

Dear Sweet Pea

JULIE MURPHY

DISCUSSION GUIDE



BOOKTALK

Dear Miss Flora Mae,

Ever since my Mom and Dad started going through their divorce, nothing in my life has been the same. I know they're trying to act like nothing has changed, but everything is different now! I'm graduating from seventh grade and I'm not sure I'm ready for that either. I am also having problems with my ex-best friend Kiera and my new best friend Oscar. How do you know the right thing to do? How do you find your voice?

Sincerely,
Sweet Pea



Do you have any answers for Sweet Pea? Do you think you'd be good at giving advice? Sweet Pea DiMarco might not have it all figured out, but she still has a few things to say! In this funny, fast-paced story, Sweet Pea will learn who her friends really are and what makes her one-of-a-kind. Perfect for fans of Raina Telgemeier and Erin Entrada Kelly.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What do you think of Sweet Pea's parents' decision to have "mirror" houses after they divorce? Does it seem like it is making things easier for Sweet Pea?
2. Now that Sweet Pea sits right behind Kiera it seems things between them are even more awkward and uncomfortable. Why do you think that is?
3. When Sweet Pea and her mom go the department store, what do you think Sweet Pea means when she says, "[It's] like this whole store is one giant party and I'm not invited" (pg. 46)? Why do you think her mom gets so upset with the sales clerk?
4. Kiera tells Sweet Pea that getting rid of Pickle, their stuffed elephant, is "not a big deal" (pg. 90). Do you agree?
5. Imagine Sweet Pea's first answer to Kiera (pg. 112) got published in the newspaper. How do you think Kiera would feel if she read it? How do you think that would make Sweet Pea feel?
6. Why is it easier for Sweet Pea and Kiera to be nice to each other in the bathroom? What has changed between them?
7. Sweet Pea thinks "something about hearing other people's problems makes my own feel farther and farther away" (pg. 154). Do you think that's true? Have you ever been in a situation like that?
8. When Sweet Pea invites Kiera for a sleepover, she can't invite Oscar too. Sweet Pea doesn't know what to do: she doesn't want to hurt Oscar, but she wants to reconnect with Kiera. What do you think is the right decision? Is there anything Sweet Pea could have done differently about talking to Oscar?
9. Does Keira mean to hurt Sweet Pea's feelings when she says, "Grease makes you fat" (pg. 172)? Why does that hurt Sweet Pea's feelings? Can you think of a time a friend said something that hurt your feelings even without meaning to? How did you react? What about a time you hurt someone else's feelings? How did you react then? What did you learn?
10. What do you think about the idea Kiera has that friends can try to change together instead of growing apart?

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11. Were Sweet Pea's parents really keeping secrets from her? Why do you think there were things they didn't tell her?
12. Miss Flora Mae tells Sweet Pea "Sometimes you've just gotta live through life without any shortcuts" (pg. 248). What are some of the "shortcuts" Sweet Pea and her parents were trying to take? Do any of them work?
13. Towards the end of the book, Sweet Pea is grateful for a night where she feels "the most okay I'd felt in a long time" (pg. 255). Why is Sweet Pea happy to just feel "okay"?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

BE A SWEET PEA. How would YOU do answering people's letters? Pretend you're Sweet Pea! Work together with a friend or classmate. Now think of a problem that someone might have that would prompt them to write Sweet Pea. Write a letter to Sweet Pea asking for help. Now swap with a friend or a classmate and answer their letter. Swap back and see what advice they gave you!

THE WRITE ANSWERS. After you've learned about Sweet Pea, her life, and her family and friends, see if you can try to answer her letters. You can find three of Sweet Pea's letters to Miss Flora Mae on pg. 48, pg. 107 and pg. 240. Try writing an answer that might help her feel better or figure out a way to deal with her problems.

SKETCH UP A SCARE. Sweet Pea and Oscar love watching "America's Most Haunted" and getting scared by paranormal activity, ghosts, and other mysteries. Think about what would make a really scary episode of the show for Sweet Pea, Oscar, and Greg to discuss during lunch. Now create your creepy creature by drawing, painting, or sculpting clay or some other material.

"WORDS MEAN THINGS." Sweet Pea is learning how to think about her body in positive ways, even when it's hard. You can learn to love your body too! Write down a list of things you LIKE about your body and what you can do (some examples: "I'm good at soccer!" or "I am great at giving hugs!") and practice saying them to yourself. Talk about yourself the way you would talk about a friend and remember all bodies are good bodies!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo by Christy Archibald

JULIE MURPHY lives in North Texas with her husband, who loves her; her dog, who adores her; and her cats, who tolerate her. After several wonderful years in the library world, Julie now writes full-time. When she's not writing or reliving her reference desk glory days, she can be found watching made-for-TV movies, hunting for the perfect slice of cheese pizza, or planning her next great travel adventure. She is also the author of the young adult novels *Puddin'*, *Ramona Blue*, *Side Effects May Vary*, and *Dumplin'* (now a Netflix original film). This is her first book for middle-grade readers. You can visit Julie at www.juliemurphywrites.com.