Some of the key themes & important events that will help you to prepare for your Text Response on Runner by Robert Newton

**Significance of the Boots / Shoes**

We first see Charlie’s boots when he turns up to race for Squizzy (p.6-8).
1. How are the boots used in this story to tell us about Charlie’s state of mind?
2. Find the times when he changes shoes. What is significant about these changes?
3. see p.46 when Dolly offers new boots.
4. see p.188 when Cecil gives him the running spikes.
5. Why does Charlie run barefoot? (p.198)
6. ‘Are you big enough to fill your father’s boots?’
   What does this expression mean in common use?

**Relationship with Squizzy**
1. Plot Charlie’s relationship with Squizzy. You might use a flow chart to show this diagrammatically.
some examples of events to cover are when -
   Squizzy helps Charlie
   Charlie feels.......... 
   Charlie works for Squizzy
   Charlie feels.....

**Choices**
There are times when Charlie makes critical decisions. These are ‘moments that define who you are’ (p.146). As he does so, time in the novel seems to stand still.
‘Heads or Tails.
Yes or no.
Stay or go.’ (p.147 and p.169)

Read p.146-152 and p.168-170
1. What do these choices reveal about Charlie?
2. Do they show different sides of his character?
3. Has Charlie changed in the time between these two decisions?
4. If so how?
5. Is Charlie too hard on himself in relation to his first decision?
6. Could he have done anything different?
7. Is Charlie remarkably brave or silly in relation to his second decision? (Justify your answers).

**Mrs Feehan**
Read p.77-79.
1. What is wrong with Mrs. Feehan after the fight with Peacock?
   ‘The bruises, after all, would heal. It was something else - something that no amount of white powder could fix.'
Ma had lost her smile.’ (p.78) Ma’s behaviour has changed quite dramatically, and it is several
months before she gets better. The Redmonds refer to it as ‘a condition’ (p.80), some people
might call it a “breakdown”. This often happens when people have experienced a threatening
event. In school, bullying can bring this about. Today it is more likely to be called an
“adjustment disorder”, or if it is more severe “obsessive compulsive disorder”, or “post
traumatic stress disorder”.

Mrs. Feehan is still struggling with grief over the death of her husband, but it is the abuse she
experiences at the hands of Mr. Peacock that triggers a breakdown in her mental and
emotional health. Charlie feels powerless to help her and worries she may never get back to
her normal self. Women were fairly powerless at the time, especially women without a
husband around. The stress of her situation, leads Mrs. Feehan to develop neurotic,
obsessive compulsive tendencies that she cannot control. She wears powder all over her
face, and is constantly scrubbing and polishing the floorboards on her knees, even to the
point of forgetting about the baby. Fortunately, we see that after some time she is back to her
old self again. These days there are plenty of medical support services to go to, for
counselling and even medication. Mrs. Feehan was lucky that she made such a quick
recovery.

**Grief**

Charlie’s Dad is with him throughout this story. He is there in the holey boots Charlie runs in,
and despite wearing Squizzy’s new replacements for a while, when Charlie really grows up he
goes back to wearing the boots he could never bring himself to throw away. Charlie often
recalls his father’s advice, e.g. about the true test of character (p.110) and to find himself a
girl who can dance (p.127). After his father’s death, Charlie ‘got so confused sometimes (he)
didn’t know who it was (he) was supposed to be’ (p. 28). He really hasn’t had time to grieve
as he has been so busy growing up and trying to support his mother, and he hasn’t really
been able to talk about his father’s death despite the many well-wishers who would help him,
only Nostrils comes close to doing so (p.40).