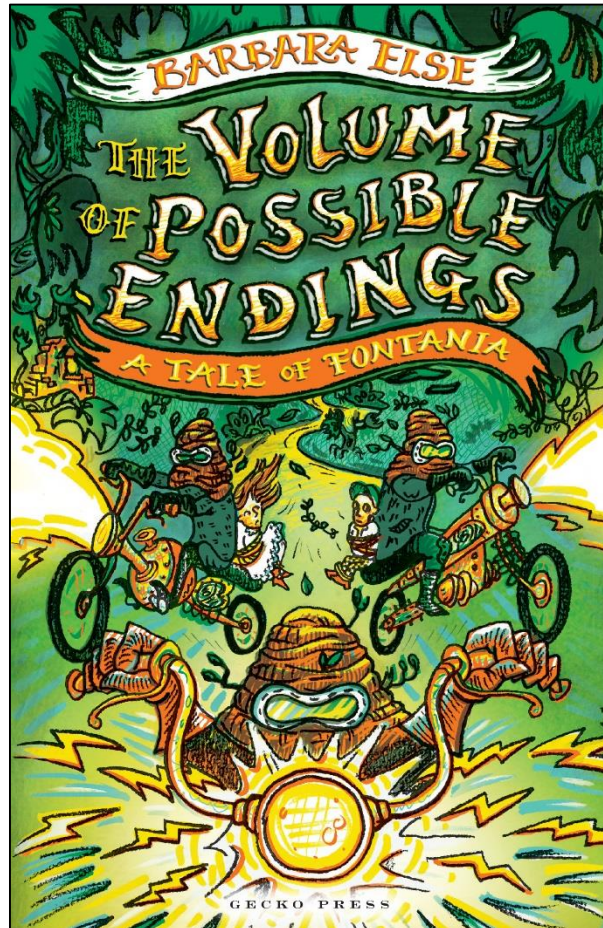




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Teaching Notes

*The Volume of Possible Endings (A Tale of Fontania)*  
by Barbara Else



### Synopsis

Dorrity is the only child in magic-free Owl Town. When she finds an enchanted book with dire predictions, she must face her enemies as well as discover who the strange boy who has appeared in the Beastly Dark is and what part he plays in discovering her true identity, her role in the future of the Kingdom of Fontania, and what the ending to her tale will be?

### Author

Barbara Else is the author of six adult novels, and is one of New Zealand's most respected writers. She is a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to literature, and has worked as a university tutor, editor, and freelance author. Her children's novels, *The Travelling Restaurant* and its sequel *The Queen and the Nobody Boy*, have won several prominent awards. Barbara lives in Wellington, New Zealand. (Visit her blog at [www.TalesOfFontania.com](http://www.TalesOfFontania.com))



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### **Themes**

This gripping, magical adventure story deals with several themes, such as otherness and the search for self, secrets and trust, power and loyalty, and bravery and destiny.

The themes of otherness and the search for one's true self and purpose in life are evident throughout the novel. Dorrity is the only child in magic-free Owl Town, a town of misfits and family and friends who are not what they first appear to be. When Dorrity stumbles across elements of magic and then the strange Metalboy, she soon discovers that everything she thought she knew about her own identity, place and purpose in life was false. Alongside Metalboy, Dorrity embarks on a dangerous adventure into the unknown of the Beastly Dark in search of answers. During this adventure they meet characters who embody otherness, from the rebellious anarchists to the half creatures created by Count Bale's dark magic. It is through the encounters with these outsiders that Dorrity's true self, identity and purpose in life are revealed.

The theme of bravery is explored as Dorrity and Metalboy, who appears to have been specifically made to face danger, confront unknown and dark forces that appear to be out to get them. They display not only bravery, but also perseverance, in order to overcome many obstacles and much adversity.

The themes of trust, secrets and loyalty are also illustrated throughout the book. Dorrity soon finds out that her brothers and other friends from Owl Town have been keeping secrets from her. Her trust is broken and for the rest of the novel her loyalty, not only her to family and friends, both old and new, but also to the monarchy, is sorely tested. Indeed the loyalty of all the citizens of Fontania, is being tested as is evident through the actions of the anarchists and Count Bale, with his plans to use Dorrity to help him become the new king through black magic and dark forces.

Magic is another theme throughout the book, whether it is Count Bale's black magic or the magic dragon-eagle feather behind Metalboy's heart. Owl Town tries to remain free of magic, embracing and demonstrating innovation and inventiveness instead, such as Mr. Coop's invention of the barrel-boat which ultimately plays a huge part in saving Dorrity, her friends, family and the citizens of Fontania from the clutches of Count Bale's dark magic.



## G E C K O P R E S S

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### Activities

1. Before reading the book, look at the cover image and title. Discuss what you think this story might be about?
2. Figurative language is used to convey ideas that might otherwise be difficult to express. One example of figurative language is a simile. There are a plethora of similes throughout the book, for example, 'Ruffgo lay like a fallen tree' (p. 139), 'His cap was in his hand and his hair was soft peaks like whipped cream.' (p. 167) and 'The barrel-boat floated like a toy in a grim bathtub.' (p. 298). Find five more examples of similes from the book.
3. Onomatopoeia is a figure of speech for a word which imitates a noise or action, for example, 'There was a whirr, a clank' (p. 22). What other examples of onomatopoeia can you find in the book? Think of some more examples that could have been used to describe some of the other action in the book.
4. This book is an adventure, fantasy novel. In pairs, research the literary genres of fantasy and adventure. Find and list any examples of passages from the book that fit the criteria of these genres.
5. Captain Dodger comments that schools have forgotten to teach children to be resourceful, creative and cunning (p. 125). Do you think the main character Dorrity displays these traits? If so, find and list examples of when she does. In pairs, write character studies on three other main characters. Begin by making a chart to list the main character traits they display. How do their particular traits affect the part they play in the novel?
6. One main relationship the book explores is the relationship between Dorrity and Metalboy. In groups, discuss the following: Do you like Dorrity and Metalboy as characters? What do you think of their reactions to different situations and what do their reactions tell us about them and their personalities? Do you think they teach each other any significant lessons about themselves and other characters? If so, what? Do you believe that their relationship develops and changes through the book? If so, what are the main events which contribute to the development and change?
7. The book has many beautiful descriptions of places, creatures, inventions and people, for example, Eagle Hall (p. 193), the dark magic's half-creatures (p. 193), the barrel-boat (p. 167) and Count Bale (p. 203). Using the author's style as inspiration, write your own descriptive paragraph or poem about a place, object or person that is important to you. Read it aloud to a classmate and then get them to draw what you have described.
8. The book is full of dramatic, highly-descriptive, suspense-filled action sequences, particularly chase and escape scenes, for example, the kidnapping by the anarchists (pp.113-116), using the blossom sleds (p. 135-136) and escaping from Eagle Hall (p. 264-268). Choose an action sequence from the book. Study and discuss the language the author uses. Then write a dramatic, suspense-filled action sequence of your own about something that has happened to you. Present your sequence in either a comic strip, movie storyboard or short children's picture book format.



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9. The narrative of the book is told in the third person. Why do you think the author chose to do this? Is it effective? Choose a passage about one of the main events of the novel. Re-write the passage as a first person narrative monologue in any of the main characters' voices other than Dorrity's, for example, Metalboy, Mr. Coop, King Jasper, Captain Dodger or Count Bale. Think about the kind of vocabulary your chosen character would use, and how their perspective of the event might differ from Dorrity's. Present your monologue to your class.
10. Many top journalists from Fontania are in attendance at the false coronation, including Mr. Kent. Imagine you are a journalist and create the front page of *Fontanian Weekly*. Present it in a newspaper format, including headlines, pictures and an article by Mr. Kent describing his experience of being locked in the cells of Eagle Hall (p. 301).
11. Create an illustrated timeline of the main events of the novel, or choose your favourite moment from the book and create your own artistic interpretation of it, for example, a diorama, painting, model, poem, cartoon strip, movie storyboard, video, etc.
12. This is a stand-alone final novel in a trilogy. Read one or both of the two previous novels, *The Travelling Restaurant* and *The Queen and the Nowhere Boy*. Then write a one page synopsis of the book or books.
13. The book is entitled *The Volume of Possible Endings, A Tale of Fontania*, and some of Dorrity's possible endings are listed in Appendix I (p. 331). Did you like the actual ending of the book? Why/why not? Either re-write the ending of the book, or write a plot outline and back-cover blurb for a fourth and final book of this series.
14. Appendix II of the novel features the lyrics and score of the 'Anarchists' Marching Song' (pp. 333-335). In groups, perform the song for your class. Then write a song to celebrate either Dorrity's fake coronation or King Jasper's success in retaining his rightful place as monarch of Fontania.
15. In groups, imagine you are a film production team attempting to gain financial backing to turn *The Volume of Possible Endings, A Tale of Fontania* into a feature film. Write up your proposal and include one or two scenes from the novel as a film script, your choices for the soundtrack, casting, location, etc. Or imagine the novel is going to be turned into a stage play. Design a suitable set, programme notes and advertising poster for the play.
16. The cover illustration, chapter openings and colour maps on the inside covers are by artist Sam Broad. What do you like/dislike about them? Design your own illustrations for two of the chapters, as well as a new cover.
17. Write a review of the book, aiming it at the children's page of your favourite magazine, newspaper or website. What did you like about the book? Why? What did you dislike about the book? Why? Give it a rating, such as stars or a number out of ten.