13 reasons to use *Thirteen Reasons Why* in your high school classroom:

1. It’s one of those rare books that appeal to both males and females (It uses alternating voices of Hannah, the dead girl, and Clay, the boy who might have prevented her suicide).

2. It’s an excellent example of well-structured literature (Voices are unique, plot moves at a perfect pace, rising action, climax and resolution are wonderfully executed).

3. It offers oodles of opportunities for high-order discussion (See 13 discussion starters below).

4. It features timely topics for teens. (bullying, date rape, suicide)

5. It has a unique multiple-person narrative mode (tape voice Hannah = epistolary narrative mode / Clay’s interior monologue = stream of consciousness mode).

6. It offers opportunities to teach several literary devices (foreshadowing, point-of-view, interior monologue, tragic flaw, foil, sarcasm).

7. There are 13 unique antagonists to dissect (there are actually 12 - really more like 15 if you count 3 extraneous characters - see story extenders below).

8. It’s entertaining (Though it covers a very dark topic, it’s tempered with enough humor and suspense to keep it from falling into a depressing read).

9. It’s won several literary awards (Best Books for Young Adults - Quick Picks for Reluctant YA Readers - Selected Audiobooks for Young Adults ( all YALSA), Borders Original Voices finalist, Barnes & Noble - Top 10 Best for Teens, Chicago Public Library Best Books, Association of Booksellers for Children - Best Books, Heartland Award, California Book Award Silver Medal, Florida Teens Read Award, Kentucky Bluegrass Award, IRA Young Adults' Choice and for 16 state award lists).

10. I’ve provided you with enough links and discussion ideas to last a month (look below this post).

11. Author Jay Asher will send your class a cassette tape answering their questions about the book (see the resources links below).

12. Teachers might stop to consider if they are choosing their words wisely enough (like poor Mr. Porter didn’t).

13. Students might stop to consider how their seemingly inconsequential actions affect another (“everything affects everything”).
1. Is there one specific event that would have changed Hannah’s mind?

2. Do even our smallest actions have a “butterfly effect?” (look that up if need be: here’s a refresher)

3. Did you like the alternating narrator device? How did it hurt or enhance the story?

4. Why is Mr. Porter “lucky #13”? Was his advice so bad as to warrant his position Hannah says, “can, take the tapes straight to Hell“ (p. 9) or is it something else? Why did Hannah record their conversation? Did she give him sufficient time to answer? Why do you think she kept interrupting him?

5. Rumors. Gossip. They sell. Discuss the TMZ, Perez Hilton, Enquirer, and People magazine mindset. Why do we gossip? How does it feel to be talked about? How would it feel if the rumor being spread was untrue?

6. Was Hannah powerless? Why or Why not? How could she have been more in control of her own life when everyone around her seemed to be pushing her down?

7. Was Hannah overly sensitive? Could this have been a result of depression?

8. Why is Clay on the tape? Do you think he deserves to be there? Do you think he thinks he deserves to be there?

9. There are several symbolic elements: The man at Rosie’s letting Clay leave without paying, the stop sign, the Lost-N-Found Gazette, Hannah’s poem,. What roles do they play in the story?

10. Hannah’s parents were absent from the story. How do you think they feel? Are they responsible? At what age are we responsible for our own actions?

11. Did you like the ending? How is Skye a symbolic element? What will become of Clay & Skye?


13. Should Hannah have made the tapes? Why do you think she did?

--------- 13 Story Extending Activities ---------

1. Have students make their own videos similar to the trailer video link above, discussing suicide warning signs, the dangers of bullying or gossip, etc…. Brainstorm personal ideas.

2. Have the students write questions for author Jay Asher. His website says that he will make a unique author-less event - "Here's how:
- Collect questions for author Jay Asher from the members of your store's reading group. Jay suggests members submit questions anonymously in a paper bag, like Hannah and her classmates do in Thirteen Reasons Why.
- Email us at least one month before the date of your meeting with your questions for Jay Asher.
- Jay will personally answer the questions on a cassette tape, which we will send to you in time for your event.
- Play the cassette tape at your meeting and let the discussion flow. Don't have a cassette tape player? We're confident that if Clay could find a tape player in Thirteen Reasons Why, so can you!
- To make your event more special, invite a school counselor, crisis hotline worker or teen psychologist to the meeting
to help answer some of the tough questions that might come up. "

3. Make a list of 13 reasons Hannah had to live.

4. Make a list of 13 things Clay could have done to save her.

5. List the character traits for Hannah’s antagonists (reasons from WikiAnswers Here)

6. Make a Venn diagram of Hannah and Clay’s characters. Include physical appearance, life facts and character traits. Examine how they’re alike / different

7. Show students various optical illusions or odd, random pictures. Have them anonymously write what they saw on a piece of paper and drop it into a hat. Read the answers aloud. Discuss differing perceptions.

8. Make personal paper lunch bags for anonymous encouragement notes like the ones Hannah made in peer communications class (Teachers: make sure everyone gets at least a couple notes per week by keeping a checklist before class begins – if none are there, write one. This is a tricky activity, I know, and would depend on the type of class)

9. Bring in several gossip magazines (People, TMZ printouts, Enquirer type). Have the students site examples of gossip based upon conjecture vs. fact. Discuss why these magazines lack journalistic integrity.

10. Play a good old-fashioned game of telephone. Begin by saying something innocuous into one student’s ear. (EX: "The class will be reading the play The Crucible tomorrow. I know we’ll all enjoy it so much that we’ll end it by eating ice cream outside on Thursday") In other words, it has to be long enough to get jumbled. The last person says the rumor aloud and the teacher tells what was actually said.

11. Read the children’s picture book, If You Give a Mouse a Cookie. Have students write their own “everything affects everything” story. It can be for children or an adult version.

12. Brainstorm a list of the unique contextual aspects of the book (Hannah’s voice is italicized, there are play – pause-stop symbols delineating sections, chapters are labeled with tape number and side) and discuss how these help or hinder a reader.

13. Research the suicide links (above). In small groups, have students make posters listing the warning signs. Ask the principal for permission to hang them in the halls during National Suicide Prevention Week.

----------- 13 Supporting Resource Links -----------

1. Author Blog

2. Author MySpace Page

3. The Thirteen Reasons Why Website

4. Penguin Publishing’s Teacher Guide


7. Author Interview at Cynsations

8. Author Interview with the Hartford Books Examiner
9. The First Book interviews first time authors: Mr. Asher's Interview

10. MP3 audio from Jay Asher on how he developed the story

11. Jay Asher on Youtube with readergirlz

12. Well-done reader/fan made book trailer:


Adapted from 2009 Cheryl Vanatti for www.ReadingRumpus.com

--------- 13 facts about author Jay Asher ---------

1. Thirteen Reasons Why is his first novel.
2. Mr. Asher had 11 manuscripts rejected before he sold Thirteen Reasons Why.
3. His favorite line from the book is “everything affects everything.”
4. He lives in California.
5. He plays guitar.
6. He likes to camp.
7. He is married.
8. He has worked in libraries and bookstores and believes this helped make him a better writer.
9. His first writing award earned him free fruit smoothies every day for a year.
10. In college, he took a children’s literature course and “found his calling.”
11. He began writing Thirteen Reasons Why the winter of 2002/2003 and sent it to agents in 2006.
12. He is working on his second novel.
13. He came up with the unique idea of a voice on a cassette tape after taking an audiotour through a King Tut presentation that used recorded narration. He added the teen suicide subject matter because a close family member had attempted (and thankfully lived through) suicide.

--------- 13 Other Books About Teen Struggles ---------

1. Looking For Alaska
2. The Perks of Being a Wallflower
3. Drowning Anna
4. Cut
5. Impulse
6. After the Moment
7. After the Death of Anna Gonzales
8. Story of a Girl
9. Damage
10. Wintergirls
11. Speak
12. Twisted (ok, ok... so I have a thing for Laurie Halse Anderson)
13. Don’t forget these classics of teen angst: The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, Go Ask Alice, The Bell Jar, Anna Karenina, Romeo & Juliet, and (of course) The Catcher in the Rye