

Hate is Such a Strong Word

Sarah Ayoub

Book Summary

In the vein of *Does My Head Look Big in This* and *Looking for Alibrandi*, *Hate is Such a Strong Word* is the story of a seventeen-year-old girl caught between two cultures, Lebanese and Anglo-Australian.

Themes

Maturity and Life Choices
Family Expectations
Peer Group Pressure
Outsiders
Self-Esteem and Identity

Curriculum areas and key learning outcomes

Hate is Such a Strong Word is an excellent resource for Year 8 onwards and could be used for the following subjects:

- SOSE/HSIE
- English
- Literacy and Language
- Visual Literacy

It could also be used to achieve the following learning outcomes:

ACELY 1739, 1740
ACELT 1633, 1638
ACELT 1626 and 1629

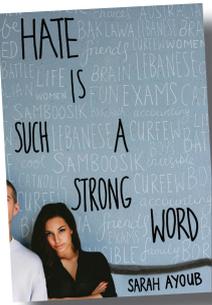
Appropriate ages:

12+

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Notes By Robyn Sheahan-Bright

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Themes

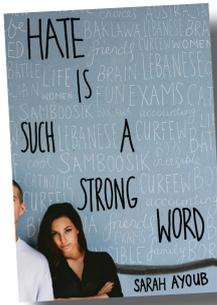
- Maturity and Life Choices
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Bibliography

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Introduction

'Although it's still daylight, boys are setting off illegal fireworks despite their mothers' fearful warnings. Older girls are heading out to parties, all dressed up, while their fathers lament their daughters' short childhoods and even shorter skirts. And I lament the fact that I won't be attending the globe's biggest party tonight – even in the limited way I've come to expect as a social nobody.' (pp 3-4)

'But where do I start with what's wrong? Not going anywhere on New Year's is the tip of the iceberg. I feel like I don't have a say in my own life. It's as though I'm invisible, defined only in the relative: dependable daughter, sister, student and friend.

Is it so wrong that I want a little more?' (pp 6-7)

Sophie Kazzi really wants to go to Dora's New Year's Eve Party but as usual she's expected to stay at home to babysit her siblings Marie, Viola, Angela and Andrew while her parents go out instead. Her Lebanese father is extremely strict and keeps her on a very short leash. Although she's an excellent student and always well-behaved, he doesn't trust her to go to places he hasn't sanctioned, even though her younger brother Andrew is allowed to do many things she can't. At school she feels 'invisible' because she's shy about putting herself forward and really doesn't want to be part of the 'in-crowd'.

Then the 'Brighton Brawl' takes place, reminding them all of the Cronulla Riots and her dad threatens to put Sophie under lock and key for the rest of her life.

Complicating matters further, in the riot's aftermath, her Lebanese-Catholic schoolmates find an 'outsider' in their midst, in Shehadie Goldsmith who has been sent to Cedar Saints College to learn something of his deceased mother's culture. Pent-up prejudices erupt against him because his father isn't Lebanese.

This story therefore reverses some of the stereotypes found in recent works about how a largely white, Caucasian society fails to accept those of other cultures. Here the students at a Catholic Lebanese school are forced to confront their own racism with the arrival of Shehadie.

The outdated attitudes of some Lebanese parents who cling to the same customs observed in their home country decades ago are also canvassed in this wide-reaching analysis of the roots of prejudice. To complicate things further, Sophie feels attracted to Shehadie, but her potential social ostracism makes her wary of declaring her hand too publicly. This, of course, upsets him more than anything, because he's also attracted to her.

Things come to a head when a teacher provokes discussion about integration in their school, and then the school formal presents further challenges.

Sophie finds through the course of these last few months at school that railing against everything that is wrong with her life is just one part of the equation. She realises that she needs to work out what's right with her life too, or how she can make it right. And that entails knowing what she wants to do, what she really believes in, who she wants to hang out with, and who she wants to be.

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About the Author

Sarah Ayoub is a freelance journalist and blogger based in Sydney, Australia. Her work has appeared in various print and online publications, including *Marie-Claire*, *Madison*, *Cosmopolitan*, *House & Garden*, *Sunday Magazine*, *ABC Unleashed*, *Cleo*, *Notebook*, *Shop Til You Drop*, *Frankie*, *Yen*, *Girlfriend* and more. She has taught Journalism at the University of Notre Dame and spoken at numerous industry events with the Emerging Writer's Festival, NSW Writer's Centre, The Walkley Foundation, Vibewire and more.

To find out more about Sarah, you can follow her on Facebook and Twitter or check out her blog at:

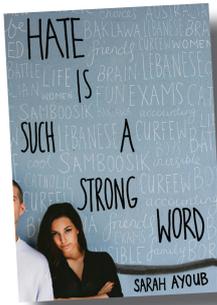
<http://sarahayoub.com>

Author Inspiration

Sarah says:

'I was inspired to write *Hate* because of the confused-identity syndrome that plagued me as I grew up in Sydney in my teens, and the fact that many years later, there are still so many Australian-born teenagers of mixed backgrounds or ethnic parentage growing up with the same issues. It's hard enough being a teenager when you're trying to find your footing in the world – dealing with your changing body, confusing friendships and the thought of what to be 'when you grow up' – without the added pressure that comes with racism, stereotyping or just wanting to have fun without it being seen as some sort of cultural letdown. Not to mention the moral panic that stemmed from the portrayal of the Lebanese in the press and my desire to show the rest of Australia that there are plenty of Australian-Lebanese who love their birth country and respect its laws just as much as they cherish the blood ties to their mother countries.'

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Notes on Themes and Curriculum Topics

SOSE

Racism and Integration

Discussion Point: What is the source of racism? Is it prejudice, ignorance, fear or a combination of all these factors?

Discussion Point: Is Australia a truly multicultural culture which is generally welcoming to foreigners? Conduct a class debate on this subject.

Activity: Some students may not be aware of the events described as the 2005 Cronulla Riots. Research this further.

[See Bibliography.]

Lebanese Culture

Activity: What do you know about Lebanese culture and history? Research this topic further.

Activity: Research the migration of Lebanese people to Australia in three successive waves of migration since the late nineteenth century. [See Bibliography.]

Activity: You might like to hold a Lebanese luncheon at your school. Ask the students to research Lebanese food and to bring a dish which is typical of the culture.

Women's Roles

Discussion Point: Despite the gains of feminism, many people today are worried that girls and women are being encouraged to be far too body conscious and that they are not supportive of each other when it comes to rebelling against such attitudes. Discuss in relation to what you see at your school and amongst your peers.

Literacy and language

This novel is a **realistic** novel. The narrative voice is a **first person, present tense** account of Sophie's experiences.

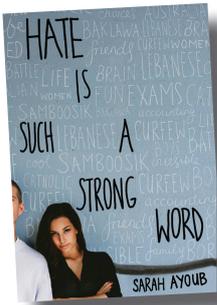
Discussion Point: Choose an incident and re-tell it from someone else's point of view.

Humour is a big part of the narrative voice in this novel. For example,

'It's okay,' he says, smiling at me. 'I know how necessary melodrama is to your sense of being. If overreacting meant that much to you, I guess I was happy to be part of it. There's no way you can go into accounting without a dose of the theatrical to keep you afloat.' (p 215)

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Activity: Find other humorous sections in the book and discuss how the author has presented serious issues in a very reader-friendly way.

Characters lie at the heart of any narrative, are the catalysts for action, and the central core around which all other narrative aspects such as theme must revolve and work. In this novel there are several major characters and a cast of minor ones.

Major characters include: Sophie Kazzi, her parents Elia and Theresa Kazzi; her aunt Leila; her siblings Andrew, Angela, Viola and Marie; her friend Dora; Shehadie Goldsmith.

Minor characters include: Vanessa Saade, who holds the beach bash; Zayden Malouf, Sophie's 'crush'; Rita Malkoun, her former friend.

Discussion Point: Apart from Sophie, which character did you consider to be central to the novel's plot and themes, and why? Was there any minor character who might have played a larger part? Why?

Activity: Character Arcs are the curve on which key events show how a character grows or develops in response to events and to interactions with other characters in the novel. Choose a character and trace an arc on which key events indicate some aspect of their personality or change in their behaviour.

Each of the chapter titles in this book might form the topic for a discussion eg 'I hate that I can't keep up with the rules of high school' (p 20).

Activity: Choose another chapter title and discuss its meaning in relation to the novel and your lives.

Key learning outcomes:

- *Appreciation of the narrative strategies employed by writers of fiction.*
- *Analysis of character and motivation.*

Visual Literacy

Cover Art

Activity: Study the cover of the book. How might you re-design this cover?

Activity: Create a display of the covers which students create.

Setting

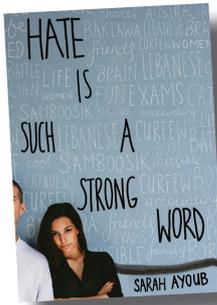
Activity: Read the novel carefully in order to imagine the geography of the Bankstown neighbourhood and of the school. Create a map of what you imagine.

Poster

Activity: Create a poster based on one of the issues discussed in the book. Come up with a slogan and an image which will attract attention.

Comic Art

Activity: Create a comic panel based on one of the scenes in this book.



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Key learning outcomes:

- Understanding of the relationship between design and narrative content.
- Visualisation of the landscape explored and described by the author.

Themes

Maturity & Life Choices

Discussion Point: Sophie is not yet sure what she wants to be, but she knows she doesn't want to be an accountant. Discuss what your future goals might be and the potential challenges to achieving those goals. Do your parents have expectations that you will pursue a particular career?

Discussion Point: Sophie makes several comments about how school is a 'cocoon' and that going out into the big world will be a real challenge to her and her classmates. Do you expect life after school to be exciting or confronting? Are you looking forward to it? Why? Why not?

Peer Group Pressure

Discussion Point: Sophie is shocked when her friend Dora joins the 'popular group' including Rita, her primary school best friend who also rejected her.

What would you have done in Sophie's situation, when Dora so publicly dumped her?

Discussion Point: Have you ever been forced to choose between friends? How did you deal with that decision?

Family Expectations

Discussion Point: Parents do have a right to expect obedience from their children but there's a fine line between demanding responsibility and being overly dictatorial. How would you have dealt with Sophie's situation in relation to her father's rules?

Outsiders

Discussion Point: Shehadie is ostracised by some of the students at the school simply because his father is not Lebanese. Can you imagine your fellow students being so critical? Are you aware of similar prejudices in your school?

Self-Esteem and Identity

Discussion Point: Sophie thinks she is invisible, because she's not a partying type nor is she interested in being part of the 'in-group'. Do you need to be part of a group in order to develop self-esteem? Is it possible to be a singular and independent person and still feel confident?

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Key Quotes

1. 'A place where I can rant about having the world's strictest dad and living by a cultural code that's at odds with my time and place. Where I can express myself without the fear of being accused of shaming my community, my family and the traditions of a heritage I'm not sure I fully grasp.' (p 8)

2. 'Let me remind you of Elias Kazzi's manifesto,' I say, and put on a deep voice. 'There are some things that are simply unacceptable among our people, Sophie. You must remember that. And a mistake on the part of an individual will always have consequences for others.' (p 18)

3. 'For a second, my heart aches for him. I know what it's like to feel invisible, but at least I'm kind of the same as everyone else. The last thing you want to be in high school is different.' (p 56)

4. 'Except Dad's always saying that good Lebanese girls - 'Never spend the night anywhere but their father's house until they get married,' she says, finishing the sentence for me.' (p 62)

5. 'I think part of it comes from living in the area we do. Having so many Lebanese around means that he doesn't have to mix with other people. The people he knows are all migrants like him, people who remember Lebanon like it was in the seventies. They don't get that Lebanon's moved with the times and is probably more modern now than a small town in the American Midwest (p 111)

6 'We're teenagers, we have to lie to our parents sometimes. You need to live a little.' (p 116)

7. 'I wonder if our lifestyle contributed to the Brighton Brawl. To outsiders, parts of Bankstown can be very confronting. Sometimes even I feel like they're not in Australia ... But I can't help wondering if in the process of trying *not* to forget where we came from, we've forgotten the country we've come to.' (p 16)

8. 'I don't want to hang out with girls I don't like, even though I know they have the power to pull me up the school social ladder. That would make me a hypocrite.' (p 36)

9. 'After all, it's going to be a long year, and we're all trying to figure out what will happen when we leave our cocoon. Will we flourish or flail in the big wide world?' (p 57)

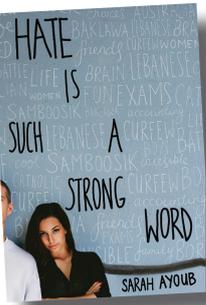
10. 'You have the best of two worlds - Lebanese and Australian. You speak two languages and balance two lifestyles. Maybe you can use that richness to show both communities that it's possible to be at ease with one another?' (p 85)

11. 'People don't get that some of them really want to be here, to function in society, but there isn't enough support to help them set up their lives. We need more education and assimilation - not to the extent that migrants have to forget who they are, but enough to bring them into the wider community rather than living on the fringe.' (p 112)

12. 'What are you going to do next year? University, *mesh hayk*?' It's a rhetorical question, because to them uni is the only option. It figures, given ninety per cent of our family are migrants whose sole purpose for coming here was to give their kids an education.' (pp 126-7)

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Questions for Discussion

1. 'I guess I'm trying to prove that you can retain your cultural identity and still integrate into the community without it causing social problems. It's going to be a lot of work.'

'But what's the point?' he asks, sitting up. 'Maybe it's the wider Aussie community that needs to adjust to the idea of migration. If they didn't have a problem with other cultures, there wouldn't be any riots.'

(p 21)

Activity: Conduct a debate based on the two positions presented here on refugees and asylum seekers by Sophie and her brother Andrew.

2. 'Come on, Zayden, they don't want us out of the country. The governor of New South Wales is a Lebanese woman, for heaven's sake. Her husband captained the Wallabies. And the former premier in Victoria was a Lebanese man.'(p 120)

Activity: Research her Excellency the Governor Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO and former Premier of Victoria, Steve Bracks' backgrounds further. Choose another prominent Lebanese Australian to research further as well.

3. 'Cedar Saints College should open its doors to students of other cultural backgrounds.'(p 148)

Discussion Point: If your school put this statement up for debate would it be stating the obvious? Is your school already integrated?

4. 'Don't forget that more than half of us were born in this country – we know how things work and that you want to punish the offenders. But why do you think arranging a sausage sizzle is going to solve the problem?' ... 'You go on about how Australia's made up of all different people and communities,' Zayden says, 'but so are we. The Lebanese people aren't just Christian and Muslim, they're also Druze and Jewish. When something bad happens, we all get labelled the same way, but when a good opportunity comes along, only one part of the Lebanese community gets to participate.'

(pp 52-3)

Activity: Research and discuss Lebanese culture as it is reflected in what Zayden says here.

5. Read Shehadie's note to Sophie about taking a stand. It includes two key quotes:

'Eleanor Roosevelt once said that no one can feel invisible without their consent. Kurt Cobain once said he'd rather be disliked for who he is than loved and respected for who he's not.' (p 153)

Discussion Point: Discuss the note and its implications in terms of your own lives. Apply what he says to some issue which has been controversial in your school community.

6. Read Sophie's speech to the class about prejudice:

'Ladies and gentlemen of Year Twelve, Mrs Cafree, my fellow debaters. The negative side's fourth speaker stated that keeping our world functioning the way that it's supposed to. But I stand here before you to counter this argument, which is steeped in the ignorance we profess to be victimised by.'
(p 156)

Activity: Write your own speech based on the topic which Sophie is addressing here.

7. 'I love how Mum's teaching me a lesson without even trying. Here I am thinking I'm invisible, when she's missed out on so much. My heart aches as I realise she's never really had a chance to be young.' (p 224)

Discussion Point: In what ways will Sophie's life be different to that of her mother?

8. 'Suddenly the phrase 'ignorance is bliss' makes perfect sense, and I understand why half the kids at my school have pretty blissful lives.' (p 122)

Discussion Point: Does this quote have wider relevance? Australians are very fond of reflecting on what fortunate lives we lead. Is this 'contentment' partly fuelled by ignorance and complacency as well?

9. Sophie and Shehadie are very engaging characters.

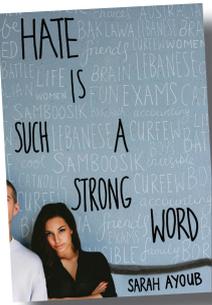
Discussion Point: Who was your favourite character in this novel, and why?

10. This novel ends on an open note with Sophie about to finish school and Shehadie heading off overseas with his father.

Discussion Point: What might happen in a sequel to this novel? Write your own synopsis of possible developments.

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About the author of the notes

Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright operates justified text writing and publishing consultancy services, and has published widely on children's and YA literature. In 2011 she was the recipient of the CBCA (Qld) Branch Dame Annabelle Rankin Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Queensland, and in 2012 the CBCA (National) Nan Chauny Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Australia.