



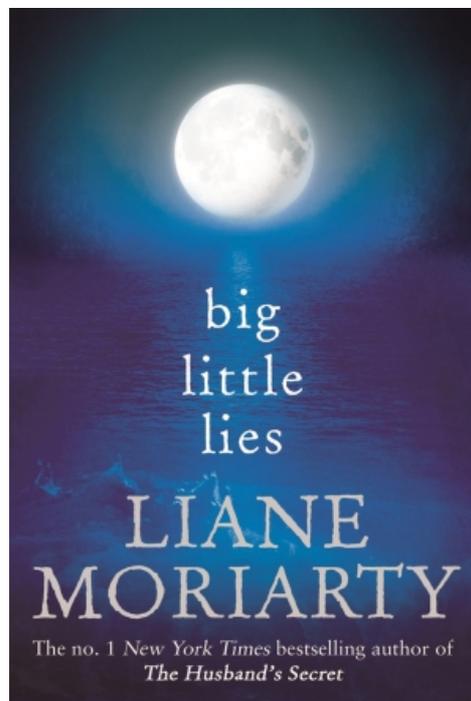
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## NOTES FOR READING GROUPS



Liane Moriarty



**BIG LITTLE LIES**

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## PLOT SUMMARY

*Big Little Lies* unravels the events leading up to a death at Pirriwee Primary School's trivia night.

Six months before the trivia night, Jane is on her way to the school's kindergarten orientation day with her son, Ziggy, when she meets Madeline, another mother with a daughter also starting school. Cultivating a friendship with Madeline, Jane hopes to make a fresh start at Pirriwee and move on from her difficult past. But when Ziggy is accused of bullying another child, it looks like the move may not be what she was hoping for.

Meanwhile, Madeline is facing the challenges of a blended family. If it wasn't enough that Madeline's teenage daughter, Abigail, is enthralled by her ex-husband Nathan's new wife, Bonnie, now Nathan and Bonnie are enrolling their younger daughter at Pirriwee Public also.

Madeline's friend Celeste is also sending her twin sons to kindergarten and she too strikes up a friendship with Jane. Most of the other parents are in awe of Celeste who is not only beautiful but also wealthy thanks to her banker husband, Perry. Little do they know what lies behind Celeste's seemingly perfect marriage.

As the school year commences, rivalries and rifts develop, secrets are exposed and truths challenged, and someone is about to lose their life.

- When Ziggy is accused of hurting another student, Jane refuses to apologise. Do you think she chooses the right course of action?
- Whose side would you have taken if you had witnessed the incident at Orientation?
- Do you think it's appropriate that Nathan and Bonnie send their daughter to the same school as Madeline's children?
- What kind of 'little lies' do you tell to be polite and keep up appearances?

## THEMES

### Family

The novel presents the reader with many different types of families, from Celeste's perfect nuclear family to Madeline's blended family and Jane's experience as a single parent.

- Jane worries about the family she is providing Ziggy with: 'She tried her best to create little rituals and family traditions for birthdays and holidays... There was something fraudulent about it. The rituals weren't real like they were in other families where there was a mum and a dad and at least one sibling. Sometimes she felt like Ziggy might be just going along with it for her sake, and that he could see right through her, and he knew he was being short-changed.' (p 62-3) Do you think Ziggy is being short-changed? How does his experience compare to Madeline and Celeste's children?
- Do you think Madeline and Ed handle their blended family well? What challenges do they face?

### Strength of character

The self-confidence of several of the female characters has dramatic repercussions on their lives. Several key moments in the novel revolve around how assertive they are and events challenge their ability to stand up for themselves.

- Madeline presents the reader with a confident portrayal of a woman - do you think her character is positive and likeable as a result, or not?
- How has the conception of Ziggy impacted Jane's self-confidence?
- Celeste obviously has the most to overcome. Did her emotional journey give you an insight into what she and other women in the same situation go through?

## CHARACTERS

### Madeline

Madeline seems to enjoy provoking other people and appears responsible for some of the tension between characters, but she demonstrates loyalty and compassion to her friends and family.

Would you enjoy being friends with Madeline? Why or why not?

### Jane

Jane's impulsive move to Pirriwee creates dilemmas and stress but allows Jane to make new friends and positive changes. It also forces her to confront her past.

Do you think Jane's move to Pirriwee was reckless? And if so, for whom?

### Celeste

Celeste's story is the most complex and emotional of the novel.

'It's almost worth it, she'd told Susi. Perhaps it was even fair. A little violence was a bargain price for a life that would otherwise be just too sickeningly, lavishly, moon-lit perfect.' (p 245)

How did you respond to Celeste's plight?

## SETTING

The novel is set on the beautiful Pirriwee Peninsular, a fictional beach setting in the northern suburbs of Sydney, Australia. A lot of the events centre around the local primary school that has glorious ocean views.

- The demographics of the peninsular bring together a lot of different personality types, as outlined by Samantha: 'We've got a lot of tradies in Pirrawee... Most of the tradies grew up here and never left. Then you've got your alternative types. Your dippy hippies. And in the last ten years or so, all these wealthy execs and banker wankers have moved in and built massive McMansions up on the cliffs.' (p 168) Is this an accurate portrayal of suburban Australia? Do the different backgrounds of the parents affect events at the school?

## WRITING STYLE

The novel is told in third person from a number of different perspectives, focusing on Madeline, Jane and Celeste.

- In addition to the main narrative voices, the novel includes interview snippets that allow other characters to describe the events leading up to the death. How did the author use these snippets to build up suspense and intrigue?
- The author used different characters' perspectives to show multiple viewpoints of the same incident. For example, when Jane first meets Celeste we see the encounter from both Jane and Celeste's point of view. How did this use of perspective influence your impression of the characters and events? How does it impact on the characters who aren't given a viewpoint (e.g. Renata)?
- The author used a lot of humour throughout the story, especially from Madeline's point of view. What scenes did you find particularly amusing? What effect did these scenes have on the novel's more serious issues?
- Did you feel sorry for the character who lost their life?
- What do you think the punishment should be for the character who caused the death?

## THE AUTHOR

Liane Moriarty is the author of five adult novels, *Three Wishes*, *The Last Anniversary*, *What Alice Forgot*, *The Hypnotist's Love Story* and *The Husband's Secret*. *The Husband's Secret* reached no. 1 on The New York Times bestseller list, was a UK no. 1 bestseller, an Amazon Best Book of 2013, sold well over a million copies worldwide, been optioned for a film and will be translated into over 35 languages. Liane lives in Sydney with her husband, son and daughter.

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