

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

## SUNNY PARKER IS HERE TO STAY

BY MARGARET FINNEGAN

**A DETERMINED GIRL** spends the summer before middle school learning to stand up for her low-income community in this funny, fast-paced novel.

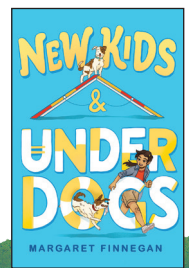
Sunny Parker loves the Del Mar Garden Apartments, the affordable housing complex where she lives. And she especially loves her neighbors. From her best friend, Haley Michaels, to Mrs. Garcia and her two kids—developmentally disabled son AJ and bitter but big-hearted daughter Izzy—every resident has a story and a special place in Sunny’s heart.

Sunny never thought that living at the Del Mar made her different, until the city proposes turning a nearby abandoned school into a new affordable housing complex and her affluent neighborhood protests. Sunny realizes the hard way that not everyone appreciates the community she calls home. Her dad, the Del Mar’s manager/handyman, wants Sunny to lie low. But as hurtful rhetoric spreads and the city’s public hearing approaches, Sunny realizes that sometimes there’s too much at stake to stay silent. With her friends behind her, Sunny is determined to change the narrative because she and her community are here to stay!

“The book uses its diverse cast to sensitively address poverty, community, racism, and autism. Sunny is a spunky young girl who finds the courage to stand up for what she believes in.”

—*Booklist*

### ALSO BY MARGARET FINNEGAN



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



- The story begins, “On the day I got cursed, I was zooming around the Del Mar Garden Apartments, testing out the new brakes on my bike.” What information can you gather about the point of view, setting, and possible problem in the story from this opening sentence?
- Describe the origin of the legend of the curse of Sourpuss Scanlon that frightens Sunny. What is the only way to break the curse?
- Sunny shares that she was named for her sunny disposition. What does having a sunny disposition mean? Give examples from the story that support Sunny’s description of her personality.
- Sunny enjoys a good relationship with her neighbors Mrs. Garcia and young AJ. What dreams do Mrs. Garcia and Sunny discuss in chapter two while on a walk with AJ? What do Sunny’s dreams reveal about her family’s socioeconomic status?
- Mrs. Garcia makes a point of introducing herself, AJ, and Sunny to a police officer while they are on their walk. Why does she want Officer Edwards to know AJ in particular?
- Why does Sunny let Natalia cut her hair? What is Sunny’s reaction to the haircut?
- Sunny shares with her friend Haley that the housing authority is interested in building a new affordable housing complex in their neighborhood. Haley goes on the Neighbor Favor app to see what commenters have to say about affordable housing. Discuss the different ideas and opinions people share on Neighbor Favor about the affordable housing proposal.
- Why are Lark and Chase participating in the protest against affordable housing? What is the argument against affordable housing that Lark and Chase share with Sunny?
- Through the conflict over the issue of affordable housing, Sunny begins to realize how others view her lifestyle. She wonders if her life at the Del Mar is “shameful.” Cite examples from the story where Sunny experiences shame about her life.
- How do Sunny and her father differ in their approach to dealing with Natalia and her situation with her boyfriend?
- Though Lark and Chase paint a negative picture of those who live in affordable housing, at one point Sunny reflects on recent events and thinks, “We were nice people, those of us at the Del Mar Garden Apartments. We weren’t criminals. We were good neighbors. We were just *good*, period.” What actions and events prove Sunny’s opinion to be true?
- At Lark’s swim party at the country club, Sunny encounters Joe. Joe expresses negative opinions about affordable housing. How does Sunny react to Joe? How does Lark’s mother counter Joe’s point of view?
- Sunny is surprised to discover she doesn’t always share her dad’s or Haley’s point of view. How does Haley’s interest in Chase and Sunny’s father’s opposition to speaking up for affordable housing at the hearing affect Sunny’s opinion of her friend and her father?
- Sunny remembers a tour of city hall when she was on a school field trip where the mayor said, “Our town belongs to all of us.” How do these words from the mayor inspire Sunny and Haley to act?

- Sunny’s dad says, “We exist best when we exist under the radar” about those living at the Del Mar. Why do you think he feels this way? How does his opinion shape his view of Sunny’s involvement with the petition and the plan to participate in the hearing about affordable housing?
- What role does Izzy play in helping Haley and Sunny prepare for the hearing? What perspective does Izzy bring to the battle between the “rich” and the “poor” in the community?
- Sunny’s father shows up to the hearing and sees that she is there. What is the fallout between Sunny and her father when he discovers she has defied his wishes by attending the hearing?
- The ornery Mrs. Scanlon doesn’t seem so difficult once Sunny has the chance to get to know her better. What sad experience do Sunny and Mrs. Scanlon share?
- How does Sunny regain her father’s trust and admiration?
- Sunny learns many lessons from her battle over affordable housing. Which lesson do you think is the most important for Sunny? Give reasons for your opinion.

# ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS



## MAPPING THE SETTING

The majority of *Sunny Parker Is Here to Stay* takes place at the Del Mar Garden Apartments. Reread the description of the setting on page one. Use the information from this page to create a map of the Del Mar. Make sure to label the different parts of the apartment complex.

## OPINION PIECE

In chapter twenty-seven, Sunny ponders the aftermath of the petition and the hearing. She wonders, “What was the difference between brave and right? Brave and true? How did you know?” What is your opinion about being right and being brave? Can one exist without the other? Write an opinion piece that explains your point of view. Include examples from the text, your life, and the world to support your opinion.

## MINING THE PAST

Read the author’s note at the end of the book and learn how Margaret Finnegan’s childhood influenced the novel. Think about an experience or incident in your own life that, for good or bad reasons, has stayed with you. Write a short story or poem inspired by that event.

## DRAW, LABEL, CAPTION

Think of an important part of the story. Draw an image that captures the theme of this scene. Add labels to point out key details in the illustration. Finally, add a caption to explain what you’ve drawn and its importance in the overall story.

The discussion questions, activities, and worksheets in this guide were created by Leigh Courtney, Ph.D. She teaches in the Global Education program at a public school in San Diego, California. She holds both master’s and doctoral degrees in education, with an emphasis on curriculum and instruction.



NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

# A LIST POEM ABOUT SUNNY



Sunny's life is a collection of bike rides, birthday parties, petitions, friends, family, neighbors, and battles between right and wrong. In the vein of George Ella Lyon's poem *Where I'm From* (visit [georgeellalyon.com/where.html](http://georgeellalyon.com/where.html)), write a list poem describing all the things that make Sunny the person she is. Think about the key events in *Sunny Parker Is Here to Stay* to gather important information to use in writing your list poem about Sunny.

## WHERE SUNNY IS FROM

Sunny is from

---

---

---

She is from

---

---

---

Sunny is from

---

---

---

She is from

---

---

---

Sunny is from

---

---

---

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

# CHARACTER FEELINGS TRACKER



Sunny experiences a variety of emotions as she tries to cope with events at the Del Mar, the tension around the affordable housing issue in her community, and incidents with her friends and family. Look for one story event from the beginning, one from the middle, and one from the end of the novel that show the different feelings that Sunny experiences throughout the story. Describe each event and write an adjective that describes how Sunny feels in relation to each one.

## BEGINNING

Description of story event: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

Adjective describing Sunny's feelings: \_\_\_\_\_

## MIDDLE

Description of story event: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

Adjective describing Sunny's feelings: \_\_\_\_\_

## END

Description of story event: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

Adjective describing Sunny's feelings: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_




# CLOSE CHAPTER READING

Pick a chapter in *Sunny Parker Is Here to Stay* to reread with a partner. As you read, use the codes in the chart to highlight key sections that stand out for you.

My partner: \_\_\_\_\_

We reread chapter: \_\_\_\_\_



| CODE   | EXCERPT FROM STORY |
|--|--------------------|
| <br><b>A FAVORITE PART</b>                        |                    |
| <br><b>SOMETHING SURPRISING</b>                 |                    |
| <br><b>I HAVE A QUESTION:</b><br>_____<br>_____ |                    |