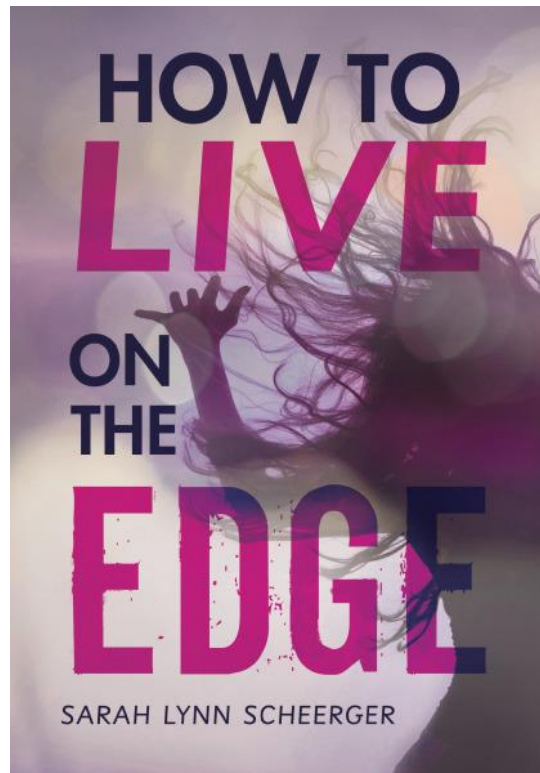


## Discussion and Extension Activities for

### *How to Live on the Edge* by Sarah Lynn Scheerger



#### Note to Teachers / Librarians / Parents / Students:

##### Social Emotional Learning Focus:

Throughout our lives we try to understand ourselves. We try to figure out who we are and who we want to be. This process involves identifying our character strengths, how we view ourselves, what makes us unique and special, and what we can offer the world. It also involves identifying areas we want to improve or change. Life is filled with choices. The choices we make may propel us down different paths.

These discussion questions apply the above concepts and weave in content from *How to Live on the Edge*.

## Book Talk:

The women in Cayenne's family have a long history of dying young. She barely remembers her mother, who died of breast cancer when she was four. Cayenne figures she'll meet the same fate, so she might as well enjoy life while she can—whether that means jumping off cliffs with her boyfriend or just cracking jokes to get under her younger sister's skin.

When Cayenne and her sister receive a series of video messages and gifts that her mother left them before dying, Cayenne isn't sure she wants them. Why dredge up the past? She's over her mother's death, and her aunt Tee is the person who's truly raised her.

But then Aunt Tee tests positive for a BRCA gene mutation—the same one that doomed Cayenne's mom—and decides to get an elective mastectomy to reduce her risk of cancer. As Cayenne helps her aunt prepare for the surgery, she finds herself drawn to her mother's messages, with their musings on love, loss, and perseverance. For the first time, she questions her assumptions about womanhood, family, and what it means to live life to the fullest, even when death might be written into her DNA.

## Discussion Guide / Questions:

What makes you who you are? What makes you special?

- Review what you wrote and analyze.
  - How much of your definition of yourself has to do with personal characteristics/qualities?
  - How much of it has to do with how you look? Or what you're good at?
- Spend some time thinking about it. Is this how you want to define yourself?

Now think of someone you respect and love. Write down what makes them who they are and what makes them special.

- Analyze what you wrote for this other person vs. what you wrote for yourself.
- Do you evaluate your own worth differently from that of others? If so, why?

Now think of someone who loves you very much.

- How would that person answer these questions about themselves?
- How would that person answer these questions about you?  
What would they say makes you who you are?  
What would they say makes you special?

How can you play to your character strengths?

Is there anything about yourself that you'd like to change? If so, how?

In *How to Live on the Edge*, some characters have a BRCA gene mutation. This puts them at greater risk for breast and ovarian cancers. They know that preventative surgeries may reduce their risk.

- If you found out that you had a genetic risk for a certain type of illness, would you be motivated to have preventative surgeries?
- Is there a certain percentage of risk that would influence your decision?
- What body parts would you be willing to live without (if doing so could reduce your genetic risk)?
- Would your own age factor into your decision?
- If you decided not to have preventative surgeries, what else would you do to reduce your risk?
- Now think of someone you love very much. What if that person has a risk for a certain type of illness? What would you want that person to do for themselves?

## Inspiration for Book and Author Bio:

Author Sarah Lynn Scheerger has a BRCA gene mutation. After making her own personal health decisions as an adult, she began to wonder what it would be like if a teenager had to face these same complex choices. And then her thought process took her deeper. What if a cisgender teen girl had to grapple with these same complex choices? Would it change her view of her body? Would it alter a young woman's timeline related to marriage and childbearing? Would these choices feel empowering or overwhelming? And how might this challenge her assumptions of what being a woman means for her? (Is it breasts and ovaries? The ability to bear children? Or is it something completely different?) These questions sparked the fictional story of *How to Live on the Edge*.

Sarah Lynn Scheerger is a clinical social worker who works with "at-risk" youth, helping them figure out who they are and who they want to be. She provides social emotional support services in schools. She started writing as a convenient excuse to avoid laundry, and admittedly has gotten a little carried away. She writes picture books as well as middle-grade and young adult novels. She lives in southern California with her husband and children. To learn more, check out her website at [www.sarahlynnbooks.com](http://www.sarahlynnbooks.com).

## What People are Saying About "How to Live on the Edge":

**“A stirring story filled with heart and soul, and one that will dare you to rethink what it truly means to be brave and alive!”** —Mary Rand Hess, New York Times Bestselling author of *Solo* and *Swing*

**“An engaging tale of vulnerability and control.”** —*Kirkus Reviews*

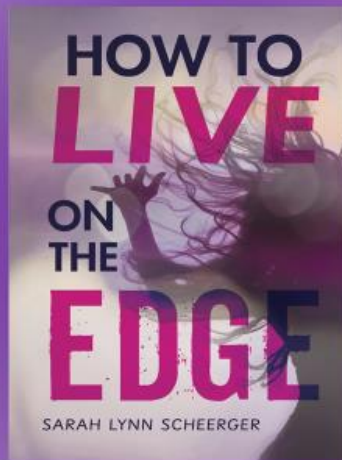
**“Authentic and emotionally passionate . . . headlong page-turner.”**

—Sherry Shahan, author of *Skin and Bones* as well as many other books for young readers

**“An important addition to young adult literature.”** —*Booklist*

**“Scheerger creates fearless, compassionate, empowered sisters who, in figuring out what kind of women they want to be, love on the edge.”**

— Gaby Triana, author of *Water the Hollow*, *Cookspell*, and *Summer of Yesterday*



**This novel deals with some important issues such as body image and the definition of femininity. Are breasts and ovaries what make a woman? . . . Readers will root for Cayenne despite the many mistakes she makes. VERDICT This book has a strong character arc and can be used as a starting point to talk to teenagers about life choices, identity, and the inescapable reality of life-ending diseases.** —*School Library Journal*

**“Told with humor and truth. . .”**

—Jennifer Longo, author of *What I Carry*, *Up to this Point* and *Six Feet Over It*

**“A gift to young readers.”**

—Catherine Linka, author of *What I Want You to See*, *A Girl Called Fearless*, and *A Girl Undone*

**“Cayenne is a perfectly-flawed and fearless heroine who we want to defy the odds. . . Burgeoning with questions like can we love after we’ve lost and can we fight fate, this powerful story answers yes!”**

—NoNieqa Ramos, author of *The Disturbed Girl's Dictionary* and *The Truth Is*

## Audio Clip of Author Speaking about the Inspiration for the Book:

Meet-the-Author of *How to Live on the Edge*: <https://www.teachingbooks.net/glcmqnm>

Guest Blog Post: <https://forum.teachingbooks.net/2020/06/guest-blogger-sarah-lynn-scheerger/>

## For More Info, Check Out the Author’s Website

[www.sarahlynnbooks.com](http://www.sarahlynnbooks.com)