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Saint Anything by Sarah Dessen



<https://sarahdessen.com/bio/>

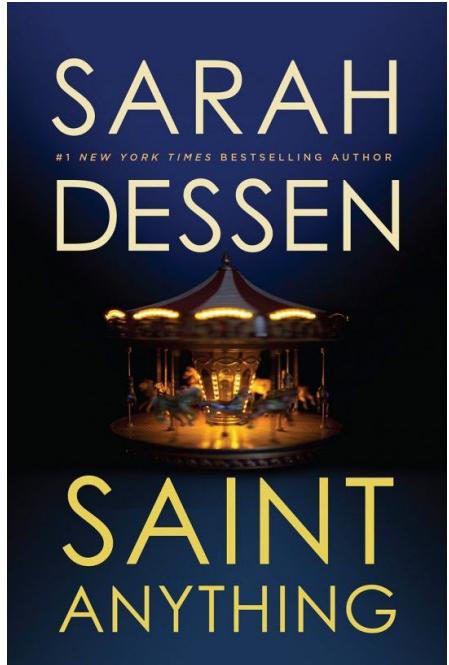
Sarah Dessen has been the #1 New York

Times bestselling author of several novels. She tends to write more for the high schoolers since she has many stories from her high school days. She never imagined herself writing YA novels until an editor at Orchard Books bought her second book, *Someone Like You*, for publication. Her book, *Saint Anything*, was claimed as “A TIME Magazine Top 10 Children’s Book of 2015.” She is currently teaching English at a university level and lives with her family in North Carolina.

Summary of the Book:

Sydney views herself as invisible with her family because of her older brother, Peyton. Ever since Peyton got caught doing drugs in the school parking lot, he continues to get busted for drugs, stealing, and reckless driving, as a habit. Once he returns from rehab, he commits the worst crime of all: drunk driving and hitting an innocent kid named David Ibarra. The result of Peyton's actions not only leaves David in a wheelchair, forever paralyzed, but it also leaves Sydney carrying on his guilt in which more problems arose regarding the effects of Peyton's bad choices. Sydney decides to switch schools to Jackson High due to money being tight in the household.

Choosing to eat pizza to kill time before heading home on her first day of school, she goes to Seaside Pizza, not knowing the family that runs the business: the Chathams. Since her first slice in the close-knit shop, she learns through the Chathams to value family, friendships, and, most importantly, herself.



<https://sarahdessen.com/book/saint-anything/>

Significant Quote that Represents the Book #1

“Like always when I saw a wheelchair, I thought of David Ibarra. It was just one of the triggers capable of bringing his face—which I knew well from all newspaper photos and online stories I’d sought out in the days and then months after everything happened—and then everything rushing back. [...] I sought this out because I felt like I should, as if it might lessen the guilt. But it never did” (48).

→ Quote #1 Analysis

The quote signifies Sydney’s internal struggle of dealing with the guilt of her brother’s crime. Though she did not run David over, she felt responsible for carrying this guilt since no one in her family seems to verbalize that what David has gone through is tragic but to worry about Peyton serving his time in prison. The quote also emphasizes Sydney knows David’s face and his identity without meeting him. It demonstrates that the thought of him will somehow always be in her mind. She never met David in person at this point in the story, but she realizes that she has come to know who was affected by someone else’s bad choices because of her brother. All in all, the passage shows how a connection between two people can be one-sided, knowing a family member has done something wrong with that other person.

Quote #2 Analysis ←

As shown in the quote, Sydney’s mother establishes a passive protectiveness when indirectly defending Peyton’s actions. This leads Sydney to understand that her mom will never be against her son, even when reason enters the conversation. Sydney sees through this fault and sympathizes with David. Even though Sydney recognizes her familial ties with Peyton, it does not give her the reason to stand by her brother. Since her mother seems to be the head of the household, Sydney feels hopeless to voice her reasoning about the situation. The quote is the few instances of Sydney and her mother having different perspectives. With that said, it reveals that complex issues regarding a family member’s mistake may or may not be easy to cope with. In this case, it is easy for Sydney’s mother to sympathize with Peyton because he is her son, while Sydney finds it more difficult to accept that her brother has ruined an individual’s life.

Significant Quote that Represents the Book #2

“[Julie, (Sydney’s mother) asked,] ‘What was a fifteen -year-old doing out riding his bike at two in the morning anyway?’ [...] *I just wonder.* That was the moment I realized my mom would never be able to really hold Peyton responsible for what he’d done. Their bond was too tight, too tangled, for her to see reason. Like anyone deserved to be hit by a car and paralyzed. Like he was asking for it. For days afterward, I had trouble even looking at her” (71).

Significant Quote that Represents the Book #3

“I reached up, cupping my hand over the pendant Mac had given me, the way I now found myself doing often. My Saint Anything. I like the thought of someone looking out for me, whoever it might be. We all need protecting, even if we don’t always know what from” (416).

→ Quote #3 Analysis

This quote elucidates the importance of the pendant Mac Chatham (the only Chatham son, which Sydney has an intimate connection with) gave Sydney (341). Here, Sydney finds herself unconsciously reaching for the pendant “often” with her “Saint Anything.” She provides her pendant that saint name since the image and wording were hard to read when Mac gave her earlier in the novel. Despite that, she finds comfort knowing that there is “someone looking out” for her and has a sense of security. The pendant itself symbolizes the gain of security and people whom Sydney now relies on throughout her journey of opening up. This ending quote showcases that the pendant embodies the support of Sydney’s improving relationship with her parents and brother, her new friendships with the Chathams, and herself.

Teaching the Book in the Classroom

- ❑ Saint pendants are essential objects within the story. It carries the significance of protection and assurance. Students can create their own pendant (either digitally or on paper) with a person whom they can rely and seek help from in its center. Students will write a paragraph reflecting why they have chosen that person to be on their pendant.
- ❑ Students can compare and contrast the families displayed in the story: Sydney’s family and the Chathams. In groups, they will use a venn diagram to visualize the differences and similarities between the families. Utilize this activity to encourage class discussion on what they have come up with in their diagrams and ask them, “What is the author trying to say about families in the novel?”
- ❑ Students can free-write on the perspective of David Ibarra’s view after the accident. Throughout the book, Sydney encounters David multiple times from the thrift store to one of the pizza deliveries with Mac, and in the end of the novel with the intent to apologize. Out of all these encounters, students will pick one event and describe the character’s feelings and thoughts about seeing Sydney.

Text Complexity and Recommended Age Group

Lexile: Ages 11 - 17; 690L

- The text complexity shown from Lexile recommends the book be taught in grades middle schoolers and high schoolers. Though it does not have a high Lexile score of the *Harry Potter* series (880L), it picks out specific themes discussed within the novel that may not be suitable for elementary and even middle schoolers. To be more precise, the discussion of "Personal & social issues: sexuality & relationships (Children's / Teenage)" is present where the protagonist does encounter a forced assault by an adult.

Dale-Chall: Raw score of 3.0853; Adjusted Score of (3.6365 + 3.0853); Final Score of 6.7; Grades 7 - 8

- Although the low score of 6.7 and recommended for only seventh and eighth graders, it should not discourage high school teachers from teaching this book. There are instances of sexual assault and drugs usage within the novel which may not be suitable for middle schoolers.

Category of Books that *Saint Anything* fits from Adolescents in the Search for Meaning

Chapter 4: Books about Real-Life Experiences

Chapter 6: Books about Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions

Why should teens read this book?

They should read this book because...

- They will understand that everyone has their own struggles which is vital to achieving empathy towards others.**
- They will find that honesty and being open to one another allows for everyone in a family or friend setting to be heard.**
- They will learn how to be a supportive friend like Mac and Layla Chatham to Sydney by listening, being patient, and encouraging.**