

MADDIE IN THE MIDDLE

JULIA LAWRIKINSON

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YEAR LEVEL: Y5–8

ABOUT THE BOOK

Maddie Lee is in year six. Her best and oldest friend Katy is busy with school duties and music and scholarship plans, and Maddie feels lost and lonely. Then a new girl starts at school. Maddie wants more than anything to become friends with her. And she does. But Samara's friendship comes at a high price, with consequences Maddie could never have imagined.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Julia Lawrinson is an award-winning writer of books for children and young adults. She hails from Perth and, despite leaving school at fifteen, has a PhD in writing and a Bachelor of Laws with distinction. Julia has worked in a range of organisations, from the arts to parliament to health. She has presented at schools, workshops and conferences across Australia, and in Singapore, Indonesia and the USA, and loves meeting her audience and encouraging reading, learning and curiosity. Her books are about friendship, family and the occasional Jack Russell. She loves the ocean, reading, dog parks and the word serendipity.

THEMES

- Coming of age
- Self-esteem
- Friendship
- Family
- Juvenile crime

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

Y5–8 English

Y5–8 Health and Physical Education (mental health and wellbeing)

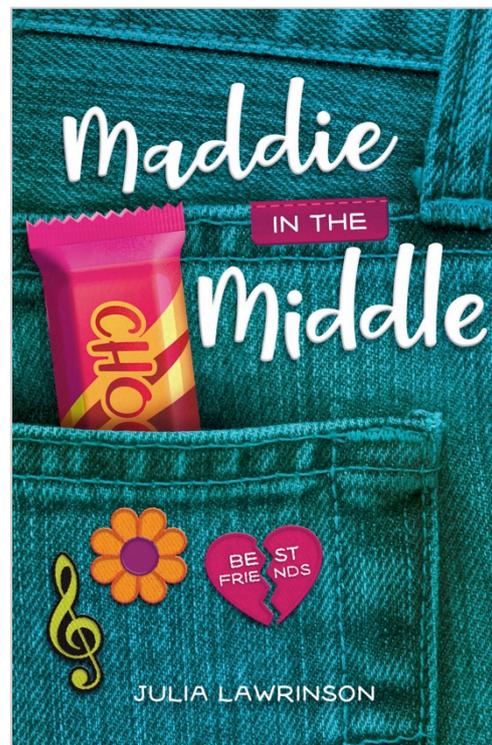
USEFUL WEBSITES

- Author's website: <https://julialawrinson.com.au>

CLASSROOM IDEAS

Discussion questions

1. Compare and contrast the characters Maddie and Katy – what adjectives would you use to describe each? How would you describe the dynamic of their friendship?
2. Do you think Maddie is jealous of Katy or Samara? Have you ever felt jealous of a friend? How did you work through this emotion?
3. What does the term 'popular' mean to you? Why do you think Maddie wants to be friends with the 'popular' crowd? Do you think it's important to be popular? Why/why not?
4. *Do your best, help the rest, put your spirit to the test!* (p. 13) What does it mean to 'put your spirit to the test'? Give an example of when you've had to do this.
5. After Maddie agrees to help Samara shoplift, Samara captions a photo of Maddie as 'true friend'. Do you think Samara is a 'true friend' in return? What is your definition of a 'true friend'?
6. Do you think Maddie made a good decision to help Samara shoplift? Is it fair of Samara to ask Maddie to take the blame if they get caught? What would you have done in Maddie's position?



7. *You'd do the same thing, wouldn't you? You'd lie to help your friend?* (p. 10) Have you ever told a lie? How did it make you feel? Did the truth come out in the end? What is the difference between a lie and a 'lie by omission'? Is one worse than the other or can both be equally damaging?
8. *On the one hand, I am proud that I am helping. On the other, I know it is wrong. Some days, I am sure that the helping outweighs the stealing. Other days, I'm not.* (p. 134) What is an 'ethical dilemma'? Have you ever been in a situation when you were unsure what the right thing to do was? How did you resolve this situation?
9. Do you think Maddie regrets shoplifting and lying to her friends and family? Give evidence from the text. It is often said that 'smart people learn from their mistakes'. What does Maddie learn from her friendship with Samara and her experience with the juvenile justice system? Use a Venn diagram to compare and contrast her character at the beginning and the end of the novel.
10. Have you ever done something you later regretted? What did you learn from your mistake? Why is it important not to dwell on past regrets and instead to focus on making better choices in the future?
11. What are the potential punishments for minors who commit theft in Australia? What is a juvenile detention centre? Maddie's father warns her: *People with criminal records get treated differently to other people.* (p. 167) How and why might they be treated differently? Do you think this is fair?
12. How are the themes of friendship, family and self-esteem portrayed in the book? What other themes stood out to you? What message/s did you take away from the story?

Creative writing

1. *Mirror Maddie's creative writing class:* Each student writes one word on a slip of paper and puts it in a class box marked 'Creative Writing Prompts'. The teacher draws out a new topic each week, with students taking twenty minutes to compose a short story, poem or dialogue on this topic.
2. Read Maddie's response to the writing prompt 'hair', entitled 'Ode to a Hairdryer', on p. 38. What do you think the poem is about? How might it relate to the situation with her mum? What might the hairdryer symbolise?
3. *Alternate endings:* How might the story have evolved differently in the three twists below? Choose one and rewrite the final chapters of the story. Then swap your answer with a partner.
 - a. Maddie had refused to help Samara steal and instead confided her concerns about her new friend's family to her dad.
 - b. Maddie was honest with the police about Samara's involvement when they were caught shoplifting.
 - c. The judge reviewed the footage of Maddie and Samara's multiple offences and decided to sentence them to a juvenile detention centre instead of community service.
4. *Diary entry:* How do you think Samara feels when Maddie takes the blame? Scared? Guilty? Angry? Anxious? Write an imaginative diary entry from her point of view. Why do you think she eventually changes her mind and defends Maddie in court?
5. *Continue the story:* Will Maddie accept her place at Lakelands alongside Katy and Samara? How will their friendship be tested during their first term of high school? Write the next two chapters of *Maddie in the Middle* from the point of view of Samara, Katy or Maddie.
6. *Short story:* Write a short story about a lie that goes wrong for the lead character.

Debate

1. In groups of three, debate for/against the validity of the claim: *It's okay to lie to help a friend.*

Do My Best campaign

1. Maddie starts a Do My Best campaign at the start of the new school year. She sets goals such as being more organised and being disciplined with her homework and clarinet practice. Design your own Do My Best campaign: what are some areas you would like to improve upon (e.g. organisation, punctuality etc.)? Choose two practical goals and create an action-plan to help you achieve them.

Mental health

1. *Clever Katy. Mysterious new girl. And me. Plain, old, ordinary me. Even if I do my best, how am I ever going to be somebody special, somebody important, somebody who matters?* (p. 25) What does the term 'self-esteem' mean? Everyone has different qualities that make them unique – what are some of the things you are good at or enjoy? What makes you special? Why is it important not to compare ourselves to others?
2. *Paper chains:* Each student randomly selects the name of a class member. They then write a note to that student describing something they admire about them. Connect all the strips to make a class paper chain to read and display.
3. *Acrostic poem:* Write an acrostic poem spelling out your name. Each line should describe something that makes you special. Display the poems around the classroom.

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