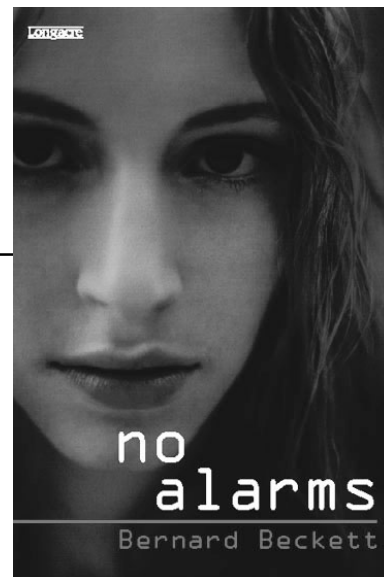


# no alarms

Bernard Beckett



Things I hate

I hate feeling stupid...

I hate everyone who thinks they're better than me...

I hate rules...

I hate posers...

I hate people who give in.

**S**ixteen-year-old Sharon's had enough. School sucks and even in her repeat year, she just doesn't get it. Her mother Kaz behaves more like a teenager than a mum, and Sharon gets left too often with her young brother Zinny. She wants out.

Along comes Justin who offers a way. His hand's on the door to a glittery new world where the risks are high. But it's a world that could pay for her wildest dreams. A dangerous world that could put an end to everything.

*No Alarms* will speak to a whole generation of disillusioned teenagers – and reveal something to those who are not. A fast-paced, provocative story where Sharon has to find her own way through.

## RESOURCE KIT

FOR USE IN SCHOOLS

Contains:

- comprehension questions
- discussion points
- creative and critical exercises
- debate topics
- visual responses
- drama exercises

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

BERNARD BECKETT was born in Featherston, New Zealand. He followed school with a degree in Economics then 'fell in love with teaching'. The discovery of teaching drama and improvisation came next, along with an interest in outdoor education. He now teaches at Onslow College in Wellington where he first began writing and directing plays.

Beckett's debut novel *Lester* was published to wide acclaim in 1999. His second novel *Red Cliff* was featured in the List of Notable New Zealand Young Adult Books of 2000. *Jolt* Beckett's third novel was a finalist in the 2002 New Zealand Post Children's Book Awards. A prolific and energetic writer, he has two novels in line for publication and is currently working on another.

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## Comprehension Questions:

### CHAPTER ONE

1. What are our first impressions of Sharon's and her mother's relationship?
2. What do we learn about Sharon very early on in the novel that suggests she finds it hard to focus or stick to decisions?
3. What are our first impressions of Sharon's family's lifestyle?
4. What instincts does Sharon seem to have about the man she spots in the park?
5. Why did Sharon decide to do maths, and what does this say about her character?
6. What image on page 13 helps to reinforce that Sharon finds maths incomprehensible?
7. How could Sharon's decision to go to the pines be seen as a mistake?

### CHAPTER TWO

1. What is it about Carla's and Sharon's game (page 19) that tells us Sharon has been unhappy for a while?
2. What does the description "part dog part steroid" mean?
3. What does Sharon think will bring her happiness at this point?
4. Why does Sharon think Justin's bedroom can't really be a bedroom?
5. What does the phrase "places you've cased" mean?
6. What reasons does Sharon have for wanting to get in on Justin's scams?
7. What small actions on pages 27–28 show that Sharon wants to change her life?
8. Describe Sharon's relationship with her half-brother, Zinny.
9. Why might Sharon be concerned not to show her eagerness to Justin?
10. What does Sharon assume people always expect of her?
11. Why does Sharon throw away the first piece of mail she steals?
12. What does Sharon think makes her luck turn on her mail-stealing spree?
13. Why does Sharon enjoy the ride in the cop car at the end of this chapter?

### CHAPTER THREE

1. What does Kaz seem to think Sharon's intentions are for her visit to Justin? Explain your answer.
2. Why does Sharon think Simon is trying to intimidate her?
3. Justin doesn't mention the stolen mail: do his reasons for this become clear? Explain.
4. What is the sense of pressure Sharon feels in relation to Tom?
5. What small piece of information on pages 46–47 tells us that Sharon is brighter than she (or anyone else) gives herself credit for?
6. Is Mr Jenkins the only person that Sharon is angry with on page 47? Explain.
7. What makes Sharon feel in control despite the fact that she's been given a detention?
8. What sort of life does Mrs Flynn foresee for Sharon? What does she think will lead Sharon to it?
9. What lets Mrs Flynn know that Sharon has probably been skipping English classes?

### CHAPTER FOUR

1. How does Ms Black try to set some boundaries for her English class?
2. What is Mr Harp known for?
3. Describe the various things that tell us Mark is intimidated by Sharon.
4. Why does Sharon get Mark to go home with her?
5. What surprises Sharon about her reaction to overhearing the conversation between Madeleine and Justin?
6. What is Justin's excuse for having avoided Sharon for a while? Why do you think Sharon feels she has to be in on the job Simon and Justin are offering? (Is there more than one reason?)
7. Why do you think Sharon feels differently about the list of ten things she hates the second time she reads it through?
8. What messages do Simon's actions or mannerisms give Sharon when she first arrives at his door?

9. Why does Sharon feel she isn't supposed to ask Simon or Justin any questions about her role in the 'job' they're doing?
10. What tactics does Sharon use to try to block the man and the dog from crossing the bridge? What do you think of them?
11. How do Simon and Justin treat Sharon at the end of this chapter? What does this say about their characters?

## CHAPTER FIVE

1. What does Sharon mean when she feels that the night is one she needs to cling to?
2. What does the list of things Sharon wants to buy reveal about her character?
3. How can we tell Ms Black seems to have made a good impression on the class?
4. Compare Sharon's attitude to shop lifting to her attitude to working with Justin and Simon.
5. What is the difference between a "half-bad" day and a bad day, according to Sharon?
6. What reminds us (pages 90–91) that Tom has been on Sharon's side, or been her support, in the past?
7. What does Kaz's attitude to the school seem to have been in the past?
8. What does Sharon mean when she says "Like you'd know," on page 92?
9. How does Sharon use Kaz's example as an excuse for being indifferent about passing her school subjects?
10. Who is responsible for fights at home, from Sharon's point of view? What do you think this attitude probably leads to?
11. What tangible way has Tom helped out over Sharon's threatened exclusion from school?
12. Why might Sharon feel that "a loose thread had been pulled at" (page 95) when Mark asks about her assignment, and what does she mean by this phrase?
13. What effect does Mrs Flynn seem to create with the seating in the guidance suite?
14. Summarise – in your own words – what Sharon feels the general problems have been for her at school (see page 97).
15. Mrs Flynn gives an extensive list of what the school sees as Sharon's behavioural problems (see page 98) – but what positive slant does Sharon place on these? How does she interpret Mrs Flynn's summary of her attitude to her academic work?
16. What is Kaz's attitude to the contract the school offers? Do you think this helps Sharon understand what the issues at stake really are?
17. When Ms Black mentions Sharon's list as some of the homework that stands out, what is Sharon's initial reaction?
18. Re-read page 104. Why can't Sharon be completely happy about Ms Black's response to the list she handed in?
19. Why does Sharon nearly run from class when it's over?
20. What does Sharon think of Kaz's lecture at the end of this chapter?

## CHAPTER SIX

1. We find out at the start of this chapter that the contract doesn't get signed "and no one mentioned it". What does that say about the school?
2. Re-read the simile of the car crash on page 107. What impressions does this image give you of how the class feels about Ms Black?
3. What is it that makes Sharon restless at the start of this chapter?
4. What do Sharon's retorts imply about Kaz and Derek on page 108?
5. Why does Sharon get so angry about what Kaz has told Derek about her school record?
6. What does Sharon mean when she says of Mark that "A dog would have made a better job of marking its territory"? (page 111)
7. What difference does Sharon notice about Mark's behaviour when he is at home?

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8. What visual and emotional impressions does the following metaphor from page 112 give you? “The spell check worked its way down the page, pausing at every obscenity, like a late night shopper picking their way through a drunken mall”.
  9. Do you think Mark has any sympathy for Sharon at this stage? Explain your answer.
  10. Do you think Sharon’s plans – as outlined in her composition for the wall mural – are at all positive? Do you think she is choosing an easy route? Explain.
  11. What is it about Trish (Ms Black) that makes it easy for Sharon to talk to her? Is there any way in which her attitude to life resembles Sharon’s?
  12. What does Trish mean when she says it’s “easier to say sorry than please”?
  13. Of all the categories of Kaz’s men friends, which does Sharon dislike the most, and why?
  14. What does Kaz mean when she says (page 119) “Aren’t you getting a bit old to believe in fairy tales?”
  15. What action gives away Sharon’s nerves or hopefulness when she’s speaking to Justin on page 120? What does she hope for from him, and how does this relate to Kaz’s earlier comments about her own men friends?
  16. When Justin picks up Sharon in the taxi, what are the early signs that the evening is not going as she expected? How would you have responded if you found yourself in her situation?
  17. Why does Sharon put up with having her photo taken?
  18. On page 126, Sharon thinks “*Five thousand bucks. You could lose that in one night, just on drinks for the neighbours. But some things, once you’ve done them, they’re yours for life.*” What does she mean would be hers for life?
  19. Why is Sharon angry with herself at the end of this chapter? Do you think she is right to be?

## CHAPTER SEVEN

1. What does the class hope for from Ms Black when Mrs Flynn finds them working on the mural?
2. How does Sharon’s attitude to the mural change when the class is banned from completing it?
3. What angers Sharon the most over the news about Trish Black’s departure?
4. Why does Sharon expect Kaz to change sides in the argument with Derek eventually?
5. What changes Sharon’s attitude to her maths study?
6. Why is Sharon called in to Mrs Flynn’s office, and what are the results of this meeting?

## CHAPTER EIGHT

1. What do you think Mark has seen of Sharon that makes him believe she deserves better than she has received from life so far?
2. What is the surprise Sharon gets when she arrives home after the incidents with Mark?
3. Why does Sharon refuse to help Trish (pages 152–153)?
4. What prediction about Kaz was Sharon right about?
5. What factors make Sharon change her mind about considering the ‘escort’ job Justin and Simon have to offer?
6. On page 159, the author says of the job Sharon is considering: “Way too easy for 5000. Way too full of questions Sharon forgot to ask, because believers never do.” What are some of the questions she should have asked in this situation?
7. In Kaz’s room, Sharon feels powerful when she undresses in front of Justin. Why is this, and what else has made her feel powerful throughout the novel so far? Do you think she really does have power in any of these situations?

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8. Do you think Kaz offers the right kind of support or advice to Sharon when she finds out she is borrowing her dress for the evening? Do you think Kaz has any other option at this point?

## CHAPTER NINE

1. What impressions does Sharon have of Hutton from his voice and manner when they first meet? What doesn't she like about his smile?
2. What does the following metaphor from page 167 tell us about the tone of Hutton's voice, and Sharon's response to it? What makes the metaphor so effective? "The sound of his voice didn't travel through the air, the way an ordinary voice might. It came at her along the carpet, crawling up onto her uninvited."
3. How does the 'job' Simon and Justin have pulled differ from the version Justin explained to Sharon? What do you feel is the biggest betrayal at this point?
4. Does it surprise you when Sharon takes control during the fight between Hutton and Justin? Does it seem 'in character' for her? Explain.
5. What arguments does Justin use to try to get Sharon on side again?
6. Why doesn't the train guard ask twice for Sharon's ticket?
7. How does Kaz misinterpret Sharon's actions at the end of this chapter? What could Sharon have done differently at this point, and how is it similar to other actions she has taken (or failed to take) previously?

## CHAPTER TEN

1. What are the images that Sharon's mind can't let go?
2. What is it that makes Sharon understand that she "has to make it right"?
3. What illusions about Mark's life have been dispelled for Sharon by the end of the novel?
4. Why does Sharon think, on page 183, "*I'm glad I'm not you*"?

## Discussion Points:

What is Sharon's attitude to problem solving at the start of the novel? What is it at the end?

Sharon quite often picks up signs or hints of 'warning' along the progress of the novel – yet she seems to ignore her own instincts. Discuss reasons why this might be so.

How are Kaz and Sharon actually quite similar characters?

Consider the type of contract that Sharon discusses with Mrs Flynn. Could the idea ever be an effective one? What type of contract would you be willing to sign with your school?

Sharon seems to think there are good days and bad days that just happen, or that the world just dishes them out to us – that they happen irrespective of her (or our) own actions. Do you agree with her?

List all the points throughout the novel where Sharon could have made different decisions which would have changed her situation for the better – both short term and long term.

The title has more than one meaning: what might the literal and figurative meanings be?

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Does Zinny have much hope for a life better than Sharon's?

What are the negative and positive aspects of Trish Black's character? Do you feel she performed to the best of her ability and made the right decisions during her time at the school?

Discuss Mark's character and actions. How does he fit in to his own family? How does he seem to differ from them? How do your answers make you reflect on Sharon's character and family in comparison?

Does the novel have a positive or negative ending? Do you hold out much hope for Sharon? Explain.

### CREATIVE AND CRITICAL EXERCISES

Write a review of the book, aiming it at the readership of your favourite magazine or newspaper.

Imagining that Kaz is down at the pub talking to a friend, write a monologue from her point of view, in which she describes Sharon and how she feels about her.

Choose one of the major incidents from the novel and write about it from Sharon's point of view, using the first person perspective.

Write a profile of Justin's character from the point of view of an undercover police detective who has been trailing Justin and Simon during their crime spree.

Design and write an end of year report card for Sharon, covering her academic subjects and her general attitude to school and her peers.

Write a personal diary entry from Ms Black's point of view, about her teaching role at Sharon's school.

Do the exercise that Ms Black sets for Sharon's class: *"Let's write about ourselves ... A poem, a diary entry, a story. True or imagined, a mixture if you like. Any length too, so long as it's in some way real."*

Write a short police statement from the perspective of the dog owner about the events on the bridge in Chapter Four – i.e. a description of Sharon, what happened, what his own responses to the situation were.

### DEBATE TOPICS :

*Divide into groups to debate affirmative and positive on the following statements:*

- *Self-discipline is more important than discipline from any authority.*
- *We all create our own destinies.*
- *Firearms should be completely banned from our society.*
- *Criminals can not be rehabilitated.*

Using the list idea that Ms Black sets for Sharon's class, write a list of at least five – and up to ten – things that you love or hate, as if it were a message that you were going to leave in a time capsule for other people to read in several decades. Try to make your list as descriptive as possible: i.e. use full sentences, and be inventive with metaphors, images, similes.

Either: (i) put yourself in Sharon's situation and imagine another version of what she might tag the tennis court wall with at the end of the novel;

Or (ii) write up what you would have included in the mural if you were a part of Trish Black's English class.

### VISUAL RESPONSES :

Design your own cover for a new edition of the novel.

Design a poster that would advertise a movie or TV serial version of the novel.

Re-read the description of the mural painted by Sharon's class, and on paper produce an artistic interpretation of how it would look.

Either: (i) Explore your suburb or the inner area of your city, scouting for tag or graffiti work. Photograph these and create a montage that expresses your artistic vision of your living environment.

Or: (ii) Use magazine and newspaper images to create a collage which expresses a vision of Sharon's living environment.

### DRAMA EXERCISES :

In small groups, rewrite one of the scenes from the novel as a film or theatre script. Either produce the scene for a class video, or perform it as a stage item.

Choose people to role play Mrs Flynn, Kaz, and Sharon, and (1) imagine they are having a meeting to discuss Sharon's future at the start of the novel. (2) Perform this exercise again, but as if the meeting is occurring at the end of the novel.

Choose people to role play Derek, Kaz and Sharon. Imagine Kaz has come home late the day after the end of the novel. What would the three way conversation be about what has happened over the last 48 hours?

Choose people to role play Justin and Sharon. Imagine them encountering each other back at school at the end of the novel. What would their conversation be like?

Choose people to role play Sharon and a school guidance counsellor. Imagine the sort of conversation they would have about the way Sharon deals with her anger.