

## Reading Group Guide: *The Time-Traveling Fashionista*

### Introduction

Louise Lambert has always dreamed of movie starlets and exquisite gowns, and longs for the day when she can fill the closet of her normal suburban home with stylish treasures. But when she receives a mysterious invitation to a vintage fashion sale in her mail, her once painfully average life is magically transformed into a time-travel adventure.

Suddenly on board a luxurious cruise ship a hundred years ago, Louise relishes the glamour of this opulent age and slips into a life of secrets, drama, and decadence. Until she realizes she's aboard the Titanic!

### Questions and Discussion for *Mothers and Daughters*

1. What era would you most like to travel back in time to? Why? Who would you most like to meet in that era? Is there anything specific you would try to accomplish during your time-travel adventure? Would you be trying to change history?
2. What would be the article of clothing that would transport you back in time? Would it be a pink evening gown like Miss Baxter's? A pair of dusty cowgirl boots? A 1920s cocktail dress?
3. What does it mean to you to be a fashionista?
4. As Marla and Glenda tell Louise: *"It takes a special kind of person to realize that when you wear vintage, you are carrying a bit of the past on your body, and the possibility that vintage can have an impact on your modern life."* Is there any object you possess of historical meaning to you? Maybe it's your mom's high school sweater? Your grandmother's earrings? How do these things impact not only your style, but your life?
5. Do you believe that traveling back in time helped Louise deal with, or give her insight into, issues in her modern life? If so, what specifically?
6. The author includes this quote by the legendary French fashion designer Coco Chanel: *"I don't understand how a woman can leave the house without fixing herself up a little--if only out of politeness. And then, you never know, maybe that's the day she has a date with destiny. And it's best to be as pretty as possible for destiny."* Was it Louise's destiny to travel back in time? How do you define destiny? Do you believe in the possibility of what Coco Chanel calls "a date with destiny"?

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7. One of the issues Louise faced when she traveled back in time was adjusting to old-fashioned customs, such as having a maid to help her dress. How did Louise face these time-travel challenges?
  
8. Louise and Brooke are two quite different individuals, but very good friends all the same. What holds them together? How will Louise's time-traveling impact their friendship?
  
9. Do you think there was a specific reasons Louise traveled back in time as Miss Baxter? Did they have a special connection?
  
10. Of all the people Louise met on board the Titanic, who did you find the most appealing or interesting? Why?
  
11. When Louise realizes that she is on board the sinking Titanic, her instinct is to try to change history. What are the advantages and disadvantages you see to changing history if Louise had the power to?
  
12. What steps does Louise have to take to act the part of Miss Baxter? How does she adapt to that role?
  
13. What does Louise gain from her time-traveling adventure?
  
14. What are the effects of returning to her normal, modern life? Do you think it will be a difficult adjustment? How will Louise's life be different?

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15. After the whirlwind of meeting Marla & Glenda, trying on Miss Baxter's pink evening gown, traveling back in time a hundred years, and escaping the sinking Titanic (!), do you think Louise will return to a future Traveling Fashionista Vintage Sale? Is she hooked on not only vintage, but also time-traveling?

16. The next Time-Traveling Fashionista book takes place in Paris, in the era of Marie-Antoinette. Can you imagine what might happen to Louise in this historical setting?

### *Enhance Your Book Club*

Pick an historical character from *The Time-Traveling Fashionista* and do a little research! What can you share about their life before, during, and after the Titanic? (Hint: [www.timetravelingfashionista.com/explore](http://www.timetravelingfashionista.com/explore))

2. Discuss where you would want Louise to travel to next? What era and what country? Who would you want her to meet? What would you want her to change? (Send your ideas to [Bianca@biancaturetsky.com](mailto:Bianca@biancaturetsky.com) and you might just read about them!)

3. Have a costume party! Agree on an era, or have everyone pick their own. Get creative with your costume and create your own "fashion historical identity!" (Send us pics for the fashionista site! [Bianca@biancaturetsky.com](mailto:Bianca@biancaturetsky.com))

4. Have everyone bring an old photograph to a your next reading group meeting. Maybe it's a photograph of a relative, or something you found online or in the library. What can you tell, or even imagine, from just looking at the photo? Can you imagine their life just looking at the costume and setting for the photo?

5. Play a game in which everyone is a character from *The Time-Traveling Fashionista*, or from an historical era. Have everyone sit in a circle and have a post-it and pen handy. Have everyone write down the name of a character on their post-it and place it on the forehead of the person on their right. Make sure they don't see so they don't know what the post-it says. Now have everyone get up, mingle about, and ask each other 'yes' or 'no' questions until everyone figures out what character name they have written on their post-it. You can even do this at the beginning of the reading group meeting, keeping the post-its on through the duration of the meeting, taking time between discussions to ask questions.

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### *A Conversation with Bianca Turetsky\**

#### **What prompted you to write this book?**

I got the idea about five years ago, when I was at this vintage store in New Haven called [Fashionista Vintage and Variety](#). It's run by two amazing women who are such characters. They know the stories behind all the pieces there, so I tried on this pink dress that belonged to a woman named Mrs. Baxter, and the owners told me a bit about her life. I was so intrigued, and I just couldn't shake it. I love how women's lives and memories are still preserved in some way with vintage clothing. Then I started writing about a fictional Mrs. Baxter in the most extreme situation I could imagine—aboard the Titanic.

#### **How did you snag an agent?**

I gave my card to an agent, who I met through a mutual friend, and then she lost it and I didn't hear from her for a few months. I was kind of depressed. I thought it was a done deal, so I started quarrying other agents reluctantly. When she finally did call out of the blue, I was so happy; it felt like when you've been waiting awhile to hear back from a boy! My original draft was 100 pages, which I thought was so long because I'd never written a book, but it ended up being like 250 pages.

#### **What's your back story, before foraying into long-form writing?**

I went to Tufts and I majored in English. I moved to New York to intern at *Rolling Stone* and *Paper*. I never thought I'd be writing for kids, but somehow this story spoke to me in a way that made it easy to write for kids. It's funny how fresh it feels to be in the mindset of a 12-year-old girl.

#### **How did you score your gig with Julian Schnabel?**

I'd been interning at those magazines for a few months and realized I had to figure out my next move beyond working for free, and I had a friend who put me in touch with Julian. I didn't have any art background at the time, so it's been the most amazing art education. My title hasn't really changed, though I've been there nine years, because there are no titles. It's not like going by a masthead with positions for everything. Julian is generous, creative and very funny. I mean, I wouldn't be working there for almost a decade if he was terrible!

#### **What's your day job like?**

There is no average day. Lately, I've been working a lot on Julian's film *Miral*, and there was a premiere at the UN recently. I've gone to Israel, Spain, Morocco and Mexico on the job.

#### **What does Julian think of your alter ego (and alternate gig) as a "time-traveling fashionista"?**

It's been very inspiring to spend time around someone who's made a living being so creative, and Julian has been really supportive of the project. He was there for my first meeting with my editor and agent. I was planning to meet them at a cafe or the White Horse Tavern, but Julian was like, "No, no, have them come here to the studio and I'll be your assistant for the afternoon." He brought them up from the lobby and was talking up my book, though I think he'd read one paragraph. He really sold them on it!

#### **How did you prepare to write this book?**

I watched tons of episodes of *My So-Called Life* and I read my old journals. It's surprisingly easy to get back to that point.

#### **What were you like as a preteen?**

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Louise reminds me a lot of myself, and I don't think that's by accident. I was an only child and I was on the swim team. I had really frizzy hair that I didn't know what to do with, and I was kind of uncomfortable with my body and myself. I always wore things that were a bit odd and not like anyone else was wearing. I felt like I was somehow trapped in this absurdly ordinary, suburban life and I should've been somewhere else!

### **Were you a vintage junkie in your younger years as well?**

I did a lot of Salvation Army and Goodwill shopping. There was a while when I was wearing men's ties and a button-down shirts all the time. I thought it was a genius look, and it was awhile before the style took off, so it just looked a bit weird.

### **Where are some of your vintage haunts in the city?**

I love Ritual Vintage, and Olives Very Vintage in Brooklyn is amazing. I have all of these old nightgowns from Olives that I always seem to buy and will probably never wear. And I also love Ina, even though that's more of a consignment store. I just got a Fendi dress there last week, and I'm going to wear it to my book party.

### **How about flea markets?**

I was just at the Brooklyn Flea and I got a ring with my initials. I truly am like a 12-year-old sometimes.

### **What was your writing process?**

My routine was to wake up an hour earlier before work and I would just make myself do it even if I was exhausted. It was really important to get into a routine of writing every day, because it's so easy to get distracted. But it still took me years.

### **How many years have you been working on it, exactly?**

I wrote the first draft for three years before I showed it to an agent, and then I rewrote it for a year with my editor. It's beyond surreal that the book is going to be out in the world and on bookshelves, because it's felt like such a private project. I didn't really talk about it while I was writing.

### **How did you connect with illustrator Sandra Suy?**

I've never met her, actually! I don't think anyone has. She lives in Barcelona, and English isn't her first language. But the images are exactly how I envisioned everything would look! She totally got the feeling of the book, and it takes it to a whole other level.

### **What's the status of the second novel in the series?**

I just turned in book two, actually. I had a year to write it the second time around instead of spending five years. The second one will come out next year. I took a month off my job and did research in Paris, which was amazing. It's such a difference to have all day to delve into the story and really think about it, instead of just having a few moments every morning.

### **What eras and settings will your preteen protagonist, Louise, travel to in future books?**

The second book was more location-based instead of being focused on a specific garment. I'm reading a biography of Marilyn Monroe, so I'm loving the idea of an Old Hollywood story because there's amazing fashion to work with. The second book goes way back, and deals with antique clothing, so I want to make the third book more current.

### **How does *Gossip Girl* and other popular preteen and teen series inspire your writing? Is there any sense of a cautionary tale to those books?**

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Well, I hope my books are as successful! But my book is kind of the anti-*Gossip Girl*. I wasn't like those characters when I was younger. When you're 12, I feel like you're either really advanced or really young for your age. I was the latter. I was playing with my dollhouse for far too long. I

wanted to write books for girls who couldn't relate to *Gossip Girl* and other super-fast, advanced book series. I think that's why middle school and high school are so hard. Everyone remembers, and remembers well. Let's just put it that way!

*\*Interview with The Daily Front Row ©, April 5, 2011*