

# Teaching Guide for

# EVIDENCE of Things NOT SEEN

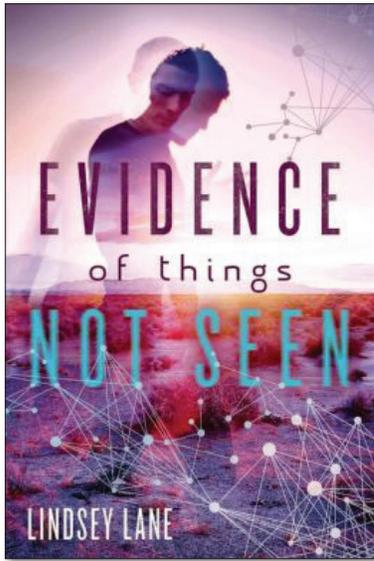
BY LINDSEY LANE

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# EVIDENCE of Things NOT SEEN

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*Evidence of Things Not Seen*

By Lindsey Lane

Published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Age range: 12 - 18 Years

## ABOUT THE BOOK

When high school junior Tommy Smythe goes missing, everyone has a theory about what happened to him. He was an odd kid, often deeply involved in particle physics, so maybe he just got distracted and wandered off. He was last seen at a pullout off the highway, so maybe someone snatched him. Tommy believes that everything is possible, and that until something can be proven false, it may be true. So as long as Tommy's whereabouts are undetermined, he could literally be anywhere. Told in a series of first-person narratives from people who knew Tommy, *Evidence of Things Not Seen* by award-winning author Lindsey Lane explores themes of loneliness, connectedness, and the role we play in creating our own realities.

*"...a gripping and genre-bending mosaic"* —Publisher Weekly

*"...perfect for sparking conversation."* —Horn Book

*"The real story is not Tommy's to tell, it is in the lives of all the people left behind."* —VOYA

*"Thought-provoking."* —Kirkus Reviews

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## ABOUT THE QUESTIONS

Honoring the book's sharp, intimate voice, these discussion questions both hold the characters accountable and make sure they get the respect they deserve. For those curious about what happens to the characters or for readers who see something of themselves or their friends in the characters, there are resources to explore the characters' issues in the real world.

The questions were written by Carrie Gordon Watson, a 29-year veteran high school teacher, conflict resolution counselor, and co-founder of the at-risk youth art engagement program, Never Counted Out ([www.nevercountedout.com](http://www.nevercountedout.com)). She holds an MA in Foreign and Second Language Education, and she has created and implemented conflict resolution programs at the high school where she's taught since 1996 and adopted and coordinated the social awareness program called Challenge Day. A Young Adult author as well, Watson's first book *QUAD* dealt with the painful and gripping reality of a school shooting. Her 2016 novel *Ascending the Boneyard* tackles subjects of grief, family, and finding oneself.

## QUESTIONS FOR THE CHARACTERS

### ASK KIMMIE JO FEATURED ON PAGES 3-8

1. You spend a lot of time putting people into separate groups and using social labels. ("Isn't that how nerds act?" page 6) And yet you call James a segregationist. How are your thoughts and behavior different from his?
2. Why did you feel it was important to start the Latinitas club?
3. Why do you think it's so "hard to break out of stereotypes and be different"? (page 7)  
In what way do you yourself hide out in groups?
4. Name even one small thing you had in common with Tommy Smythe.
5. You talk a lot about choosing our actions. What, if anything, do you think you could have done differently to change the outcome of Tommy's disappearance?

## RESOURCES

Want help busting out of those stereotypes and cliques?  
<http://www.tolerance.org/mix-it-up/what-is-mix>

Does your school have major issues with separation, cliques, and bullying?  
The amazing people at Challenge Day have answers!  
<http://www.challengeday.org/challenge-day-program-teen.php>

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## ASK MARSHALL (THE PROPOSAL)

FEATURED ON PAGES 10-32

1. Prom comes (not ideally) the night before Mother's Day and right in the middle of a search for Tommy Smythe. What do you think the school can do to make a more ideal situation for prom? What is more important?
2. What do you like so much about Leann? What do you think makes her so distracted sometimes?
3. What's your contingency plan if things don't go the way you want them to on prom night?
4. Why do you talk so much when you're nervous?
5. When you told Leann, "No one knows why he disappeared. I thought maybe something bad had happened and he needed to get away. That's what I would do." (page 29), what were you trying to get her to reveal to you?

## RESOURCES

Are you or someone you know thinking of running away?

<http://www.1800runaway.org/Should-I-Run-Away/> or call 1-800-RUNAWAY

Lots of resources on the National Runaway Safeline website (above), including this one for Safe Place: <http://nationalsafeplace.org/>

## ASK LEANN (THE PROPOSAL)

FEATURED ON PAGES 17-32

1. What would you say are the most likable aspects of your personality?  
Which of these do you think Marshall was attracted to?
2. What does a "normal" life look and feel like to you? What would you leave out?
3. Whenever you're alone with Marshall, you seem like you're an inch away from bolting.  
Why do you get so nervous around him?
4. You were having such a good time at the prom, and then at the Whip In afterward.  
But you got nervous again when Marshall brought you to the pull-out and asked you to close your eyes. What happened?
5. What were you thinking about when Marshall kept rambling on out there in the pull-out?
6. What were you thinking about on the way home from prom, when you saw the moon slip behind a cloud and wished with all your heart it would come back out?

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## RESOURCES

Have questions about healthy sexual development but are too embarrassed to ask?

These guys have lots of great info, much of it created by teens for teens: <http://sexetc.org/>

If you or someone you know is experiencing an abusive relationship, these awesome people can help: <http://www.childhelp.org/pages/hotline-home> or call 1-800-4-A-CHILD

These folks can help too:

<http://calyouth.org/> or call their 24 hour confidential hotline at 1-800-843-5200

## ASK ALVIN FEATURED ON PAGES 34-41

1. What did you mean when you said, “I’m living a fucking stereotype”?  
What parts of your life do you feel match that stereotype?
2. Why did it take Tommy Smythe showing up at the salvage yard that time to make you realize how messed up your old man is?
3. What do you think are some of the possibilities for your future?  
What kinds of things did Tommy say to you to make you see those possibilities?
4. How does Tommy’s disappearance make you hopeful about your mom’s disappearance?

## RESOURCES

Are you worried that someone you know might be living in an abusive home?

Teens Health.com has tons of resources for understanding abuse and getting help.

The page can even be translated into Spanish.

[http://teenshealth.org/teen/your\\_mind/families/family\\_abuse.html](http://teenshealth.org/teen/your_mind/families/family_abuse.html)

## ASK MARICELA (THE COMIC BOOK) FEATURED ON PAGES 43-52

1. What are the best and worst parts of being a 15-year-old day laborer?
2. Why are you so attracted to Alfredo when he’s taken advantage of so many girls?  
What stops you from going to him?
3. What do you think about Juany’s relationship with her son, Niño? And Alfredo’s?
4. How do you feel about getting left behind with Juany and Alfredo’s baby?
5. You talk about maybe something good happening next.  
What kinds of possibilities do you imagine or hope for?

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## RESOURCES

There are resources out there for undocumented youth.  
The folks at United We Dream can help with all kinds of things.  
<http://unitedwedream.org/>

Also, if you're wondering whether you or someone you know is in an unhealthy relationship, visit the folks at Love Is Respect.org. Lots of helpful stuff here: <http://www.loveisrespect.org/>

## ASK JAMES FEATURED ON PAGES 54-58

1. Why did you always work with Tommy Smythe in science lab if he drove you nuts?
2. You said that Tommy was always fixated, that he “couldn't be normal about liking something.” How is that personality trait the same (or different) from yours?
3. What did you mean when you said, “People seek their own level. Like water.”?  
How does that apply to the way you are with people?
4. You wondered if a problem still exists once we find the answer.  
What's your answer to this?

## RESOURCES

Curious about Asperger's syndrome? You can read some stuff about what Asperger's looks like here: <https://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism/asperger-syndrome> and get some advice from these awesome folks here:  
[http://kidshealth.org/teen/school\\_jobs/good\\_friends/making\\_friends.html](http://kidshealth.org/teen/school_jobs/good_friends/making_friends.html) .

## ASK THE SMYTHES FEATURED ON PAGES 60-68

1. Mrs. Smythe, you told the sheriff, “It's all our fault.”  
Why do you feel so guilty about Tommy's disappearance?
2. Mr. Smythe, how would you feel if you found out that Tommy really did find his birth family, that he was with them right now?
3. Mrs. Smythe, it seems like the way you look for Tommy is very similar to his theory of alternate realities. Can you talk about that?
4. Mr. Smythe, if you thought Tommy was “different,” why didn't you have him tested?  
Do you think it would have made a difference in what happened?

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## RESOURCES

There are people out there whose mission it is to help find kids who go missing, and to provide support to family and friends. Find out more by visiting the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. <http://www.missingkids.com/Resources>

## ASK IZZY (HYPOTHESIS) FEATURED ON PAGES 70-84

1. You didn't set out to do an experiment in behavioral science on prom night, but it turned out that way. Why did it make you want to establish and prove your hypothesis with Alex?
2. Why did you feel like you couldn't just talk to Alex about your hypothesis?
3. How did you feel about and interpret Alex's reaction to your experiment?
4. How do you justify your actions that night with Alex? Do you feel like you were in the right, in the wrong, or some combination of the two?

## RESOURCES

The amazing folks at Teens Health have lots of insights about healthy sexual expression. Girls, start by looking here [http://kidshealth.org/teen/sexual\\_health/girls/virginity.html#cat20015](http://kidshealth.org/teen/sexual_health/girls/virginity.html#cat20015).

Guys, they haven't left you out of the conversation. [http://kidshealth.org/teen/sexual\\_health/guys/virginity.html#cat20016](http://kidshealth.org/teen/sexual_health/guys/virginity.html#cat20016)

## ASK RACHEL FEATURED ON PAGES 86-93

1. What did you mean when you said, "Tommy needed help knowing how to be in the world"? How did you try to help him?
2. You talked about Tommy acting like he was in love with particle physics. Sometimes when people are in love but they think their love won't be returned, they do commit suicide. What could have happened to make Tommy feel betrayed by his one love?
3. Do you think it could have ever worked out with you and Tommy? Why?

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## ASK MR. MCCLOUD FEATURED ON PAGES 95-101

1. What are the best and worst parts about having a kid like Tommy in class?
2. How does the concept of “infinite possibility” play into the idea of tracking students with different ability levels, intellectual levels, or interests?
3. You quoted Tommy as saying he believed that “nothing is certain unless you include every possibility.” How do you think the concept of “infinite possibility” played into Tommy Smythe’s disappearance?

## RESOURCES

Curious about quantum physics? You’ll find a cheat sheet here at Quantum Physics for Dummies: <http://www.dummies.com/how-to/content/quantum-physics-for-dummies-cheat-sheet.html>

or here, at Learn Quantum Theory in Ten Minutes: <http://scienceblogs.com/pontiff/2007/11/20/learn-quantum-theory-in-ten-mi/>

## ASK KARLA (LOST) FEATURED ON PAGES 103-120

1. What pushed you to decide to go find Russ and call him to meet you at the pull-out?
2. Once when your momma was doing something bad to a man while you were just inside the car, you said you knew your life was about to change. “It was almost over. It had just begun.” What did you mean by that?
3. Assuming that alternate realities exist the way Tommy Smythe said they did, what would you have been doing at age 13 in some of the other universes?
4. What do you think should happen to a parent who sells their child into prostitution? Why?
5. How did it make you feel to realize that your momma was becoming less like a sister or friend and more like a boss?
6. Why did you go off with Russ in the first place? What did he represent for you?

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## RESOURCES

If you are a young person being sexually mistreated or exploited by an adult in your life, there are people out there who want to help. Please reach out to someone. It's important to know that kids who are sexually exploited aren't bad, and they haven't done anything wrong. They completely deserve to be safe, supported, and cared for.

The Center for Missing and Exploited Children  
[www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com) and [www.alliesagainstslavery.org](http://www.alliesagainstslavery.org)

The End Trafficking Project  
[www.unicefusa.org](http://www.unicefusa.org) and [www.liveyourdream.org/Stop-Trafficking](http://www.liveyourdream.org/Stop-Trafficking)

## ASK MARY LOUISE FEATURED ON PAGES 103-120

1. In what ways did your conversations with Tommy make you think about infinite possibility in your paintings?
2. What did you think when Tommy told you that death was just another way of being, that it was happening all around us all the time? Did that change for you after he disappeared?
3. Why is it important for you to put eyes in all your paintings? How did that start?

## ASK JAKE (WATERMELONS) FEATURED ON PAGES 129-145

1. How does it feel, going to the pull-out every week to sell fruit knowing that it was the last place Tommy Smythe was known to be?
2. When you said, "One of the cool things about farming is the seed knows exactly what it's going to be," you were thinking about your future, weren't you? What's the parallel between the seed and your life?
3. If Tommy Smythe's alternate universe theory were true, what other lives would you be living now that you've graduated high school?
4. You talk about having a tendency to wait around for things to happen, about being slow to decide things, about always second-guessing yourself. In what ways do you think these habits have altered the course of events in and around your life?

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## RESOURCES

Having trouble deciding what to do after high school? The amazing folks at TeensHealth.org have thought about this too. [http://kidshealth.org/teen/school\\_jobs/school/after\\_hs.html#cat20179](http://kidshealth.org/teen/school_jobs/school/after_hs.html#cat20179)

They also have tons of great tips for healthy living—not just for our bodies but for our minds too. Check out what they have to say about all that by visiting: [http://kidshealth.org/teen/your\\_mind/#cat20016](http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/#cat20016)

## ASK TIM FEATURED ON PAGES 147-154

1. What did you get or understand out of looking through Tommy Smythe's notebook that you found?
2. Sometimes people who are so different from each other can also have things in common. Tommy was a weird science nerd. You're a jock. You're mom's super religious. What do you all have in common? Do you think this matches in some way with Tommy's theory of multiple possibilities?
3. You said that Tommy was an in-the-moment kind of guy, whereas you plan everything out, even on the field. Do you think one way makes more sense than the other?
4. You asked, "Why does everything have to be linked to something else?" Do you truly think that everything in the universe is random, or is it possible that some things really are linked?

## ASK TARA (RITUAL) FEATURED ON PAGES 156-171

1. What's it been like living with your mom since your dad was murdered?
2. Knowing that your dad had a secret life, it must sometimes feel like he, or you, were living in alternate realities. Can you talk about that?
3. Your dad had a ritual of smoking two cigarettes a day: "One cigarette in the morning to think about what you want to do. And one cigarette to forgive yourself for whatever you didn't get done." If he could tell you what his second cigarette was for the night he died, what do you think he'd say?
4. How did Tommy Smythe's disappearance make the whole world feel off-kilter for you?
5. How did spreading your dad's ashes at the sinkhole and saying good-bye to him make you feel like maybe it was time to say good-bye to Tommy as well?

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## RESOURCES

You can find lots of information and other resources for kids of drug addicted parents at NIDA for Teens: <http://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/post/helping-children-addicted-parents-find-help>

And support groups for young people who are experience grief and loss here: <http://www.hellogrief.org/>

## ASK FRANK AND STELLA (THE LAST DANCE): FEATURED ON PAGES 173-185

1. Frank, what makes you so devoted to Stella?
2. Some people think there are multiple realities. What would some of your and Stella's alternate realities look like?
3. Stella, what happens in your mind when you get confused about things?  
Do you ever think about other ways your life might have turned out?
4. What do you love about Frank?
5. Frank, you were afraid that if you took Stella back to your old lives, you'd just be an old man and his batty wife. You said you are so much more than that.  
What do you mean by that?

## RESOURCES

AFATeens was founded by a teenager to help peers across the country raise awareness of Alzheimer's, and to engage, educate, and support young people and their families who are affected by the disease. Lots of great resources at: <http://www.afateens.org/coping.html>

## ASK NANDO FEATURED ON PAGES 187-191

1. Tommy Smythe has been called a weirdo, a science nerd, a freak. Your dad thinks he's a brujo, a magician. Is it possible that he's all these things?
2. Your father doesn't think Tommy is dead but that he's more like a spirit body, still very much alive but in a different form. What do you think happened to Tommy Smythe?
3. You said, "That muchacho loco is gone and I'm still looking for his notebook."  
Why would you do that?

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## ASK DWIGHT (CHRISTMAS ORNAMENTS): FEATURED ON PAGES 193-210

1. What goes on in your mind when your father gets abusive? Is it different when he hurts you and when he does it to your mother?
2. You were pretty shocked to see your mom with money. How did you feel when she told you how she got it?
3. You took the box of Christmas ornaments as you fled the house, because you “didn’t want to leave one last breakable thing in the house.” What did it mean to you to take them? Why did you hang them on a tree in the middle of nowhere?
4. While hanging the ornaments, you found a pair of science goggles and took them. What did those goggles represent to you? How do you think they got in that tree?

## RESOURCES

No one deserves to be abused: not by a parent, not by a sibling, not by a boyfriend or girlfriend. Let the amazing folks at TeensHealth.org drop some words on the subject.

[http://teenshealth.org/teen/your\\_mind/families/family\\_abuse.html](http://teenshealth.org/teen/your_mind/families/family_abuse.html)

There’s also some good information at LeavingAbuse.com.

[http://leavingabuse.com/domestic\\_abuse/family-abuse-and-teenagers.html](http://leavingabuse.com/domestic_abuse/family-abuse-and-teenagers.html)

Also, every state has a domestic abuse hotline. Get the contact info for your state here:

<http://www.thehotline.org/resources/resources/>

## ASK HALLIE FEATURED ON PAGES 212-217

1. Why do you think the Stillwell pull-out is a kind of magnet for drama, given all the strange things that have happened there over the years?
2. When you talk about laws and boundaries regarding land ownership ultimately being silly, do you think the same might apply to the laws of physics? Is it possible we really don’t belong to our bodies or to any one given reality?
3. What do you think would have happened to the Mexican girl and her baby if you hadn’t taken them in? How are their lives going to be different now that you have?
4. You believe it’s time to stop looking for Tommy Smythe, but that doing so will probably cause a public outcry. Why do you think people are so reluctant to give up the search for a boy even after he’s been missing nearly a year?

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## ASK CHUY

FEATURED ON PAGES 219-226

1. What did you think when you first found out that the man you were digging a fence post for was the father of the boy who went missing a year ago?
2. When you're sleeping on the run, you say you listen in the dark to figure out what's around you, but after a while you stop, just breathe, and feel like you become the air. You said, "I start to disappear into the night." What did you mean by that?
3. What is your explanation for the guy who appeared in a flash of lightning during a storm one night, then disappeared just as fast?
4. Do you believe in aliens and portals to another universe, like you learned about in comic books? Or in spirits that walk the earth, as Consuelo talked about?
5. Why do you think it's so hard for people to live in uncertainty, in not knowing, in the mystery of this life?

## RESOURCES

Once again, the amazing folks at TeensHealth.org have tons of resources for helping you sort through the complexities of life. Things like mental health, dealing with problems, and being your best self. See what they have to say: [http://teenshealth.org/teen/your\\_mind/](http://teenshealth.org/teen/your_mind/)

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## TOMMY SMYTHE'S NOTEBOOK

Go back and read just the pages of Tommy's notebook. What do you notice that you did not notice before? Below are some questions you might explore when exploring those torn pages.

*"We leave pieces of ourselves everywhere. Every time we meet someone, they take some of us and we take some of them. That's how it is. Little particles stick us together. Bit by bit. I think it's how we get whole."*  
—Tommy Smythe (opening)

**Do you agree that little particles stick us together every time we meet someone?  
In your opinion, is this is how we become whole beings?**

*"All possibilities exist."* —Tommy Smythe (page 9)

**Truth or theory? Back it up with some thought.**

*"Sometimes I think this world – the one we are living in right now – is the one where we have to get it right."*  
—Tommy Smythe (page 33)

**Why would this be that world? Why couldn't this be the world we get to make mistakes in?**

*"McCloud says if we know what causes mass, then we might be able to figure out how much less mass is needed to move things through space."* —Tommy Smythe (page 42)

**Do you think it's possible to transport matter from one place or realm to another?  
What's your theory on how it could happen or why it couldn't?**

*"I lost my notebook again...I went into another dimension. I wouldn't be able to find that notebook until I came back into this dimension."* —Tommy Smythe (page 53)

**Why wouldn't Tommy's notebook exist in other dimensions?**

*"I wonder if I become more by joining up with the other wave that is me."* —Tommy Smythe (page 59)

**Is it possible to discover other versions of yourself, to create your own alternate realities, without traveling to other dimensions?**

*"McCloud said that a general rule among physicists is that if phenomena are not expressly forbidden, they are eventually found to occur...if the equation exists, so does the possibility."* —Tommy Smythe (page 69)

**What happens to that possibility once a phenomenon is expressly forbidden?  
Can something be forbidden without being expressly forbidden?**

*"Before being observed, the system takes on all possibilities. So reality is created by the observer."*  
—Tommy Smythe (page 85)

**In what ways do most of us create our own reality?**

*"Observation of a rabbit...I think they smell and hear and react. That's all. We name it fear. I'm not sure it's fear. It's how they survive."* —Tommy Smythe (page 94)

**How does this description also apply to Tommy Smythe?**

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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- The novel is told in alternating points of view from the characters in a small Texas town. Whose story affected you the most and why?
- Kimmie Jo says “He (Tommy) would have been cute if he tried a little.” How do you feel about a statement like this? What does it reveal about this character’s view on society and how she views others and herself? Is there too much pressure to be cute, good-looking, attractive in society? In high school?
- What do you think happened to Tommy Smythe? What do you wish happened to Tommy? Why do you think the author chose to leave Tommy’s disappearance a mystery?
- Do you think Tommy’s disappearance could be a metaphor for that lost feeling we have or feel in our lives?
- A major theme in this book is the existence of all possibilities. Do you believe, as Tommy does, that “All possibilities exist (p. 9)”?
- Tommy wrote “We leave pieces of ourselves everywhere. Every time we meet someone, they take some of us and we take some of them. That’s how it is. Little particles stick us together. Bit by bit. I think it’s how we get whole.” Do you agree?
- Karla’s story in the book is intense and tragic. Kimmie Jo says on p. 8, “Like something might have changed if we’d done one thing different before.” Do you think Karla’s outcome could have changed if she’d done one thing differently? If her family had made better choices? Did you sympathize with Karla or did you judge?
- How do you think Tommy would feel if he knew everyone was looking for and missing him? How would he handle it?
- Alvin struggles between love and hate for his father. Why do you think he stays? Do you think he’ll leave one day? Why or why not?
- In Christmas Ornaments, Dwight has an epiphany when he realizes that his father enjoyed beating his mother and himself. Have you ever witnessed or been in an abusive situation? How did you handle it? Is there anything you wish you had differently? Why?