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# DIVING INTO THE WORLD AND GOING BEYOND THE SCREEN: A REVIEW OF *THE EPIC STORY OF EVERY LIVING THING*

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## Abstract

The author reviews the young adult novel *The Epic Story of Every Living Thing* (2022) by Deb Caletti, providing analysis and suggestions for teaching.

**Keywords:** clipper ships, Hawaii, scuba diving, social media, surrogate parenting

Deb Caletti's *The Epic Story of Every Living Thing* was published in 2022, which reflects the setting being post-pandemic. The book has two narratives that in the beginning do not relate to each other, but in the middle and the end there is a connection that will be carried on throughout one character's life. The novel is about a 17-year-old girl named Harper, who is all about social media and trying to look perfect for people (her followers) whom she has never met. But there is one thing in Harper's life that she considers to be a missing piece, which is knowing her biological father. Even though Harper has an unhealthy relationship with her phone and social media, through her outlets she discovers her half-sibling Dario. Dario introduces Harper to two more half-siblings, Wyatt, and Simone, and they track down their biological father, Beau Zane, who lives in Hawaii.

The siblings travel to Hawaii to meet Beau, a surfer dude who also owns a diving shop called Captain Neptune. Harper wanted to find her biological father because she felt something was missing in her life; she also wanted to find out who she really is. After returning from Hawaii, Harper is a changed person, for the better, all because of the support from Beau Zane, her half-sibs, and the elusive Mary Patten.

The second story is set in the 1850s and is about Mary Patten, the 19-year-old wife of a sea captain, who takes responsibility for their merchant ship *Neptune's Car* when her husband is struck by yellow fever.

These two-story lines intersect and intertwine because Harper's newfound Hawaiian family will be affected by the U. S. Navy detonating a bomb at the site of the remains of *Neptune's Car*. Harper's energy moves from virtual to actual as she joins her dad, her grandmother, her half-siblings and local activists to protest the Navy's actions. Helping to preserve the site helps Harper shift from viewing life through a screen to living life with people.

This book would be appropriate for high school juniors and seniors because of its content and language. The reason that it would appeal to high school students is because the protagonist is 17 years old, and the setting is post-pandemic, which everyone has lived through. I would include this in my course curriculum by having my class read the book then have them choose between the

following projects: (1) take a break from social media for a week, and write a paper about it, or (2) research a historical landmark, including its backstory and how it became a historical landmark. Both are writing projects, but they are allowing the students to use critical thinking about the book, and the obstacles that Harper and Mary Patten face.

There may be some challenges that arise when teaching this book: the language used and how Harper describes certain situations is sometimes a little advanced for high school students. Discussing with my students about the situations and language in the book before reading it would give me an idea if they were ready to read a book like this one or not.

What I liked best about this book is how much Harper grows as a person even at such a young age of 17. The first couple of chapters in the book were hard to read because Harper treats people in her life—especially her boyfriend—like they are not that important. It is obvious that they came last when compared to her followers. Once Harper goes to Hawaii, she starts to change; then, when she loses her phone, she experiences the epiphany of realizing what she was missing by having her phone in front of her face the whole time. I also liked how the author connected Harper and Mary Patten and created a bond that will stick with Harper for the rest of her life.

### **Author Biography**

Laney Roller is from Exeter, Missouri, and graduated from Pittsburg State University in 2025. After graduating, Laney will teach 9<sup>th</sup> grade English at McDonald County High School in Missouri. Laney's favorite novel is *WE* by Yevgeny Zamyatin and favorite book series is *Divergent* by Veronica Roth. Laney loves traveling to settings where books are based, including a recent adventure in Forks, Washington, where *Twilight* was filmed. Laney can be reached at [lroller@gus.pittstate.edu](mailto:lroller@gus.pittstate.edu).