



TEACHERS' NOTES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Lower to upper secondary
(Ages 13+, years 7 to 10)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English
- **General capabilities:** Literacy, Critical and creative thinking, Ethical understanding, Personal and social capability

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- This is the follow-up school mystery story from debut author Amy Doak.
- Fabulous example of a strong narrative voice.
- Features a wonderfully diverse group of friends who come together to solve the mystery . . .
- Great example of intergenerational friendship.

THEMES

- Friendship
- Murder mysteries
- Challenging assumptions and biases

PREPARED BY

Penguin Random House Australia

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Eleanor Jones Can't Keep a Secret

Amy Doak

PLOT SUMMARY

Things have settled down in Cooina and Eleanor Jones is getting used to her new normal – spending time with her friends, going to school, and working on a project at the local old age home. But just as things start to feel calm, a series of events once again rock Eleanor's world: Troy's ex-girlfriend is back in town and, during a visit to the old age home, Eleanor's buddy Nance admits to witnessing a murder, swearing Eleanor to secrecy.

In an effort to definitely *not* be concerned about Troy's ex, Eleanor throws herself into solving the mystery of the murder Nance spoke about. Enlisting the help of new friend and genealogy expert Jem to research Nance's past, Eleanor soon realises that digging into old secrets can sometimes be incredibly dangerous indeed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amy Doak is a lifelong lover of books, reading and writing. Following a career in media – advertising, radio, television and magazines – she continues to work as a freelance writer and is excited to see her non-fiction writing career evolve into a fiction one.

Amy lives in regional Victoria with her husband, teen, tween, dog and a very grumpy cat.

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. Look at the cover. What can you tell about the book from the images used?
2. How has the designer used the typography and colour to communicate what the book is about and what genre or category it might fit into?
3. Do you think the cover would be as affective with a different font? Why or why not?
4. Look at the back cover of the book and study the cover for the first book in the series, *Eleanor Jones is Not a Murderer*. How has the designer established a 'look' for the series?

WRITING STYLE

Questions

1. How would you describe Amy's writing style?
2. Do you think the text would have the same impact on the reader if it had been written in the past tense? Why or why not?
3. Eleanor's voice is quite strong and drives the narrative forward. Do you think this works well for the type of story it is?
4. Can you think of other genres where a strong narrative voice would be effective?

Activities

- Rewrite the opening scene of the novel from a different character's point of view. Which point of view do you think is more effective for hooking the reader into the story? Why do you think this is so?
- Select a character from the story who isn't Eleanor. Then select one of your favourite scenes from the book. Re-write that scene from your chosen character's point of view. What changes have occurred in the story because of this change in point of view. Would the story be the same or different if your chosen character was the main voice in the narrative?

KEY STUDY TOPICS

Crime/mystery genre

Amy Doak is a big fan of the murder mystery genre. There are also many popular novels and TV shows using this genre.

Questions

1. What typical tropes has the author used to make *Eleanor Jones is Not a Murderer* and *Eleanor Jones Can't Keep a Secret* fall into the murder mystery genre?
2. A key murder mystery trope is the red herring. Can you think of any red herrings that were used in the story of Nance witnessing the murderer? (Don't forget this could be a plot element or a character.) Were any used for the robberies' storyline?
3. Nance's story of witnessing a murder would be considered a 'cold case'. Do you know of any cold cases in real life? What do you think makes something a cold case?

Activities

- Find other stories in literature that are based on cold cases. Why do you think this is a popular storyline within the crime genre?
- The interpretation of information is important when solving a murder. Can you find moments in the story where information has been misconstrued or interpreted the wrong way? Do you think this happens in real life?
- 'Foreshadowing' is also used a lot in crime fiction. Find moments in the story where Amy has used this technique to create tension?
- Compare *Eleanor Jones Can't Keep a Secret* with another crime book you have read. What are the similar themes or tropes or examples of symbolism that you can find? Why do you think these are recurring elements?

Friendship and relationships

Questions

1. How would you describe the dynamic between Eleanor and her friendship group in this story? If you've read book one, how do you think it has changed and developed?
2. Look at Namita and Eleanor's relationship throughout the story. In what ways is their relationship different to Eleanor's relationship with Troy, Ethan and Alfie? Why do you think this is so?
3. Eleanor and her friends are volunteering at the old age home in Coinda. Have you ever done this



type of volunteer work? What do you think some of the positives would be by getting to know an older person?

4. How has Eleanor's relationship with Min changed and developed since book one?
5. Angus was mainly seen off the page in *Eleanor Jones is Not a Murderer*. How do you think his return to school has affected Eleanor and her friends? Has this changed the group dynamics? Do you think this is a good thing or a bad thing?

Activities

- Do you think Eleanor's relationships with her friends has developed since the first book? Find a passage in the text that demonstrates this.
- Take a look at the first scene at the old age home. (p.2) Eleanor is busy with Nance but the others are all talking to residents. Choose one of the others in the group and write a description or script outlining their interaction. (For example, Troy and Lil, Namita and Marg, Alfie and Kevin or Angus and Morris.) Try to get inside the heads of the characters you've chosen and create an authentic scene given the surrounds and environment they are in.
- Interview an older person in your life. Ask them about what life was like when they were your age. What was their school day like? How important were their friendships and romances? Was it more important to get a job after school or go to university? Then write a short report about the differences and similarities of your lives.
- Compare the experience of Eleanor with Jem with Laura with Victor. Can you see many correlations? How do you think this ties in with the quotes from *Little Women* that different characters quote in the story?
- Discuss in groups the options that Laura would have had dealing with Victor back in the sixties. Do you think she should have told her family and friends? Why do you think she chose not to do this?

KEY QUOTES

'Where's Ruby?' I ask, determined to not feel bad. 'She told me she scored the other ticket.'

'She told you . . .?' It looks like Troy is finding it hard to concentrate. He's now looking at Jem's hand, firmly planted in the small of my back, the feel of which is starting to annoy me a little.

'Well, well.' A voice to the left of me makes me turn. Of course, it's Ruby Walker. This night just keeps getting better and better. (P182)

What do you think Eleanor is feeling at this moment? Are there other ways she could have handled this so she came out of the moment feeling better than she did?

Namita puts one hand lightly on my shoulder. 'A kiss is not "just" a kiss when you don't want it, you know.'

Her words land with a thud on my heart and I realise that's exactly why I've been feeling so icky and weird and awful. She's right. I've been telling myself it was no big deal, that it was just a kiss and it didn't mean anything. It did though. It meant a lot of things. (p. 232)

It takes Eleanor a while to realise why she is so upset with Jem and the way he acted. What can you do within your relationships to ensure that consent is a part of the conversation?

'Murder!' Nance Williams shudders. 'I was there, you know. I saw it all.'

It's the first thing she's said to me all day and it is said with conviction and urgency. (p1)

How effective are these first few sentences in hooking the reader into the book? Can you think of other great first lines in novels?

'Listen, Jem –' I start.

'Who's Min?' He cuts me off.

'I'm sorry?'

'The person who was meant to go to the theatre tonight with you. Who is Min?' (p182)

Looking back at the story, can you find other examples like this of Jem potentially showing his true nature? Do you think it is reasonable that Eleanor didn't pick up these moments of foreshadowing? What other examples of foreshadowing can you find in the story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Would you call Eleanor Jones a reliable narrator? Why or why not? Can you find places in the text which demonstrate this?
2. As in book one, Eleanor mentions and reads a lot of books throughout the narrative – see **Worksheet 1**. How do these texts link to the novel *Eleanor Jones Can't Keep a Secret*? Are they linked by themes? By the plot? Or by the characteristics of the main characters? Or is there no link at all?



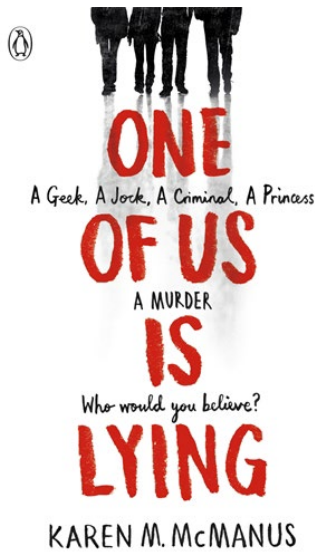
3. Once you have read the book, think about how Eleanor handled the situation with Jem. Why do you think she felt pressure to ask him to go to the play with her? Have there been times you've felt the same way?
4. In today's society, where social media is everywhere, do you respect Eleanor's decision to not be on her phone all the time? Do you think this is a sustainable attitude for her to have? Why or why not?
5. How much do you think that the media, friends, family or just your own ideas about when certain things should happen in life effect a person's decision about when to start dating? Do you think this is different from person to person?
6. Find moments in the story that describe how Eleanor feels when she is with Jem compared to when she's with Troy. What are the main differences between the ways Troy and Jem treat Eleanor? Do you think Eleanor is aware of these differences?

ACTIVITIES

- Once you've read the novel, go back and look at the cover elements – how has symbolism been used to plant seeds about the action within the narrative?
- Women who grew up in the 60s and 70s were pioneers for women and feminism. Research a famous woman from the sixties or seventies and learn how they influenced modern life. Make a clear connection between them and how we live life today.
- Read the passage on page 145. Research women's rights in Australia. How have things changed legally for women since the 1950s?
- Do you think there were red flags regarding Jem that Eleanor wasn't seeing? Find evidence in the text of some things that he says or does that indicates he is only thinking of himself, not about Eleanor and her feelings? Were there warnings from other characters?
- Pick one of the following time periods: 1500s, 1800s, post-World War I, the sixties, the eighties. Pick a country: Australia, China, USA, France, Italy, India. Research how people generally approached dating/courting/finding a partner in that time and place. How does this differ from today?



FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



One Of Us Is Lying
by Karen M. McManus

Five students go to detention. Only four leave alive.

Yale hopeful Bronwyn has never publicly broken a rule.

Sports star Cooper only knows what he's doing in the baseball diamond.

Bad boy Nate is one misstep away from a life of crime.

Prom queen Addy is holding together the cracks in her perfect life.

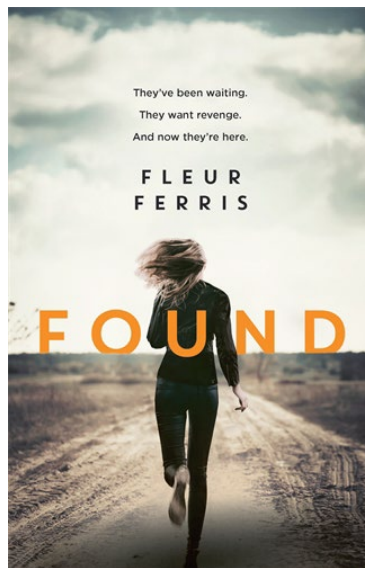
And outsider Simon, creator of the notorious gossip app at Bayview High, won't ever talk about any of them again.

He dies 24 hours before he could post their deepest secrets online. Investigators conclude it's no accident. All of them are suspects.

Everyone has secrets, right?

What really matters is how far you'll go to protect them.

Teachers' notes available.



Found
by Fleur Ferris

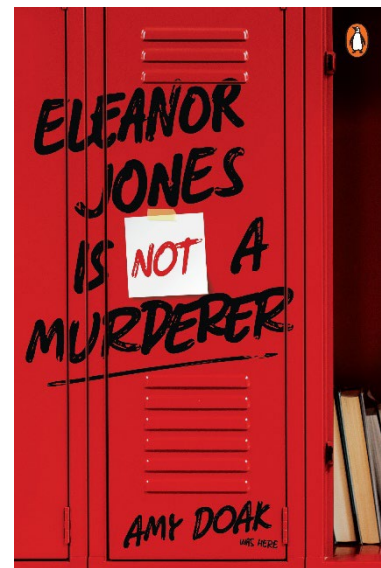
What happens when someone else's past catches up with you?

Elizabeth Miller has always lived in Deni. In a small rural town, Beth's biggest problem is telling her protective and fiercely private father that she has a boyfriend.

But when her dad disappears before her eyes, Beth discovers that he's not who she thought he was. Her family's secret past has caught up with them, and someone wants her dead.

Beth has been unwittingly prepared for this moment her whole life. Will it be enough to outrun – and outsmart – her hunters?

Teachers' notes available.



Eleanor Jones is Not a Murderer
by Amy Doak

Eleanor Jones has just started at her ninth high school in less than five years. Since she and her mum are always moving on, Eleanor likes to stay on the outer, to stay invisible. So maybe it's just bad luck that the very first person she talks to at Cooina Secondary College, Angus Marshall, is stabbed and left for dead the same day. The last message on Angus's phone is from Eleanor Jones.

After being interviewed by the police, Eleanor realises they don't have all the facts and decides to investigate. In trying to understand what happened to Angus, Eleanor inadvertently becomes involved with an eclectic group of students – who all have their own reasons to want to solve the mystery.

As they slowly unravel Angus's secrets, Eleanor discovers the true meaning of friendship – and uncovers a danger lurking at the heart of the town . . .

Teachers' notes available.



WORKSHEET 1: Eleanor's reading list

Write a brief synopsis for each of Eleanor's ESBs. Choose which of these you'd like to read . . . Feel free to add a couple of titles of your own to the end of the list.

Title of novel	Synopsis	Y/N
<i>Playing Beatie Bow</i>		
<i>The Great Gatsby</i>		
<i>Little Women</i>		
<i>Anne of Green Gables</i>		
<i>The Secret Garden</i>		
The Phryne Fisher mysteries		



ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
Eleanor Jones Can't Keep a Secret	Amy Doak	9781761342424	1-10	\$19.99		
Eleanor Jones is Not a Murderer	Amy Doak	9781761342417	7-10	\$19.99		
One Of Us Is Lying	Karen M. McManus	9780141375632	7-12	\$19.99		
Found	Fleur Ferris	9780143784326	6-9	\$19.99		
TOTAL						

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