

Black Inc. Book Club Notes

TITLE: Muddy People

AUTHOR: Sara El Sayed

ISBN: 9781760642464

PRICE: \$29.99

SUBJECT: Biography & Memoir

Book description

A hilarious, heartwarming memoir of growing up and becoming yourself in an Egyptian Muslim family

Soos is coming of age in a household with a lot of rules. No bikinis, despite the Queensland heat. No boys, unless he's Muslim. And no life insurance, not even when her father gets cancer.

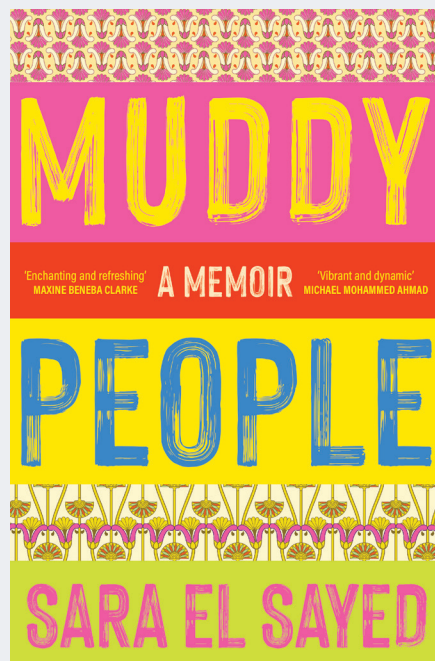
Soos is trying to balance her parents' strict decrees with having friendships, crushes and the freedom to develop her own values. With each rule Soos comes up against, she is forced to choose between doing what her parents say is right and following her instincts. When her family falls apart, she comes to see her parents as flawed, their morals based on a muddy logic. But she will also learn that they are her strongest defenders.

Praise for Muddy People

'Both cosmopolitan and Australian at the same time, *Muddy People* is like the best kind of cake: warm, sweet, a bit nutty – and made with so much love.' —**ALICE PUNG**

'Sara El Sayed's writing is fresh, vibrant and dynamic. This is the kind of mud that will dirty your hands and cleanse your spirit.' —**MICHAEL MOHAMMED AHMAD**, author of *The Lebs*

'*Muddy People* is a nuanced, engaging and lyrical account of what it means to be Other in Australia, and its characters are impeccably drawn. Sara El Sayed is an enchanting and refreshing new voice in the Australian literary landscape.' —**MAXINE BENEBA CLARKE**



About the author

Sara El Sayed was born in Alexandria, Egypt. She has a Master of Fine Arts and works at Queensland University of Technology. Her writing features in the anthologies *Growing Up African in Australia* and *Arab, Australian, Other*, among other places. She is a recipient of a Queensland Writers Fellowship and was a finalist in the 2020 Queensland Premier's Young Writers and Publishers Award.



Black Inc. Book Club Notes

Discussion Points

1. What do you think motivated the author to write this memoir? Discuss current social and political issues that make this book important.
2. How does the book's structure lead you through the story? Did you find the way the chapters were broken up helpful in following the timeline?
3. The book juxtaposes a strict Egyptian Muslim family with a more easygoing Australian lifestyle. In what ways are they different, and in what ways are they (perhaps surprisingly) the same?
4. 'Men are pigs, all of them. Don't get married, if you can help it.' (p.57) Nana doesn't have a good opinion of men. How do Nana's life experiences influence the author and her mother? How does family history shape younger generations?
5. The author talks about wanting to be a good person and wanting to make Baba happy. There are lots of references throughout the book to religious ideas of what is good and bad. Discuss how religion plays a part in morality and how overarching themes of good versus evil appear in different cultures.
6. 'Someone had told her that her body was not okay, and she was still carrying that with her. It worried me that she was an adult and still had these feelings.' (p.95) What does the title, *Muddy People*, refer to? How does racism and xenophobia affect the author's self-image?
7. The author takes the blame for her parents' divorce in the hope that it will spare them some burden. Discuss the themes of guilt, blame and sacrifice in familial relationships.
8. When the author is made school captain she wonders if it is because she used humour to give the other students a 'racism hall pass' (p.198). Self-deprecating humour is often used to make people feel at ease – particularly when it comes to race, sexuality and disability. Can you think of entertainers who use self-deprecating humour and why they might do so?
9. When the author's brother, Mohamed, brings a white girlfriend home and their father has no issue with this, the author is angry. Why? Why are the rules different for her? What does she do about this?
10. *Muddy People* is – among other things – a migrant story. Have you read other memoirs that are similar to this? In what ways were they similar?
11. What are your lasting impressions of the book? How did it make you feel, and were you surprised by the last chapter?