



Teachers' Notes

Eric Vale – Epic Fail

Written by Michael Gerard Bauer
 Illustrated by Joe Bauer

Teachers' Notes by Madeline Holmes

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Category	Junior Fiction
Title	Eric Vale – Epic Fail
Author	Michael Gerard Bauer
Illustrator	Joe Bauer
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Introduction

We all have moments in life we would like to forget or just pretend never happened. As much as he'd like to erase it from the history books and pretend nothing out of the ordinary occurred, Eric Vale isn't likely to forget the day his name became synonymous with Epic Fail anytime soon. Neither, it seems, is the Year Five class at Moreton Hill Primary School. This is a story about one boy's dogged determination to rewrite his past by doing something undeniably awesome so that no one – not even Martin Fassbender – can say otherwise.

Eric Vale – Epic Fail is a very funny tale about those awkward and seemingly unforgettable events of childhood.

About the Author

Michael Gerard Bauer was born in Brisbane. He taught at schools before resigning in 2000 to pursue his dream of being a published writer. His first novel *The Running Man* won the CBCA's Book of the Year (Older Readers) Award in 2005 and he has since garnered many other honours including international awards. His other books include *Don't Call Me Ishmael!*, *Ishmael and the Return of the Dugongs*, *Dinosaur Knights*, *Just a Dog*, *You Turkeys!* and *Ishmael and the Hoops of Steel*. Many of Michael's books have been published in other countries and in different languages.

About the Illustrator

Joe Bauer is a young filmmaker whose recent film *The Killage* has enjoyed international critical success. In addition to making comedy films, Joe has been drawing since childhood. He is the creator of the original covers for his father Michael's first two *Ishmael* books. This is his first published illustrated book.

Reading the Text

Part One

Class discussion

After you have read the first chapter, have a discussion about your first impressions and thoughts on *Eric Vale – Epic Fail*. Here are some topics you can use to prompt discussion:

- Who is our narrator? What do we learn about him?
- What is an epic fail?
- Does anyone have a nickname? Do you agree with Eric's assessment on nicknames?
- The novel is written in first-person narration. Do you know what this means?
- What do we learn about Eric's classmates in the opening chapters?
- How would you describe the tone of the novel?
- What kind of person is Chewy? How do you know this?

Group task

You have been asked to create a series of videos that could be posted to YouTube that give advice to kids your age on how to avoid or cope with 'epic fail' moments in life.

Each episode could have its own heading like 'what to do when ...', 'How to avoid ...' or 'How to respond when ... happens'. You might like to include re-enactments of potential epic fails. It's entirely up to you on how you proceed. Be creative in your responses.

You will need to prepare a script for your videos and organise your team so that everyone plays a part. You should nominate a director, a camera person, a set designer, and a chief writer, though everyone should be involved in each process.

Literary component

- 1) Like Eric, create your own journal to store your thoughts and to jot down any awesome stories. For one week, try to keep your journal with you at all times and see what prompts your imagination. Do write down all your genius ideas, you'll need these later!

- 2) You can also begin a blog to respond directly to the story. Write about characters you like, plot developments that take you by surprise, your thoughts on Eric's plan to rid himself of his nickname – you can write about anything as long as it relates to the story. Use the class discussion questions to prompt your responses.

Part Two

Class discussion

There is an old saying 'a picture is worth a thousand words'. What do you think this means? Consider these questions:

- How do the illustrations contribute to *Eric Vale – Epic Fail*?
- Do you think visual accompaniments make stories more powerful?
- Do these illustrations make you more aware of the tone of the novel?
- Which illustrations do you like best and why?
- Are illustrations just for kids or can adult books have them too?
- Do you respond more to illustrations or text?
- Which do you think is the more powerful medium? Do you think a picture delivers a message more clearly than words, or vice versa? Can you think of an example to demonstrate your point?

Individual project

Imagine you have been put in charge of the next school assembly. Consider the assembly in the story. What was successful? What went horribly wrong? Prepare a plan with this in mind. You will need to come up with a schedule (news items, speakers, etc.), a theme, entertainment ideas and a proposed guest speaker. Draw

inspiration from your own school assemblies. What's happening at school at the moment: is there any news of big events or competitions that should be included? You might need to talk to teachers and students in different year levels to come up with a comprehensive plan. Write up your plan as a program with instructions that anyone could use to produce your assembly.

Literacy component

You've seen how Eric writes like he's in a hurry to get his ideas out, snippets here and there when inspiration strikes. Writing to a time frame can spur the imagination. Write down a topic on a piece of paper and give it to your teacher. Your teacher will pick topics at random and give you ten minutes to write about the subject. The idea of the exercise is to write down everything that pops into your head until your teacher say stop.

Part Three

Class discussion

Aasha Alsufi has moved to Australia from Somalia and, despite her classmates' efforts, she is having a difficult time fitting in. Moving to a new country isn't easy.

- Why do you think this is the case?
- Can you imagine moving across the world to begin a new life?
- Do you think it's difficult to meet new people?
- Why doesn't Aasha respond to her friendly classmates?
- Make a class list of everything someone like Aasha has to adjust to when moving to a new country. E.g. language barriers.
- How would you make someone like Aasha feel welcome?
- What do you know about Somalia? Can you find it on the world map?
- What do you image life is like in Somalia?

Group task

You've been invited to participate in a brilliant ideas festival. Using your *awesome stories and genius thoughts journal*, choose one of your creative ideas to go into a class box. As a class, form a round table and one by one select an idea to discuss. Talk about the logistics of implementing the idea, debate how the idea would be beneficial, discuss the purpose of the idea, etc. Once you've gone through the entire idea box, vote on your preferred brilliant idea.

The top four 'brilliant ideas' can be used as debating topics. In teams of three, you will need to debate for or against the idea. Remember that the purpose is to convince the judging panel (your classmates) that your argument is sound, so use persuasive words and construct a clear and coherent argument.

Literary component

- 1) Compose an essay on 'the importance of being polite at all times'.
- 2) Choose one of your pieces from the speed writing exercise to develop.
- 3) Continue with your blog.

After Reading the Text

Class discussion

Have a class discussion about your final impressions of the story. Here are some guiding questions:

- Was the ending expected?
- Were you satisfied with the conclusion?
- Was there a theme?
- What makes a story humorous?
- What did you most like about the story?
- How would you describe the author's writing style?

Individual project

Research Somalia – find out what you can about what it would be like to live there. Visit http://www.unicef.org/somalia/reallives_7696.html and listen to Somali children speak about their experiences. Write up your findings in an article and post this on your blog.

Literacy component

Write a short story and explore how your protagonist copes with an epic fail. Draw on the situations and character experiences in *Eric Vale – Epic Fail* for inspiration. You might like to base it on a real-life experience you have had.

Extension Activities

- 1) Write a review on *Eric Vale – Epic Fail*. A good review is entertaining to read. It should be as interesting as the book you are writing about. You're summarising the book for a potential reader. Avoid saying whether something is good or bad and instead look at what you think works and what you think didn't work. Once you've compiled your review, you might like to go one step further and, in groups of three or four, have a book review session like you see on TV. As well as talking about *Eric Vale – Epic Fail* you might like to introduce books you've read in the same genre or by the same author as a comparison. You could even film these sessions and have someone pretend to be the author appearing on the show.
- 2) The night before the swimming carnival Eric comes up with what he thinks is a fail-proof plan. He prepares for everything he thinks may go wrong. Imagine that you are about to embark on a family holiday. Like Eric, write up a table where you identify possible problems and how you choose to prevent them or at least to lessen their impact.
- 3) Create your own list of positive slogans using Chewy's examples.
- 4) Rewrite a chapter from the perspective of Mr Winter. How might he view his pupils?!

- 5) Write a new creative piece (or use one you've done in a previous exercise) and illustrate it in a similar style to the novel.
- 6) Choose an endangered species to research. Write up your findings on your blog.
- 7) Volunteer to help produce the school newsletter. You might like to contribute a write-up of a school event, like a guest speaker's visit to a school assembly.
- 8) Prepare a monologue as one of the characters from the novel. Try to reveal your chosen character's personality and thoughts and feelings about particular events and people in the story.
- 9) Choose a scene from the novel and write a script to act out as a group or in pairs. The scene might be presented as a live performance in class or as a film.