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KEEP HOLDING ON DISCUSSION GUIDE



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Keep Holding On by Susane Colasanti (Viking; Hardcover fiction; \$17.99; 224 pages; ISBN: 978-0-670-01225-1; ages 12 and up)

1. Do you like Noelle? How did reading Noelle's story make you feel? What are Noelle's strengths and weaknesses, and how do these change from the beginning to the end of the book?
2. Who are the bullies in Noelle's life? What do her bullies have in common? What tactics do they use against Noelle? Why do they bully her? How does Noelle respond to their bullying? Conversely, who are Noelle's friends, even if she doesn't immediately identify them as friends? Why are they friends with her?
3. Why is Noelle afraid to go out with Julian? Do you think her fears are valid? Why or why not? Why does she make out with Matt?
4. Adults play key roles in Noelle's life. What do you think of Noelle's mother? Do you think Noelle and her mother love each other? What would you do if you had Noelle's mother? Do you think all of Noelle's problems are because of her mother? Why does Noelle have such a difficult time trusting Mrs. Henley and Ms. Scofield? Who are the adults in your life and how do they treat you?
5. Many strong, emotional events take place in Noelle's life. How does Ali's suicide affect Noelle? Do you think it's Noelle's fault that Ali killed herself? What does Noelle do in reaction to Ali's death? What does Ali's suicide make Noelle realize about her own suicidal thoughts? Why does Noelle keep a box containing X-Acto blades and pills in her closet? What happens when her mother finds this box?

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6. What event do you think was the pivotal event that leads Noelle to start standing up for herself? What situation have you been in where you were “done” and you did something about it? What did you do?
7. Bullies and the people they pick on are in every school. Even if you aren't being bullied, you probably know someone who is, or maybe you are the bully. Think about the bullies and victims in your school. After reading Noelle's story, do you feel inspired to help those who need it? How do Julian, Simon, Sherae, Mrs. Henley, and Ms. Scofield each help Noelle? What will you do to help? If you are the one being bullied, who will you ask for help? If you are the bully, what is the reason you are picking on someone and how might you stop?
8. This book primarily focuses on victims of violence and bullying. If this story was told from Carly's point of view, how would it be similar to Noelle's? How would it be different? Do you think bullies like Carly are deserving of help and compassion? Why or why not? Why do you think Audrey is friends with Carly?
9. What happened between Sherae and Hector? Why do you think Sherae doesn't tell someone other than Noelle what happened? Do you think Hector believes he didn't do anything wrong?
10. What do you consider the worst thing that happens to Noelle? Why do you think it is the worst? What do you think is the best thing to happen to her and why do you think it's the best?
11. Noelle writes a very personal essay for *The Spectrum*. What inspires her essay, and what does her essay drive her to do? If you had to share a personal and painful story with your classmates like Noelle does, what story would you tell? What would you hope they would take away from your story? What did you take away from Noelle's story? At the end of the book, the author includes a note to the reader about her own embarrassments and experiences of being bullied. What did the author learn about her own experience and what do you think she is trying to tell you?
12. Several times Noelle gets angry with adults and other kids who see her getting bullied but don't do anything about it, but then she sees Ali getting bullied and doesn't help her. Why doesn't Noelle help Ali? Do you think people are right to not get involved? Why do you think people don't step in to help someone who is being bullied? Have you seen someone getting bullied and done nothing about it? After reading Noelle's story, do you think you would do anything different the next time you see someone getting bullied? Do you think that staying silent is a form of bullying?
13. What is the scariest or hardest thing for you to face in school or at home every day? How do you deal with that fear?
14. How do the lessons Noelle learns in physics about inertia (pp. 71-73) and the visible light spectrum (pp.136-137) apply to her life outside physics class? What has happened in your own life that has been your “outside force” and what did it make you do?

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15. If you had a bad situation in your life, who would you go to for help? Noelle doesn't seek out help because she's embarrassed. How do you relate to Noelle's embarrassment? Can you understand Noelle's embarrassment? What is the most embarrassing thing to happen in your life? Who did you tell about it?
16. If you had to choose one character from the book, who would you say best represents you and why?
17. At the end of the book, Noelle's life is recovering and she has people she can trust in her life. What do you think her future holds? What happens next?

Visit susanecolasanti.com to contact Susane Colasanti and for a list of resources to help with issues addressed in *Keep Holding On*.

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