

TEACHER'S RESOURCE KIT LIKE WALLPAPER

BARBARA ELSE (ED.)

This is an anthology of New Zealand short stories especially for teenagers. Being a teenager is arguably the most intense time in anybody's life. It's a powerful, highly concentrated time when small things can seem insuperable but huge things are often accomplished without effort. The writers of the twenty stories gathered in this anthology have all been there, done that. One is in fact still there, going through the teenage years herself.

Each story here reflects an aspect of what it is to be a teenager in New Zealand. The settings are New Zealand homes and flats, local schools and roads, beaches, rivers, cities. But in another sense each piece is universal.

Issues addressed in the stories range across aspects of peer pressure and friendship. Parents and family relationships feature as do young romance, sexuality, and death. There is a mixture of tone, voice and form. The writers include Jane Westaway, David Hill and Fleur Beale as well as some stunning newcomers such as Natasha Lewis and Samantha Stanley.

Barbara Else is a successful writer of adult fiction. She has edited previous story collections *Claws & Jaws*, *30 New Zealand Animal Stories*, *Another 30 New Zealand Stories for Children* and *30 Weird and Wonderful New Zealand Stories*.



Reading age: 13-17

**Suitable for male and female students
(NB: 8 out of 19 authors are male.)**

Excellent for NCEA Levels 1, 2 & 3:

**English written language, internal
assessment.**

**Contemporary New Zealand literature;
contemporary Polynesian literature.**



Like Wallpaper is published by Random House New Zealand Ltd,
Private Bag 102950, North Shore Mail Centre, Auckland,
tel: 09 444 7197, fax: 09 444 7524
Email: customerservice@randomhouse.co.nz

SYNOPSIS

The styles of the stories range from the humorous and anecdotal to the social realist and supernatural — with characters who are a mix of streetwise and inexperienced, insightful and thick-skinned, foolhardy and staunch.

‘The Meaning of Elephants’ by James Norcliffe

A comic tale of how a new boy falls out with — then wins over — the most popular girl in school.

‘Ashes’ by Renata Hopkins

The children of two fractured families have to spend a weekend together as one family’s mother offers the other a temporary refuge. It brings tensions on both sides to a head.

‘Playing’ by Hugh Brown

A short, sharp, bittersweet story of a male friendship and separation.

“‘How Many People Live in Your House?’” by Peggy Dunlop

A trick is played on a nosy neighbour; the perpetrators are the kids in a Samoan family in 1950s Wellington.

‘The Unsaid Things’ by Natasha Lewis

A delicately indirect story about teenage sexuality; a relationship between two girls intensifies and then crumbles.

‘Deep Waters’ by David Hill

On an outdoors pursuits course Cass agitates against a student who seems to go slowly on everything — then she has to rely on him during a dangerous river crossing.

‘Unaccompanied Minor’ by Jane Westaway

Skip left home at 17; he relishes the independence, he says, but we learn more about why he took off on his own so early.

‘Stage Struck’ by William Davis

Tama’s been practising for two months for the night of the school production. He’s got one line. Will he pull it off?

‘Glow-worms’ by Pat Quinn

An outdoor-education group visits some glow-worm caves and the narrator becomes split off from the group. The narrator is mysteriously guided to safety and the events lead to a revelation about the outdoor education teacher.

‘Just Imagine’ by David Hill

This story looks at the conflict between displaying bravado and real feelings . . . should you impress your mates, or the girl you’ve got your eye on?

‘How to Build a Coffin’ by Lily O’Donovan

A girl comes to terms with her mother’s terminal illness and bonds with a wider support network.

‘Mates’ by Fleur Beale

Three 14-year-olds, Callum, Jake and the Lamb, have a hard, drunken night and get into serious trouble with the law.

‘It’s Like, Like’ by Renata Hopkins

A girl plays with similes while thinking about family and school.

‘One Good Reason’ by Peter Friend

A younger brother tries to protect an older brother against parental anger, but his loyalty has terrible costs.

‘Alphabetical Destiny’ by Brigid Lowry

A woman looks back on a friendship that was built on awe and laced with harsh self-criticism: there is still love left, but also relief that the relationship has changed.

‘You Know Who’ by Jane Westaway

A girl tries to break out of the conformity of the in-group she’s become a part of, when she sees how the crowd alienates another student at their school.

‘Friendly Persuasion’ by David Hill

A cool new guy at school has a knack for leading other kids astray, while appearing to be innocent of wrong-doing himself.

‘Like Wallpaper’ by Carl Nixon

A young man wonders about meeting up with the father who left when he was six.

‘And After That, the Dark’ by Bill Nagelkerke

A boy has to study the death customs of another culture, and a fateful school trip takes him to a place where these customs are suddenly of urgent importance.

‘Apple of My Eye’ by Samantha Stanley

Two young sisters ride the tricky currents between their strict, traditional Samoan family rules and the temptations of palagi culture.

NCEA LEVEL ONE

AIM: Write in a range of genres

Produce creative writing

Write a short story based around your own experience of family life, school life, or peer pressure. Use the first person.

Write about the same incident from the perspective of another character in the story. Use the first person perspective for this new angle, also.

AIM: Produce formal writing

EITHER write a book review of *Like Wallpaper* for a national newspaper, highlighting at least four short stories for specific commentary;

OR write a new blurb for the publisher’s reprint of the collection.

AIM: Speak with confidence

EITHER read your book review or blurb aloud to the class;

OR write and present a speech on one of the major themes in the collection. (See list of themes below. Students may also discover their own themes.) Use examples from the short stories to support your argument.

AIM: Media or drama production

EITHER turn one of the short stories in this collection into a piece for stage or film: e.g. dramatic monologue, dialogue, etc;

OR retell one of the stories from the perspective of a different narrator or character. Present this as a dramatic monologue.

AIM: Conduct research

Research the history of the short story in English literature. How can we define the short story as a literary genre?

NCEA LEVEL TWO

AIM: Produce crafted and developed creative writing

Write a short story in the third person about one of the themes in the short story collection, e.g. rites of passage; loyalty; betrayal; sexuality; family pressure; cultural differences; the generation gap; mortality.

AIM: Produce crafted and developed transactional writing

EITHER write a book review of *Like Wallpaper* for a national newspaper, highlighting at least four short stories for specific commentary;

OR imagine you are the editor of this collection, and you have to write an essay for a book-trade magazine about the themes and concerns of the collection.

AIM: Explore the language of and think critically about written texts

Close language study:

Choose three short stories in the collection and discuss their use of language: imagery, sentence structure, narrative voice and the type of short story each one is. (For example, ghost story, realistic fiction, slice of life or twist-in-the-tale? Are there stories that seem to combine more than one description of the short story? How does the short story appear to differ from a poem, or a novel?)

Analyse the narrative voice, language style, and themes in at least three of the short stories in the collection. For example:

- Is the language colloquial, formal or a mixture?
- Does the narrator address the reader directly? If so, what effect does this have? If not, what effect does that have?
- Does the author use descriptive language to achieve certain effects (for example, similes, metaphors and other comparisons)?
- Does the author use slang or conventional, grammatically correct sentences?
- What tense is the story written in — past or present? What effect does that tense create?
- Is there a clear plot progression, or instead are we seeing the way private thoughts develop in an individual mind?
- What are the cumulative effects of all these stylistic features? How do the form and the style help to reinforce the themes?

Critical writing:

EITHER write an essay that compares the short-story collection *Like Wallpaper* to one of your other set texts this year.

You might want to focus on genre and compare a handful of stories from the anthology to older New Zealand short stories, or you might want to find short stories that share similar thematic concerns to one of your other set texts;

OR compare two or three of the stories in *Like Wallpaper* to the short fiction of an earlier New Zealand short story writer — Katherine Mansfield, Frank Sargeson, etc. What are the similarities; what are the contrasts?

AIM: Speak with confidence

Write and present a speech for the affirmative or negative side in one of the following debate topics:

- ‘Teenagers are a media invention’
- ‘Peer pressure is always destructive’
- ‘There is no culture in New Zealand’
- ‘History never repeats’
- ‘Youth is a period of intense narcissism’

Use quotations from stories in *Like Wallpaper* to help support your argument.

AIM: Conduct research: investigate a language or literature topic and present it in written form

EITHER write an essay on one of the themes that appear in *Like Wallpaper*:

- The nature of innocence and experience
 - Discipline versus freedom
 - Maturity versus immaturity
 - Conformity versus insight
 - Bravery versus foolishness
-

- Risk-taking versus fearfulness
- Repercussions of domestic violence
- Youth as renewal, rebellion, yet also rawness and vulnerability
- Codes of honour, valour or loyalty: between friends (or family members) versus the law of the state, or other authority figures
- How parents, institutions and authorities can fail young people
- Cultural misunderstandings; cultural differences

Use plenty of evidence from the short stories themselves to support your points.

OR research the ‘unreliable narrator’ in literature, and use one or two of the short stories in *Like Wallpaper* to illustrate some of the effects created with this narrative technique.

NCEA LEVEL THREE

AIM: Produce creative writing

Write a short story that follows one of the main short-story traditions: twist in the tale (e.g. detective fiction); impressionist; realist; slice of life; comedy; supernatural.

AIM: Speaking with confidence: construct and deliver an oral presentation

EITHER prepare a 10-minute presentation based on the research project you choose below;

OR write a critical analysis of at least three of the short stories, and prepare this as the type of review you would hear on a national radio arts programme.

AIM: Conduct research: complete independent research on a language or literature topic and present findings in written form

Write an essay (1500 words) on one of the following choices:

EITHER research the history of the short story in New Zealand. What are the major short-story traditions within New Zealand literature, and how might these compare to and/or contrast with English literature before 1900? Are there typical qualities to a New Zealand short story? Does *Like Wallpaper* appear to support a long tradition, or does it renovate/change it in some way?

OR select one or two *Like Wallpaper* authors. Research their biographical and literary information. Write an essay comparing their other work to their contributions in this anthology. Are there similar techniques and concerns? If not, what are the differences?

FURTHER ACTIVITIES FOR ALL LEVELS

CHARACTER STUDIES

Ask students to write character studies on the protagonists in at least three of the short stories. Ask them to consider how their selected characters might be:

- forming judgement and self-reliance
- pulling back the veil between childhood and adulthood
- variously learning about society, sexuality, mortality and the deceptions of the so-called real world

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

Discuss definitions of youth, youth culture, cultural variety and difference — particularly between Pacific Island cultures and European/Western cultures; or religious and secular practices.

Do teenagers really exist as a separate social category? Are teenagers a marketing invention? How do we define teenagehood and adulthood?

Students can discuss their own place in family, local community and wider society. The stories will help them to focus on issues of law and order, loyalty and family pressures.

ISSUES/THEMES

(also mentioned in Level Two exercises)

Ask students to choose at least three short stories from the collection, and write a short essay on how their chosen stories treat one of the following themes:

- The nature of innocence and experience
- Discipline versus freedom
- Maturity versus immaturity
- Conformity versus insight
- Bravery versus foolishness
- Risk-taking versus fearfulness
- Repercussions of domestic violence
- Youth as renewal, rebellion yet also rawness and vulnerability
- Codes of honour, valour or loyalty: between friends (or family members) versus the law of the state, or other authority figures
- How parents, institutions and authorities can fail young people

