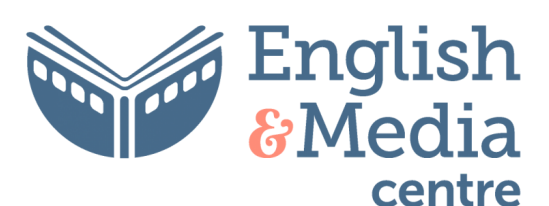
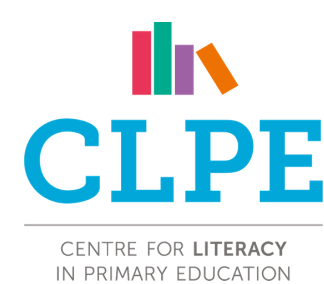
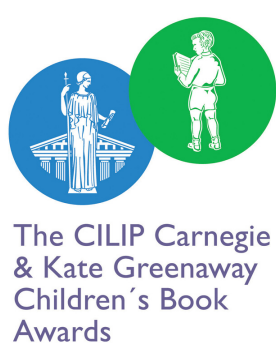
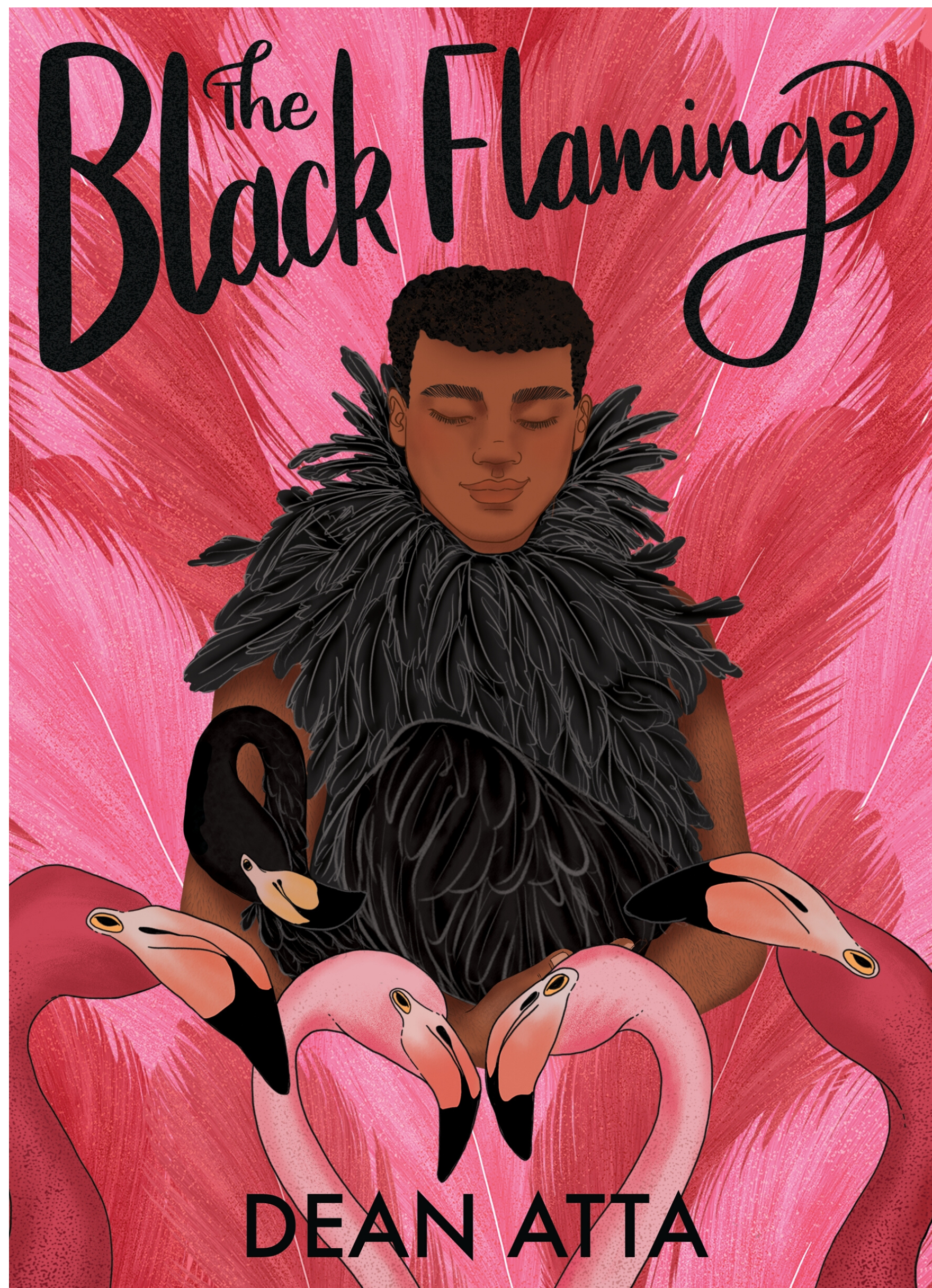


CILIP CARNEGIE SHORTLIST 2020

SHADOWING RESOURCES



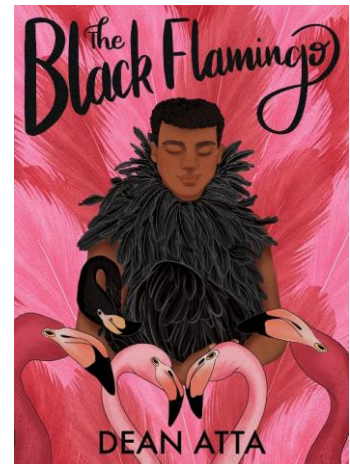
CILIP Carnegie Medal 2020 TALKING POINTS

Title: **The Black Flamingo**

Author: **Dean Atta**

Publisher: Hodder Children's Books

Age: 13+



Note to Group Leaders

This book contains some material that may not be suitable for some students. We recommend that group leaders read the book carefully before teaching it or recommending it to students and/or seek parental guidance. As with all Carnegie and Kate Greenaway shortlisted titles, we trust that shadowers and other young readers will be guided by their group leader, librarian, teacher or parent to help them select suitable, enjoyable and age appropriate material from the lists.

DEVELOPING CHARACTERS

- Michael changes a lot over the long period covered by this story. What important lessons does he learn?
And what does he teach other people?
- How are the changes to the character, as he grows up and has new experiences, reflected in the way his language changes?

FAMILY, COMMUNITY

- Michael's relationships with his family members vary in terms of how close and positive they are – what kind of support does he get from each of them?
- How important are Michael's friends in his story – and is their presence and support consistent and uncomplicated?
- What does Michael's story have to teach us about the importance of having not only inner strength, but a strong and supportive community around you, too?

FINDING YOUR PLACE

- Why does Michael find it difficult, even at university, to find himself “the perfect fit”? What initially stops him from fitting in?
- He has always worried about being “only half” of anything, and never enough. What does it take for him to embrace his whole, intersectional identity?
- Characters like Michael are still all too rare in our books – why does representation of diverse identities matter? (It can be easier to find diverse voices in books from the U.S. – how important was it to you as a reader that part of Michael's identity is his Britishness?)

SELF-EXPRESSION

- How do the pieces of Michael's poetry help us to understand what he is thinking and feeling?
- How does poetry itself help him better to understand the world and himself?
- Drag and poetry are both important for Michael's growing self-expression – can you see some parallels between how they help him over the course of the story?

FLAMINGOS

- What is a black flamingo a metaphor for?
- In what other ways is flamingo symbolism used in the book? Are there other images that really stick in your mind?
- A black flamingo is unique, standing out from the crowd – is this “standing out” a good thing, or a bad thing, in Michael's experience?

FORM

- What did you think of the mixed form in which the book was written – was it effective? Did it make it easier or harder to read?
- Many comparisons have been drawn, inevitably between this book and other verse novels (including last year's Carnegie Medal winner, Elizabeth Acevedo's *The Poet X*) – which others have you read, and how do they compare?
- Atta's words are complemented by the work of the illustrator Anshika Khullar; how did their illustrations change your reading experience?
- A lot of thought clearly went into the book's design, too – the cover, the shape, blank spaces on the page, and so on. Do these sorts of things affect your reading, too?

ENDING

- Is the ending of the book entirely uplifting and hopeful, do you think – or is it not quite as simple as that?
- The book has been called “celebratory” – so what do you think is being celebrated?

AND FINALLY...

- Some books stay with you long after you've read them – they change the way you see the world. Was this one of those books, for you?
- Does it deserve to win the Carnegie Medal?

FURTHER THINKING

CILIP works in partnership with Amnesty International and Inclusive Minds to raise awareness and understanding of the importance of human rights, inclusion and representation in children's literature. The discussion points below are intended to further stimulate reader's thinking on the themes explored in the shortlisted books.

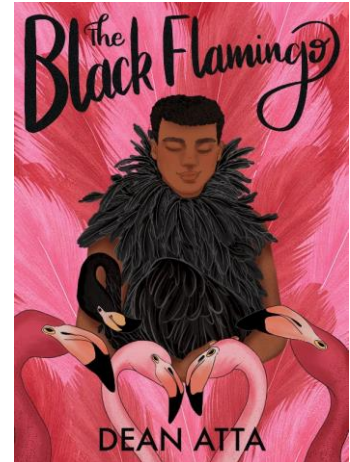
CILIP Carnegie Medal 2020

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Discussing human rights in this story:

Equality and freedom from discrimination; right to safety; freedom of expression; right to culture; right to the full and free development of our personalities.

- What impact do gender stereotypes have on Michael's life?
- How can schools make students feel safe and celebrated for who they are?
- How do you feel when Uncle B describes how 'white fear or suspicion' interrupts black people's lives?



Discussing inclusion and representation in this story:

- What does the book say about exploring the various possibilities of who you are?
- Consider the way we can all push the boundaries of expectations.
- What's the message around toys that are thought to be for girls and toys that are thought to be for boys and who plays with them?



***The Black Flamingo* by Dean Atta**

Before reading

Making predictions

- Working on your own, in a pair, or in a small group, complete the three prediction tasks, below.
- If possible, discuss your ideas with other readers.
- Keep a note of your ideas so that you can refer back to them as you read.

The front cover



- Examine the book's front cover.
 - What do you think the book will be about?
 - What is the likely audience for the book?
 - Does it remind you of any other books? Does it make you want to pick the book up and start to read?

The title

The title of the novel you are going to read is *The Black Flamingo*.

- Think about the title. What meanings and connotations can you think of for each word separately, and then for the whole title?
- Draw together your ideas, questions and predictions about the novel, including what genre of story you might expect. If possible, discuss your ideas with other readers.

Looking inside the book

- Working on your own, in a pair, or in a small group, flick through the pages of the book
- What are your thoughts about how it is set out as poetry? Have you read any other 'verse novels'? If so, which were they and what did you think of them? If not, what are your thoughts about trying one?
- What are your thoughts about some of the images in the book?

During reading

We recommend reading the novel without pausing too often, then doing some more substantial work afterwards.

Keep a journal while reading, pausing to write down your reflections about each of the points below. Where possible, have a discussion with other readers before putting your thoughts down on paper.

Say it out loud

Dean Atta is a spoken word poet, meaning that he usually reads his poetry in performance. Try reading some of the poetry aloud, or listening to someone else read it. Think about whether the poetry works better aloud or on the page and why.

A boy with a doll

Michael is at primary school when he decides he wants a Barbie for his birthday. How might people at your primary school have reacted if they discovered a boy playing with a doll?

Under pressure

What are the different pressures faced by Michael? Which seem to cause him the most difficulty? What gives him strength and encouragement? How does his ability to cope develop as he grows up?

Changing it up

When you have read at least 100 pages of the novel, look back at some of the different types of writing, for example when a poem is separate from the narrative on its own page (like the ones Michael writes in the back of his maths book), or when it is a text message exchange. Why do you think Atta includes these different types of writing?

Missing Dad

In a poem called 'Fatherless Nation', Dean Atta writes about absent fathers saying, 'The seeds are sown but the house ain't a home/Because the kids are left feeling alone.' Think about Michael's relationship with his father and how it affects him.

Daisy and Rowan

When he is torn between Daisy and Rowan, describing both as 'so cute', Michael adds, 'I know if I could choose/I would be with Rowan/but he's a mystery to me.' What do you think he is saying about his different feelings towards Rowan and Daisy?

Mixed heritage

How does Michael feel about his Jamaican and Greek roots? What messages does he get about his mixed heritage and about being British from his mother and the rest of his family at different times in the novel?

Best friends

Track the changing friendship between Daisy and Michael. What do they have in common? How are they different? In what ways do they support each other? Do you accept Daisy's explanation for betraying Michael with her comments at the club? Do you think he was right to forgive her?

A novel in verse

As you read, think about why Dean Atta decided to write his novel in poetry. If the novel were told in prose, with Michael as a first-person narrator, how would it be different?

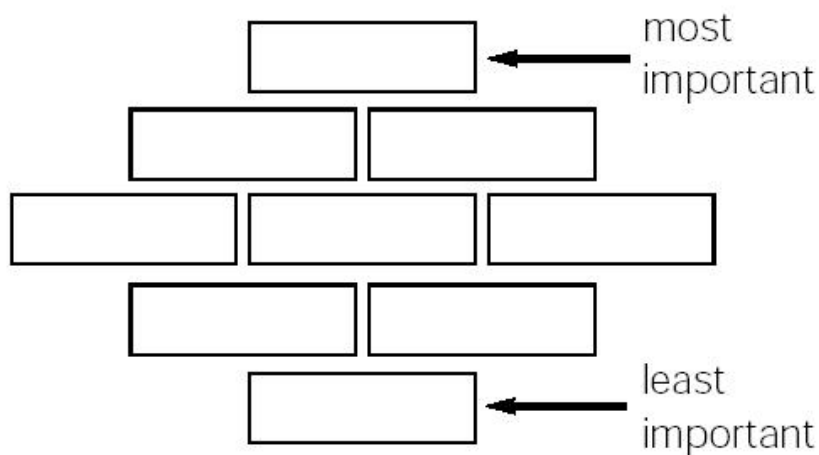
After reading

What is the novel about?

- Below are nine suggestions for what *The Black Flamingo* is about.
- Working on your own, in a pair, or in a small group, rearrange them into a 'Diamond 9' formation, as shown below.
- If possible, compare your ideas with other readers and discuss any differences.

<i>The Black Flamingo</i> is about ...		
Prejudice and ignorance	Daring to be different	Growing up without a father
What it means to be masculine	Finding a place to fit in	The importance of accepting people for who they are
A young gay black man learning to love himself	Gender and sexuality	Coming out

Diamond 9 pattern



Michael in the middle

Michael is the central focus of the narrative. To help you remember and think about everything Michael was involved with, produce a diagram of his relationships in the novel.

- Working on your own, in a pair, or in a small group draw Michael in the middle of a large sheet of paper. Label the picture with words and phrases that describe him.
- Write the names of key characters in the novel, or draw them, around the edge of the sheet: Mum, Uncle B, Granny B, Emily, Callum, Trevor, Anna, Daisy, Faith, Grace and Destiny, Rowan, Kieran, Mzz B, Lennie, Sienna, Simon, Jack, Katy/David.
- Draw arrows between Michael and the other characters and write along the arrow the nature of their relationship, including key moments described in the novel.
- Draw arrows between other characters where links exist. For example, between Destiny and Kieran or Mzz B and Katy/David. Write along the arrow the nature of their relationship, including key moments described in the novel.
- If possible, compare your ideas with other readers.

Defending the novel

- Imagine that your school has decided to ban *The Black Flamingo* from its school library because a parent has complained about all the references to sex and drugs.
- Write a letter to the headteacher challenging their decision, explaining to them why this is a book that should be made available to your school's students.

Difficult subjects

Dean Atta writes very openly about Michael's feelings, about the insults that are thrown at him and about his experiences with sex and drugs. Here are some different readers' responses.

- Think about which one you most closely agree with and why.
- A. This stuff just makes me embarrassed and uncomfortable and I'd rather not read about it.
 - B. I think this kind of thing should be discussed, even though it's a bit uncomfortable, but I'm not sure it's appropriate in a book for young adults.
 - C. It's fantastic to see a book for and about young adults which deals openly with these important real-life issues.

Race and sexuality

In an interview with the *Guardian*, Dean Atta said 'You know you're black, but you have to kind of figure out that you're gay.'

- Discuss whether you think Michael has a harder time becoming proud of his ethnicity or his sexuality.

Goldilocks

Michael says:

I didn't feel black enough
For African Caribbean Society
I didn't feel Greek enough
For Hellenic Society
I didn't feel queer enough
For LGBT Society
But I've got to find a group
That's just right for me.

- Discuss why Michael feels it is so important to find a group that is 'just right'? Do you think this is something all young people struggle with, or is it particularly an issue for Michael because of his mixed-race heritage and sexuality?

The good, the bad, and the ugly

The book includes moments where Michael has to deal with prejudice and aggression, but also times when he experiences kindness, acceptance and understanding.

- Pick two or three memorable moments from the novel and discuss why you think Atta included them, for example:
 - This moment reveals something about Michael's, or someone else's, character.
 - Michael learns something from this experience.
 - The reader learns something from this moment.
 - Atta wants to show the prejudices that still exist for someone like Michael.
 - Atta wants to offer hope to young people who might be thinking about coming out.

'I am the black flamingo. The black flamingo is me trying to find myself.'

In the prologue, Michael explains how zoos choose the right flamingo couple to hatch an egg, but that he always felt that he was an experiment to see how he could survive 'without complete love'.

- Discuss why Michael chooses 'The Black Flamingo' as his drag name. What is he expressing about himself?
- If you could choose a name that expressed something important about your identity, what would it be?