

## **SPLIT SECOND by Sophie McKenzie** **READING NOTES**



### **SETTING AND SOCIETY**

Sophie McKenzie sets this thought-provoking young adult novel in 'London, the near future'. Which elements of the setting are recognisable from the London we know today? And what is different and unfamiliar about the city she describes? Can you see our London (or other big cities) ever turning into the London of this book?

Discuss the impact of government austerity cuts on a nation. What happens to society when there is suddenly less food to go around? Do people start changing their priorities?

In this book homelessness is at a terrible high. Imagine what it would be like to see a homeless person on every street – can you think of any other countries where this is the case? How does the situation escalate to this level? Is there a solution? What can the government do to effect changes?

### **CHARACTERS**

The two main characters, Charlie and Nat, put themselves in highly dangerous situations throughout the story, in order to fight for what they believe in. Discuss their respective motives – are they driven by political idealism, family loyalties, romantic interests, or a combination of these things? If their family members hadn't been injured or killed in the bomb blast at the beginning of the book, would they still have an interest in fighting off the terrorists that are threatening their country? Would you?

Much of the time Charlie and Nat are kept in the dark about crucial information (e.g. the contents of a package which they are told to carry). They must therefore trust Taylor and rely on the sketchy information he feeds them. What assumptions do they make about Taylor, and what techniques does he use to encourage them to make these assumptions?

Do Charlie and Nat's feelings for one another cause them to work well together, or do they distract them from the important issues at hand and cause the pair to take their eye off the ball at crucial moments? How do you think their relationship will grow and develop in the second book, when they will be on the run together?

The politician Roman Riley has certain qualities which encourage people to trust and support him. For example, he is charismatic and an excellent public speaker. He is good at delivering neat soundbites. Can you think of any other politicians now or in the past whose popularity can be attributed to similar qualities? With historical figures, did any of them turn out to be undeserving of the public trust?

## RACISM AND FAR-RIGHT GROUPS

In this book, members of the fictional far-right group, The League of Iron, use online forums to communicate. Discuss why and how the Internet is such a powerful and effective tool for this kind of group.

What causes racist groups like The League of Iron to blame non-whites for the problems in society? To what extent do fear, uncertainty and ignorance drive their extreme political beliefs?

Nat has to fake a vicious and racist attack on his friend Parveen in order to gain the trust of a member of The League of Iron. Discuss how this attack makes both characters feel. Even though they know it isn't real, is it still upsetting? How so?