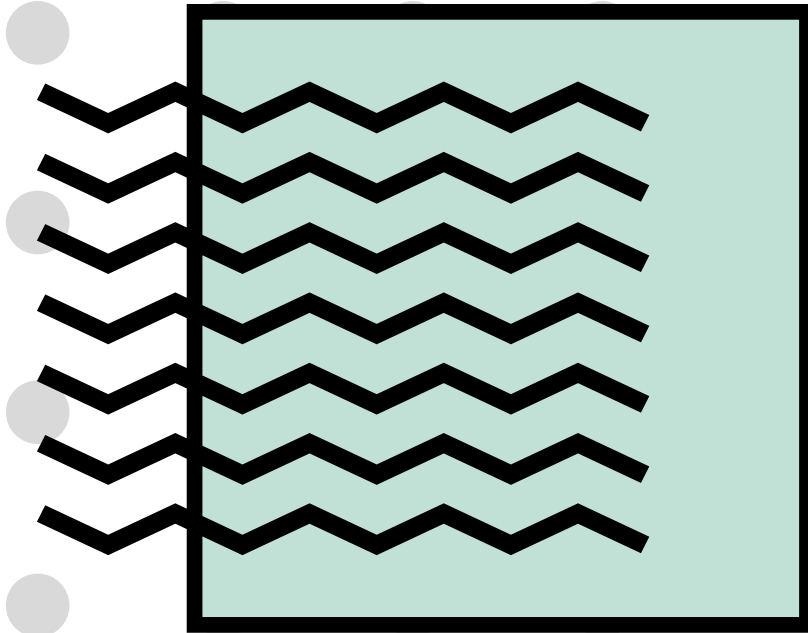


@BYSARAHAYOUB



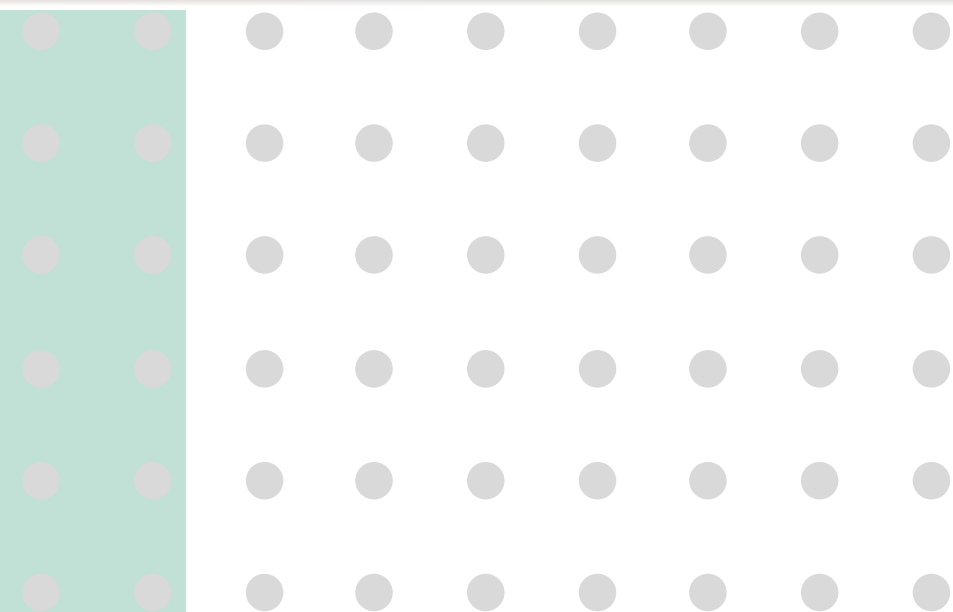
LONGING & BELONGING WITH DR SARAH AYOUB

On reading, writing and
finding one's place

HOW I STARTED

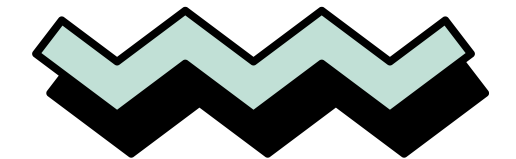


MY STORY STARTED WITH THE TRAGIC MURDER OF A 14 YEAR OLD SCHOOL BOY NAMED EDWARD LEE, WHO WAS STABBED BY A GANG OF YOUTHS OUTSIDE A PARTY IN PUNCHBOWL IN 1998.





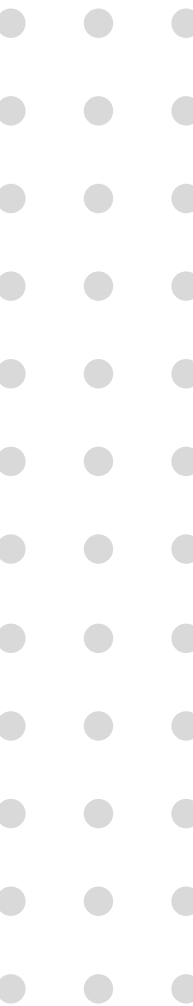
WHY AM I TELLING YOU THIS?



The murder happened just a block away from my high school, where I was in year 7, but its proximity to my sense of identity made it feel even closer. At twelve years old, I was on the cusp of my adolescence, and in the magazines I read and the TV shows I watched, girls my age were worrying about changing bodies, confusing friendships, their growing sexuality and first relationships.

I DIDN'T HAVE THE LUXURY OF THOSE 'NORMAL' TEEN PROBLEMS HOWEVER...

...because like many other teens of migrant heritage, I was suffering from something Professors Greg Noble and Paul Tabar call “Front-Door Syndrome”: which sees teens “live in an Australian world until they cross the threshold of their parents’ home and enter their parents’ culture” (Noble & Tabar 2002:131). At home, I was expected to be a good Lebanese girl. There were gender roles to conform to and strict rules to follow. And in the wider world, things weren't easy for me either, because I grew up at a time where to be Lebanese was to be on the margins of society.



To help support.....
Leb and wog
bashing day....
Bring your mates
down and lets
Options Bar

Crackdown on Middle Eastern crime:



Geoffrey Atkinson, wearing a green shirt and camouflage cap, joins the mob of men attacking Safi Merhi during the Cronulla riots. ANDREW MEARES





**BUT THERE WAS ONE
PLACE THAT WAS THE
EXCEPTION.**

THE LIBRARY.





BOOKS HAVE POWER

It's now been almost 20 years since I started writing my first book, *Hate is such a Strong Word*. It's been almost ten years since it was published. I started writing it as a way to deal with the things that I was going through, even though I had no plans to become an author one day, and even though I had never set foot in a creative writing class and didn't know what I was doing. But picking up a pen, or in my case, opening up Microsoft Word, was liberating.

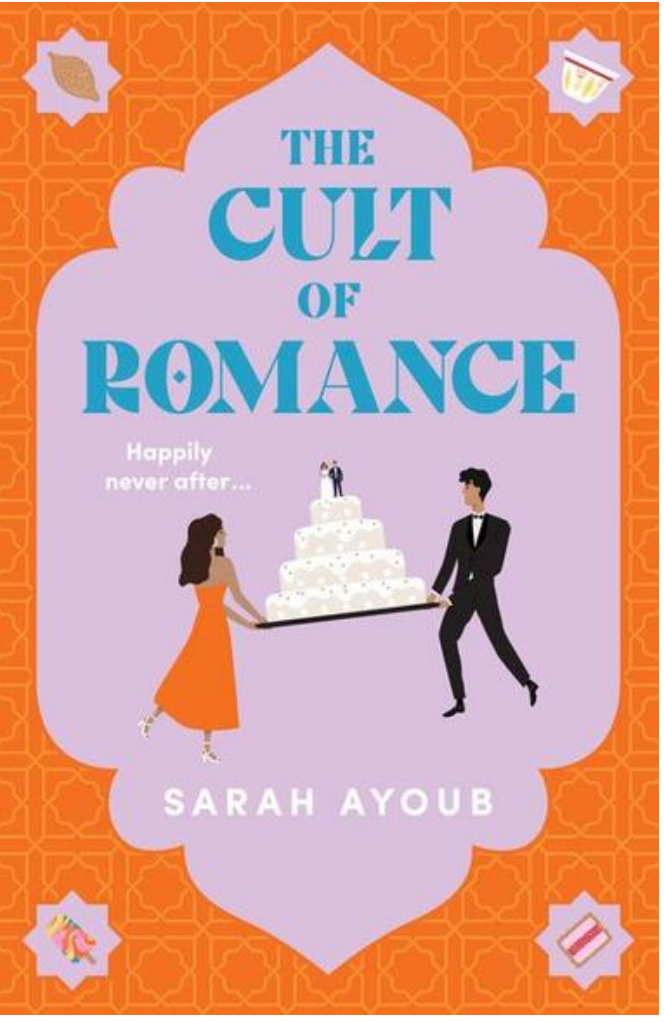
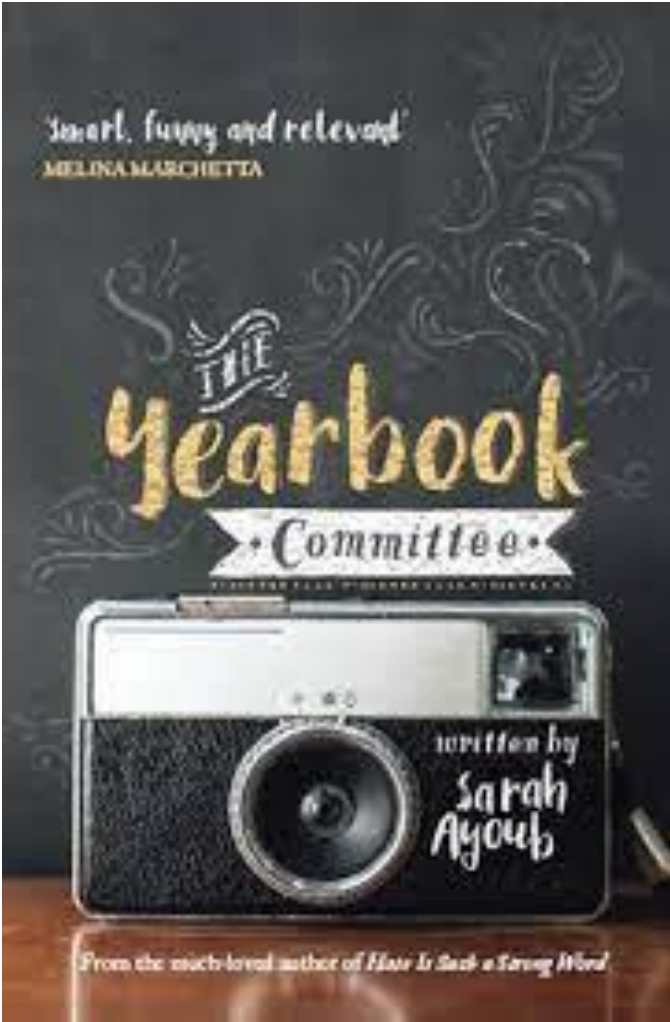
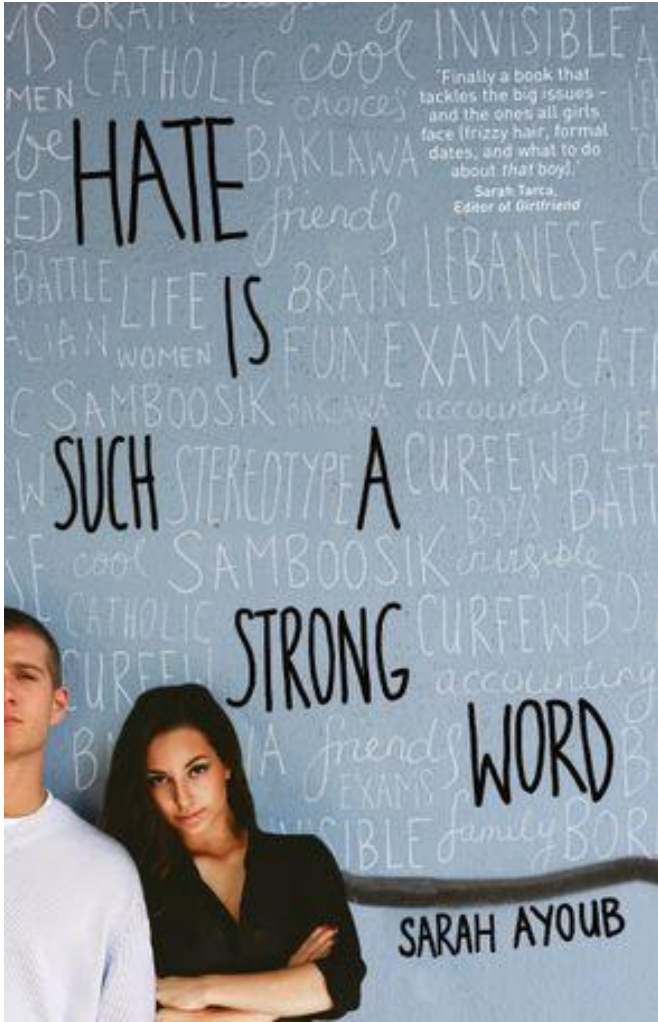


**I NOW RECOGNISE MY WRITING AS AN ACT OF
"COMING TO VOICE" – THIS IDEA THAT THE LATE
BLACK FEMINIST AND ACTIVIST BELL HOOKS
SAYS IS A "A GESTURE OF DEFIANCE THAT HEALS,
THAT MAKES NEW LIFE AND NEW GROWTH
POSSIBLE", ESPECIALLY FOR THE OPPRESSED,
MARGINALISED, COLONISED, ETC.**



**WRITING DIDN'T JUST HELP ME HEAL, IT ENABLED
ME TO CARVE OUT A SPACE IN THE WORLD. IT
GAVE ME A SENSE OF PRIDE IN MY IDENTITY.**

THIS IS WHERE IT LED ME:



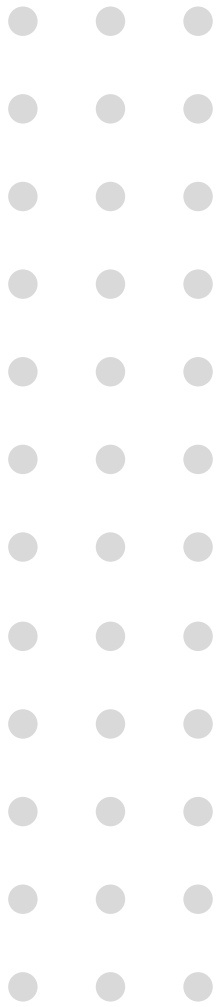


BUT IT ALSO GAVE OTHERS THE CHANCE TO SEE ME DIFFERENTLY.



And that’s precisely why books are so important. It’s because novels can do something that a three minute news report can’t. In them we get context and struggle, and background and love. When we see people and their stories with all their layers and dimensions and contradictions, we can

And while this is true of all books, it’s especially true in one's teen years, which is why it is so important to advocate and make space for teen readers. Research shows that it is the adolescent audiences of (predominantly) YA literature who are in the process of “master[ing] the ability to empathise” (Nikolajeva 2014:90). Basically, it is teen readers who are more likely to be at a point in their lives where the respect for other people’s experiences is starting to percolate in their minds.



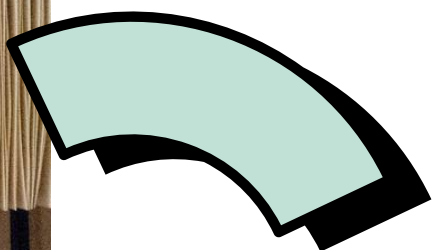
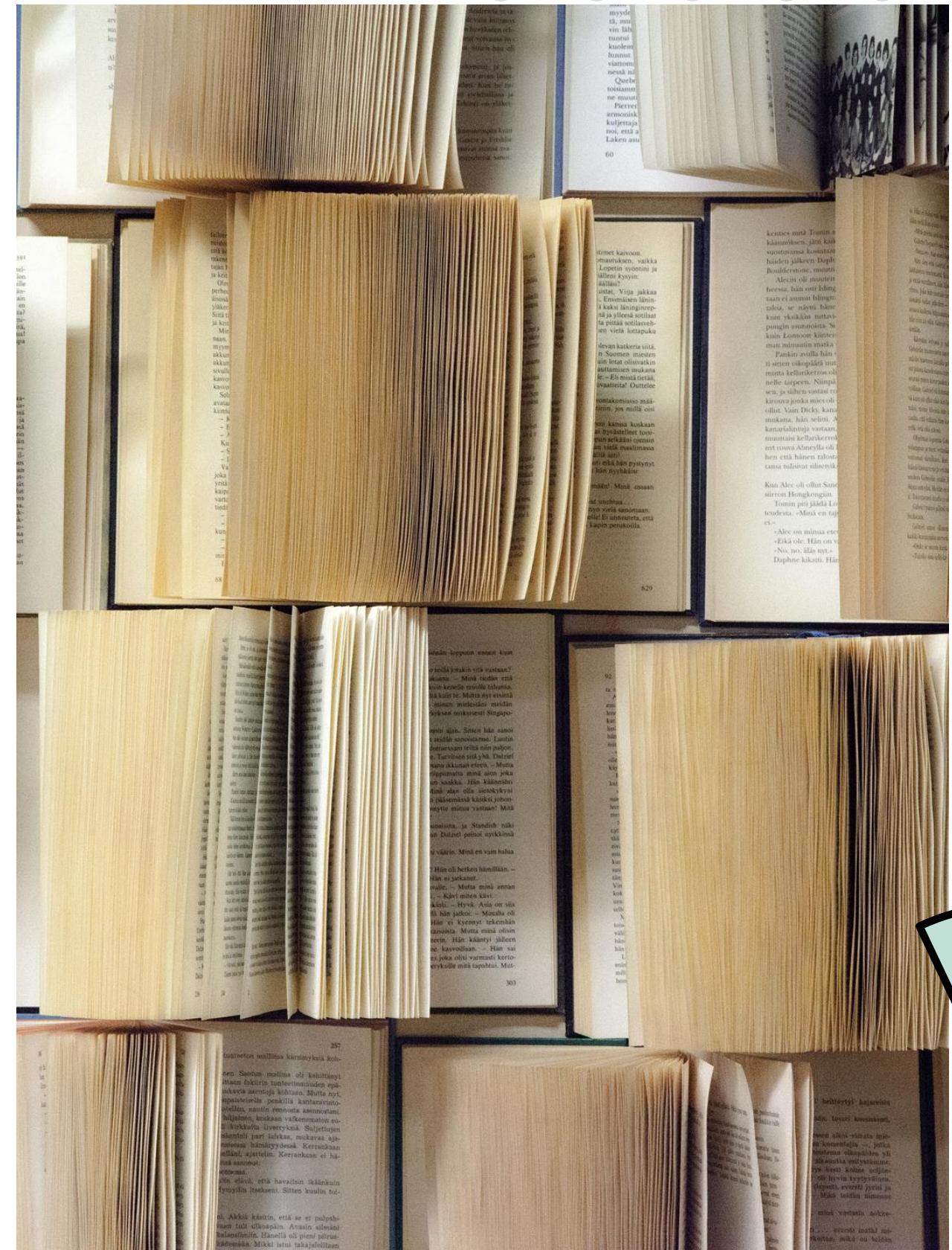
NARRATIVE INTIMACY

BOOKS MAKE THINGS THAT SEEM TOO ABSTRACT MORE PERSONAL AND IMMEDIATE

They generate what Day terms a “narrative intimacy” – a relationship between the reader and the narrator that reflects a real relationship through the sharing of information.

This narrative intimacy enables us to become potential allies for the marginalised, by situating us as readers within the protagonist’s close circle, giving us a first-hand account of an experience that might otherwise be too foreign for us to understand.

An American researcher of YA literature, Michael Cart, argues that fiction gives us an external view of another life, but also an internal one: through “the emotional rapport that it offers the reader, it enables us, in short, to eavesdrop on someone else's heart” (1996:269).

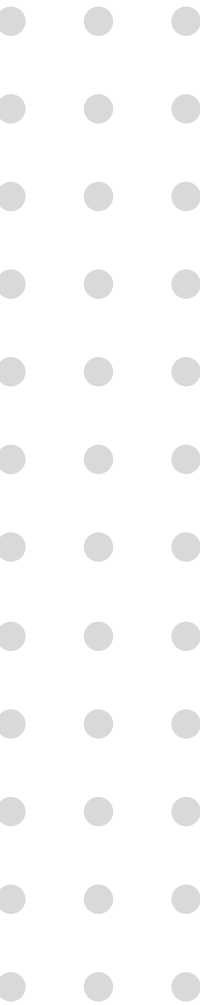




PRETTY POWERFUL, HUH?

In fact, it's a subtle reminder of why they burned books in Nazi Germany. It's because they understood the power of the written word to humanise the very people that they were demonising.

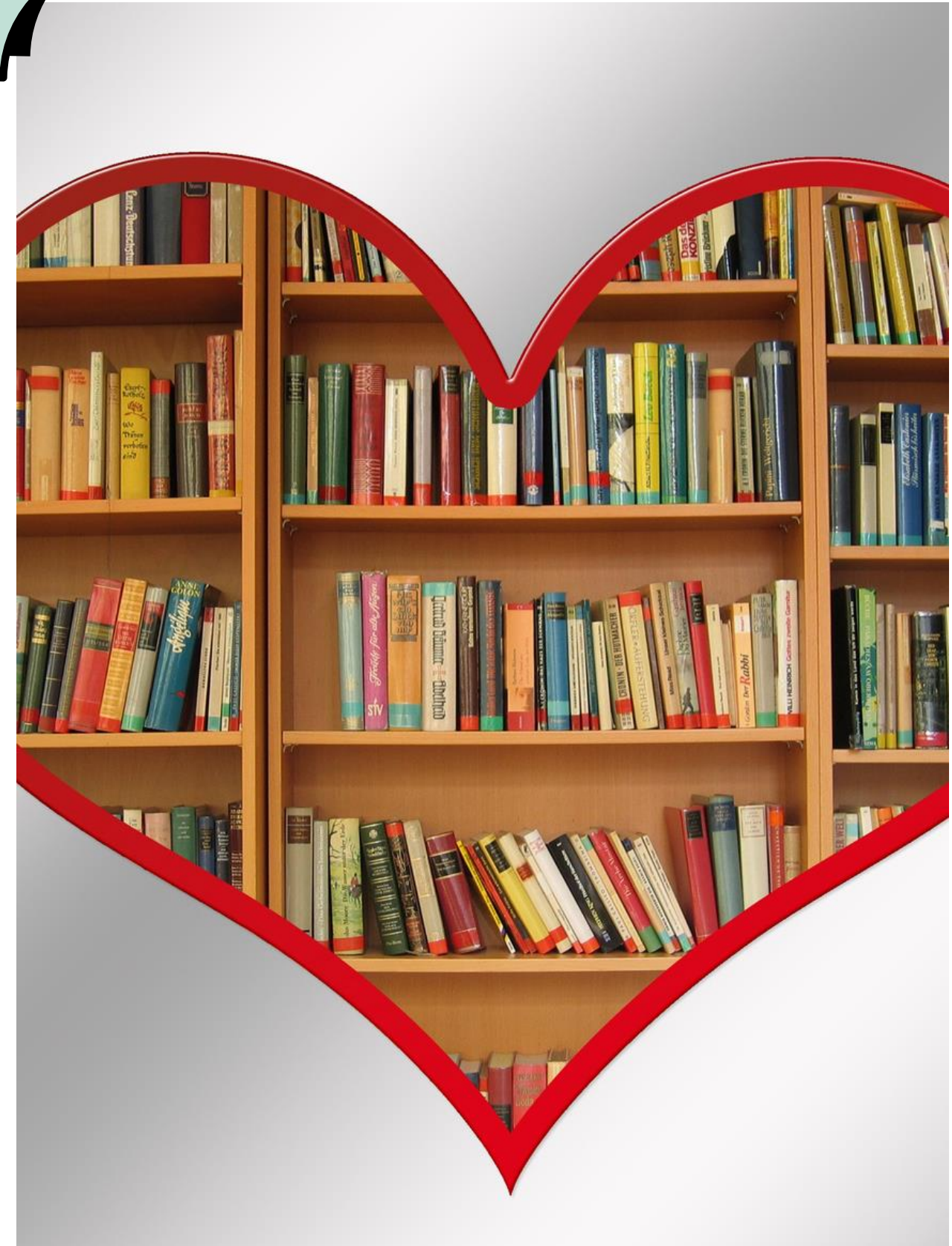
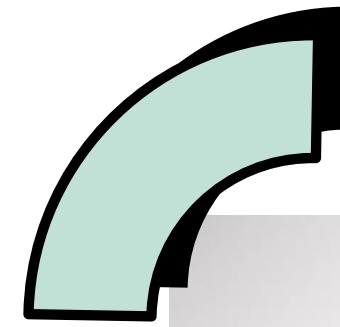
It's because they understood the power of the written word to challenge people's thinking. books have the power to include people, but also to exclude them.



IN FACT, IT'S PART OF THE AUSTRALIAN STORY

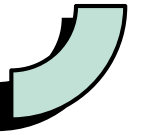
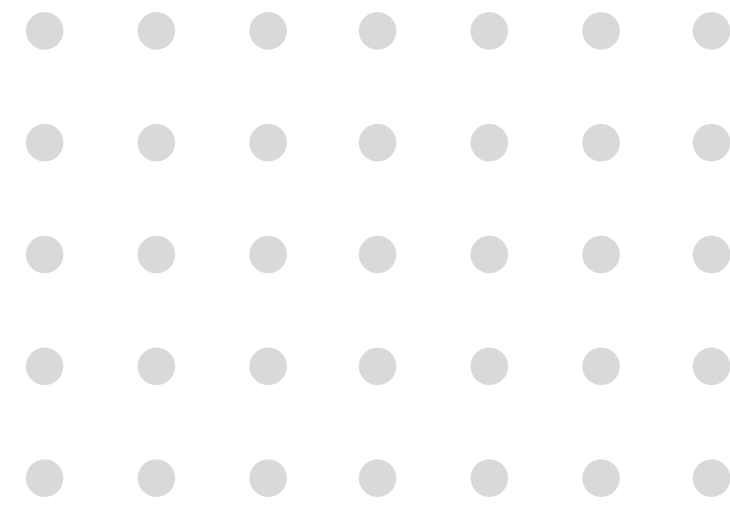
IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THIS COLONY, AND WELL INTO THE MID 20TH CENTURY, LITERATURE WAS USED TO EXCLUDE PEOPLE

- Clare Bradford tells us that Indigenous peoples were portrayed as uncivilised, reinforcing a “fear of, and contempt for, Aboriginal peoples” (Hanzl 2001:47), and depicting the superiority of European culture and colonisation as “a necessary and inevitable process” (Bradford 2001:15).
- The ethnic Other was similarly absent from Australian literature for a significant part of the 20th century, despite Asian immigration to Australia well before Federation.
- To be Australian was to be 'white'.





SO WHERE DO YOU FIT INTO ALL THIS?



#1

THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU'RE READING

How does it orient you to the world around you? Is it making you a more informed person? Books are made for entertainment and escapism, but they also wield great power.

#2

THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU'RE RECOMMENDING

As librarians, you wield even greater power, because you are the gate keepers of the kind of work that is accessible to everyone, regardless of where they go to school or how much money they have.

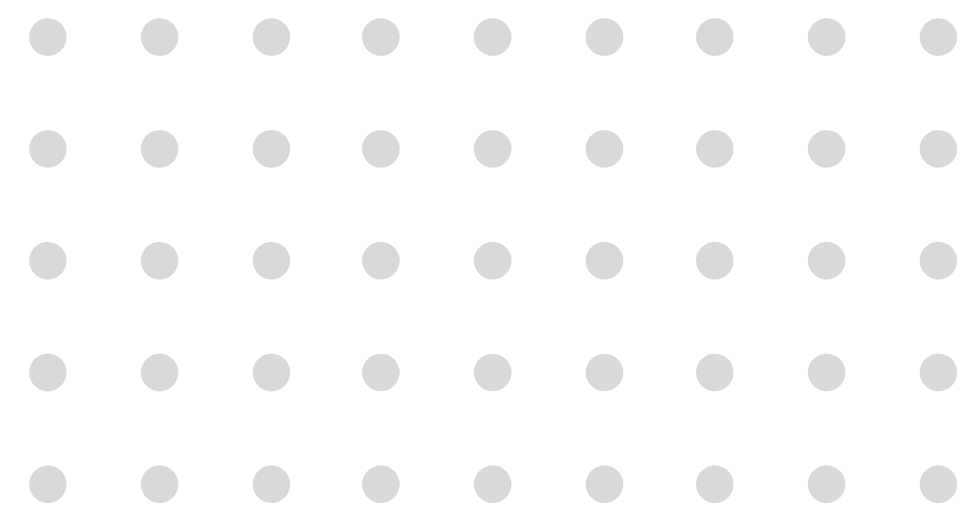
#3

DIVERSIFY YOUR OFFERINGS, CHALLENGE YOUR PATRONS

Make books by authors who are not famous, best-sellers or award-winners part of your displays. Even if your patrons might not initially relate to them, there's potential for those books to open space for conversation. Many people don't realise how hard it is for CALD people to sell books - we work twice as hard for half the space.



TO TAKE YOU BACK TO MY TEEN YEARS, I AM GOING TO SHARE WITH YOU THE CONCEPT OF WHAT CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE TERMS 'A SINGLE STORY' (2009). ADICHIE SEES SINGLE STORIES AS REPRESENTATIONS OF POWER DYNAMICS, WHERE COMMUNITIES AND GROUPS ARE REPRESENTED IN VERY PARTICULAR WAYS "OVER AND OVER AGAIN" UNTIL PEOPLE ASSOCIATE THEM WITH THOSE VERY REPRESENTATIONS (ADICHIE 2009). POWER, SHE ARGUES, IS NOT JUST THE ABILITY TO TELL CERTAIN STORIES, BUT TO MAKE THESE STORIES THE DEFINITIVE REPRESENTATION OF A PEOPLE OR GROUP.



When I was growing up, the newspapers and talkback radio programs made the ‘gangsta’, the rapist, and the terrorist the definitive representation of what it meant to be Arab, Lebanese or Muslim. It meant that for years and years, an entire generation of teenagers felt afraid or unworthy to take up space in law, politics, medicine, theatre, music, literature and science and more. It made bosses afraid to hire us in case we were trouble. We were excluded from bars and restaurants and clubs. We had no power because of the damage done by people who told our stories. While we now have the power to tell our stories, the battle we are facing as marginalised authors is a little different. Now, it has become a bit more about tokenisation. There's little critical engagement with the work, because it has become about ticking a diversity box.





DON'T COMPARE APPLES TO APPLES

In a piece for *Meanjin* last year, author George Haddad wrote:

"I admire how David Malouf did that. He carved out his own vibe, but he had the luxury of not being funnelled into categories (the literary scene was misguided in other ways back then). David Malouf wasn't really ever considered an Arab-Australian or a queer writer, he was just an incredible writer. I know that those categories serve a purpose and can occasionally be a good thing but I find them damaging and constrictive—not to my writing practice, but to its reception—it's like always comparing an apple to last season's apple."

This is a reminder of how important it is to see each work by a marginalised author as a distinct work - our stories are not one and the same, and space should be made for diversity within that diversity.



QUESTIONS?

