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# THIRTEEN R3ASONS

## WHY

A NOVEL BY

JAY ASHER

“A MYSTERY, EULOGY,  
AND CEREMONY.”

—SHERMAN ALEXIE,  
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF  
THE ABSOLUTELY TRUE DIARY  
OF A PART-TIME INDIAN

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## ***Thirteen Reasons Why***

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Association of Booksellers for Children's "Best Books"

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Borders Original Voices Finalist

Chicago Public Library's "Best of the Best Books"

Kansas State Reading Circle's "Recommended Reading List"

New York Public Library's "Book for the Teen Age"

16 State Award Master Lists

## Praise for *Thirteen Reasons Why*

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“*Thirteen Reasons Why* is a mystery, eulogy, and ceremony. Twenty or thirty times, I snapped the book shut when a sentence, an image, or a line of dialogue was too beautiful and painful. But I, afraid and curious, would always return to this amazing book. I know, in years to come, I will often return to this book.”

—Sherman Alexie, author of *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*

“Every once in a while you come across a book that you can’t get out of your mind, one you have to rush back to if you must put it down for some reason. Jay Asher’s *Thirteen Reasons Why* is one of those books, and is at the very top of my personal Must-Read list.”

—Ellen Hopkins, bestselling author of *Tricks*, *Identical*, *Crank*, *Burned*, *Impulse*, and *Glass*

“Very clever premise, strong voice, perfect suspense. This one will keep you reading. Jay Asher is a fine storyteller.”

—Chris Crutcher, author of *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*, *Whale Talk*, and *Deadline*

“A spectacular first novel. Jay Asher tells his story with such honesty and simplicity that the tragedy feels shatteringly real.”

—Gordon Korman, author of *Son of the Mob* and *Jake, Reinvented*

“It is a brilliant debut that will leave readers feeling a sense of remorse for Hannah, guilt for Clay, and hope for the lasting lesson of the story.”

—Bookazine

“Readers of Jay Asher’s debut novel for teens, *Thirteen Reasons Why*, should be forewarned—never has a page-turner been so difficult to read. This may sound like a criticism, but in fact it’s a compliment, for this is the story of a suicide’s aftermath, and Asher’s ability to convey the anguish of someone who was left behind is truly remarkable.”

—BookPage

“*Thirteen Reasons Why*, Jay Asher’s first novel, is eerie, beautiful, and ultimately devastating.”

—*Chicago Tribune*

“Wonderfully realistic in his writing, Asher offers teens and parents alike a great story on an important topic.”

—*Green Bay Press-Gazette*

★ “[Hannah’s] pain is gut-wrenchingly palpable, and the reader is thrust face-first into a world where everything is related, an intricate yet brutal tapestry of events, people and places. Asher has created an entrancing character study and a riveting look into the psyche of someone who would make this unfortunate choice. A brilliant and mesmerizing debut from a gifted new author.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review and Editor’s Choice

“Compelling reading.”

—*Booklist*

“Heavy but compelling. . . . Asher’s novel asks us to look at how petty cruelty can deal crushing blows.”

—*Miami Herald*

“An honest and frank book about a very sensitive subject, and one that deserves to find a wide readership.”

—*Montgomery Advertiser*

“*Thirteen Reasons Why* will leave you with chills long after you have finished reading.”

—NPR

“If you have the chance to only read one novel this year, *Thirteen Reasons Why* should be that book. It’s sad, amazing, heartbreaking, and hopeful, all at the same time.”

—Teens Read Too (gold award), 5 stars

“Readers won’t be able to pull themselves away. . . . The author gets all the characters right. . . . Asher knows how to entertain an audience; this book will leave readers eager to see what he does next.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“The breakneck pace and dizzying emotion are the true source of this novel’s irresistible readability at all levels.”

—*School Library Journal*

“A stealthy hit with staying power . . . thrillerlike pacing.”

—*New York Times*

## 10 YEARS ► AFFECT EVERYTHING

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A decade after the publication of *Thirteen Reasons Why*, there are moments I vividly remember about the creation and writing of this book. I remember pulling into a gas station parking lot, panicked that I might lose this sudden idea, grabbing a pen and paper, and scribbling down what became the opening pages. At that time, I had been trying to get published for nine years. This story, though, was different from any I'd worked on before. For one, it wasn't a comedy. Two, it was from a teen perspective. Three, it was from male *and* female teen perspectives. As a bonus, it was perfect for a unique storytelling structure (a simultaneous dual narrative) that I'd been thinking about for years.

It was also the first time it felt like a story was coming to me, rather than me looking for a story. And throughout, this story told me how it wanted to be written.

Hannah Baker was my first character to push the story forward—to push me forward—and I let her because it felt real. Now, I can't let my fictional character take full credit. I did a lot, too! But when it came to her voice, she set the tone for everything that happened. If she said something I didn't fully understand, yet it felt like what she would say, I kept it in because it felt honest. Those words came with a mix of sarcasm, anger, humor, and hurt, and I was learning so much about her the more I wrote. I also learned more about people who find themselves in a place where they can't see hope anymore . . . even though it's *always* there. Hannah was not based on any one person in my life, but that disappearing hope was inspired by a close relative who attempted suicide when she was the same age.

Another vivid memory occurred in a coffee shop while I was working on the story, maybe a year after that gas station epiphany. A three-word phrase came to me that felt like it summed up everything I was trying to say: *Everything affects everything*. I used a pen to jot that phrase down and hoped I could find a place for it within the story. I did, and the first major review the book received—a starred review!—began with those words. That was one of my first clues that people just might get what I was trying to say.

I did *not* expect millions of people to get it. In fact, while I was smart enough to not tell my publisher this, I did not expect *Thirteen Reasons Why* to sell very well. I thought there would be a group of people who really loved it, but that it would be a small group. Why its readership kept growing, if I have to guess, is possibly because I wrote it for people who don't typically read books that deal with such

heavy topics. I wrote it for people like me! I knew there was no better way to get me to pick up a book than with the challenge: “Trust me, you won’t be able to put it down.” So I wrote it as a suspense novel.

It was a novel that often felt like thirteen short stories, all connected, which allowed me to explore several serious issues through one person’s perspective. Hannah says, at one point, that you never truly know what goes on in anyone’s life but your own. Because of that, you can’t fully anticipate how they’ll respond to something you do or say—good or bad. And we hear that all the time. “If I had known what else they were dealing with . . .” But I also wanted people to recognize where Hannah could’ve done more to help herself, and that’s why Clay’s half of the conversation is essential.

Clay, as he listens to the tapes, represents the reader. I wanted him to show anger where the reader would probably feel angry, or be sad where they felt sad, or be uncomfortable, or sometimes just laugh along with Hannah. Clay’s story was harder to write because I had to keep his half of the story interesting compared to Hannah’s dramatic tale, which was being told simultaneously. But while his story was difficult, the character was easy because most of his reactions simply mirrored mine as I added his thoughts over Hannah’s narration.

After I developed the “reasons” Hannah would describe, I came up with characters who could bring about those situations. The order of their stories mostly concerned increasing the tension, letting myself discover how each story led to the next as I wrote. That way, it was suspenseful for me, too! (Mostly, though, it’s because I don’t like to outline.)

The publication of *Thirteen Reasons Why* coincided with schools re-evaluating their role in student safety, both physically and emotionally. Slowly recognizing the reach and influence of social media, which was only starting to emerge as I wrote the book, adults began to see that the teen years were increasingly complex. No matter how complex technology makes our relationships, though, every generation will still want—and deserve—respect. That’s one reason I kept certain technologies out of this book, and instead focused on stories that would withstand many more years of our world growing even more complicated.

More than ever, we need to discuss the way we treat each other—and ourselves—and make those discussions routine. Books, as you know, are a wonderful way to do that. People can use a piece of fiction to open a conversation that is otherwise hard to begin. Sometimes it’s between friends, sometimes between a teen and their parent, or a teacher and a class of students, or a librarian and a book club. People involved in these discussions often tell me how wonderful it is to see everyone sharing their thoughts and experiences (which, of course, is the only way to better understand each other).

I guess it’s sometimes easier to talk honestly about fiction than ourselves. I know it is for me! We may get angry at a character, and to justify that anger, we

compare our reaction to something in the real world. Or we argue about what a character should have done, which just happens to be what we would do (at least, what we tell ourselves we would do). So when we talk about fiction, we're revealing ourselves. With *Thirteen Reasons Why*, you have a story with many characters, delving into many issues, with suspense pulling you through. But those characters—their actions and reactions, appropriate or not—give every reader an opinion to discuss.

It would have made my teenage head spin to know something I wrote is taught in so many schools. I often argued over my teachers' analyses of theme and symbolism in the books and stories we read. Like in that poem with the red wheelbarrow. I still don't know why it's red, Mrs. Avery! (Any symbolism you find in this book is either all in your head or proof that my subconscious is much smarter than the rest of me.)

This book has also given me opportunities to speak in schools across the country, and in several countries around the world. When my presentations are more issue-oriented, I like to begin with an admission: "In no way am I an expert." Yet students often reach out to me after reading *Thirteen Reasons Why* because, as one put it, "it makes me feel so much better knowing that someone understands." People need to feel understood, or to know they will be understood if they open up and reach out. Otherwise, they won't reach out. So please, don't let a book be anyone's first time feeling understood.

Even more memorable than the writing of *Thirteen Reasons Why* are the resulting school, library, and bookstore visits. There's the tear-filled hug I shared with a boy whose best friend had committed suicide the year before. The jacket this boy wore, which was his friend's favorite jacket, was worn that day in remembrance. Right now, as I write this introduction, I wear a wristband given to me by a mother in honor of the seventh-grade daughter she lost to suicide. There are moments I've witnessed between students, like when a boy was telling me he had no one to talk to. Another boy, overhearing this, stepped into the conversation: "I know you and I haven't been friends for a while, but you can always talk to me."

To sum up this introduction, I wrote a book. I wrote it as honestly as I knew how, and people responded to it. They shared it, and they shared its message. But it is just a book. It's the readers who are important beyond the book. I stand by the idea that everything affects everything, but I also believe everyone affects everyone they come in contact with. I have been so fortunate to hear from my readers daily, and to travel extensively because of this book. The people I continue to meet because of this book affect me deeply. They inspire me with their strength, show me where I'm fortunate, teach me how to ask for help, and give me new ways to be there for others. Also, many of them have become friends.



I am so glad I pulled into that gas station parking lot to scribble down an idea for an unusual story.

I hope the story of Hannah and Clay, and any conversations you have about them, adds something special to your life, too.

Thank you,  
Jay

TH1RTEEN R3ASONS

WHY

A NOVEL BY

JAY ASHER



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Ebook ISBN: 9780451478269

Asher, Jay

Thirteen reasons why : a novel / by Jay Asher.

p. cm.

Summary: When high school student Clay Jenkins receives a box in the mail containing thirteen cassette tapes recorded by his classmate Hannah, who committed suicide, he spends a bewildering and heartbreaking night crisscrossing their town, listening to Hannah's voice recounting the events leading up to her death.

ISBN: 978-1-59514-788-2

[1. Suicide—Fiction. 2. High schools—Fiction. 3. Schools—Fiction. 4. Interpersonal relations—Fiction.]

I. Title

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, businesses, companies, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Version\_1

*For JoanMarie*



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*Readers React to Thirteen Reasons Why*  
*Discussion Guide*

“Sir?” she repeats. “How soon do you want it to get there?”

I rub two fingers, hard, over my left eyebrow. The throbbing has become intense. “It doesn’t matter,” I say.

The clerk takes the package. The same shoebox that sat on my porch less than twenty-four hours ago; rewrapped in a brown paper bag, sealed with clear packing tape, exactly as I had received it. But now addressed with a new name. The next name on Hannah Baker’s list.

“Baker’s dozen,” I mumble. Then I feel disgusted for even noticing it.

“Excuse me?”

I shake my head. “How much is it?”

She places the box on a rubber pad, then punches a sequence on her keypad.

I set my cup of gas-station coffee on the counter and glance at the screen. I pull a few bills from my wallet, dig some coins out of my pocket, and place my money on the counter.

“I don’t think the coffee’s kicked in yet,” she says. “You’re missing a dollar.”

I hand over the extra dollar, then rub the sleep from my eyes. The coffee’s lukewarm when I take a sip, making it harder to gulp down. But I need to wake up somehow.

Or maybe not. Maybe it’s best to get through the day half-asleep. Maybe that’s the only way to get through today.

“It should arrive at this address tomorrow,” she says. “Maybe the day after tomorrow.” Then she drops the box into a cart behind her.

I should have waited till after school. I should have given Jenny one final day of peace.

Though she doesn’t deserve it.

When she gets home tomorrow, or the next day, she’ll find a package on her doorstep. Or if her mom or dad or someone else gets there first, maybe she’ll find it on her bed. And she’ll be excited. I was excited. A package with no return address? Did they forget, or was it intentional? Maybe from a secret admirer?

“Do you want your receipt?” the clerk asks.

I shake my head.

A small printer clicks one out anyway. I watch her tear the slip across the serrated plastic and drop it into a wastebasket.

There’s only one post office in town. I wonder if the same clerk helped the other people on the list, those who got this package before me. Did they keep their

receipts as sick souvenirs? Tuck them in their underwear drawers? Pin them up on corkboards?

I almost ask for my receipt back. I almost say, "I'm sorry, can I have it after all?" As a reminder.

But if I wanted a reminder, I could've made copies of the tapes or saved the map. But I never want to hear those tapes again, though her voice will never leave my head. And the houses, the streets, and the high school will always be there to remind me.

It's out of my control now. The package is on its way. I leave the post office without the receipt.

Deep behind my left eyebrow, my head is still pounding. Every swallow tastes sour, and the closer I get to school, the closer I come to collapsing.

I want to collapse. I want to fall on the sidewalk right there and drag myself into the ivy. Because just beyond the ivy the sidewalk curves, following the outside of the school parking lot. It cuts through the front lawn and into the main building. It leads through the front doors and turns into a hallway, which meanders between rows of lockers and classrooms on both sides, finally entering the always-open door to first period.

At the front of the room, facing the students, will be the desk of Mr. Porter. He'll be the last to receive a package with no return address. And in the middle of the room, one desk to the left, will be the desk of Hannah Baker.

Empty.

## **YESTERDAY**

### **ONE HOUR AFTER SCHOOL**

A shoebox-sized package is propped against the front door at an angle. Our front door has a tiny slot to shove mail through, but anything thicker than a bar of soap gets left outside. A hurried scribble on the wrapping addresses the package to Clay Jensen, so I pick it up and head inside.

I take the package into the kitchen and set it on the counter. I slide open the junk drawer and pull out a pair of scissors. Then I run a scissor blade around the package and lift off its top. Inside the shoebox is a rolled-up tube of bubble-wrap. I unroll that and discover seven loose audiotapes.

Each tape has a dark blue number painted in the upper right-hand corner, possibly with nail polish. Each side has its own number. One and two on the first tape, three and four on the next, five and six, and so on. The last tape has a thirteen on one side, but nothing on the back.

Who would send me a shoebox full of audiotapes? No one listens to tapes anymore. Do I even have a way to play them?

The garage! The stereo on the workbench. My dad bought it at a yard sale for almost nothing. It's old, so he doesn't care if it gets coated with sawdust or splattered with paint. And best of all, it plays tapes.

I drag a stool in front of the workbench, drop my backpack to the floor, then sit down. I press Eject on the player. A plastic door eases open and I slide in the first tape.



## CASSETTE 1: SIDE A



*Hello, boys and girls. Hannah Baker here. Live and in stereo.*

*I don't believe it.*

*No return engagements. No encore. And this time, absolutely no requests.*

*No, I can't believe it. Hannah Baker killed herself.*

*I hope you're ready, because I'm about to tell you the story of my life. More specifically, why my life ended. And if you're listening to these tapes, you're one of the reasons why.*

*What? No!*

*I'm not saying which tape brings you into the story. But fear not, if you received this lovely little box, your name will pop up . . . I promise.*

*Now, why would a dead girl lie?*

*Hey! That sounds like a joke. Why would a dead girl lie? Answer: Because she can't stand up.*

*Is this some kind of twisted suicide note?*

*Go ahead. Laugh.*

*Oh well. I thought it was funny.*

*Before Hannah died, she recorded a bunch of tapes. Why?*

*The rules are pretty simple. There are only two. Rule number one: You listen. Number two: You pass it on. Hopefully, neither one will be easy for you.*

*"What's that you're playing?"*

*"Mom!"*

*I scramble for the stereo, hitting several buttons all at once.*



*"Mom, you scared me," I say. "It's nothing. A school project."*

*My go-to answer for anything. Staying out late? School project. Need extra money? School project. And now, the tapes of a girl. A girl who, two weeks ago,*

swallowed a handful of pills.

School project.

“Can I listen?” she asks.

“It’s not mine,” I say. I scrape the toe of my shoe against the concrete floor. “I’m helping a friend. It’s for history. It’s boring.”

“Well, that’s nice of you,” she says. She leans over my shoulder and lifts a dusty rag, one of my old cloth diapers, to remove a tape measure hidden underneath. Then she kisses my forehead. “I’ll leave you in peace.”

I wait till the door clicks shut, then I place a finger over the Play button. My fingers, my hands, my arms, my neck, everything feels hollow. Not enough strength to press a single button on a stereo.

I pick up the cloth diaper and drape it over the shoebox to hide it from my eyes. I wish I’d never seen that box or the seven tapes inside it. Hitting Play that first time was easy. A piece of cake. I had no idea what I was about to hear.

But this time, it’s one of the most frightening things I’ve ever done.

I turn the volume down and press Play.



*. . . one: You listen. Number two: You pass it on. Hopefully, neither one will be easy for you.*

*When you’re done listening to all thirteen sides—because there are thirteen sides to every story—rewind the tapes, put them back in the box, and pass them on to whoever follows your little tale. And you, lucky number thirteen, you can take the tapes straight to hell. Depending on your religion, maybe I’ll see you there.*

*In case you’re tempted to break the rules, understand that I did make a copy of these tapes. Those copies will be released in a very public manner if this package doesn’t make it through all of you.*

*This was not a spur-of-the-moment decision.*

*Do not take me for granted . . . again.*

*No. There’s no way she could think that.*

*You are being watched.*



My stomach squeezes in on itself, ready to make me throw up if I let it. Nearby, a plastic bucket sits upside-down on a footstool. In two strides, if I need to, I can reach the handle and flip it over.

I hardly knew Hannah Baker. I mean, I wanted to. I wanted to know her more than I had the chance. Over the summer, we worked together at the movie theater.