



# FAKE

by  
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Ele Fountain is an author who writes great adventure stories based on important real-life themes. While *FAKE* is set in an imagined future, there is much in the book that readers will recognise from life today. What Ele has done is imagine a situation that *could* happen in society rather than *will* happen. Speculative fiction is very good at offering readers an opportunity to reflect on things in present-day life which may need changing or re-thinking. In this reader's guide we will look at the themes in *FAKE*, and what they make us think or feel.

In *FAKE* failing antibiotics have shifted society online. As big tech companies begin to dominate life, the boundaries between real and virtual have blurred. At 14, Jess is attending school for the first time. Meeting other children and making real friends is something she's dreamed of for years. But Jess misses her family, especially her sister Chloe, who is in poor health.

When mysterious trouble starts at home, Jess turns to the digital world to fix things. She is a brilliant coder and programmer. But Jess takes her skills into forbidden territory and while trying to help her family, discovers explosive truths. These truths reveal just how manipulated reality has become.

With her family's lives in the balance, Jess must defy everything she's been told to help them—before it's too late.



# Theme – FAMILY & HOME

## QUESTIONS:

Read the first two chapters of FAKE again and see if you think Jess is nervous, excited, scared, anxious or happy. Perhaps she is a mix of all these emotions?

What do you think the titles of the chapters tell us about what Jess and her family are feeling? Chapter one is called END and chapter two SHOCK while chapter three, in which Jess arrives at her new school, is called BEGINNING. Do the titles give any clues about the emotions Jess is experiencing on leaving her family for the first time?

What do you think about the advice that Jess's mother gives her when she drops her off at school, and of Jess's reply?:

*'Be bold. Question everything. Don't forget to brush your teeth.'*

*'I won't have any trouble with the middle one,' I say.*

*'You won't have any trouble at all,' says Mum.*

What do you think this shows about their relationship?

## ACTIVITY:

Can you find examples of conversations and actions in the text, that show that Jess's parents trust and encourage their children to be themselves?



# Theme – EQUALITY



When Jess gets to school she realises very quickly that she and her fellow pupils all come from very different backgrounds.

## QUESTION: >>>>

How do we know that Jess's family is not wealthy?

What is it about the things that Jess takes to school that suggests the family are very careful about how they spend money?

How does their lack of money affect the way they look after Chloe when she is unwell?

## ACTIVITY: >>>>

In small groups, discuss whether you think a family more rich and powerful than Jess's family could be as easily deleted.



# Theme – FREEDOM AND CONTROLS

The dual themes of freedom and social control are very important in FAKE. Social control is described as ‘a certain set of rules and standards in society that aim to keep order and stop unrest or rebellion.’

## QUESTIONS: >>>>

When Jess gets to school, she starts to doubt some of the things she has been led to believe. What happens that makes Jess question the ideas she has lived with as truth—ideas such as not starting school until you are 14?

Do you think by the end of the book Jess realises just how much social control is exercised over her life?

Look at the dedication in the book. How do you think this relates to the story that the author is telling in FAKE?

*You cannot buy the revolution.  
You cannot make the revolution.  
You can only be the revolution.  
It is in your spirit, or it is nowhere.*  
**Ursula K. le Guin – *The Dispossessed***

## ACTIVITY: >>>>

Research a famous rebellion or revolution that has happened in real life. What cause did the rebels or revolutionaries stand for?  
Can rebellions or revolutions be peaceful?



# Theme – VIRTUAL VERSUS REAL WORLD

## Extract

*Think about it, there's a lot of money to be made from keeping people in one place, with only their screens. Think of all the shopping for a start. Why change things if most people are happy? Give them more incentives like new hologram sets, or VR kits instead. Mum says that money makes the world go round. Not truth. The ones making all the money are smart. They're very generous to the people who made the laws, so they won't rush to change them. She says people are more likely to believe lots of half-truths, if that fits what they want to believe, than the actual truth itself.*

## ACTIVITY:

Form small groups to discuss the pros and cons of a virtual world. Think of five things that are positive and five that are negative and then discuss your lists.

Thinking about the theme of equality in the book, do you think that everyone would agree with the positive and negative aspects of virtual life you've chosen? Or might differing circumstances make a difference (for example, access to equipment, or the amount of free time different people have)?



# Theme – FRIENDSHIP



When Jess gets to school, she meets a lot of new people. Her mother has warned her that some students will never have met another child ‘for real’ before.

## 《《《《 QUESTIONS: 》》》》

How do you think making friends ‘virtually’ might differ from making friends ‘in person’?

When Jess is talking to Ana just after they have arrived at the school on page 46, we find out that Jess does not take health supplements while Ana takes them everyday. What impact does this information have on the girls’ perceptions of one another?

Read page 54 and 55 again and think about how Jess’s actions impact others around her and their opinions of her.

How important are Jess’s friendships in helping her get to the truth? Read chapter Gone (page 153). Does the important exchange in this chapter rely on trust and friendship? Are all the characters involved acting with the same motivation?

## 《《《《 ACTIVITY: 》》》》

In small groups, talk about things that are important for you to share with your friends—things like your favourite sports and musicians, and things related to your families.

Are there things that would make it hard for you to be friends with someone? How do you think you could overcome those issues?



# Theme – CODE WRITING

## QUESTIONS: >>>>

What is a cypher and how does it work?

## ACTIVITY: >>>>

Using the cypher in FAKE can you work out the titles of these books that Jess loves to read?

AT	KP	U 4
BS	LD	VJ
CL	MF	W 9
D 7	NW	XK
EV	O 8	YC
F 2	PZ	Z M
GB	Q 3	
HR	RA	
I 6	SE	
JN	TH	

HRV R8SS6H  
HRV 98DJVE 82 96DD84BRSC DRTEV  
N84AWVC H8 HRV A6JVA EVT  
HRV D68W HRV 96HDR TW7 HRV 9TA7A8SV  
8JVA EVT, 4W7VA EH8WV

Now make up your own cypher and write a review of FAKE to share with your group.

