



# The Best Liars in Riverview

## LIN THOMPSON

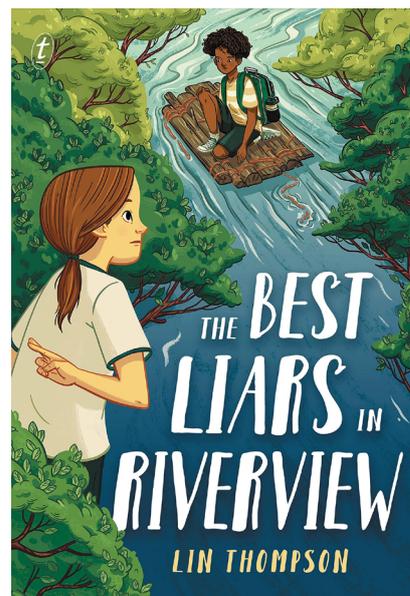
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Fiction

RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 10+

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### CURRICULUM GUIDE

The following teaching guide has been designed to embrace shared curriculum values. Students are encouraged to communicate their understanding of a text through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.

The learning activities aim to encourage students to think critically, creatively and independently, to reflect on their learning and connect it to an audience, purpose and context. They encompass a range of forms with a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they promote the integration of ICT and life skills.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Lin Thompson (they/them) grew up in Kentucky and now lives in Iowa with their wife and cat. Lin is a Lambda Literary Fellow of 2018, and *The Best Liars in Riverview* is their debut novel.

### SYNOPSIS

Is a lie of omission as bad as an outright lie?

Aubrey and Joel have always been the same kind of weird, and their friendship has made all the other stuff—stuff like Joel's dad, like Rudy Thomas, and like growing up in the small town of Riverview—bearable. When Joel disappears, Aubrey isn't sure where he's gone. But they do know more than they told the police and Joel's parents.

- They know the way Joel's face crumpled during the fight they had the night he went missing.
- They know that the Running-Away Game has recently become more than just a game.
- They know that Joel isn't the only one who has been keeping a secret.

And although they don't know for sure, Aubrey is pretty sure that Joel wants them to find him. So, with their sister, Teagan, and friend, Mari, Aubrey sets out to find their best friend and make things right with him. Along the way, Aubrey is forced to confront about the lies they've told their parents and the police, and, most importantly, the lies they've been telling themselves.

Aubrey and Joel have both been trying to make themselves fit when everyone around them is saying they don't. As they follow the river out of town, they'll learn that being what other people tell you to isn't always right, and that having a few people really believe in who you are can make all the difference.



### BEFORE READING

1. What does it feel like to be bullied? What are the different ways people can be bullied? As a class, discuss the rules your school has in place to prevent bullying. Do they work?
2. Watch this video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iK9IGpnsiPE>) of Lin Thompson reading a short excerpt from the novel. What do you think they mean when they say 'growing up in a community where they don't even have the language for exploring their own queerness yet'? What kind of language do you think Lin means? Why might this be significant for the characters in the book?
3. Discuss the types of characters that you see in most of the books you read. Are certain types of people written about more than others? Why is it important to see ourselves reflected in fiction? Share a book with the class that has a character who you've really connected with. What made you feel so connected to this character?

### WHILE READING

1. What does Aubrey leave out of the story they tell the police? Why are these omissions significant?
2. How does Aubrey describe their friendship with Joel?
3. What kind of town is Riverview? Do Aubrey and Joel fit in there?
4. Why does Aubrey lie to Joel's mum? Does Joel's mum have his best interests at heart?
5. What do the search party find that makes Aubrey realise what Joel has done?
6. When Rudy Thomas teases Joel, Aubrey can't shake the feeling that Rudy is making fun of them too (p. 173). Why do you think this is?
7. What name does Aubrey give the look that Joel gets when the kids at school tease him? When did this look start?
8. What metaphor does Aubrey use to describe the feeling of Joel being gone? Come up with an alternative metaphor to capture this feeling.
9. Make a list of the things that Aubrey knows about Joel that help lead them to him.
10. What kind of words does Aubrey think are 'secrets'? What has taught them to feel this way?
11. What is Aubrey's real answer to where Mystic Creek goes?
12. When Aubrey is reflecting on all of the things that have led to Joel's disappearance, what do they realise about the face Joel's dad made when he caught them playing She-Ra? What do you think Joel's dad was so angry about?

13. Why does Aubrey think that their mum won't support their gender identity?
14. How does Teagan show her support for Aubrey? Why is Aubrey surprised by this?
15. What does the title of the book mean? After you've finished the book, discuss who you think the 'best liars in Riverview' really are.

### AFTER READING

#### CHARACTER

1. At what point do you realise that Aubrey's true gender is different from the gender others assume for them? How does following Joel help Aubrey face up to the truth of who they are?
2. How does Aubrey think people will respond if they talk too much about the topics they're interested in (trees, bugs etc)? How does Mari's reaction surprise them?
3. By the end of the book Aubrey has come to terms with the differences between them and Joel—'In the end, we're different people, Joel and me. Similar but not the same. We're going to keep making our friendship work. Even if that means going our separate ways sometimes. Even if that means that sometimes we need different things' (pp. 316–317). What are some of the different things that Joel and Aubrey need? Do you think these differences will get in the way of their friendship?

#### STYLE AND STRUCTURE

1. Lies of omission: the first chapters of the book are structured around missing information, with Aubrey laying the various versions of the truth they've told over each other until the reader has the whole picture. What does this technique reveal about the characters in the story? How does it build suspense?
2. The story is structured around the journey that Joel takes (and the journey that Aubrey takes to find him). Draw a map of the physical journey in the story. On this map, make a list of the significant moments in the emotional journeys of each of the two characters (for example, when Joel leaves his dad's pocket-knife in the ground to get rid of his expectations). How do Aubrey and Joel's emotional journeys reflect their physical one?

#### THEMES

##### Identity

1. How does it make Aubrey feel when people assume that they're a girl, like when Officer McCarthy calls them a 'nice young lady'? (p. 31) What could people say instead of making these assumptions?
2. Aubrey calls Riverview a 'place where people like [Joel's] dad and Rudy Thomas's dad want boys to act certain ways and like certain things' (pp. 256–257). What are the types of things Joel's dad and



Rudy's dad expect of boys? What happens to boys who don't fit these expectations? Is that fair?

3. What is different about the make-believe games that Aubrey and Joel play that allows them to express themselves more truthfully? Why do you think Aubrey starts to be ashamed of these games?

### Community

1. Why does it bug Aubrey so much when Father Jacob calls Joel 'our child' during a prayer? (p. 14) Is it hypocritical for the community to show concern for Joel only after his disappearance?
2. Why does Mari feel like she doesn't fit in in Riverview? When she shares her experience of anxiety with Aubrey how does it change their friendship?
3. Make a list of the ways that Joel and Aubrey are excluded by their community (these might be direct, such as bullying, or indirect, such as being made to feel uncomfortable about what they're wearing). How can we ensure that people don't feel excluded from our school (and other) communities?

### Bullying

1. 'Mrs. Thomas acted like her son, Rudy, was just a class clown instead of a bully' (p. 46). How is Rudy responsible for Joel's disappearance? Why do you think Mrs. Thomas excuses his behaviour?
2. When Joel gets bullied, Aubrey's instinct is always to distract him, but later Aubrey feels guilty that they didn't do more (p. 255). What else could they have done? What difference would speaking up have made?
3. Who is Vice Principal McDonnell referring to when he says, 'Poor kid. But honestly, I'm not sure what he expects' (p. 229)? Is this an acceptable response to bullying by a teacher? What should he have done differently?
4. Do zero-tolerance bullying policies work? Why or why not?

### RESPONDING

1. When Aubrey's great-great-aunt assumes that they're Teagan's brother, it makes them feel exposed. Aubrey's mother corrects her, saying 'this is my younger daughter' (p. 134). Rewrite this scene in a way that might make Aubrey feel more supported by their mother. How might the language change? How might this change the way that Aubrey feels and responds?
2. What are some of the 'rules' of middle school that Aubrey observes in the story? Think about your own experiences in upper primary school—did similar rules apply? Make a list of the rules that determined whether or not you fit in. Compare them to the rules in the book and discuss the way these rules can hurt or exclude people. Come up with a list of ways to make your classrooms more inclusive for everyone.

3. On the night that Joel and Aubrey go camping, Joel begs Aubrey to 'say something' (p. 261), but Aubrey doesn't. Imagine that they could live this scene over and write what Aubrey wishes they'd said to Joel.
4. Write a scene from either Joel's or Aubrey's life set six months after the end of the book. Where do they live? What is their friendship like? How have things changed for them? You could write this in the form of a letter from one to the other.