

A Study Guide prepared by IYC Tutor Byron Eden

The Test

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As you read this book, The Test, please make a list of all words that are used in the book that you do not know the meaning of. Bring your list to class each week, along with your copy of the book and this study guide, and we will resolve vocabulary words that you find. The central character in this book is Liselle Mason. She and her brother Brian play a significant role in another Bluford Series book, Until We Meet Again. If you are drawn to Liselle and her story, you may want to consider also reading Until We Meet Again.

CHAPTER 1

1. (p.2) Liselle Mason is 20 years old and has just returned to her old high school, Bluford High School. Why did she return?
2. What are Liselle's thoughts when she was asked by the school principal to come in and speak with some of the current students?
3. How would you describe the attitude and behavior of the girls that had been asked to meet with Liselle, specifically Tamara? (p.4-9)
4. How was Liselle dressed for this meeting, and what was the impression of the other girls? (p.6) Is it easy to judge someone by their appearance?
5. What thoughts do you think were going through the heads of the other girls when they learned that the speaker is a former student who got pregnant at age 16?
6. (p.12-13) "I'm not proud of the story I'm about to tell you, Liselle began. There are certain things that happened – things that I'm ashamed of. I made some really bad choices." "In the end, you gotta make your own choices. But maybe you can learn from my mistakes. That's why I'm here". Have you ever learned from the mistakes made by others? Have you learned from your own mistakes? Are there others in your life that have learned from mistakes made by you?

CHAPTER 2

The next eight chapters of this book are a flash back to the time when Liselle was actually a 16 year old student at Bluford High School.

1. This chapter begins with Liselle on the floor of the girl's bathroom at Bluford High School at 4:00 on a Friday afternoon. Why is she in the bathroom at that time, and why on the floor of the bathroom? What is she doing?
2. (p.16) While waiting for the results of her pregnancy test Liselle thought back on all of the early warning signs that she was in fact pregnant, which she had ignored. What were they?
3. Liselle is interrupted while in the girl's bathroom by another student, Kendra. Why does Liselle not trust Kendra?
4. After leaving the school Liselle meets a group of friends in the parking lot of a nearby grocery store. One of those present is her best friend, Monique. Why

does Liselle not tell her best friend that she has just confirmed that she is pregnant?

5. (p.26) “Secretly she envied Monique’s confidence. There was something about Monique that sparkled. She seemed to thrive on the attention she got from boys. Liselle felt dull in comparison. She had a hard time keeping up.” Have you ever quietly compared yourself to someone else, and found yourself lacking by comparison?

CHAPTER 3

1. Describe Liselle’s relationship with her mother (p.31), her father (p.36), and her brother Brian (p.34).
2. (p.32) Kendra’s advice to “tell somebody” is etched into Liselle’s head. “Liselle knew the girl was right, but it seemed that as long as she didn’t tell anyone, she could pretend everything was normal. The positive test result never happened. Maybe it would all just disappear somehow.” Why is it so difficult to share this important information with others? Has there been a time in your life when you were reluctant to share some very important information with others?
3. Liselle’s mother has prepared dinner and asks Liselle and Brian to come to the dinner table to eat. “I’m not hungry” Liselle responded. She hadn’t eaten much since Friday. What effect does proper nutrition have on an unborn child?
4. By Monday Liselle returned to school, having still told no one of her pregnancy. (p.41) What happened at the school cafeteria that day?
5. Mom comes to school when Liselle fainted. (p.45) While in the nurse’s office Liselle tells her mom “I think I am pregnant”. What do you think most mothers are going to think when told by their teenaged daughters that they are pregnant?

CHAPTER 4

1. An hour later Liselle and her mother are at a clinic where it is confirmed that she is pregnant. How far along is she? (p.47)
2. “The pregnancy is into its second trimester, the doctor continued, looking at both of them. Which means Liselle’s options are limited.” What does that mean?
3. Liselle’s mom is angry that she got pregnant. “We’ve talked about sex. We’ve talked about protection. I thought you were smarter than this!” “Well, I guess I’m just stupid then! It just happened, Mom, all right? What do you want me to say?” “Why didn’t you tell me sooner? Mom continued. Four months along, Liselle? Why didn’t you say something?” Liselle lowered her eyes and fiddled with the drawstring on her sweatpants. “I don’t know. I didn’t want you to be mad at me.” What are some of the reasons why people still get pregnant – even though they are knowledgeable about protection? What are the biggest reasons why you or your partner should not wait four months to tell someone, and seek medical care, which Liselle had not done?
4. (p.51) “The time for pretending is over. The sooner you realize that, the sooner we can start figuring out how in the world we’re gonna deal with this situation. We have a lot to work out, and not much time”. “How could you do this, Liselle?

- Don't you realize what this means", asked Mom. "It can't be that bad, Mom, Liselle snapped, trying to sound unafraid. I mean Shayna had a baby. And what about you? Weren't you like, seventeen, when you had Brian?" Liselle is trying to justify her actions by making a comparison to the similar actions taken by others. Have you ever done this, in trying to minimize your responsibility by comparing it to what others have done?
5. "Caring for a baby is a huge responsibility. You gotta put your own needs aside and do what's best for your child. Every day. You don't get to take a day off or skip one night 'cause you're tired. Understand? It's not about what you want, it's about what the child needs. You ready for that?" How do you think that your life will be (is) different from other men, when you father a child?
 6. Mom tells Liselle "Things are gonna change around here. You're gonna have to grow up real fast. We have a lot to figure out". "We ain't gotta figure out nothin', Liselle grumbled, unable to stop herself. Maybe I don't need your help". "Baby girl, Mom said, pointing a stern finger. You need me now more than you ever have." Has being at IYC been a time when you realized that you had to "grow up real fast"? Has there been anyone in your life that you "Needed now more than ever?"
 7. Several pages of this chapter are Liselle's thoughts on when she first met Oscar. Where did they meet for the first time?
 8. What were Liselle's first impressions of Oscar?
 9. After meeting Oscar for the first time, it wasn't long before Oscar invited Liselle up to his room, across the street from the party at his cousin, Jamil's house. (p.61) "She wasn't sure about being alone with a boy she had just met. But there was something genuinely nice about Oscar, she thought". There is an old phrase about "being in the wrong place at the wrong time". Is this one of those situations? Do you think Liselle would have gotten pregnant if she had refused to go with Oscar up to his room?
 10. (p.62) During her first visit to Oscar's room there was no sex. (p.63) Yet Liselle hears Oscar's cousin Jamil tell Oscar "You could do better, though. Liselle, she's all right I guess. But I know other girls at Bluford who are finer than that". Liselle thought "She wanted him to like her. She wanted to keep his attention. And she was afraid that if she didn't impress him soon, he would discover that what Jamil said was right: there were prettier girls at Bluford. Why should he care about her?" Have you ever pursued someone, or has someone pursued you, for fear that you might lose that person?
 11. (p.65) The next day Liselle and Oscar realize that neither one of them has a condom. "For a moment they were silent until Oscar finally sighed and sat up. Just forget it, he said, his voice flat. It was probably a bad idea anyway". (p.66) "All that mattered was keeping Oscars interest". What decision did Liselle make? What other options did Liselle and Oscar have when it was realized that they both wanted to have sex, yet they had no condoms or other forms of birth control? What else could they have done?

CHAPTER 5

1. In this chapter Liselle firmly tells Oscar that she is pregnant. What thoughts are likely to go through the mind of a teenaged boy when a sexual partner tells him that she is pregnant?
2. (p.68) “As she walked home that afternoon, months ago, Liselle was certain that Oscar believed she was special. But the next day, when they passed in the hallway at school, he looked away nervously and didn’t say a word. It was as if he didn’t know who she was”. Why would Oscar look away, and not even acknowledge that he knows someone that he has just been sexually intimate with? Have you ever treated someone this way?
3. (p.69) “She returned to Oscar’s house after school the next day, and again several days later. She was determined to show – to prove to him – that she was worth his attention”. “Three times she went up to his room. Each time he promised he would remember to go to the drug store to get condoms.” And each of those times Liselle had unprotected sex with Oscar, “afraid that if she argued, he would want her to leave”. “But at school, Oscar continued to look past her, keeping his head down as they brushed shoulders in the hallway. Liselle asked herself “Why did you ignore me like that? What did I do wrong? Liselle swallowed hard and hung her head. Why did I keep going back?” Why would a guy continue to have consensual sex with a girl that he won’t even look at while at school? Why would that girl continue to have a sexual relationship with a guy who treats her that way?
4. (p.70) Oscar asks “What are you gonna do?” “I don’t know. I’m four months along. The doctor said I gotta keep it”. (p.71) “I’ll call you tomorrow or something”, Oscar says. Yet he never calls. Why not?
5. Liselle then takes a bus her to father’s apartment. (p.76) This surprise visit does not go very well. Liselle requests to temporarily stay with her father. What are his thoughts on this idea?
6. (p.78) Liselle hears that her father is on the phone, and she gently picks up the receiver on an extension phone. Who was her father talking to, and what was he saying?

CHAPTER 6

1. The next morning Liselle went to her cousin Shayna’s house. Shayna was almost two years older than Liselle, and dropped out of Bluford once her daughter, Ruby, was born. (p.84-85) What are Shayna’s thoughts on learning that Liselle is pregnant? What kind of mother is Shayna?
2. (p.88) Liselle asks Shayna if it would be possible for Liselle to temporarily stay with Shayna and her mother, Aunt Zoe. Shayna realizes that her mother is not likely to approve of Liselle moving in. (p.89) What does Shayna suggest instead?
3. (p.89) “Living with Shayna almost seemed too good to be true – to be with someone who wouldn’t be on her case all the time and who didn’t treat her like a kid. But most of all, Shayna knew what it was like to have a baby. Liselle was sure Shayna could teach her how to take care of her baby. Suddenly, becoming a mom didn’t seem so scary. If Shayna can do it, thought Liselle, so can I”. What

are the advantages and disadvantages of this plan? What are your impressions of Shayna based on what you have read so far?

4. (p.92) “Liselle followed her cousin out into the busy streets and tried to ignore the growing feelings that things with Shayna weren’t right”. It is often said that you have to learn how to trust your gut instincts. What are Liselle’s gut instincts telling her? There is also another saying that if something is too good to be true, it is for a reason, it is not true. Have you ever had any experiences like that, where you found that something that seemed too good to be true was in fact not true?

CHAPTER 7

1. On Wednesday afternoon Liselle returned to her mother’s house to get some clothes and her cell phone charger, knowing that no one else would be home at that hour. (p.93-94) What was it like for Liselle to walk into her bedroom once again? How does that compare to Shayna’s apartment?
2. (p.96) Liselle is awakened by her brother, Brian. Liselle tells her brother that she is going to get an apartment with their cousin, Shayna. (p.97) “Why would you wanna live with Shayna?” “No offense, but she ain’t the most responsible girl in the world. You really wanna live with her? Besides, you’re only sixteen. How you gonna pay for an apartment? And with a baby on top of it?” (p.98) “Can we be real for a second? You’re gonna have a baby. You gotta start thinkin’ about what’s best for the kid.” Brian is trying to talk sense into Liselle, but she doesn’t want to hear it. Have you ever had a relative or loved one try to talk you out of something – and you really should have listened to them?
3. (p.99) When Liselle tells Brian about her visit with their Dad, Brian says “That ain’t a father, if you ask me. A real father spends time with his kids. A real father would help Mom out.” “You can’t make nobody be nothin’ they ain’t. People are who they are, Liselle. If they act like fools, you should believe ‘em, not try to change ‘em or pretend they’re something else.” Have you ever been in a relationship where you pressured someone to be something they were not, or has anyone tried to pressure you into becoming something that you are not?
4. (p.100) On Thursday Aunt Zoe announced that she was going out, leaving the care of Ruby to Shayna and Liselle. (p.102) What did Shayna do that surprised Liselle?
5. (p.105-107) What did Liselle do when she realized that she could not care for baby Ruby?

CHAPTER 8

1. (p.108) Liselle “was furious with her cousin for leaving her alone with Ruby. Shayna lied to me, Liselle thought angrily. She told me that being a mom was easy. But it’s only easy for her because Aunt Zoe does everything.” “All week she had been pretending that it wasn’t a big deal to be pregnant, that someone – Dad, Shayna, Oscar – would make everything all right. But she couldn’t pretend anymore. Just a few hours alone with Ruby had made the truth undeniable.

Having a child was a huge responsibility. And Liselle wasn't sure she could handle it." Aunt Zoe gives Liselle a healthy dose of reality, in realizing how difficult it really is to raise a child, and the sacrifices everyone must make. (p.115) "Mom thinks she's gonna have to raise my baby, Liselle thought. Why wouldn't she, with the way I've been acting? The past four months suddenly flashed before Liselle's eyes. Sleeping with Oscar just to keep his attention. Being too scared to go to the drug store herself. Ignoring the signs her body was giving her. Refusing to eat. Running away. Ditching school. Maybe Mom's glad I'm gone, Liselle thought. Maybe she doesn't want to end up like Aunt Zoe." Has anything happened in your life where you have come to realize how many sacrifices someone has made for you? Have you had to make similar sacrifices for someone else?

CHAPTER 9

1. The next day Liselle moved out of Shayna's apartment. She went back to Bluford High School as classes were being dismissed. She finally tells her best friend Monique that she is pregnant. (p.122) She also talks with Oscar, who tells her "I was gonna call you. I'll call you later, all right?" (p.123) Liselle tells Oscar, "I'm gonna need your help, Oscar. We're gonna need money. And diapers. And a crib. And a thermometer that you stick under their arm because babies get fevers. We're gonna need jobs, too. We gotta figure out how we're gonna take care of this baby. We can't act like kids anymore. We gotta grow up." What other changes can you think of that Liselle and Oscar will have to make?
2. (p.125) "This ain't my fault! Oscar suddenly blurted. You're the one who came over to my house. What did you expect? For me to be all happy? Maybe I don't wanna deal with all this." Is Oscar right, that Liselle's pregnancy is not his fault? Who is responsible for this pregnancy?
3. (p.129) Back at the clinic Liselle is given a clipboard with several sheets of papers, with questions that she does not know how to answer. Who did Liselle call for help? Where was the person she called?

CHAPTER 10

This chapter now returns to the present time, after Liselle is finished giving her presentation to the group of girls at Bluford High School.

1. (p.131) "I wish I could tell you that everything worked out. I wish I could say it was easy taking care of a baby. Or that Mom didn't have to pick up an extra shift at the diner to pay for all the stuff we needed. I wish I could tell you that Dad helped out more, and gave us money to pay for the doctor visits." (p.132) "But I'm not going to lie to you". "Will one of them end up like me Liselle wondered, looking into their eyes. Will one make the same mistakes I did? She knew the answer. It was the reason Ms. Spencer wanted her to speak to them." Are school presentations like this an effective way of getting an important message to the students?

2. (p.133) Liselle then asks each girl “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Several girls give various answers. When asked why she is asking what the girls want to be when they grow up, Liselle points out that none of them said “I want to be a teenaged Mom”. (p.135) She then gives them examples of her typical day as a mother. How do you picture your life as a teenaged father? What changes would have to be made in your life?
3. (p.137) When school principal Ms. Spencer asks Liselle what she wants to be, what do the girls suggest?
4. (p.138-9) After the group is dismissed Liselle rushed to the girls bathroom to change into her work uniform. There she is met by one of the girls, April, who says “I’m in trouble, she whispered. I don’t know what to do”. What kind of trouble do you think that April is in?

What did you think of this book, and why?

ALTERNATIVE ENDING

I usually end my reading study guides by giving an opportunity to do some creative writing. I am going to ask you to pretend that that this book ended with Chapter 9, and you get to write whatever ending you would like. Write an alternative ending that is different from how the author ended this story. Please remember that there is no right or wrong ending, you can write whatever you wish. Be creative. Have fun. When you are finished I will show you an alternative ending that I wrote.

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Liselle had a relatively uneventful pregnancy, after getting off to such a careless start. It was difficult being nine months pregnant during the heat of the summer months. When she finally went into labor the only person who was present was her mother – who beamed with joy after the delivery of her first grandchild.

Not long thereafter reality set in. Liselle had identified Oscar Price as the baby's father on the birth certificate. The doctor's bills and the hospital bills arrived a short time later. Virtually nothing was covered by insurance. Soon Liselle was being pestered by bill collectors, demanding to know what arrangements were being made to pay her bills. One collection agency notified Liselle that in an attempt to collect the money owed them they were going to go after Oscar Price, the child's father, as well. When Oscar was contacted by the collection agency he immediately suggested that he was probably not the father of Kelena, Liselle's daughter. A paternity test was ordered, and it soon became apparent that Oscar was in fact the father of Kelena. This new approach to collect debt from the unmarried father of the child, resulted in a fair amount of publicity, usually carried as stories about **Dead Beat Dads**.

One person to read about the story was the new District Attorney. After several questions had been asked and answered, it was learned that Oscar had never paid a penny for the care of the child he fathered – not a single Doctor visit, not a diaper, not a single piece of clothing, not even anything for food – absolutely nothing! The District Attorney soon filed the paper work so that half of all of Oscar's assets were taken from him in an attempt to pay the bills that he was equally responsible for. Despite Oscars plans to go to college, to buy a new car, to get an apartment of his own, he now found that he could no longer afford it, when half of everything that he earned, half of everything that he owned, was being held to pay these bills.

Several newspapers, magazines, television and radio stations carried news accounts of this new approach to collect money from dead beat dads. Soon the story was picked up on the internet as well. One day Liselle's father received an envelope in the mail, with no return address on it. The article reported that Liselle's bills were now being paid in part by Oscar, but the article ended by asking the question "Why is it that for her entire life, Liselle's own father has avoided all financial responsibility for the two children that he fathered? He too is another **Dead Beat Dad!**"

Three months later Liselle received a substantial cashier's check in the mail. The origin was not identified, but the handwriting on the envelope sure looked like her father's. A smile crept across Liselle's face as she thought "Sometimes a little good can come out of a bad situation. Maybe there is hope for the future after all".