

# DISCUSSION GUIDE



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**“A marvellously delicate parable of friendship and compassion, *Stitch* is witty, elegant and profound.”**

*Jonathan Stroud*

**“Brimming with heart and bursting with big questions. I loved it.”**

*Lucy Strange*

# Stitch

## PÁDRAIG KENNY

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Kenny's charming take on the *Frankenstein* story is a beautifully crafted book, full of heart, humour and curiosity. Stitch, a creation of the Professor, grapples with the nature of his existence in the castle where he has been waking up for 584 days. But when the Professor's nephew arrives with his own agenda, Stitch and his friend Henry must discover exactly who, or what, they are. With the help of their new friend, Alice, they are forced to explore what lies beyond the castle grounds, and ask what it truly means to be a monster.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pádraig Kenny is an Irish writer from County Kildare, now living in Limerick. Previously an arts journalist, a teacher and a librarian's assistant, he now writes full-time. His first novel *Tin* and recent *The Monsters of Rookhaven* were both Waterstones Books of the Month. He has twice won the Children's Books Ireland Honour Award for Fiction, has been nominated for the Carnegie Medal and shortlisted for the Irish Book Awards. This is his first book for Walker.

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION:

This book is packed full of intrigue and discussion points, with many areas of interest to explore. It also deals, in a very accessible way, with some deeply philosophical and existential questions. Care should be taken when discussing the nature of life and death with your group, and appropriate support should be in place for any young people for whom discussions may be difficult. You may also want to check understanding of some of the source material that inspired *Stitch*, particularly Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

#### Getting started:

What did the group think of *Stitch*? What did anyone like about it? Why? Did it remind anyone of anything else they've read, or seen? What? Does anyone in the group know the story of *Frankenstein*? Discuss understanding of this source material.

#### 1. **Stitch**

"Both hands are grey in colour because all of Stitch's skin is grey, not like the Professor's skin." – p.10

How would anyone describe Stitch's character? Is he likeable? Why? Or why not? What does anyone imagine Stitch looks like? Does the author describe his appearance? What does the name "Stitch" suggest to the reader? At times, the reader knows more than Stitch – if appropriate you could introduce the idea of narrative fallibility and omniscience – how does this create twists and tension in the book? In particular, consider the revelation of how long the Professor has been "asleep".

## 2. Henry

"Henry turns around. He is a lot taller than Stitch. A lot bulkier too." – p.12

Are Henry and Stitch very different? In what ways are they different? How are they alike? What does Henry's name, Henry Oaf, suggest about him? We learn early on that "Henry breaks things" – what did anyone think this could mean, before we learned more about their history together?

## 3. Waking Up

"Stitch wakes up, just as he always has done for the past five hundred and eighty-four days he has been waking up." – p.7

What might it be like to wake up as Stitch, for the first time, 584 days ago. How would this be different from being born? How might you feel if you suddenly woke up for the very first time? Would it be a happy experience? Scary? Intriguing? Encourage group members to expand on their answers.

EXTENSION – Creative writing: Challenge the group to write a version of Stitch's very first morning, either in the style in which the book is written or as a first-person narrative. Imagine Stitch seeing his room for the first time, or the castle, or meeting the professor.

## 4. Scientificacious

"Very important and most valuablest and treasured and appreciated by all and sundry for being Henry Oaf, my most bestest self." – p.13

How does Henry speak? Can anyone think of any examples of unusual or made-up words he uses? Create a list together – why does anyone think he might speak like that? What effect does it have? Does the way he speaks reflect who Henry is as a person – a jumble of other parts? Discuss. You could even try coming up with your own nonsense words that sound like other words, or create a game – guess the real word amongst the neologisms.

## 5. Alice

"Her gaze makes Stitch feel strange. It's almost as if it compels him to say something, but he doesn't know what to say." – p.23

Even though the book is written in the third person, the reader sees Alice through Stitch's eyes – what effect does this have? What is the first impression we get? How does that impression change? Imagine if we weren't introduced to Alice through Stitch's narrative – how might this be different? Discuss the importance of narrative voice in shaping the reading experience. EXTENSION: Rewrite a passage from the book from, for example, Alice's perspective. Consider how this would be different and what effect you want to create for the reader.

## 6. Professor Hardacre

"A silver locket hangs from a chain around his neck." – p.21

What motivates Professor Hardacre? Why does he do what he does? Is he a bad person? Does he do the right thing? Is it as simple as that? How realistic are Professor Hardacre's ambitions? Could he succeed? What would happen if he did? Would his wife and child be the same?

## 7. Assumptions

"Stitch isn't listening to his instruction. He's too fascinated now." – p.153

How important are assumptions in the book? Do all the characters make assumptions? What is the danger in making assumptions? Consider Stitch and Henry's thoughts about Gregor, or Professor Hardacre's thoughts about Alice, or Stitch, or Henry.

What about Samuel – does he make assumptions? Is it significant that he is blind? If so, why? Discuss as a group.

## 8. White Rabbit

“He feels the sudden urge to look in the other corner where the empty cage is...” – p.9

What does White Rabbit represent to Stitch? What effect does the incident with White Rabbit and Henry have on Stitch? Why can't he look at the empty cage? Why is it so hard for him to consider what happened? What does this say about Stitch's understanding of the world around him?

## 9. The right thing to do

“Stitch shrugs. ‘It felt like the right thing to do. And now, after all I saw last night, it all makes sense.’” – p.70

Regularly, Stitch does things because he thinks they are the “right thing to do”. What does this mean? What is “right” about them? What does the writer suggest about morality if Stitch, created from lots of different parts, can understand right and wrong? Why is he able to do the right thing, when others often hesitate, aren't brave enough or don't want to?

## 10. The Great Book of Exploration

“Stitch can't read, but he likes to look at the sketches of faraway lands, places covered in ice, or smothered in jungle vines, and on his favourite page of all is a sketch of an explorer.” – p.18

Stitch cannot read, but Henry “remembered” how to read – what does this suggest? Why might Stitch enjoy looking at *The Great Book of Exploration* so much? What does the book represent to him? How does it impact his outlook? Why, at the end, when Stitch goes off exploring, does he know “deep down that this is what he needs to do”?

