

The Stand In

AUTHOR

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SCIS: 5421545

ISBN: 9781761290558

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



SYNOPSIS

When new girl Millie shows up at Lena’s boarding school, she arrives with a question. Why is Lena pretending to be someone she’s not? Lena ignores her. Until Millie shows her photo after photo of someone who looks like her. Exactly like her. Intrigued, Lena agrees to meet her look-alike, Saskia.

Saskia is wild. And rich. And money is something Lena desperately needs if her mother is to stay in the care home she currently lives in. So when Saskia offers Lena cold, hard cash to stand in for her at family events, Lena finds she can’t say no. Sometimes, she doesn’t even want to say no—to the weekends away, the beautiful clothes, the amazing food and Saskia’s on-again-off-again boyfriend, Rhys.

Until, of course, she agrees to one last job. The one she definitely should have said no to. Because that job might be the last thing she ever does.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A.J. Rushby is the author of over twenty-five internationally published, award-winning novels, spanning from junior fiction up to adult fiction and non-fiction. Also known as Allison Rushby, she can be found at www.allisonrushby.com and @allisonrushbyauthor.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
 - What is a ‘stand-in’?
 - What demographic do you think the target audience for this novel might be?
 - When do you think the novel might be set?
 - Who do you think the main character in the novel might be?
 - What do you think the novel might be about?
 - What genre do you think the novel is most likely to be and why do you think this?
 - What do you predict might be some of the plot points in the novel?
- How does the author set the scene for the rest of the novel? After reading the first two chapters of the book, in small groups summarise the key information that you have learnt about where and when the novel is set, who the main character is, and what you know of her personality and personal circumstances.
- Read all of the Robert Frost poem that Lena quotes at the start and then again at various points throughout the

novel. At the beginning and at the very end Lena explicitly relates the events described in the poem to the events in her own life. Do you agree or disagree with her perception of both the poem and of the events that surround her? Why, and in what way? Write a brief (less than 500 word) descriptive analysis of the relationship between the poem and the events in the story from the point of view of Lena.

- Lena thinks that ‘if Millie can’t work out that friends bring you a tea or hot chocolate if you don’t drink coffee and specifically include you on shopping trip invitations, I’m not going to spell it out for her’. In your opinion, what did Millie think of Saskia, and of the way Saskia treated Millie? Why do you think Millie acted the way she did around Saskia? How and why did Millie’s opinion of Saskia change over the course of the novel? Write a brief analysis of the dynamics, motivations, reactions and power imbalances within Saskia and Millie’s friendship.
- Saskia is clearly a very bad friend for anyone to have. In contrast, what makes someone a good friend to have, and who in the novel shows themselves to be a good friend? Find at least three examples of the kind of behaviour that exemplifies friendship within the novel, and write a short piece contrasting these behaviours to Saskia’s.
- Lena comes to the conclusion that Saskia is a sociopath. What defines a sociopath and do you think that Lena’s assessment of Saskia and her behaviour is accurate?
- Saskia says that getting people to do what she tells them to is her superpower, and the way the other characters in the book act demonstrates this. Why do you think so many people are so consistently inclined to do what Saskia asks them to? Rewrite one of the scenes from the point of view of Millie, Sophie or Rhys, describing how they feel about Saskia and explaining why they do as she asks even when they have misgivings or when it goes against their best interests.
- Four of the key themes within the novel are:
 - Friendship
 - Family dynamics
 - Trust
 - Secrets.

Choose any two of these themes, and describe how the author has used the interrelationship between them over the course of the novel to influence increasing plot-tension and character growth and development. Use evidence from the text to support your conclusions.

- Create an artwork that you feel is a metaphorical representation of the various plot elements that contribute to the denouement. Write a brief description of your artwork, and how the different aspects of it relate to the different aspects of the novel.
- Which character within the novel do you, personally, find the most relatable, and why? What aspects of that character and their opinions and behaviours do you find resonate with you personally, and what about them and their portrayal by the author causes you to be sympathetic to their position?
- Neither Saskia nor Lena believe Millie at first, and they are both astounded by just how strong the resemblance is between them. If you encountered a stranger who looked so similar to you that they could easily be mistaken for you, would you want to meet them and spend time with them? Why or why not?
- Based on your understanding of Saskia’s personality, rewrite the scene where she and Lena first meet from Saskia’s point of view.
- At the end of the novel, Saskia makes it clear that she thinks that Lena is a fool for asking for so little from Bram. If you were in Lena’s position, what would you have asked for from Bram, and why? Do you think that Lena should have asked for more than she did, or for less? What are the risks inherent in asking for anything, and would you consider them worth it?
- Identify three key pivotal moments within the novel where the decisions that Lena made could have caused there to be a very different outcome. Choose one of these moments, and write a short piece exploring the possible alternate course of events.
- What are some of the different literary techniques that the author has used to create and increase plot-tension throughout the course of the novel? In small groups, discuss the role of plot-tension within the overall narrative structure, and identify at least three different techniques used by the author. Share your conclusions with the class, and discuss the importance of varying levels of plot-tension to reader engagement.