

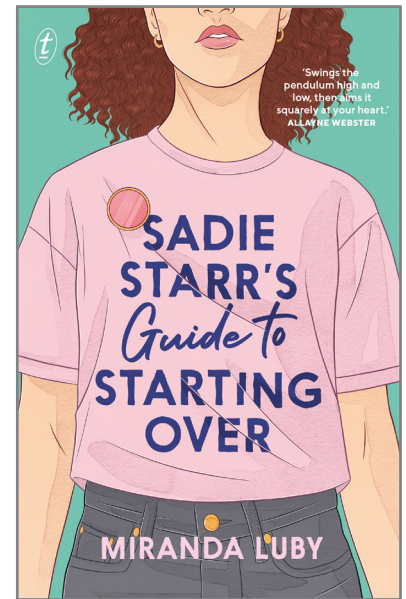
Sadie Starr's Guide to Starting Over

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower to Mid Secondary
(Language, Sexual references)



SYNOPSIS

Sadie Starr is obsessed with starting over. A new year, a new diet, a new social media identity. Anything that gives her a chance to be a better version of herself.

So when her dad's job moves the family interstate, Sadie's excited for a fresh start. It's also the perfect excuse to leave behind the mess she's made with her best friend and secret crush, Daniel, whose advances she rejected—for fear of screwing things up.

But at her new school, life gets complicated fast.

She meets glamorous Alexa and her pink-badged girl gang, on a mission to 'support women', and outcast Jack, who the girls say has been stalking fellow student Loz.

But Loz has a different story, one that changes everything.

Sadie's torn. She wants to be popular. She wants to keep Loz's secret. She wants to fix everything. But she'll have to make choices. And the wrong ones could throw her perfect new life into complete chaos.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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*.

STUDY NOTES

BEFORE READING

- 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.
- 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.
- 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

- 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?
- What does 'getting life right' look like to Sadie?
- How does Sadie describe her feelings about moving to Melbourne? Is there anything she's sad to leave behind?
- How does Sadie's fear of things going wrong apply to both her writing and her relationship with Daniel?
- Describe Sadie's relationship with her sister. What is the difference in the way each of them is treated by their parents?
- What does Daniel's stutter indicate?
- 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?
- What are some of the pressures that make Sadie feel she needs to be a particular way? Where do they come from?
- Why does Loz lie about Jack stalking her? Is this fair to him? What could she have done instead?
- 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?
- How does Jack's dad react to his OCD? How do you think his attitude is likely to make Jack feel?
- 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?
- How does Loz help Sadie to see herself differently?
- 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**

- First impressions are important to Sadie, as they provide the chance to reinvent yourself before judgement. 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?
- What does Sadie change about herself to fit in with Alexa and her friends? Do you think they would have accepted her otherwise?
- 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**

- 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?
- 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?
- Does Alexa genuinely believe in feminism? How do her actions towards her friends contradict her belief?

Self-esteem

- 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?
- 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?
- 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

- '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.
- 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?
- 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?
- Why doesn't Sadie stand up for Jack? What does she risk if she does? Would it be worth it?

RESPONDING

- 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.
- 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').
- 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?
- '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.