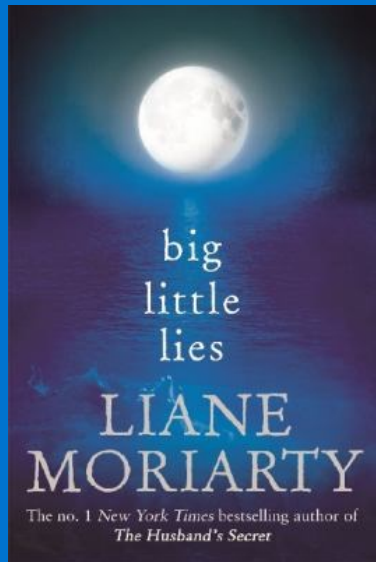


Big Little Lies

Author Background

- Born— Sydney, 1966
- Raised— Sydney
- Education—M.A., Macquarie University
- Currently—lives in Sydney with her husband, son, and daughter.



Liane Moriarty's name does not appear on any major literary awards lists but her books are hugely popular. Her seven international bestsellers have been read by over six million people, including one million Australians. With *Big Little Lies*, Moriarty became the first Australian author to debut at number one on the *New York Times* bestseller list.

Moriarty is the eldest of six siblings, three of whom are authors (sisters Jaclyn and Nicola write young adult literature and contemporary chick-lit, respectively). Moriarty's first publishing contract came about when her father commissioned her to write a novel – she was paid an advance of \$1.00 and produced *The Mystery of Dead Man's Island* – an epic in three volumes. Life was busy and varied – with her mother fostering over 40 children.

Moriarty began her career in marketing, working at a legal publishing company and embracing corporate life. She eventually started her own business called The Little Ad Agency, before establishing herself as a freelance advertising copywriter writing everything “from websites and TV commercials to the back of the Sultana Bran box”.

Having produced some short stories and first chapters of books that got no further, Moriarty may have never completed a novel if it hadn't been for her younger sister Jaclyn publishing an award-winning novel of her own. Spurred by friendly sibling rivalry, she enrolled in a Masters Degree at Sydney's Macquarie University and as part of that degree produced her first novel, *Three Wishes*, which went on to be published around the world.

Moriarty's novels explore the rich territory of female friendships, marriage and parenting in the suburbs, and skilfully expose their darker substructure. The drama of life behind closed suburban doors is her primary source of inspiration:

“...if I go out with a group of mothers, I'm always conscious that people are looking and thinking: 'Oh, just a group of soccer mums.' We always underestimate each other. But there are always the most incredible lives going on behind the scenes. You only have to walk behind one door and you find a story to tell. That's what I'm interested in.”

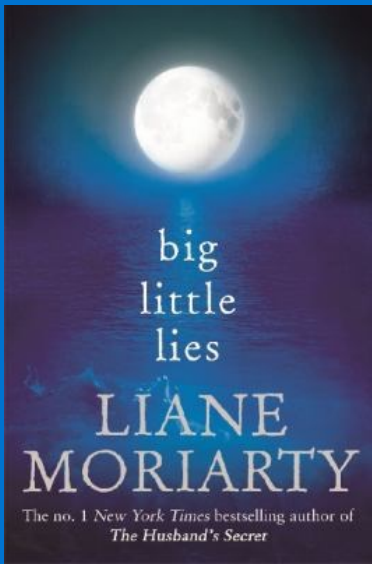
Big Little Lies is Moriarty's sixth novel. It was adapted and televised in 2017 as a widely acclaimed seven-part HBO series starring Nicole Kidman, Reese Witherspoon and Shailene Woodley.

Sources: The Sydney Morning Herald; Author's Website; Publisher's Website (Pan MacMillan Australia); Lit-Lovers Website; Wikipedia.

Author quotes sourced from The Sydney Morning Herald's Good Weekend article, *How Sydney author Liane Moriarty sold six million books and inspired an HBO series* by Amanda Hooton, published 15 July 2016.

Big Little Lies

Book Summary



Pirriwee Public is a beautiful little beachside primary school where children are taught that 'sharing is caring'. So how has the annual school trivia night ended in full-blown riot? Sirens are wailing. People are screaming. The principal is mortified.

And one parent is dead.

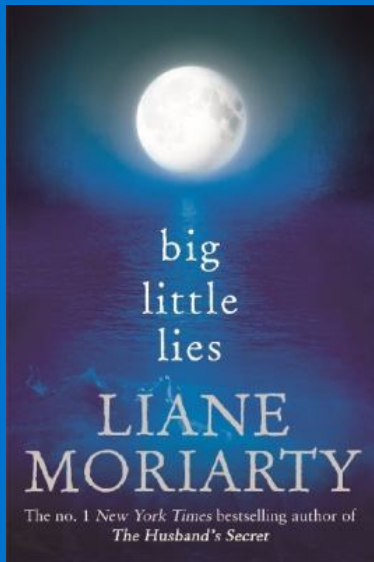
Was it a murder, a tragic accident or just good parents gone bad?

Madeline is a force to be reckoned with. She's funny, biting, and passionate; she remembers everything and forgives no one. Celeste is the kind of beautiful woman who makes the world stop and stare but she is paying a price for the illusion of perfection. New to town, single mum Jane is so young that another mother mistakes her for a nanny. She comes with a mysterious past and a sadness beyond her years. These three women are at different crossroads, but they will all wind up in the same shocking place.

Big Little Lies is a brilliant take on ex-husbands and second wives, mothers and daughters, schoolyard scandal, and the little lies that can turn lethal.

(From the publisher's and author's websites)

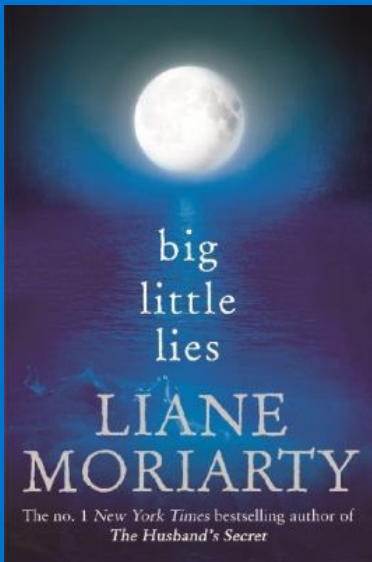
Big Little Lies



Discussion Questions

1. The power of secrets is a theme throughout the novel. Jane remembers, "She hadn't told anyone. She'd swallowed it whole and pretended it meant nothing, and therefore it had come to mean everything." [p. 220] Do you think this is a universal truth, that the more you keep something secret, the more power it takes on?
2. Madeline seems to enjoy provoking other people and appears responsible for some of the tension between characters, but she demonstrates loyalty and compassion to her friends and family. Would you enjoy being friends with Madeline? Why or why not?
3. Jane's impulsive move to Pirriwee creates dilemmas and stress but allows Jane to make new friends and positive changes. It also forces her to confront her past. Do you think Jane's move to Pirriwee was reckless? And if so, for whom?
4. Celeste's story is the most complex and emotional of the novel. "It's almost worth it, she'd told Susi. Perhaps it was even fair. A little violence was a bargain price for a life that would otherwise be just too sickeningly, lavishly, moon-lit perfect." (p. 245) How did you respond to Celeste's plight?
5. There are a lot of scenes in which the characters say they wish they could be violent: Jane says she wants to throw Ziggy into the wall when he has a tirade in the bathtub, that she would hit Renata if she was in front of her, and then she stops just short of kicking Harper. Do you think Moriarty is trying to show us Perry's side and have us sympathize with him? Or, rather, that feeling violent is a natural impulse but one that people learn to suppress?
6. Moriarty used different characters' perspectives to show multiple viewpoints of the same incident. For example, when Jane first meets Celeste we see the encounter from both Jane and Celeste's point of view. How did this use of perspective influence your impression of the characters and events?

Big Little Lies



Discussion Questions (Cont'd)

7. Madeline muses, *"Maybe it was actually an unspoken instant agreement between four women on the balcony: No woman should pay for the accidental death of that particular man. Maybe it was an involuntary, atavistic response to thousands of years of violence against women. Maybe it was for every rape, every brutal backhanded slap, every other Perry that had come before this one."* [p. 430] And then Madeline thinks, *"Sometimes doing the wrong thing was also right."* Do you think the women did the right thing? Were you surprised that women who ostensibly didn't like one another --- Madeline and Bonnie, Madeline and Renata --- ended up coming together to help one another out?
8. *Just for fun:* The seven-part HBO series of the book starring Nicole Kidman, Reese Witherspoon, and Shailene Woodley was widely acclaimed – if you saw it, did you prefer the book or the series?

Compiled from Reading Group Guides and the publisher's website (Pan MacMillan Australia)

Big Little Lies

Liane Moriarty

Reviews

It begins with a murder. It's not clear who was killed, but it was definitely someone at the Audrey and Elvis Trivia Night fund-raiser at Piriwee Public School on the coast of Australia. Back up six months, to when Madeline Mackenzie celebrated her fortieth birthday with kindergarten orientation for her youngest daughter, Chloe. She runs into the gorgeous, if spacey, Celeste White and her twin boys; new kid Ziggy Chapman and his mum, shy, jumpy, Jane; and, unfortunately, her ex-husband and his New Age wife, Bonnie, and their daughter, Skye. When a little girl accuses Ziggy of choking her, the class mums begin to divide. As antibullying fervour escalates, Jane grows closer to Madeline, with whom she shares her terrible secret, and Celeste, who is hiding an insidious secret of her own, not that she will admit it. What starts as a send-up of suburban helicopter parenting turns darker as the pages flip by, building to a tense climax at Trivia Night, where one too many fizzy pink cocktails leads to . . . well, murder. Funny and thrilling, page-turning but with emotional depth, *Big Little Lies* is a terrific follow-up to *The Husband's Secret* (2013).

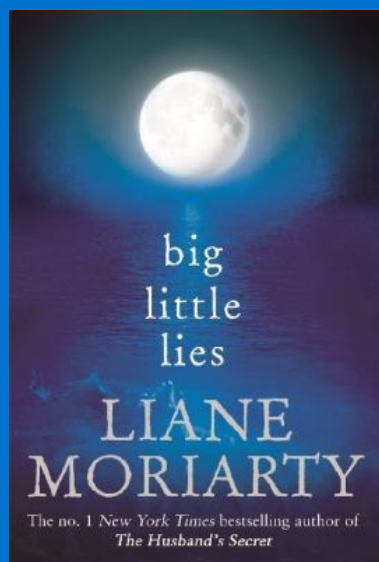
Booklist

Ms. Moriarty keeps her books long and gossipy, primarily by stalling. She introduces several sets of major characters, cuts back and forth among them, and scatters the narrative with foreshadowing about the terrible, terrible night — in this case, the Elvis Presley-Audrey Hepburn costume party at the school — on which something terrible happened. The book is peppered with parents' voices commenting cryptically and amusingly about whatever it was. Was the root cause a French nanny? An erotic book club? Head lice? As evidenced by *The Husband's Secret*, Ms. Moriarty's fans will happily plow on through endless minor incidents to find out.

Ms. Moriarty writes [...] in an easy, girlfriendly style that only occasionally lands with a thud. ("The word 'help' screamed silently in her head, as if she were begging for something: a solution, a cure, a reprieve. A reprieve from what? A cure for what? A solution for what?") And a low-level bitchiness thrums throughout the narrative, becoming one of its indispensable pleasures. The witnesses' descriptions of whatever happened are usually comically distorted, as in a game of telephone, so that everyone's understanding of Trivia Night is at best half-wrong. The Australian yenta is a type very much in evidence here, and if there's one trait all the mothers share, it's wanting to bad-mouth all the other ones.

The ferocity that Ms. Moriarty brings to scenes of masculine sadism really is shocking. A seemingly fluffy book suddenly touches base with vicious reality, in ways that may give *Big Little Lies* even more staying power than *The Husband's Secret*. She's done her homework well in describing the uh-oh moments, the tiny slights, the faint changes in the atmosphere around a charming, loving Dr. Jekyll who is about to turn into Mr. Hyde, and the battered woman who has learned to live with this and make excuses for it. *Big Little Lies* isn't likely to attract much of a male readership, aside from the demographic of guys who enjoy being demonized. But it champions its women with a handy, all-purpose rationale: Sometimes doing the wrong thing is also right.

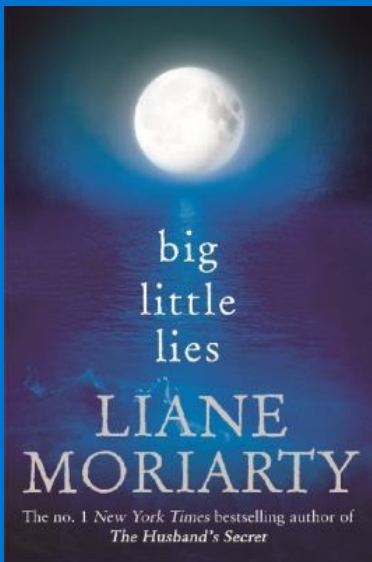
The New York Times



Big Little Lies

Liane Moriarty

Reviews (Cont'd)



After last year's best-selling *The Husband's Secret*, Australian Moriarty brings the edginess of her less-known *The Hypnotist's Love Story* (2012) to bear in this darkly comic mystery surrounding a disastrous parents' night at an elementary school fundraiser.

Thanks to strong cocktails and a lack of appetizers, Pirriwee Public's Trivia Night turns ugly when sloshed parents in Audrey Hepburn and Elvis costumes start fights at the main entrance. To make matters worse, out on the balcony where a smaller group of parents have gathered, someone falls over the railing and dies. Was it an accident or murder? Who is the victim? And who, if anyone, is the murderer? Backtrack six months as the cast of potential victims and perps meet at kindergarten orientation and begin alliances and rivalries within the framework of domestic comedy-drama.

Deservedly popular Moriarty invigorates the tired social-issue formula of women's fiction through wit, good humour, sharp insight into human nature and addictive storytelling.

Kirkus Reviews