**Why invite author L.M. Elliott to speak:**

[**L. M. Elliott**](https://www.lmelliott.com/laura-bio-and-interviews)was an award-winning magazine journalist primarily covering women's issues for 20 years before becoming a *New York Times*bestselling author of 14 historical and biographical novels. Her works cover a variety of eras (WWII, the Cold War, the Great Depression, and the American Revolution) and are written for a variety of ages. They have been honored with the Scott O’Dell, VLA Cardinal Cup, and Grateful American prizes for historical fiction, been named NCSS/CBC Notables, Kirkus YA Bests, Bank St. College of Education Bests; to TXLA Tayshas HS Reading Lists and as finalists for state awards in VA, MD, PA, UT, ME, VT, KS, IA, and SC. She graduated Wake Forest University and has a master’s in journalism from UNC-Chapel Hill.

Elliott speaks frequently to students and educators. Typically, she focuses on one era or work, gives a PowerPoint talk focusing on the history contained in that particular novel with examples of the research-treasure hunt she went through to find and include those facts. When talking about a controversial era, she sticks to her journalistic background, simply presenting facts, hoping to promote critical thinking, following Margaret Mead’s statement that youth “must be taught *how* to think, not what.” Q & A follows, which often also delves into the craft of writing.

Her latest novel is designed for high school students but is also a “cross-over” read for adults.

[TRUTH, LIES, AND THE QUESTIONS IN BETWEEN](https://www.lmelliott.com/book_landing_page_historical/truth-lies-and-questions-between) is set in 1973, the year of Watergate, the fight for the Equal Rights Amendment, Roe v Wade, and Vietnam vets returning to an America still reeling from anti-war protests. It’s the third of three Cold War dramas (the first [SUSPECT RED](https://www.lmelliott.com/book_landing_page_historical/suspect-red) on 1950s McCarthyism; the second [WALLS](https://www.lmelliott.com/book_landing_page_historical/walls) about the infamous Berlin Wall, which went up overnight in 1961).

These three works are “docudrama” fiction/nonfiction hybrids, featuring a photo essay of factual people and news headlines, punctuating the fictional narrative. Each chapter opens with images of that month’s major events that affect the thoughts and actions of characters. The unique format offers a compelling story while also providing a comprehensive but quick and evocative synopsis of a pivotal year in our history.

All three explore the impact of political polarization, inflammatory rhetoric, cultural wars, and disinformation—especially on young people, right as they form their world views, sense of hope and agency, who they want to befriend and become.

While Watergate stretched over two years, TRUTH LIES zooms in on the year Senate hearings produced one shocking revelation after another—about Nixon's campaign tactics, thirst for retribution, the DNC headquarters break-in and ensuing cover up—lending the narrative a courtroom-style drama as its spine. 1973 was also the year ratification of the ERA, expected to be quick, was suddenly derailed by *women*. Suburban homemakers marshalled by conservative author Phyllis Schlafly, who claimed the ERA would demolish their chosen life-role as stay-at-home moms and wives.

Finally, 1973 was also only the second year that young women were allowed to be Capitol Hill pages—only a handful, which meant, whether they planned to be or not, they were a symbol for women's liberation. Hence the perfect, plausible linchpin protagonist to connect 1973’s two enormous political groundswells became a moderate, 18-year-old Republican Senate page, who *legitimately* witnesses close-up those Watergate hearings. Her own arc of growth and self-examination reflect the nation’s, as she questions everything she'd previously believed about the president, her parents, her boyfriend, her definition of womanhood—asking what’s truth vs. lies vs. “politics as normal” vs. gaslighting vs. manipulative “otherizing.”

Patty’s questions are fueled by testimony that spark worry her father, a Midwest campaign fundraiser for Nixon, might have gotten caught up in the scandal, following his political hero. Patty is also a symbol—given the startling sexism of the 1970s despite the feminist movement—of learning to shake free of cultural messaging and expectations that a “likeable” woman is demure, accommodating, even submissive to the opinions of her father and family and the dreams and desires of her boyfriend.

All three of these Cold War docudramas feature characters from opposite sides of the political spectrum learning to overcome biases to empathize with and even embrace one another. In TRUTH LIES: that’s Patty, the strait-laced Senate page, dutiful daughter, easily shocked, political-wife-wannabe and the hip, brainiac musician, voracious-reader, and feminist Simone, whose family couldn’t possibly control her opinions and statements if they tried.

The heart of the novel is Patty’s personal journey— but of equal importance is her hard-won friendship with Simone, their consciousness-raising, as Simone might call it. They each grow—becoming more compassionate, open-minded, confident in their individual self-worth—because of the influence of the other. (As do Richard and Vlad in SUSPECT RED; Drew and Matthias in WALLS.)

**Why use historical fiction as interdisciplinary *complement* to social studies, civics, government, and English classes?**

Story is how we make sense of ourselves—all the way back to Homer—retelling events, looking for parable, what personality traits, what words, what moments brought out the best (or the worst) in people as guidance for choices we must make ourselves. Story *humanizes* dates, statistics, battles, election results students must memorize to regurgitate for standardized tests. Story gives them a protagonist they care about, to walk them through—anxious about what’s around the corner—the challenges and dangers, the hurts and hopes, the failures and triumphs, of a historical era. Empathizing, imagining *what would I do if that person said that to me or threatened someone I love*. When we feel something, we humans remember it.

But to do all that, historical fiction must be well-done.

*Good* historical fiction is meticulously researched and woven tightly with facts, with an era’s societal constraints, slang, political and cultural personalities, food, creative arts, even smells. It’s a magic trick. While immersed in a compelling, suspenseful, richly detailed narrative, readers learn without realizing it. Like osmosis, simply breathing in all those revealing specifics.

*Good* historical fiction also explores issues and conundrums that resonate with today. Providing the perfect prism to look through and at current arguments, removing the heat of immediacy, stripping away defensiveness, allowing easier revelations and non-confrontative classroom discussion. Students are simply talking about characters, themes, and past events, not pointing fingers at classmates.

To learn more about Elliott and her works, and to contact her about a possible appearance, please go to [www.lmelliott.com](http://www.lmelliott.com).