



Everybody has a Secret: A Review of Sara Shepard's *Pretty Little Liars*

By Amy Sutherland

“Two can keep a secret if one of them is dead.” – Benjamin Franklin

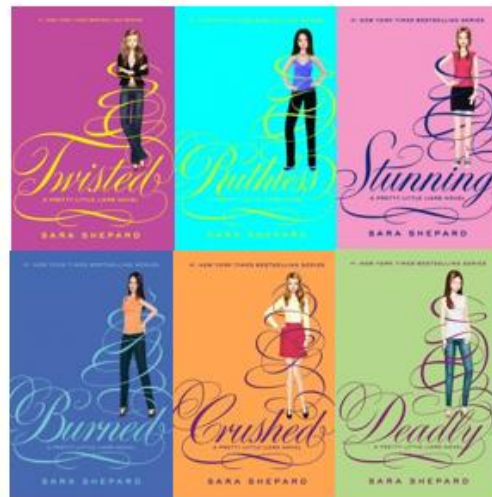
Everything is beautiful in Rosewood: the houses, the cars, the people. That is, until one day when that perfection is shattered.

Alison DiLaurentis was the most popular girl in the Rosewood Day 7th grade class, so Aria Montgomery, Spencer Hastings, Hanna Marin, and Emily Fields cannot believe it when she decides to be their friend. They are swept up into her world of popularity and allure. Then, on the last night of summer before the 8th grade begins, Alison goes missing. Without her, the four friends drift apart, separated by their secrets and lies.

Three years later, Alison is still missing and Aria, Spencer, Hanna, and Emily pretend they don't know each other. One day, though, they all begin to get messages, especially text messages and emails, from the mysterious A, who knows things about them that only one person would know: Alison. But Alison went missing. Is she still alive? Or is A someone else entirely?

Who's Watching You?

A is constantly lurking and seems to be omnipresent, knowing everything that is going on in Rosewood. The girls are in a constant state of surveillance and fear. Being terrorized by A brings Aria, Spencer, Hanna, and Emily back together to seek the truth while trying to keep their secrets buried forever.



The concept for the series is thrilling and seeping with drama. The books are captivating from the prologue and leave readers thirsting for more after they have flown through the pages. The storyline, at times, may seem outlandish or overly dramatic. Intertwined throughout the novels, however, are realistic themes and characters which make this series appealing.

Aria, Spencer, Hanna, and Emily all come from affluent families and are being blackmailed by a mysterious figure who is threatening to reveal their scandalous secrets. The number of readers who are

experiencing similar troubles is probably small. Yet, the four main characters demonstrate other issues which many teens will understand. Aria must navigate her parents' separation. Spencer tries to break away from her sister's shadow and get her parents' attention. Hanna is struggling with an eating disorder and relationship troubles. Emily is questioning her sexuality. Throughout all of this, all four characters must deal with the struggles of high school, relationships, friendship, and, perhaps most importantly, the fact that they are being terrorized and bullied by A.



The television series, based on Shepard's series of novels, deviates slightly from the plot, yet is true to the portrayal of the characters and the incorporation of themes that are applicable to teens' lives. And, of course, the storylines are as dramatic and enticing as Shepard's original work. An added bonus is the fabulous costume designs.

Some readers and viewers may critique *Pretty Little Liars* as being far too outlandish and unrealistic to be enjoyable. In a way, this is true. But, it is also this drama which

makes the story engaging and enticing. It is exciting and thrilling. And, in our current society, where cyberbullying is a reality, the idea of being terrorized by text messages isn't all that forlorn. In addition to this are the realistic themes to which teens can relate. Teens may be attracted to this series because of the thrilling storylines, but in reading the books or watching the television series, they can also learn from valuable themes such as finding one's identity and fostering friendships. As Shepard continues to release books, and once readers are hooked, they can continue to read all 15 *Pretty Little Liars* books and realize that no matter how many times A is revealed, no one has any idea who A actually is. The secrets and lies run deep in Rosewood.

Read Alike/ Watch Alike

Gossip Girl by Cecily Von Ziegesar



Welcome to the Upper East Side where wealth and appearance mean everything and where *Gossip Girl* keeps everyone on

Who's Watching You?

their toes, spreading rumours and unearthing secrets. The story focuses on it-girl Serena van der Woodsen, her best friend and queen bee Blair Waldorf, golden boy Nate Archibald, bad boy Chuck Bass, and outsider Dan Humphrey. All of their comings and goings—which are salacious and scandalous—are chronicled by the blogger, Gossip Girl, who receives tips from teens and who constantly sends out blasts on her blog highlighting the lives of the residents of the Upper East Side.

Like A in *Pretty Little Liars*, Gossip Girl takes on the role of the omnipresent and ever-watching figure who wreaks havoc. Unlike A, however, Gossip Girl is less vindictive and seems to be motivated less by lies and more by gossip and drama.

Although it is slightly different than the novels, there is also a television series based on the novels. Some of the characters, especially Chuck Bass, differ in the television show, and the storylines differ drastically. Yet, the show is as enjoyable and entertaining as the books.

