



Sadie Starr's Guide to Starting Over

MIRANDA LUBY

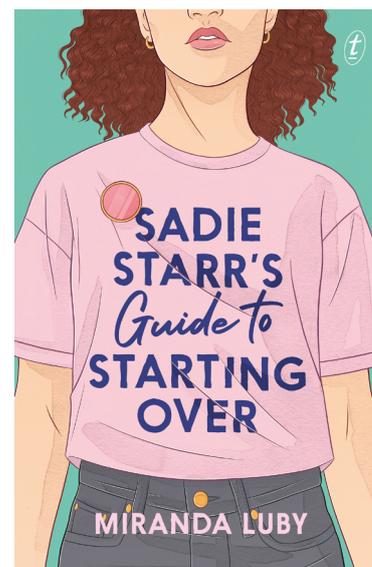
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Fiction

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.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Credit: Cormac Hanrahan

Miranda Luby is an author, freelance journalist and copywriter 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*, the BBC and the *New York Post*. Miranda was shortlisted for the Text Prize for her debut novel, *Sadie Starr's Guide to Starting Over* (previously titled *Therefore I Am*).

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SYNOPSIS

When Sadie's dad announces that they'll be moving to Melbourne, Sadie is optimistic at the thought of starting over. Moving away from Sydney will give her a chance to reinvent herself—a new look, a new body, new friends. The only person she's sad to leave behind is Daniel, her best friend and maybe-something, but on the day she's leaving, Sadie upsets Daniel so much that he tells her their friendship is over.

Still, once she arrives in Melbourne, Sadie's new life gets off to a good start. It's the do-over she's always wanted. She's in control of her eating, losing weight, staying on top of her studies, and has managed to become friends with Alexa Andersson. Alexa is pretty and popular. She 'saves' Sadie on her first day, warning her about Jack, who has been ostracised for allegedly stalking someone the year before. Alexa is a fierce feminist determined to create more safe spaces for women in the school, and publicly calling out anyone who threatens that safety. She and her two other friends, Ish and Harper, make their feminism known by wearing pink badges pinned to their clothes. The badges are a marker of being on the right side—and Sadie desperately wants one.

But the more Sadie gets to know Alexa and her friends, and Jack—who lives in the house next door and is being badly bullied at school in the wake of his indiscretion—and Loz, who was the target of the alleged stalking (but who refuses to speak up against Jack), the more Sadie starts to think that her new friend is using her feminism as a weapon, and it's pointing at the wrong people. As Sadie starts to untangle the mess, her struggles with her body and with her friends threaten to overwhelm her. She just wants to start over, and this time to get it right. But the biggest lesson Sadie Starr is going to learn is that sometimes getting it right means learning how to be okay when things don't go to plan. *Sadie Starr's Guide to Starting Over* explores complex themes of feminism, body image, friendship, the dangers of black-and-white thinking and love with nuance and generosity.



BEFORE READING

1. What does someone with an eating disorder look like? Discuss some of the stereotypes that exist around disordered eating, and why these can be harmful to people who struggle with their body image.
2. Would you call yourself a feminist? Describe what being a feminist means to you, and whether feminism is something you feel that you can identify with or not, and why.
3. What does it mean to start over? Is starting over something to fear or something to celebrate? What are some of the challenges that you think Sadie might have to face in the novel?

WHILE READING

1. Why is Daniel so upset when Sadie kisses him? What do you think he means when he says that she always needs everything to be her way?
2. What does 'getting life right' look like to Sadie?
3. How does Sadie describe her feelings about moving to Melbourne? Is there anything she's sad to leave behind?
4. How does Sadie's fear of things going wrong apply to both her writing and her relationship with Daniel?
5. Describe Sadie's relationship with her sister. What is the difference in the way each of them is treated by their parents?
6. What does Daniel's stutter indicate?
7. Sadie thinks that she kisses Sam to become a more ideal version of herself. What does this self look like? What's the problem with her motivation here?
8. What are some of the pressures that make Sadie feel she needs to be a particular way? Where do they come from?
9. Why does Loz lie about Jack stalking her? Is this fair to him? What could she have done instead?
10. In what way is Sam 'uncancellable'. What is social currency, and where does it come from? Why do some people have it and not others?
11. How does Jack's dad react to his OCD? How do you think his attitude is likely to make Jack feel?
12. Why is Sadie afraid of putting her work out there? Have you ever felt this way? Why is she afraid of not being in control?
13. How does Loz help Sadie to see herself differently?
14. Sadie describes starting over as a 'magic trick'. Is she right? How does her attitude change towards the end of the book?

AFTER READING

CHARACTER

1. First impressions are important to Sadie, as they provide the chance to reinvent yourself before judgment. Her first impressions of Jack are that he is distant and paranoid, and then she meets Alexa, who tells her that Jack is a 'psychopath' and a 'stalker'. Is this a fair first impression? What other factors contribute to his initial behaviour?
2. What does Sadie change about herself to fit in with Alexa and her friends? Do you think they would have accepted her otherwise?
3. Loz lets other people influence her actions—she goes along with accusing Jack of stalking, and sells drugs on behalf of her brother—why do you think this is? At what point does she finally make a decision based on what she wants for herself? What does she want for herself?

THEMES

Feminism

1. What is the meaning behind the pink badges? Is Sadie right to suspect that they're more about exclusivity and popularity than feminism? What is her suggestion to make them more inclusive? Why does feminism need to be an inclusive movement?
2. Towards the end of the book, Sadie's essay triggers a 'battle of the sexes', where the boys start to hand out blue ribbons to make a stand of their own. Why do you think they do this? Are they justified?
3. Does Alexa genuinely believe in feminism? How do her actions towards her friends contradict her belief?

Self-esteem

1. What are some of the things Sadie's mum says that make Sadie feel ashamed of her body? Is this her mum's intention? Instead of saying that Sadie should 'focus on some healthy eating habits', (p. 15) what could she say instead?
2. Sadie feels that the threads of 'appearance' and 'self worth' are tangled into a knot in her mum's brain. (p. 13) How do you think her mum feels about herself? Do you agree that body image and self-worth are often tangled together?
3. What do you think Jack's sense of self-worth is like? His dad criticises him; everyone at school believes he's a stalker—describe the way you think he feels about himself? Where does he eventually find solace?

Friendship

1. 'I realise now how much body language was a part of our relationship, of the way we got each other, and without it we're a mess of misunderstandings.' (p. 199) How important is body language in friendships? Describe the way that a lack of body



language leads to a misunderstanding between Sadie and Daniel.

2. Sadie struggles to choose between her loyalty to Loz and her friendship with Alexa. Should she have to choose? Is there a feasible way for her to be friends with both of them? Do you think they would get along if they spent time with each other? Why/why not?
3. Sadie thinks 'no one wants to be friends with a swirling mass of neurotic, unruly thoughts.' (p. 97) Is she right? How do you think her friends would react if she told them how much she was struggling? What would Daniel say if she was honest with him?
4. Why doesn't Sadie stand up for Jack? What does she risk if she does? Would it be worth it?

RESPONDING

1. At the end of the book, Alexa, Ish and Harper decide to set up a more official women's support organisation at school, with clear goals and guidelines around what they want to achieve in terms of cultural and systemic change. What do you think some of these goals and guidelines might be? Discuss the value of women's support organisations in schools and draw up a plan for a group like this.
2. How does Sadie feel about writing? Loz describes this as 'finding their souls'. What does 'finding their souls' look like for each of the characters in the book—for Daniel, Alexa, Loz? What does it look like for you? Come up with a five minute creative presentation that showcases your passions and skills (like the one that Sadie comes up with for the school's 'Festival of Ideas').
3. When she first arrives in Melbourne, Sadie imagines possible versions of her future self. What are some of the ways she pictures herself in the future? Write five versions of your own future self—where do you see yourself in five years? What parts of yourself do you expect to stay the same, and which parts might change?
4. 'For as long as I can remember, I've been obsessed with the idea of starting over. Wiping the slate clean. Beginning again.' (p. 16) Why is Sadie so obsessed with the idea of starting over? Is there a moment in your life where you would have started over if you could? Write a short story based on the alternate pathway your life might have taken.