

Tell Me No Lies

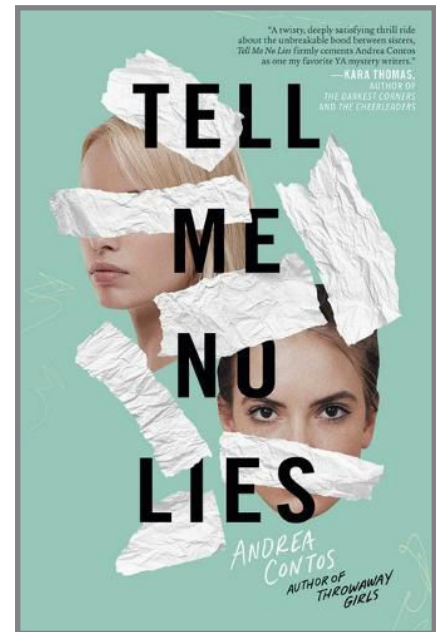
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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Secondary
(Violence, Language, Sexual Content)



SYNOPSIS

Nora and Sophie Linden may be sisters, but they're not friends. Not since the party last month. Not since the night Sophie's boyfriend, Garrett, disappeared. Half the town thinks Garrett is dead, the other half believes he ran away, but Sophie knows something no-one else does—Garrett left that party with Nora. And straight-A, Ivy-league-bound Nora had never been to a single party before that night.

Then Nora withdraws, barely coming home anymore, right when Sophie starts receiving messages from someone who claims to be Garrett, promising revenge—for what happened to him that night, and for the lies both girls told to the police about it.

With the sisters' futures—and lives—in jeopardy, they'll have to decide whether to trust each other again, or risk their secrets leading them to their graves.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrea Contos has a degree in business from Michigan State University and left a successful career in human resources to focus on her writing. She was a 2017 Pitch Wars mentee and has also been a finalist in the Lone Star Writing Contest and the NTRWA's Great Expectations Contest. Andrea lives with her family outside Detroit, Michigan.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class, discuss the cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
 - What genre do you think this book might be?
 - Why do you think this?
 - What does the title tell us about the possible storyline?
 - What are some of the potential types of novel that this title could be representative of?
 - What is the original phrase that the title alludes to?
- The story in *Tell Me No Lies* is told in the first person from the alternating points of view of Nora and Sophie. Why do you think the author chose to tell this story using this particular format? As a class, discuss how having two separate protagonists sharing their understanding of events from very different perspectives enhances the plot tension, and enables the chronological and narrative complexity of the novel. In your opinion, would it have been possible to tell this story from the point of view of only one of the two sisters? Individually, write one to two pages exploring the importance of this alternating viewpoint structure to the novel as a whole. Consider whether the story would have

- had the same impact on the reader without the shifting points of views, and without the chronological complexity, and to what extent the alternating perspectives of the two protagonists allowed the author to create this. Use evidence from the text to support your assertions.
- On p 20 Nora states that when she and Sophie were functionally each other's best friends that they 'held each other back'. She then goes on to say that until she intentionally distanced herself from Sophie, that they were both of them 'unable to chase the versions of ourselves we were meant to be'. Answer the following questions based on this realisation:
 - In your opinion, and based on your understanding of the characters of Nora and Sophie, is this likely to have been true?
 - In what way can you see this potentially happening had they remained as close as they once were?
 - Do you think that it is possible that Nora was wrong, and that without parental interference there might have been another solution where they could have helped each other shine whilst still having their close bond?
 - In small groups explore this concept, and write a three part summary and analysis of Nora and Sophie's relationship as it was described using evidence from the text to support your assertions:
 - when they were younger,
 - as it currently is during the events described in the novel
 - as you see it being in the future.
 - Share your summary with the class, and compare the conclusions that each group came to, discussing the points of difference between your analyses and predictions.
 - Read the scene with Adam on p 43. As a class, discuss whether this is an example of the author using foreshadowing, whether it might be hints included to subtly build tension in the plot, or if it is possibly both simultaneously.
 - On p 44 Sophie talks about the anger part of the grief process. As a class, discuss what you know of grief, grieving, and the grief process, and relate it to the context of the novel. Some things to consider in your discussion might be:
 - What part does anger have to play in people's expressions of grief?
 - How much can grief affect the ways that people behave?
 - What are some different ways that grief and grieving can manifest in people's behaviour?
 - What are some of the things we can do and say when we know someone is grieving, that can help them feel supported and heard, without them feeling pressured or judged?
 - On p 63 Nora states that 'That was the moment, I know now, that changed the course of this story.' Having read the book, do you agree with her assessment? What are some other potentially life-altering moments and choices within the novel? Can you identify any other points where a simple choice by a single character could have completely changed the entire sequence of events for Nora and Sophie?
 - In small groups discuss this, and identify at least four discrete instances where a decision by a single character has far-reaching effects felt by many. Share your conclusions with the class and compare and contrast the different pivotal moments each group has identified.
 - Sophie states 'I was sure Garrett was in control of every thing, that he'd always protect me, that I never had to worry as long as I had him. Now I'm not so sure he could even protect himself.' As a class, discuss the importance of not relying on the protection of others. Compare Sophie's perception of Garrett over the course of their relationship, to how he is presented over the course of the entire novel. How does Sophie's understanding of him and his behaviour change as she learns more about the events that took place—and how much of her changed opinion of him is due to her own introspection on the nature of their relationship and her role within it?
 - *Tell Me No Lies* is a chronologically complex novel. Nora's and Sophie's narrations are offset temporally by a full month, and there are multiple revelations of prior events occurring within both narratives as well. As a class, discuss and map the chronological structure of the novel, and use this to help you individually create a timeline of the key events within the novel. As a class, discuss how much, and in what ways, the author's decision to craft a very chronologically complex narrative adds to the tension and intrigue within the novel.
 - Paint an artwork that you envision as a potential alternative cover for the novel. Write a brief explanation of what your artwork depicts, and why you chose to paint what you did.
 - The ocean and its power has a very tangible thematic presence throughout the novel as a whole. As a class, discuss

the ocean and its thematic role throughout the novel, and how the noise and power of the waves is represented both literally and figuratively in Nora and Sophie's descriptions of events.

- When Nora and Sophie's parents divorced, Sophie's initial response is to tell Nora that it is all her fault (p 106). Was she correct? Why/why not? As a class, discuss the importance of taking responsibility for our own actions, but also the equal importance of not erroneously assuming responsibility for the choices that others make.
- On pp 218 and 278, Nora explicitly addresses the concept of the need to consider not just the end when making one's decisions in life, but also the impact and ethics of your chosen means. Do you agree or disagree with the well known aphorism 'the end justifies the means'? Why or why not? Do you think that there are times when this holds true and times when it doesn't? In small groups try to think of at least three examples of hypothetical situations where you all agree that the end does justify the means, and three examples where you agree that it doesn't.
- As a class, discuss how the author develops the various characters who don't actually appear in the book, or who appear on very few occasions compared to how often others mention them. For example, Maddie doesn't appear at all, yet we are left with a very clear picture of her as a character from Nora's examination of her bedroom, and Sophie's interaction with her parents. Create a fictional character of your own based on a description of someone else searching their room. Reread the scene on p 260 to help give you inspiration in how to create such a scene and character.
- What types of privilege are explicitly addressed in the book? In what ways do these types of privilege impact the different characters in the book, and how do the different characters acknowledge or deny the privilege (or lack of privilege) that affects them? As a class, discuss the themes of unthinking privilege and its interaction with, and role in creating, disadvantage for others.