

THE MULTIMILLION-SELLING AUTHOR OF *BIG LITTLE LIES*

LIANE MORIARTY



Reading group notes

**big
little
truths**

Blurb

Parenting teens is not for the faint of heart but Madeline, Jane and Celeste have been through worse. It's been a decade since the school trivia night that changed their lives forever and now they're living blissfully ordinary suburban lives.

But when an anonymous grisly package arrives at the local high school, and a man in a green Volvo is seen lurking around the kids, everyone in their beautiful beachside community is uneasy.

Is this history repeating itself or something new and more shocking?

Can you ever truly outrun the mistakes of your past?

What big little truths are about to be revealed?

Once again, Liane Moriarty examines the complexities of modern women's lives, shining light on shame and family secrets with wit and compassion.

'Equal parts juicy, gripping, and impossible to put down . . . I loved diving back into the lives of these unforgettable characters.' – **FREIDA McFADDEN**, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Housemaid*

'What a gossipy, dazzling pleasure it is to be in Liane Moriarty's mind!' – **RUFİ THORPE**, author of *Margo's Got Money Troubles*

'Warm, funny, shocking, and twisting. Written with such skill and heart, reading *Big Little Truths* felt like catching up with old friends. I adored it.' – **CHRIS WHITAKER**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *All the Colours of the Dark*

About Liane Moriarty

Liane Moriarty is the Australian author of ten internationally bestselling novels, including the No. 1 *New York Times* bestsellers *The Husband's Secret*, *Big Little Lies*, *Truly Madly Guilty*, *Apples Never Fall* and *Here One Moment*. Her books have sold more than twenty million copies worldwide, including four million in Australia and New Zealand, and have been translated into more than forty languages.

Big Little Lies, *Truly Madly Guilty* and *Apples Never Fall* all debuted at No. 1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list – the first time this has ever been achieved by an Australian author. *Big Little Lies*, *Nine Perfect Strangers*, *Apples Never Fall* and *The Last Anniversary* have been adapted into successful television series.

Discussion Questions

**** Please note, this summary contains spoilers ****

1. *Big Little Truths* opens with two epigraphs: 'Little kids, little problems; Big kids, big problems' and 'History will be kind to me for I intend to write it.' (Winston Churchill) How do these epigraphs presage what is to come in the novel?
2. 'Certainly everyone agreed it was just wonderful to simultaneously be dealing with hormonal changes, disdainful teenagers and elderly parents. Why was being a woman so dreadful? Just because Eve gave Adam the apple? The man was probably hungry. The woman was always in charge of organising the fucking snacks.' (page 15)
Madeline and Celeste are both firmly in the 'sandwich generation' at this point in their lives, caring both for children and for elderly parents while juggling their own changing lives. Why do you think this responsibility often falls so squarely on women? How are Celeste and Madeline's approaches similar or different?
3. On page 102, the parents' WhatsApp group discusses the man who has been seen approaching girls and asking them seemingly innocuous questions. This turns out to be Marco, whose motives are different from what many parents suspect. What might this suggest about the nature of our society, and how has social media and the online nature of our modern communications played into this? Why do you think many parents (and students) jump to such extreme conclusions?
4. There are some 'Easter eggs' in this story for readers of its predecessor and companion novel, *Big Little Lies*. What were some of the ones you noticed?
5. Renata confides in her friends that she reported childhood abuse she suffered at the hands of her uncle to her family and was not believed. This had long-term devastating consequences for Renata's relationship with her family, as evidenced at her mother's funeral. What do you read into this about Renata's character, and why she might be the way she is today? Were you surprised that Renata found Melody and Seth suspicious from the outset?
6. On page 257, Jane contemplates the difference in women's attitudes to their appearance when she thinks: 'how mortifying to consider a woman "brave" if she didn't embellish or adorn herself in some way'. Why do you think she thinks this? As examples, Jane gives Celeste, who mostly foregoes make-up and no longer considers her appearance a top priority, and Melody, who is always careful to appear put together. Discuss how the two women's life experiences might have influenced the way they now approach this subject.
7. Did you notice anything odd about Melody Montclair in the early stages of the book? If so, what were the signs?
8. On page 262, Celeste's son Max says, 'I told her if she wanted to meet someone she should do it the normal way, on a proper, regulated dating app. Like, don't just pick up some rando at the poke shop! That's not safe.' We are shown many examples of the way the world has changed when we see the kids' conversation contrasted with the women's narrative. What are some examples you noticed? What do you think of the 'new normal' in some of these situations?

9. On page 266, Jane *'tried to imagine Melody in the car that day when they all cried on the side of the road and failed. Melody was too composed, too . . . cool.'* Jane originally thinks Melody is a strong, feminist, independent woman, but the truth reveals a different picture. What might this say about appearances and first impressions?
10. *'She had not realised how the glitter of casual daily laughter was threaded through her life until it was gone.'* (page 283) Madeline's life is turned upside down by Ed's cancer diagnosis and treatment. This story thread shows us some of the repercussions of serious illness and its flow-on effects that might not be obvious to those who haven't experienced it. Have you had a life experience of this sort, and if so, what were some of the consequences you weren't expecting?
11. *'Now that Josh was going to school without a fuss, she'd forgotten all about that. It always seemed to happen that way. There would be an issue with one of the boys that seemed so serious, so overwhelming and insurmountable, and then it was over, and life was normal until you were facing the next thing.'* (page 292) The act of 'parenting' has evolved markedly over time. Compare the way the adults in *Big Little Truths* parent their children to the way you were raised, and the way you raised your own, if you have children, or helped raise those in your wider family. What do you think has changed the most about parenting over time? Has this been a good or bad thing, on the whole?
12. What do you think of Jane's preference not to have another baby? Why do you think other people feel so strongly about this, and is the pressure they put on Jane fair? What do you think Jane will ultimately decide to do?
13. On page 302, Mary-Louise says, *'Although I've changed as I've got older. I don't care so much what people think.'* Do you agree that this happens to women, in particular, as they get older? Why or why not?
14. On page 311, Madeline thinks: *'How was it that the woman always ended up in this position? Trying to meet the competing needs of every member of the family, undertaking the most complex and sensitive of diplomatic negotiations, and then, when they failed, which they inevitably did, the woman had to take the blame?'* Do you think this rings true? Why do you think women often take this role in families, and what are the potential consequences?
15. Mary-Louise tells Celeste a little about her life with her husband before he died, including that he called her by her second name, a name he preferred, and that she had to have expenses approved by him before she could make purchases. What might this tell us about her family life, and Perry's growing up? How do you think this might have influenced Mary-Louise into the present day?
16. On page 312, Madeline tells us, *'She was reminded of all the times that the most intense crises in her life had passed. They almost always did. The kid grew out of it or finally learned to sleep through the night or read or sit still. You got better or got over it or fixed it or sold it or got a divorce. All this would one day be in the past.'* This idea is expressed several times in the novel: Celeste says, *'This too shall pass'* and the kids say, *'It's not that deep'*. How does this idea help all the characters in the novel cope with the challenges they face? Do you have a mantra like this?

17. On page 337, Melody says: *'It's almost a sickness. I'd do anything for him.'* What was your reaction when you heard this? What do you think of the way the other women reacted? What did you think of Melody's story about her mother removing her father's shoes?
18. On page 339, regarding Bonnie and her ongoing guilt over Perry's death, Celeste thinks, *'history never ended, it all flowed together, and sometimes it carried you right back to a time you thought you'd escaped'*. Bonnie, Celeste and Jane all deal with ongoing trauma in this novel – some of them better than others. What are some examples of this? What do you think triggers Bonnie's breakdown over the events of ten years ago, and for Jane, raises the spectre of Ziggy's traumatic birth?
19. On page 402 Jane asks, *'How can something be wrong one day and right the next just because of a birthday?'* The theme of consent is raised several times in the novel. Why do you think it's important that we have a legal age of consent in our society? Consider Celeste's conversation with her sons about giving and receiving 'enthusiastic consent' and Jane's conversation with Ziggy about why her experience was an assault. How do you think consent is best handled in these situations?
20. On page 426, Jane thinks: *'It occurred to her that nearly all her fury was directed at Melody, rather than Seth, not solely because Melody had been her friend but because Melody was a woman. As women they were meant to be in this together. Us against them. Did an old-fashioned part of her subconsciously believe women should be held to higher standards of morality because men "couldn't help themselves"? Men will hurt us, oh of course they will, that's to be expected, but we don't enable them, Melody, we protect each other, and we especially protect girls and younger women because we remember our own vulnerability. Didn't Melody remember?'* Consider this sentiment. Why do women – rightly or wrongly – tend to hold other women to higher standards of morality than men? Do you agree with Jane, and why or why not?
21. On page 457, Mary-Louise says, *'A man's cruelty terrified like a hammer, but a woman's malevolence cut like a scalpel.'* What do you think she means by this? Can you think of any examples?
22. What are some of the secrets and lies that shape the novel *Big Little Lies*, and conversely, what are the truths that have a major impact in this companion novel, *Big Little Truths*?