickness

Henry Tumour
by Anthony McGowan

Rules

In this book club you will discuss *Henry Tumour* by Anthony McGowan in a group of 4-6 readers. The book club opens with a brief introduction that one of you reads out loud. The book club then continues in four rounds:

- 1 Round 1 consists of 5 questions about the plot. One of the group members acts as the quiz master who reads each question out loud, after which everyone (including the quiz master) writes down their answer. The correct answers will appear on the screen after you have turned over the final question card. You may then check your answers and calculate your scores.
- 2 Round 2 consists of asking and answering questions each of you have about the book/story. Each group member consults the group about elements of the text that they thought was unclear. Together, you try to find answers to the questions that are raised. After everything has been cleared up, your group is ready to proceed to the next round.
- 3 Round 3 consists of discussion questions. The person with the most correct answers to the quiz questions from round 1 gets to be the first to turn over a card and respond to the question. The other members of the group may then add to the discussion by responding and sharing their ideas. Take turns until all cards are flipped.
- 4 Round 4 is where you get to review the text. How many stars would you give the text and why? Discuss this together until you have reached a shared verdict. Use the text box to explain your choice.

This book club was developed by the editors of LitLab, a digital laboratory for high school literature research. For more teaching materials, visit www.litlab.nl. A teacher's guide and a didactic justification of this teaching method are available at www.litlab.nl/docenten.



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A close-up photograph of a child's eyes, looking directly at the camera, with a warm, orange-toned background.

Henry Tumour

Introduction

I'll say it was you.

You'll say your tumour stole them?

I'll say you made me do it'. (p. 147)

Hector Brunty is trying to survive school like any other fourteen-year-old. But unlike his classmates, Hector is never alone. He is suffering from a brain tumour named Henry Tumour, who is trying to take control over his thoughts and actions. While Hector is awaiting brain surgery, Henry is desperate to teach the nerdy Hector to find a girlfriend before it's too late. But Henry is an aggressive teacher, who not only teaches but also forces Hector to do things he normally would never dare or want to do.

The novel *Henry Tumour* is written like a 'stream of consciousness' and follows a boy who is constantly arguing with his own brain, his friends and his mother. The story is told through the conversations between Hector and Henry Tumour, as Henry not only affects Hector's life, but also becomes part of the storytelling itself. In this book club, you will join their conversation by thinking about the novel's literary form and the ethical questions raised by Hector's actions.

Round 1: Understanding the plot

Take turns turning over a card and answering the question. After the person whose turn it is has answered, the rest may add to that answer or share their own views.

Round 2: Initial questions

Take turns selecting one of the excerpts (*fragmenten/stukjes*) from the book listed below. Think of a question you would like to ask one of the characters, and work together to find an answer to that question.

1. Hector tries to undress Uma against her will: 'There was... "Fuck off."' (p. 195-196)
2. Hector learns from his mother who his father was. '*Calm down*... don't understand' (p. 242-243)
3. Hector accidentally insults Amanda while arguing with Henry. 'But no... new gang.' (p. 266-267).

Round 3: Discussion

Take turns turning over a card from a pile of your choice and answer the discussion question. The other members of the group may then add to the discussion by responding and sharing their ideas.

Round 4: Opinion

Review *Henry Tumour* by rating the novel on a scale of one to five stars, and then provide an explanation for your choice. Discuss what aspects you enjoyed and what aspects you didn't, and provide reasons for your opinions. Reflect on whether the discussion influenced your individual perspective, and if so, how. Incorporate examples and arguments from your responses to the discussion questions to support your review.



Question 1

What happens between Hector and Uma at the graveyard?

Question 2

Why is Henry pushing Hector to have sex with girls?

Question 3

What is the reason Hector doesn't know his dad?

Question 4

How has Henry changed Hector's personality?

Question 5

Why has Hector's mom been so absent in his life?

Answers

- 1 He tries to have sex with her but she refuses.
- 2 He wants to propagate Hector's genes.
- 3 Hector's dad is dead, but his mother never told him.
- 4 He made him more self-confident and aggressive.
- 5 She is addicted to Valium.



Question

3

Question

2

Question

1

Answers

Question

5

Question

4



Personal connections? 1

If you had an alter ego in your head that was the complete opposite of your personality, what would they be like?

Personal connections? 2

Do you ever feel like it's difficult to control your own thoughts? What do you do when that happens?

Personal connections? 3

Why do you think Hector's mom never told him about his father? What would you have done if you were in her position?

Personal connections? 4

The boys in the story often argue about the looks and sexual features of the girls. What do you think about the way Hector and his friends view the girls in his school?

Personal connections? 5

Forced by Henry, Hector assaults Uma when they're together in the graveyard. What did you think of her response to that situation? And what about Hector's response?

Personal connections? 6

Under Henry's influence, Hector is doing a lot of stuff he normally would not approve of (fighting, stealing, insulting and assaulting girls). Other characters often justify these actions as a result of his brain tumour. What do you think about that: is someone still responsible for their actions when their brain is damaged?



Personal connections?

3

Personal connections?

2

Personal connections?

1

Personal connections?

6

Personal connections?

5

Personal connections?

4



Food for thought? 1

The name 'Henry Tumour' is a pun referring to 'Henry Tudour', a name of several famous English kings. Who is the king in Hector's head: Henry or Hector? Support your answer with examples.

Food for thought? 2

There are neurologists (brain experts) who think that our personality depends completely on how our brain works. What would you say to them after reading this novel? Is Hector able to resist Henry, or is he indeed a passive slave of his own brain (tumour)? Support your answer with examples.

Food for thought? 3

Hector not only loses control over his brain, but also over his body. Explain that statement by giving examples of scenes from the novel where Hector loses control over his body.

Food for thought? 4

How would you evaluate Henry's influence on Hector's life? Is he affecting his thoughts and actions only negatively, or do you also see a positive influence?

Food for thought? 5

As readers, we are in locked up in Hector's head for the entire novel. What do you think would have happened to the way you see Hector if the author had also included other perspectives, such as Amanda's or Uma's?

Food for thought? 6

How do you interpret the cartoons at the end of the novel? What happens to Hector and Henry in this final scene?



Food for thought?

3

Food for thought?

2

Food for thought?

1

Food for thought?

6

Food for thought?

5

Food for thought?

4