

THE BIG LIE

JULIE MAYHEW



HC: 978-0-7636-9125-7

Also available in audio and as an e-book

About the Author

Julie Mayhew is the author of *Red Ink*. She has written plays for radio and the stage and is the cofounder and host of a short-story cabaret and the head of a writers' workshop. Julie Mayhew lives in England.

About the Book

Nazi England, 2014. Jessika Keller is a good girl—a champion ice skater, model student of the Bund Deutscher Mädel, and dutiful daughter of the Greater German Reich. Her best friend, Clementine, is not so submissive. Passionately different, Clem is outspoken, dangerous, and radical. And the regime has noticed. Jess cannot keep both her perfect life and her dearest friend, her first love. But which can she live without? Haunting, intricate, and unforgettable, *The Big Lie* unflinchingly interrogates perceptions of revolution, feminism, sexuality, and protest. Back matter includes historical notes from the author discussing her reasons for writing an “alt-history” story and the power of speculative fiction.

Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used as writing prompts for independent work.

Discussion Questions

1. Is Jessika a “good girl”? What is your definition of *good*, and does Jess fit that definition by the end of the book?
2. Ingrid tells Jess to “pretend like you’re in love” (page 23). Who does Jess think of? How would the Party and her family react to this?
3. Explain how students and people are categorized or tracked in their occupations (future) in the Greater German Reich. Have you ever felt pigeonholed or “tracked”?
4. Jess often reframes events, like her encounter with Fisher. Why does she do this?
5. According to Jess’s father, the Jay Acker tapes are laced with radiation. He says, “Not only will they corrupt your mind, they’ll give you a deadly cancer in the bargain” (page 30). How does this propaganda work to keep Jess in line?
6. Why did the Party invite Jay Acker to perform? How did it feel to read that he would be the first American on British soil or any German soil in more than seventy years?
7. Why does Jess’s friendship with Clementine change?
8. Jess works hard to prove herself normal and special. What is normal for Jess? For the Party? For you?
9. What happens to Herr Hart? Why would people think Herr Keller and Herr Hart are best friends? In reality, what is their relationship?
10. “It’s better to live a short honest life . . . than a long, long, long one in the dark” (page 171). What do you think Clementine meant by this? Do you agree?
11. How do you think Jess’s relationship with GG influenced her reaction to Clementine’s revolting against the Greater German Reich?
12. Jess initially tells her father everything. When does that change? Why does Jess stop telling her father about Clementine’s transgressions?
13. On page 72, Clementine tells Jess she’s been given her date. What is going to happen? Why was Clementine designated for this?
14. What happens to Jess in the end? Why? How does her family react, especially her father?
15. Is it easier to revolt quietly, follow the rules, and be yourself like GG? Or revolt openly and be truthful like Clementine? Which would you choose? Why?
16. This book is told in three parts: *Eins*, *Zwei*, and *Drei*. What is the significance of that? What does each part tell you?
17. Why do you think the author chose to write a book chronicling the victory of Germany in World War II? What questions does this alt-history raise for you, the reader?
18. What is “the Big Lie”?

