

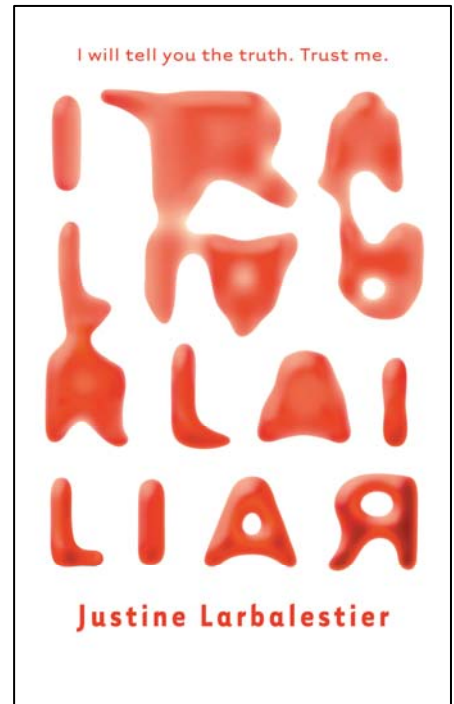
# Liar

Justine Larbalestier

October 2009 ISBN 978 1 74175 872 6 pb

## Summary

Micah Wilkins is a liar. But when her boyfriend, Zach, dies under brutal circumstances, the shock might be enough to set her straight. Or maybe not. Especially when lying comes as naturally to her as breathing. Was Micah dating Zach? Did they kiss? Did she see him the night he died? And is she really hiding a family secret? Where does the actual truth lie? *Liar* is a breathtaking roller-coaster read that will have readers grasping for the truth until the very last page. Honestly.



## Author style and motivation

Justine Larbalestier writes a powerful narrative that is fast-paced and dramatic. She has made Micah the ultimate unreliable narrator. As the book unfolds the reader finds out something that makes them re-interpret everything that's gone before so they can never be sure of what's actually happened. She writes short sections based around three threads: 'Before', 'After' and other parts that are Micah's reflections on herself, her school and family, to keep the reader jumping around in time between the story's events.

*"Liar* is my first thriller. It's from the point of view of a compulsive liar. And I mean *compulsive*. Micah's been messing with my head for years and she's about to mess with yours. You cannot believe a word she says, which means that her revelations cannot be taken at face value. So what you think is the big spoiler probably isn't because there isn't one big spoiler, there are many.

"I deliberately wrote the book to be read in *at least* two different ways. You may think you know what kind of book it is and what kind of person Micah is, but you'll find other readers will disagree with you completely. There is no one right way to read this book. And *that's* why I'm so keen for readers not to spoil it for others. Because I want each reader to come to their own conclusions.

*"Liar* is as much a jigsaw puzzle as a novel, but one where the pieces can go together in many different ways. Writing it was a puzzle, too. I wrote it back to front and inside out. Not from start to finish, but scene by scene. As I wrote I shuffled scenes around, rewriting them with every move. It was one of the most enjoyable writing experiences of my career." — *Justine Larbalestier*

Justine Larbalestier discusses her literary influences and the inspiration for the settings in this book in a booktrailer available on the Allen & Unwin website.

## Sample discussion questions and activities overleaf.

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In the classroom...

# Liar

by Justine Larbalestier

## Discussion & Activity Questions

Themes include: lies and the truth, secrets, school life, families, crime, race

1. Before reading the book, consider the title and cover design, red 'blobs' morphing down the page to form the word 'liar' at the bottom. What might the significance of this be? Consider the literary contrast (juxtaposition) of the title, *Liar*, with the words above it: '*I will tell you the truth. Trust me.*' What do students expect from the novel after reading and discussing the above points?
2. *Liar* can be described as a 'psychological thriller'. Visit Wikipedia for its definition of this genre: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychological\\_thriller](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychological_thriller). Have students read any of the books or seen the movies listed there as genre examples? Discuss the ways in which *Liar* fits the definition of 'psychological thriller' based on the themes, issues and literary devices described on Wikipedia.
3. Discuss the significance and meaning of the titles of the three parts of the book: 'Telling the Truth', 'Telling the True Truth', 'The Actual Real Truth' and the image that accompanies these.
4. Because the story is narrated by Micah, everything we learn about the other characters comes from her perspective, and only what she wants us to know. Have students trace the outline of the story using one of the other characters, maybe one of Micah's parents or a classmate, as narrator. What differences and similarities are there in the retelling?
5. Micah tells us that her parents and the Greats (not to mention Micah herself) have very different points-of-view on how and where Micah should live her life. Identify the similarities and differences and then debate who is right.
6. Apart from episodes in which Micah visits the Greats, the story is firmly set in New York City. Micah makes frequent reference to streets, parks and other landmarks. On a street map, locate the places that Micah visits or makes reference to. Students can also visit Google maps and use 'street view' to see photos of these locations and watch the booktrailer on the Allen & Unwin website to find out more about wilderness in the city and life in New York apartments.
7. Choose one notable incident from the novel and produce a storyboard for that episode. Consider how that episode might be filmed. What props would you need? What sort of costumes and setting would be appropriate?
8. What do students believe happens at the end of the book? Discuss using examples/quotes from the book to support their arguments.
9. Justine is a prolific blogger and has written much about *Liar*. Have students visit her blog and find out more about the writing process and Justine's inspirations.
10. The cover of the Australian edition of *Liar* only features type, not images. Have students design their own covers, (perhaps using pictures as well as type) to create a new look for the book that will entice prospective readers to pick it up.

Curriculum recommendation and discussion questions prepared by Kate Justelius-Wright, Allen & Unwin.

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