

Title: *We Were Liars*
Author: E. Lockhart
Perspectives Category: Socio-Economic Differences

Reviewer Name and Grade: Ella O., 9th Grade

Response Submitted: November 27, 2020

1. What is the main plot of this book?

Cadence Eastman (referred to as Cady) has spent nearly every summer of her life on the private island of Beechwood along with the rest of her wealthy family. Cady's summers growing up were spent with her two cousins, Johnny and Mirren, and Gat, who befriends them after Cady's aunt brings her boyfriend and his nephew with her one summer. The four call themselves "the Liars," and revel in each other's company. When Cady is fifteen years old, she is involved in an accident that lands her in the hospital with a serious head injury, yet she has no idea how she got there and when she asks about the accident, she gets no definitive answers. Cady spends two years recovering from her injuries, and is forced to travel to Europe with her father instead of returning to Beechwood during those summers. The summer she turns seventeen, Cady returns to the island with her mother, and is reunited with the Liars. Cady is now determined to find out what happened on the night of her accident, but her family has been instructed to let her recover those memories on her own. With the help of Johnny, Mirren, and Gat, Cady tries to recall the events leading up to the accident. This story focuses on not only the relationship between these characters, but their relationship with their wealthy family, and how this wealth affects it. It also talks of greed, bigotry, lies, love, family, and loss.

2. Which character did you most identify with and why?

I identified most closely with Mirren, one of Cady's closest cousins and friends. This was because Mirren was often characterized as bossy, and she liked to act as if she was the leader of the Liars. I, too, try to lead groups and projects whenever the opportunity presents itself. She also acted as the voice of reason for the group, as I often find myself doing. However, Mirren was the one who invented the idea for the event that sparked the chain of events leading up to Cady's accident. She did this in hopes of creating a change in her family's bigoted and greedy behavior. I think I can understand this, because I also hope to bring about positive change, but I aim to do it in a way that does not hurt others.

3. What do you believe is the main message of this book?

I believe that the main message of the book is that privilege can often skew someone's perspective of the world, and cause harm. Over the course of the book, Cady falls in love with Gat, but her grandfather doesn't approve because of his South Asian descent. This subtle bigotry goes unnoticed by most of Cady's family, but it is all too obvious to Gat. This becomes even more clear when his uncle Ed proposes to Cady's aunt, Carrie, and she rejects him. Carrie knows that if she marries Ed, she will lose her share of the inheritance from her father and that she, Ed, and Gat will be cut off from the family. Cady's mother and two aunts are still fully dependent on their father and unable to support themselves, and Cady continually watches them argue over

inheritances and the value of their father's property. The children detest this arguing and see it as tearing their family apart.

4. *Do you think the main message of this book was effectively integrated into the story, or did it come across as too "preachy"?*

I think that the main message was perfectly integrated into the story, highlighting all the subtleties of her family's bigoted and greedy ways while still making it clear to the reader that this was problematic. An example of this was the way that Cady's grandfather claimed to be a good man, but was extremely exclusionary, and would try to upkeep a "traditional image" of an old, powerful New England family with his dangerous beliefs about cultural superiority. This impacted Cady's life and relationships, and part of her character growth throughout the book was recognizing how wrong her grandfather was, and how her family needed to fix their way of thinking.

5. *If two or more perspectives on an important topic were explored/presented in this book, which one did you agree with and why?*

The idea of a "perfect family" was explored throughout the book, and compared to Cady and Gat, Cady's grandfather Harris had a very different idea of what this looked like. I agree with Cady and Gat that love takes many forms and there is no such thing as a perfect family. Harris, however, believes that Gat, being of a different ethnicity, will ruin the appearance of his family, and so tries to separate the two by threatening Cady and her mother's inheritance. I think that Harris's way of thinking is deeply flawed. He is not a tolerant person, and he is unaware of how privileged he is.

6. *In what ways (if any) were your beliefs about a topic changed or reaffirmed through reading this book?*

While reading this book, my beliefs were reaffirmed. These beliefs include that racism, bigotry, and greed are some of the not only worst but most harmful things out there, and can destroy a family.

7. *What perspective, if any, do you think was missing from this book?*

I think that no perspective was missing from the book. We had Harris on one side, fitting the stereotype of the old family patriarch stuck in his ways, we had Gat to bring a fresh voice to the family and illuminate its flaws, and we had Cady, someone who learnt over time how horrid her family has become.

8. *Did this book encourage you to pursue any topics further through more reading, research, action, etc., and if so, how?*

This topic encouraged me to teach myself how to recognize bigoted behaviors in my everyday world, and make sure to call them out in order to make a change. I think bigotry is a learned behavior, and by recognizing it and then vowing to do something about it, we are one step closer to creating a more accepting world.

9. *What type of reader (based on age, interests, perspectives, etc.) would you suggest this book to?*

I would suggest this book to a teenaged reader who is interested in realistic fiction. I think this book is a great read for anyone who is trying to open their mind further, because it lays out some great examples of prejudice and classism that cause you to take a step back and think about where this behavior comes from. It's easy to read, and not only does it have a powerful message, but the story it tells is truly enticing.

10. *What other book(s) you have read that you think would make a good addition to this category of the Perspectives Bibliography, and why?*

A book I would like to recommend is *Everything Leads to You* by Nina LaCour. This is a book about poverty in Hollywood, and shows how social class is connected to opportunities. Emi is privileged, with parents who are professors studying issues related to African-American studies and pop culture. Emi's new love interest, Ava, and her friend, Jerome, are homeless and living in a shelter, and highlight how Emi leads such a fortunate life. An example of this was when Jerome points out the privilege involved in having framed pictures of the ghetto around the house as subjects of academic study, when that is his reality. This is an example of the discussion that is encouraged by *Everything Leads to You*.