

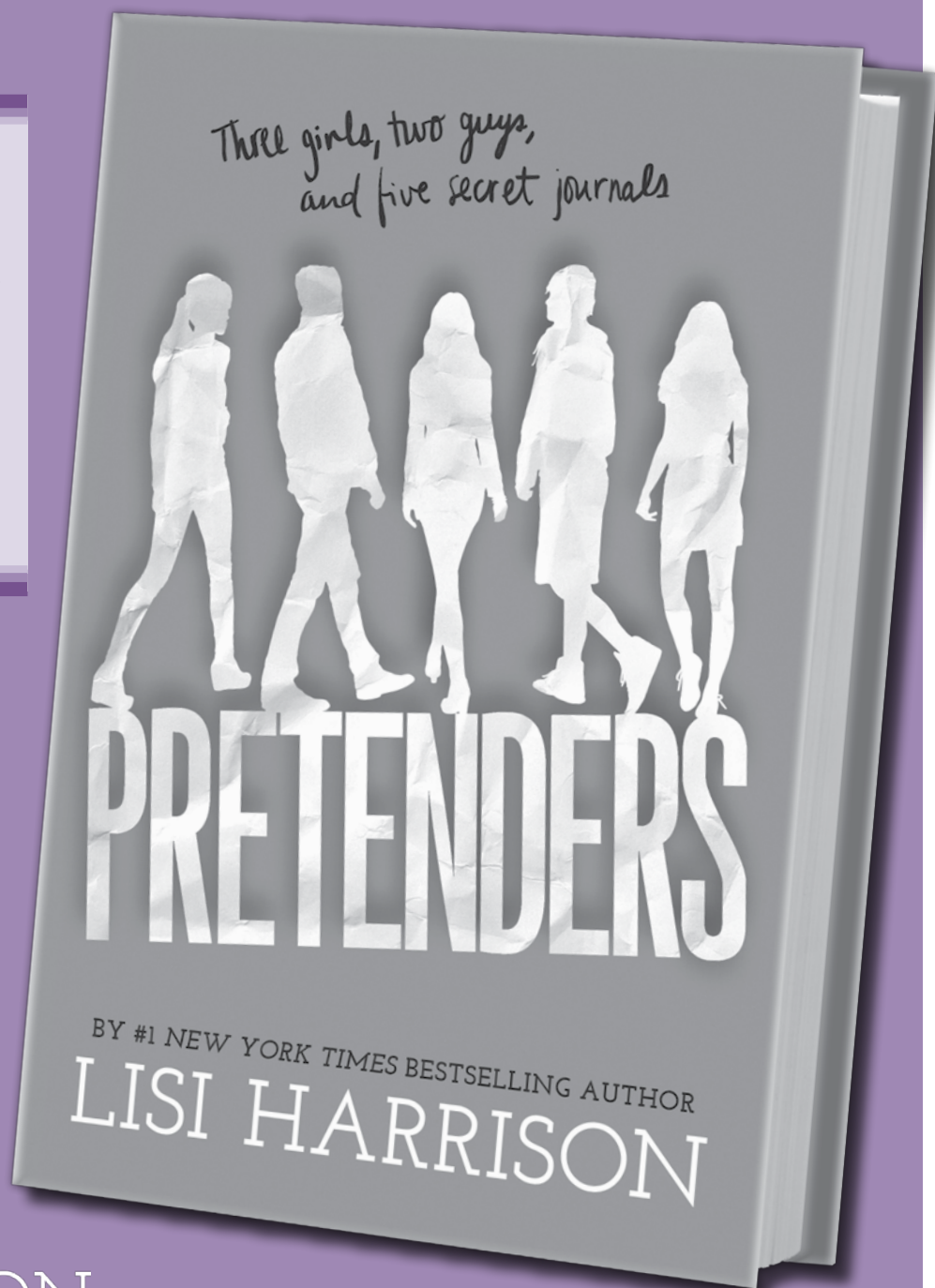
educator's guide

PRETENDERS

Curriculum connections

- ❖ Teen Life: Peer Groups/Popularity/Cliques
- ❖ Personal Development: Individuality

Ages: 12 & Up



by
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PRE-READING ACTIVITY:

Ask students to brainstorm the types of issues people want to hide from others and why they want to hide them. Discuss the following: What is sacrificed by being a pretender or wearing a “mask” to cover up a weakness or a secret? Then ask students to reflect on the consequences of living behind a facade.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

English

Ms. Silver asked her students to keep a journal as a place to record their feelings. Is there something to be said about taking pen to paper and journaling rather than typing on a screen? Ask students to keep a journal for 10 days recounting 10 specific events in their lives: a dance danced, a game played, a friend gained, a concert attended, an honor bestowed, an award won, or any other event that holds special meaning in the student’s life. Using descriptive words and phrases and sensory images, students should express the feelings attached to the event without overtly naming or stating the feeling. At the end of the 10 days, ask students to select one entry to take through the writing process for publication.

Creative Writing

Using a Google image search, ask students to find and print a black and white picture/photo of people in unusual situations or conditions. Have students focus on two individuals in the photo. Using their imagination, ask them to create a story based on what’s depicted and write from each individual’s point of view. Encourage students to think about how differently each person internalizes the world. Publish the final pieces with the photo in a classroom blog.

History/Social Studies

Vanessa quotes Deepak Chopra, a prolific author, holistic-health practitioner, and *New Age* guru. Ask students, individually or with a partner, to investigate Deepak Chopra, holistic health, or the *New Age Movement* and to present their information to the class using technology. After all students have an opportunity to present, have students write a personal reaction paper to one or more topics discussed to share in small groups.

Drama/Theater

Ask students to prepare a three-to-four minute Reader’s Theater script based on the characters and events in *Pretenders*. Students should work with a partner or a small group and select an event or situation that more than one character writes about in their journal. Each script should include a list of the characters, staging instructions, a brief introduction of the scene by the narrator, and a script with dialog for each character. Each group should practice and perform their Reader’s Theater for the class.

THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

Friendship

Blake and Lily’s friendship and Sheridan and Audri’s friendship change dramatically throughout their freshman year. In addition, new friendships form between Vanessa and Lily and between Jagger and Audri. Ask students to select one of the friendships among the five students and to identify the factors that either help to form the friendship or to break the friendship apart. Then with a partner, write a poem in two voices between the two friends that explains the developments in the friendships.

Peer Pressure

Working in small groups, ask students to select one of the five students and to identify the role peer pressure plays in the decisions and relationships he or she makes. Students can use a character line graph to illustrate the connections between peer pressure and the decisions. For each decision, have students list the decision and provide a short description on the graph and then evaluate the influence of peer pressure on the decision. Have groups share and post their graphs.

Self Worth

The characters view themselves one way, but that is not always a true reflection of who they are. Often other people see the characters differently than the way they see themselves. But it is the character’s opinion of themselves and their families that causes them to act and react in negative ways. Working in small groups, ask students to select a character and to write a “Collage of Voices” character analysis of that character. Students

should write a short statement from each of the other people that the character interacts with explaining exactly what others think or say about the character. Have each group orally present their “Collage of Voices” to the class.

Family Relationships

Parents play an important role in each of the student’s lives and each character knows how to get what they need or want from their parents—even Duffy uses his parents’ situation to his advantage. In small groups, ask students to write a “How to Parent a Teenager” guide for parents using the parents in *Pretenders* as models for what to do and what not to do. Encourage students to include humor and specific examples from the book in their guides.

Self-Discovery

Pretending to be someone you don’t really feel you are may take courage, but it may also be an opportunity for self-discovery and growth. For example, Sheridan “pretends” to be a variety of celebrities, so she can be who she thinks other people want her to be, but, in reality, young people often “pretend” or assume different personas as they search for the personality that truly fits for them. In small groups, ask students to write skits that showcase how “pretending” can be the first step in confidence building and achieving a new reality. Have students perform their skits for the class; then students can discuss the skits and how “pretending” led to a positive outcome.

Social Media

The rise of social media has changed the way we communicate and interact with one another. Discuss how social media can turn people into pretenders. Ask students to go on a social media fast for one week and journal about their experience.

Overcoming Challenges

Starting high school is a milestone most students eagerly anticipate, but being a freshman can also be a frightening experience. Ask students to work in small groups to create a media presentation about the advantages and disadvantages of being a freshman. Ask each group to write interview questions that will elicit an honest portrayal of the emotional experience of being

a freshman: the fear of not being accepted, the anxiety of not fitting in, the apprehension about joining groups, the nervousness about clothes choices, the worry about making new friends, and the pretenses that help students adapt. Each group should include interviews from faculty and upperclassmen, and after the presentations are shown, students can discuss the issues raised during the interviews.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does being one of the Phoenix Five mean to the students selected to receive the honor?
2. What motivates each of the five students to excel? How do the different motivations illicit similar results?
3. What is the craziest thing you’ve ever done to be accepted/liked?
4. In their journal entries, each of the characters comments on his/her appearance. What role does appearance play in the mask the students wear? Why is appearance such an important factor in their lives?
5. The journals allow the reader to see the private lives of the characters. How do their private lives contrast to the public personas they create?
6. What role does social media play in the five students’ lives? How do they use social media to their advantage?
7. Why does Lily tell Duffy that Blake is gay? Why doesn’t she tell Sheridan or Vanessa?
8. How does Duffy use Lily? Why does Lily allow Duffy to use her?
9. What role does Vanessa’s brother, A.J., play in her life? How does he help her?
10. Why does Sheridan allow Logan to drive her father’s M3 GTR? How does this stunt backfire on her?
11. What makes these characters sympathetic? We shouldn’t be rooting for them because they are lying, but we do. Why?
12. How do you feel about X-Phonie exposing the journals? Do you agree with X’s message? Do you think this was the best way to accomplish his/her goal?

about the book



Pretenders

HC 978-0-316-22244-0

PB 978-0-316-22232-7

Also available in downloadable audio and e-book formats

Nominated by the students and faculty, the Phoenix Five are Noble High School's best-at-everything freshmen—or are they? One of the five students broke into the safe in the teachers' lounge, stole all of the Phoenix Five students' private journals, and then published them in a book. The Phoenix Five return to Noble High as sophomores, excited about new clothes and high goals, to discover that their secrets are out, and their private journals exposed; now everyone will know the five of them are pretenders. The five students are, for all appearances, normal with a twist: Jagger's parents are in jail, so he lives in the back room of a pet store; Lily has been homeschooled all her life and doesn't want anything normal ever again; Sheridan is beautiful but channels celebrities because she has no confidence; Duffy is a jock who will do anything to make the varsity basketball team; and Vanessa is an overachiever striving for perfection while trying to keep her family together. As the lives of the Phoenix Five intersect and interweave, each character creates his/her own view of their interactions—and the possible answer to the question on everyone's mind—who stole the journals? The ramifications of all the illegal activities, lies, crushes, friendships, and honest feelings—that remains to be seen.

also by Lisi Harrison



License to Spill

HC 978-0-316-22242-6

Also available in downloadable audio and e-book formats

In book one, the leaked journal entries of five high school freshmen revealed how they reached rock bottom and became determined to claw their way back to the top. But there are more secrets to spill as their freshman year continues. Lily, Vanessa, Duffy, Sheridan, and Jagger navigate the drama of relationships, grades, and their own personal dilemmas—recording it all on the pages and exposing that they aren't what they pretend to be.

about the author



Lisi Harrison is the author of *The Clique*, *Alphas* and *Monster High* series. She was the Senior Director of Production Development at MTV and Head Writer for MTV Production. Lisi is currently “pretending” to write her next novel. Visit her online at LisiHarrison.com.