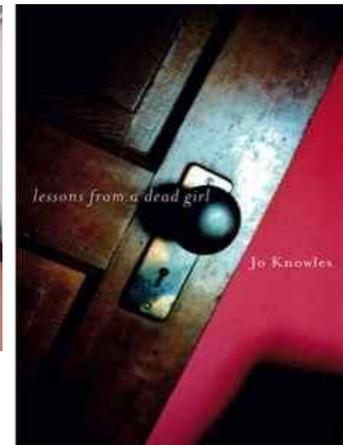


Teacher's Guide for *Lessons from a Dead Girl* By Jo Knowles

ISBN-10: 0763632791
ISBN-13: 978-0763632793



“A razor-sharp examination of friendship, abuse and secrets.”—Kirkus

About the book:

FF=Friends Forever. That's what Leah tells Laine when she writes the letters on her hand in the fifth grade. But theirs is a complex and abusive friendship, and it's only after Leah is killed in an accident that Laine begins to make sense of their complicated past. How long does a childhood promise written on the palm of a hand last? Is there really such a thing as friends forever? Only Laine can answer. To do so, she must explore a troubled friendship, find its core, and decide whether she can forgive Leah—and ultimately, forgive herself.

Pre-reading:

After reading “Lesson One” predict what you think you’ll learn about Leah and Laine’s friendship.

Discussion guide:

1. Describe the beginning of Leah and Laine’s friendship. Do you think Leah picked her on purpose? Why? Why do girls seem to need the classification of “best friend?” Do boys require this exclusivity too? Why or why not?
2. What is the secret the girls share? How can secrets gain power? Do you think everyone has them?
3. In every friendship is there a more dominant person? Which role do you play most often? Why? Are sibling relationships also unequal footing?
4. Why do you think Leah asks Laine not to leave her alone with Sam? Do you think there’s a direct connection to him and the doll closet? Why do you think children who are abused often become abusers themselves? Why does Laine say “It feels good and horrible at the same time.” (p. 42)
5. How would you describe Laine and Leah’s friendship? Who has control? Does one person always have control in a relationship in subtle and not-so-subtle ways? Why does Leah threaten to reveal their secret?

6. Leah has "...the strangest way of knowing things—hidden things—about people." (p.57) How do you think she has developed this talent? What types of things does she observe? Do you have this skill to understand others' motivations? Would it be useful?

7. Why do you think Leah reaches out to Paige Larson? What is revealed at her party? Why does she insist on secrets again? What does Laine want to do? Why does Leah disagree? What would you have done?

9. Mr. Mitchell teaches his class about the mark of true friendship. What is the litmus test for it? Would your friendships qualify under this test or not? Why? Laine says, "maybe that's what being real friends is all about—putting up with the hard lessons—both taught and learned together." (p.77) With whom do you agree- Mr. Mitchell or Laine? Can you agree with both of them or not?

9. Have you ever heard the old saying "there's a thin line between love and hate?" Does this apply to Laine and Leah's relationship or not? Why? Do you think what the girls have shared is a friendship or something different? How does it finally snap?

10. How has this relationship made Laine less secure about other friendships? Are the intimacies shared by Laine and her new friend, Jess, typical of female friendships? What physical demonstrations of friendship are allowed between male friends? Why do you think there is such a difference?

11. Laine tries to prove to Leah that she's over the whole relationship by dancing and having fun with Web. Have you ever tried to overcompensate for the loss of a friendship or romantic relationship in this way? How? Did it convince anyone (even yourself)?

12. Why does Laine blame herself for what happened to Leah? Do all secrets eventually come to light? How do Web and Jess respond to the truth? Why couldn't she trust them with it at first? Would you trust your friends with your deepest, darkest secrets?

13. Why did the author set up the book in a series of lessons rather than chapters? Which lesson in the novel holds the most truth in your own life? Explain. What lessons have you learned from your own longest friendships?

Jo is available for school and library visits in person or via Skype. For information e-mail Jo at jo@joknowles.com. To learn more about Jo and her work, visit www.joknowles.com

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