

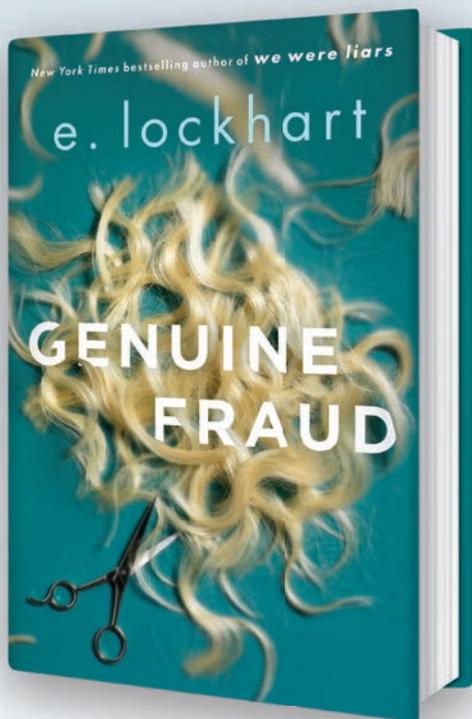
New York Times bestselling author of *we were liars*

e. lockhart

GENUINE  
FRAUD



DISCUSSION GUIDE



Grades 7 and up

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## ABOUT THE BOOK

**In this diabolically smart and brutal psychological thriller, *New York Times* bestselling author E. Lockhart explores themes of friendship, ambition, social status, travel, and, above all, deceit.**

Meet a brilliant almost-eighteen-year-old whose charm and quiet smarts are her ticket into the privileged upper class she aspires to enter as an equal. She is an athlete, an intellectual, a fighter, an impersonator. She should have been a spy, a superhero, the star of an action movie. And yet she became something else. What if it could all be undone?

Structurally inventive, this impactful novel will have readers pumped up and on the edge of their seats, following characters who pay keen attention to the smallest detail and who prove that being invisible doesn't have to be a negative. But how many times can someone reinvent themselves? You be the judge.



Heather Weston

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**E. Lockhart** wrote the *New York Times* bestseller *We Were Liars*, which is also available in a deluxe edition. Her other books include *Fly on the Wall*, *Dramarama*, *The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks*, and the Ruby Oliver Quartet: *The Boyfriend List*, *The Boy Book*, *The Treasure Map of Boys*, and *Real Live Boyfriends*. Follow E. Lockhart on Twitter at @elockhart.

## PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. One of the topics E. Lockhart explores in *Genuine Fraud* is **identity**: how it's formed, how much control we have over it, which parts of ourselves are lasting, and which parts we can change.

**What plays the greatest part in your sense of identity? Is it where you come from, what you've experienced, your interests, what you wear, how you look, how you talk? What is the story you tell that explains who you are and how you came to be that way? Do you and your family or siblings share the same origin story? How much does the way others view you influence the way you view yourself? Which parts of yourself, if any, remain unchanged no matter where you are or who you're with?**

**Suggested resource:** Explore the work of sociologist Erving Goffman, whose book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* Jule says she read at Stanford. You can watch a short video about Goffman produced for BBC Radio's "A History of Ideas" on YouTube: [youtube.com/watch?v=6ZOXS-QLDWM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ZOXS-QLDWM) (published April 15, 2015).

According to Goffman, "Each person in everyday social intercourse presents himself and his activities to others, attempts to guide and control the impressions they form of him, and employs certain techniques in order to sustain his performance, just as an actor presents a character to an audience" (from Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1959).

**Do Goffman's ideas change the way you think about identity?**

2. An **antihero** is a protagonist who lacks the conventional qualities of heroism, such as idealism and courage; he or she is someone who concerns the reader with his weaknesses and yet is sympathetically portrayed. Typically, an antihero will succumb to base impulses; antiheroes magnify the frailties of humanity. Telling the story from a villain's point of view is one way to create an antihero. As the audience experiences the narrative from the villain's perspective, we are able to understand their motives, thought processes, and feelings, leading to empathy. Alternately, an antihero story may focus on a main character who is not the villain as such, but who certainly does not live up to the hero archetype. This kind of antihero is often marked by ennui, angst, and isolation. Both types of antihero allow readers to empathize with people who are imperfect and to better understand their fundamental humanity. A few examples of antiheroes from popular culture include Tony Soprano in *The Sopranos*, Stringer Bell in *The Wire*, and Walter White in *Breaking Bad*.

**Most antiheroes are men. Why is it that we are less likely to see antihero stories about women? What is gained and what, if anything, is lost by making a teenage girl an antihero?**

**Suggested resource:** Consider the ideas about antiheroes that are offered in this TED-Ed animated video, "An Antihero of One's Own" at [ed.ted.com/lessons/an-anti-hero-of-ones-own-tim-adams](https://ed.ted.com/lessons/an-anti-hero-of-ones-own-tim-adams). Educator Tim Adams argues that antiheroes are not villains, but rather bumbling, sympathetic, and ultimately noble characters who end up challenging those in power, but who pay a high price for doing so. As examples, he mentions Guy Montag in *Fahrenheit 451* and Winston Smith in *1984*.

**How do these ideas fit with your understanding of antiheroes? What happens when antiheroes abandon all sense of morality and succumb to their ignoble motivations? What happens when we encounter stories where the antihero is not punished in the end?**

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. PERCEPTIONS OF THE MAIN CHARACTER.** In the first scene of the novel, Jule introduces herself to a stranger in a hotel gym. She offers details about where she's from (London), her activities in high school (she ran track), and topics she knows a lot about (superheroes, spy movies, YouTubers, fitness, money, makeup, and Victorian writers). Then a third-person narrator steps in and tells us things Jule believes: "the more you sweat in practice, the less you bleed in battle"; "the best way to avoid having your heart broken was to pretend you don't have one"; "the way you speak is often more important than anything you have to say" (p. 6). We learn about a confrontation with a coach that led to her dropping out of Stanford. We then see her swim a mile and study Spanish instruction videos.

**Based on these details, what are your first impressions of Jule? What adjectives would you use to describe her? Does she remind you of other characters you've read in novels or seen in films?**

- 2. WOMEN'S ROLES.** Jule is aware that other people have certain expectations of her because she's a woman. She's learned this in part by watching action movies: "She knew that women were rarely the centers of such stories. Instead, they were eye candy, arm candy, victims, or love interests. Mostly, they existed to help the great white hetero hero on his fucking epic journey. When there was a heroine, she weighed very little, wore very little, and had had her teeth fixed" (p. 22). Jule works to subvert this pattern, and she's both savvy and strategic in the way in the way she goes about it.

**How does Jule simultaneously work with and against the expectations others have of her based on her gender? How does that strategy help her develop her own unique sense of power and control?**

- 3. BEING MORALLY COMPROMISED.** Jule and the other main character, Imogen, both think of themselves as orphans. When they meet, Immie explains that reading orphan stories helped her understand who she is and where she came from. She singles out *Vanity Fair*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Great Expectations* as her particular favorites because they feature what she calls "edgy orphans." In a conversation with Jule, she explains what she means: "All of them want a better life and go after it, and all of them are morally compromised. That makes them interesting" (p. 32).

**Do you agree that characters who are morally compromised are more interesting than characters with a strict moral code? Why or why not? What do such characters offer to readers?**

- 4. CHARACTER MOTIVATIONS.** As we get to know Jule, we learn how hard she's worked to change her life. She's left her past behind and written a new origin story. She's read books, studied accents, and built up her physical strength. She's learned to observe other people closely and model herself on their images.

**In seeking these changes, what is it that Jule really wants? What parts of herself is she trying to get rid of? What does she hope to replace those parts with?**

- 5. TURNING POINTS.** People's lives can change in a single moment. As a result of a chance meeting or an unexpected event, a person may experience an opportunity or an epiphany that sets her on a new course. One turning point for Jule occurs when she is physically assaulted in an arcade. Instead of fleeing from her attackers, she fights back and wins. The experience changes her internally. "She felt like she was in a movie. . . . She looked the same, looked just like anyone, but she saw the world differently after that. To be a physically powerful woman—it was something. You could go anywhere, do anything, if you were difficult to hurt" (p. 60).

**What are some other turning points in the novel? How are turning points both accidents of fate and moments when people seize control? How do turning points have external and internal consequences for the person who experiences them? What have been some major turning points in your life?**

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS *continued*

6. **POWER.** Power means different things to different people. For some, power is physical: it's having enough strength and skill to escape an attacker or win a fight. For others, power is economic: it means having the financial resources to go where you want, do what you want, and live how you want. Another form of power is psychological: a feeling of confidence and control in a situation due to knowledge, social skill, or personal charisma. While these examples of power are individual, power is also structural: it is reproduced and maintained in institutions that favor the interests of some groups and disenfranchise others, and in cultural systems that value some ways of talking, thinking, and being over others.

**What kinds of power are characters struggling over in *Genuine Fraud*? Where is the struggle for power explicit, and where is it implicit? What does it take to gain power if you don't have it?**

7. **PRIVILEGE.** Jule encounters many privileged people in *Genuine Fraud*. Immie and her friends experience privilege through their race, wealth, and social status. This often manifests in the things they don't have to think about, worry about, or even consider—for example, subtle things like manners and customs. At one point, Jule tries to explain this to Immie's friend Forrest: "Every place has rules. . . . What you do when you come to a new place is, you figure them out. Like when you're a guest, you learn the codes of behavior and adapt. Yes?" Forrest doesn't get it. He says he just does what feels right to him. Jule tells him that's because of where he comes from—his privilege: "Other people adapt to you, asshole. You think there's no adapting going on, but you're fucking blind, Forrest. It's all around you, all the time" (p. 64). Often the people with the most privilege are the least able to see it.

**In your experience, what are some of the things privileged people don't always see about themselves? What makes less privileged people more able to see these things?**

8. **MOVIES.** At several points in the book, the narration shifts from events in the moment to a panoramic look at events from afar. Sometimes Jule sees herself as a character in a movie. Other times a third-person narrator invites the reader to view herself this way: "Picture yourself, now, on film. Shadows flit across your smooth skin as you walk. There are bruises forming underneath your clothes, but your hair looks excellent. You're armed with gadgets, thin shards of metal that perform outrageous feats of technology and assault. You carry poisons and antidotes. You are the center of the story" (p. 21).

**What purpose do these movie references serve in the novel? How do they help us better understand Jule's motives and the identity she's constructing? How do movies influence the way you see yourself?**

9. **INTERPRETING WRONGDOING.** People commit crimes for many reasons. Sometimes crime is premeditated; other times it occurs in the heat of the moment, perhaps even by accident. Crime may be part of a pattern of behavior in a person's life or it may be an aberration. Once a person has committed a crime, however, she is marked by it. Even if she isn't punished, she has to figure out how to live with what she has done. Jule wonders about this in a conversation with a character named Paolo: "Do you think a person is as bad as her worst actions? . . . I mean, do our worst actions define us when we're alive? Or do you think human beings are better than the very worst things we have ever done?" (p. 76)

**How would you answer Jule's question? Does a person's motive for committing a crime ever excuse it? What about the circumstances in which the crime was committed? Or the person's emotional state at the time? Once a person has gone astray, is redemption possible? Why or why not?**

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS *continued*

- 10. TALES TOLD BACKWARD.** *Genuine Fraud* is written in reverse chronological order. When we meet Jule, we quickly realize she's in the midst of something dramatic—on the run, using a false name, being chased by a cop—but we don't know any of the details. Then the story jumps back in time. It's seven weeks earlier, and Jule is in a different city. Slowly, readers pick up bits and pieces of her story, but we have to work hard to figure out how they all fit together. Telling the story backward makes the writing and the reading of this novel more complex.

**Why do you think E. Lockhart decided to tell Jule's story this way? How would the reader's experience—and the overall impact of the story—be different if we watched events play out from beginning to end?**

- 11. THE TITLE.** The title of this book is *Genuine Fraud*, which is an oxymoron. *Fraud* means “intentional perversion of truth in order to induce another to part with something of value” as well as “a person who is not what he or she pretends to be.” *Genuine* means “free from hypocrisy or pretense” (*Merriam-Webster Eleventh Edition*).

**Why does it make sense to put these two words together? What are the different forms of fraud you can identify in the story? What are the different ways we can read the word *genuine*? In what ways are the various forms of fraud we find here genuine? Interpret the book's title as many ways as you can.**

- 12. A BOOK'S INTENT.** Authors of fiction strive to tell good stories, but at the same time, they may offer social commentary through the books they write. This commentary presents observations and beliefs about the way the world is or the way it should be. In a work of fiction, commentary is often found in the things characters say to each other, in the decisions they make and the consequences of those decisions, and in the ways they struggle with big ideas and reconcile those struggles. Conclusions about the author's intent can also be drawn by looking at who has power in a story and why or how the struggle for power plays out as the story unfolds.

**With these ideas in mind, what social commentary do you think this book is offering? What is Lockhart saying about identity, gender, ambition, morality, deceit, privilege, class mobility, heroes, and antiheroes?**



“The more you  
**SWEAT**  
in practice,  
the less you  
**BLEED**  
in battle.”

## AFTER READING

### Suggestions for further exploration

1. **LITERARY RETELLINGS.** *Genuine Fraud* is informed by many different texts, from Victorian novels to superhero stories. At its core, however, it is a reinvention of a famous story line where a person far away is behaving badly (Immie), and the main character (Jule) is enlisted to bring that person home. In the process, the main character's entire moral structure is churned up and changed. *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, a novel written by Patricia Highsmith that was later made into a movie directed by Anthony Minghella, is just one version of this story line. Henry James told the same story in *The Ambassadors*; so did Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* and Ann Patchett in *State of Wonder*. After you read *Genuine Fraud*, read one or more of these other novels, or watch Minghella's movie. Explore the ways Lockhart has worked with familiar plotlines and tropes to create something original and new.

**What does her novel do that these other novels don't? What do readers gain from literary reinventions such as these? What other novels can you find that take traditionally male stories and reinvent them with a female protagonist?**

2. **SUPERHEROES.** As Jule notes on page 22, superhero stories are known for restricting female characters to the role of love interest or sex object. Even when females are cast in powerful roles—skillful in battle, emotionally tough, and physically strong—they're dressed and posed in hypersexualized ways. Read "The Problem With How Superhero Movies Treat Women, in 11 Posters," on *Mic* ([mic.com/articles/123525/how-superhero-movies-treat-women-in-11-posters#.Du9bUvNSW](http://mic.com/articles/123525/how-superhero-movies-treat-women-in-11-posters#.Du9bUvNSW), published August 7, 2015). Then read "The Grim Reality of Female Characters in Superhero Films," a blog post on *Everyday Feminism* ([everydayfeminism.com/2013/11/female-characters-superhero-films/](http://everydayfeminism.com/2013/11/female-characters-superhero-films/), published November 30, 2013), followed by "The Problem with Female Superheroes," an article from *Scientific American* ([scientificamerican.com/article/the-problem-with-female-superheroes/](http://scientificamerican.com/article/the-problem-with-female-superheroes/), published June 23, 2015). Take a look at *The Hawkeye Initiative* ([thehawkeyeinitiative.com](http://thehawkeyeinitiative.com)), a project housed on Tumblr in which male superheroes are put in the same hypersexualized poses that women are placed in, which both calls attention to and parodies this issue.

**What other resources can you locate that challenge the way females are depicted in superhero movies or comics? What other texts can you find that, like *Genuine Fraud*, put strong women at the center of the story?**

3. **LOOKING ACROSS AN AUTHOR'S WORK.** When readers delve deeply into the works of a single author, distinctive patterns and themes start to stand out. An author might explore a set of related issues and questions across different stories, or write in a style or voice that's easy to recognize. Compare *Genuine Fraud* to other novels E. Lockhart has written, such as *The Boyfriend List* and its sequels, *Fly on the Wall*, *The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks*, and *We Were Liars*.

**What connections can you make across these texts? What do they have in common? What issues has Lockhart written about in more than one book? What are some of the core questions she keeps trying to answer? What, if anything, sets her work apart from that of other authors writing for teens today?**

## PRAISE FOR *GENUINE FRAUD*

★ **“CAPTIVATING. . . BEWITCHING.”**

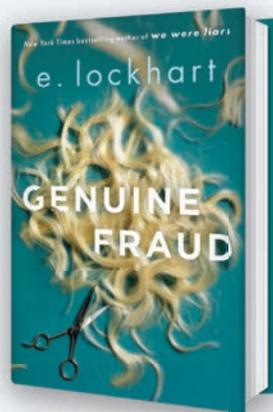
—*Booklist*, Starred

★ **“INTOXICATING.”**

—*The Horn Book*, Starred

★ “An **EXCELLENT CHOICE** recommended for teens and adults who love **TWISTY** mysteries, stories about class conflict, and **TOUGH-AS-NAILS** teen girls.”

—*School Library Journal*, Starred



★ “This thriller from the author of *We Were Liars* **WILL CHALLENGE PRECONCEPTIONS** about identity and **KEEP READERS GUESSING.**”

—*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred

★ **“A BRACING PACE**, a slew of far-flung locations, and a storyline that runs mostly in reverse will **KEEP READERS ON THEIR TOES**”

—*Publishers Weekly*, Starred

## PRAISE FOR *WE WERE LIARS*

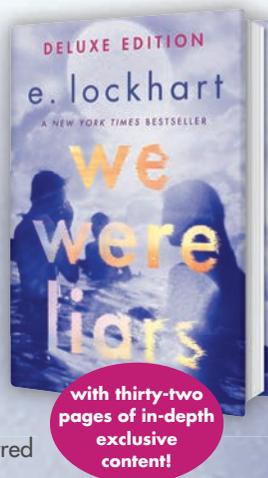
“**[An] irresistible premise . . . [a] ticking time bomb of a novel.**” —*The New York Times Book Review*

★ **“Surprising, thrilling, and beautifully executed** in spare, precise, and lyrical prose, Lockhart spins a tragic family drama, the roots of which go back generations.” —*Booklist*, Starred

★ “The ending is **a stunner that will haunt readers** for a long time to come.” —*School Library Journal*, Starred

**“Thrilling, beautiful, and blisteringly smart,** *We Were Liars* is utterly unforgettable.” —John Green, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Fault in Our Stars*

★ **“Riveting, brutal and beautifully told.”** —*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred



This guide was created by Jennifer Buehler, an Associate Professor of Education at Saint Louis University.



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