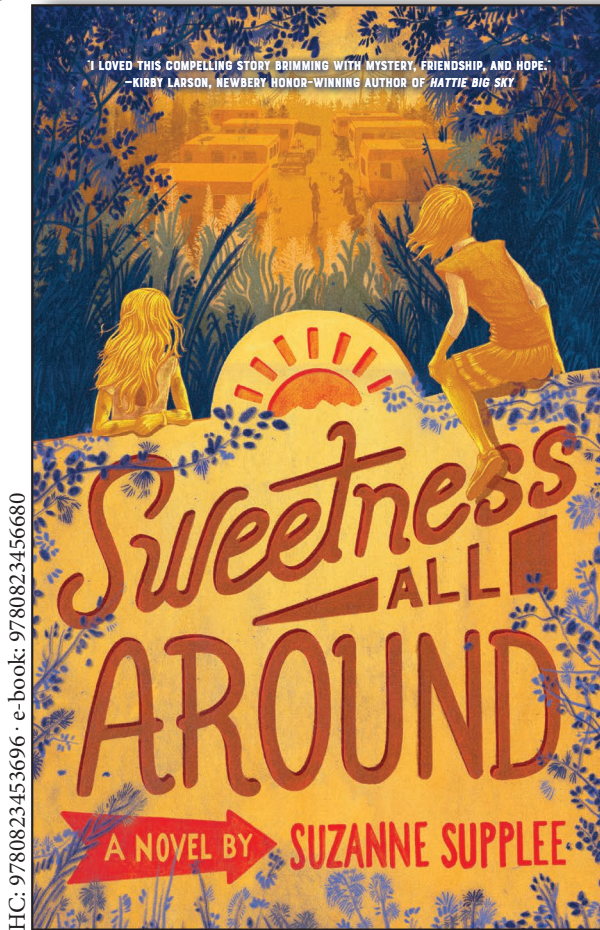


HOLIDAY HOUSE

READING GROUP

GUIDE



Sweetness All Around

by Suzanne Supplee

ABOUT THE BOOK

An indomitable heroine who believes she is destined to find her kidnapped neighbor leads this warm, big-hearted story with irresistible characters and a captivating mystery.

Almost-eleven-year-old Josephine is NOT pleased to be moving into the Happy World trailer park over the summer of 1974. Happy World isn't happy. It's dingy and depressing! Nothing like the world that head-strong Josephine wants for herself. But when Josephine learns that her would-be next-door neighbor in Happy World was kidnapped months ago, she develops a begrudging interest in her new home. Despite her efforts to stay detached, Josephine investigates Molly's disappearance with help from the eccentric cast of characters living in Happy World. It turns out the rough edges of her community are softer and sweeter than they first seemed. And the unexpected friendships she forms might be more precious than anything she's ever owned.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Discuss the meaning of the quote by John Wesley that the author uses at the beginning of the novel. Explain how the quote summarizes the central theme of the story. What does "This," the title of the first chapter, mean? How is "Light" an appropriate title for the last chapter?
- Describe Happy World Trailer Park. What is Josephine's view of the park and its residents? Why did Josephine and her mother have to vacate their apartment? Contrast her room in #13, their trailer, with her previous room. How is life in the trailer a hardship on her mother and her business? Discuss why Jo thinks that Happy World is a tragic place. How does her opinion of the trailer park change by the end of the novel?

- In what ways is Penny Willoughby, Jo's mother, a good mother? What are the best lessons about life that she teaches Jo? Josephine doesn't know much about her father. Explain what she means when she says she mostly remembered "the bread crumbs he's left" (p. 23).
- Josephine explores the trailer park and discovers Lisa Marie, a girl her age. What is Jo's first impression of Lisa Marie? Point out times in the novel that Jo is rude to Lisa Marie. How does Penny Willoughby try to help her daughter understand Lisa Marie's behavior? Jo's mother is very kind to Lisa Marie. How does this make Josephine jealous? At what point do Jo and Lisa Marie become true friends?
- How does Josephine learn about the disappearance of Molly Quiver? Explain why Helen-Dove, Molly's mother, gives Josephine her daughter's Tiger Paws tennis shoes. Discuss Jo's obsession with finding Molly. Explain what Jo means when she says, "It was a strange feeling to have somebody else's sad crawling on you" (p. 69).
- Helen-Dove says that Ray, her ex-husband, and Raylene, her ex-mother-in-law, abducted Molly. Define exploit. How are Ray and Raylene exploiting Molly? How have they managed to stay one step ahead of the law? At what point does Helen-Dove reveal her own criminal past? Discuss Penny Willoughby's reaction to this news.
- How is Jo sure that Molly wants to come home? Identify the clues that Josephine uses to identify Molly's whereabouts. How does she convince her mom that they need to travel to Pickersgill, Alabama, to find her? Discuss how all the residents of the trailer park pitch in to help. Explain what Helen-Dove means when she says, "This [Pickersgill] is a place you try to forget, not remember" (p. 215). How is it unlikely that Josephine, Lisa Marie, and Molly will forget this place?
- What does Miss Lake, Josephine's teacher, mean when she asked her students if they needed "clarification"? Discuss the hurdles Jo must jump before she finds "clarification." At what point does she find it? What other characters in the book find "clarification"?
- Josephine is a good storyteller and writer. Miss Lake taught her that "stories had surface meanings and deeper meanings" (p. 112). Identify the surface and deeper meanings in the novel.

Guide created by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Suzanne Supplee is the author of several young adult novels. Her books have been honored on various state lists, including a Golden Sower Honor and the Louisiana Teen Choice Award, received a starred review from Publishers Weekly, and named a YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults. *Sweetness All Around* is her debut middle grade novel. Suzanne earned a bachelor's degree from Southern Illinois University and a master's in creative writing from Towson University. She lives in Baltimore and teaches English. Visit her at SuzanneSupplee.com.