

## ***Because Everything Is Right but Everything Is Wrong* by Erin Donohue.**

### **Notes for Teachers**

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'It's busy! Almost overwhelming. I get what Caleb's going through, absolutely. This is not the sort of book you could make a class read. You've got to want to read it. Can I borrow it to carry on reading at lunchtime?

'Caleb's lucky to have such a perfect friend, one who is so totally on his wave length.

'Hang on a minute. I'm not so sure about this Casey person...'

These remarks capture one student's reactions while reading the opening chapters of this novel for the first time.

*Because Everything Is Right but Everything Is Wrong* deals with an issue that is highly relevant to the lives of young adults in New Zealand. Many may have experienced mental illness personally, or may know family, friends or fellow students who are struggling with depression or severe anxiety. As teachers, we are therefore mindful that within the ranks of our students there are many who are like Caleb in one way or another, and we need to take heed of their well-being. Erin Donohue's novel opens minds and provides points for discussion, inquiry and exploration.

As the novel deals with sensitive issues, including suicide, a sensitive approach to introducing the text is recommended. Perhaps discuss with colleagues ways to present students with this text. Or discuss it with the students themselves, and seek their input.

Note the support services listed at the end of the novel, and draw students' attention to these:  
*Important mental Health Contacts*

The novel is useful as a written text for a number of standards offered at Level 2 NCEA English:

*Note: If this is likely to be a text that students would choose for Achievement Standard 2.9, for which it is eminently suitable, let them read it unfettered by close pre-teaching as a literary text.*

- 2.1: Analyse specified aspect(s) of studied written text(s), supported by evidence (External examination)
- 2.3: Analyse significant aspects of unfamiliar written text(s) through close reading, supported by evidence (External examination)
- 2.6: Create a crafted and controlled visual and verbal text which develops, sustains, and structures ideas, using language features appropriate to purpose and audience to create effects. (Internal assessment)
- 2.7: Analyse significant connections across texts, supported by evidence. (Internal assessment)
- 2.8: Use information literacy skills to form developed conclusion(s). (Internal assessment)
- 2.9: Form developed personal responses to independently read texts, supported by evidence (Internal assessment)

Suggestion: Where appropriate, present the suggested formative tasks and activities using shared digital documents. Students are then able to work individually or collaboratively with other students and the teacher. They may contribute responses, add further points, offer evidence they have found in the text, analytical comments, live links to relevant supporting material, and so on.

Reading Anticipation Activity – Individual task

1. Based on the title, make predictions about what the novel will be about.
2. After reading each chapter, make a prediction about what will happen next. Note questions you have about something you have read in that chapter or previous chapters, perhaps using a bookmark where the relevant note and page number can be recorded.
3. After reading the whole novel, check to see how accurate or close your predictions were. How and at what point were your questions answered? What happened, or was revealed, that you did not anticipate? (Consider aspects that might reflect the writer’s purpose e.g. deliberate foreshadowing.)

**Literature Study**

**Externally assessed standards**

**Achievement Standards 2.1 and 2.3**

This novel offers scope as a studied written text to prepare students for the external examination literary essay, 2.1, but also helps prepare them for the unfamiliar text paper, 2.3, as Donohue uses language features thoughtfully to convey ideas.

Suggested focus activities:

**Language features**

Work with students to find examples of language features that are used throughout the novel, and consider the writer’s purpose in each case.

As a starting point, students may use an appropriate source to supply definitions of the different types of language features.

Explore Donohue’s use of figurative language, syntax, style, symbolism, vocabulary, and sound devices, and places in her novel where any of these techniques are used in combination to create effects. A collection of quotations from the novel can be found below the chart. The use of a shared document approach allows for collaboration, and once completed, the chart provides students with notes for later reference.

Example of language features working in combination to create effects

The following excerpt from the opening chapter helps us to appreciate Caleb’s debilitating anxiety, because the power of the **simile** is intensified by the use of **repetition**: ‘Everyone turns to me, their eyes like laser pointers burning through my clothes, through my skin, into my bones.’

Language feature(s)	Definition of term	Example(s) from the novel	Purpose and effect
Metaphor			

Analogy			
Personification			
Simile			
Listing			
Motif or image			
Simple sentence			
Compound sentence			
Complex sentence			
Minor sentence			
Balanced sentences			
Triple construction			
Verb tense			
Abstract noun			
Adjective			
Adverb			
Conditional words and expressions			
Narrative Point of View, including 1 <sup>st</sup> Person and unreliable narrator			
Symbolism			
Text layout			
Italics			
Alliteration			
Onomatopoeia			
Vocabulary with negative connotations			
Vocabulary with positive connotations			
Repetition			

Paradox			
Syllogism			
Oxymoron			
Irony			
Synaesthesia			
Hyperbole			
Rhetorical question			
Allusion			
Present participles			
Punctuation			

Work with students to discover how the writer uses more than one type of language feature to portray Caleb's character, his mood, and his perception of his world in the following excerpts:

'My hands twist, dancing some hot, tangled tango where they can never get close enough to each other.' (Ch.1)

'Inside my head alarms are ringing. I call this The Fear. Sometimes it's a sparking wall socket lodged in my heart. Sometimes it's ice cold water trickling through my veins.... I can't make myself move, can't make myself turn the page. I'm paralysed. Stuck. I've started calling this The Deadness.' (Ch. 2)

'But slowly I feel them all looking at me. Waiting. It's like the music stops. My breathing stops. Time stops.' (Ch. 3)

'It takes me a week to work up the strength to turn the water off. A month to get dressed. A year to walk downstairs to the dining room door.' (Ch.4)

'How is it possible to be totally oblivious to your family trying to talk to you? How is it possible that I wouldn't even register their voices?' (Ch. 5)

'I want the leaves to crunch under my feet but it rained last night so they stick to the path in soggy clumps.' (Ch. 8)

'She asks what I could bring to the job and I wonder what the job wants me to bring. I think of one episode of Miranda Hart's sitcom where she answers the same question by saying, *I could bring some tea and cakes to it, would it like that?*'

'My family, slipping away from me. Or am I slipping away from them?' (Ch.11)

'I throw for *my* Deadness and *my* Fear becoming *our* Deadness and *our* Fear.' (Ch.11)

'I just want to do it. It's the whole "ripping off the plaster" thing. I want it over with. Mum wants to peel away as slowly as she can. Mum doesn't want this to hurt.' (Ch.12)

'I taste the words on my tongue. Let them pool in my mouth, swell against my cheeks.' (Ch.16)

'Imagine if she visited me every day. I'd be out of here in no time.' (Ch.16)

'No yes/no/yes/no/yes maybe.' (Ch. 17)

'Her heart took a hammering that night but she didn't die.' (Ch.18)

'Because everything is right but everything is wrong.' (Title, and Ch.10)

'There's a bunch of fake flowers on the windowsill.' (Ch. 17)

## **Settings**

Work with students to determine how settings, both in place and time, provide useful insights into Caleb's character. Consider how particular settings are used to comment on an aspect of human nature.

### Place:

Bed and bedroom; at home

In the car

School: C5, library, canteen, corridor, Careers office (with its posters. Ch.9)

Aaron's place in Porirua

Doctor Moore's Office (with its poster Ch. 5), hospital,

Aotea Lagoon

The park

The hospital psych ward (Ch.13)

The 'Adolescent Crazy House' treatment centre

### Time:

Assignment deadlines

Wanting time to stand still (Ch. 9)

Wanting time to go backwards (Ch. 8)

Counting down the hours and days

## **Narrative point of view**

Work with students to establish how the narrative point of view influences our response to characters, events, settings and ideas in the text.

Examine the effects of the 1<sup>st</sup> person narrative, both singular and plural, and the unreliable narrator aspect, noting when Caleb uses 1<sup>st</sup> person singular, and when he uses the plural form.

Consider how 1<sup>st</sup> person point of view and passages of interior monologue highlight aspects of human nature.

Note the importance of reading between the lines, and noting clues that prompt us to question Caleb’s perspective and version of events.

Caleb	Explanation and evidence from the text	To what extent does Caleb represent human nature? Give personal or real world examples.	
How Caleb sees himself	Caleb refuses to face up to the possibility that he needs help. After rejecting his Mum’s suggestion that he see Dr Moore, and insisting he’s fine, he persuades himself: ‘I’m not sick. I’m just tired and stressed and maybe a little bit scared of everything.’ Note how the doctor challenges Caleb to speak for himself: ‘So that was your Mum’s perspective. How was it from your end, Caleb?’ (Ch. 5)	How we see ourselves	Some of us minimise our issues, and try to rationalise that what we are experiencing or feeling is nothing to worry about. We sometimes choose to kid ourselves that everything is fine when it’s not, and avoid seeking help, perhaps out of fear about what might happen to us if we admit to not coping.
How Caleb thinks others see him		How we think others see us	
What Caleb hears others say about him, and what he thinks they mean		What others say about us that tells what they think of us	
What Caleb thinks about others and their motives, and what this tells about him		What we think or say about others, and what this tells us about ourselves	
How Caleb would like others to see him		How we would like others to see us	

## Characters and relationships, and their function

Consider how characters are used by the writer to comment on an aspect of human nature.

### Caleb

Aspects of his character:

- His freeze, fight, flight responses when stressed
- His panic attacks
- His irrational thoughts or actions
- *The Deadness* and *The Fear*
- His sense of detachment from reality
- His inner voice, impulses, and reactions
- His moods
- The 'alright' scale
- His thoughts
- His cynicism and sense of the absurd
- How he communicates with others
- His relationships with others
- His projected persona, real persona, fears, id, ego, superego
- His tendency to overthinking, circular thinking, defeatist thinking
- His dependence on a false reality
- His self-harming
- His judgements about others and their motives
- His sense of detachment from reality
- His habit of keeping secrets
- His trait of noticing physical details
- His way of imagining what he'd like to say, but not saying what he thinks.
- His way of giving himself a 'pep talk'.

### Group activity to develop understanding of character and writer's purpose

Select aspects of Caleb's character, with evidence, and suggest how the writer uses this aspect to comment on human nature.

An important aspect of Caleb's character	Evidence from the text	How the writer uses this aspect to comment on human nature
Caleb often feels detached from the real world and from others around him.	'My brain switches off and I'm on autopilot. I nod and shake and swear and smile in all the right places...But I can feel the distance between us.' (Ch. 1)	Donohue, using 1 <sup>st</sup> person point of view, highlights Caleb's tendency to detach himself from a stressful situation by going through the motions of expected behaviour, even though he feels anxious and disconnected from his classmates. He hides his true feelings. The writer wants us to be aware that many people suffering from severe anxiety or depression may hide inner turmoil behind a cheerful exterior,

		to avoid drawing attention to themselves.

## Casey

Consider:

- What Caleb sees in Casey – her attributes and quirks.
- Casey's role in the narrative.
- How Casey's character helps us to understand Caleb.
- To what extent Caleb is dependent on Casey.

## Other characters:

Consider Caleb's relationships with others, and how his interactions with these characters help us to understand him:

- Family members: Pat, Mum and Dad
- Friends and 'friends'
- Teachers
- Medical personnel: Doctor Moore, psychiatrist Anne Lewis, therapists Sandra, Chris, Todd and Alice, nurses, support workers

## Ideas and themes

Work with students to identify important ideas and themes embedded in the text, looking for those with universal relevance. Consider how these ideas are used to comment on an aspect of human nature.

Idea or theme (Expand these brief ideas into a thesis statement that can be explored and argued in depth)	When and how this idea or theme is shown in the text, with evidence	How the idea is used to comment on human nature.
Pain		
Identity		
Reality and unreality		

Truth, lies, fakery and fiction		
Loneliness		
The outsider		
Fear and courage		
Wishful thinking		
Personal journeys		

## Structure

Work with students to examine how the writer has structured the novel to control the way information is revealed and disclosed to the reader. Track the decoys and clues placed by the writer to throw readers off the scent, or foreshadow later events. Note the points in the text where your predictions were realised, providing evidence from the text that informed your judgment. Note also the way the passing of time is shown. Consider how Casey adds a structural element.

Clue	Evidence	Comment on effect
The first time Casey appears in Caleb's life.	'On my way to my next class I feel someone walking beside me.' (Ch. 2)	Caleb senses Casey's presence before he actually sees her.

## Links to society and the wider world

Work with students, discussing the relevance of the novel to the wider world. Media releases and features are a good starting place, but EPIC database offers materials that provide a window into the extent of the subject, and *Because Everything Is Right but Everything Is Wrong* provides a list of support services and contacts at the end of the book. Again, a digital shared document gives scope for a collaborative approach to finding information and participating in discussions.

### Reading around the issues to broaden knowledge and understanding

This novel invites interest in a number of mental health issues and inquiry topics. Possibilities may include mental health treatments, different perspectives on mental health, and so on. Encourage students to explore a range of sources, including EPIC Database's The Health and Wellbeing Resource Centre, Opposing Viewpoints in Context, and Global Issues in Context, which offer useful articles and papers on stress, anxiety, depression and teen suicide. Students might be interested in historical perspectives on mental health treatments, and institutions such as Bedlam, England's first institution for the mentally ill. *Te Ara, The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, outlines the story of mental health services in New Zealand. Likewise, New Zealand's online newspapers regularly run features

supporting mental health and suicide prevention, and a quick search brings up useful articles. Finally, a list of 'Important Mental Health Contacts' is included at the end of the book.

Source	What we learn about anxiety, depression and mental illness amongst young adults.	How this information supports our understanding of the characters in the novel
<p>Information about the writer from Escalator Press: link to Interview with Erin Donohue:  <a href="http://www.escalatorpress.co.nz/product/everything-right-everything-wrong/">http://www.escalatorpress.co.nz/product/everything-right-everything-wrong/</a></p> <p>Link to Interview with Erin Donohue:  <a href="https://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/nin-tonoon/audio/2018624545/i-said-take-me-to-the-doctor-and-we-can-start-from-there">https://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/nin-tonoon/audio/2018624545/i-said-take-me-to-the-doctor-and-we-can-start-from-there</a></p>		
<p>EPIC:  <a href="https://www.tki.org.nz/epic2">https://www.tki.org.nz/epic2</a> offers a range of sources</p>		
<p>From online news:  <i>Suicide and silence: Deciding who can say what</i>  <b>Sunday Star Times</b>  <a href="https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/95376224/suicide-and-silence-deciding-who-can-say-what">https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/95376224/suicide-and-silence-deciding-who-can-say-what</a></p>		

## Literary essay

Note that the following selection of literary essay topics from the 2017 NCEA external examinations lend themselves to responses on this text, not only as a stand-alone text, but also as a companion text to others studied:

### Level 2

Write an essay on at least one written text that you have studied, in response to one of the questions below.

1. Analyse how one or more minor characters influenced the development of a main character.

2. Analyse how language features were used to create a vivid setting.
3. Analyse how one or more important events represented a turning point for a character.
4. Analyse how language features were used to capture the reader's imagination.
5. Analyse how the text was structured to reveal a surprise.
6. Analyse how one or more ideas were used to comment on an aspect of human nature.  
(Note: 'Ideas' may refer to character, theme, or setting)

<http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/nqfdocs/ncea-resource/exams/2017/91098-exm-2017.pdf>

### Collaborative essay writing

Work with students on selecting a best-fit topic for this text, planning the essay, and writing it as a collaborative exercise. Display the assessment criteria and schedule, and discuss which elements are fulfilled and which still need developing.

Students can then adapt and personalise this essay, the exercise providing valuable learning and practice for the external assessment.

### **Internally assessed standards**

This novel also offers scope as a written text for a range of internal Level 2 English Achievement Standards: 2.6, 2.7, 2.8 and 2.9

- **2.6: Create a crafted and controlled visual and verbal text which develops, sustains, and structures ideas, using language features appropriate to purpose and audience to create effects.**

*Te Kete Ipurangi*, NZQA's support site for teachers (TKI) offers Level 2 assessment resources where two tasks in particular have relevance to this novel:

1. Resource reference: English 2.6A v2

Resource title: Looking forward/looking back

'...develop and perform a dramatic monologue based on a character from a text.

Your monologue will focus on the character **before** and **after** a significant event or change in their lives. Show this significant event or change to the audience both visually and verbally and connect the ideas between the two parts (the before and after) of your monologue.'

2. Resource reference: English 2.6B v3

Resource title: Delving into ideas from texts

'...create a controlled visual text focused on ideas that interest you from a text you have studied in class this year.'

<http://ncea.tki.org.nz/Resources-for-Internally-Assessed-Achievement-Standards/English/Level-2-English>

- **2.7: Analyse significant connections across texts, supported by evidence.**

Another applicable TKI Level 2 English resource gives students the opportunity to use this novel as one of four texts for Achievement Standard 2.7. For this assessment 'Now, you connect the dots' students 'select a particular aspect of text (such as character, setting, or theme) and analyse the significant connections across a range of texts.'

Resource reference: English 2.7B v2

Resource title: Now, you connect the dots

<http://ncea.tki.org.nz/Resources-for-Internally-Assessed-Achievement-Standards/English/Level-2-English>

- **2.8: Use information literacy skills to form developed conclusion(s).**

Donohue's novel *Because Everything Is Right but Everything Is Wrong* raises issues that students could explore as inquiry topics for Achievement Standard 2.8. The TKI teacher guidelines for this Level 2 English resource explain that 'the purpose of the inquiry is to give students a context through which to demonstrate their information literacy skills and the formation of developed, convincing, and perceptive conclusions from their investigation.'

Resource reference: English 2.8B v2

Resource title: Investigate

Students 'complete an inquiry into a topic linked to a written, visual, or oral text.'

The inquiry enables students to demonstrate their information literacy skills and ability to form developed conclusions from their investigation.'

<http://ncea.tki.org.nz/Resources-for-Internally-Assessed-Achievement-Standards/English/Level-2-English>

- **2.9: Form developed personal responses to independently read texts, supported by evidence**

As students are required to read texts 'independently' for this standard, leave them free to read and respond personally to *Because Everything Is Right but Everything Is Wrong* without pre-teaching the text.

As the teacher guidelines for the TKI internal assessment resource for this standard make clear, 'Students need to independently select, read, and recommend' at least six texts, and texts 'should not be taken from those studied directly as part of a student's literature study.'

Resource reference: English 2.9A v2

Resource title: Highly recommended!

<http://ncea.tki.org.nz/Resources-for-Internally-Assessed-Achievement-Standards/English/Level-2-English>

