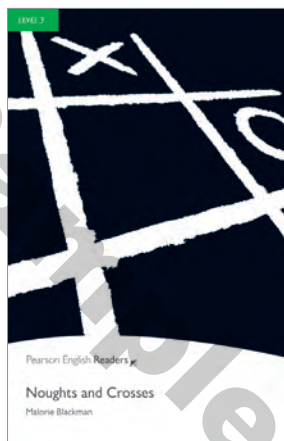


# Noughts and Crosses

Malorie Blackman



## About the author

Malorie Blackman was born in London in 1962. She wanted to become an English teacher but studied computer science instead. She worked in computers until she started writing when she was twenty-eight, and apart from books she also writes scripts for television programmes. She lists playing the piano and writing poems as her hobbies and she lives in Kent with her husband.

## Summary

**Chapters 1–2:** Meggie McGregor and her employer, Mrs Hadley, are watching two children playing in the garden. Callum is Meggie's son and Sephy is Mrs Hadley's daughter. Mrs Hadley's husband, Kamal, arrives and hits his wife after discovering, with the innocent help of Meggie, she had lied to him. Later, Meggie is told that Mrs Hadley no longer wants her to work for her. When they are sitting on a beach Callum kisses Sephy and then begins to explain his worries about school. He has been admitted to Sephy's school, which is an elite school for people like Sephy who are from a social group called the Crosses. Callum is from an inferior group called the noughts. Sephy is sad that Callum feels inferior and that the two groups are not allowed to mix. Callum returns to his parent's small house and is asked where he has been. His older brother Jude says he has been with a Cross girl but Callum denies this. He looks at his sister, Lynette, and recalls the day three years previously when she had lost her mind following an accident. Three years ago too, Sephy's mother had changed and had become unhappy and started drinking. One night, Sephy hears her father refer to the noughts as 'blankers', a terrible name for them. He is talking to a man who has infiltrated a

group called the Freedom Fighters. He wants the man to discover the name of their leader because he is worried this group might destroy his plans to gain an important government position. She is surprised to see the man her father is talking to is a nought. Back in Callum's house, Callum's sister thinks she is a Cross because she believes she has dark skin, when in fact it is white like the rest of the family.

**Chapters 3–4:** When Sephy arrives at school she sees a crowd of Cross people shouting that they didn't want blankers in their school. She tries to calm the situation and inappropriately refers to the crowd as blankers. Later, she apologises to Callum for the use of the word but it has clearly hurt him more than she realised. He tells her to keep away from him at school for her own sake. When Callum returns home he sees a news story about the trouble at the school and sees Sephy saying the terrible word again on the TV. Also on the news is Sephy's father threatening the Freedom Fighters with death. He goes to bed thinking that perhaps it isn't a good idea to associate with Crosses. The next day, Sephy sits down to eat her lunch with Callum and some other noughts, but her teacher drags her back to her own table. The following day, Sephy is badly beaten up by some Cross girls and is confined to bed. Callum goes to visit her everyday but is turned away by Mrs Hadley's secretary. In Callum's house a fight breaks out between Jude and his sister Lynette because she insists she is a Cross. Callum's father breaks up the fight and explains the reasons for Lynette's behaviour. Three years previously, she and her Cross boyfriend, Jed, had been attacked by a group of nought men and the beating had seriously affected her brain.

**Chapters 5–6:** Sephy overhears an argument between her mother and father. He accuses her of being a drunk and of not having allowed his son (by another woman) into the family and she accuses him of having an affair. Later in the evening they find their mother unconscious after drinking an overdose of medicine. There are problems too in Callum's house. Lynette walks out after a fight with Jude. Three hours later two policemen arrive with the news that she has died in an accident with a bus. That night, Callum finds her suicide note in his bed. Several months later, Callum suspects his father and Jude are in some way linked to the Freedom Fighters. One day he arranges to see Sephy at a shopping centre but Jude forbids him to go there on that particular afternoon.

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He meets Sephy and under his insistence they leave the building just before a bomb explodes. Back home he learns that the bomb had killed seven people. Jude admits to his mother he had placed the bomb in the centre and she demands that he leaves the house. That night the police raid the house and arrest Callum, his mum and his dad, but not Jude because he isn't in the house. The police have found a drink can with Jude's fingerprints on it near the bomb site. Callum's dad confesses to the crime and says that Jude must have innocently left his fingerprints on the drink can when it was in the house. He tells his wife he did not place the bomb.

**Chapters 7–8:** An anonymous donor (who we learn later is Mrs Hadley) has agreed to pay for an expensive lawyer to defend Callum's dad. At his trial, Callum's dad pleads innocent but is found guilty. Two weeks later, Sephy is taken by her parents to witness the execution of Callum's father. However, just before the execution is due to be carried out, the prison governor stops it and declares that the sentence has been changed to life imprisonment. Callum's father is not pleased because he was prepared to die and doesn't want to remain in prison his whole life. Callum visits Sephy and informs her that her father had ordered the execution to be cancelled so that his father would have to stay in prison. They talk about the sad recent past and the problem between the Crosses and the noughts. The mood is ugly at first, until the two kiss each other. A few days later, Callum's father is killed while trying to escape from prison. While Callum is thinking about this in a café, his brother Jude approaches him and asks if he wants to join the Freedom Fighters. He trains with a gang of four others for three years and eventually Jude becomes his boss. One day he sends Sephy a note asking her to meet him at the beach. When she arrives at the beach she is kidnapped by Callum and his friends.

**Chapters 9–11:** The group keep Sephy in a secret place. Before they send a ransom demand, Callum films Sephy with a newspaper to prove they really have her. Andrew Dorn, one of the senior members of the Freedom Fighters, arrives to see Sephy and then tells the group that she must be killed. The group leave to pick up the ransom money and Callum and Sephy are left alone. They admit that they do still love each other and sleep together. Jude returns an angry man because one of the group has been captured, and when he sees the two together a fight breaks out. Sephy manages to run out of the house

and the group follow her. Callum allows her to escape, but just before she leaves she tells him she recognised Andrew Dorn as someone who works for her father. The group breaks up and Callum gets a job far from home. He hears a radio report saying that Sephy could be pregnant. He returns home to see her and is caught in her garden and put in prison. Sephy's father visits him and gives him a terrible choice. If he agrees to a prison sentence and not death, then Sephy will have an abortion. Her father gives Sephy the same choice. Both of them know they can't let their baby die. Callum goes to his death with the sound of Sephy's loving voice in his ears and his words of love to her on his lips. A baby girl is born and named Callie Rose McGregor.

### Background and themes

**Racial discrimination:** This is the central theme of the book. Because the noughts have different coloured skin they are economically disadvantaged, their schools are inferior, and the only interaction they can have with the Crosses is in the role of servants such as Mrs McGregor, and certainly not a romantic affair such as Callum and Sephy have.

**Rebellion:** Some sections of the nought community are not prepared to accept their disadvantaged situation and fight back with bombs and kidnapping. Callum is in the unfortunate situation of being in love with a person he is supposed to be at war with.

### Discussion activities

#### Chapters 1–2

**While reading** (p. 4, after 'Sephy, do you ever dream about ... escaping?')

- Discuss:** Put the students in small groups and ask them to discuss the following questions about dreams: *Do you often have dreams? Do you have the same dream many times? Do you tell anybody about your dreams? Do you sometimes have bad dreams? What is the strangest dream you have ever had? Do you think dreams can tell us anything about the future?*

#### After reading

- Write and guess:** Put students in pairs and ask them to choose a short paragraph from Chapters 1–2. Tell them to write it again, making five changes to words in the text. Students then read out their paragraphs to the other students who have to identify the mistakes.

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## Chapters 3–4

### Before reading

- 3 **Discuss:** Put the students in pairs and ask them to talk about their first day at secondary school. Tell them to consider the following questions: *Were you nervous/excited/frightened when you arrived? Did your parents take you to school? Did you make friends with anybody? Did you have a fight? Did you like/hate any of the teachers?*

**While reading** (p. 13, after 'It was the end of another bad day at school.')

- 4 **Role play:** Put the students in groups of three and tell them they are going to act out a conversation between Sephy, Callum and the headmaster at the end of the school day. The headmaster asks questions about what has happened and Callum and Sephy give their accounts.

### After reading

- 5 **Write:** Ask the students to write a summary of Chapters 3–4. Tell them the summary must be exactly 50 words long, not one more or less. They then read out their stories to the rest of the class who vote for the best summary.

## Chapters 5–6

**While reading** (p. 24, after 'On the TV there were pictures of people on the ground, broken windows, blood.')

- 6 **Write and role play:** Put the students in pairs and tell them they are going to be two television news reporters at the bomb scene. Tell them to write a news presentation based on what they know and to invent more information. Tell them to make the presentation as lively as possible. See Discussion activities key.

### After reading

- 7 **Game:** Write the word *person* on the board. Then write the word *unkind* in front of it. Tell the students that there are approximately 30 words in Chapter 5 that can be written before the word *person* to describe a person's feelings, character or physical appearance. In pairs tell them they have 10 minutes to find as many of these words as possible. The pair with the most words wins.

## Chapters 7–8

**While reading** (p. 30, after 'But there will be no hanging today.')

- 8 **Discuss:** Tell the students that some countries have the death penalty for serious crimes and some do not. Then ask them to discuss the following questions: *Which countries execute criminals? Are people who are guilty of serious crimes executed in your country? What are the serious crimes? Do you agree with executions? Do they stop people doing crimes?*

- 9 **Write and guess:** On the board, write *Sephy didn't have Callum's number*. Elicit which word is wrong from the students (address not number). Now students choose a sentence from Chapters 7–8 and rewrite it changing one word. Students walk around the classroom, reading out their sentences and the other students have to identify and correct the mistake.

## Chapters 9–11

### Before reading

- 10 **Predict and quiz:** Put the students in pairs and read out the following questions: *The group send a letter to/telephone/meet Sephy's father? Callum cuts off Sephy's hair/finger/ear. A policeman/Callum/Jude helps Sephy to escape. Sephy's dad wants to kill/look after/hide Sephy's baby. Callum marries Sephy/is executed/returns to his family. Sephy's baby is a boy/a girl/dead. After you finish the book check the student's answers and the pair with the most correct answers wins.*

**While reading** (p. 45, after 'No, you're not,' Dad said.)

- 11 **Role play:** Put the students in pairs and tell them they are going to act out a conversation between Sephy and her dad. Tell them to be very argumentative and to make threats of what they will do if the other person doesn't agree to their demands.

### After reading

- 12 **Pair work:** Write the following words on the board: *newspaper, government, midnight, hotel, birthday, grandfather, spy, cloth*. Ask the students talk and write in pairs to say how these words were used in Chapters 9–11.
- 13 **Write and ask:** On the board, write *Who hit Sephy across the face?* Elicit the answer (Jude). Ask students to write another question about something in Chapters 9–11. Now have students stand up and walk around the classroom, asking and answering each other's questions.
- 14 **Discuss:** Remind the students that the book is about two groups of people who can't live together, in this case because of the colour of their skin. Then put them into small groups to discuss the following questions: *What can we do so people of different coloured skin can live together? Do you think there are the same problems with people of different religions or people from different nations or people that are poor and people that are rich? Can the government make laws to stop this problem happening? Do you have any friends that are not from your country?*
- 15 **Research:** Ask the students to look on the Internet for reviews of the book and to find one bad review and one good one. Then the students read out their reviews to the rest of the class.