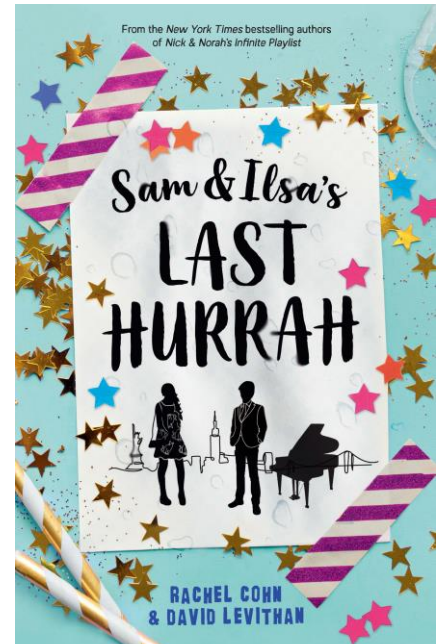


Sam & Ilsa's Last Hurrah

By Rachel Cohn and David Levithan

April 2018 ISBN 9781760293857 paperback
Recommended for readers 15 years and older



Summary

Siblings Sam and Ilsa Kehlmann have spent most of their high school years throwing parties for their friends in their grandmother's spectacular but soon-to-be-vacated New York apartment—and now they've prepared their final blowout, just before graduation.

The rules are simple: each twin gets to invite three guests, and the other twin doesn't know who's coming until the parties show up at the door. With Sam and Ilsa, the sibling revelry is always tempered with a large dose of sibling rivalry, and tonight is no exception.

One night. One apartment. Eight people. What could possibly go wrong? Oh, we all know the answer is plenty. But plenty also goes right, as well...in rather surprising ways.



Eschewing a typical introduction, the novel opens with a quote from *Liberace*, a flamboyant entertainer of the 1950s and 1960s, and a dinner party invitation, announcing itself along the way as an original and different take on the average YA novel.

It soon settles into a dual narrative told by the Sam and Ilsa of the book's title, both gradually revealing their personalities and introducing an eccentric cast of characters via distinctive voices and points-of-view.

The plot—shaped like a screwball comedy with a young adult twist—features a thoroughly modern attitude.

Use in the curriculum

Though there is some colourful language, drinking, dope smoking and talk about sex (it is set at a high school graduation party, after all), this novel is quite sweet and moral and suitable for use in Years 11 and 12 and in the Year 10 classroom.

The following Year 10 content descriptions are applicable:

Language

- Understand how language use can have inclusive and exclusive social effects, and can empower or disempower people
- Understand that people's evaluations of texts are influenced by their value systems, the context and the purpose and mode of communication

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- Analyse how higher order concepts are developed in complex texts through language features, including nominalisation, clause combinations, technicality and abstraction
- **Literature**
 - Reflect on, extend, endorse or refute others' interpretations of and responses to literature
 - Analyse and explain how text structures, language features and visual features of texts and the context in which texts are experienced may influence audience response
 - Evaluate the social, moral and ethical positions represented in texts
 - Identify, explain and discuss how narrative viewpoint, structure, characterisation and devices including analogy and satire shape different interpretations and responses to a text
 - Compare and evaluate how 'voice' as a literary device can be used in a range of different types of texts to evoke particular emotional responses
 - Analyse and evaluate text structures and language features of literary texts and make relevant thematic and intertextual connections with other texts

Literacy

- Analyse and evaluate how people, cultures, places, events, objects and concepts are represented in texts, through language, structural and/or visual choices
- Identify and analyse implicit or explicit values, beliefs and assumptions in texts and how these are influenced by purposes and likely audiences
- Use comprehension strategies to compare and contrast information within and between texts, identifying and analysing embedded perspectives, and evaluating supporting evidence

In the senior secondary classroom, the book can be used to address the following outcomes:

Unit 1

- Understand the relationships between purpose, context and audience and how these relationships influence texts and their meaning
- Investigate how text structures and language features are used to convey ideas and represent people and events in a range of texts

Unit 2

- Understand the ways in which ideas and attitudes are represented in texts
- Examine the ways texts are constructed to influence responses

Unit 3

- Understand relationships between texts, genres and contexts
- Investigate the effects of different conventions and mediums on responses

Unit 4

- Understand how content, structure, voice and perspective in texts shape responses and interpretations
- Examine different interpretations of texts and how these resonate with, or challenge, their own responses

Themes

- ★ love ★ friendship ★ coming of age ★ LGBTQI ★ own voices

Discussion questions

1. Spend a few minutes researching the American entertainer, Liberace. Once finished, discuss why you think the authors decided to begin the story quoting him. What sort of mood does this quote – and the invitation to the dinner party that immediately follows – set for the story to come?
2. Read the first two chapters of the book and discuss how language and tone are used to illustrate each chapter's central character.
3. One of the book's two authors, Rachel Cohn, said that the novel is about how you see yourself versus how others see you. Is the dual-narrative device an effective way of exploring this theme? In your answer discuss how either Sam or Ilsa see themselves and how their twin's view might differ significantly.
4. "*How do you leave?*" I ask. "*How do you get out of the fortress.*" (page 161). What is the 'fortress' that Sam is referring to here and why do you think he needs to 'get out'? Does Ilsa have her own 'fortress' and do you think she should escape it, too? Why?
5. How do Sam and Ilsa plan to escape their fortress by the end of the novel? Do they seem to have succeeded in the final chapter of the novel, set 10 years later?
6. "*You must find your allies, because sometimes leaving is...hard. People believe you are a certain thing, and if you're not who they want you to be, they can get confused...Get rid of those people that doubt you. Then go forward.*" (pages 164-165) Did this scene change your opinion of Freddie/Caspian? How does the sudden switch from comedy (the humour of a sock puppet saying all the things Freddie is afraid to say) to tragedy (the hint of a family torn apart by his obsession) impact on the story as a whole?
7. "*Families are just like that, I guess. Maybe it doesn't have to mean they love each member any less.*" (page 197). What do you think Ilsa means here and do you agree with her assessment of families?
8. What do you think Sam is referring to in Chapter Twenty? Hint: google Dolly Parton and Sylvester Stallone in a movie called *Rhinestone*.
9. Create a collage of images that reflect the themes, cultural icons and objects of desire referenced in the novel. Perhaps think about including the New York skyline, Dolly Parton and Liberace, champagne, fashions (Dior gowns), American colleges and grand pianos.
10. Use this collage to design a new cover for the novel. Would you keep the title, *Sam & Ilsa's Last Hurrah*, or come up with something new? What sort of typeface and colours would you use in the title and authors' names? Write a short explanation for your choices and why you think they will attract readers.
11. According to Rachel Cohn, her writing partnership with David Levithan consists of one author writing a chapter and sending it on to the other to continue the story, and so on. Try this approach with another student to write a short story about the 18-year-old Maddy mentioned in Chapter twenty-one.

The authors

This is David and Rachel's fifth collaboration, following *Nick and Nora's Infinite Playlist*, *Naomi and Ely's No Kiss List*, *Dash and Lily's Book of Dares* and *The Twelve Days of Dash and Lily*.

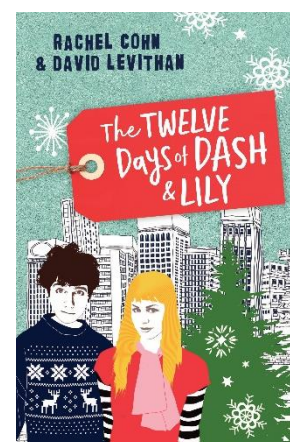
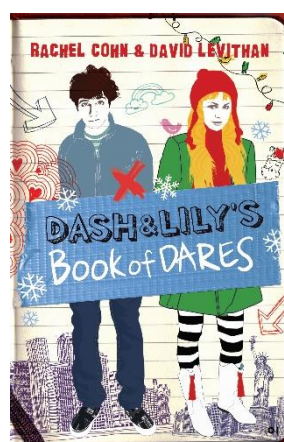
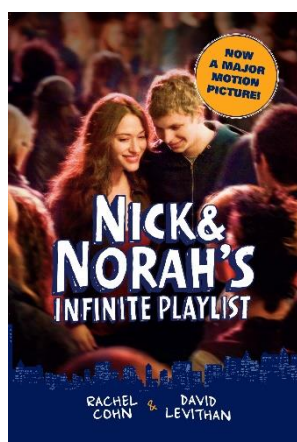
Rachel Cohn is the bestselling, award-winning author of many books, including *Gingerbread* and *Cupcake*. She lives in Los Angeles with two very cool cats named McNulty and Bunk.

David Levithan is the author of many brilliant and bestselling books, including *Boy Meets Boy*, *Every Day*, *The Lover's Dictionary* and *Will Grayson*, *Will Grayson*, co-authored with John Green.



About their writing technique, Rachel says:

'Sam & Ilsa's Last Hurrah is the fourth collaboration between David Levithan and myself. We had the idea to write a sibling He Said/She Said book first and then decided to use the format we've used in the past - we have the main characters' names and the premise of the book decided, and then we just write without much other planning. He writes a chapter and sends it to me, and I pick it up where he left off. To keep the writing spontaneous, there's not a lot of discussion that happens along the way.'



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