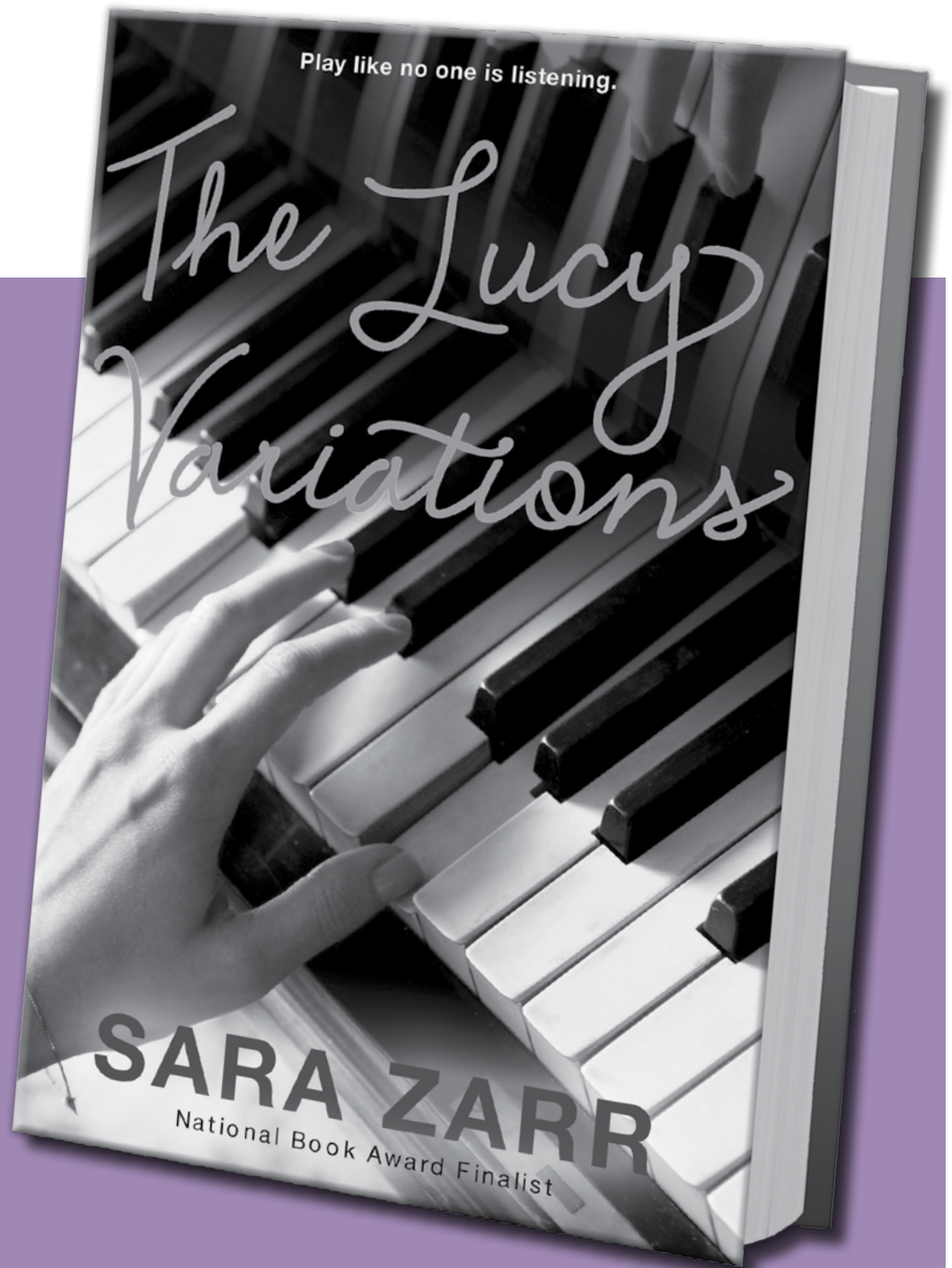


The Lucy Variations



Curriculum connections

- ❖ Music
- ❖ Literature
- ❖ Self-discovery

Ages: 12 & Up



“A mellifluous novel.” —*Booklist*

by
SARA ZARR

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Will toasts “to the wonder of beauty in all its forms” the first time Lucy meets him, and this idea strikes a chord with her. Identify the moments in the novel where Lucy feels joy and an awareness of the beauty in everything. What do these moments teach her? How do they ultimately help her reconcile her feelings toward music and playing?
 2. Describe the contentious relationships Lucy has with her grandfather and mother. Why does Lucy see them as an obstacle to her happiness and love of the piano? How does her perception of each of them change over the course of novel?
 3. “Music, her grandfather always told her, was language. A special language, a gift from the Muses, something all people are born understanding but few people can thoroughly translate.” People in Lucy’s life feel that she is obligated to use the great gifts she’s been given. Does Lucy agree? Does her thinking change over time? Do you agree that someone with Lucy’s talent owes the world their translation? Why or why not?
 4. Reyna, Lucy’s best friend, wonders whether Lucy simply misses music for the attention, and Lucy questions this herself. Considering Lucy’s crush on her English teacher, Mr. Charles, do you think Lucy is simply someone who seeks the spotlight? Why or why not? How much is Lucy’s craving an audience due to being a musician versus simply being human?
 5. An intermezzo is a musical term for a short movement between the larger segments of a musical piece. Why do you think the author chooses to name the brief flashback chapters intermezzos? Consider how this non-linear structure shapes the narrative. What insights into Lucy’s character do these chapters provide?
 6. Lucy feels betrayed by her family for not telling her when Grandma Beck is gravely ill. Consider the role of betrayal in other relationships, particularly those with Will and her brother Gustav. What does Lucy learn about violating trust?
 7. The Beck-Moreaus are an incredibly privileged family. How does the family’s wealth and status shape the story? What aspects of their privilege does Lucy wrestle with? How would the story be different if Lucy’s family came from a more modest background?
 8. Throughout the novel, we see Lucy coming to terms with the idea of acting for herself rather than seeking permission or gratification from others. How is Lucy’s decision to cut her hair and purge her closet a part of this process? Identify other moments in the story where we see Lucy act independently, influenced solely by her own desires. How do these moments help her in her path to self-discovery?
 9. “Brain, heart, and means. ‘Without heart, you’re a machine.’” Describe the role of love in the book. Consider romantic love, but also familial love, and passion for one’s craft. What lessons about love must Lucy learn in order to move on from quitting music?
 10. Will is a key supportive figure in Lucy’s rediscovery of her passion for music. But Will is a complex character who battles with his own insecurities. How do Will’s complicated feelings involving music and success affect his relationship with Lucy? Do you believe Will’s explanation of his motives at the end of the story is genuine? Why or why not?
 11. A musical variation is a theme of music that is repeated but altered in some elemental way such as melody, rhythm or pitch. Interpret the title *The Lucy Variations* in light of this definition. In what ways does it speak to Lucy’s return to the piano? What foundational aspect of music does she return to, and what elements will she change?
 12. Listen to the songs on Lucy’s Love List. How does each song speak to the themes or tone of the novel? Is music a big part of your life? Take a moment to consider what would be on your own love list and why.
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The Lucy Variations

about the book



THE LUCY VARIATIONS
by Sara Zarr
HC: 978-0-316-20501-6

Lucy Beck-Moreau once had a promising future as a concert pianist. The right people knew her name, her performances were booked months in advance, and her future seemed certain.

That was all before she turned fourteen.

Now, at 16, it's over. A death, and a betrayal, led her to walk away. That leaves her talented 10-year-old brother, Gus, to shoulder the full weight of the Beck-Moreau family expectations. Then Gus gets a new piano teacher who is young, kind, and interested in helping Lucy rekindle her love of piano—on her own terms. But when you're used to performing for sold-out audiences and world-famous critics, can you ever learn to play just for yourself?



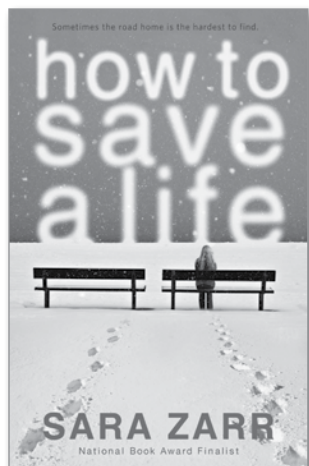
about the author



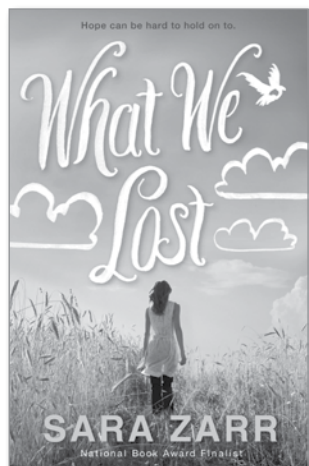
Photo © Jeffrey Overstreet

Sara Zarr was raised in San Francisco, California, and now lives with her husband in Salt Lake City, Utah. She is the author of *How to Save a Life*, *What We Lost*, *Sweethearts*, and the National Book Award finalist *Story of a Girl*.

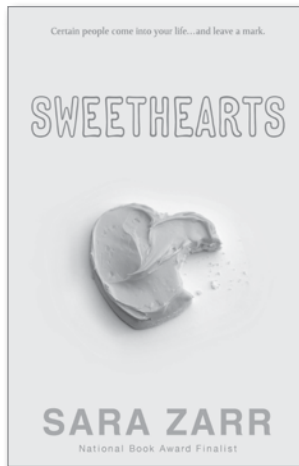
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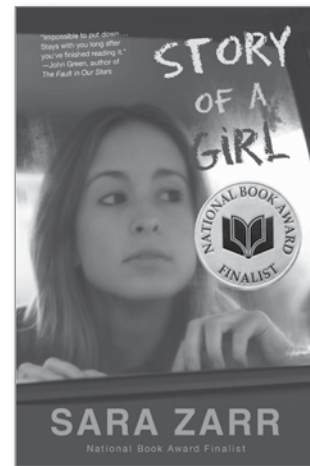
HOW TO SAVE A LIFE
PB: 978-0-316-03606-1



WHAT WE LOST
PB: 978-0-316-03604-7



SWEETHEARTS
PB: 978-0-316-01456-4



STORY OF A GIRL
PB: 978-0-316-01454-0