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.*

Response Submitted By: Jayne J., 11th Grade
Date Submitted: April 7, 2022
1. What is the main plot of this book?
        We Were Liars is a mysterious young adult novel about a wealthy family who spends every summer on their private island called Beechwood. The story focuses on the main character, Cadence Sinclair Eastman. After Cadence suffers a head injury during one of the summers she was in Beechwood, she cannot remember almost anything from that trip. The plot is based around death, loss, greed, and memory.
"I am nearly eighteen. I own a well-used library card and not much else, though it is true I live in a grand house full of expensive, useless objects. I used to be blond, but now my hair is black. I used to be strong, but now I am weak. I used to be pretty, but now I look sick."
"My story starts before the accident. June of the summer I was fifteen…"
2. Which character did you most identify with and why?
        I think I most identify with a mixture of Mirren and Gat. Mirren is known to be bossy at times but has a genuine relationship with Cadence. Gat is protective and is an outsider to Cadence's family. I relate to both of them the most because I can get bossy at times when I get serious yet I still have that side of me that goes easy on others even when I'm bossy because I am a genuine person. I also relate to Gat because when I was younger I was always the odd one out in my friend groups and felt out of place in that group. But, I got out of those friend groups and got real friends which to Gat is Cadence, Mirren and their other friend Johnny.
"Watch yourself, young man," said Granddad, sharp and sudden.
"Pardon me?"
"Your head. You could get hurt."
"You're right," said Gat. "You're right, I could get hurt." (this shows hes an outsider to Grandad)
"Mirren puts her arm around me, 'i've missed you so much' "
3. What do you believe is the main message of this book?
        The main message of this book is that actions have consequences. It's mostly centered around wealth, loss and memory. This main theme is a good message to learn.

""Beauty is a valid use," Mummy argues. "It creates a sense of place, a sense of personal history. Pleasure, even, Cadence. Have you ever heard of pleasure?"

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 the main message was a little preachy because throughout the storyline there were a lot of actions of many different types that resulted in many consequences. Each action dealt with different variants of consequences. But it was preachy at the same time because the way they dealt with the consequences was not right. One of the biggest consequences Cadence has experienced was burning Clairmont(the Sinclair home)

"We would light every floor, every room, if possible, to make sure Clarimont was burned completely."

"One night, two summers ago, on a warm July evening, Gatwick Matthew Patil, Mirren SInclair Sheffeild, and Jonathon Sinclair Denis perished in a house fire…."

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

There was a topic of, if the liars should burn down Clairmont because it would be destroying Grandad and the Sinclair power. I would agree and justify their actions because the Sinclairs have been mentally abusive to all the liars. They use their wealth and greed as a way to abuse the liars mentality.

"Gat and I talked to Mirren and Johnny. Convinced them to take action . We told each other over and over; do what you're afraid to do." -they are talking about taking revenge on Clairmont and the Sinclairs.

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

My beliefs about any topics in this book were not really changed. Everything that happened in this storyline is what I would have done but maybe have better planning of the events that happened.

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

I think if we got Cadence's mom, Penny, perspective on the story it would impact it more because it would show how and why Penny did the things she did to Cadence. When Cadence had her head injury, Penny went to the doctors to see what she could do and the doctor said to not speak of anything that happened so her migraines couldn't get worse by thinking too hard about the problem. Penny has also been a very greedy person by how she was raised and how her sisters are. I think if she was separated from the Sinclairs, she would be better off and she could impact another side of the story.

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

Yes, I read the bonus content that came with the book because I still had questions after reading and I think reading the bonus content and authors notes really helped me research more into the story.

"What Cadence found: Notes and Poems from Gat" (extra letters from Gat responding to Cadence when she was recovering)

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

Anyone who has a mystery thriller interest would really like it because of the concept of the family secrets and the outcome of it. I also think anyone from teens to late 20s would like it

because this book is in this age range. I also think anyone with ADHD would enjoy the formatting of this book because each chapter is very short and very easy to understand by how it's separated so anyone with ADHD wouldn't be lost or distracted.

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

I think *The Silent Patient* is a good book to add to this category because it's also a psychological thriller novel and it has some twists and turns that make you have to research more about it because you'd still be in shock about the plot just how *We Were Liars* was.

Name and Grade: Serena C., 10th Grade

Date written: June 28, 2022

1. *What is the main plot of the book?*

   We Were Liars is told from the perspective of Cadence Sinclair. The Sinclairs are a wealthy family that spends each summer on a private island. Early on in the book, the reader learns that Cadence was in an accident when she was fifteen, and has suffered memory loss and painful migraines since then. Two years later, she decides to return to the island and find out what happened during the accident. As the story progresses, Cadence regains her memory and ultimately discovers the truth.

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

   I did not really identify with any of the characters. Cadence was an interesting character, but it was difficult to relate to her because her accident was not something that I could personally connect with. However, I think that Cadence can definitely be relatable for some readers because she was definitely a multi-layered character.

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

   I think that there are two main messages of *We Were Liars*. First is that one must accept their mistakes, move on, and forgive themself. Most of the book is told from Cadence's point of view, and it is not until the end that the reader learns that she has been in denial for the past two years. This is important because it provides a completely different perspective on the novel, showing how denial and an inability to move on from the past can alter one's perception of reality. The second main message focuses on lying, manipulation, and how truth can be a matter of perception.

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 of this book did come off as a bit preachy. The theme was constantly reinforced, but was done so in an uninteresting way. A lot of the book focused on lying, so the theme was always thrown straight at the reader. At times, I found it to be a bit annoying and unengaging to read.

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 book was mostly told from Cadence's perspective. Early on, the reader learns that Cadence's point of view is not entirely reliable. She uses vivid imagery and some exaggeration to convey her strong feelings. For example, she states that she was shot by her father. However, in reality, her father's actions had just hurt her greatly, though he had not caused her any physical harm. I did not agree with Cadence for some of the book, because her tendency to exaggerate made the true events in the story unclear at times.

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

This book reaffirmed my beliefs about accepting one's mistakes. Everyone makes lots of mistakes in their lifetime. Whether it may be something small, such as forgetting to set your alarm, or something with much greater consequences, it is important for everyone to forgive themself and move on from their mistakes. This book effectively conveyed that theme.

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

I think that it would have been better if the author had written a few chapters from another character's perspective. Since *We Were Liars* was told from Cadence's point of view, it could be a bit difficult to determine truth from untruth. However, if Lockhart had written some chapters by other characters such as Cadence's mom or grandfather, it would have been easier to connect the dots.

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

No, this book did not encourage me to further pursue any topics. I do not think that there is much outside research to be done regarding the topics in this book, and since I personally did not enjoy the story, I was not inspired to explore similar issues.

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

I think that this book is appropriate for anybody older than 10. The chapters are very short and the book is very easy to finish within a few days. If you are looking for a light read, then you may want to check out *We Were Liars*.

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

I think that the book *Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens would be a good addition to this category. *Where the Crawdads Sing* is a coming of age novel that follows Kya, a poor girl who grows up in a marsh. The book alternates between the present and the past, until the two time periods meet. In the present, the local police are investigating a murder that Kya is suspected to have committed. In the past, the reader learns about Kya's experiences growing up secluded from people. The novel is truly unique and I highly recommend it to anyone who loves to read.

1. *What is the main plot of this book?*

The story follows a family who lives on a private island off the coast of Massachusetts and is from the point of view of Cadence Sinclair Eastman. Cadence is one of the teens in the family along with Johnny, Mirren, and Gat. This group calls themselves the "liars" and are very close. Cadence's grandfather, Harris Sinclair, is the owner of the island where his three daughters and their children come during the summer. The book navigates through Cadence's summers at the island and specifically her summer fifteen and summer seventeen. Cadence experiences the dynamic between her aunts and her grandfather and her romance with Gat, a family friend. Cadence sustained a serious head injury from swimming on the island during summer fifteen and is often unaware and weak in the summer to come. She spends time with the "liars" only to realize in the end it was just hallucinations/memories and a fire they started killed them.

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

The character I most identified with was Cadence. This is because she is also a teen girl navigating through life and family dynamics. Cadence is experiencing several new relationships and growing pains which I believe any teen can relate to.

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

I believe the main message of this book is to appreciate your time with the ones you love. Cadence went through a great deal of trauma and lost many people in her life that she loved including her father, Gat, her grandmother, Mirren, and Johnny. Holding onto those you love and making memories with them are important as this book illustrates how loss can happen at any time and to anyone. Another message could be that wealth does not solve all problems. Harris Sinclair and his family were extremely wealthy but this did not matter because all the members in the family went through immense loss and hardship.

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 the message of the story was effectively transmitted and was interesting to read about. The author includes fairy tale excerpts that apply to the situation in the story revealing new messages for the reader to dive into which were very effective and interesting.

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

Perspectives explored in the story include those of Harris Sinclair and his daughters. All three of his daughters want themselves and their family to be financially secure and are fighting for it. Bess' perspective is that she needs the money to financially support her daughter Mirren, but Cadence's mother's perspective is that she needs the money because Cadence's father is no longer in the picture. Harris Sinclair's perspective is to not give any more money or houses because he is done with the money. I don't really align or agree with any perspective here. I see all sides and their flaws as well.

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

None of my previous beliefs were changed for reaffirmed from reading this book but it did confirm my belief of how immense wealth can make people greedy.

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

I believe the perspective missing from this book is Cadence's father and Gat's. We do see some of Gat's perspective but I would've liked to see more. He is technically an outsider and is not related to the Sinclair family so I would've liked to hear his opinions as an outsider not just his and Cadence's romance. In the story Cadence's father's perspective is left out and we only get the perspectives of Cadence and her mother and I think it would've been interesting to hear the father's too.

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

I don't think so because there wasn't anything revolutionary or something I hadn't heard of before in the book but I still really enjoyed the book and felt it was very interesting to read.

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

I think this book is best suited for teens. The plot can be more difficult for a younger kid to understand and the topics and connections made are more advanced and best suited for a teen or adult reader.

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

I definitely believe the A Good Girl's Guide To Murder series would be perfect for this list. The questions all apply to topics and occurrences in the book and it is overall a great series that would appeal to a lot of teen readers.