



CFE Levels 3 and 4 (ages 12-14)

E. Lockhart **Learning Resources**

Creative and fun learning
activities based on
We Were Liars

Introducing *We Were Liars*

Cadence is the eldest granddaughter of the beautiful and privileged Sinclair family who spend every summer together on their private island. The Liars of the title are Cadence's cousins Johnny and Mirren, and Gat, the outsider who she falls achingly in love with. The four spend idyllic summers together swimming, playing tennis, talking about the world and their futures.

At the end of summer fifteen, Cadence suffers an accident on the island that leaves her traumatised, suffering from terrible migraines and unable to remember what happened. All she knows is that she was found on the beach, half drowned, dressed only in her underwear. Raised in a family who hide their emotions behind strong chins and perfect smiles, who don't discuss death, divorce or family tragedy, Cadence struggles to piece together what happened that summer.

We Were Liars is a searing and gut-punching novel with a brutal secret at its heart which will have readers turning straight back to the first page to read it all over again.

Activities

Group Discussion

Lit 3-02a, Lit 3-09a

We Were Liars has a mystery at its centre which readers might not see coming and will probably spark a lot of discussion amongst your pupils. Here are some starting questions to get the conversation going.

The Family

- What drives each of the family members? Are there any characters who you particularly like or dislike?
- Although he has spent many summers on Beechwood Island and his father is in a long-term relationship with Carrie Sinclair, Gat always feels like an outsider and is not accepted as a member of the family by Cadence's grandfather. Why is this? What does this tell us about the Sinclair family? What does Gat's character add to the story?

The Liars

- The Liars live in a world of privilege and luxury but their mothers bicker endlessly over possessions and properties. The Liars are exasperated, and they decide to take the matter into their own hands. Were the Liars justified in any way to commit the crime they committed? Can you sympathise with their frustrations?

The Truth

- Did you have a theory about what happened to Cadence?
- Were you shocked by the revelation at the end of the book? Did you see it foreshadowed earlier in the novel?
- How do you feel about the twist? If you were E. Lockhart would you have chosen to end the book differently?

The Writing Style

- *We Were Liars* is a first-person narrative, but that narrative includes fairy-tales, hallucinatory episodes, and scenes that are repeated with new interpretations at different points in the story. What did you think of the narrative style?
- Do you trust Cadence's narration?

Character Descriptions

Eng 3-31a, Eng 3-27a

This task will encourage pupils to consider E. Lockhart's sparse, poetic writing style and to write their own character descriptions, creating a piece of group writing describing everyone in the class.

E. Lockhart writes short, beautifully crafted descriptions of the Liars:

'Johnny, he is bounce, effort and snark'.

'Mirren, she is sugar, curiosity and rain'.

'He was contemplation and enthusiasm. Ambition and strong coffee'.

Ask your pupils to consider what makes these descriptions so effective and how much they can understand or imagine about each character based on one short sentence.

They can then have a go at writing descriptions of other characters in *We Were Liars* in the same poetic style as E. Lockhart, using three or four words or short phrases.

Pupils can then try doing the same thing for themselves or their friends. Ask each pupil to write a description of themselves or a friend in the same style as E. Lockhart using three or four words or short phrases. The descriptions could be kept anonymous and then pinned up in the classroom for everyone to read and guess who they might be. Once every pupil has written their description these can be joined to become a poem describing every member of the class.

Retelling Fairy Tales

Lit 3-16a, Eng 3-31a, Eng 3-19a

Throughout *We Were Liars* there are many references to fables and folklore. In this activity your pupils will consider why E. Lockhart has included these references in the novel and then go on to create their own modern re-telling of a fairy tale.

Cadence finds a book of fairy tales which she was given by her father. She says 'Read them and you hear echoes of one story inside another, then echoes of another inside that'.

Ask your pupils to read Cadence's retelling of these fairy tales (p. 43, p. 54, p.105, p.168, p.222) and to consider the following questions:

- How true is the quote above about echoes of one story inside another? How are the themes of these fairytales echoed throughout the rest of the book?
- What do the fairytales tell us about Cadence's own family?
- Can you identify any other classic texts which are referenced by E. Lockhart in *We Were Liars*?

An online version of Andrew Lang's *Blue Fairy Book* which E. Lockhart references in *We Were Liars* can be found here:

www.gutenberg.org/files/503/503-h/503-h.htm#2H_4_0026

Ask your pupils to pick a story from the *Blue Fairy Book* and to consider how it could be translated into a modern re-telling. Some things to think about are:

- Where would the story be set?
- Who are the characters?
- What is the moral or lesson of the story?

Once pupils have written their modern fairy tales you could hold a story-telling event where pupils act out or read their stories for their peers.

The Society for Storytelling has a free downloadable resource on how to prepare a story: www.sfs.org.uk/content/how-prepare-story

Create a News Report

Lit 3-09a, Lit 3-14a, Lit 3-28a, Tch 3-04a

In this activity your pupils will create a news broadcast from Beechwood Island, imagining that they are a news crew arriving at the scene of the incident.

Split pupils into small groups and ask them to consider what makes up a news report. e.g

- An anchor's introduction from the newsroom.
- An on the scene reporter.
- An eye witness interview.
- An expert's account for example from a doctor, criminal psychologist or police detective.

Ask pupils to look back through the book to compile information that they want to include in their report. Pupils can then allocate roles and write a script or bullet points for each section.

The BBC has some great tips on how to plan and structure a news report: news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/school_report/resources_for_teachers/8472052.stm

Once the pupils have created and compiled their news reports it is time to get filming! When all the films are completed you can hold a screening to watch each report.

Make a book trailer

Tch 3-04a, Eng 3-19a, Eng 3-24a, Eng 3-31a

Book trailers are a fantastic way of encouraging pupils to engage with a book and combine a number of different skills from the curriculum.

A book trailer is just like a film trailer, giving a taster of a book for its potential audience. Scottish Book Trust has created a brilliant resource pack on creating book trailers which can be found at:

scottishbooktrust.com/cpd/toolkits/booktrailer-masterclass

Once your pupils have made their trailers you can hold a film screening – watching all of the trailers together. Encourage your pupils to discuss the trailers after they have seen them:

- How well has each trailer captured character, setting, atmosphere?
- Does the trailer make you want to read the book?

Reading Recommendations

If you enjoyed *We Were Liars* you might like to take a look at these book lists for some ideas for further reading:

- **Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous: 11 teen books about life in the 1%**
scottishbooktrust.com/reading/book-lists/lifestyles-of-the-rich-and-famous
- **12 Heartbreaking Reads for Teens**
scottishbooktrust.com/reading/book-lists/lifestyles-of-the-rich-and-famous