



## ***The Trouble with Liberty***

Kristin Butcher

Reading level: 4.2

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AR Quiz # 67487

### **Book Summary**

When Liberty Hayes moves to town, everyone wants to be her friend—she has money, looks and a great personality. Yet Liberty is not what she seems, and problems with her parents soon manifest themselves when she accuses the band teacher of sexually assaulting her after class. Liberty's new best friend Val defends her and accuses Ryan (who has never liked Liberty but says he saw the whole thing) of lying to get Liberty in trouble. Will people believe Liberty or will they believe Ryan?

### **Prereading Idea**

Discuss with students different aspects of being the new kid in a small-town high school. How could the dynamics of long-time friendships change if a pretty rich girl transferred into school a few weeks before classes began? Would it be different if the new student was a boy? Why or why not? Brainstorm possible scenarios and ask students to share personal experiences.

### Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas

- Val says the welcome sign to Sutter's Crossing should say *Blue Jean Capital of Canada*. What makes blue jeans so popular, and who invented them? How long have they been around and how have styles changed over the years? Are blue jeans a fashion statement or a necessity? Divide the class into groups of four, and ask each group to make a creative presentation to the class on the history of blue jeans, using visual aids, an original skit, poetry, songs or other unique ideas. The following website will be a helpful beginning:

[www.designboom.com/eng/education/denim2.html](http://www.designboom.com/eng/education/denim2.html)

- Tell students to imagine that a sexual harassment case in their school is about to go to trial. A female student has accused a male student of making unwanted advances toward her, including touching her in inappropriate ways, calling her names with sexual connotations and spreading rumors about her sexual behavior. Assign students one of the following roles: a reporter covering the case for a newspaper, the school's principal, teachers from the school, a concerned citizen, the parent of the alleged victim, the parent of the accused young man, or other people who might be involved. Have each student write a resolution to the case from the assigned point of view, stating their reasons for the resolution and including factual information about sexual harassment in North American schools.

### Connecting to the Text—Elements of the Novel

#### *Theme*

The following quotes represent themes of this novel. Working in groups, have students copy one of the themes in the middle of a poster board. Around the theme have students write a paragraph telling how the theme relates to each of the main characters. Then, have students add a paragraph telling how the theme relates to their lives as well.

“You can stand tall without standing on someone. You can be a victor without having victims.” —Harriet Woods, former lieutenant governor of the State of Missouri

“Friendship with oneself is all important because without it one cannot be friends with anybody else in the world.” —Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 32<sup>nd</sup> President

**Conflict**

The basis of every good narrative is conflict because without it there is no story. Liberty sets into motion the main external conflict with her accusation of Mr. Henderson, and Val, Ryan and Liberty must all deal with internal conflict. How does the external conflict instigate the internal conflict in these characters? Ask students, as partners, to choose two of the characters in the book and to write a dialogue between them explaining what the conflict is and how the characters will resolve it (external conflict). Or ask students individually to choose a character and write a dialogue with themselves explaining what the conflict is and how the character will resolve it (internal conflict). Have students present the dialogues to the class.

**Point of View**

This story is told from Val's point of view. If Liberty had told the story, how might it have been different? Assign students a partner and ask them to choose an appropriate section from the book and rewrite it from Liberty's point of view. Share their rewrites with the class.

**Characters**

A complex character like Liberty can be taken apart to determine what makes her “tick.” Remind students that character can be revealed five ways: by speech, by appearance, by thoughts, by what other people say or think about her and by actions. Pair students and ask them to analyze Liberty by creating a web cluster. Students should put her name in the center of a piece of paper and draw circles around her name. Then they should write one individual characteristic with an explanation in each circle, and connect the circles to her name with a line. Ask students to share their clusters and discuss what motivated Liberty to action.

**Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions**

1. In chapter 2, Val states, “As far as I could tell, Liberty had *everything* going for her.” But as you read, you know this statement is not true. How many times do people make wrong assumptions about people they meet? Brainstorm the basis for most of our assumptions? Consider physical appearance, attitude, clothes and others. Why should we wait to form opinions of others until we know them better?
2. Being someone's “best friend” holds different meanings to different people. Val was concerned for Liberty and wanted to help her because Liberty said Val was her best friend (ch. 7). Val, however, thought Ryan was her best friend and she felt bad for neglecting him since Liberty came to town. How did Val ultimately prove her friendship with Ryan? With Liberty? Did Ryan remain a true friend to Val? Why or why not? Did Liberty show any true feelings for the people she called friends? Why or why not? Loyalty and trust were key factors in these friendships. What other characteristics convey friendship?

3. Why did Val feel like she left her self-respect at Liberty's? What could Val have done to avoid losing her self-respect? What advice do you think Val would give others regarding new and old friendships.
4. The author explains what the trouble with Liberty is in the last sentence: "The trouble with Liberty was Liberty." What do you think she means by this statement? Was there a time when you were your own "worst enemy"? Give an example of a time when you let your individual personality interfere with what you knew to be right.
5. Since Liberty's mother had always done just what Liberty wanted her to and never disciplined her, why do you think Mrs. Hayes forced Liberty to write the letter exonerating Mr. Henderson? Do you think Liberty's father had anything to do with that decision? Is there someone that you have wronged to whom you would like to write a letter of apology?
6. For her own personal reasons, Liberty falsely accuses Mr. Henderson of sexually assaulting her after class, setting into motion a series of serious consequences. What will be the lasting results of this false accusation? Why is it so difficult to "undo" any false accusations? Have you ever been falsely accused? Did a simple, "It didn't happen" or "I'm sorry" help?

### Writer's Craft

#### *Vocabulary Enrichment*

Use the following words in a complete sentence using context clues so that the reader will be able to figure out the meaning of the word.

Impish  
Gullible

Mellow  
Slathered

Incredulous  
Malicious

Ask students to read their sentences orally and then write some of the best the sentences on sentence strips to post around the room.

#### *Foreshadowing*

Authors often use foreshadowing as a hint about future plot twists. Two examples of foreshadowing are in chapter 3 when Liberty says, "Mr. Henderson? The guy is a total hunk," and "I bet Mr. Henderson would look good on me too." Find other examples of foreshadowing in this novel and discuss the predictions you made based on the clues you received from the author.

### Author Biography

As a child **Kristin Butcher** couldn't wait to learn to read because it seemed like magic to her, and she wanted to unlock the door to all the wonderful stories her parents had read to her. Being a teacher also helped Kristin understand children better, and that understanding, coupled with her well-written prose, results in books that are hard for kids to put down.