



family of liars

e. lockhart

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Recommended for: 13–18 years old

Themes: Family, siblings, secrets, coming of age, consent, privilege/class, suspense, mystery, grief, trauma

Applicable to learning areas: English language, literacy and literature

Summary

This is the page-turning, must-read thriller prequel to *We Were Liars*, the #1 New York Times bestseller and TikTok sensation. *Family of Liars* transports readers back to the story of another summer, another generation, and the secrets that will haunt them for decades to come. This prequel also includes a hand-drawn map and family tree.

A Word from the Author

'I decided to think of the two novels as related to one another like an anthology TV show in which thematic material repeats in a new season, with different meaning or a fresh approach. Here is another drug-addicted heiress, another difficult romance, intense summer friendships, and unspeakable truths told through fairy tales. But, I hope, a very different journey.'

'I started by thinking about the three Sinclair sisters on this island, separated from the rest of the world. What was their shared wound? And what would upend their world? The answers: the loss of Rosemary and a boatload of cute boys.'

– E. Lockhart

Suggestions for Classroom Discussion and Application

Book design

- In what way has the book's designer conveyed the impression of a joyous but long-gone memory? Why do you think the designer chose to overlay the image with the title? What is the impact of the font used for the title? How do the image and title work together to create mood? [Optional] Compare and contrast this cover with the cover of *We Were Liars*.

Part One: A Story for Johnny

- In what way does this opening frame the rest of the book's retrospective narrative? In your answer, consider the questions that arise from the opening pages. [For instance, why is Carrie being haunted by her son and what terrible thing in her past is she hiding?]
- If the opening of a story is designed to hook the reader and compel us to continue reading past the first few pages, has E. Lockhart succeeded here?
- Do you find the narrator's voice intriguing? If so, why, and if not, why not?
- What effect do the repetition of the words 'I', 'him' and 'never' in the third paragraph create?
- Has the mood established by the cover been enhanced or diminished by the opening of Part One?

Fairy Tales and Intertextuality

- Consider these extracts from the text and answer the questions below:

Our family has always loved fairy tales. There is something ugly and true in them. They hurt, they are strange, but we cannot stop reading them, over and over. Page 54

I want to tell that story to you now, because – well, like the other fairy tales, it may help you understanding this difficult thing I am trying to say, the part of my life that I cannot yet put into my own words. Pages 161–2

- What does the term intertextuality mean?
- What does Carrie's telling of the 'Cinderella', 'Stolen Pennies' and 'Mr Fox' stories reveal about her own story?
- [Extension Question] How do the gruesome and tragic details within these stories affect the mood of *Family of Liars* as the novel progresses?

*I have never been kissed before. It's like
diving into cold water, like
eating a raspberry, like
listening to a flute, and it's like
none of those things. Page 89*

- How does the language of free verse intensify the scene here?
- Find an example of free verse later in the novel and analyse the language used. How does it affect your understanding of the scene?

There are stacks of green napkins, bouquets of white and yellow flowers, trays and bowls of ‘nibbles’ – meaning things to eat during cocktail hour. Bowls of salty olives mixed with lemon rind, salmon mousse and sesame crackers, cashew nuts and yellow cherry tomatoes.’ Page 78

Since food can be a symbol in literature, what do you think the many and elaborate descriptions of it in *Family of Liars* might symbolise? In your answer, consider the family dynamics of the Sinclairs, their place in society, and the nature of retrospective narratives.

We girls have never been taught to grieve, to rage, or even to share our thoughts. Instead, we have become excellent at silence; at small, kind gestures; at sailing; at sandwich-making. We talk eagerly about literature and make every guest feel welcome. We never speak about medical issues. We show our love not with honesty or affection, with loyalty. Page 17

Given later events in the novel, how accurate do you think Carrie is about her family here?

Point of View

- Harris’s motto is ‘No way out but through.’ Tipper’s is ‘Live a joyful life.’ How do these mottoes define and limit each character?
- Retell the story from Penny’s point of view (POV). Does changing the POV shift your understanding of Penny’s and Carrie’s motivations?
- Although Carrie informs us that she had been a liar all her life in Part One, were you surprised by the revelation that she had lied about Pfeff’s death in her first telling? How did E. Lockhart foreshadow that Carrie might have been more involved in his murder earlier in the novel? What other novels have you read involving an unreliable narrator? Why do you think this device is quite popular in YA fiction?

Discussion

- Consider these extracts from the text and discuss the prompts below as a class:

At first, this land belonged to Indigenous people. It was taken away from them by settlers from Europe. Nobody knows when, but it must have happened.

That’s ugly money, too. Just in different ways. The history there includes exploited workers, broken contracts, and child labor overseas – along with journalistic integrity and belief in the freedom of press. Pages 29–30

- In your opinion, is ‘old money’ and all the trappings it can buy portrayed positively or negatively in the novel? Did this description of where their money originated influence your view of the Sinclairs and their private island?
- Talk about the actions the Sinclair sisters and their father take at the novel’s climax. Are the actions justified? Do you, as a reader, feel content that the Sinclairs’ position in society protects them from the consequences of their actions?

Winding up

- Would you describe the ending of the novel as a resolution? *'I do not think it will always be this way.'* What do you think the last line means?

Essay questions: choose one

- In what way does the title, *Family of Liars*, relate to the events and characters within the novel?
- *'Money can't buy you happiness.'* Discuss this aphorism as it relates to the main themes of *Family of Liars*.

About the author

E. Lockhart is the author of the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *We Were Liars*. She also invented a superhero for DC Comics. Her books include *Whistle: A New Gotham City Hero* and *Again Again. The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks* was a National Book Award finalist and a Printz Honor Book. *Genuine Fraud* was a *New York Times* bestseller and a finalist for the *L.A. Times* Book Prize.

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