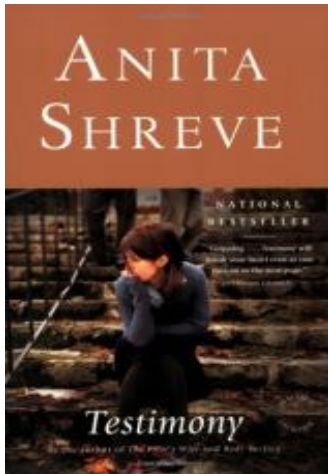


# Testimony

by Anita Shreve

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## About the Book

At a New England boarding school, a sex scandal is about to break. Even more shocking than the sexual acts themselves is the fact that they were caught on videotape. A Pandora's box of revelations, the tape triggers a chorus of voices --- those of the men, women, teenagers and parents involved in the scandal --- that details the ways in which lives can be derailed or destroyed in one foolish moment.

Writing with a pace and intensity surpassing even her own greatest work, Anita Shreve delivers in **Testimony** a gripping emotional drama with the impact of a thriller. No one more compellingly explores the dark impulses that sway the lives of seeming innocents, the needs and fears that drive ordinary men and women into intolerable dilemmas, and the ways in which our best intentions can lead to our worst transgressions.

## Discussion Guide

1. The story in **Testimony** is told from many different perspectives. Why do you think Anita Shreve chose this narrative style for the novel? Can you see any connection between this style and some of the novel's themes?
2. Some characters in **Testimony** --- for example, the students --- narrate from the first person point of view. For other characters, such as Mike and Owen, the author always uses the third person. Rob's mother, Ellen, speaks in the second person. What do these different points of view tell you about the roles of various characters in the story? Did you find yourself empathizing most with any character in particular?
3. Several characters comment that if the sexual incident at Avery had occurred at a local public school, it would have drawn little or no attention. Do you agree with this assessment? Is it fair that this elite institution be held to a different standard?

4. When Mike initially brings J.Dot into his office and accuses him of taking advantage of the girl in the video, J.Dot replies that "She knew better" (123). Do you think that Sienna knew better? Setting aside the letter of the law, how responsible do you think Sienna is for what happened?
5. When Sienna calls her mother on Wednesday morning (129), she cries hysterically. Her roommate, Laura, implies that Sienna may have been acting. Do you think that Sienna is acting or are her emotions genuine? Is it possible for both to be true at the same time?
6. When Silas first reflects on what he did on the videotape, he repeats the phrase "I wanted" (43) many times. When Anna recounts her affair with Mike, she too uses this refrain, "I wanted" (210). What do Silas and Anna each want? Are these purely sexual wants or are they more complicated? Why do you think mother and son use the same language of desire to condemn themselves? How much do you think desire is to blame for what happened?
7. Discuss the evolution of Anna and Owen's marriage over the course of the novel. Are you surprised that they do not separate after all that has happened? Do you believe that by the end of the book Owen has forgiven Anna?
8. To describe her relationship with Silas, Noelle often uses the metaphor of walking through doors together. Did you feel this was an apt metaphor? How does the significance of this image change as the novel progresses?
9. Some of the parents of the boys feel a keen sense of responsibility for their sons' behavior. Ellen in particular says, "And, of course, you are. You are responsible" (189). Do you believe the parents of J.Dot, Silas, and Rob made decisions that in some way led to this event? How culpable should parents of teenagers feel for the behavior of their children?
10. As Silas writes in his journal, all his entries are addressed to Noelle. How does the tenor of the letters change over the course of the novel? Do you believe Noelle is capable of forgiving him? Should she forgive him?
11. Were you surprised when you learned who filmed the incident? All of the students involved seem to have made an unspoken agreement to protect this person's identity. Do you agree with their reasons for doing so?
12. One of the big questions driving **Testimony** is "Why did these students do what they did?" In his letter to Ms. Barnard, Rob writes that "It was an act without a why" (303). What does Rob mean by this? Do you think the other three would agree with his assessment? If not, how might their answers be different?
13. What do you think will happen to the students in the future? What course can you see their lives taking in the months and years following the close of the novel? How will they be affected by the incident and its aftermath?
14. At the end of the novel, Rob suggests that, in an unexpected way, his life may turn out better because of what happened at Avery (304). Do you agree with his logic? Can you see any redemptive effects the scandal may have for other characters?

## Author Bio

Anita Shreve was a high school teacher and a freelance magazine journalist before writing fiction full time. She was the author 19 novels, including *THE STARS ARE FIRE* as well as the international bestseller *THE PILOT'S WIFE*, and *THE WEIGHT OF WATER*, a finalist for the Orange Prize. On March 29, 2018, Shreve passed away from cancer at the age of 71.

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**Publication Date:** May 5, 2009

**Genres:** Fiction

**Paperback:** 305 pages

**Publisher:** Back Bay Books

**ISBN-10:** 0316067342

**ISBN-13:** 9780316067348