

LESLIE'S JOURNAL

by Allan Stratton

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction

Themes: Abusive relationships
Bullying
Friendship

Suitable for: Grades 9 – 11

Leslie's Journal

Fifteen-year-old Leslie hates school, fights with her mom, and has only one friend. But when the handsome Jason McCready, a senior, transfers to her school and asks her out, Leslie believes there really must be a God after all. As the relationship quickly progresses, Leslie discovers that underneath Jason's charm and good looks lies a manipulator, an abusive young man who will stop at nothing to get what he wants. When events start to spiral out of control, Leslie is confronted with difficult decision — and her life may depend on making the right choices..

ACTIVITY IDEAS

The following activity ideas are only a start. There are many possibilities for helping students construct meaning from text.

Comprehension activities:

- help readers to extend their general knowledge from prior experience
- develop reading strategies for comprehension
- bring relevance to the act of reading
- foster discussion and reflection through response to the text

BEFORE STARTING THE BOOK

Activities to build the context and introduce the topic of the book, and to establish prior knowledge and interest and develop predictions of what the text will be about.

1. Discuss with students any experiences they have had reading published journals or diaries, such as Ann Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl* or fictional diaries/journals, and elicit the characteristics of this genre.
Invite them to talk about how reading a diary or journal is different from reading a memoir or a novel.

2. Explain that *Leslie's Journal* is a fictional journal that the main character writes as a school assignment. Then read aloud the following passage from page 1, a quote from one of Leslie's teachers:

“Your journal is just for you. So write, write, write. As with everything in this world, you’ll get out of it what you put into it.”

Ask:

- What does the teacher mean by “what you put into” a journal?
 - What might a person “get out of” writing a journal?
3. Invite students to keep a reading journal as they read *Leslie's Journal*. They could record
 - their thoughts and feelings about characters and events
 - predictions about what might happen next
 - reflections on themes and issues raised by the text

Be sure to establish with students at the outset whether their journals will be read by you or will remain private. Remind students to respect the privacy of each other's journals.

WHILE READING THE BOOK

Activities to check on comprehension, stimulate interest, involve readers in reflection as they read, and encourage consideration of other readers' reactions.

CHAPTERS 1–15

1. Ask students to note three places in the text where they felt sympathy toward Leslie, and three places where they did not. Then, in a written response or class discussion, invite students to suggest reasons why the author would create a main character that evokes mixed reactions from readers.
2. Have students choose the statement below that best reflects their opinion of Jason so far, and then defend their choice in a small-group discussion.
 - Jason might not be perfect, but he is basically a sweet and sincere guy.
 - Jason is 50% sweet and sincere, and 50% selfish and manipulative.
 - Jason doesn't really care at all about Leslie and is just manipulating her to get what he wants from her.
3. Invite students to assume the character of Leslie's mom, Katie's mom, Mr. Manley, or Jason. Then have them develop a monologue for the character, in which they express what they think of Leslie and why. Students could role-play the monologue for the class.

CHAPTERS 16–30

4. Students could write a letter that Leslie might have written to an advice column, and then write a response from the columnist. Alternatively, students could exchange letters and write a response to a classmate's letter. Provide time for students to read aloud letters and responses and then, as a class, critically examine the advice offered.
5. Invite students to complete a graphic organizer, such as a Venn diagram, to compare and contrast the personalities of Leslie and Katie. When students have completed the task, ask:
 - Why do you think Leslie and Katie are such close friends, even though they are so different?
 - Does the author make this friendship believable? Use examples from the novel to support your opinion.
6. Ask students, "Do you think Jason would ever seriously hurt Leslie?" Remind them to support their opinions with specific examples from the novel. Alternatively, if students are keeping a reading journal, they could respond in a journal entry.

CHAPTERS 31–44

7. Recall with students that Leslie calls Amber Bentham, a girl Jason was involved with in Port Burdock. Elicit from students why Amber didn't want to press charges against Jason. Then ask them to consider whether they feel Amber is justified in not pressing charges. Students could respond by working in small groups and holding an informal debate.
8. Discuss with students how, although the book is written as a journal, it is structured like a novel, with a climax and a resolution. Invite students to share ideas about where the climax occurs, and then ask them to share their thoughts on the resolution: Was it satisfying? Was it believable? To extend the activity, have students create a plot diagram for the novel.
9. In their reading journals or in a written reflection, ask students to examine Leslie's feeling that Jason is a coward. In what ways is this true? In what ways is it not true? After they have provided examples to support each side of the issue, encourage students to come to a final opinion on Leslie's statement and to share their thoughts with a partner.

AFTER READING THE BOOK

Activities to inspire continued reflection and response to the text, bring conclusion to the experience of reading this particular text, and stimulate further extensions.

1. Have students make a list of all the characters in the novel who, at one time or another, act like bullies. Remind them to include specific incidents for each character. Provide time for students to share their thoughts with the class, and then lead a whole-class discussion examining the theme of bullying in the novel.
2. Students could research and write a fact booklet for their peers on one of the following topics:
 - cyber bullying
 - abusive relationshipsEncourage them to include a list of organizations and websites that provide useful information and/or services. Alternatively, students could create a short video or PowerPoint presentation.
3. Ask students to compile a list of five important decisions Leslie makes in the book, and to categorize each as a good or bad decision, explaining their reasons.
4. Allow students to work in small groups to discuss one of the following issues:
 - Can girlfriends be abusive to boyfriends? If so, what forms might this abuse take?
 - Like Leslie, Jason is a person with problems who comes from a troubled home. What do you think of the punishment Leslie received for all the things she did wrong? What about Jason?
5. Have students create a print or video broadcast news report that might have appeared in local media in Leslie's city during or after Jason's trial. Encourage students to include quotes from interviews that might have taken place with various characters. (Students can ignore the fact that minors would likely not be named in media reports.)
6. Students could plan an after-school information session on abusive teen relationships or bullying. Encourage students to consider
 - how to go about getting permission from the school and arranging a space for the session
 - how to identify and approach experts to speak on the topic
 - how to publicize the event