

# DURHAM COUNTY LIBRARY

## Book Club Kit Discussion Guide

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*Thirteen Reasons Why*  
by  
Jay Asher  
(New York: Razorbill, 2007)

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### **Author:**

Jay Asher got the idea for *Thirteen Reasons Why* at a museum. While taking an audio tour, he was struck by the eeriness of the voice in his ear—a woman who described exactly what he was looking at, but wasn't there. Jay lives on the central coast of California. *Thirteen Reasons Why* is his first book. [From [teachervision.fen.com](http://teachervision.fen.com)]

### **Summary:**

Clay Jensen doesn't want anything to do with the tapes Hannah Baker made. Hannah is dead, he reasons. Her secrets should be buried with her. Then Hannah's voice tells Clay that his name is on her tapes—and that he is, in some way, responsible for her death. Clay spends the night crisscrossing his town with Hannah as his guide. He becomes a first-hand witness to Hannah's pain, and learns the truth about himself—a truth he never wanted to face. [From [teachervision.fen.com](http://teachervision.fen.com)]

### **Questions:**

1. How does Hannah and Clay's dual narrative enhance the story? What additional details are revealed through this method of storytelling that might have otherwise remained secret if the book had been written from only one of their perspectives? How might the story have changed if the book had been written from one of the other people's perspectives instead of Clay's? For example, Tony's?
2. Consider the title of the novel. Are each of Hannah's thirteen reasons of equal importance? Which do you find to be the most unexpected? Who is responsible for Hannah's death? Why do you think Hannah committed suicide?
3. The inside of the book jacket for *Thirteen Reasons Why* pictures a replica of the map that Hannah leaves for each of the people named on her tapes. What does being able to visually trace Clay's route through rough town add to your reading experience?
4. Discuss the role that the presence of Hannah's voice plays as a physical presence on the tapes. Is the impact the tapes have different from the impression a suicide note would have left? Why do you think she recorded and left the tapes? If her story had been recorded on CDs or MP3 files would the effect have been different?
5. At the beginning of the first tape, Hannah says, “. . . there are thirteen sides to every story.” What does she mean by this? Are there sides to her own story that Hannah

doesn't know? Do you think she would have made different decisions if she had had the chance to listen to each of the other thirteen sides?

6. Hannah references rumors that she hoped to get away from when her family moved. What do you imagine she meant? Define the word "rumor." What comment does this story make about rumors in general? Discuss how rumors and truth can be connected. Is one more powerful than the other? Can rumors be positive? Does Hannah's story change your original point of view on this subject?
7. Hannah also says, "No one knows for certain how much impact they have on the lives of other people. Oftentimes, we have no clue. Yet we push it just the same." Discuss the concept of individual perception and how it contributes to how Hannah's story plays out. What do you think she means by "pushing it"? Further on, Hannah says, "I'm sure you must have thought, This can't be why I'm on the tapes. It wasn't a big deal." How did each of her thirteen reasons push her to her final decision? Do you think they would have each made different decisions about their actions if they had known how they were impacting Hannah's life?
8. During Jessica's tape, Hannah says, ". . . you would rather believe some made-up rumor than what you knew to be true . . . It was easier to accept. Easier to understand. For [you], the rumors needed to be true." What does Hannah mean by this? How can the truth sometimes be more difficult to confront than a lie? Discuss the author's use of the word "need" in the above quotation. How does this particular word choice impact the meaning of Hannah's sentence?
9. Why do you think Clay's mom reacts to Clay's actions and responses to her questions the way she does? Do you think she knows he's lying? Why doesn't she question him?
10. Hannah compares poetry to puzzles and then likens the audio tapes she recorded to poetry. Do you agree with her reasoning? How does this idea keep reappearing throughout the story?
11. Discuss the concept of the *Lost-N-Found Gazette* and how it applies to the main themes of truth, betrayal, rumors, and secrets that run throughout the story.
12. Discuss the phrase "The truth will set you free." How does this apply to the story Hannah tells? Does truth really gift freedom? Is there power in knowing? Is there always peace in knowledge?
13. Discuss the significance of what the man behind the counter at Rosie's says to Clay when Clay is about to leave the restaurant.
14. While walking to the party, Hannah says, "Even the best moments of the night were affected by that one incident—by that nonincident—in front of my old house." Describe the difference between "incidents" and "non-incidents." How can the lack

of interaction be just as important or influential as actual confrontation?

- 15.** At the beginning of Clay's tape, Hannah says, "I'm not even sure how much of the real Clay Jensen I got to know over the years. Most of what I knew was second-hand information. And that's why I wanted to know him better. Because everything I heard—I mean everything!—was good." How does this relate back to and complicate Hannah's previously stated feelings about rumors and hearsay and the idea that sometimes people need to believe certain things, regardless of truth?

[From [teachervision.fen.com](http://teachervision.fen.com)]