

# The Edge of Everything

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Fiction

RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 14+

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## CURRICULUM GUIDE

The following teaching guide has been designed to embrace shared curriculum values. Students are encouraged to communicate their understanding of a text through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.

The learning activities aim to encourage students to think critically, creatively and independently, to reflect on their learning, and connect it to audience, purpose and context. They aim to encompass a range of forms and include a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they include the integration of ICT and life skills.



Credit: Cormac Hanrahan

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Miranda Luby is an author, journalist, copywriter and animal lover living on Victoria's Surf Coast. She has won several awards for her short stories, and her journalism features in publications such as *National Geographic*, *BBC Travel* and the *New York Post*. Miranda was shortlisted for the Text Prize for her debut novel, *Sadie Starr's Guide to Starting Over*. *The Edge of Everything* is her second novel for young adults.

## SYNOPSIS

The death of Lucy's brother, Charlie, in a freak accident has left her stuck, isolated and teetering at the edge of a black hole that threatens to engulf her. To get through the days, she's been numbing herself with endless phone scrolling, occasionally punctuated by the rush of 'life bombing' with her new friend Jacinta, from whom she has hidden her past. Her parents are desperate for Lucy to break free from the inertia of her sadness—to reconnect with the friends she can't bear to see and step into a future she's not sure she wants. But beneath their enthusiasm for moving forward lies the darker truth of their own journey.

When a bird randomly crashes into Lucy's window, it pierces her cocoon of grief. Desperate to help save an endangered species, she's also not entirely sure that it isn't a sign from the universe or a message from the afterlife. Her quest to ensure its survival leads her to the local wildlife sanctuary, where she meets Ben, a fellow animal lover who has also experienced huge loss. As Lucy gradually opens up to him, she is forced to grapple with the truth of her past, the hope of the future—and the meaning of life in all its facets. (A love triangle also ensues.)

*The Edge of Everything* is a tender and funny exploration of grief that doesn't shy away from life's big questions. Compelling and deftly told, this luminous contemporary novel will appeal to a wide range of readers.

## BEFORE READING

1. Read the book's blurb. Are you a person, like Lucy, who looks for signs from the universe?
2. The blurb refers to the 'randomness' of life. What does this mean to you? Do you believe life is random, or is there some kind of design or meaning to it?



3. Make a prediction about why 'things are not going to be that simple' for Lucy when dealing with grief for her brother, a new love interest and an injured bird. What kinds of complications could arise? Look at the book's front cover and see if this ties in with your predictions?

### WHILE READING

1. How does Lucy see Charlie's role in the family, and how does this affect how she views her place? Is her perception accurate?
2. Lucy describes her friendship with Rach as transforming 'From Ugg boot-level comfortable to a too-small school shoe.' (p. 88) What causes this shift?
3. Do you agree with Charlie and Lucy's theory that 'every human is born with the potential to achieve one transcendent thing'? (p. 6) Why or why not?
4. Lucy's dad talks about the placebo effect and the power of taking action, even when you don't feel like it, to trick yourself into feeling better. Are there ways you've used this strategy in your own life?
5. 'I don't think too hard about why it would feel good to go viral... That many people seeing my face, liking and commenting, would be undeniable proof that I've made a mark on the world, or at least that I'm alive.' (p. 50) Do you relate? Do you agree?
6. Why does Lucy initially decide not to tell Jacinta about Charlie's death?
7. What examples does Ben give Lucy about animals adapting to urban environments, and what they represent in the novel?
8. Come up with a list of things you feel neutral about, like Lucy and Jacinta do on p. 155.
9. What does Lucy hope to discover on Charlie's phone? Does she find it?
10. Who ends up in hospital and why?
11. What is the significance of the setting of the Franklin Sewage Treatment Plant? (p. 274)
12. What does the Evans Real Estate Summer Day Do reveal to us as readers

is it that I can simultaneously believe that I'm special...but also be convinced that I'm nothing? That I'm worthless. I wonder if everyone feels this way, but some more intensely than others. And maybe some people feel it, but they keep it a secret.' (p. 238) What do these observations from Lucy tell us about who she is? Why do you think the author chose to include them?

2. Who is Jacinta and why is Lucy initially drawn to her? How are they different? What are some of the ways that Jacinta's father's illness affects and shapes her life?
3. Lucy often confronts uncomfortable emotions by turning to her phone—googling facts (p. 174), watching YouTube (p. 15), scrolling socials (p. 85) and general scrolling (p. 239). Are these patterns you identify with? What does she do differently at the end of the book, and what does this illustrate about Lucy's character? (p. 302)
4. What is it that keeps drawing Lucy back to Lockie and vice versa? Were you Team Ben or Team Lockie?
5. The author uses specific visual details to establish character. What unique details of dress and appearance does she use to help build the characters of Dinesh, Mum and Jacinta?

### THEMES

#### Grief

1. 'Many of the characters in this novel are grieving, and they each deal with their grief in different ways. Compare and contrast the experiences of two or more of the following characters: Lucy, Mum, Dad, Lockie, Ben, Ben's father and Jacinta. What are some of their coping strategies, and how effective are they?
2. The awkwardness and discomfort of not knowing how to respond to another person's pain is a recurring theme throughout the novel. What are some examples of characters doing this well and poorly? Is there an overall conclusion you can draw from how the novel grapples with this idea? Discuss an interaction in your own life that you wished had gone differently or you weren't sure how to navigate.
3. What does Lucy eventually realise is at the heart of her 'black hole' experiences of grief?

### AFTER READING

#### Style and character

1. 'I wanted all the attention and I wanted none of it. I wanted to look beautiful for Lockie and I wanted to be invisible. I wanted to cry in a way other people thought was natural, normal, but also in a unique way no one else possibly could, because I was Charlie's sister.' (p. 125) 'How

#### Relationships

1. How does Lucy's relationship with her parents grow and change over the arc of the novel, and how is this expressed?
2. What makes Jacinta uncomfortable about Lucy's behaviour and her role in it?



3. What does the character of Bella Darling represent? Have you had a similar relationship with someone on social media? What do you think we get from parasocial relationships with celebrities?

### Philosophy

1. What does Ninja's release back into the wild show Lucy about the point of being alive? (p. 300)
2. Throughout the book, Lucy grapples with the shortness of our individual lifespans in the context of the infinite universe. What are the pros and cons of viewing our lives as meaningless blips?
3. In the final chapter, Jacinta suggests that maybe Lucy could get into transcendentalism. Why does she think it would appeal, and what else can you find out about it? Is it a philosophy that resonates with you? Do you have your own life philosophy?

### RESPONDING

1. Lucy and Jacinta initially bond over their attempts at 'life bombing'? Make a five minute Bella Darling-inspired YouTube video about life bombing. Include a definition and an argument for or against this concept, as well as some dos and don'ts.
2. Lucy wonders, 'Did Charlie really think he had to be special in some obvious, impressive, important way in order to matter? Was he genuinely scared of it not being true?' (p. 238) Write a poem, letter or diary entry from Charlie's point of view exploring this issue.
3. A lot of the novel's plot revolves around the fate of Ninja, the plains-wanderer, a highly endangered Australian bird. Write a persuasive speech explaining why it's important to save this—or any—endangered species from extinction. Alternatively, write a song about the topic in the style of Dinesh's band, the Flannelette Futons.
4. When Lockie describes finishing school, he tells Lucy, 'It's like you start to realise what you really want.' (p. 187). What do you imagine Lucy will want when she finishes school? Write a bonus epilogue chapter outlining her hopes, dreams and ambitions on her high-school graduation day. This can be in prose or in the form of a text message chain with a friend.