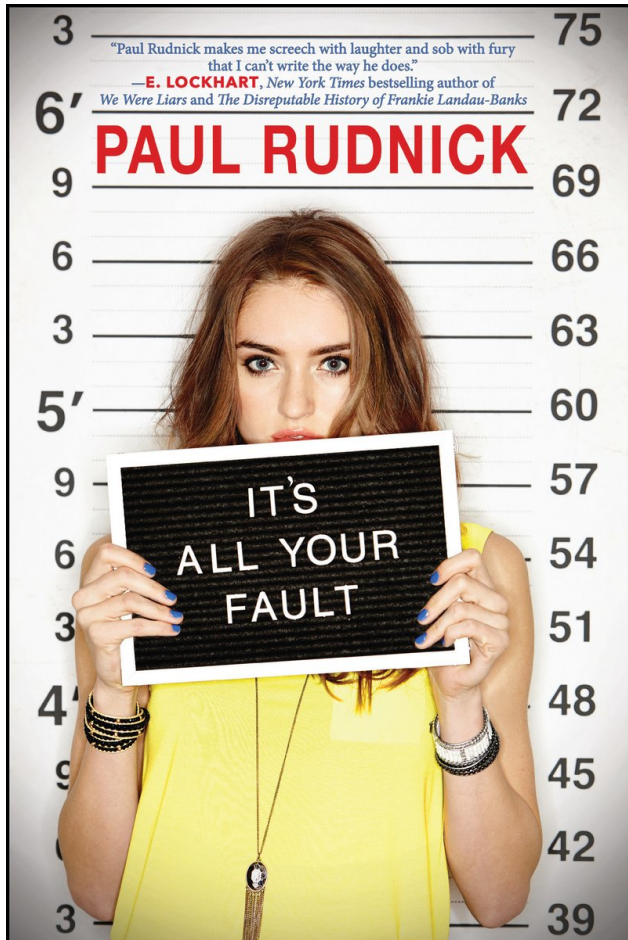


# *It's All Your Fault* by Paul Rudnick



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## About the Author: Paul Rudnick

- Author's Website: <http://paulrudnick.com/secret/novels-anthologies/>
- Paul Rudnick is a literary genius from New York who is a novelist, an essayist, a screenwriter, and a playwright. Rudnick comes from a Jewish background and a lot of his work focuses on social issues. His articles and essays have appeared in *Vogue*, *The New York Times*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Esquire*. Rudnick has received awards such as The John Gasser Playwright Award, an Obie Award, and two Outer Critics Circle Awards. Currently, Rudnick is writing the Broadway musical adaptation of *The Devil Wears Prada*. Rudnick has a long list of accomplishments, but what is most significant about

him is his ability to make people of all ages laugh. Rudnick's works are hilarious, engaging, and particularly beneficial to young readers because he delivers moral lessons while making people laugh hysterically.

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## Synopsis of *It's All Your Fault*

*It's All Your Fault* tells the story of two seemingly opposite girls Caitlin and Heller who are former best friends/cousins whose relationship crumbled after one secret, life-threatening experience. Caitlin Singleberry is a straight-edge, cookie cutter, perfect homeschooled Christian girl who strives to be the best, most perfect good girl she can possibly be. Heller Harrigan serves as her opposite, for she is a wild super-star willing to do any drug, crash any party, and cover the tabloids with her mug shots, nudes, and other debacles. Caitlin is assigned to turn Heller into a good girl in order to save Heller's reputation before her big film, *Angel Wars*, debuts. The issue is, Caitlin and Heller are not only complete opposites, but enemies, and they are forced to spend time together. Caitlin begins to partake in activities she never thought she would and even starts having feelings for boys! Caitlin and Heller have crazy fights and adventures, but ultimately they learn a lot more about each other and their relationship than they expected.

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## Text Complexity

- **Lexile:** 1090L Ages 14-17
  - I believe that the reading range for this novel could be 13-17 because I believe 8th graders would benefit and are capable of understanding the novel. The language is straightforward and simple enough to comprehend for young readers. There are references to sex but they are always humorous and short-lived, so it would not be inappropriate for middle schoolers.
- **Dale-Chall Formula:**
  - Raw score: 3.1965
  - Adjusted Score: (3.6365 + 3.1965)
  - Final Score: 6.8
    - Age Range: Grades 6-8
    - As previously mentioned, I believe that this novel fits the 13-17 age range, therefore, I believe that this book is a little too inappropriate for 6th and 7th graders. While the sex references are brief, there are also heavy subjects such as drug addiction, alcoholism, and suicide which can be overwhelming for younger audiences.

- **New Dale-Chall Readability Index:**

Age Range: Grades 7-8

- This New Dale-Chall Readability Index is slightly more accurate than the previous one, but I would still claim that this book is not for 7th graders.

- **Exeter Qualities:**

- “Exciting plots that include secrecy, surprise, and tension brought about through narrative hooks and a fast pace.”
  - *It’s All Your Fault* is a book nobody can put down because it is extremely fast paced, exciting, dramatic, and hilarious. Even teen readers who do not enjoy reading will enjoy this book because of all the riveting drama and jokes it contains. There is one big secret that is alluded to throughout the novel and is finally revealed at the end, which will entice young readers to keep reading. There is almost constant tension between Heller and Caitlin and tensions between Heller and her fanbase which will keep young readers on their toes.
- “Characters who reflect experiences of teen readers, something that is not found in much of the literary canon, especially when it comes to strong female protagonists.”
  - Characters Heller and Caitlin experience a wide range of problems and emotions that many teen readers experience as well. Both Heller and Caitlin suffer with insecurity and wondering if they are good enough which causes them to strive for unattainable perfection. Growing up, especially with puberty, teen readers are very uncomfortable and uncertain with their bodies and identities, so by reading *It’s All Your Fault*, these problems will be normalized for teen readers.
  - *It’s All Your Fault* is spectacular because all the main characters are female and the males are the side characters, which is a rare occurrence. This is significant because young female readers will be represented in an empowering way because they usually see themselves represented as a simple side love interest. With this novel, two male characters are simple side love interests and the female characters take charge and go on adventures.

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## Quotes

1. “‘I’m gonna lay this out for you. Isn’t it wacky, I don’t hear from you, or any of your family, not a Singlepeep, for all that time. Now, boom, all of a sudden, right before I’m opening in the biggest movie of all time, here comes little Caitlin Prissy pants Singletoons, knocking on my door and my roof. I’m not saying you want something, and I’m not saying that all of a sudden you’d like to be--shazam!--best buds again, and I would never ever, God forbid, use the word Singleberry and starfucker in the same sentence, but doesn’t this seem just the tiniest bit suspicious? Just a smidge? Just a Singlesmidge?’ Heller leaned back and took a satisfied drag on her cigarette. She reached inside the stretched-out neckline of her T-shirt and scratched herself. She’d challenged me and said terrible, untrue things, with that smirk on her face. She’d mocked everything sacred. Everything Singleberry. How DARE she? ‘Heller’, I said, standing straight and tall, because good posture can defeat dishonesty. ‘You’re right--we were friends, once upon a time. But I am not here because of your fame or your money or your FOUR HOUSES and your SIX ASSISTANTS. I am here as Christian, because you are in need. You have committed felonies, you have been arrested, you have abused countless substances and you have...behaved in an overtly sexual manner.’” (42-43)

- a. **Significance:** This quote is significant because it strongly illustrates the personality differences between Heller and Caitlin. Heller portrays herself as a blunt, raunchy person who is not afraid to say what she thinks versus Caitlin who holds herself to her own very strict, Christian based moral standards and refrains from using “sinful” language. Heller is indirectly yet also directly accusing Caitlin of showing up in her life to take her money. This accusation speaks volumes, because it exposes Heller’s deep-seated trust issues as a result of her worldwide stardom. How can Heller trust anyone, even a family member, if she is extremely famous? Heller does not trust people’s intentions because people, even her fans, are just trying to get money, a story, or a connection out of her. Consequently, Heller puts up a mean front in order to drive people away so they cannot hurt her or take advantage of her. Caitlin naturally does not understand this at first, and is greatly offended by Heller’s accusation and insults. This quote highlights how Caitlin views fame as one-dimensional--something that is easy, stress-free, and over the top. Caitlin ridicules Heller for having four houses and six assistants in an attempt to shame Heller for her excessive spending, possessions, and needs. Caitlin also expresses how she feels holier-than-Heller, as a good Christian girl who is here to save Heller from all her sinful behaviors and tendencies. While Caitlin has some good intentions in aiding Heller, her reaction to and assumptions of Heller highlight how she is ignorant of Heller’s background and perspective.

2. “Heller was looking right at me, to see if she could trust me. I wasn’t sure how to reassure her--I almost reached out to touch her arm but that felt fake, as if I was her minister or guidance counselor. I just nodded, which I hoped was enough. ‘It was the only way I could deal with everything, with wanting to be so good and with working so hard and with so many people hating me. I would buy a bottle of Jack Daniels because that made me feel like a tough guy, and I would sit there really late at night and I wouldn’t stop until I’d finish the whole bottle and passed out. A few hours later I’d wake up and I’d take a shower and I’d get back to work. I made a deal with myself that I’d never complain about anything and I’d never tell anyone what was going on as long as each week, I had that one hour where I could just not think about anything. Because, believe me, if I couldn’t drink, all I would do with any downtime would be to obsess over whatever else I should be doing to prepare for the movie and about how I could get Ava Lily Larrimore to like me.’ Heller was scaring me, not just because of how hard she’d push herself and because of her blackout drinking but because I understood. While I had never experienced anything like Heller’s kind of pressure, I knew what it meant to want to be perfect every second of the day. I knew about punishing myself for even the tiniest failure. I knew about freaking out because no punishment was ever enough.” (121-122)
  - a. **Significance:** Heller is opening up to Caitlin about her fears, insecurities, and unhealthy coping mechanisms. Before, Heller would always insult Caitlin and push her away, never allowing her to become close. Now, in a rare moment, Heller is opening up to Caitlin and Caitlin is doing her best to be there for her cousin. This quote is significant because Caitlin finally begins to understand why Heller acts out all the time--because the heavy pressure of fame and perfection is so daunting to Heller. Before this talk, Caitlin assumed that Heller was a rich, spoiled celebrity who only cared about partying and material objects, but now she sees that Heller is terrified of public opinion and is destroying her physical and mental health to cope with these anxieties. For Heller, opening up to Caitlin is a huge accomplishment because it is so difficult to open up to someone, especially someone you are not on the best of terms with, about the struggle of addiction and insecurities about being famous. Heller’s speech exposes how being famous is not lavish and perfect but rather intimidating and overwhelming--especially for a young girl. Instead of calling Heller names and judging her, Caitlin listens to and empathizes with Heller, which has been hard for her to do considering their rough past together. Caitlin realizes that Heller is not only a complex human with problems, but that she can also identify with Heller’s insecurities. Caitlin realizes that she also struggles with attempting to be perfect all the time, and that, even

though she and Heller come from different worlds, they can still connect on that struggle.

3. “She...Heller knew? I’d always had panic attacks but I’d convinced myself that I covered them and no one noticed. They were my secret. My parents had taken me to a therapist but that was private. I was homeschooled. No one had to know. ‘I know how bad they can get. It’s okay.’ ‘Not...not...no.’ ‘Let’s try something. I think it might help. I’ll do it with you. We’re gonna hold our breath and count to three and then slowly let it out. One...two...three..’ I held my breath. I counted. I let it out. ‘I saw that email. I think I know what’s going on. North Carolina is far away. You’ll be alone. They’ll want you to sing. Of course you’re scared. But this is me. I know you. Catey?’ I looked at her. ‘You can do it. If you want to. You can do anything.’” (218)
  - a. **Significance:** In this quote, Caitlin is having a panic attack after discovering that she was accepted into another college. Caitlin is overwhelmed because she has too many options for the future and she is unsure of what she wants to do, especially considering she has been homeschooled her whole life. Heller recognizes Caitlin is having a panic attack and rushes to help her, which shocks Caitlin because she thought that nobody knew about this secret. The fact that Heller knows Caitlin’s secret is significant because it shows how Heller has always genuinely cared for Caitlin and is sensitive to other people’s issues. Caitlin is shocked but also touched that Heller knows, which softens Caitlin’s overall anger toward Heller. This experience accentuates Heller’s capability for empathy and love and Caitlin’s capability to open up and trust people she is upset with. Heller also tells Caitlin that she can do anything, which is a very reassuring, loving sentiment that displays Heller’s true kindness. This quote is also significant because it shows readers that even seemingly put-together perfect people like Caitlin doubt themselves, struggle with anxiety, and fear the future.

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## Why Young Adolescents Should Read This

- Many kids and young teens struggle with anxiety and the strive for perfection like Caitlin and Heller do. By reading this novel, young adults can identify with strong female characters who also battle anxiety demons, therefore readers would feel less isolated and more aware that they are not suffering alone. Moreover, readers who do not have anxiety can become aware that many people, even people their own age, can have anxiety. These readers will be able to become more emotionally intelligent and aware of different kinds of people and their personal issues.
- Young adolescents should read this novel to gain perspective on different upbringings/ lifestyles. Readers that identify with Caitlin can open their eyes and minds to people who

are less religious than they are. Readers that identify with Heller can understand that more conservative people like Caitlin are not boring sticks in the mud. Watching Caitlin and Heller open up and empathize with each other could allow readers to do the same in their own lives/relationships.

- Young adolescents should read this novel to practice and understand the benefits of forgiveness. Throughout the novel, Caitlin insists that she will never like or forgive Heller for what Heller did to her at the quarry. As Caitlin starts to understand Heller's issues, and as Heller continues to open up to Caitlin and eventually apologizes, Caitlin is able to forgive Heller for the quarry incident. When Caitlin forgives Heller, their friendship becomes stronger than ever, so I believe readers would be able to take this example and practice forgiveness in their relationships.
  - Unfortunately, some young adults deal with drug/alcohol abuse and suicidal thoughts like Heller. Young adults who read this book will realize that there is always hope, always something worth living for, and that is possible to overcome drug/alcohol addiction. When Heller describes why she does drugs/alcohol, a lot of readers will realize that drugs and alcohol can be extremely dangerous especially when used as an unhealthy coping mechanism. Young adults could also gain perspective from Heller when she is talking about suicide. Many readers will be able to identify with these thoughts and feelings, and by seeing how Heller overcame them and found happiness in a rekindled relationship, they will be able to take a step back from their unsettling thoughts and realize that life can become good again.
  - Young adolescents should read this novel to realize and understand the negative effects and disadvantages of being famous, especially at a young age. Throughout the novel, it is clear that, even though Heller enjoys her fame, she has suffered greatly for being a child star and a star now. Fame puts so much pressure on Heller to the point where she turns to drugs and alcohol to feel nothing. Fame causes fans to bother Heller in public, take advantage of her, and even causes one crazy fan to attack her with a knife. Moreover, with fame comes great criticism from the public, very harsh criticism a teenager should not have to deal with. By reading this novel, young adults will realize that fame can be very toxic and destructive.
  - Teenagers and young adults all struggle with the power of choice. Will they go to college? Will they follow their passion? Which path is the right one to follow? In the novel, Caitlin is anxious about her future, unsure of which college to go to that will make her happy but also make her family proud. Many young readers will be able to identify with fearing the future and fearing failure. By reading this novel, young readers will realize that they have more power in their choices than they realize, and that ultimately following one's passions is rewarding.
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## Teaching *It's All Your Fault* in the Classroom

- Before reading, give a list of basic archetypes such as Christian girl, rockstar, jock, etc. and ask students to write down and/or discuss how they expect these people to be, look, and act. After reading the book, have students revisit these stereotypes and ask if have they changed their minds at all.
- Have students write about a time where they felt betrayed by a close friend or family member. Have students then, after reading the book, explain why they forgave that person if they did, and if they have not, if they think about reaching out to that person again.
- Have students discuss why or why not they want to be famous. After reading the book, revisit the topic and discuss the pros and cons of being famous, especially at a young age.
- Have students write about a time they felt brave and why they felt the need to be brave. Did they do it under peer pressure? Did they do it to impress anyone? Did they do it for themselves? Or was it a combination of the three?
- *It's All Your Fault* can be paired with the novel *Openly Straight* by Bill Konigsberg. *Openly Straight* is about a young gay boy who is openly gay in his hometown but when he transfers schools he purposely claims he is straight because he feels like being the gay kid stripped him of his identity. Students can compare and contrast this boy's identity struggles with Heller's--Heller is insecure about her fame identity and if she is good enough.

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## Other Work by Paul Rudnick

- *Social Disease*
  - *I Shudder*
  - *The Collected Plays of Paul Rudnick*
  - *Spy: The Funny Years*
  - *Fierce Pajamas*
  - *Disquiet, Please*
  - *Mirth of a Nation*
  - *Auntie Mame*
  - Here is the link to his other work: <http://paulrudnick.com/secret/novels-anthologies/>
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