

Pretty Little Liars #6: Killer Study Guide

Pretty Little Liars #6: Killer by Sara Shepard

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Plot Summary

"Pretty Little Liars: Killer" is the story of a group of teenagers who are forced to solve the mystery behind their friend Ali's death. The narrative begins with a collective memory of the day that all five girls met, when four of them (Emily, Hanna, Spencer, and Aria) try to steal Ali's piece of a school flag. However, they find out that it has already been stolen. After Ali's death, in the present day, the girls think that they've seen the body of Ian, the wrongfully-accused suspect in the murder, in the woods. However, they return to find the body has disappeared.

Meanwhile, each girl has her own personal issues to deal with, while they continue to get harassing texts and emails from "A," an anonymous source. Aria has moved in with her father and his young, pregnant girlfriend, after her mother's boyfriend started to harass her. Emily is bisexual and dating a boy, whose mother has it in for her. Meanwhile, Hanna's stepsister Kate is trying to take over her life, and they both compete for the same boy, Mike (Aria's younger brother). Finally, Spencer's parents have been very cold to her, and she has come to believe that she is adopted, finally tracking her birth mother down to a woman in New York City, who wants to meet her.

Aria also begins a romance with Ali's brother, Jason, who is strange but handsome. He bolts, however, when Aria invites him to a gallery opening at a former home for disturbed boys, which is now a hotel. Meanwhile, Emily's romance with Isaac is tested when they have sex and his mother possibly overhears them, and later threatens Emily. At first, he refuses to believe her, but later confronts his mother and finds out Emily was telling the truth. At the same time, Spencer, using her sister's computer, gets messages from Ian, confirming that he is still alive. She is preoccupied with Olivia, her birth mother, whom she met in New York, and who wants her to move there too. After calling Olivia's realtor, though, Spencer discovers that the whole thing was a hoax, and that all of her college money has been taken.

On the night of the gallery opening, everything comes to a head, and the girls realize separately various elements that together lead them to realize that a police officer, Officer Wilden and Jason must have murdered Ali together. Once Ian confirms this over the computer, though, someone tries to set fire to the woods and the girls. In the fallout, when everyone is safe, the girls realize that someone has joined them: Ali.



Chapters 1-4

Chapters 1-4 Summary

"Killer" is the sixth installment in the "Pretty Little Liars" series, covering four friends' search for their childhood friend's murderer. Alternating among their viewpoints, the book begins with omniscient narration, describing a key day when the girls were in the sixth grade. In this memory, Emily, Hanna, Spencer, and Aria have all separately hidden around Ali's house in the hopes of capturing her part of the time capsule flag, a kind of treasure hunt their school has organized. Ali has bragged of having a piece, but after the girls hear an argument and she emerges from the house, she tells them all to come out because their search is useless; the flag has already been stolen. Later, the girls all become friends. When the flag is put together for the time capsule however, Aria feels guiltily about the missing piece, which belonged to Ali and which Aria has back at home.

Chapter 1 opens with a search in the woods behind Spencer's house, where Spencer is convinced that she saw Ian, the main suspect in Ali's killing. Officer Wilden of the police force appear, but is acting strange in front of all of the girls, who have arrived. The body, however, is missing. Various back story is provided in this chapter, which includes the investigation into Ian's activities and the death of a former friend of the girls' called Mona. Ian talked to Spencer shortly before his disappearance, claiming his innocence, and Officer Wilden witnessed them speaking. He refuses to go into the woods, to the girls' frustration, and says he needs to radio back to the station to follow protocol. The girls are incensed that he doesn't seem to believe them, and are surprised to see him then go into the woods, in the opposite direction from where they had seen Ian's body.

In Chapter 2, Aria is eating breakfast with her father and his girlfriend, Meredith, when she sees on the television that there are some doubts about the investigation, and that Ali's family has been getting text messages. Aria calls Emily and they discuss how strange it is that they haven't received any messages themselves from the mysterious "A," an anonymous writer who has harassed them all over the past few months. Aria thinks about how she once saw Wilden, when he still went to the high school, going through a girls' locker. She then calls her mother's house, but her mother Ella's boyfriend Xavier, who has tried to molest Aria, picks up the phone. Aria hangs up, but not before Xavier guesses that it is her. Meanwhile, Meredith is about to have a baby shower, and Aria's father tells her that it will be at a new house he's purchased, where Aria can move as well. Through the kitchen window, Aria is certain she sees eyes, which quickly disappear.

Chapter 3 focuses on Emily and her relationship with her boyfriend, Isaac. Though bisexual, Emily has come to terms with her sexuality partially through Isaac's help, which led to a relationship between them. They watch TV, but as she leaves his house, a man comes flying out at her, screaming that her car scratched his BMW. Isaac tries to diffuse the situation, and Emily realizes that the screaming man is Ali's brother, Jason. After Jason leaves, Emily and Isaac kiss and tell each other that they love one another.



In Chapter 4, Hanna, now a very popular girl, is at the mall with her friends as well as her new step-sister, Kate. They are eating at Pinkberry, rather than at their normal restaurant, Rive Gauche. There is some tension between Hanna and Kate, because Hanna announced to the school that Kate has herpes, causing Hanna's boyfriend Lucas to break up with her. Hanna notices both someone who looks like Mona, their dead friend/enemy, and then another figure who resembles Officer Wilden. To avoid messages from A, she has a new phone, and only gives the number to her friends. Her friends, under Kate's direction, are ogling the Lacrosse boys, and especially Aria's younger brother, Mike. The girls then go to Rive Gauche, expressly against Hanna's wishes. She begins to feel that she has lost control of the group.

Chapters 1-4 Analysis

This first section is important for a variety of reasons, but namely for establishing the back story, the relationships between the girls, and the problems they will face in the coming narrative. Moreover, it introduces a variety of suspects, foreshadowing later suspicions.

The first chapter explains in great detail the significance of the piece of flag, which will come into play later in the book. In a way, the mystery of Ali's death is like this flag, in that each girl must contribute something to come up with a comprehensible whole. Therefore, its introduction here highlights its immediate importance. The tension with her brother is also important to note at this stage.

The girls obviously have a long history of being friends, which this section also accentuates. However, they have not always been able to trust their friends, as the remembered experience with Mona (who tried to kill them) proves. Each girl also has her own separate life, friends, and problems; what unites them all is Ali's death.

Finally, Jason, Officer Wilden, and "A" are all introduced in this section, and all in mysterious terms. This casts them in the role of potential suspects, and should arouse the reader's suspicions.



Chapters 5-8

Chapters 5-8 Summary

Chapter 5 begins from Spencer's perspective. She is studying with a boy she likes, Andrew, who finally makes a move, and the two begin to make out. However, Spencer's been jumpy lately, not just because of Ian, but also because she has begun to suspect that she is adopted. With Andrew's help, she has tracked down the woman she believes to be her birth mother, and the woman, Olivia, has written back to her. Trying to find more information, Spencer gets Andrew to help her download files on her father's computer, and then writes back to Olivia to set up a meeting in New York.

In Chapter 6, Aria drives her brother Mike to school, but does not go in herself. After the news of Ian's disappearance, news trucks have camped outside the school. Aimless, she goes to the train station, not knowing where to go. There, she sees Jason, Ali's older brother. The two of them chat and flirt, and go to have a drink. The story about Ian comes onto the news, and Jason leaves abruptly.

Hanna is back at the mall in Chapter 7, where she finds part of this year's flag. She thinks about the day that Ali lost her part of the flag, and how Ali seemed more distracted than actually upset. Kate, meanwhile, keeps talking about Mike, and Hanna goes to ask him out, just to upset her step-sister.

In Chapter 8, Emily and Isaac decide to take their relationship to the next level by having sex. However, though they think that they are alone in the house, they discover that Isaac's mother, Mrs. Colbert, was actually downstairs. She acts strange when she sees Emily, but agrees to invite Emily to dinner the following night, on Isaac's urging.

Chapters 5-8 Analysis

Family plays the most important role in this second section. Here, each girl's issue with her family is highlighted in turn, demonstrating the powerful and sometimes dangerous role these people play in our lives. Olivia, for example, seems to be perfect, but the fact that Spencer refuses to heed Andrew's warnings should alert the reader that something is perhaps not right with the situation. Similarly, Aria feels a disconnect from her own brother, and spends time with Ali's brother instead, though he acts strangely.

Hanna's discovery of the flag brings the symbol back into the storyline, and draws an important parallel between this year and the year that Ali died. Kate, on the other hand, is annoying, but there is nothing actually sinister about her. Conversely, Mrs. Colbert genuinely seems to be hiding something regarding Emily and her feelings towards her son's girlfriend. This may even lead the reader to add her to the possible list of suspects.



Chapters 9-12

Chapters 9-12 Summary

Spencer tries to download her father's files onto her own computer in Chapter 9, but ends up crashing it. She goes downstairs to tell her parents, who have seemed cold and distant lately, but they couldn't care less. Her mother even yells at her because somebody has painted offensive graffiti on their garage. Spencer's older sister Melissa offers to let Spencer use her computer, though. When Spencer starts to use it, she's shocked to see someone appearing to be Ian Instant Messaging her sister. She confirms that it is him by asking his middle name - Elizabeth - which almost nobody knows. Spencer then gets a new message from A, telling her that she'd better solve the mystery of Ali's killer or she'll be the next one gone.

The girls are all together in Chapter 10, which is from Emily's perspective. They wonder briefly if Ian might be A, but Spencer, after her conversation with him on the porch, is sure it isn't. She reveals that he saw two blonde girls the night that Ali disappears. The girls bewail the fact that they have to keep searching. Aria tells them that she talked to Jason, but Emily warns her that Jason is awful. Later, Emily sees Jenna, a girl that the group accidentally blinded, and Maya, her ex-girlfriend, talking mysteriously down the street.

In Chapter 11, Aria settles into her new house, which she loves. Her mother has sent her invitations for her new gallery opening in the mail, but Aria worries about seeing Xavier there. She fantasizes about Jason, and remembers how when she was little, he was the one who gave her Ali's piece of the flag. She then has to go downstairs to Meredith's shower, where Mike has invited both Kate and Hanna, who is furious, and doubly so when she finds that Kate has gotten the same present for Meredith that she has. Later that day, Aria runs into Jenna down the street, and tells her that she's moved into the new house; but Jenna, for some reason, already knows.

Chapter 12 begins with Isaac giving Emily a ring to show his affection. They then eat dinner with his parents, but Mrs. Colbert is still acting strange, and appears to be directing weird sexual innuendos at Emily. Mr. Colbert, a caterer, talks about the new event (Ella's art exhibition) at a former home for disturbed children, which is now a hotel. At the end of the evening, Emily helps Mrs. Colbert to clean up, and finds a picture of herself and Isaac in a drawer. However, Emily's head has been cut out of the picture. She then receives a picture text from A, of the group with Ali and Jenna.

Chapters 9-12 Analysis

The third section of "Killers" adds even more suspects to the running list. Here, both Jenna and Maya act strange around the girls - and both have reasons for wanting to place them in harm's way. Character motivation is an important element in the book,



and no character acts in any way inconsistent with his or her past and defining traits. Even Melissa, the seemingly "perfect" sister, has somehow been in contact with Ian, who was thought to be dead, while Mrs. Colbert's creepiness goes one step further as Emily finds her picture.

The tension of this section is further underscored by the messages from A, which are becoming more frequent and more tense. They obviously disturb the members of the group, and signal a quickening of the narrative pace for the reader, who should thus expect more trouble in the chapters that follow.



Chapters 13-16

Chapters 13-16 Summary

Spencer goes to New York to meet Olivia in Chapter 13. She has lied to Andrew, telling him that she's having dinner with her family. On the train on the way to the city, she wonders what her sister's involvement is with Ian. However, once Spencer arrives in the city, she can only think about Olivia, whom she exactly resembles. Olivia is beautiful, and married to a rich man (Morgan), who is about to take her away on a honeymoon. In addition, Olivia is full of plans for the future, and gets excited thinking about Spencer moving to the city after graduation, suggesting that she even get her own West Village apartment. Olivia eventually has to leave in a helicopter to meet Morgan at the airport, but accidentally leaves a folder with information about her new apartment with Spencer.

Aria runs into Jason at another train station in Chapter 14. Still flirting with her, Jason suggests that they go together to a bar in Hollis. There, even though she is underage, Aria gets served alcohol, and the two talk a lot, including about an ex-girlfriend that Jason had when he used to attend Yale (he has since transferred to Penn). He kisses her, and she is elated; however, when he leaves, Aria gets a message from A that there is more to Jason than there seems to be.

In Chapter 15, Hanna and Mike go on a date to the mall, where he wants to take her shopping. Hanna sees Officer Wilden there loading large amounts of propane into his car. Mike is charming, if a little young, and takes Hanna to a Chinese restaurant, where he speaks in Mandarin to the waitress, telling her that Hanna is an underwear model. The date is almost perfect, until Mike takes Hanna back to his place only to find Kate waiting. Apparently, she has a date scheduled with Mike for dessert.

Spencer tells Andrew about her possible birth mother in Chapter 16, and he's upset that she lied to him about where she went. He also urges her to tell her parents, worried that she's going to get hurt. He tells her not to be too trusting. Later, Spencer goes downstairs to find that her parents have sold her car without telling her. Enraged, she turns to Olivia's portfolio and notes that her realtor's card is included in the documents. At that moment, she gets a message from A, ordering her to keep searching for Ali's murderer.

Chapters 13-16 Analysis

Family again comes into play in the fourth section of "Killers," this time in darker and more disturbing ways. The most important element of this section is the presence of deceptive elements, indicating problems beneath the surface.

Though Spencer is so delighted at Olivia's presence and her acceptance/approval, the reader can't help but sympathize with Andrew, who thinks it is all too good to be true. Andrew's disapproval foreshadows the later trouble Spencer will have with her "mother."



Meanwhile, Aria's relationship with Jason becomes more complicated, and seemingly better, as they kiss, but this is undermined by the subsequent text from A, warning her off.

Similarly, Hanna's date with Mike seems perfect on the surface, except for Kate's appearance at the end, proving that all is not as it seems.



Chapters 17-20

Chapters 17-20 Summary

Emily goes out to dinner at Applebee's with her swim team in Chapter 17. There, she remembers Ali joking about her brother being in a mental ward, but dismisses it. She also tells her friends on the team that she's going to the art opening, with a boy. They are surprised, but happy for her. Spencer, who is also at the restaurant, urges Emily to meet her in the bathroom, where she shows Emily the new note from A. After Spencer leaves the bathroom, Mrs. Colbert enters and harshly warns Emily to stay away from her son. Finally, Emily receives a picture from A on her phone, of Officer Wilden leaving confession.

In Chapter 18, Hanna goes for a job, and runs into Officer Wilden at the Cauvanagh house. She looks at his black car, and recognizes an ice-fishing permit on the windshield, which he's try to conceal. He tells her that he has reason to believe Ian's in California now, and insists on taking her home. However, he drives extremely quickly and dangerously, and she's terrified to be in the car with him and exits as soon as she can.

Spencer contacts Olivia's realtor in Chapter 19. He has the perfect apartment for her in the West Village, but tells her that it won't last long enough for her to come visit it the next week. She puts a deposit down on it, using money from an account she found on her father's computer with her name on it.

Aria goes rock-climbing with Jason in Chapter 20. They have a great time and flirt a lot. She remembers, slightly uneasily, a sleepover where Jason offered to help Ali feed the cat and Ali was unnerved. Jason also reveals that he used to spend a lot of time with Dave, the school psychiatrist, when he was younger. Aria starts to complain about Ali, and apologizes, but Jason is glad to have the chance to unload about his younger sister. It is only when Aria invites him to the party at Radley that Jason panics and leaves as quickly as he can. Aria then hears laughter from an unknown source, haunting her.

Chapters 17-20 Analysis

Problems begin to come to the surface in this section, disturbing and baffling the girls, who are still working individually on their own lives, and collaborate only sporadically. Mrs. Colbert's confrontation with Emily proves that Emily's suspicions were right, and the woman really does hate her: the question that remains is, how much? Similarly, Officer Wilden adds to his list of strange actions by driving Hanna back home so violently. Finally, Aria's unknown insult to Jason, which results in his public scolding of her, indicates once more that she does not know the full story - and neither does the too-trusting Spencer, as she will soon find out.



Chapters 21-24

Chapters 21-24 Summary

In Chapter 21, Emily tries to explain to Isaac what his mother said to her, but he refuses to believe it. Upset, he leaves her on the side of the road. She then gets a message from A telling her to go to her first love's house, and she walks over to Ali's home only to see Maya's shadow in the window. She also sees Jenna talking to a guy in the shadows; after a moment, she realizes that the guy is Jason.

Hanna dreams about sixth grade, and Ali in particular, in Chapter 22. In her dream, Ali asks if she remembers seeing her when Hanna was in a coma, and tells Hanna that she needs to find her part of the flag. When Hanna wakes up, she hears her father and Kate laughing together downstairs. Angry, Hanna storms into Mike's gym and demands that he be exclusive with her. In return, he asks for her piece of the new flag; when she refuses, he asks her to go to prom with him instead. She agrees.

Ella keeps contacting Aria about the opening in Chapter 23. Emily, meanwhile, warns her about Jason. However, Aria is thrilled to get a message from Jason telling her to meet him at his parents' new house that evening, and telling her how to get into it. When she arrives, though, there is a vicious dog in the yard that attacks her; she runs inside to find the apartment empty. There are pictures of a girl she doesn't know everywhere. Jason comes in and explodes in anger, claiming that he didn't message her, didn't invite her, and that his family doesn't even have a dog. She leaves.

Spencer goes to New York in Chapter 24, only to find that the apartment she "rented" doesn't even exist. She tries to go to Olivia's apartment building, and discovers that neither Olivia nor her supposed new husband has ever lived there. Panicked, she looks at her bank account, to find that all of the money has been drained from it.

Chapters 21-24 Analysis

Misplaced trust defines the events and characters in this section. Though the reader does not yet know (and never finds out in this installment of the series) why Jason is talking to Jenna, the conversation does seem to undermine whatever relationship has been developing between him and Aria. Hanna, meanwhile, can no longer trust her stepsister or her "boyfriend" to allow them to see each other anymore, and forces Mike to pick her.

The biggest betrayal of trust is Aria's, of course, when she is placed in the violent situation of unknowingly invading Jason's home. This raises another question: is the person who sent her the fake messages the same person who killed Ali?



Finally, though unconnected to the murder, Spencer's betrayal is also shocking to her, though perhaps not to the reader. It also sets up another obstacle for the character, who now must explain to her unloving parents what happened.



Chapters 25-28

Chapters 25-28 Summary

Hanna goes to the opening at Radley in Chapter 25 with Mike. When she's there, she sees Kate, and flaunts the fact that she's "won" Mike instead of Kate. However, Kate laughs, saying that she picked the worst guy possible to prove that Hanna would go after anyone just to make sure Kate couldn't have him, and that they are now even for the herpes incident. Mike hears all of this and leaves the room.

Emily has also arrived at Radley, in Chapter 26. There, Maya talks to her, briefly and threateningly, and Emily realizes that there are still psychiatric records in the building. She tracks them down, and finds that Jason was institutionalized repeatedly there. Isaac, who has followed her, tells her that he found the picture of them and confronted his mother, who is really crazy. He begs Emily for forgiveness, but she cannot forgive him yet.

In Chapter 27, Noel, a member of the Lacrosse team, reveals to Hanna that they also had a bet about who would take Mike to prom. Hanna finds Mike, who is pleased, and they decide that the date is still on. They go to dance, only to hear a creepy song about a dead girl called Alison playing. Hanna then starts to think about why Wilden would hide his ice-fishing sticker, and realizes that she has to go find Aria.

Aria has arrived late and appears in Chapter 28 after visiting Ali's grave, where a body that was never confirmed as Ali's has been buried. First, Emily shows her Jason's name in the records, and the girls wonder if they should call Officer Wilden. However, Hanna shows up and tells them that they shouldn't, because it was his black car they saw the night of Ali's murder. Aria agrees that this makes sense, and also wonders if Jason was involved, perhaps because Ali was dating a much older boy, Ian, at the time. They know they need to talk to Ian, but before they leave, Aria looks at the piece of the flag Hanna has attached to her belt, and asks why there's a frog on it. Hanna says that it's because Ali's original piece had one on it, but Aria says that it didn't, finally revealing that Jason gave her Ali's piece of the flag. The girls leave to contact Ian, only to find that Wilden's been listening in on them. They flee for Spencer's house.

Chapters 25-28 Analysis

Various resolutions to the characters' personal dramas come about in this section, as Hanna and Mike define their relationship, Isaac believes (but is spurned by) Emily, and as Aria tells her secret about the flag. The most important elements of the section for the overall narrative, though, are those revealing truths about the suspects in the case.

By the end of the section, the reader should be convinced, along with the girls, that Wilden and Jason killed Ali, though the reasons for the murder are still unclear. Other lesser mysteries also remain unsolved, including the reasons Jason was in the

institution, the mystery of the frog on the flag, and whose bones are actually in Ali's grave. Though the reader may hope for these questions to be resolved by the end of the novel, they are not: as the novel is one in a series, these unanswered questions provide a "cliffhanger," urging readers to continue with the books.



Chapters 29-31

Chapters 29-31 Summary

In Chapter 29, Spencer goes through her sister Melissa's notebooks and finds that she made out with "JD," or Jason, years ago. Hanna and Emily show up at her door then, and tell her what they've discovered about Jason and Wilden. They all go on Instant Messenger then, and contact Ian. Ian tells them that he'd been planning to meet Ali the night she was murdered, but saw two blond girls running away. He says, as well, that both Jason and Wilden were supposed to be in the Poconos at that time, but were in Rosewood. He confirms that they were the murderers. At that moment, the girls smell gasoline.

In Chapter 30, Aria returns to Ali's flag and sees the letter J crossed out on it. On her way over to Spencer's she sees Ian's class ring in the woods and goes towards it. There, a fire has started, and she helps an unknown figure escape from under a branch.

Having escaped, the girls realize that Wilden bought propane, in Chapter 31. Once they are safe, they see that the new figure is Ali.

The narrator adds a postscript, summarizing the remaining questions in a mocking tone.

Chapters 29-31 Analysis

The girls make a narrow escape in this section. Instead of a happy ending with resolutions, arrests, and other traditional narrative devices, however, the novel ends on Ali's reappearance and the narrator's sardonic comments. These leave the reader with unanswered questions, just as the girls themselves still have much exploring to do before they fully solve the mysteries before them.



Characters

Emily Fields

One of the "Pretty Little Liars," Emily begins as an awkward sixth-grader in the earliest part of the book, trying to steal Ali's part of the flag. She later reveals that she had a crush on Ali at this time. Bisexual, Emily has struggled with her sexuality, and been helped through her struggle by her now-boyfriend, Isaac. However, she has also dated girls in the past, including the bitter Maya, who appears to be a suspect at various points in the book. After having sex with Isaac, Emily experiences a lot of tension with his mother. Straightforward and forthcoming, Emily immediately tells Isaac this, although he doesn't believe her until much later. Also stubborn, Emily refuses to forgive him just yet. Emily is one of the more clear-minded characters. It is perhaps her earlier confrontation with Jason regarding the supposed scratch on his car that makes her suspicious of him. However, while Aria is completely ready to be seduced by Jason, Emily is wary of him immediately and ends up with the records to prove that he was a troubled youth.

Aria Montgomery

The daughter of hippies, Aria is a sensitive and artistic girl who has returned to Rosewood after spending the past three years in Iceland. There, she was pleased to find that boys cared less about what she looks like and more about what she is like. However, she has had a long-term crush on Jason, Ali's brother, and is finally able to explore it during "Killer." Due to both her own careless chatter and her ignorance of certain facts (like the time Jason spent institutionalized as a teenager), she eventually does not succeed in her relationship with him. Aria shows a naive side when she believes the text she thinks Jason sent to her, ignoring the facts and plunging ahead to go visit him, placing herself in danger. Nevertheless, she does have good instincts for self-preservation, and can put her foot down when forced to, though she avoids confrontation. For example, she refuses to have any dealings with her mother's new boyfriend, Xavier, who tried to harass her, though she is still too sensitive to tell her mother about what's happened and prefers to take a more passive route, moving in with her father and step-mother.

Hanna Marin

The most outgoing of the group, Hanna was once an awkward and mousy child. After Ali's death, she transformed into the pretty and popular member of the "Liars" group, and now hangs out with Ali's former friends, Naomi and Riley. Hanna was once in a coma, and seems to have a near-psychic connection with Ali, who addressed her in the coma and who appears to her in an important dream in the narrative. However, Hanna is also insecure in important ways, notably regarding her family. She takes an intense



dislike to her new stepsister, Kate, whom she distrusts - although it was Hanna who betrayed Kate by sharing her embarrassing secret in front of the school, rather than the other way around. This shows Hanna's tendency to strike first rather than be hit, even if the sense of danger is only slight. This character trait also emerges when Kate appears to have a crush on Aria's brother Mike. Though she finds him annoying, Hanna goes to extremes to get Mike for herself, rather than letting Kate get him. In the end, she finds out that this was a trick Kate played on her to get even for the rumors Hanna spread. Nevertheless, Hanna reveals her romantic side by continuing her relationship with Mike, even after she learns the truth.

Spencer Hastings

Probably the most vulnerable of the "Liars," Spencer is put in a tough position at the beginning of the book, when a relative dies and leaves millions of dollars to her entire family - except for her. This seemingly confirms her suspicions that she was adopted, a big fear of hers. However, she receives some comfort when she actually meets her birth mother Olivia, who appears to accept and love Spencer unconditionally. This is doubly important because Spencer's current home life is difficult, with her parents ignoring her and mis-treating her when they do talk to her. In addition, it also makes her betrayal that much more painful when she realizes that Olivia's relationship with her was just a scam, and that she has lost all of her college money. Spencer, though insecure, is also committed to the truth, and believes that Ian did not commit Ali's murder. She begins the book as the driving force into Ian's disappearance, and is perhaps the most upset of all the girls when he is not found.

Alison diLaurentis

Also known as Ali, she is the girl's childhood friend, who was killed in sixth grade. At the time, she was having problems with her brother, Jason, and dating a much older boy, Ian. The night of the murder, two blond girls were seen in the woods where Ali's body was eventually found. Each girl has their own memories of Ali, and sees her in a slightly different way.

Jason diLaurentis

This is Ali's brother. Formerly a troubled youth, he seems to have overcome a lot and enrolled first at Yale, then at Penn. However, he is still very sensitive about certain things, including his institutionalization.

Melissa

This is Spencer's older sister who is somehow involved with Jason and Ian.



A

This is the anonymous character who sends the girls texts and pictures regarding Ali's death. There was once another A, Mona, but she died in a previous volume.

Officer Wilden

This is the town police officer and later a suspect in Ali's murder.

Kate Randall

This is Hanna's stepsister.

Maya St. Germain

This is Emily's ex-girlfriend and a suspicious character.

Jenna Cavanaugh

This is a girl the group blinded by accident several years ago and a friend of Maya's.

Ian

This is a major suspect in Ali's murder, though he is innocent; his disappearance begins the book.

Isaac

This is Emily's boyfriend.

Mrs. and Mr. Colbert

These are Isaac's parents.

Andrew

This is Spencer's boyfriend.



Mike

This is Hanna (and Kate's) boyfriend as well as Aria's younger brother.

Ella

This is Aria's mother.

Xavier

This is Ella's boyfriend.

Byron

This is Aria's father.

Meredith

This is Aria's father's girlfriend who is now pregnant.

Olivia Caldwell

This is Spencer's supposed birth mother.

Michael Hutchins

This is Olivia's "realtor," who turns out to be a scammer.

Dave

This is the school psychiatrist, who Jason used to visit.

Noel

This is a friend of Mike's from his Lacrosse team.



Objects/Places

Rosewood, Pennsylvania

This is the small town on the Main Line where the action of the story takes place.

Ali's House

This is the grand Victorian house where Maya now lives.

The Flag

Part of a time capsule project sponsored by the school, the flag is divided into pieces to be found and decorated, then reassembled.

The Woods

This is the place of Ali's death, as well as Ian's disappearance. The woods are immediately behind Spencer's house and Ali's former home.

Baby Shower

This is the party held for Aria's new stepmother, Meredith. Kate and Hanna have a confrontation here when both of them show up as Mike's date, bringing the same present.

Aria's New House

This is the house on Coventry Lane, near Spencer's, where Aria's father and stepmother move.

King James Mall

This is Hanna's favorite location for hanging out; the site of Pinkberry and Rive Gauche, as well as her date with Mike; also the place where she spots Officer Wilden buying propane.

New York City

This is the city where Spencer goes to meet her birth mother, Olivia.



Spencer's Father's Computer

This is the location of files relating to Spencer's possible adoption and finances.

Poconos

This is the vacation locale where Officer Wilden and Jason were supposed to be the night of Ali's murder.

BMW

This is Jason's car.

Black Car/Pick-Up Truck

This is Officer Wildon's vehicle.

Radley

This is the site of the new hotel and formerly an institution for troubled children.

Iceland

This is the county where Aria spent the last three years.

Rocks and Ropes

This is the rock-climbing facility where Jason takes Aria.

Rottweiler

This is the vicious dog Aria encounters in Jason's yard.



Themes

Guilt

As both a psychological and literal thriller, "Killer" plays heavily on the theme of guilt, which each character, including the minor ones, experience to some extent. Obviously, the main issue is the guilt of the killer. As one of the killers whose motives go unexplained or that you guess at throughout the novel, some of Jason's actions can be read as stemming from guilt. For example, he befriends one of his sister's friends - the same girl to whom he gave Ali's piece of the flag years ago. Apart from the murder, however, each of the girls has her own secrets, which trouble them deeply. Spencer's is her relationship with the woman she thinks is her birth mother, and her subsequent loss of her college funds. Hanna has a partially-hidden contempt for her stepsister, though she does not feel guilty about this. She does, however, feel some guilt for revealing Kate's secret to the school. Aria is guilty about having hidden Ali's flag for so long, and Emily feels guilty and ashamed for sleeping with Isaac while his mother was downstairs. In each case, guilt can be seen as the result of pressure put on the girls from various sources, the most important ones being their parents and their romantic interests.

Friendship

Friendship is displayed in two forms in "Killer" such as the past and the present. In the past, the girls were friends in a traditional sense, especially when Ali was alive. Though they were all very different, they shared experiences, played together, helped each other, and supported one another. In the present day, however, there are only two things uniting them: their forced search for Ali's killer, and their shared childhood roots. These forces combined help push the girls on their quest to find Ali's killer, though more than one of them seems willing to stop, exhausted by everything they've had to do so far. The group of "Liars" is also defined by opposition to other characters in the book. In earlier volumes, this included Mona, their common enemy. Here, it is their direct opposition to Ali's killers, as well as their suspicions about others, including Maya and Jenna. However, they do not seem overly involved in the day-to-day dramas, however big, of the others' lives. For example, Aria simply sits back and watches as the drama with Hanna and Kate unfolds at Meredith's baby shower.

Truth

The title of the series presents truth (or the lack of it) as one of the major themes in "Killers." Indeed, truth and lies come out in various forms in the book: in the lies the girls tell each other, in the lies they are supposed to have told to others, and in their suspicions of others lying to them. The main lie amongst the girls themselves is, of course, Aria's claim that she has no idea where Ali's piece of flag is. She has had it in her bedroom for years, and refused to tell the other girls about it, letting them go on



thinking that the flag was stolen by someone else, possibly the killer. Throughout the book, the girls are also doubted by numerous others, including Officer Wilden, who claims that they may have been inventing events, and subsequently the news, which also accuses them of doing so. Individually, the girls are also doubted: notably, Isaac refuses to believe Emily's claims about his mother until he has seen the evidence with his own eyes. Finally, the girls constantly suspect others of lying to them, from Jason to Ian, creating a web of doubt that makes it even more difficult to find out who the real killer is.



Style

Point of View

The novel takes an unorthodox approach to point of view. It begins and ends with an omniscient narrator, who has a strongly sarcastic and mocking tone, describing the girls and the events preceding and following the book's action in detail - seemingly knowing everything. The novel then alternates, chapter by chapter, among the four main characters, in a close third-person narration for each of them. In this point of view, the reader is privy to the character's thoughts as well as her actions, allowing for a reliable account of what is taking place, as well as the motivations of each character in various scenarios. Another voice also makes its way into the book: that of A. Though the old A (Mona) has died, the new A keeps on sending the girls messages. However, the characters all note that the tone of these messages is very different from the former voice, which wanted to hurt more than help them; this A actually seems to aid them in their quest to find Ali's murderer, though at times it threatens them as well. In fact, the voice sounds similar in tone to the narrator of the book's introduction and conclusion, though this link is never explicitly made. The effect of these shifting points of view is a confusing, yet comprehensive, vision of the situation. Again, the narratives piece together to provide a bigger picture, exactly like the flag puzzle set up by the school.

Setting

The setting for the book is mainly in Rosewood, Pennsylvania. Rosewood is a small town, and idyllic other for the fact that it was home to a brutal murder of a young girl. It seems to be suburban, bordering on rural, with mysterious woods behind Spencer and Ali's homes. The town is also contrasted by Spencer's trip to New York City, where she comes across a variety of glamorous locales that are in stark contrast to her hometown. This also helps to convince her that her life is not really what she was intended for. Of course, Rosewood is not as idyllic as it appears on the surface: the woods, where Ali was killed, Ian's body disappeared, and somebody tries to burn the girls, represent this darker side of the region. In addition, even authority figures cannot be completely trusted here, as a variety of dodgy parents, adults, and police officers makes clear.

The book is set close to the present day and in the recent past, about four years earlier, when the girls were twelve. The novel confirms this timing by making references to popular culture, such as the television show, now off the air, *Veronica Mars*.

Language and Meaning

The language of "Pretty Little Liars: Killers" is important in three respects: the world in which it belongs, the tone of the language itself, and notable absences of speech. In most respects, the four protagonists are normal teenagers, and talk like them. They make jokes and tease others, and their individual narrations sound more or less the



same, with some slight differences (Aria's romanticism as opposed to Hanna's skepticism, for example). However, there are other spheres of language that come into the novel, including parental speech, which verges from the absent-minded, in the case of Aria's parents, to the cold, in the case of Spencer's, and legal speech, which the Officer hides behind when the girls want him to search the woods.

The tone of the language can help link the voice of A to the voice of the nameless narrator at the beginning and end of the book, as well as distinguish the girls' narratives from the context of this narration.

Finally, the language in the book is equally notable for what people do not say. Jason never tells Aria why he freaks out regarding the gallery open; she has to wait for Emily to discover his name in the institution's records before she understands. Ian is cryptic at first in his messages, for fear of being caught. Similarly, though Melissa clearly knows more than she's letting on, her absence of speech is telling in this situation.

Structure

The important elements of the book's structure are its alternating points of view, the narrator appearing at the beginning and the end of the story (and nowhere else), accelerating action, and the cliffhanger ending. The alternating points of view keep the novel moving forward, structurally, as readers become attached to first one narrative and then the other, having to link them together to get the whole picture of what is happening globally in Ali's murder case. The narrator's voice places this action in an ominous and new context, and the note at the end of the story is jarring after the relatively objective narration the reader has just passed. Meanwhile, the book itself is divided into chapters that produce more and more obstacles for the girls, while simultaneously becoming shorter and shorter: this is a structural technique to create a sense of urgency and to keep the reader engaged. Finally, the novel is unlike traditional narratives in that it uses a cliffhanger ending, leaving many questions (listed by the narrator) open, hoping to convince the reader to come back for the next installment.



Quotes

"Meet me in the woods where she died," it said. "I have something to show you" (Chapter 1, p. 12-13).

There's no need to hide. I thought we had an understanding" (Chapter 2, p. 27).

"You were the only one with substance," Jason added, giving her a kind, alluring smile" (Chapter 6, p. 58).

"But Ian was dead. The person who had sent his parents that text earlier today was an imposter" (Chapter 7, p. 71).

"One of these things doesn't belong. Figure it out quickly..or else" (Chapter 12, p. 113).

"I hope so,' Jason said. They smiled shyly at each other. Aria's heart thudded in her ears" (Chapter 14, p. 132).

"As far as I'm concerned, you're trash. Don't you dare set foot in my house again" (Chapter 17, p. 158).

"Maybe it's good we're talking about her. I mean, right now, Alison's this big elephant in the room that no one will discuss with me. (Chapter 20, p. 181)

"They say people should always talk to coma patients. They can hear. Did you hear me" (Chapter 22, p. 195).

"I might forgive you someday,' she said, 'but not today' (Chapter 26, p. 232).

"At the same time, the chorus began. 'All-i-son, I know this world is killing you" (Chapter 27, p. 236).

"Doesn't it seem weird, that he went into law enforcement" (Chapter 29, p. 255).

"This can't be happening,' Emily thought. 'There is no way this can be happening.' It was...ALI" (Chapter 31, p. 265).



Topics for Discussion

Given the evidence presented in the book, who is the most likely suspect in Ali's death? Provide textual support for your answer.

Each girl has a very different outlook on life, as well as different information regarding Ali's murder. Compare and contrast their perspectives and beliefs.

Melissa, Spencer's older sister, appears at various points in the novel. What is her role in the story? Why is she important?

Spencer's birth mother, Olivia, takes the story the farthest away from the main setting. Why is this important to Spencer's character, and to the story as a whole? How does it contribute to other characters' plotlines, and connect to Ali's murder (if at all)?

Each girl must deal with familial issues of some kind. Discuss these issues and their importance to the story, focusing on one girl's family in comparison to the others.

Most of the main characters have romances in the works. Describe the ultimate success or failures of each relationship, and place them in terms of their link or importance to Ali's death.

Everybody deals with pain and grief differently. Contrast at least three different coping mechanisms the book presents. Is one presented as healthier or better than the others? Explain.

The story is set both in the past and the present. What is the effect of this? How do diversions into the past affect the overall tone of the story?