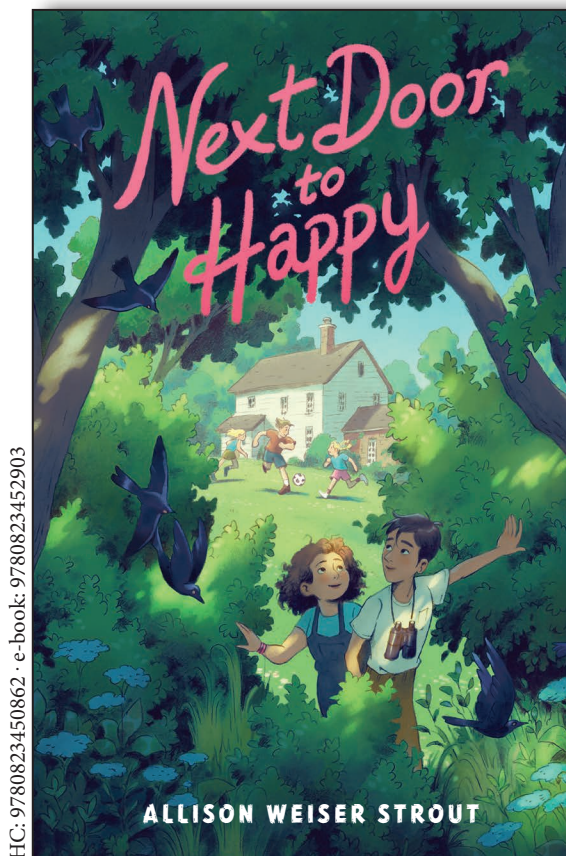


# HOLIDAY HOUSE

## READING GROUP

### GUIDE



Margaret Ferguson Books

## Next Door to Happy

by Allison Weiser Strout

“A perceptive first novel.” —*Booklist*

### ABOUT THE BOOK

**Twelve-year-old Violet Crane is an only child in a lonely household who longs to be part of the gregarious family that’s just moved in next door.**

With a mother struggling with anxiety, a father who recently moved out, and no siblings to commiserate with, socially awkward Violet Crane feels like she is

starting middle school with less going for herself than that of your average kid. When the rambunctious Walker family moves in next door, Violet can’t help but wish she could become a part of their household—everyone and everything seems so normal compared to her own. But then Violet overhears a conversation between Reggie and his mother in which she tells him that she doesn’t feel like Violet is an appropriate friend. Violet is devastated until she faces a truth—no person, family, or friendship is perfect—and realizes just how lucky she is.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Violet’s parents are separated. What is the source of their split? Violet’s dad tells her that she needs to realize that “life isn’t perfect” (p. 2). Discuss how imperfect Violet’s life is.
- What does Violet mean when she says that she and her mom and dad were never a team (p. 6)? How does Violet respond when her dad asks how her mother is doing?
- Violet’s mom suffers from anxiety. Why does Violet’s mother want Violet to know that she hasn’t always been this way? Violet says that her mother doesn’t want anyone to know about her anxieties. How does this cause Violet difficulty?
- Explain the communication between Violet’s mother and Reggie. Does Reggie have secrets too?
- The Walkers have moved next door to Violet and her mother. Explain what Violet means when she says they are a “real family” (p. 1). How does this explain the title of the book?
- Describe the five Walker kids. How does Violet view Mrs. Walker? At what point does she learn that sometimes people aren’t the way they appear?

- Katie has always been Violet's best friend. How does their friendship change after Missy and Katie spend the summer at sleepaway camp together? Explain why Violet feels that she is "tagging along."
- Discuss the friendship that Violet develops with the Walker children. How do they fill a void in her life? At what point do Violet and Katie fall back into the "natural rhythm" of their friendship?
- Describe the friendship that Violet forms with Reggie. Discuss why Reggie tells his secret about what happened on the baseball field to Violet.
- Violet and Reggie Walker are now in middle school. What is "cool" and "uncool" at middle school? Violet says that her mother doesn't understand "how middle school actually works" (p. 84). How do we know she is right?
- Debate whether Mrs. Walker makes things worse for Reggie by walking him to the bus stop. Discuss what Violet means by "I feel like a different person coming to the bus stop with the Walkers" (p. 58). Explain why Mrs. Walker asks Violet to eat lunch with Reggie.
- Owen asks Reggie to sit at his table at lunch. Explain why Violet thinks that Reggie could fit in with Owen and his crowd. Why does Reggie want to sit alone? Discuss what Owen means when he tells Reggie "Your loss, bro" (p. 98).
- Reggie Walker has many talents. How is it obvious that he is happiest when he is alone in his own world? Why is he willing to share a piece of his world with Violet?
- When Reggie wants to come to Violet's house, why is Violet reluctant to let him? What happens when he does come over?
- Discuss what Violet's mother says to Reggie. What does she mean by "You don't worry about what anyone else thinks, so you don't need to run away" (p. 168)?
- Explain what Violet means by "I like my two separate spaces. My everyday world and the Walker's world next door. I don't want anything to change" (p. 105). What happens to change her desire to go to the Walker home?
- Discuss the conversation between Violet and Reggie when she tells him that she overheard his mother call her mother strange (p. 148). Discuss what Reggie means when he says, "I'm the problem. It's me" (p. 149).
- Reggie is stung by bees in the woods behind his house and has an allergic reaction. How is Violet responsible for saving his life? Explain how she knows exactly what to do. How does this incident change Mrs. Walker's view of Violet and her mother?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Allison Weiser Strout** is a writing tutor for middle school and high school students. *Next Door to Happy* is her debut novel. She lives in New York City and Maine. Visit Allison online at [AllisonWeiserStrout.com](http://AllisonWeiserStrout.com)