

Featured in The Nerd League

By Katie Knecht

It wasn't until the end of August, nearly six months after *Big Little Lies* was released on HBO, that I gave in to the hype. The miniseries had been recommended to me but I dismissed it as a "mom drama" based on the [main ad image](#) and I kept getting it confused with *Pretty Little Liars*. But there I was on the couch, jetlagged from a two-week trip, with a fresh HBO login from a friend. I decided to give the first episode a try, and I'm glad I did because there was a lot more to the show than I anticipated.

The show centers around females who, yes, can be catty and annoyingly stereotypical, but they are also strong willed, smart, and come together in unexpected ways. The families featured in the show vary in status and background, but the one thing they all have in common is that their kids attend first grade together at a fancy public school. This might seem like the setup for a show your aunt would DVR, but the truth behind these characters and the murder mystery that is revealed throughout makes it much more.

Shailene Woodley will forever be the teenage mom from *Secret Life of the American Teenager* in my mind, but she was able to make me forget her breakout role with her acting. She plays a new-to-the-area single mother and, although she doesn't seem to care about status and appearances as much as the other mothers, she fits in well with the gossipy Madeline Mackenzie (Reese Witherspoon) and stoic Celeste Wright (Nicole Kidman).

Big Little Lies shows off Reese Witherspoon at her finest. She is sassy, clever, and quietly vulnerable. The mom who can do it all, Witherspoon's character is obsessed with perfection in all things, whether it's her relationship with her teenage daughter or the community play she helps organize. She is also fiercely loyal to her friends and is not afraid to say *exactly* what she's thinking. *Legally Blonde* fans will recognize a bit of Elle Woods in this spicy character Witherspoon portrays with precision.

Nicole Kidman artfully plays a stay-at-home mother with a seemingly perfect life: two precious little boys who are twins, a handsome husband who earns enough money for a gorgeous home on the beach, and an expensive wardrobe in a closet the size of my bedroom. But you quickly learn that, behind the perfect seaside life she seems to lead, there are serious underlying issues within her family. Kidman plays an ex-lawyer who is finding herself and her strength throughout the series.

And let's not forget Zoë Kravitz, who plays step-mother to Witherspoon's older daughter, and whose hippie, vegan, organic, all-good-things vibe is so chill that you can't even be annoyed with it.

From the first episode, you know that someone in the community has died, and you spend the remainder of the show piecing together what happened, all while being entertained by the above.

Aside from the expected he-said-she-said drama that fills the plotline, the show confronts weighty issues such as domestic abuse, sexual assault, single motherhood, bullying, and a woman's role in the home and at work. The show even dives into couples therapy, which I found to be well portrayed as a therapy goer myself. The reality with which these issues are approached is refreshing.

Big Little Lies also keeps the day-to-day of life as mothers and wives real among their main characters. Witherspoon, divorced and remarried to Ed (Adam Scott) finds herself questioning if there is enough fire in her marriage. There is silly birthday party drama among the children which then rises to the parents. Sisters argue, wives cheat, and husbands lie. The truth emerges in impactful ways.

So look past the gossip vibes and give *Big Little Lies* a shot. Go on.