

Teacher's notes

Sweet Valley High: Secrets

by Francine Pascal



SUMMARY

Sweet Valley High is a top-selling American series of fiction for teenagers. All the books in the series revolve around the lives of teenage twins, Jessica and Elizabeth Wakefield, and their friends at Sweet Valley High School, in a fictitious town in California in the USA.

Secrets was published in 1983, in the early days of the *Sweet Valley High* series. It takes place at the time of the autumn dance at Sweet Valley High School. Jessica Wakefield is determined to win the dancing competition and become queen of the dance, with the boy she loves, Bruce Patman, as the king of the dance. Jessica usually succeeds, through fair means or foul, to get what she wants. After various devious manipulations, her plans look as if they are going well, but she has not accounted for her sister's sense of fair play. Is it possible that Elizabeth might outmanoeuvre her?

ABOUT FRANCINE PASCAL

Francine Pascal was born Francine Rubin in Manhattan, on May 13th 1938. It was neither her father, an auctioneer, nor her mother who encouraged her to write, but her brother.

Francine met John Pascal while they were students. They were married in 1965 and together brought up Francine's three girls from her former marriage. John and Francine collaborated on several projects, including TV shows, the popular musical 'George M' and a book about one of the 20th century's most famous trials - *The Strange Case of Patty Hearst*.

When Francine's husband died from lung cancer in 1981 at the age of 48, Francine was distraught. 'He was my mentor, a lovely man, a wonderful father and a beautiful writer,' she said. She went to France for nine months and felt strong and healthy again. However, she fell apart when she returned to New York, and turned to writing again to try to recover. It was her writing that rescued her from the abyss when she launched the *Sweet Valley High* series in 1982, which rapidly became a profitable business.

Francine Pascal has also written several other teenage books and several adult novels. She now divides her time between writing, travelling and her homes in New York and the South of France.

BACKGROUND AND THEMES

In 1982, Francine Pascal planned to sell an idea for a daytime drama to a TV network. However, she was persuaded by a friend to turn the idea into a book series instead. This became the *Sweet Valley High* series.

The first book in the series was called *Double Love*. It introduced the world to twins Jessica and Elizabeth Wakefield, who are identical in looks alone. In character, they are totally the opposite to each other. Elizabeth, the elder twin, is sensible, loyal and kind, and helps her sister in times of trouble. Jessica, the younger twin, is wild, frivolous, and manipulative. She is, however, devoted to her sister. 'The trick is to think of Elizabeth and Jessica as the good and the bad sides of one person' says their creator, Pascal.

The *Sweet Valley High* books have become one of the most popular series of all time. Today there are a total of 120 million books in print, which can be read in 15 different languages. The popularity of the series led to the development of other series: *Sweet Valley Kids*, when the twins are in primary school, *Sweet Valley Twins*, and *Sweet Valley University*, when they are in college.

Pascal's three daughters obviously provided her with a certain amount of material for her books, but her own memories of growing up in New York gave her most of the universal themes, as she recalls. 'I was a very optimistic teenager and my conflicts were the stuff of everyday teenage trauma - loyalty, friendship, sacrifice, honor, truth and love - I think the books appeal because teenagers today are still an idealistic group.'

As in all the *Sweet Valley High* books, *Secrets* deals with the isolated world of teenagers. Adults hardly enter this world at all, but exist as shadowy figures in the background. The themes of the book concern

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ELEMENTARY

SWEET VALLEY HIGH: SECRETS



Teacher's notes

fundamental teenage issues, such as love, friendship, rivalries and fun, as the young adults struggle to handle their emotions and passions and find their way in relationships.

There is a deeper theme running throughout *Secrets* - that of good overcoming evil. We see this theme through the fairness and loyalty of one twin (Elizabeth) working to outwit the greed and jealousy of her sister (Jessica).

Although Francine Pascal plans the stories for the *Sweet Valley High* series, six other writers actually write the books. Pascal gives her writers strict guidelines for the themes, characters and settings of the books, and outlines the plots. She used this method on the first book of the series, and has maintained the same guidelines ever since.

The *Sweet Valley High* series has been made into a highly popular TV show, 'Francine Pascal's Sweet Valley High'.

Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the reader, and supplement those exercises. Supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book can be found on the photocopiable Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers but, with the exception of discussion and pair/group work questions, can also be used by students working in a self-access centre.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

Write the titles of the chapters on single pieces of card. Put students into small groups. Give each group a set of cards and ask them to try to put them in the right order for the book. Compare the answers of the groups. Keep these cards so that you can repeat the activity when students have finished the book.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

Chapter 1

Write on cards the names of the people on the 'Who's Who in Sweet Valley High' page, with one name on one card. Put students in pairs, and give each student a card. With the book open at the 'Who's Who' page, students ask each other questions, such as "I am Enid Rollins, who is my boyfriend?" Move the cards around the room so that everyone has a go with each card. Then ask the class questions with their books shut.

Chapters 2-3

Divide the students into small groups. Ask each group to write down who they think told Ronnie about Enid and George writing to each other, why they told him, and what is going to happen. The groups tell the class what they think. Have a class discussion.

Chapters 4-5

Write down in reported speech with present tense verbs a conversation between two of the people in these chapters. Divide students into pairs or small groups. Students change the reported speech into direct speech and have the conversation together. If you do different conversations for each group, groups can swap conversations when they have finished the first one.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

Repeat the 'Before Reading the Book' activity (putting chapter titles in the right order). Do students find the exercise easier now?

Write the titles on the board - The Break Up, The Truth, The Party, The Secret, The Winner. Ask students, in pairs, to think up another title for each chapter.

Glossary

It will be useful for your students to know the following new words. They are practised in the 'Before You Read' sections of exercises at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)

Chapter 1

alone (adj./adv.) not with other people

boyfriend (n) this boy is the very good friend of a girl

competition (n) when people try to win something

good-looking (adj.) with a pretty face

jealous (adj.) feeling angry or unhappy because somebody has something and you want that thing

king (n) this man is the most important man in a country

queen (n) this woman is the most important woman in a country

true (adj.) right

twin (n) this person has a brother or sister of the same age; they were born together

Chapters 2-3

heart (n) this is part of your body; it keeps you alive; you love and hate with it

kiss (v) to put your mouth on somebody's mouth or face

vote (v) to write 'x' on a paper and show which person you want

worried (adj.) not feeling happy because you are thinking about a problem



Student's activities

Sweet Valley High: Secrets



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Students can do these exercises alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only activities are marked.

Activities before reading the book

Read the introduction to your book and answer the questions. All the answers are numbers.

- When did Francine Pascal write the first *Sweet Valley High* book?
- How many *Sweet Valley High* books are sold in the UK every month?
- In how many countries can you buy the books?
- How old are the people who read the *Sweet Valley High* books?
- How many different *Sweet Valley High* books can you buy?
- In how many languages can you buy the books?
- When did *Sweet Valley High* come to Britain?

Activities while reading the book

CHAPTER 1

- Put these names with the sentence that is about them.

Ms Dalton Bruce Patman Winston Egbert
Jessica Elizabeth Enid Cara

- He has blue eyes, dark hair, and drives a Porsche.
 - She has hair the colour of the sun, blue-green eyes, and usually gets what she wants.
 - She is young and very pretty and teaches French.
 - He is nice but not rich or good-looking.
 - She has the same pretty face as her twin, but is quieter.
 - She is unhappy because of a secret.
 - She is Jessica's friend.
- Put these words in the right place in these sentences.
teacher boyfriend sisters friends
girlfriend
 - Jessica and Elizabeth are
 - Enid is Ronnie Edwards'
 - Jessica wants Bruce Patman to be her
 - Cara and Jessica are
 - Ms Dalton is a at Sweet Valley High.
 - Are these sentences right or wrong? Make all the sentences right.
 - Elizabeth wants to be dance queen more than anything in the world.
 - Ken Matthews is Ms Dalton's boyfriend.
 - Enid and Elizabeth are very good friends.
 - Bruce Patman is rich.

- Jessica thinks Winston Egbert is good looking.
- George and Ronnie are friends.
- Enid leaves a letter on the floor of Elizabeth's bedroom.

CHAPTERS 2 - 3

Chapter 2

- This is the story of Chapter 2. Which thing happens first? Which thing happens second? Put the numbers 1 to 9 next to the sentences.
 - Jessica wants a book from Elizabeth's room.
 - Elizabeth and Todd go to the cinema with Enid and Ronnie.
 - Ronnie is jealous. He takes Enid home.
 - Jessica sits on Elizabeth's bed and starts to cry.
 - Jessica asks her mother where Elizabeth is.
 - Ronnie kisses Enid.
 - Elizabeth telephones Enid. Enid is angry with her.
 - Jessica dresses for Lila's party.
 - Jessica reads the letter and smiles.

- Who says these things? Who do they say them to? Is it:

Ronnie Enid Jessica Elizabeth Alice

- says to
'I think you're a little jealous.'
 - says to
'What's wrong with Ronnie?'
 - says to
'I'm sorry we can't go together.'
 - says to
'I'll take you home, then it's over between us.'
 - says to
'Which dress shall I wear tonight?'
 - says to
'Have a good time.'
 - says to
'I thought you were my friend.'
 - says to
'You're better without her.'
- Are Jessica and Elizabeth both kind people? Why/Why not?

Chapter 3

- Answer these questions:
 - Why does Jessica want to go to the dance with Ronnie?
 - Who starts the story about Nora Dalton and Ken Matthews?
 - Why is Bruce not at Lila's party?



Student's activities

- (d) Who does Enid think told Ronnie about her letters from George?
- (e) Why does Jessica think Enid cannot be queen?
- 2 Put the right question with the right answer and say who is speaking.
 - (a) 'Don't you think she's sorry you had a fight?'
 - (b) 'Why don't you go and talk to Ronnie?'
 - (c) 'What did you say to her this afternoon?'
 - (d) 'Why does Ronnie want to talk to you? I didn't think you knew him very well.'
 - (e) 'What's happening? Perhaps I'll talk to Ronnie ...'
 - (i) 'No thanks. I'm waiting for somebody more interesting.'
 - (ii) 'Don't say anything to him!'
 - (iii) 'Nothing much.'
 - (iv) 'I didn't before Saturday but he was at Lila's party and we started talking.'
 - (v) 'I know she isn't sorry.'
- 3 Think of five adjectives about Jessica and five adjectives about Elizabeth. Which girl do you like best?

CHAPTERS 4 - 5

Chapter 4

- 1 Put the words below in the right places in the story of what happens in Chapter 4.

Ms Dalton	dance	letter	Enid
Jessica	write	Mr Collins	coffee
George	Elizabeth	forgets	nearly
her	clean	run away	to
he	before		

Elizabeth visits in his office. He talks to her about her problem with Elizabeth then talks to Winston, because he is friends with Winston knows that George and Enid to each other, but he didn't tell anybody. On the morning of the Elizabeth has a cup of with Todd in town. That afternoon Jessica and Elizabeth are told to their rooms they go to the dance. Elizabeth finds the then she knows that wrote to Ronnie. Enid goes to see to talk about her problem with Ms Dalton tells her not to from her problems. Enid is dressed for the dance, when George comes her house. He tells her he is taking to the dance, and kisses her. Enid about Ronnie.

- 2 Put the words in these sentences in the right places.
 - (a) likes Mr Collins teacher Elizabeth her
 - (b) friends Winston are and George
 - (c) a talks lot Winston
 - (d) secrets doesn't about friends Winston his tell
 - (e) like Todd doesn't Jessica
 - (f) cleaner room is than Elizabeth's Jessica's
 - (g) angry is very Jessica with Elizabeth

- (h) was Ms and white Dalton unhappy looked
- (i) thinking Ms leaving is Dalton Sweet of High Valley
- (j) better remembered George than Enid looks
- 3 Why is Ms Dalton unhappy?

Chapter 5

- 1 Put the two halves of the sentences together.
 - (a) Elizabeth wants to teach Jessica a lesson
 - (b) Jessica is very excited ...
 - (c) All the girls vote for Winston ...
 - (d) Nora Dalton arrives ...
 - (e) Lila started a story about Ms Dalton and Ken ...
 - (f) Enid is happy with George ...
 - (g) Jessica is unhappy
 - (i) ...because she must go to all the school dances with Winston.
 - (ii) ...when the voting starts.
 - (iii) ...after about half an hour.
 - (iv) ...because she is jealous of her.
 - (v) ...because she doesn't try to be someone she is not.
 - (vi) ...because Elizabeth tells them that Jessica likes him.
 - (vii) ...because Jessica told Ronnie about George's letters to Enid.
- 2 The words in *italics* are wrong. Write the sentences again and put the right word in. Try not to look at the book.
 - (a) Jessica wears a long *blue* dress to the dance.
 - (b) Elizabeth says that *Bruce Patman* will make a good king for some lucky girl.
 - (c) Elizabeth and Jessica arrive at the dance with Todd and Ronnie at *seven thirty*.
 - (d) Elizabeth says something *loudly* in Lila's ear.
 - (e) Nora Dalton has a flower *under* one ear.
 - (f) Ken is very *happy* with Lila.
 - (g) *Nobody* is interested in the boy that comes to the dance with Enid.
 - (h) A lot of people watch Enid and George *talk* together.
 - (i) The new dance *king* is Jessica Wakefield.
 - (j) The photographer asks Jessica and Winston to *smile* for a photo.
 - (k) Jessica's heart *fell* when Bruce smiled at her.
- 3 How does Jessica feel at the end of the dance? Do you feel sad for her?

Activities after reading the book

Write down or talk with a friend:

Elizabeth made Jessica unhappy at the dance. Was this a good idea? Do you think Jessica will be a better person because of this?

