

MEG ROSOFF

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***Just in Case* by Meg Rosoff**

YEAR 9

Background

David Case experiences a momentary life-changing event, and to avoid what he is sure is a dark fate, decides to change his name to Justin. Fate is not so easily distracted. With a new name, Justin Case, sets about reinventing himself with his imaginary dog, Boy, at his side. As he moves reluctantly through a world that is difficult to negotiate, he discovers running, love and unlikely friends. Some are there for him during his final show down with Fate.

This is a surreal exploration of the imagination and power, or lack of it, to control and manipulate our existence. It touches on all the big picture issues of how and why we live and the game of life we all play.

..I remember distinctly the feeling that I didn't know exactly where the edges of reality were, not only when I was a teenager, but for many years afterwards, especially when it came to things like attraction and sexual relationships and how the world worked. The rules of the world seemed so unclear to me, and I wanted to write a book about a character who wasn't sure where reality began and ended.

Interview with the Author – Meg Rosoff p2.

<http://www.bookbrowse.com/author_interviews/full/index.cfm?author_number=1059>

Objectives

This unit is built around the section of the VELS English that encourages students to explore the way texts position us to interpret issues and ideas in a particular way.

Students read and interpret texts that present some challenging issues. They compare texts that explore similar themes and ideas, and recognise that writers can express views and values other than their own. They develop a critical understanding about the ways that writers and producers of texts try to position readers to accept particular views of people, characters, events, ideas and information. They discuss the ways in which persuasive texts present opinions and evidence, justify positions and persuade.

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2005) *VELS English Domain Level 5* p 22.

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Focus: Identity

In *Just in Case*, Agnes tries to capture the essence of Justin, his true identity, or a version of it, through her art.

- Does she succeed?
- Or can any such work of art only ever be a version of the truth?
- Consider also the various reactions to Agnes's art, particularly Justin's.

With a digital camera create a photo essay that describes an 'identity'. It can be real or imagined. To accompany the photo essay, write brief descriptions to complement the images. These can be expressed in sentences, lists or verse.

- Discuss how you as author/creator have attempted to manipulate your audience - to have them see your 'identity' as you wish them to. Connections could be made between the results of this activity and works of everyday media that seek to influence our opinions.

Focus: Fate

Justin has a moment early in the book in which it suddenly occurs to him how dangerous life really is, how many truly awful things could happen, how vulnerable he is. And though his response to that realisation is somewhat extreme, he is in fact right. Life is dangerous and terrifying and full of loss and tragedy, and most of us manage to get through it and stay cheerful by pretending it will all turn out alright.

Interview with the Author – Meg Rosoff p2

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I don't believe in fate, per se, but I do believe that life is a minefield – and if you add a little bit of depression and a little bit of paranoia to the mix, you can start to believe that someone or something is planning your downfall. Giving Fate a voice just snapped that "force" into focus, so that it no longer felt random, but controlled.

Interview with the Author – Meg Rosoff p5

<http://www.bookbrowse.com/author_interviews/full/index.cfm?author_number=1059>

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Franklin D. Roosevelt said 'Men are not prisoners of fate, but only prisoners of their own minds'. Explore the place of fate in our lives.

- Does fate mean different things to each of us?

It has been said 'How a person masters his fate is more important than what his fate is.' Discuss in relation to Justin's actions in *Just in Case*.

Discuss as a group, with reference to the text, the way Fate is portrayed by Rosoff. Brainstorm a list that describes the character, Fate.

Assessment

With a partner, using the knowledge from the above discussions, create a dialogue between a character of your choice, real or imagined, and the character of Fate from *Just in Case*.

Those who wish to may perform their dialogue to the class.

Further Reading

Being John Malkovich (film)

Donny Darko (film)

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (film)

Green, John *Looking for Alaska*

Hartnett, Sonya *Of a Boy*

Hartnett, Sonya *The Devil Latch*

Macdonald, Caroline *Secret Lives*

Salinger, JD *Catcher in the Rye*