

READING GUIDE FOR *THERE WILL BE LIES* BY NICK LAKE

In Brief

A tautly told, cleverly layered thriller about identity, the nature of truth and the resonance of myth from Printz winning, Carnegie shortlisted Nick Lake.

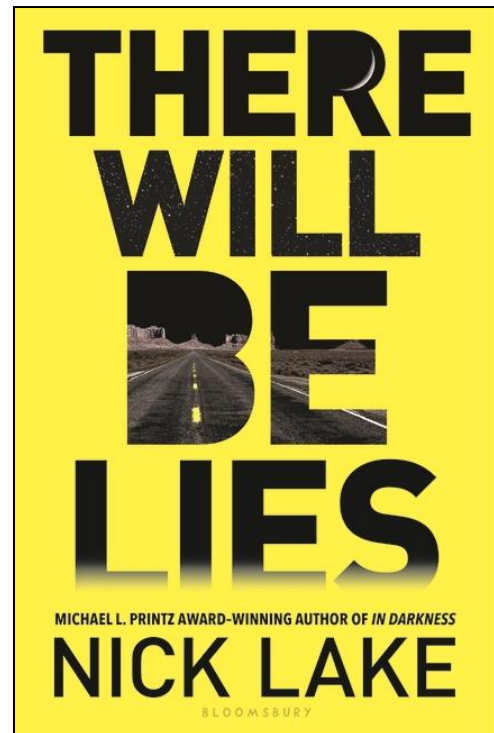
In Detail

Seventeen-year-old Shelby Jane Cooper leads an isolated, strictly regulated life. Her world consists of being home-schooled by an overprotective mom, punctuated by trips to the baseball batting cage and library. Then everything changes the day she's given a copy of *Grimm's Fairy Tales* by handsome Mark, who works at the library. When Shelby leaves the building, a car knocks her down and a coyote comes towards her. "There will be two lies," the creature warns. "Then there will be the truth."

Shelby's whole world is shattered when her mom drives into the night, and, everywhere she looks, the coyote's there, watching her. As their road trip progresses, devastating lies are laid bare, new truths are revealed and Shelby's whole identity unravels, forcing her to question everything she thought she knew about herself, the world and her place in it.

About the Author

Nick Lake was born in Britain but grew up in Luxembourg, where his father worked for the European Parliament. Nick works in publishing and writes in every spare moment. His first novel, *In Darkness*, a powerful and moving book about the Haitian earthquake, was published for adults and older teenagers in 2012. The recipient of huge critical acclaim, *In Darkness* was shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal and won the 2013 Michael L Printz Award. *Hostage Three* was also published to rapturous reviews. "Complex, with unexpected political intelligence and emotional power," said *The Guardian*. "A bold, ambitious and gripping thriller," said Booktrust. And the novel was selected as *The Times'* Children's Book of the Week, and described as "a clever and gripping story."



For Discussion

1) *My left hand will live longer than my right. The rivers of my palms tell me so.*

Never argue with rivers. Never expect your lives to finish at the same time.

What is the significance of these lines from a Bob Hicok poem, quoted at the start of the book?

2) What do you think of the title of the book, *There Will Be Lies*? Can you think of any other suitable titles?

3) Did the book's title, and the coyote's words to Shelby ("There will be two lies ... Then there will be the truth," p32), make you question the truth of the characters' words and actions? Did you see any plot twists coming? Did the author signpost any of the plot twists? Consider the following:

- a) Shaylene Cooper's multiple lies
- b) Mark's two identities
- c) The identity of the Crone and the Child

4) Do you think Shaylene Cooper's occupation (a stenographer) has any significance?

5) "He is not to be trusted" (p197). Would you have trusted Mark/Coyote? Would you have believed him and taken up the challenge to kill the Crone and save the Child?

6) How successfully does the author weave Native American mythology into telling Shelby's story? Has it inspired you to find out more about the mythology?

7) What role do fairy tales play in the novel? Consider Mark's gift to Shelby and his comment that "*No one is too old for fairy tales*" (p29). Consider the references to "changelings" (p87 and p344). "*I am sick of fairy tales*" (p392). What does this signify? Does Shelby change during the course of the novel?

8) Were you surprised when the animals started talking? What did you think of the way the novel shifts between the 21st century world we know, and the world of the Dreaming? How successfully do you think this is realized?

9) What did you think of the author's technique of leaving sentences and moments hanging between paragraphs and chapters?

10) "I don't KNOW what I look like" (p12).

"You stole me from myself. You stole my life. Everything I thought was me ... everything I thought was real" (p391).

What does the novel reveal about the way personal identity is formed?

11) "Surely that's the test of whether something is real, I say. Whether more than one person experiences it" (p95). Do you agree with Shelby? What makes something real? Does something have to be experienced by multiple observers for it to be "real"? Or do you agree with Mark when he says that a dream is real to the person experiencing it, which makes it "a kind of reality" (p95)?

12) What motivates Shelby to keep crossing into the Dreaming world? Would you have done the same?

13) "It's the idea of this big crack in the world, like it's a place where you can see under the world's skin, to what's beneath. To the truth below the earth" (p61).

What is the significance of Shelby's perception of the Grand Canyon? How does it relate to the themes of the novel?

Compare the description above with the following description of how Shelby feels when she visits the Grand Canyon: "I feel ... like I'm a crack in the world. A crack in time" (p395–396). What does Shelby mean by this? What does it reveal about her self-perception?

14) Did any moments or lines in the novel make you laugh?

15) "For the very first time, I understand, truly understand, what we lost when we made trains and cars and planes, and even when we began to grow things" (p161). What does Shelby mean by this? What has humankind lost? How does this relate to Mark's comment that, "You are a billion years of ancestors, in one person. Every living thing can trace a lineage right back to the start of life, to when the first bacteria fell to earth in stardust" (p324). What does this mean? Do you think the collective unconscious exists?

16) “It’s just *my* Dreaming that is ending. Because I don’t need it any more” (p427). What psychological function does the Dreaming have? Do you think Shelby really experiences it? Does it matter if it actually exists?

17) “I got the metaphor wrong. I was not the bat. I was the ball. THAT – that is the lesson of the cage” (p432). What does Shelby mean by this? What role does this metaphor, and the metaphor of the cage, play throughout the novel? Consider Shelby’s comment that “in that cage, I can beat anything” (p21). Consider the incident of Shelby’s birth-father hitting her with a ball. Consider the description of where the crying Child is imprisoned in the Dreaming.

18) What do you think Shelby says to Shaylene before she’s arrested (p418)? Why do you think Shelby doesn’t reveal it to the reader? What does her decision to keep it a secret reveal about her character?

19) “Can you still love someone if you find out they did something bad? Turns out, you don’t have much choice. You love them whatever. You love them forever” (p150). What does the novel say about the nature of love? Reread pages 384–385. Can you understand why Shelby texts Shaylene to collect her? Would you have forgiven Shaylene? Can you empathise with Shaylene’s actions? Can you understand why Shelby left her newfound birth-family to find Shaylene? Would you have visited Shaylene in prison?

20) What did you think of the book’s ending? Why do you think Shelby made the trip to Scotland?

Further Reading

- *In Darkness*: Nick Lake
- *Hostage Three*: Nick Lake
- *Gone Girl*: Gillian Flynn
- *Close My Eyes*; *Girl Missing*; *Sister Missing*; *Missing Me*: Sophie McKenzie
- *Before I Go To Sleep*: S.J. Watson
- *Now You See Me*: Emma Haughton
- *We Were Liars*: E. Lockhart