



**When Sara Salt's brother is born prematurely**, her mom and stepdad send her to stay with her half-sister, Abby. Sara has trouble talking to new people, like Abby's friends, but writes letters to her brother all about it. As she gets to know more about Abby's mission to help unhoused people, she takes up her pen to help the cause.



## About the author

Gabrielle Prendergast is the award-winning author of numerous books for children and teens. She won the BC Book Prize for her YA sci-fi novel *Zero Repeat Forever* and the Westchester Award for her YA novel *Audacious*. After years of working in social welfare and the music and film industries, Gabrielle began writing books when she became a mother so that she could work from home. She is the author of *Aftershock* and *Flash Flood* in the Orca Anchor series. Gabrielle lives in East Vancouver.

## Themes

Housing insecurity, new siblings, illness, extended family, social activism, autism, neurodiversity, anxiety, letter writing.

## Warm-up activity

What are letters? Have you ever received a letter? Or written a letter? Read some notable letters on [lettersofnote.com/category/kids/](https://lettersofnote.com/category/kids/). Have students write letters to grandparents, local politicians or celebrities and post them at the post office.

## What is an epistolary novel?

An epistolary novel is a story told through letters written by one character to someone else or by several characters to each other. Sometimes, it also includes other things like diary entries or newspaper articles to help tell the story. Even if there aren't any letters, some stories use different types of notes or documents to share what's happening.

*The Anxious Exile of Sara Salt* is written entirely in letters from Sara to her new baby brother. Some other examples of epistolary novels include *Dear Mr. Henshaw* by Beverly Cleary, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* by Jeff Kinney and *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. Even picture books can be epistolary, like *Dear Polar Bears*, by Gabrielle Prendergast.



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## Discussion Questions

1. What does “exile” mean? Why does Sara talk about her time in Toronto as an “exile”?
2. Sara’s sister, Abby, is an advocate for those who are housing insecure. What are some things that can lead to housing insecurity?
3. Why do you think Sara takes to writing letters so enthusiastically?
4. Sara is afraid of elevators, strangers and the smell of paint, among other things. What are some things you are afraid of?
5. Like Sara, many people write to their city hall or police department to express their concerns. If you were to write a letter to your mayor or your local police, what might it be about?
6. Sara talks about using the term “unhoused” instead of “homeless”. What is the difference between these two words? Why might one be preferable to the other?

## Activities

1. At the end of the book are lists of the books, movies and songs Sara mentions in her letters. Write a list of your favorite books, movies or songs. Decorate it with drawings or stickers.
2. Sara mentions doing collage a couple of times. Make a collage inspired by one of the below:
  - a. Your favorite book, movie or song
  - b. An issue you might write to your mayor about
  - c. Something you’re afraid of
3. Draw a map of the completed Ivy Village as it would look from one of the high-rise apartments. Don’t forget the health pod, the caretakers’ pod, the picnic tables etc.
4. Build a diorama of Sara and Abby’s pod home. Include the kitchen, living area, bathroom and two small bedrooms.
5. Write and illustrate an epistolary picture book made from a letter to your pet or another animal.
6. Write a letter to the author and post it to

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## Vocabulary

Collage	Unhoused	Housing Insecure	Glimpse
Dialog/Dialogue	Opportunity	Architect	Subconsciously
Accomplished	Disgruntled	Mortifying	Epiphany
Extraordinary	Extraterrestrial	Exile	Fervent

