

# Family of Liars

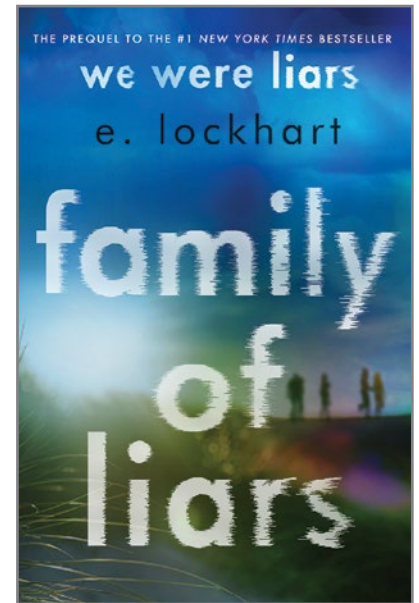
AUTHOR

**E. LOCKHART**

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**RECOMMENDED FOR:** Mid to Upper Secondary  
(Drugs/Alcohol, Obscene Language, Sexual Content)



## SYNOPSIS

The page-turning must-read thriller prequel to *We Were Liars* – #1 New York Times bestseller and TikTok sensation – takes readers back to the story of another summer, another generation, and the secrets that will haunt them for decades to come.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

E. Lockhart is the author of the #1 New York Times bestseller *We Were Liars*. She also invented a superhero for DC Comics. Her books include *Whistle: A New Gotham City Hero* and *Again Again. The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks* was a National Book Award finalist and a Printz Honor Book. *Genuine Fraud* was a New York Times bestseller and a finalist for the L.A. Times Book Prize. Visit her online at [www.emilylockhart.com](http://www.emilylockhart.com) and follow @elockhartbooks on Instagram and @elockhart on Twitter.

## A WORD FROM E. LOCKHART

‘Occasionally someone would ask about a sequel or a prequel to *We Were Liars*, but I just didn’t have an idea I thought was worthwhile. Then one day, I did. I decided to think of the two novels as related to one another like an anthology TV show in which thematic material repeats in a new season, with different meaning or a fresh approach. Here is another drug-addicted heiress, another difficult romance, intense summer friendships, and unspeakable truths told through fairy tales. But, I hope, a very different journey.

I started by thinking about the three Sinclair sisters on this island, separated from the rest of the world. What was their shared wound? And what would upend their world? The answers: the loss of Rosemary and a boatload of cute boys.’

E. Lockhart

## EDUCATIONAL APPLICABILITY

Themes include: family, privilege, class, suspense, mystery, grief, trauma.

Suggestions for discussion and classroom activities:

- In what way has the book’s designer conveyed the impression of a joyous but long-gone memory? Why do you think they chose to overlay the image with the title? What is the impact of the font used for the title? How do the image and title work together to create mood? [Optional] Compare and contrast this cover with the cover of *We Were Liars*.

- Read Part One. A Story for Johnny.
  - In what way does this opening ‘frame’ the rest of the book’s retrospective narrative? In your answer consider the questions that arise from the opening pages. [For instance, why is Carrie being haunted by her son and what terrible thing in her past is she hiding?]
  - If the opening of a story is designed to ‘hook’ the reader and compel us to continue reading past the first few pages, has E. Lockhart succeeded here?
  - Do you find the narrator’s voice intriguing? If so, why, and if not, why not?
  - What effect did the repetition of the words *I*, *him* and *never* in the third paragraph create?
  - Has the mood established by the cover been enhanced or diminished by the opening part?
  
- ‘Our family has always loved fairy tales. There is something ugly and true in them. They hurt, they are strange, but we cannot stop reading them, over and over.’ p 54  
 ‘I want to tell that story to you now, because – well, like the other fairy tales, it may help you understand this difficult thing I am trying to say, the part of my life that I cannot yet put into my own words.’ pp 161-2
  - What does the term intertextuality mean?
  - What does Carrie’s telling of the Cinderella, Stolen Pennies and Mr Fox stories reveal about her own story?
  - [Extension Question] How do the gruesome and tragic details within these stories affect the ‘mood’ of *Family of Liars* as the novel progresses?
  
- ‘I have never been kissed before. It’s like diving into cold water, like eating a raspberry, like listening to a flute, and it’s like none of those things.’ p 89
  - How does the language of free verse intensify the scene here?
  - Find an example of free prose being used later in the novel and analyse the language used and how it affected your reading experience of the scene.
  
- ‘There are stacks of green napkins, bouquets of white and yellow flowers, trays and bowls of ‘nibbles’ – meaning things to eat during cocktail hour. Bowls of salty olives mixed with lemon rind, salmon mousse and sesame crackers, cashew nuts and yellow cherry tomatoes.’ p 78  
 If food can be a symbol in literature, what do you think the many and elaborate descriptions of it in *Family of Liars* might symbolise? In your answer consider the family dynamics of the Sinclairs, their place in society and the nature of retrospective narratives.
  - ‘We girls have never been taught to grieve, to rage, or even to share our thoughts. Instead, we have become excellent at silence; at small, kind gestures; at sailing; at sandwich-making. We talk eagerly about literature and make every guest feel welcome. We never speak about medical issues. We show our love not with honesty or affection, with loyalty.’ p 17  
 Given later events in the novel, how correct do you think Carrie is about her family here?
  
- How do Harris’s motto, ‘No way out but through’, and Tipper’s ‘Live a joyful life’ define each character?
  
- Retell the story from Penny’s point of view (POV). Does changing the POV change your understanding of Penny and Carrie’s motivations?
  
- Although Carrie informed us that she had been a liar all her life in Part One, were you surprised by the revelation that she had lied about Pfeff’s death in her first telling? How did E. Lockhart *foreshadow* that Carrie might have been more involved in his murder earlier in the novel? What other novels have you read involving an *unreliable narrator*? Why do you think this device is quite popular in YA fiction?

- ‘At first, this land belonged to indigenous people. It was taken away from them by settlers from Europe. Nobody knows when, but it must have happened...’ That’s ugly money, too. Just in different ways. The history there includes exploited workers, broken contracts, and child labour overseas – along with journalistic integrity and belief in the freedom of press.’ pp 29-30  
In your opinion, is ‘old money’ and all the trappings it can buy portrayed positively or negatively in the novel? Did this description of where their money originated influence your view of the Sinclairs and their private island?
- In a whole-class discussion, talk about the actions the Sinclair sisters and their father take at the novel’s climax. Are each justified? Do you, as a reader, feel content that their position in society protected them from the consequences of their actions?
- Would you describe the ending of the novel as a resolution? What do you think the last line, ‘I do not think it will always be this way.’ means?

**Essay Questions:**

- In what way does the title, *Family of Liars*, relate to the events and characters within the novel?
- ‘Money can’t buy you happiness.’ Discuss this aphorism as it relates to the main themes of *Family of Liars*.