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EVERYTHING IS CHANGED

Nova Weetman



Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising teacher librarian
in context with the Australian curriculum
(English)

ISBN: 978 0 7022 5416 1 / AUS \$19.95

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SYNOPSIS

Jake and Alex are best mates, but their friendship crumbles as they bury the consequences of a careless mistake and hide a terrible secret. Filled with remorse and guilt, Jake wants to confess to the police, however Alex has moved on with his life – new house, new school, and new friends.

Told in reverse chronology through the alternating voices of Jake and Alex, *Everything Is Changed* is a confronting and thought-provoking novel that exposes the impact of lies and guilt on a once-unbreakable friendship.

THEMES

Relationships:

- The friendship between Jake and Alex breaks down as a result of the lies and guilt that follow the tragic mistake they make.
- Jake is convinced he will end up in prison, just like his father. Their relationship is non-existent.
- Alex does not enjoy a close relationship with his parents.
- Both Jake and Alex are attracted to new girl Ellie. Her relationship with Alex makes Jake uncomfortable.

Guilt:

- Guilt erodes the friendship between Jake and Alex.
- Guilt prevents Jake from foreseeing a promising future.

Honesty:

- Jake's and Alex's friendship and futures could have had different outcomes had the boys been honest about the accident.

WRITING STYLE

Everything is Changed is written in first person, present tense, and is told in reverse chronology. The narrative alternates between Jake's and Alex's perspectives, giving the reader insight into and empathy for each of the boys. The structure of the text results in a page-turning read as readers are taken to the exact moment in which everything changed at the end of the book. It is suitable for a Young Adult audience, both male and female, but would particularly attract reluctant male readers with its inclusion of skateboarding and the unique bond between best mates.

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STUDY NOTES

- The opening pages of *Everything Is Changed* immediately hooks the reader. Discuss the way in which the author has successfully created a sense of urgency and tension through this scene.
- As you read *Everything Is Changed*, create character portraits of Jake and Alex. Include personality traits, physical characteristics and attitudes. Add to these portraits as you read through the novel.
- Throughout the text, both Jake and Alex struggle with the relationships they have with their fathers. How does this contribute to their friendship? How might the boys be different if they had had better relationships with their fathers?
- How are Jake and Alex similar and different from one another? How do these aspects change the further you get into the novel?
- How do both boys change throughout the narrative? Give examples from the text to support your response.
- Jake makes the observation that everything looks the same even after something so horrific has happened. Have you ever had this same sensation? Share with a friend or write a reflection to explore these thoughts.
- What does Ellie mean when she says, 'the pool of damage has spread to anyone who cares' (p2)?
- Speculate on what you think might have happened to implicate the boys.
- Discuss the scene in which Alex's mother takes him to the police station. How has Nova Weetman created tension with phrases such as '[the car] idling angrily on the street, like even it knows I'm guilty' and 'she stabs it off again, sentencing us to silence' (p7–8)?
- What do we learn about Alex from the first chapter he narrates?
- Contrast Alex's home life with Jake's. How do small details like sheets being changed, quality of cars and the difference between their school experiences drive a bigger wedge between the boys?
- What clues do we get that Alex doesn't have a very close relationship with his parents, for example, 'our responses crashing into each other and blowing apart all the truth in our relationship' (p10)?
- In his second chapter, Jake says, 'I can't find my thoughts. They're all messed up in my head' (p11). Have you ever felt like Jake? Discuss Nova Weetman's ability to tap into tangible experiences and emotions to draw the reader into the text and make the main characters so relatable.

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- On p13, Jake pulls a newspaper clipping from his pocket. After reading the text, write this newspaper article about the accident.
- When at the police station, what does Jake mean when he says ‘the phone smells like other people’s fears’ (p17)?
- Why does Jake want to hug the police officer when he goes into the cell?
- Reread p20, where Nova Weetman describes Jake’s experience inside the prison cell. How has she made this scene so effective?
- Discuss the scene in which Alex plays golf. What can we tell about Tone, Tone’s father and Alex’s father from this scene? How do their traits help paint a picture of the new world in which Alex finds himself?
- Why does Alex comment that his father ‘doesn’t even smile congratulations. And that hurts more than anything’ (p25)?
- Discuss Alex’s reflection that ‘the more I do things like that, let people think one thing when the truth is something different, the closer I am to being a person I don’t like much’ (p48). If this is how he feels, why doesn’t he change his behaviour?
- Why does Alex say that all the things Jake knows about him are like ‘little bombs waiting to go off’ (p49)? Give examples of what ‘little bombs’ he means.
- Reflect on Alex’s observation that ‘maybe that’s what happens to memories. The good ones start to fade even when you don’t want them to’ (p50). Are you able to relate to this feeling? Share with a friend.
- Why does Jake shave his head? Of what is he really ridding himself?
- What role does Mr Cap play in Jake’s life? Have you had a teacher who has helped you in this way? Share with a friend.
- What are your impressions of Tone? How does he compromise Alex’s principles?
- Hold your own debate on the same topic that Alex debates – ‘That Civilisation Has Failed’.
- Why does Alex offer to walk Sarah home from the party? Why does he leave her to walk to the door on her own?
- Discuss Alex’s comment that ‘our scars are invisible. And they won’t ever heal’ (p72). Do you agree? Why?
- Why does Alex place so much emphasis on the Latin crest on his blazer and joining the rowing team? How does he really feel about going to the Grammar school? Why does he feel this way?

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- Why is Jake determined to find Sarah, whom he describes as ‘that girl with the eyes, that girl I broke without even touching her’ (p86)?
- Why does Jake feel as though Alex ‘thinks I’m only as good as the cheap fast food I sometimes binge on after school’ (p89)? Is Jake being fair about his friend? Discuss.
- Discuss the following passage from Alex’s narrative: ‘I know I’m lying to everyone, but that’s what happens when you put a man in a coma and then he dies. You become two people, split down the middle between before and now. And the now is not such a good place to be.’ (p116).
- Why does Alex describe his first day at his new school as ‘a sort of supersized world’ (p152)?
- Why does Tone insist on giving Alex a new nickname – Zander? What does this reveal about Tone’s character?
- When Alex goes to a new school, Jake says, ‘I’m not jealous. I’m hurt. And that’s so much worse’ (p159). Why does he feel this way?
- Describe the relationship that Jake shares with his mother, particularly as epitomised by their night out having gelato (p175), which is a particularly tender scene.
- How does the death of Lottie affect Alex? Given that she was a present from Alex’s dad, what does Lottie symbolise?
- How do the deaths of Lottie and Peter Waterman affect Alex in similar ways?
- What relationship does Alex have with his sister, Sass? Why is their relationship so much closer than that he has with his parents?
- Why does it take until p127 for readers to learn the victim’s name – Peter Waterman?
- Why doesn’t Jake want his mother to feel proud of him? Why does he feel he doesn’t deserve to enjoy science or look forward to a future?
- Why does Jake keep Alex’s report card from the skip bin?
- After visiting the CSIRO, Jake finally feels as though ‘if I can just keep going, everything will be okay after all’ (p208). How does the visit to these labs help him see the hint of a positive future?
- Discuss Alex’s realisation that even when he leaves the borough and his old school, he’ll just take the guilt ‘with me wherever I go’ (p211).
- How does Ellie affect the friendship between Jake and Alex? Give examples to support your ideas.
- Why does being better at science than Alex make Jake feel better?

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- Reread the scene on p225 in which Alex's parents read the newspaper about Peter Waterman's death and condemn the perpetrators. Why is this such a powerful scene?
- What role does skateboarding play in *Everything Is Changed*?
- When Jake rubs Alex's back when he is vomiting (p250), it shows the depth of their friendship, yet the final pages indicate that their friendship will never be repaired. Discuss the many elements that have eroded such a tight relationship.
- Alex and Jake try to get on with their lives, and occasionally forget what has happened, before remembering the tragic events of that night. Have you ever had this sensation? Share with a friend.
- How might the story have been different had the boys turned themselves in straight after the accident?
- Discuss the fact that good readers read backwards and forwards through the text, particularly in a story told in reverse chronology.
- After finishing the text, reread the first two chapters. How does rereading change your understanding of these chapters knowing what later unfolds?
- The boys made a mistake. Are they being too hard on themselves or is their guilt justified? Discuss.
- Would you rather be Alex or Jake? Why?
- How does the absence of strong father figures affect the lives of both Jake and Alex?
- Write a chapter from the perspective of Jake's mother.
- In the role of either Jake or Alex, write and perform a monologue that demonstrates your understanding of the turmoil they are experiencing after the death of Peter Waterman.
- Write a reflection about the importance of friendship in your own life.
- Plot the reverse chronology structure of *Everything Is Changed* on a story map. Discuss this method of telling a story.
- Find out more about Camberwell and Greensborough (the borough). Create a suburb profile, including images, to help create a visual of the worlds in which Alex and Jake live.
- In the role of Ellie, Jake or Alex, create a vision board that demonstrates your understanding of that character.
- Compare *Everything Is Changed* with a film such as *Pretty in Pink*, *Dead Poet's Society* or *The Outsiders*.

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AUTHOR MOTIVATION

In 2015 I was talking at a writer's festival about a short film I wrote many years ago called *Ripples*. It was about two bored teenage boys who throw a rock off a freeway overpass and hit a car. UQP publisher Kristina Schulz heard me mention it and suggested it would make a great YA book. And so the idea of *Everything Is Changed* was born. But I didn't want to just tell a consequence story written chronologically; instead I wanted to tell a story of a friendship that unravels because of what these boys do. And to achieve that, I decided the book had to be written in reverse, starting with one teen in jail and ending with the night they go to the freeway.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nova Weetman has been writing for 18 years. As a screenwriter, she has written short films for Film Victoria, including *Ripples* and *Mr Wasinski's Song* (AWGIE nomination and winner Best Australian Short at MIFF), and has written for *Neighbours*, *Pixel Pinkie*, *H2O*, *Buzz Bumble*, *Wild But True* and *Fanshaw and Crudnut*. As a writer, she has had short fiction published in *Overland*, *Mslexia*, *Kill Your Darlings*, *Wet Ink* and *Island* and non-fiction published in *Overland* and Fairfax Media. Nova is the author of three middle-grade books, including two in the *Choose Your Own Ever After* series, as well as *The Secrets We Keep* (2016). She has also published two young adult novels, *The Haunting of Lily Frost* (2014) and *Frankie and Joely* (2015). *Everything Is Changed* is Nova's sixth book.