Lovereading Reader reviews of
Asking For It by Louise O’Neill

Below are the complete reviews, written by Lovereading members.

Helen Clare
A very well written account of a young woman dealing with the effects of the aftermath of what appeared to be teenage high jinx and the issue of consent. It is compelling and insightful and handles well the negative aspect of social media.

Highly recommended for young adults and adults alike.

Karen
A frightening and realistic story of both teen and adult behaviour which raises the question of consent and the consequences of combining drugs, alcohol and social media.

This book should probably be on the school reading list for every teenage girl as a warning that combining alcohol, drugs and social media does not end well for anyone.

The main character, 18 year old Emma O’Donovan is not an easy person to like. Everybody tells her that she is so beautiful she should be a model. She is also self-obsessed and is jealous of anyone else having the attention that she feels should be hers.

After events at a party get out of control, Emma finds her world is quite different and the second part of the story focuses on Emma’s downfall and the breakdown of relationships – of both friends and family. Everybody has an opinion of her behaviour and she is the subject of endless discussion–on the radio, TV and in the small town where she lives. The ‘Ballinatoom Girl’ is how
she becomes known. Because of the way she behaved and dressed, people say she was ‘asking for it’.

This is an extremely powerful and thought provoking story and the writing is at times brutal. It raises issues of taking responsibility for yourself and the question of consent. We see the story from Emma’s point of view but as she doesn’t remember, it’s the pictures and comments on social media that paint a picture.

The whole story is frighteningly realistic and will no doubt horrify those parents who believe that their child is incapable of such behaviour. This is marketed as a Teen and Young Adult book, however I would recommend it for adults too. There is much to discuss here and it would be a great choice for a book group.

www.myreading-corner.blogspot.co.uk

Rachel Bridgeman

Hard to sum up such a huge book so briefly. This is a brave, unflinching examination of consent, social media and social attitudes to sexual politics. Not for the faint hearted. Superb.

Wow. This was read in one long sitting, my husband noted that it has been a long, long time since he's seen me so engrossed in a book as I was. Definitely one for older teens, due to subject and language, but I think it should be necessary reading in schools throughout the UK for it's unflinching examination of rape culture. The first person narrative drives the story home, the attitude of the main character, Emma, has you questioning her motives and the way she treated a close friend who had experienced a similar assault (in that it was rape, but not what happened to Emma) has you starting to think and question what really happened. Before you know it you are in the same trap as most people, asking 'What was she wearing? Why did she put herself in that situation?' and then you realise you fell into the trap of victim blaming. It is not spare with details whilst not being graphic, Louise O'Neill chooses every word with precision. The fall out of this attack in a tiny Irish town spreads world wide and challenges widely held notions, as the title says was she 'Asking for it'? Brutal, uncompromising and with a massively honest ending, I passed this straight to my 18 year old who gave it straight to her friend urging her to pass it on as far as possible. Not an easy read, but a necessary one.

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Genevieve McAllister

A morality tale for the 21st century, ‘Asking for It’ deals with the repercussions of Emma O’Donovan’s night out.

Here’s a novel dealing head on with the Facebook society of today. Louise O’Neill writes unflinchingly about the repercussions of Emma O’Donovan’s night out. She’s not a particularly sympathetic character but that’s kind of the point: does anyone deserve what Emma goes through? Was she, in fact, ‘Asking for It’?

The novel sharply reminds us about the dual standards at play for men and women, even today, even within the home. Emma is praised for being beautiful and popular, but she’s not supposed to wear a slutty dress to a party whilst her brother has semi-naked FHM babes up on his wall. How far have Emma’s parents conditioned her to behave the way she does – her mother makes snide comments to her ‘friends’ and neighbours and Emma does the same.

Once the pictures have surfaced on Facebook of what actually happened at the party on Saturday night, a pack mentality surfaces in the Donovan’s small town. The community’s behaviour is completely reprehensible and as the town closes ranks against Emma – the victim - it’s tacitly condoned by those even in responsible positions. After all, the boys involved are local sporting heros and don’t need this hiccup preventing them from scholarships and success.

*A morality tale for the 21st century, I felt sickened and saddened reading this. It should be compulsory reading for teenage girls and boys everywhere. It could so easily happen. It probably already has.*

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Beth Kemp

‘Asking For It’ is hard to label as enjoyable, because in many ways it’s excruciating, but it certainly had me hooked. It raises many contemporary issues and would make a great book club read.

‘Asking For It’ is a truly compelling read which accurately and unflinchingly explores rape culture and various aspects of contemporary teen lives. It’s hard to label as enjoyable, because in many ways it’s excruciating, but it certainly had me hooked, and will appeal to adult and teen readers alike.

The main character and narrator is not a likable character, and personally I feel that this a large part of the point. While I wouldn’t say I liked her, she
gained my sympathy and I think it’s important to raise the issue that being a ‘nice girl’ is not a required part of being a victim. The narrative style is fantastically effective, inserting stream-of-consciousness type commentary into a description of events, so that we really feel the effects of Emma’s thought processes.

The book raises many issues and would make a great book club read. I’m a secondary English teacher and would love the opportunity to discuss it with teenage students, as I really feel that following the story pulls readers through so many emotions and opinions. This is without doubt a strongly feminist book, but with no hint of didactic writing. The story speaks for itself – eloquently – and O’Neill does not shy away from the grey areas and the uncertainties.

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Katy Noyes

A Mean Girl's story... How would you feel if the popular but not-very-nice girl had something pretty horrific happen to her?

O’Neill’s debut was one of the most stunningly original and powerful Young Adult books I’ve read. The themes of women, power and powerlessness are carried on in her second book, which is just as thought-provoking.

Popular Emma O'Donovan is perhaps not the nicest of people - cruel to her ‘friends’, a tease with boys, worshipped at home, she’s top of the pile. Until one party...

Unable to remember anything the next morning, social media tells the story all too clearly. Or does it?

The novel tells the tale of Emma's plummet from grace, we see the reactions around her as family, school, the media take sides. What did she do? Was it her fault? And what SHOULD she do?

Do we want to gloat that the mean b!t@h got taken down a peg? Is it that simple? Emma's perspective shows us it really isn’t.

Emma is well-drawn. You have little sympathy for her at the start, though the way males around her treat girls, and how she deals with this began to soften my feelings. Post-party, there's a shift in loyalties, and Emma represents more than just one accuser, she is all teenage girls/women who have to fight against their community feelings, the media, who see what they want to see.

O’Neill seems determined to make a point about young women. I would suggest
that this is a book (alongside its predecessor) that is used in GCSE (or A-Level) classes to stimulate discussion - I want boys to think about how they treat girls, and girls to consider how they expect to be treated and why.

To say this 'makes a good point' is an understatement. It's powerful, explicit on more than one occasion (parental advisory: not for primary-aged readers) and very, very important.

Julie Evans

A story which brings a different perspective to the age of the Smartphone, highlighting the potential damage it can cause to the individual and subsequent consequences to their families. A dangerous invention in the wrong hands.

Initially I found this book slow to start, lots going on, jumping slightly from one scenario to the next leaving the reader unsure as to whether they are reading in the past, present or future.

However, after the initial slow start the storyline became a real page turner. Emmie, the main character seems to have been brought up in quite a materialistic world without much guidance from her parents who seem to concentrate more on their status within the community.

The consequences of rape are well highlighted with uncertainty as to whether the ordeal being captured on a Smartphone can assist or hinder a case such as this.

I found the ending to this book happened way too sudden leaving me looking for another chapter to complete the story.

Gill Dally-FItzsimons

Uncomfortable...Compelling...Heartbreaking.

This book should definitely be read by parents and teenagers alike. It tells the story of Emma, one Saturday night and the after-effects of the events of that evening.

It is a truly uncomfortable read, but it makes you think the unthinkable. We live in the age of social media, the age of the "selfie" and how every minute detail of our lives are uploaded for the world to see... but what about those details that we can't remember, "the camera never lies" and what about when we have no control over the images that are uploaded.
Emma’s story is heart-breaking and probably similar events happen most Saturday nights.

I couldn't put this book down, it really makes you think, the reactions, emotions and feeling of Emma and her family are so raw and convincing. The author portrayal of Emma’s mother, father and brother are so believable and woeful, and Emma herself goes from a typical self-obsessed teenager to a tragic shadow of herself.

This is a brilliant story, but disappointingly, it wasn’t the ending I was hoping for.

Sophia Ufton

Wow, this book was just amazing. Really gripped to the book, didn't want it to end...

Emma O'Donovan is eighteen years old and she wakes up on her front porch, not knowing how she got there. When she goes to school all her friends seem to know what’s happened to her but she doesn’t. Even photographs of her in explicit detail doesn’t help. Sometimes people don’t want to believe what is right in front of them.