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Social Issues
Crime
Suspense
Ages: 12 & up
Discussion questions and activities for the following books:

KILLING MR. GRIFFIN
DON'T LOOK BEHIND YOU
THE THIRD EYE
I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER
STRANGER WITH MY FACE
DOWN A DARK HALL
LOCKED IN TIME
SUMMER OF FEAR
DAUGHTERS OF EVE
A GIFT OF MAGIC

Readers with additional questions can visit Lois Duncan at www.loisduncan.arquettes.com.
KILLING MR. GRIFFIN

1. Make a list of qualities required to be a “good teacher.” By those standards, was Mr. Griffin a good teacher? Is a good teacher always popular? Can a good teacher be strict and demanding?

2. Discuss the importance of viewpoint. Have students list the chapters by number and decide from which viewpoint each chapter is written. Chapter Five is written from the viewpoint of Griffin’s wife. Does this chapter in any way change their opinion of Mr. Griffin? If so, how? Who is the one main character who is never a viewpoint character in any chapter? (It’s Mark.)

3. Discuss the technique of “foreshadowing” or subtly “planting” references to something seemingly insignificant that will later turn out to be crucial to the story. Find the references in chapters One and Five that foreshadow Mr. Griffin’s heart condition.

4. Students often wonder “Was Mr. Griffin David’s father?” Have your students come up with their own answer. All the clues are in the story. Does Mr. G’s age correspond with Mr. Ruggles? His personality — (over-serious Griffin versus free-spirited Ruggles)? His career choice? His dedication to perfection? His huge feeling of responsibility toward his wife, unborn child, and students? The answer, obviously is NO. So why does David react emotionally to the class ring on Mr. Griffin’s hand? If your students read the book carefully, they will find that both men attended Stanford University. So they wear identical rings. Use this to demonstrate the importance of looking at details.

5. Mark was a charismatic psychopath. Have students research real people who fit that description, (Charles Manson, etc.) Compare Mark’s group of followers to Manson’s group of followers. Why are certain people vulnerable to such manipulation while other people are not?

6. Have students stage a mock trial, playing the parts of suspects, witnesses, attorneys, and a judge. Have the lawyers present evidence from the book, the jury decide upon a verdict, and the judge pass sentence. What are the verdicts and the sentences?

7. What is the significance of the “Song for Ophelia”? Discuss the irony in the final two lines in the final chapter. How does the presentation of that poem in the first and last chapters of the book work to bring the story full circle? Have students write a similar poem for Mr. Griffin.

8. Have students view the film of KILLING MR. GRIFFIN and compare it to the book. What are the main differences? Why do they think the scriptwriter made those changes? Did they improve the story or detract from it?
DON’T LOOK BEHIND YOU

1. In DON’T LOOK BEHIND YOU April’s family was thrust into the Federal Witness Protection Program. Have students do research online to see how much information they can find about this program. (Why is so little specific information available?)

2. Discuss how students would feel in April’s situation: What would you hate most about having to change your identity and reinvent yourself? Was April justified in trying to contact Steve? Would you have done the same thing in her situation? Would you have made the impulsive decision to return to your own hometown, even knowing it would mean losing all contact with your parents and siblings?

3. Have students read the Q&A at the end of the book, which includes an e-mail from a reader whose family really is in the Witness Protection Program. He says he can’t have a girlfriend, go to parties, or even have a Facebook page for fear something about his current life might “slip out.” How would students feel if they were in his position? Would they rebel, even if it meant they were sacrificing the safety of their family?

4. What is your feeling about the role Max played in this story? Do you consider him a Good Guy or a Bad Guy? Why?

5. Why did the FBI select a town like Grove City in which to place the Corrigans? Was that a good choice or a bad one? Where would you choose to go to reinvent your life and never be recognized by anybody you knew before? How difficult would that be for your parents?

6. How did you feel about Lorelei? Was she a strong character or a weak one? Compare her to your own grandmothers. In what way are they alike and in what ways are they different? In what ways did Lorelei differ from Elizabeth (April’s mother)? How different are you from your parents?

7. What would you have done if you had been Steve? Do you think he was right or wrong to move on with his life after April vanished?

THE THIRD EYE

1. In Chapter 20, Rob panics when attacked by a Doberman. Rob is a police officer — is it out of character for a seasoned cop to react this way to a dog? Duncan uses “foreshadowing” to prepare the reader for the fact that Rob was terrified of dogs. Have your students locate those instances of foreshadowing (Chapters 6 and 7) and discuss how they do/don’t work to support the story’s climax.

2. Discuss Rob’s conflicting feelings about his brother. Are they justified? How did they affect Rob’s career decision?
3. Discuss Karen’s mother’s reason for pressuring Karen to deny her psychic abilities. Was this justified? What does Karen eventually decide, and why? Has she made the right decision?

4. Have students write a newspaper article about something newsworthy that Karen does ten years later. Include information about Karen’s personal life/family life at that time.

5. What is the significance of the Dream Child’s blue eyes? What is a “dominant trait”? Have students explore the field of genetics by recording the eye colors of their parents and other ancestors. Which colors are dominant? Have students draw lots to match themselves with classmates of the opposite sex. Have the pairs work together to figure out what color their children’s eyes would be if they married and had four kids.

I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER

1. Do you believe that Julie, Ray, Barry and Helen did the wrong thing by leaving the scene of an accident even though they did call in and report it? What, if anything, would have been gained if they had stayed at the scene? In that situation, what would you have done?

2. Which of those characters were changed by “what they did last summer”? Which of them were not?

3. Succumbing to peer pressure is a theme in several Lois Duncan novels. Compare the peer pressure in I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER to that in KILLING MR. GRIFFIN and DAUGHTERS OF EVE. What instances of peer pressure have you personally been exposed to?

4. Do you think Julie did the right thing by sticking to the pact that she and her friends made in the car? Is it ever right to go back on your word if you change your mind about whether you made the right decision?

5. How do you feel about Collie? Was he a Good Guy or a Bad Guy? What would you have done in his situation?

6. Collie “stalked” the four teenagers physically. What other ways are there to “stalk” people? (Discuss stalking on the Internet and what steps to take if someone’s stalking you whether physically or on the Internet.)

7. In the first edition of I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER, published in 1978, Collie was involved in the Vietnam War. The updated edition, published in 2010, features the war in Iraq. What is the cause of most wars? Have students do Internet research on both the Vietnam and Iran/Iraq wars. Each generated many protesters. Why were those wars so controversial as compared to our involvement in World Wars I and II?
STRANGER WITH MY FACE

1. Have students go online and research the subject of Out-of-Body Experiences.

2. Have students discuss the dual imagery in the book — Lia and Laurie represent “two sides of a coin” — dark versus light — Jeff’s two-sided face, etc.

3. Discuss the issue of adoption. Should adopted children be told? Why did Laurie’s mother not want her to know? Was it a valid reason? Should adopted children seek out their birth parents?

4. Why did Lia want to separate Laurie from the people closest to her — Gordon, Helen, Jeff, and Megan?

5. In Chapter 12, Lia tells Laurie to, “Release your hold on the earth! Let go of the words that are tying you down!” But Laurie finds it impossible to think without utilizing language. Have students experiment with sitting in silence for five minutes and keeping their minds free of words. Are they able to do so? If not, what makes it so difficult? Is there ever a time during their waking hours when their minds are free of words? Under what circumstances does this occur? (During strenuous physical activity? While listening to music?) Discuss the practice of meditation.

6. How many descriptions of the ocean can students find in this book? Contrast them. Have students see how many verbs and adjectives they can come up with to describe the sounds of the ocean.

7. This book contains a description of eternity — “If there were a mile-high mountain of granite, and once every ten thousand years a bird flew past and brushed it with a feather, by the time that mountain was worn away, a fraction of a second would have passed in the context of Eternity.” Have students come up with their own descriptions of eternity.

8. Have students write an “Afterword” for this book, describing the lives of the characters ten years later.

DOWN A DARK HALL

1. DOWN A DARK HALL is a “Gothic” novel. Have your students research that genre. How does a Gothic differ from a regular suspense novel? What elements are in this book that make it a Gothic? How does this book differ from other Duncan’s suspense novels in pacing, description, etc.?

2. Madam Duret “chemically ages” the manuscripts and paintings created by her students. Have students research the methods that might be used to create this aging effect. Have them research real life cases in which people produced counterfeit paintings by the Old Masters and passed them off as real. Have students write a newspaper article describing Madam Duret’s exciting discovery of an “original” manuscript by a famous writer.
3. Discuss why Madam Duret does not want Natalie to talk to Kit and the other students. What is she afraid that Natalie might reveal to them?

4. Research the artist Thomas Cole. At what age did he die? Does the picture Lynda painted in Chapter 10 sound like a scene that Cole would have painted?

5. Have students listen to music by Franz Schubert. Have them research his life. What age was he when he died? What might he have achieved if he had lived twenty years longer?

6. Compare Ellis’s poem in Chapter 11 with poems by Emily Brontë. Does “Ellis’s” poem sound like poetry that Brontë might have written? Why or why not? Why does Sandy call the ghost woman “Ellis” instead of “Emily”?

7. Have students do research on famous women in the arts. What is the explanation for the great “unbalance” in earlier years of more men than women?

8. If you were to write a sequel to this book, what would you have happen?

**LOCKED IN TIME**

1. Discuss Lisette’s reason for wanting to stop her own aging. Was that reason valid? Why did she choose to stop the aging of her children? Does a parent have the right to make such a decision in his/her children’s behalf?

2. Have students construct a timeline for the Dubois family, starting from the year in which they drank the potion to stop them from aging, and incorporating all the information Josie discloses at various places in the book in regard to places they lived, events they experienced — the circus fire, etc.

3. Have students write a diary entry by Lisette’s first husband, when he realizes that he is aging and his family is not. Or a letter that Gabe might have written to the girlfriend who “grew past him,” explaining why he is bailing out of their relationship. Or a letter to a physician, as it may someday be written by Nore’s father, when he realizes that Josie has been living in his household for 30 years and still has the body of a 12-year-old.

4. Have a class discussion about the pros and cons of not aging. Would anyone want to live forever? If so, why? If students had the option, would they stop the aging process right now? If so, what would they gain by being this age forever, and what would they miss by not experiencing middle age and old age? After 200 years, would the “same-old, same-old” become overwhelmingly tedious? If not, why not? If one were to elect to stop the aging process, what would be the ideal age at which to do so?

5. In what ways is Nore’s acute awareness of “time” a factor in this story?

6. A topic for discussion — widowhood (or divorce) of parents, parental remarriage, and the effect upon the children. Hold class discussions or assign privately written papers.
SUMMER OF FEAR

1. Why, in your opinion, did Julia work her spells on the Bryant family? What did she have to gain?

2. If you were Rachel, what arguments would you use to warn your family about Julia? Do you think they would believe you?

3. Research some of the local folklore and superstitions of your area. Write a short report and share it with the class. Be sure to include the origins, and the stories that have come down through the years.

4. SUMMER OF FEAR was originally published in 1976. The updated edition was published in 2011. Discuss what changes were made so this story would apply to life today. (Examples: In 1976, there were no cell phones, so Rachel could not reach her mother to warn her that her life was in danger.)

5. Create a Facebook page for the “real” Julia. If Rachel had viewed that page, what information might have been on it that would have clued her in to the fact that the “cousin Julia” who had come to live with her was not the same person?

6. Suggest a plot for Lois Duncan to use if she ever decides to write a sequel to SUMMER OF FEAR?

DAUGHTERS OF EVE

1. The original edition of DAUGHTERS OF EVE was published in 1979 when the feminism movement was just taking hold. Girls of that generation were very confused about what was expected of them and what they really wanted out of life. Men and boys were equally confused about the new social roles that women were attempting to force on them.

   In this updated edition of DAUGHTERS OF EVE, published in 2011, Irene Stark describes the town of Modesta as “being stuck in a time warp.” Discuss how society was changed by the feminist movement. Was Modesta “stuck in a time warp” or do the same issues women faced in the 1970s still exist in some instances today?

   In what ways, if any, did the feminist movement improve society? In what ways, if any, did it change society for the worse?

2. In what way did Irene Stark influence the behavior of the girls in DAUGHTERS OF EVE? Did Irene have a valid reason for her bitterness toward men? Would you consider the club to be a “cult”? (Research the term “cult.”)

3. The ten girls in DAUGHTERS OF EVE were very different. Have each student create a Facebook page for one of those characters, based upon the personality traits she exhibited. Pass those pages around and have members of the class decide whether they would accept or reject that person as a Facebook “friend” and why.

4. Class discussion: Do you think the punishment the girls inflicted upon Peter was justified? Was there a better way to handle this situation? Do the boys in the class feel differently about this than the girls? If so, what does that indicate about differences between genders?
5. When DAUGHTERS OF EVE was first published, it was challenged for opposing reasons. Feminists thought the book was anti-feminist; anti-feminists thought it advocated feminism. What was your personal reaction to this book? Was it feminist or anti-feminist?

6. Domestic violence is as relevant today as it ever was. However, today there are resources available for people like Jane’s mother. What resources for victims of domestic violence are available in your town?

A GIFT OF MAGIC

1. In A GIFT OF MAGIC, Nancy is born with psychic abilities. At first she takes them for granted but later doesn’t want to acknowledge them. How would you feel if you were in her position? Would you want to deny your abilities so as not to be “different,” or would you want to take part in lab experiments to learn more about them?

2. By doing research, Nancy discovers there are many types of ESP, including telepathy, clairvoyance and precognition. Have students do their own research online and report what they find about the various types of extrasensory perception.

3. Lois Duncan’s novel, THE THIRD EYE, is also about a girl with psychic abilities. That girl, Karen, uses those abilities to help law enforcement. Read THE THIRD EYE, and compare Karen with Nancy. In what ways are they alike and in what ways different?

4. In the updated edition of A GIFT OF MAGIC, published in 2012, Nancy and Kirby are twins, yet nothing alike. Have students research the difference between identical twins and fraternal twins.

5. Does anything you learn about Nancy, Kirby and Brendon in the epilogue come as a surprise to you? Create a Facebook page for each of them as you visualize them in their 20s. Which one would you be most inclined to accept as a Facebook “friend” and why?
Praise for Lois Duncan

Margaret A. Award for a Distinguished Body of Work for Young Adults
Katharine Drexel Award, awarded by the Catholic Library Association
Pennsylvania Librarian Associations Award
Educational Press Association of America Distinguished Achievement Award

Praise for Don’t Look Behind You

ALA Best Book for Young Adults
Parents’ Choice Book Award
Children’s Book Award
Phantom’s Choice Award

Praise for Killing Mr. Griffin

ALA Best Book for Young Adults
New York Times “Best Book for Children”
Nominated for Edgar Allen Poe Award

Lois Duncan is an acclaimed suspense author for young adults. She has published nearly 50 books for children, including I Know What You Did Last Summer, which was adapted into a highly successful horror film, and Who Killed My Daughter?, a non-fiction book about the harrowing experience of her daughter’s murder.