

Learning GUIDE FOR

"Tamani masterfully bounces and slams two hearts up and down a shrouded court of first love and revelations. A hard-to-put-down backboard breaker."
—Rita Williams Garcia, National Book Award finalist and *New York Times*-bestselling author

ALL THE THINGS WE NEVER KNEW

LIARA TAMANI





About the Book

AGE RANGE: 13 - 17 years

GRADE LEVEL: 8 - 12

PUBLISHER: HarperCollins Publisher

ISBN-10: 0062656910

ISBN-13: 9780062656919

All the Things We Never Knew is a lyrical romance about two Texas, high school basketball stars navigating the ups and downs of first love. Through poetic, economic prose and alternating perspectives, Liara Tamani, author of the acclaimed *Calling My Name*, follows two teens as they explore love, family, heartbreak, betrayal, and the power of healing.

Carli feels completely lost. She secretly wants to quit basketball, but is afraid of disappointing her father and teammates. To make matters worse, her parents are getting divorced and she and her brother must decide who to live with. The only thing saving her is her belief in signs, and they all just pointed to Rex.

Rex craves love. He might be ESPN's high school basketball player of the year, but he's terribly lonely. An only child, his mother died giving birth to him and he's sure his father blames him for it. Plus, Rex has moved to a new school where some of his new teammates hate him. But meeting Carli changes everything. With her, he feels all the love he's ever wanted to feel.

All the Things We Never Knew has all the romance of a love story, the high energy of a sports book, and the profundity of two young people trying to grow and figure out life. A complex, luminous novel that will appeal to readers of Elizabeth Acevedo, Nicola Yoon, and Jenny Han.

A NOTE TO EDUCATORS:

“How do I create the future I want for myself?”

“What steps do I take to get there?”

These are questions that young people face. There is no simple answer, but it's important to help teens explore the possibilities. While *All the Things We Never Knew* is a sports romance that offers many Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy, it's also a story about two young people with passions, curiosities, and big dreams. Teens who are actively working to shape their futures while navigating dysfunctions at home. Liara Tamani does not shy away from the complex family issues that many teens face. She believes that letting young people know that it's okay to recognize parental shortcomings and constraints so that they can begin to forge their own paths is important. *All the Things We Never Knew* is a story steeped in love, hope, and the power of healing. As you read and discuss this book with young people, hopefully they'll be reminded that the choices they make every day can help create their desired futures.

THEMES AND CONSIDERATIONS

Destiny and Free Will: When Carli and Rex first meet and develop feelings for each other, a lot of chance is involved. But they soon learn that it takes a lot more than chance to love someone and have a lasting relationship. It's the choices they make along their journey that hold the power to connect or separate them. The same principle also applies to their lives. Chance has a lot to do with the families they were born into, but every choice they make adds up to shape their futures.

Appearances vs. Reality: On the surface, Carli and Rex are basketball stars, but underneath they are so much more. Carli is very curious, which leads her to explore the depths of the world around her. And Rex is a lover of nature, which gives him hope and peace. Also, from the outside, Carli's and Rex's families seem perfect; but Carli's parents are going through a divorce and Rex's father barely speaks to him. Carli and Rex, like all people, are complex beings with textured lives.

Higher Powers: Both Carli and Rex are searching for truths beyond themselves that can help guide and give meaning to their lives. While some people seek wisdom in the way of religion, others create a more personalized guidance system for themselves. In this novel, Carli looks to signs from the Universe for direction. And Rex looks to his mother, who died giving birth to him.

Self-Trust: Carli's personal journey is one of self-trust. She doesn't want to play basketball but is afraid to leave the sport because she doesn't want to disappoint her dad or teammates. She's also afraid that she won't be able to figure out what to do with her life instead. Even though she loves drawing and collaging, it's not immediately clear to her that she should pursue this love because it's been so long since she's listened to herself and followed her own interests. Learning to trust herself is a process.

Guilt: A large part of Rex's personal journey involves releasing the guilt he feels surrounding his mother's death. The novel explores the impact prolonged guilt can have on mental health.

Dreams: While Rex has big, concrete plans for his future, Carli is still working to figure out what she wants to do. While their journeys are very different, they are both working to create futures they love.

Family Issues: Rex and Carli both have family members who make choices that heal and harm them, just as Carli and Rex alternately love and cause each other pain throughout the course of their relationship. The novel explores how family issues can influence individuals as they interact with others and form romantic attachments.

Secrets: Rex and Carli each have secrets they keep from one another, secrets their family members keep from them, and secrets they keep from the people in their respective worlds. One of the key themes in the novel is the role secrets play in breaking down communication and causing divisions between individuals and among groups of people.

Healing and Truth: In this novel, healing (at both the individual and relationship level) begins with honesty. At the individual level, it occurs when characters face the truth about themselves. And at the relationship level, healing begins when characters begin to be honest with each other.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS, DISCUSSION QUESTIONS, JOURNAL PROMPTS, AND ACTIVITIES

PRE-READING *Activity*

1. What are some examples of “[star-crossed lovers](#)” you know about from real life, movies, or other fiction? Create a list with as many examples as you can.
2. Watch all (or clips) from the movie [Love & Basketball \(2000\)](#). Create a [plot pyramid](#) and annotate or illustrate it with key scenes from the plot. Or choose a character and complete a [character arc](#) that plots their evolution and transformation.
3. **Journal Prompt** - Do you believe destiny, choice, or a combination of both shapes people’s lives and relationships?
4. The novel’s dedication is, “To anyone who’s ever wanted love from someone in pain.” What do you think the novel will be about? Some say that Cupid’s arrows are a western symbol for love because “love hurts”. Do you agree or disagree with that statement? If you do agree that love hurts, can it also heal? Think of some examples for each scenario.
5. Read this article on the [7 Types of Love](#). How many of them have you experienced? Which do you expect to read about in this novel?

CHAPTER BY CHAPTER READING

The Very First Kisses

EQ What sorts of stories do we tell ourselves about first kisses? Do you believe a first kiss sets the tone for the rest of a relationship? Think about famous first kisses you have read about or heard of. One of the most famous, perhaps, being in Act 1 of *Romeo and Juliet*. What expectations do readers (and lovers) have about where a relationship will go after the first kiss? Would you agree with the statement that all great love stories begin with one?

Journal Prompt (1) “The boy is the only one who can see the pain...The boy who just came out of nowhere, blowing me a kiss in the middle of his game...And now our histories are mixing.” - Think about a public moment with a family member, or friend, that felt private because you knew what that person was feeling, or they knew what you were thinking--without exchanging any words. Describe that moment with as much descriptive detail as possible.

DQ (6-7) What connections does Rex make between Carli and his mom? What’s special about her from the very beginning that in his mind sets her apart from other girls?

DQ (12) What does Carli think about Rex’s habit of blowing a kiss before free throws? According to what you’ve read so far, is she wrong? What effect does Cole’s speech have on her?

Journal Prompt (23) Rex tries to get to know Carli better through social-media photos, though “[He’s] not one of those crazy stalker dudes or anything.” Have you ever looked through the social media profile of someone you just met? What did you imagine you knew about them based on what you saw? If you got to know them better later, how right or wrong were you? Make some predictions about where Rex and Carli’s relationship will go based on what you’ve read so far.

Activity - Try showing a social media account of someone you know to someone who doesn’t know them. Have them do the same for you. Create a description of the person you see based solely on the images and/or captions. Then, share the description with the person who knows them. What did you get right? How were you wrong? What can we learn about people through social media and what are its limitations? What do you learn about friends and family through the images they post on social media? What can people learn about you? How does the perception change when you actually know the person in-real-life?

Where It Hurts

**Note to educators, given the fact that [divorce is considered an Adverse Childhood Experience](#), please consider reading about [trauma-informed approaches to instruction](#) before discussing in class. You may choose instead to offer the discussion as a journal-prompt, or give students the opportunity to read and think about divorce as a social occurrence and not as personal experience.*

DQ (34-35) What is Carli’s “new reality”? What questions does she have and what is her reaction to the news Cole brings? What times in your life have you had similar thoughts and reactions?

DQ (38-39) What information does Carli withhold from her father? Why does she withhold it?

Activity - As you read, keep track of all of the misconceptions characters have about one another that are rooted in information that is withheld or miscommunicated. Sometimes information will be revealed through thoughts the characters have about themselves or others. Use the following chart to keep track of words characters think and say. Then, as truths are revealed, compare them with your initial thoughts and observations.

Character	What they say	What I think	What other characters think	Final inferences, revelations and observations

DQ (46-47) Why does Rex have such a hard time expressing himself? How does this affect his relationships and ability to interact with those around him? How does he cope? Compare and contrast the reality of his relationship with Nya to the fantasy of his thoughts and perceptions about Carli.

DQ (57) What is ‘[normative determinism](#)’? Do you believe in it? Do you know any examples of it in real life?

DQ How do Rex and Carli experience love and harm in their families? How does this match or depart from the way their families are perceived by those on the outside who do not know the particulars?

Journal Prompt - What is an event that happened in your family life that drastically changed the way your family functions. How did this change your life and relationships? The way you relate to others and show up in the world around you?

Tell Me

EQ Why do people in families withhold information from one another? In your experience, what impact does this have on family relationships?

DQ (68) “When he sees us, he wipes himself clean of the little boy and stands up.” In this moment, how are Carli and her father’s roles reversed?

DQ (71) “You see, Mom doesn’t believe in all my sign stuff. She’s never said so, but she’s not exactly big on believing in general...she’s always preached that questioning and studying is more important than believing. And every time she’s asked me how my signs work, I’ve never had a good answer for her.” Do you believe there are signs or signals from a higher power or other force that people can use to receive guidance or wisdom?

Activity - Consider the famous line from Shakespeare's play Julius Caesar "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars / But in ourselves, that we are underlings." (Julius Caesar, Act I, Scene III) Create a multimedia presentation using Animoto, Tiktok, or any other medium. Use examples from fiction or real-life events to defend your perception of whether it is fate, or some unseen element, individuals themselves and the choices they make, or a combination of the two-- that dictates a series of events.

Ex. [Beyonce Knowles: Chart of a DIVA](#)

DQ (79-81) What does Carli want to know and what are her mother's reasons for not telling her?

Journal Prompt - Describe a time you really wanted to know a secret. Did you eventually find out the truth? How did the truth affect you? What was your perception of the person or people who kept the secret from you after the truth was finally revealed.

Very Important Things

DQ At this point in the book, what very important things are Carli and Rex thinking and feeling about one another? What outward clues do they show that reveal their inner feelings?

DQ (92) Why is Rex so excited about this moment? How does love, or the promise of it, change him?

DQ (100) "The pain inside me peeks its head out, eyeing a friend, And now it's like his hurt and my pain are hiding under the bleachers together, holding hands." How can painful experiences bring people together? Do you agree that people who have both experienced the same or a similar loss or negative experiences can form a bond that is closer than those who have both experienced similar joys or positive experiences? Why or why not?

Activity (104-106) Research The Weird Sisters, then identify one modern version of them and compare their characteristics with those in Shakespeare's Macbeth. How do the Weird Sisters connect with Carli's beliefs about fate, destiny, and free will?

Additional Resource: [Retellings and Reimaginings of MACBETH's Weird Sisters](#)

Journal Prompt - What is the most important thing about you that affects your view of yourself, and the way you show up in the world with others? This can be something you love to do and/or share with people, an event that has happened in your life, an identifying characteristic, or a relationship you have that's very important to you.

The Sum Color

**Note to educators, given the fact that death of an attachment figure is considered an [Adverse Childhood Experience](#), please consider reading about [trauma-informed approaches to instruction](#) before discussing it in class. You may choose instead to offer the discussion as a journal-prompt, or give students the opportunity to read and think about loss of an attachment figure as a social occurrence and not as personal experience.*

Additional Resource: [Traumatic Grief | The National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)

DQ How can sharing family secrets or important life events that have shaped us bring two people together? How can keeping that information inside drive them apart?

DQ (130) When Rex observes that, “Even the strong trees, like the oak at the bottom of the driveway with the huge trunk and the mature crown stretching across the street, go through things...Even the strong ones do better when they’re not alone.” What do you suppose he is making a connection to from his own life?

DQ (137) What thoughts does Rex have about the difference between his relationship with his father and Carli with hers? Make some predictions about how this contrast might affect their relationship with one another.

DQ (140-141) What secret does Rex reveal to Carli about his past? How does it affect his perception of himself?

DQ (148-150) Why do you suppose Carli feels conflicted about sharing her secrets with Rex after he shares his with her? How do her thoughts contrast with what she says and does?

Journal Prompt - What is a moment in your life when you had the opportunity to be vulnerable or share a painful or important experience in your life? Did you take it? Why or why not

Bubbles of Hope

EQ What happens to individuals internally and externally when they have hope? What happens when that hope is lost?

DQ (164) What do you suppose is behind Rex’s conflicting feelings about his father?

DQ (170) What happens in this scene that contrasts with what happens in the earlier scene between Rex and his father?

DQ (178-179) Compare this scene with what happens on pages 140-141. Why do you suppose each character reacts to the truth the other reveals in the ways that they do? How do their inner thoughts differ from outward words and actions. You may find it useful to use the character analysis chart to record observations.

Journal Prompt Do you agree that relationships don’t really start to get real until the people involved have had a fight or experienced adversity? Why or why not?

That's All She Wrote / Secret Spots

EQ What types of activities and experiences bring two people together on an emotional, spiritual, or physical level? Which of these experiences have Carli and Rex had? How is their relationship similar to, or different from others around them? Others they have had?

DQ (196) How is Cole's reaction to the divorce different from Carli's? Why do you suppose they approach the situation so differently?

DQ (199) What is ironic about Rex wanting "more words" from Carli? Think back to pages 46 and 47 when he considers often not having the words to express himself. How could each of them benefit from having more compassion for the other person?

DQ (208) What does Rex say that reveals how he really feels about Carli? What does she do that reveals how she really feels about him?

DQ (213-217) What does Rex and Carli's decision not to have sex reveal about their feelings for one another and themselves?

DQ (225-226) "I wasn't lying when I said I'm trying to share everything with you. You saw what happened when we were keeping things to ourselves...No more secrets, I say.No more secrets, she repeats." What is the significance of this moment for Rex and Carli and how does it represent growth for each of their characters?

Activity - Take this [Attachment Styles test](#) and compare results with one other person. Do you agree with the results? Take the test again responding as you think Rex or Carli would. What were the results? What evidence can you find in the novel to support your findings? You may find it helpful to do a Google images search for "Relationship Attachment Styles" to find a diagram you feel best visually explains the concept. In your own words, complete the chart below with definitions or examples.

Avoidant	Fearful Avoidant
Secure	Anxious

Additional Resource: [Which of These Four Attachment Styles Is Yours?](#)

Journal Prompt - It is often said, "Hurt people hurt people," a phrase that explains emotional wounds intentionally or unintentionally inflicted by people with unhealed trauma on those around them. In your experience, have you found this to be true? If so, what are some ways they can heal and stop the cycle?

Journal Prompt - Compare and contrast physical intimacy with emotional intimacy. What do people need to do in order to be prepared for either type of intimacy? What are some of the benefits or consequences of each?

Two and Two / Make It Stop

EQ *Some cultures use very specific family labels and have specific words for relationships like “mother’s half-brother” or “step-sister”. Others use very general labels. How do language labels within families impact feelings of closeness or distance within families?*

DQ (246) What secret does Carli finally learn? How does it affect her? How does it alter the way she sees her father? How does this alter the way she sees herself?

DQ (263) What does this moment reveal about Rex’s insecurities regarding Carli’s feelings for him? Why do you suppose he feels this way?

DQ (266-268) How does Rex project disappointments about his relationship with his father onto his interpretation of events with Carli? How does this affect his behavior?

DQ (274) What does Carli’s mother reveal about the relationship between love and trust? How does this relate to what has happened with Carli and Rex’s relationship?

Journal Prompt - Many modern families come together in non-traditional ways, forming new types of bonds with partners, friends, neighbors, even people they meet by chance. Tell the story of what you consider to be your family, using as much detail as you can to describe your relationships to the people you love and what keeps you bonded together.

Additional Resource - [Our World in Data: Marriages and Divorces](#)

It All Comes Down / Never Would've Imagined

DQ What steps do Rex and Carli take to begin to break down one another’s defenses? What events help them become more reflective about their own reactions to each other? How might events have been different if they each had known what was going on with the other? What events happen to each of them that help them to see themselves more clearly?

DQ (322) How does Rex begin to heal from his past?

DQ (327-329) How are Shannon and her father’s roles reversed?

Journal Prompt - People who experience divorce or loss of an attachment figure during childhood sometimes unconsciously push people away rather than drawing them closer in situations where emotional intimacy or vulnerability is required. This is a form of self-protection but often results in creating feelings of rejection or abandonment they experienced with the loss of an attachment figure. How have you seen that cycle play out for Rex and/or Carli? Do you or anyone you know have experience with this cycle?

Journal Prompt - Using personal experience, or any other source of knowledge that you have, respond to the question, what healing has the possibility of happening when secrets and lies get brought out into the open?

All Up In It! Nothing and Everything

DQ (371) “Regardless of the first-kisses fact, our fate will depend on how we treat each other--how much of the good in ourselves we’re willing and able to give each other--simple as that.” How does this moment represent a role reversal between Rex and Carli?

Journal Prompt - In the end, Carli and Rex learn so much about themselves, their family members, and the role that secrets and lies can play in bringing people together in love, or breaking them apart. At this point in your life, what lessons have you learned about secrets, lies, or love that you would pass on to someone to save them heartache and sorrow?

Post-Reading

1. (61) “Suzanne Simard, this badass forest ecologist, has actually traced messages moving down a dying mother’s tree trunk, through the fungus in the ground, and into her seedlings. Dying trees speak to their children.”

Research Suzanne Simard and the language of trees. Draw or use Google Drawings to create a depiction of messages about life, love, relationships or any of the other themes from the novel that you would pass on to those you love, using the language of trees.

Additional Resource: [NPR Suzanne Simard: How Do Trees Collaborate?](#)

2. Consider the relationships Carli and Rex have with each of their family members. Create a chart that plots the evolution of Rex or Carli’s relationship with one or more family member(s). How do family relationships shape them? How do their relationships change throughout the course of the novel?

3. **Journal Prompt** - Have you ever experienced the breakup of a relationship? Did it happen to you directly or by association with someone else? If you can, look at it objectively--or as though you are a stranger who doesn’t know the people involved. Was it due to a misunderstanding or a series of miscommunications, or was there some other reason? If you could go back in time and do things differently, would you?

4. Rewrite one of the scenes from the novel from the opposing character’s point-of-view. How does changing perspective impact ability to understand where someone might be coming from? How does it enhance our ability to empathize and possibly exercise compassion?

5. Several scenes in the novel are written in alternative forms, such as letters or text conversations. Choose one of these scenes and write a constructed response on how the author’s choice of form impacts function. In other words, *how does the way you tell a story impact the reader’s experience?*

6. Trees and basketball are two powerful extended metaphors for communication in this novel. Find scenes where these or any other symbol or metaphor appears and reappears over the course of the novel’s events and write an essay to explain their importance to support one or more of the novel’s overall themes. Use text evidence to support your assertions.

Standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.6
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.B
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.A

About Liara Tamani

Liara Tamani (www.liaratamani.com) lives in Houston, Texas. She holds an MFA in writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts. She is the author of the acclaimed young adult novels *Calling My Name*, a 2018 PEN America Literary Award Finalist and SCBWI Golden Kite Finalist, and *All the Things We Never Knew*, a 2020 Kirkus Best YA Book of the Year. Before becoming a writer, she attended Harvard Law School and worked as a marketing coordinator for the Houston Rockets & Comets, production assistant for *Girlfriends* (TV show), home accessories designer, floral designer, and yoga and dance teacher. Follow her on Instagram @liaratamani.

Praise For

ALL THE THINGS WE NEVER KNEW

Featured in NPR, *Good Morning America*, *Buzzfeed*,
Essence Magazine, *Teen Vogue*, and *NBC News*.

- ★ "A poignant love story. Tamani's characters are well drawn, her prose is gorgeous, and the imagery she employs is lush. A masterpiece."
– *BOOKLIST*, *starred review*
- ★ "A superb, complex romance full of heart, humor, and unforgettable characters."
– *KIRKUS REVIEWS*, *starred review*
- ★ "Readers will be easily swept away by this tale exploring the hearts and souls of two emotionally vulnerable athletes."
– *PUBLISHERS WEEKLY*, *starred review*
- ♥ "A deep dive into the glory and mess of new relationships...Engaging."
– *School Library Journal*

A Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection

JULIA E. TORRES is a veteran language arts teacher and librarian in Denver Public schools. She has been awarded the 2020 NCTE Colorado Affiliate Teacher of Excellence award, chosen as a 2020 Library Journal Mover and Shaker, and serves educators as a member of the ALAN (Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE) Board of Directors. Her work has been featured in several publications including NCTE's Council Chronicle, NPR, AlJazeera's The Stream, PBS Education, KQED's MindShift, NY Times Learning Network, The Chicago Tribune, ASCD's Education Update, Rethinking Schools, School Library Journal, and many more.

