

Teacher's Guide

CLEAVAGE: Breakaway Fiction for Real Girls

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ages 12-14 (grades 7-9)

1. Suggestions for pre-reading discussion:

- a. Is there pressure put on girls to look a certain way? Why do you think that is? Do boys have the same kinds of pressure? Discuss the differences.
- b. What role does the media/advertising play in the idea of body image?
- c. How can you tell if a friend or family member feels insecure about their appearance? What can you do to help them feel better about the way they look?

2. Topics for discussion and writing:

- a. Which story or character did you identify with the most? Why?
- b. Do you agree with the advice Viva Diva gave to Faceless on the Farm? Pretend you are Viva Diva and write a response letter to Faceless on the Farm. What advice would you give her?
- c. Write a story about a time when you or someone close to you has felt insecure about their body image. What caused this feeling and why? How can such feelings be overcome?

3. Suggested course-related activities/research:

- a. [health; social studies; history] Brainstorm a list of ways in which people have attempted to drastically change their appearance. Include contemporary and historical examples from across cultures (hint: some examples are Chinese foot binding, corsets, anorexia, cosmetic surgery). Research two examples and focus on the risks involved. Why do you think people are driven to these extreme measures for the sake of "beauty"?
- b. [social studies; media] Find an ad from a magazine or newspaper that projects the idea that women should fit a certain unattainable body image. Bring it to school and present it to the rest of the class, explaining how it sends this message and why this idea of beauty is unrealistic. How do you think most people who don't fit into this body image feel when they see this? Recreate the ad in a way that advertises the product without sending this message.
- c. [cultural studies; ethics] Write an essay about common attitudes of people towards their own and others' bodies. In your concept of an ideal world, how should these change? What could be done within the school system to bring about such changes in attitude for current and future generations?