

Readers Guide for *Lie Lay Lain* by Bryn Greenwood

1. What would you have done, if you had witnessed Gayle's death? Would you be willing to make the same promise to a dying person? If so, how far would you go to keep that promise?
2. Both Olivia and Jennifer treat themselves to luxuries. Olivia's are small: painting and decorating her own nails. Jennifer's luxuries are expensive and name brand: Coach handbags and Louboutin shoes. Which of them enjoys her luxuries more? Why? What does this disparity say about them?
3. During Olivia's ill-fated trip as a church youth group volunteer, she uncovers another counselor's secret—that she didn't wait until marriage to have sex. Neither did Olivia. How does this element of "do as I say, not as I do" play into Olivia's own attitudes about sex? How does she feel about losing her virginity? About her sexual activity with Rindell? Is it at odds with her religious upbringing? Or is it in keeping with her need to go along and please people?
4. Lies are a major plot element and means of characterization in *Lie Lay Lain*. Which lies are the most damaging? Which lies do you find most offensive or shocking? Toward the end of the book, Olivia asks Rindell, "How important is the truth?" In the novel, what are the consequences of telling the truth? Is there such a thing as *The Truth*? Within the story, who is the most truthful character? How do you measure it?
5. Olivia frequently seems passive or even cowed, but faced with her brother's terrible crime, she displays great strength. Has this strength been in her all along? Where else do we see it? Or is this strength a new growth? Stemming from what? Conversely, Jennifer comes across as "in control," with an orderly life. What compels her to try to control so many things? Is this a strength or a cover for weakness?
6. The narrative suggests that if Jennifer had been walking more slowly, she might have been the one struck and killed as she crossed the street. How might the lives of the other characters have developed, if she and not Gayle had died? What if Jennifer had left work a few minutes earlier and never witnessed Gayle's death?
7. We're familiar with the idea of cliques and mean girls in the public school system. How did you react to the discovery that the "cool kids" continue to dominate Olivia's adult working life and even her spiritual life at church?

8. Olivia feels suffocated by her parents, while Jennifer feels disconnected from hers. As much as she loves her father, after all, he remains *Mr. Palhete* in her narrative. How have they developed these patterns, and how do parental relationships shape the way Jennifer and Olivia respond to other people?
9. Rindell has served his country, survived a horrific natural disaster, and is serving his community as a paramedic. Does his sacrifice or his suffering ultimately earn him the right to use the events of Hurricane Katrina to erase his past life? Is his past truly erased? Will it ever be?
10. How is Olivia changed by learning that Rindell is not who he claims to be? How does it affect her perception of her own identity?
11. Returning from their trip to the state park, what prevents Rindell from rebuffing Jennifer's sexual advances? Surprise? Old habits? Low self-esteem? Is it likely that he'll continue this pattern of behavior, or have things changed for him by the end? Why or why not?
12. How do Olivia's issues of self-esteem and body-image affect her feelings for Rindell and her perception of his feelings for her? How does his self-doubt affect his perceptions of their relationship? In the end, how has Olivia's sense of self-worth changed? What about Rindell?
13. There are multiple instances of infidelity in the story. What would have happened if Olivia had never learned about Rindell's infidelity? If Jennifer had remained ignorant of Kevin and Carrie's affair? If Kevin *had* learned of Jennifer's misdeed?
14. What changes for Jennifer, after she is certain that Shanti is dead? Why does she give up on everything? How is she likely to emerge from this experience? Stronger and more independent? Or do we see the beginnings of a long-term cycle of depression and co-dependency? What do you think she will do after Olivia's visit?
15. The Greater Tampa Bay Area has a population of over four million people. How does living in such a large metropolitan population center enable Rindell's reinvention as his cousin? For Olivia, however, Tampa is her hometown, where she is surrounded by people and landmarks from her childhood. How does that affect her ability to grow or change? What does the move to Miami offer her?

16. Tampa continues to pass through cycles of urban growth, decay, and gentrification, creating tensions between the rich and the poor. Where do we see those tensions played out in the novel? How are the cycles of growth and decay reflected in the trajectories of the characters?
17. Beyond socio-economic issues, what racial tensions are evident in the novel? How do the characters perceive and interact with characters of other races? How do those perceptions and interactions change?
18. Although *Lie Lay Lain* is a work of fiction, the book is dedicated to the memory of Rilya Wilson, who went missing out of foster care in Florida at the age of four, and is presumed dead. Her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday would have been September 29, 2014. Hers is sadly not the only recent case of children being mistreated by those entrusted with their care. How do you feel about the current conditions for children in foster care in America?