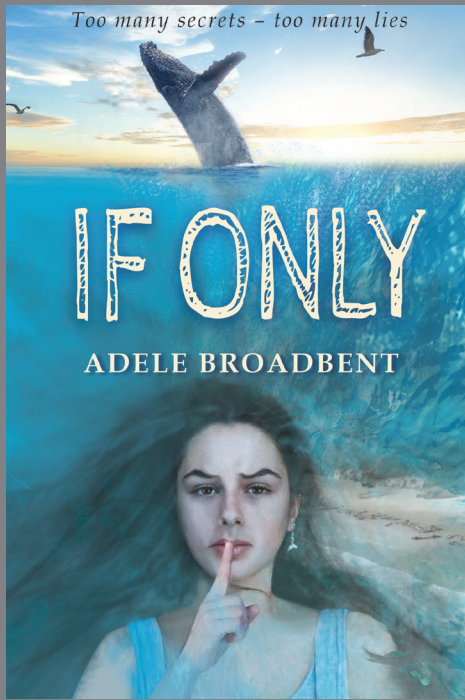


Too many secrets – too many lies



If Only

by Adele Broadbent

About the author:

Adele Broadbent is passionate about children's literature. A bookaholic, she is a children's author, bookseller, reviewer and avid reader. Her review site www.whatbooknext.com is designed especially for children's and teen's use and is also popular with parents and school librarians when looking for the next great children's read.

Adele loves her job at Wardini Books in Napier, and lives on a small lifestyle block in Napier with her husband and two sons. Her favourite age to write for is for 8-12 year olds, and especially adding secrets for her readers to discover. Say hello through her contact page on www.adelebroadbentbooks.com

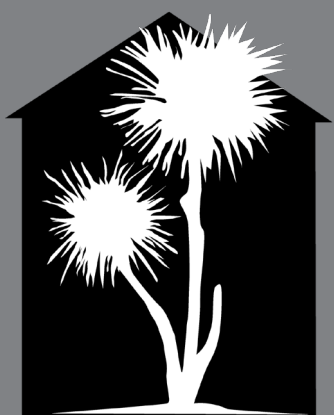
Synopsis of Novel:

Fifteen-year-old Kayla and her best friend Tam are typical young teens. They do ok at school, stay at each other's houses and binge watch movies but they are at that difficult transition age when they want to spread their wings and explore independence. Tam has always wanted to be one of 'the in-crowd girls', the girls who get invited to all the cool parties and have all the fun. But the girls' parents, Kayla's especially, are certainly not ready to loosen the shackles of parental control, so when Tam finally wrangles an invite for them both to a hot party the girls invent a web of lies to cover themselves — a scenario that will certainly be familiar to some of the similar aged girls who are the target audience for this very relevant novel.

Through a close third person focus on Kayla we experience in vivid and almost excruciating detail the various dramas of the party. Kayla feels awkward and only talks briefly to the interesting and environmentally aware Alex, but Tam drinks a lot of alcohol and accepts a party drug, culminating in the inevitable passing out and sadly a possible sexual encounter with an abusive young male. This is the beginning of a wedge between two previously inseparable girls, because Tam is certain that the person who was adjusting her clothing when she woke up in the darkened bedroom was Kayla's new friend, Alex. Events become further complicated when Kayla's much-loved family friend 'Aunty' Mae dies of a sudden heart attack. Kayla has also lied to her parents about going to see Mae the previous Sunday, when in fact she clean forgot to go, but lies told develop lives of their own and she finds it easier to stick with it, despite the terrible guilt she feels — what if she had been able to help her and the attack hadn't occurred?

The growing friendship between Kayla and Alex and the deteriorating friendship of the two girls are a major focus of the novel. Tam's period is late and she is terrified of an unwanted pregnancy. She eventually discovers she is not pregnant, but she still believes Alex to be her abuser. Kayla is caught right in the middle of these dramas — she genuinely likes (loves?) Alex and can't believe he would take advantage of an out-of-it girl, so she continues to lie to her parents so she can still see him. He is an active environmentalist and a committed member of Project Jonah, the group that attempts to rescue stranded whales on New Zealand beaches. Kayla too becomes very involved, especially after meeting Alex's charismatic grandmother, another committed environmentalist. There is an interesting sub-plot involving a history between Aunty Mae and this woman and it cleverly turns out to be an important plot link in the main story.

The climax of the novel is a tragic whale stranding on a beach where Kayla is hanging out with Alex, but this event is also the turning point that allows all the lies and confusions to become cleared up. The abusive male turns out to be Evan, Alex's cousin and Tam decides to report it to the police. Kayla's parents are still very annoyed at all the lies and deceptions they were subjected to and are not ready to forgive her yet, but they also have a new understanding of their daughter's increasing need for independence and growing passion for the environment. The novel ends on an upbeat note with all the young people and their parents sitting down to clear the air.



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Character notes

Kayla

A typical fifteen-year-old and very relatable to the target audience. She has social anxieties and lacks the confidence of Tam, but she is feisty when pushed and willing to take risks. We readily relate to her difficulties — although the lies she continues to tell throughout the novel push our loyalty at times.

Tam

Like Kayla in most respects, but she has a dangerous craving to be liked and popular. What happens to her is very relevant at this time and we applaud her decision to make the young man face the punishments he deserves for his abusive actions.

Kayla's parents

Standard, good Kiwi parents. They love their two children very much but do not really understand Kayla's growing need for independence. Readers will swing between thinking they are too strict on Kayla and then empathising with their frustrations at her behaviour.

Alex

Doesn't have the parental controls that Kayla does (a common New Zealand situation) and is used to operating on an almost adult level of independence. A very committed environmentalist — verging on obsessive.

Themes / issues:

This very engaging novel has several important messages for teens — and their parents if they choose to read it — and this is definitely recommended. The obvious message is that lies eventually catch you out and it is better to avoid them altogether — but in the real and complex world of experimenting teens this is much easier said than done. Peer pressure has an immense pull on young teens and even the most balanced and well brought up teens will lie occasionally to fit in their peer group. It is too easy to condemn Tam for so desperately wanting to be part of the in-crowd. It is the human condition to want to be liked and accepted and we need to look Tam as a fragile and vulnerable teen, not an irresponsible 'try hard'.

Another message of great relevance to teens is the danger of leaping to conclusions based on scant information or half understood scenarios. Both Kayla and Tam are guilty of this — Tam through her continued belief that Alex was her abuser (without any real evidence) and Kayla through her assumption (on the basis of one photograph) that Alex's grandmother, Liz, had 'stolen' Aunty Mae's boyfriend off her when they were teens. The writer is cautioning teens to try and look at issues with a wider and less self-focused lens and to try to 'walk in another's shoes' before casting judgement.

The necessity to keep lines of communication open is another useful idea from the novel. It is heart-breaking to see the previously tight girls fall out and put up barriers, when each desperately wants to get back to how they were.

The power of love — both young and old — is always a worthwhile message and adults (both parents and teachers) need to be reminded that when teens

fall in love it can be a very powerful emotion. Putting barriers between young couples is usually doomed to fail — discussion and understanding may be better. However, we also need to acknowledge the fiercely protective love that most parents have for their children and to empathise with the raw emotions and feelings of helplessness many parents feel when their previously family focused and trustworthy children begin to spread their wings socially and to develop interests that do not involve them or may meet their approval. And then there is the environmental message that is a thread throughout the novel. It is certainly worthwhile to be active in protecting our fragile environment, and as the novel shows this can also be a great way for the generations to link in a common cause.

Writing style

Through a close third person focus on Kayla we are effortlessly immersed in her complex life. Broadbent captures the teenage girl world very well and this is partly due to the relevance of the plot line and themes but mostly as a result of the care she takes to allow us to hear and see this world. The inner thoughts and the spot-on dialogue feel very genuine and will allow the target audience to easily relate to the characters and their concerns. Broadbent plays with our emotions skilfully throughout the novel and, like Kayla, we are pulled in various directions, particularly with the nature of Alex. Is he Tam's abuser? Are his environmental concerns a cover for something else? Is he for real? Broadbent positions us to have shifting views on Kayla's parents as well. Are they too strict on her? Most teens will cringe at the severity of her punishment, especially the grounding and the total removal of her phone, but more analytical teens will also acknowledge the need of parents to keep their children safe.

Writing Style Activities:

- Try rewriting passages with a different narrative focus. Firstly, using a close third person focus on Tam, describe the girls arriving at the party, and secondly writing in first person as Kayla's father, capture his emotions when he arrives on the beach to see her assisting the beached whales.
- Broadbent describes the drama and the tragedy of the stranded whales very well. Quote a passage you found personally moving and explain how the writer made you feel this way.

Year level suitability and application

Scott's target reading audience is probably year 10 and 11 girls but due to the skill of the writer and the wider environmental concerns the novel will have relevance to a wider reading audience. Some High School English departments may wish to use it as a year 10 or 11 class set, but it should also find its way into many students' personal reading logs. The novel's strong lead characters, upfront themes and interesting settings will work very well with the NCEA Level One Written Text questions.

Activity:

Discuss with students how well the novel fits with the 2019 level 1 external exam Written Text questions — it basically works with every question! Tell students they will be able to attempt writing essays after reading the text.

Learning opportunities

Before reading activities

Reading the cover for visual/verbal clues:

- Discuss with students how publishers ‘position/manipulate’ readers in a variety of subtle ways before they read a word of the story. Students work in pairs to study the verbal and visual clues given by front and back cover of the book — colour, images, layout, contrast, font style and placement, title etc. Students make a set of predictions on plot, character and setting based on those clues alone. Younger students will need specific coaching in this skill.

Prior knowledge discussion / activities:

- It is probably best to avoid getting students to share their experiences of sneaking out to parties and discussing what goes on in these parties, but in every year 11 class there are bound to be some students who are quite familiar with these situations and there will no doubt be some lively informal discussions on this topic. Don’t shut them down too quickly, as this could be a very good incentive for some students to get stuck into the novel.
- Pre-reading formal discussions could focus on any experience the students have of environmental groups or whale strandings. Students in the wider Nelson area will definitely be aware of these all too frequent events. These discussions often allow students who may not be so good at reading and analysing texts to have their ‘moments in the sun’ and will be an encouragement to them to persevere when the reading becomes challenging.
- Contact Project Jonah and have a spokesperson come and speak to the class.
- A lively discussion on the fine line between environmental activism and lawbreaking vandalism would also be a good way of stimulating readers.
- It may also be a good time to invite a school counsellor or a health teacher to speak to your class on the issue of consent in sexual relationships.

During reading:

Understanding the content: answers may be written or oral

Note: these are to be answered during, not after reading.

Chapter one:

1. What obvious personality differences can you see between Kayla and Tam?
2. What have been Tam’s social ambitions ever since Kindy?

Chapter two:

3. What was ‘perfect’ about the way Kayla asked her mother if she could stay over at Tam’s on Saturday night?
4. Why does Kayla still feel obliged to visit Aunty Mae, even though going to see her is now ‘boring’?

5. Describe the ‘uniforms’ the guys and the girls wear at the party?
6. How would you have felt in Kayla’s position when she is alone at the party?

Chapter three:

7. What are two problems of being short at crowded parties?
8. What does Kayla fear may have happened to Tam?

Chapter four:

9. List the lies Kayla has told so far?
10. What continues to worry Kayla about how Tam is acting?

Chapter five:

11. What is contradictory about Tam’s behaviour at school?
12. Why does she have a go at Kayla?

Chapter six:

13. Do you think Kayla should have admitted immediately she had not been to see Mae?

Chapter seven:

14. What is the state of the ‘stand-off’ between the girls?
15. If you were a school counsellor what advice would you give to try to solve the dispute?
16. Explain Theo’s lack of reaction to Mae’s death?

Chapter eight:

17. Why is Tam opposed to bike riding?
18. What are two impressive things about Alex?
19. What further adds to Kayla’s guilt about Mae?

Chapter nine:

20. How does the girls’ dispute escalate on the bus ride to school?

Chapter ten:

21. What are ‘gardening girls’?
22. How can you tell Naomi’s presentation was successful?
23. Why is Kayla reluctant to sign up to the Project Jonah training?

Chapter eleven:

24. What insight does Kayla make about Tam’s motives for the next party?
25. Tam has misgivings about Alex. Do you?

Chapter twelve:

26. What gives the impression that Mae has ‘just popped down to the shops’?
27. What is mysterious about the small photo Kayla finds?
28. Can you make any links about the whales that keep appearing in this story?

Chapter thirteen:

29. How does Kayla’s lie almost get found out?

Chapter fourteen:

30. List all the ground-breaking things Kayla has done in the last week?.
31. What connections are you making when the ex-friend of Mae speaks at her funeral?

Chapter fifteen:

32. Why is Kayla not keen on holding a garage sale?
33. What does she decide to keep and why?

Chapter sixteen:

34. What is gender stereotypical about the students' reactions and suggestions about the new environmental project?
35. What is unusual about Alex's date proposal?

Chapter seventeen:

36. What is Kayla's mum's reaction to the news about a boy?
37. What is ironic about her advice about Tam?

Chapter eighteen:

38. What are two things Kayla likes about Alex?
39. Do you think the writer has captured a first date well or not? Why?

Chapter nineteen:

40. What is your impression of Kayla's dad?
41. What makes Kayla feel a bit better about Mae?

Chapter twenty:

42. Why is Kayla nervous about meeting Alex's grandmother?

Chapter twenty-one:

43. What is the main purpose of her shop?
44. Why is Kayla afraid Alex might find her a fake?

Chapter twenty-two:

45. What is it about the MP that annoys Alex and Liz so much?

Chapter twenty-three:

46. Should Kayla go to this new party? Why or why not?

Chapter twenty-four:

47. Describe Kayla's reaction to her first real kiss with a boy. Has the author written this well?

Chapter twenty-five:

48. Do you have any ideas on what Alex might have planned for Mr Wilkes?

Chapter twenty-six:

49. Is it fair for Alex to pressure Kayla to sneak out at midnight?

Chapter twenty-seven:

50. Is their protest legal or illegal? Why?

Chapter-twenty-eight:

51. What discovery does Kayla make about Liz and Mae?

Chapter twenty-nine:

52. Is Kayla justified in making assumptions about what happened all those years ago?

Chapter thirty:

53. Why is Alex's mother so angry?

Chapter thirty-one:

54. What are two new things you learn about Alex in this chapter?
55. What causes Kayla to explode at Liz?

Chapter thirty-two:

56. What 'evidence' sealed Kayla's fate?

Chapter thirty-three:

57. Why does Kayla's mother allow Tam into the house?

Chapter thirty-four:

58. Are you surprised about what happened to Tam?

Chapter thirty-five:

59. What are your thoughts on what may have happened?

Chapter thirty-six:

60. Thinking as Kayla, list all the things pointing to Alex being Tam's abuser.

Chapter thirty-seven:

61. What are your views on the phone ban?

Chapter thirty-eight:

62. What is the main barrier to the girls becoming close friends like before?

Chapter thirty-nine:

63. What type of party pill may Tam have taken?

Chapter forty:

64. What new confusion is revealed in this chapter?

Chapter forty-one:

65. What are your thoughts about Kayla making up even more lies?

Chapter forty-two:

66. How does Alex try to put some perspective into Kayla's accusations?

Chapter forty-three:

67. How does Kayla attempt to help the whales?

Chapter forty-four:

68. What form does the rest of the rescue attempt take?

Chapter forty-five:

69. Why do the rescuers dig around the fins?

70. How does the writer capture the competing emotions and agendas in this chapter?

71. Quote a passage where no-one appears to be connecting.

Chapter forty-six:

72. What 'truths' are told in this chapter?

Chapter forty-seven:

73. Which characters impressed you most in this chapter? Why?

Chapter forty-eight:

74. What things have yet to be admitted and discussed before healing can take place?

Chapter forty-nine:

75. Are you happy with the resolutions of the various conflicts and misunderstandings/deceptions that have shaped this book? Justify answer.

Post reading: Taking it further

- Explain Broadbent's choice of title for the novel and suggest other possible titles with explanations for each.
- Students write a letter to Adele Broadbent giving their reaction to her novel and asking her to clarify or elaborate on any areas of concern or issues they may have. They could also ask her about her title choice and hopefully find out how close to the mark they were.

Activity one: Group work activity

Select two of the themes / issues listed earlier in these notes and get students to elaborate more on what the author may be commenting on and how she may be positioning them to think about these issues. When considering the 'how' aspect students will need to closely consider character presentation. A group spokesperson reports findings to the class.

Activity two: Individual work – longer paragraph answers.

- Describe at least one challenge faced by a character in the written text. Explain how this challenge helped you understand the character.
- Describe one incident that changed your perspective or point of view on the written text. Explain how this incident changed your perspective.
- Describe a moment in the written text that surprised or shocked you. Explain how this moment was important to the text as a whole.
- Describe a character that you disliked or admired in the written text. Explain how your feeling towards this character helped you understand the text as a whole.

- Look at the 2019 Level 1 Written Text external exam questions. Write brief notes on how applicable each one is to the novel, then select one and write a structured essay. Give students ample time for planning and writing – two periods will be sufficient.

Role play activities: (all role plays need to be handled with sensitivity and closely monitored by the teacher)

- Monologue – adopt the role of either Kaya, one of Kayla's parents, Tam or Alex. Speaking in character explain your relationship with another character. Discuss how the relationship changes during the novel.
- Monologue - Speaking as Kayla one year in the future reflect on the events of a year ago and comment on how they have helped make you the person you are now.
- Group role play – in groups of two to four students select, rehearse and present a conflict situation in the novel.

Beyond the text activities:

- Write a speech on an aspect of ocean conservation, focusing on practical solutions for the challenges facing conservationists.
- Design a poster highlighting the cruelty and injustice of whaling OR a poster promoting limited whaling due to cultural traditions.
- Design a list of Do's and Don'ts when assisting stranded whales.
- Design a poster that strongly promotes the Consent message.