ELPL Lit Kits

**Thirteen Reasons Why** by Jay Asher

When high school student Clay Jenkins receives a box in the mail containing thirteen cassette tapes recorded by his classmate Hannah, who committed suicide, he spends a bewildering and heartbreaking night crisscrossing their town, listening to Hannah's voice recounting the events leading up to her death.

**About the Author:** Jay Asher's debut teen novel, Thirteen Reasons Why, spent three years on the New York Times bestseller list. His second teen novel, The Future of Us, was coauthored with Carolyn Mackler. His novels have sold to over thirty foreign markets, and both were optioned by major Hollywood studios.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. How does Hannah and Clay’s dual narrative enhance the story? What additional details are revealed through this method of storytelling that might have otherwise remained secret if the book had been written from only one of their perspectives? How might the story have changed if the book had been written from one of the other people’s perspectives instead of Clay’s? For example, Tony’s?

2. Consider the title of the novel. Are each of Hannah’s thirteen reasons of equal importance? Which do you find to be the most unexpected? Who is responsible for Hannah’s death? Why do you think Hannah committed suicide?

3. The inside of the book jacket for Thirteen Reasons Why pictures a replica of the map that Hannah leaves for each of the people named on her tapes. What does being able to visually trace Clay’s route through town add to your reading experience?

4. Discuss the role that the presence of Hannah’s voice plays as a physical presence on the tapes. Is the impact the tapes have different from the impression a suicide note would have left? Why do you think she recorded and left the tapes? If her story had been recorded on CDs or MP3 files would the effect have been different?

5. Why do you think Clay’s mom reacts to Clay’s actions and responses to her questions the way she does? Do you think she knows he’s lying? Why doesn’t she question him?
6. Hannah compares poetry to puzzles and then likens the audio tapes she recorded to poetry. Do you agree with her reasoning? How does this idea keep reappearing throughout the story?

7. Discuss the concept of the Lost–N–Found Gazette and how it applies to the main themes of truth, betrayal, rumors, and secrets that run throughout the story.

8. Discuss the phrase “The truth will set you free.” How does this apply to the story Hannah tells? Does truth really gift freedom? Is there power in knowing? Is there always peace in knowledge?

9. Discuss the significance of what the man behind the counter at Rosie’s says to Clay when Clay is about to leave the restaurant.

10. While walking to the party, Hannah says, “Even the best moments of the night were affected by that one incident—by that nonincident—in front of my old house.” Describe the difference between “incidents” and “non-incidents.” How can the lack of interaction be just as important or influential as actual confrontation?

11. At the beginning of Clay’s tape, Hannah says, “I’m not even sure how much of the real Clay Jensen I got to know over the years. Most of what I knew was second-hand information. And that’s why I wanted to know him better. Because everything I heard—I mean everything!—was good.” How does this relate back to and complicate Hannah’s previously stated feelings about rumors and hearsay and the idea that sometimes people need to believe certain things, regardless of truth?

12. “Grandma’s dreams come from hearing about Up North when she was growing up in Texas on a farm, on a road that had no name. Grandma’s dream is bigger than her life. I guess at Mor’s dreams; having a husband, a family, love. That’s the way I would list them. But then I think about it again—her dream maybe was feeling the way she felt with Doug—the way she would smile easy; she would laugh easy; she would play. At least at first. Then the sky in her dream got low too.” How would you describe Grandma’s dreams? Nella’s? Rachel’s?

13. What roles do adults play in what happened to Hannah? Do you think any adult could have done something that would have helped Hannah? Why do you think Hannah decides to include only one adult on her tapes? Why does she open the truth of her story to an adult at all? Why Mr. Porter in particular?