



Lullaby

BERNARD BECKETT

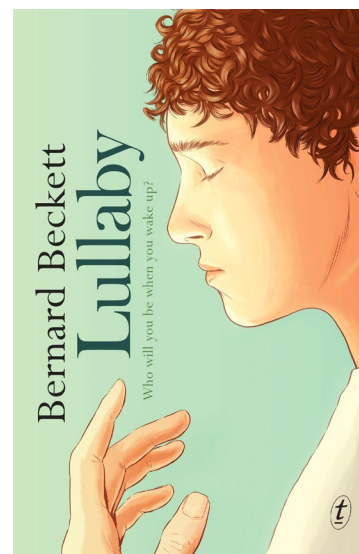
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TEXT'S TEACHING NOTES FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

- ▶ Text's teaching notes are designed for teachers to explore the novel in line with the *Australian Curriculum: English*.
- ▶ Questions are divided into stages: from pre-reading to post-reading and include suggested tasks for assessment.
- ▶ Refer to the legend below and the accompanying [Australian Curriculum: English Scope and Sequence reference chart](#) to decipher these codes.
- ▶ An ACARA coding system connects each task to the *Australian Curriculum: English*. It includes links to strands, modes, general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities.

STRANDS	LA – LANGUAGE LY – LITERACY
MODES	W – WRITING R – READING L – LISTENING S – SPEAKING
GENERAL CAPABILITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LITERACY INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CAPABILITY INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING NUMERACY ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR
CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SUSTAINABILITY ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER HISTORIES AND CULTURES ASIA AND AUSTRALIA'S ENGAGEMENT WITH ASIA

SYNOPSIS

Theo is in a coma and his twin brother Rene sits beside him dreading a looming decision he must make about their future. As the story unfolds we gradually piece together a puzzle that explores the nature of fraternal bonds, trust, medical ethics and a conspiracy that will change Rene's reality forever. This is a novel that requires more than one read. There are no clear answers in Rene's story, the truth dawns on the reader at the same time that it is revealed to Rene.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bernard Beckett is a multi-award-winning author of books and plays for young adults and one of New Zealand's most outstanding writers. In 2006 Bernard was awarded a fellowship for a project examining DNA mutations. This new direction in his life led to the publication of the sophisticated sci-fi novel *Genesis*, which has since been published in over twenty countries and was the winner of the 2010 Prix Sorcières. He lives near Wellington with his wife and twin sons.



AUTHOR'S NOTE ON THE PHILOSOPHICAL ELEMENTS IN THE NOVEL

I think of *Lullaby* as being the third in my sequence of novels-as-thought-experiments. The thought experiment is a common tool in philosophy, where practitioners challenge themselves and each other to think of a problem in a new way, by creating a hypothetical scenario that challenges our habits and assumptions (see the Trolley Problem, the Philosopher's Zombie or Mary the Colourblind Scientist, for example). In *Lullaby*, as with the previous novels, the thought experiment, which might usually be outlined in a single paragraph, is extended into a full narrative.

In a perfect world, the reader, as interpreter of the narrative, is also part of the experiment. For example in *Genesis*, the fact that the reader forms an attachment to the narrator is pivotal in the way the final experiment plays out, and is responded to. In *Lullaby*, the thought experiment is simply described: Imagine that you die. Your body stops working. Your brain shuts down. Your cells wither and decompose. However, a different person wakes up with your memories, thinking they are you. Should we say that you are still alive, or that you have died?

As with any thought experiment, the answer you give is only the starting point. If you answer that you have not died, what if we tweak the experiment: although the other person has your memories, there are some imperfections and blemishes? How close to your memories would they have to be, for you to have not died? If you answer that you did die, then what if your body dies, but your brain is successfully transplanted? And so it goes on. The end goal, were this philosophy, would be to clarify and refine definitions of death, sleep, memory and identity.

But this is not philosophy. It is a story. I have focussed on a young man being interviewed by a psychologist, following the catastrophic electric shock his identical twin brother has suffered. The narrative tension, then, revolves around the mystery of his circumstance, the question of whether the psychologist will judge him fit to donate, and the uncertainty over how he will decide, should he be given the choice.

The emotional lives of the character are integral to this story, and here the relationships between Rene and his brother, the psychologist, and his girlfriend Emily, provide a context by which we can understand and believe in the protagonist's actions.

Finally, the first person narrator creates the illusion of the single storyteller, recounting his past. But, given the role that the past and memory play in this novel, with its premise of identity as transferable, the reader might well anticipate in advance the final conceit: that there is not one teller of the story, but two. This final punch is an attempt to leave the reader grappling with their own response to the central thought experiment.

BEFORE READING

1. Undertake research about medical experimentation and discovery. What medical procedures do we have now that might have been considered radical in their early days? What are some of the proposed medical procedures of the future currently being considered? (ACELT1812) R LT
2. A great deal of research has been undertaken about the connection between twins. What does it suggest about twins? If you know some twins, conduct your own inquiry into connections that they have that are unique. Consider the advantages and disadvantages of these traits. (ACELT1635) R LT
3. Organ donation is now an accepted part of medical practice, however there are still only small numbers of donors in Australia. Conduct a debate on the pros and cons of donating organs or write a speech that attempts to persuade more people to become donors. (ACELT1812) R S LT

WHILE READING

1. Consider the irony of the title – *Lullaby*. What is the connotation or impression we usually have of something like a lullaby? Does the mood of the novel fit with that idea? (ACELT1774) R LT
2. The novel is deliberately ambiguous. How does the writer use structure to create this ambiguity? What is the effect? (ACELA1553) R LA
3. Consider the following quotations. What is the underlying meaning of each line? (ACELT1774) R LT
 - 'They'd brushed his hair, as if he were already dead.' P. 1
 - 'Her voice was gentle. It wouldn't last.' P. 2
 - '...a game I couldn't win—had to win.' P. 7
 - 'Stories never come loose cleanly; everything's always tangled up with something else.' P. 27
4. Why do emotions catch Rene by surprise? Why do you think he suppresses his emotions? (ACELT1635) R LT
5. What do you think about Maggie's style of questioning? Is it harsh given the circumstances? How do you think Rene responds to her questions? (ACELT1812) R LT
6. How does the use of italic text alter the way we read the lines on page 7? (ACELA1553) R LA
7. When Rene initially meets with Maggie he seems reluctant to talk or reveal anything. What evidence is there to suggest this? Why do you think he is reluctant? (ACELT1774) R LT
8. Re-read pages 190–91 – 'I knew nothing...' to 'That moment lives inside me still.' How is Rene feeling in this passage? What do you notice about sentence structure, tone and pace in this passage (ACELT1635; ACELA1553) R LT LA



9. Why do you think Emily cuts Rene just before he drifts off to sleep for surgery? What does this tell us about both characters? (ACELT1774) 🌟 R LT
10. How does the voice in the text change? What is the effect of the change on the reader? (For example: pp. 7, 9, 157 and 200) (ACELT1643) 📖 R LT
11. How does Rene's memory of his parents differ from the suggested reality? (For example: pp. 9 and 10, and 15 to 18) (ACELT1774) 🌟 R LT
12. Rene describes feeling as though he were in a 'fog' (Page 2) when he first meets Maggie. Why does he say this? At what point do you believe that 'fog' lifts? (ACELT1774) 🌟 R LT
13. Rene draws parallels with his life and being a long distance runner. Why do you think he chooses this analogy? Is it an accurate one? (ACELT1774) 📖 R LT
14. In reference to his mother's diary, Rene states 'There was a time, we were maybe nine or ten, when Theo and I read from it every night. And another time, when neither of us could bear to look at it.' (Page 8). Why did it change? What does this tell you about their connection with their mother? (ACELT1774) 🌟 R LT
15. What does Rene's description of Maggie tell us about what he thinks of her? (For example, on page 8 when he ponders what sport she plays.) (ACELT1774) 📖 🌟 R LT
16. Make a list of the unanswered questions in the novel, such as 'What really happened to the twins' parents?' Pair up with a friend and see if you can answer the questions? (ACELT1774) 📖 🌟 R LT
17. What did the journalist in this hospital mean by 'What stories shall we tell ourselves?' Why does this become significant at the end of the novel? (Page 158) (ACELT1774) 🌟 R LT

AFTER READING

CHARACTER

1. Despite being identical twins, Rene indicates that he and Theo are still quite different. Search through the novel and find evidence to suggest this. Where possible, use a quotation. (ACELT1774) 🌟 R LT
2. Rene suggests that Theo is the stronger, more resilient, of the two brothers. Do you agree? Justify your argument with evidence from the novel. (ACELT1774) 🌟 R LT
3. We know a limited amount about Maggie and Emily and their roles in this story. Create a version of events from their point of views. Consider how she might feel about what happens to Theo and Rene. (ACELT1774) 🌟 R W LT
4. How does Rene's internal and external voice differ? Why are both to be included in the novel? (ACELT1643) 🌟 R LT

STYLE AND STRUCTURE

1. In the opening paragraph, what literary devices (such as metaphor, personification) are used to create the mood? Select three examples from the first paragraph. (ACELA1553) 📖 R LA
2. What is the impact of starting a story after a key event (Theo's accident) has already occurred? (ACELA1553) 📖 R LA
3. Beckett makes the unusual choice to offer dual narratives from page 196 to the end of the novel. Why do you think he does this? How does it alter the way we read the text? What makes it challenging to read? (ACELA1553) 📖 R LA
4. Compare the two voices at the end of the novel. Try reading only the left-hand voice only, then the right-hand voice only. Does this alter the way we see the characters? What differences are there between the two versions? (ACELA1553; ACCEL1643) 📖 R LA LT
5. When the two voices emerge on page 200, which voice do you believe is the original Rene's and which is the new Rene (Theo)? Is there anything that indicates this? (ACELA1553) 🌟 R LA

THEMES

Identity

1. Are we born with our identity or do we develop it over time? Argue a case for one perspective. What do you think Rene believes? You might choose to form an argument from Rene's point of view. (ACELT1812) 🌟 R LT
2. When Rene and Theo swap places and go to school, how does Rene feel about the fact that it takes no more than a pink T-shirt to change his identity? (ACELT1774) 🌟 R LT
3. What do you think the challenge of living with another version of yourself would be? (ACELT1812) 🌟 R LT
4. Rene fears both losing his brother, but also gaining another self. Why do you think this is the case? (ACELT1774) 🌟 R LT
5. If all formal identity were destroyed, how would you prove who you were? What proof does Rene have of who he is? (ACELT1774) 🌟 🧑 R LT

Medical ethics

1. Can privacy and medical research coexist in Rene's situation? (ACELT1812) 🧑 R LT
2. 'That's how my story begins, eighteen years ago, my mother took a risk with our lives.' (Page 6) Consider the way that medical research has both decreased and increased the risks we take. (ACELT1812) 🧑 R LT
3. Rene says of his aunt, 'She was that age, the generation that grew up online and lost their perspective.' (Page 24) What does he mean? Could the same be said of those conducting medical research? (ACELT1812) 🧑 R LT



4. Maggie says that the psychological counseling is necessary for the experiment to go ahead, but what isn't being considered in the process? (ACELT1812) R LT
5. From a scientific perspective, was the experiment a success or failure? What do you think the ethical position on this result would be? (ACELT1812) R LT
8. Imagine you are the doctor behind the experiment that Theo and Rene are involved in. It is five years after the experiment took place and an enquiry is being held by the medical ethics committee. Put forward your defence. (XACELT1812) R W LT
9. Emily presents an image of Theo that is mostly negative. Do you agree with her or are there positive qualities in Rene's twin? (ACELT1774) R W LT
10. *Lullaby* suggests that there are both winners and losers in this experiment. Who are they? (ACELT1812) R LT

Life and death

1. 'A thousand little anchors holding you in place.' (Page 11) What does Rene learn about the fine line between life and death? (ACELT1774) R LT
2. Medicine has advanced to a state where the line between life and death is difficult to define. Why is this the case? Explore moments in the novel where Rene struggles with the distinction. (ACELT1812) R LT
3. What does the novel suggest about the finality of death? Why does Rene consider part of himself dead? (ACELT1812) R LT
4. What does the story about the bee tell readers about death and Rene's view of it? (ACELT1812) R LT

RESPONSES

1. 'All memories have flaws.' What is the earliest you can remember? Write down your earliest memory. What do you think might create flaw in people's memories? Write a reflection on this question that draws on the novel and your own experience. (ACELT1644) R W LT
2. *Lullaby* does not provide the reader with a clear ending. What do you think happens next? Use the events from the story, along with your own assumptions, to write an extension of the novel. (ACELT1644) R W LT
3. 'If any two electrons are too close...then the combined probability of them being anywhere cancels out. It's only through being apart that they can exist at all.' (Page 20) Is this true of the relationships in the novel? (ACELT1774) R W LT
4. Rene refers to 'jump[ing] from one story bough to the next' (Page 31). Try writing your own personal reflection where you jump from one story to the next, linking them like a chain. Take a moment at the end to reflect on the stories you have chosen to include. Are they all memories? What connects them? Are they true? (ACELT1644) R W LT
5. Who does Rene trust in the novel? Is this trust or lack of trust justified? (ACELT1774) R W LT
6. Rene convinces himself that Theo will be okay, despite knowing the truth. Explore the roles of hope and trust in the novel. (ACELT1774) R W LT
7. How far is too far? Where should we draw the line in medical research? Write a persuasive essay that argues your point of view on this topic. (ACELT1812) R W LT