Discussion Guide

1. The story begins a few months after Sage and her dad have moved from downtown Philadelphia to a rural area of Virginia. Have you ever made a big move like that? Do you prefer cities, rural areas, or suburbs? Why? How does Sage's perception of her new home change from the beginning of the book to the end?

2. We find out early in the story that Sage has a set of grandparents she has never met. What do you think it would be like to suddenly hear from relatives you didn't know? If you were Sage, would you want to meet them or would you rather stay home? What do you think was Sage's initial reason for wanting to go visit them, and how did that change after she talked with her dad about it? How did Alejandro influence her decision?

3. At the beginning of the story, Sage is very reluctant to talk with Alejandro about what's really going on in her family. Why do you think it's so hard for her? How do her experiences in Ohio and her friendship with Marla allow her to grow, and what evidence is there that she has changed in her thinking by the end of the story?

4. Have you ever had a falling out with a friend or relative? Did you or the other person try to mend the relationship? How? Were you able to find your way back to one another? The book leaves the relationship between Sage and her mom open-ended, with hope and possibilities, but no definite conclusion. What do you think will happen next between them? And between Sage's mom and her grandparents?

5. Throughout the book, Sage goes running to try to clear her head and feel better even though it doesn't always work. Do you have something that you find particularly calming and helpful to do when you're experiencing a lot of stress? Or something you like to do regularly to keep everyday challenges from getting to be too much?

6. Sage enjoys music, but she won't allow herself near the drums due to the association she has between them and her mom's accident. After the personal growth she experiences, do you think Sage will ever decide to play the drums again? What are some clues from the text? Do you play an instrument or have another creative pursuit like art, writing, dance, or cooking? There are many ways to be creative. What are some of your favorites?

7. Along with difficult memories, Sage recalls some very happy times with her mom. How do her feelings toward her mom change through the course of the novel? What does her mom mean when she tells Sage to "look forward, not back," and does Sage ultimately succeed in doing that?

8. A recurring theme in the book is that of trying to outrun or race the clouds. What does it mean to try to race them, and how is that different from running along with them? What do clouds symbolize in the story?

9. How would you feel if a friend came to you with a secret they had never shared before? How might you be able to support them? What do Marla's and Alejandro's reactions to Sage's news about her mom show you about their friendship?

10. Sage's relationships with Grandmother Marion and with Pawpaw are very different from one another, even from when she first arrives in Ohio. What are some examples from the text that show this? How do these relationships change as the story goes on?

11. Sage meets Marla on the plane and thinks she'll never see her again. She never would have imagined that they'd become close friends. Have you ever met someone in a random situation like that and ended up connecting again? Have you ever had a friendship begin that way?

12. When Sage tells Marla, "I guess I'm waiting for the perfect moment (to talk to my grandparents)," Marla asks if Sage thinks there really is one. What do you think Marla means by that, and do you agree or disagree?

13. Sage wishes to have a family like Alejandro's. Have you ever really wanted something a friend has? How did you deal with it, and how did it affect your friendship?

14. If you were ever in a difficult situation, what adult could you talk to? If they weren't able to help, who might you confide in next?

15. Do you have pets? What kind and how many? Have you ever experienced the way an animal can bring people together? How did Nicky help bring characters with big differences together? Do you think he and Sylvester could ever end up as friends? Why or why not?

16. Sage finally comes to understand that what happened to her mom wasn't her responsibility, and that even when you love someone very much and really want to help, people are ultimately responsible for their own actions. How does Sage come to this realization? Have you ever blamed yourself for something that really wasn't your fault?

17. Addiction can be a very hard thing to talk about. Why do you think it's so difficult to discuss? What are some ways you can stay safe from drugs? What does it mean when people say, "One Pill Can Kill"?

18. Alejandro manages to teach Sylvester a trick. Have you ever taught an animal a trick? Was it easier or more difficult than you expected?

19. Sage flies by herself from Virginia to Ohio to visit her grandparents. Have you ever flown in a plane before? Did you find it scary, fun, or a combination of both? Do you prefer a flight or a long drive?

20. What do you think will happen next for Sage and her family? Do you think her dad will start teaching music lessons? Will Sage and her mom begin running together again? Do you think her family will go out to Ohio regularly after this? Will she and Marla stay good friends?