

All Girls

Emily Layden

Reviewed by: Madison Li, 16

Star Teen Book Reviewer of Be the Star You Are! Charity

www.bethestaryouare.org

Atwaters is the typical elite, all-girls boarding school in New England, with students from affluent families who live by prestige and tradition. To the community's distress, an alumna who graduated two decades ago accuses a current faculty member of rape. She presses a lawsuit against the school for covering it up, and right before the school year begins, boldly confronts the community by placing glaring signs in Atwaters' front yard: "A rapist works here." The scandal quickly casts its shadow over the school. Although the administration attempts to police the ensuing conversation and hush the rumors with vague assurances, the skeleton is already, irreversibly, out of the closet. The students must navigate high school against this gruesome betrayal from the institution, carving themselves unforgettably into Atwaters' history.

The author uses multiple perspectives, each following a single current Atwaters student. Every narrator's snapshot is distinct and explores the lives of students of varying ages, economic statuses, and social circles. While the girls deal with a diverse array of personal challenges, they lead intertwined lives under the same roof. Unlike other books that focus on the drama of a rape allegation and its culprit, this story offers an acute look into the case's lasting ramifications upon a community. Some students thoroughly involve themselves in the turmoil, and others only stand at the border. The defining feature of the book, though, is the girls' profound connection with each other. No matter their differences and conflicts, everyone is burdened by the same weighty expectations of their peers, adults, and society. The girls are ultimately united by their shared coming-of-age, often discovering unexpected friendships along the way. The author expertly crafts these experiences with precise, lucid details, creating a highly realistic portrayal of teenage girls' complex lives.

I recommend *All Girls* by Emily Layden to young adults, especially women. You'll see your past self in the Atwaters girls and relive your own high school days, from the tense trickiness of the social hierarchy to the harrowing complications of self discovery. It will feel as if the author had reached into the crevices of your own heart, plucking details from forgotten memories to painstakingly recreate such intricate emotions and contexts. As a warning, there's an explicit scene describing non-consensual intercourse. There's extensive build-up, so it's easy to skip, but similar heavy themes are present throughout. The book centers upon sexual assault, after all, and pinpoints several girls' struggles against attempts to silence their voices. Students also confront a variety of other sensitive issues, including mental health, LGBTQ+ relationships, and racial discrimination. Of course, one most fundamental theme is the strength of young women in the face of these difficulties. This book, at its heart, is a collection of the Atwaters girls' truths.

Recommended Titles:

Prep by Curtis Sittenfeld

Notes on a Silencing by Lacy Crawford

Swimming Lessons: Poems by Lili Reinhart

Are You Listening? by Tillie Walden

Tiny Pretty Things by Sonal Charaipotra, Dhonielle Clayton