

NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHOR  
**DRONIELLE CLAYTON  
& SONA CHARAIPOTRA**

I saw it all go down

New babe alert

**THE**

Watch out, Georgie

Desperate

**RUMOR**

Believe her

Don't start drama

It was just a little fun

All of this is a lie

**GAME**

Something bad went down

Girl, you asking for trouble

Somebody needs to come clean

I don't even know who this girl is anymore

# THE RUMOR GAME

EDUCATORS'  
GUIDE

## ABOUT THE BOOK



All it takes is one spark to start a blaze. At Foxham Prep, a posh private school for the children of DC's elite, a single rumor has the power to ruin a life. Nobody knows that better than Bryn. She used to have it all—the perfect boyfriend, a bright future in politics, and even popularity thanks to her best friend, cheer captain Cora. Then one mistake sparked a scandal that burned it all to the ground.

Now it's the start of a new school year and the spotlight has shifted: It's geeky Georgie, newly hot after a summer makeover, whose name is on everyone's lips. When a rumor ignites, Georgie rockets up the school's social hierarchy, pitting her and Cora against each other. It grants her Foxham stardom . . . but it also makes her a target. As the rumors grow and morph, blazing like wildfire through the school's social media, all three girls' lives begin to unravel. But one person close to the drama has the power to stop the gossip in its tracks. The question is—do they even want to? From Dhonielle Clayton and Sona Charaipotra, authors of the *Tiny Pretty Things* duology (now a Netflix series), comes another edge-of-your-seat social thriller perfect for fans of *We Were Liars* and *Cruel Summer*.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



**Dhonielle Clayton** is a *New York Times* Bestselling author of *The Belles* series, *Shattered Midnight*, co-author of *Blackout*, and the co-author of the *Tiny Pretty Things* duology, a Netflix original series. She hails from the Washington, D.C. suburbs on the Maryland side. She taught secondary school for several years and is a former elementary and middle school librarian. She is COO of the non-profit We Need Diverse Books. She's an avid traveler, and always on the hunt for magic and mischief. Up next: *The Marvellers*, her middle grade fantasy debut. You can find her on social media @brownbookworm.



**Sona Charaipotra** is author of the doc dramedy *Symptoms of a Heartbreak* and co-author of the YA dance duology *Tiny Pretty Things*, a 2020 Netflix original series. A former *People* reporter, she's writes for publications like the *NYTimes* and *Cosmopolitan*. She has a master's in screenwriting from NYU and MFA in fiction from New School. Next up: *How Maya Got Fierce* and *The Rumor Game*. Find Sona on Twitter: @sona\_c

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The Common Core Standards push readers to look closer when reading a text including examining author's craft and analyzing word choice and narrative elements. Clayton & Charaipotra's novel *The Rumor Game*, includes intricate themes, complex characters, and a well-crafted plot that allows the reader to deeply delve into the text. This teaching guide include discussion questions and English language arts activities to be used in grades 9-12 as this text is read as a whole group, small group, or a combination. This guide could also be modified to be used with a student who is reading the novel independently.

The Common Core Anchor Standards in English Language Arts and National Health Education Standards that can be addressed using the discussion questions and activities in this guide are:

### English Language Arts

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1  
Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2  
Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3  
Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4  
Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5  
Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6  
Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.10  
Read and comprehend complex literary texts independently and proficiently.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.1  
Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

### Health

- Standard 2: Students will analyze the influence of family, peers, culture, media, technology, and other factors on health behaviors.
- Standard 8: Students will demonstrate the ability to advocate for personal, family, and community health.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Use these questions as reading check-ins, writing prompts, or classroom discussions throughout *The Rumor Game*.

1. Why do you think the authors included the date and time for each chapter?
2. How does hearing from different narrators throughout the book add to the purpose of the novel?
3. Do you believe that one bad decision should ruin a person's life and future?
4. Do you believe the anti-bullying campaigns at schools are successful? Why or why not?
  - **Extension:** Have students plan an anti-bullying campaign.
5. What are the pros and cons of popularity?
6. How was the setting of Washington, D.C. influential on the story?
7. Although Bryn's dad is imperfect, he dealt with Bryn's accident well (page 181). What does this tell you about him?
8. How does the book reinforce that boys receive less social punishments when it comes to rumors? Why do you think this is the case in our society?
9. On page 184, Jase is seen in an "offensive Egyptian pharaoh costume." Why is this costume offensive? What does Jase being okay with wearing this costume tell you about his character?
10. Throughout the book, the authors show instances of microaggressions on our characters of color. What makes something a microaggression? What examples did you notice in the book?
11. On page 261, Georgie decides to watch *Sixteen Candles* even though it is sexist and racist. Is it okay to like things that are problematic? Explain.
12. At the reveal on page 285, were you surprised? What clues did you see along the way to show you who the perpetrator was? Did the unveiling throughout the next 180 pages happen as you predicted at this point?
13. Throughout the book, the power of words is discussed, primarily when it comes to fat (p. 28, 293) and crazy (p. 12, 57). When is it okay to use these words? When is it not okay? Why are these words so powerful? What other words would you put in this category?
14. How did the culture of Foxham breed toxicity?
15. Do you think it was okay for Georgie to fake run away to out the person behind all the rumors?
16. How does Georgie use lists to motivate herself? Do you think this activity is toxic or helpful for her recovery?
17. What were the purposes of the post-it note pages? The social media posts? How did the authors use of multi-media format add to the final product?

18. Now that you have finished the book, with all the evidence throughout: do you believe Bryn caused the car accident on purpose or not?
19. How did the authors inclusion of figurative language, such as the similes on pages 318 and 435, impact your experience of reading the text?
  - **Extension:** Have students find other examples of figurative language throughout the book.
20. The author's note mentions that "This book is about the power of words and how the things you say can have real consequences in people's lives. It's about how lies can become truth to many if repeated enough times by the right people. It's about the lies we sometimes start to believe about ourselves." How did the book accomplish this theme? What details throughout the book shaped and refined this theme?

## CLASSROOM EXTENSIONS

Use these activities to extend your students' thinking and experience with *The Rumor Game*.

### Inventing Definitions

Each part of the novel begins with a word that is defined. The first few definitions are legitimate dictionary definitions while the last is one invented because of the situation within the book.

*Examples:*

- Rumor 4) can destroy your life
- Lie 4) we all do it
- Game 3) a manipulative scheme; 4) a secret or clever plan; 5) tricks

Have students choose other words that could have definitions invented based on *The Rumor Game* and create your own *The Rumor Game* glossary.

### In the Minds of the Characters

#### Six Word Memoirs

Cora has a new obsession: Six-Word Memoirs, and she uses them throughout the book to summarize her feelings.

- Have students create a six-word memoir for each character in the book.
  - **Extension:** Have students explain the memoir's meaning using text evidence from the book.
- Students could also make their own six-word memoirs to share.

#### Vision Board

Some of the characters in the novel have vision boards which show their goals for the future. For example, Cora mentions hers on page 30.

- Have students create vision boards for each of the characters based on where they ended up at the end of the book.
  - **Extension:** Have students explain their vision boards using textual evidence from the book.
- Students could also make their own vision board for their future.

## **Social Media**

In the Author's Note, Dhonielle Clayton and Sona Charaipotra mention "now the things people say about you can stalk you everywhere, online and IRL. Your smartphone is a permanent line to social media. And the trauma of it can be absolutely devastating." This topic is very controversial but evidence definitely exists to back the statement made by the authors.

- Group students into two groups. One side will be pro-social media and the other will be con. The students should research their side pulling evidence to support their side of the debate.
- Host a debate in your class between the two sides.
- Finally, have students decide after the debate if they believe that social media is more harmful or more positive when it comes to teens and our society and complete a persuasive essay supporting their beliefs.

## **Diet Culture**

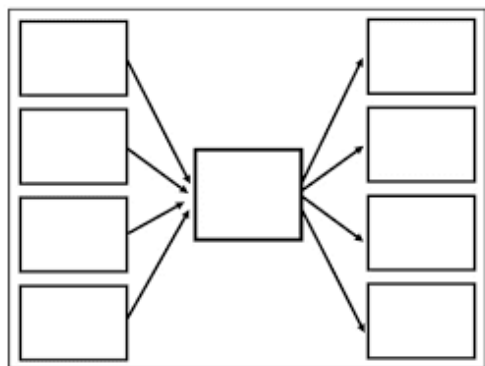
Although body positivity is a movement of recent, our culture is obsessed with dieting and body image. Georgie and her family are an example of what happens when diet culture is pushed to an extreme.

- First, define diet culture with students to ensure that it is separated from the fact that we need to eat nutritiously to be healthy.
- Have students read [The Distasteful Truth About Diet Culture](#) by Raymond Tran.
- Reflect as a class on the article once completed. What did it teach them? How do they feel about the article? How does diet culture affect us day to day?
- Finally, have students create a list (like Georgie) for themselves of ways they could eliminate toxic diet culture in their lives and their school.
- Examples: eliminating diet talk, not following body image influencers, not commenting on anyone's food choices, etc.

## Cause/Effect of it all

Once finished with the book, it is important to visually see the fall out of Bryn's decisions. Have students create a cause/event/effect map with "Bryn starting the rumor" as the event. Students should pull evidence from the story for causes of this event and effects of this event.

- Example: Multi-Flow Map from Thinking Maps ©



- Do not give students a premade graphic organizer or have students premake them. There may be 7 causes and 5 effects, so leaving the students to authentically make the graphic organizer allows them to push their thinking.

Student then should use their graphic organizer and other activities/discussion of the book to answer the following question as an essay: Although Bryn was at fault for the rumor, who or what do you believe is the real culprit for all of the conflict in *The Rumor Game*?

## Mental Health Awareness

Throughout *The Rumor Game*, mental health and addiction play prominent roles. It is important to discuss, reflect, and learn from these aspects in the book. Lauren's Kids, a non-profit organization focused on educating about sexual assault prevention and awareness, created a set of Mental Health Lessons titled "Safer, Smarter Teens: Be the Change" which is specifically for high school. It educates on Mental Health & Wellbeing, Understanding the Stigma Associated with Mental Health, State of Mind, Seeking Help, Addiction, and Wellbeing all in whole-class discussions, small groups, and individual activities. It is highly recommended to use this free curriculum in conjunction with *The Rumor Game*: [https://safersmarterteens.org/mentalhealth/SST\\_HS\\_MH\\_v6.pdf](https://safersmarterteens.org/mentalhealth/SST_HS_MH_v6.pdf).

This guide was created by Kellee Moyer, a middle school teacher-librarian in Orlando, FL. Kellee is the author of various teaching guides for all levels; the co-author of the blog [Unleashing Readers](#); a past committee member & chair of the Schneider Family Book Award and Amelia Elizabeth Walden Award; on the 2016-2018 ALAN Board of Directors; and a member of NCTE, ALAN, and ALA. Kellee can be reached at [Kellee.Moye@gmail.com](mailto:Kellee.Moye@gmail.com).