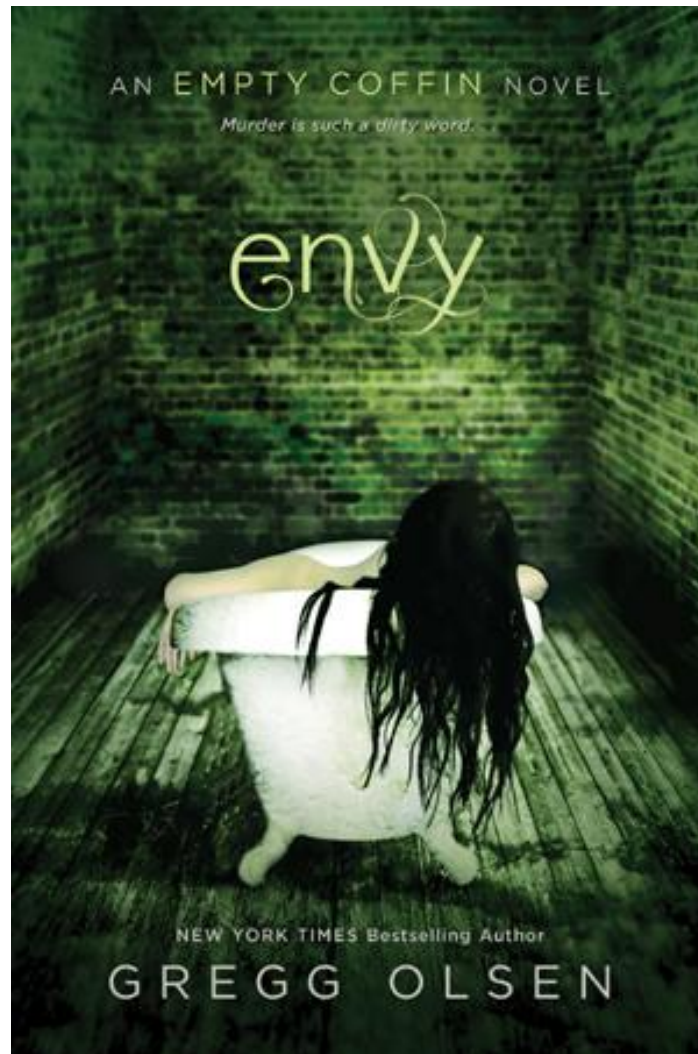


Reading Group Discussion Guide



**“Sometimes good needed a
hand in dealing with evil.”**

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STERLING CHILDREN'S BOOKS

An Introduction to *Envy*, by Gregg Olsen

Even without their psychic abilities, twin sisters Hayley and Taylor Ryan know from the screams and the ambulance that something horrible has happened a few houses away. The commotion brings out half of Port Gamble to watch the shrouded body of their neighbor and classmate, Katelyn Berkley, being wheeled out of her home. But what the twins don't know is how she died—yet.



While Katelyn's on ice at the morgue, Taylor sees a tugboat making its way through Port Gamble Bay. It's a pretty normal sight except for the word "look" that's spelled out in the foam of the boat's wake. Soon, she and Hayley will receive several other signs pointing them toward the truth behind Katelyn's untimely death.

The fifteen-year-old twins can't remember a time when they weren't picking up feelings and messages connected to the lives—and deaths—of other people. But it's also a secret they keep from everyone, including their spiky-tempered best friend, Beth Lee, Hayley's boyfriend, Colton James, and their parents, Valerie and Kevin—a psychiatric nurse and true crime writer.

At Kingston High, it's old news that Katelyn started cutting herself after she didn't make the cheerleading squad. But was she depressed enough to kill herself? Taylor and Hayley know they need concrete evidence to prove anything.

The sisters begin their investigation with Starla, a super-hot cheerleader who recently kicked Katelyn—her former BFF—to the curb. The only thing they find out is that Starla is as mean as she is pretty. When the twins gain access to the dead teen's bedroom, however, Hayley senses a deep sadness surrounding the computer: Katelyn had been chatting with an anonymous admirer.

Unfortunately, Katelyn's death also draws unwanted attention to the Ryan family. Something links Katelyn to the twins besides their Daisy Scouts' badges, and a nosy reporter named Moira Windsor is willing to do whatever it takes to get the story. As the girls begin to piece together the grim portrait of deceit and cyber-bullying that brought about Katelyn's untimely end, Moira is watching their every move.

Set in historic Port Gamble, Washington, *Envy* marks the debut of bestselling author Gregg Olsen's Empty Coffin series. Amid the quaint town's rigorously maintained historic homes and beneath its dreary skies, Taylor and Hayley Ryan are about to come in contact with the worst evils of the modern world—and to discover the extent of their extraordinary powers.

Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. Why do you think Gregg Olsen titled this book *Envy*? Discuss three different instances in which envy is the motivating factor behind a character's actions.
2. After she didn't make the cheerleading team, Katelyn started cutting herself. A lot of kids at her school knew but didn't say anything to an adult. Do you think telling an adult would be a help or a betrayal?
3. "Though they were no longer close, the twins had grown up with Katelyn. As it often seems to be, middle school became the great divider" (p. 7). Did you drift apart from a previously close friend during middle school? Why do you think that happens to so many friends?
4. After Katelyn's death, Sandra asks Colton to break into her laptop, and he reluctantly agrees. Are the dead entitled to their privacy, or—since the laptop's data helps solve the mystery of her murder—are Sandra and Colton doing the right thing?
5. Were you surprised to learn that Sandra's drinking stemmed from guilt about the fact that she and Katelyn survived the crash that killed several others? Have you ever felt guilty about being lucky? How did you deal with it?
6. How much do you think Valerie Ryan knows about her daughters' abilities? Why does she keep what happened on the video a secret from her husband?
7. If you could ask any of the characters in *Envy* one question, who and what would it be?

SPOILER WARNING: DON'T READ FURTHER UNLESS YOU WANT TO KNOW WHODUNNIT!!!

8. How did you feel when you discovered that Teagan was responsible for Katelyn's death? Mindee's cyber-bullying aside, was her poor parenting to blame, or could any kid have wound up in Teagan's shoes?
9. Because "Mindee Larsen had worried about teens being victims of online predators" (p. 134), it's ironic that she takes advantage of Katelyn. Do you think probation is an appropriate punishment?
10. Talk about a cliffhanger of an ending. Moira's dead, and "*it had to be done*" (p. 282). What do you think Shania knows that the twins do not?

An Interview with Gregg Olsen:

1. **Is it true that Port Gamble was originally called Memalucet, or “Empty Coffin”? Why did you choose to set a crime series in a small town rather than a big city?**

No, it wasn't called Memalucet, but here in the Pacific Northwest there are a lot of towns that have Native American names and I just thought it would be interesting to create a legend around something that happened (or rather, might have happened!) a long time ago. I did some research on Chinook jargon, but the name—like the legend—is totally made up.

2. **How do your twin daughters feel about being the inspiration for Taylor and Hayley? How much input did they have in *Envy*?**

My girls have rolled their eyes at their dad so much over the years that I'm surprised they haven't fallen to the floor. Both girls helped me with the finer points, particularly about the Starla character (everyone knows someone like that, right?). Although I've written more than 13 books, I'm pretty sure that *Envy* is only one that both of my girls have read. Worried, maybe? ☺

3. **“Every year at Christmas time, their mailbox was filled with cards from baby killers, stranglers, and arsonists. Have a Merry Christmas! Don't do anything I wouldn't do!” (p. 11) Do you—like Kevin Ryan—really get Christmas cards from criminals you've interviewed?**

Oh, yes! Prison is very lonely (as it should be, right?). Inmates have got nothing but time on their hands and few people to mail cards to, I guess. So, yes, over the years, I've received quite a few.

4. **When Taylor and Hayley are trying to figure out what Jake Damon did to get fired from his old job, Hayley runs a Google search. You do a lot of research for each book, and the Internet has probably made that part of your job a lot easier. But does it also present challenges?**

The challenge is in sifting out the stuff that's flat out wrong so that you can find what you really need. We all know this, but it bears repeating: Just because it is on the internet doesn't mean it is true.

5. **The idea that Taylor's psychic powers are heightened by water is pretty cool. Did you make that up, or is it something you uncovered in your research?**

I'm not really sure where that come from, but I think all of us have been underwater and experienced the sensory deprivation that comes with that (no smell, little hearing). If you could hold your breath a long time and not worry about it, then just maybe you would be in another world where you could really concentrate.

6. **Many parents in young adult novels are often portrayed two-dimensionally, so one of the interesting things about *Envy* is the way that you show what lies behind**

- 7. their outward weirdness—like Sandra’s drinking or Shania’s unwillingness to leave the house. Did you do this intentionally?**

Age is a number. Even though older people have been through a lot more experiences, their hearts, personalities, and hopes are the same as a younger person. On the flip side, younger people often view the world without the kind of filters that their parents have. I think what happened to Shania and Sandra provides crucial insight into their behavior. Think of it this way: Something might have happened to the crabby lady you can't stand. Maybe cut her a little slack?

- 7. You’ve said in other interviews that you read a lot of crime books when you were a kid and that influenced your decision to become a crime writer. Did you ever consider another profession when you were growing up?**

I always wanted to be a veterinarian or zoologist.

- 8. Your website biography says that your books show the “lives of people caught in extraordinary circumstances.” Does that apply to the criminals as well as the victims? Are crimes often committed a result of “extraordinary circumstances”?**

While my true crime books are written because of the action of a criminal, the people who really have my heart and interest me the most are the victims and how they deal. They truly are caught up in something extraordinary. In my book *Bitter Almonds*, Hayley Snow (note the spelling of Hayley....guess that's where I got that name!) was a 15-year-old girl whose mother was poisoned by cyanide-laced pills. Hayley was like a lot of teenagers coping with loss and wondering if her stepfather had killed her mom (he didn't!). She's the kind of ordinary person, who by the telling of her story, becomes extraordinary.

- 9. What’s easier to write: true crime or crime fiction? What advice would you give to an aspiring writer?**

Both genres present challenges. I love meeting new people and telling their stories, but it is a huge responsibility to get it right. With fiction, I get to run the show completely and that's kind of fun. My best advice for aspiring writers is so simple. Write every day. Something. Even a paragraph.

- 10. At the end of *Envy*, your publisher included a really scary teaser chapter from the next *Empty Coffin* book. Could you share any hints about what true crime you’re exploring in that one?**

The book is called *Betrayal* and here's the hint: Mothers and daughters.