

Shades of Simon Gray

about the book

Hidden crimes and secrets and lies, past and present, nearly cause a teenager's death. This gripping novel interweaves a historical murder mystery and the supernatural with crimes of the 21st century.

"A page-turning plot, good characterization, and very convincing setting will have this suspenseful thriller driving up library circulation."

—Kirkus Reviews



pre-reading activity

Ask the group to look in the newspaper or news magazines and find articles about computer crimes in our nation. How might such crimes be considered white-collar crimes? Outline rights and responsibilities that schools should teach students regarding computer technology.

questions for group discussion

1. Discuss the significance of the prologue in the novel. How does the parallel story about Jessup Wildemere round out Simon Gray's story?
2. Debate the differences between a horror, a mystery, and a ghost story. How does this novel fit all three genres? Discuss whether the crows and the frogs make the novel more suspenseful. Explain the purpose of the chapters where the reader is taken inside Simon's mind while he is in a coma.
3. Analyze each teenage character in the novel. Discuss how Simon Gray changes when Kyle and his friends take over his life. Why do you think Simon agrees to help the seniors cheat? Discuss how Simon might be a victim of peer pressure. How do the teens rationalize their cheating? Contrast Devin's remorse to Kyle's behavior at the end of the novel.
4. Why is Simon Gray considered both a likely and unlikely suspect in the computer crime at Bellehaven High School? It is quite common for schools to cover up criminal acts in an effort to avoid unwanted publicity. Discuss why the school involves law enforcement in the "suspected hacking" from the very beginning. What evidence is there that the principal may indeed suspect George McCabe, the school's Systems Administrator, of some type of unethical or unlawful behavior?
5. Simon wants to play one of the ghosts in the school's production of *Macbeth* because he says, "I'd rather be the one doing the haunting." (p. 154) Though he doesn't get the part, how does Simon "haunt" the teens involved in the Project? At what point does Simon realize that he was searching for a way out the night of the accident? Why is he so furious with Jessup for being stupid? He tells him, "This was your life." (p. 219) Debate whether Simon sees himself in Jessup's situation.
6. The police don't find what they are looking for on Simon's computer, but they do find an interesting poem, and a letter. Explain the poem "Bat Wings." What does this reveal about Simon? To whom is the letter written? What is the only thing Simon has to gain from the Project?
7. Using someone's password is considered unethical behavior, but it isn't a crime. Discuss why it is important to protect a personal password. At what point could using someone else's password become a crime? The FBI is using technology to track criminal behavior in our nation. What privacy issues are involved? Why is it important to understand these issues?