

DISCUSSION GUIDE



What happens online doesn't always stay online . . .

BACKLASH

Sarah Darer Littman

*author of *Want to Go Private?**

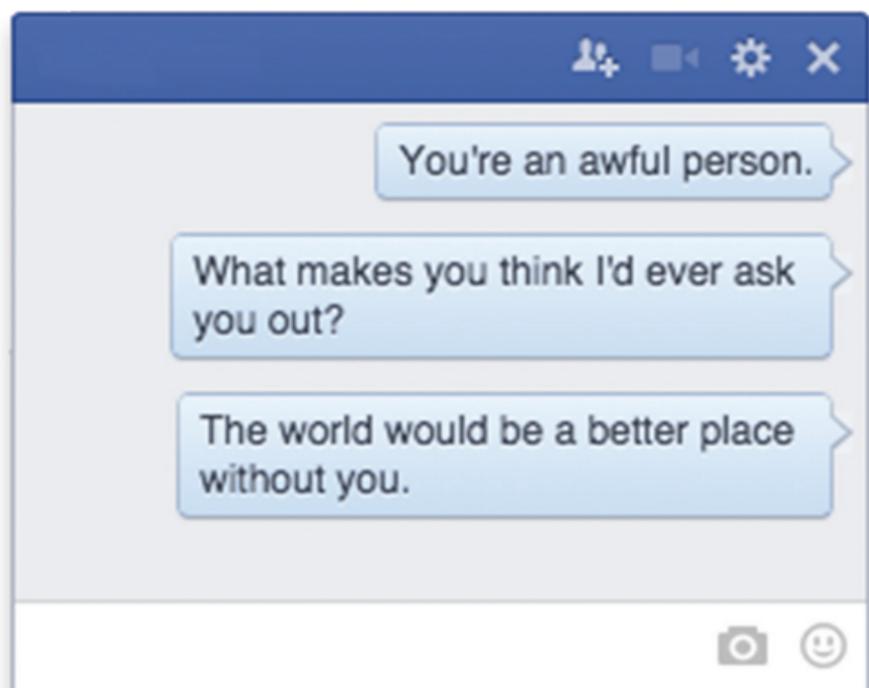
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Lara just got told off on Facebook.

She thought that Christian liked her, that he was finally going to ask her to his school's homecoming dance. They've been talking online for weeks, so what's with the sudden change? And where does he get off saying horrible things on her wall? Even worse – are they true?

It's been a long time since Lara's felt this bad, this depressed, this ugly. She's worked really hard to become pretty and happy – and make new friends after what happened in middle school.

Bree used to be best friends with overweight, depressed Lara, but constantly listening to Lara's issues got to be too much. Secretly, Bree's glad that Christian called Lara out. Lara's not nearly as amazing as people think.

But no one realized just how far Christian's harsh comments would push Lara. Not even Bree.

As online life collides with real life, things spiral out of control, and not just for Lara. Because when the truth starts to come together, the backlash is even more devastating than anyone could have ever imagined.

For more about the book visit
<http://backlash-book.com/>

Discussion Questions

1. At the dramatic opening of *Backlash*, Lara thinks, “The words on the screen don’t make sense. They can’t.” How does reading those words set the stage for Lara’s choice to harm herself?
2. While watching the EMTs work on her sister, Sydney thinks, “I can’t say how many times I’ve wished that I were an only child. But now I’m whispering frantic prayers, over and over, that I won’t be” (p. 9). Considering Sydney’s reflections on her relationship with Lara, what do we learn about how she feels about her sister? Do you think her attitude is particularly unusual? Why or why not?
3. Early in the novel, Liam describes the Kelleys as “our friends.” Why does he still see them as friends? How has his relationship with Sydney changed throughout recent years? Do you see ways in which he is regretful for not remaining close to her?
4. Bree shares that being friends with Lara was often difficult; she calls high school a “relief. Bigger place, new people. Made it easy to escape, to hang out with other girls” (p. 14). While her choice to cyberbully Lara is deplorable, what was it about her friendship with Lara that she found challenging? Do you think she had a legitimate reason to feel as she did?
5. What does Bree’s determination to post the pictures of an unconscious Lara indicate about Bree’s state of mind? Do you think it’s common to feel compelled to seek out “likes” at any cost as a way to get attention?
6. Compare and contrast Lara and Bree. Are these two characters similar in any ways?
7. In what ways do the events between Lara and Bree bring Sydney and Liam closer together? What makes their friendship so problematic?

8. As Sydney considers her tryouts for the school play, she feels anger at her sister for not considering her needs, and she thinks, “It’s all about Lara. Just like it always is” (p. 28). Do you think Sydney has a right to be frustrated with Lara for her suicide attempt? Is she in fact “self-centered”?
9. In what ways do Lara and Bree’s parents influence the behavior of their daughters? Explore how each of these adults acts and reacts to the situation as it unfolds.
10. After a newspaper headline describes them as a “Mother-Daughter Bullying Team,” Bree states, “Mom and me a team? That’s got to be the biggest joke ever. The truth is, she’s the crazy coach and I’m the player who always gets yelled at for no reason” (p. 228). Do you think Bree’s analysis of her relationship with her mom is accurate? Why or why not?
11. Predict how each member of Lara and Bree’s family will ultimately be changed by the events that transpire in *Backlash*.

Extension Activity: Turn Down the Dial

Have groups select a current events article about cyberbullying, either from backlash-book.com or from a print or online news source. After reading the article, have groups review the following questions:

- What factors intensify cyberbullying and online cruelty, and what can be done to lessen them?
- Why does anonymity make online cruelty and bullying escalate quickly and what can be done about it?

Have groups draft a step-by-step plan that offers strategies for intervention and have them share an overview of their article and plan of action.

Extension Activity: Be Upstanding

In small groups have students define the following terms: escalate, de-escalate, bystander, and upstander. Using the events in *Backlash*, ask students to answer the following questions about the cyberbullying depicted in the novel:

- Who was involved in the story and what roles did they play?
- Who was the target?
- Who were the offenders?
- Were there bystanders and/or upstanders?

After reviewing the roles participants play in the cyberbullying in *Backlash*, have students discuss the following questions:

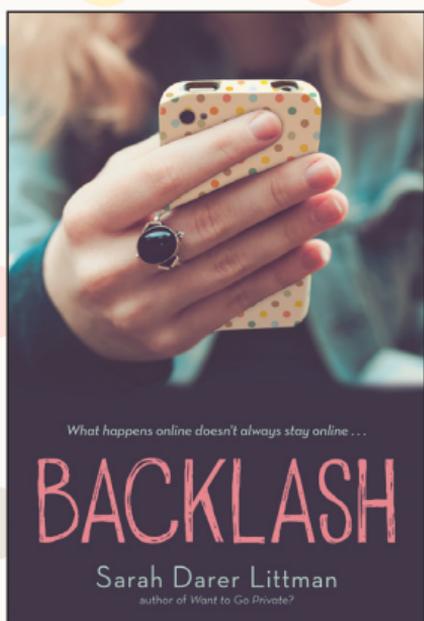
- How do you think the online cruelty might be different from offline behavior?
- What do you think you might have done if you were Lara? What could you have done to be an upstander in this situation? Ask groups to discuss the ways that everyone can help de-escalate online cruelty.

Then, have groups create original Public Service Announcements that offer basic definitions and demonstrate specific strategies to help deal with this issue. Students will draft a script and either create a storyboard or film a video.

For more information and resources on cyberbullying, check out

www.backlash-book.com

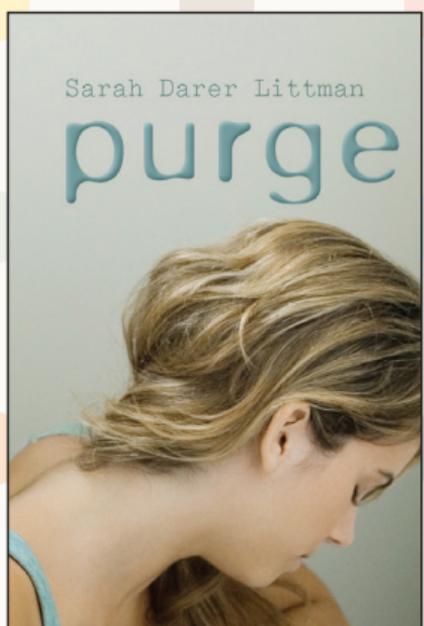
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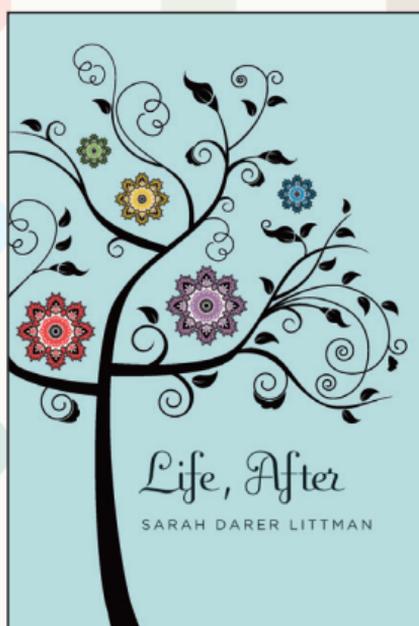
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