



READERS' GROUP GUIDE

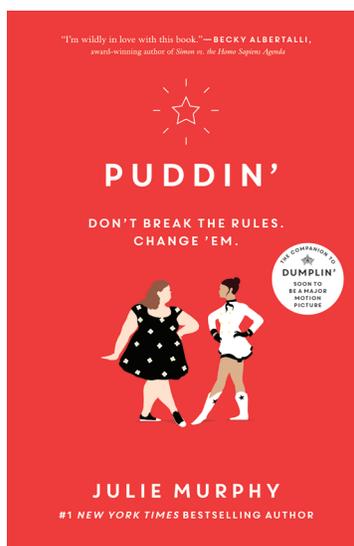
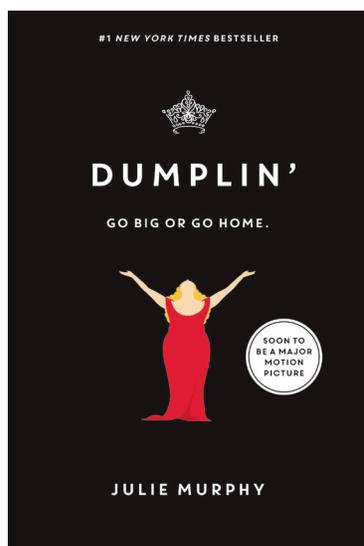
FOR

DUMPLIN'

AND

PUDDIN'

BY JULIE MURPHY

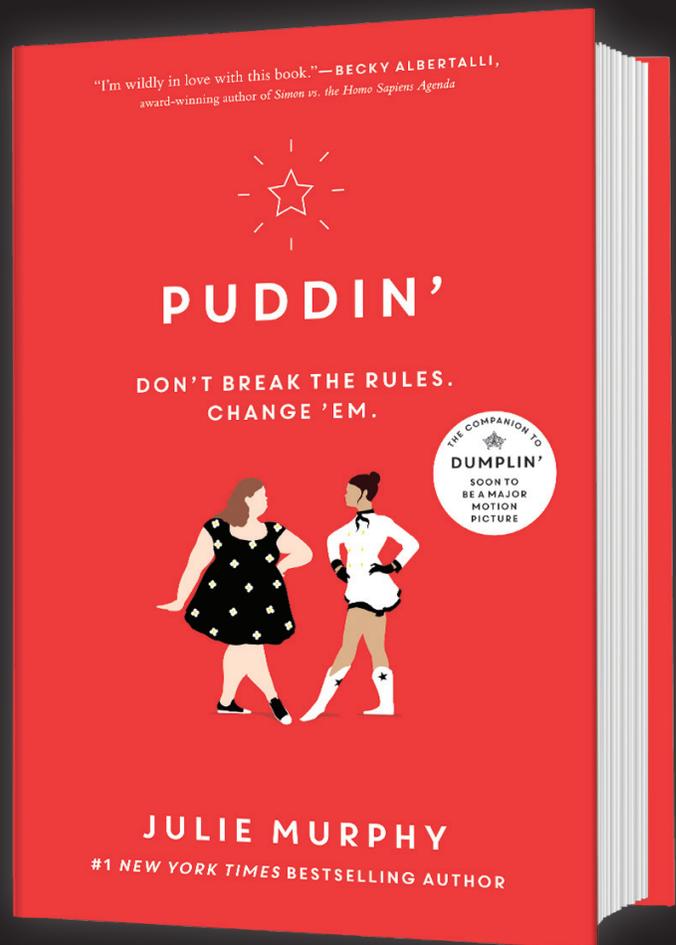
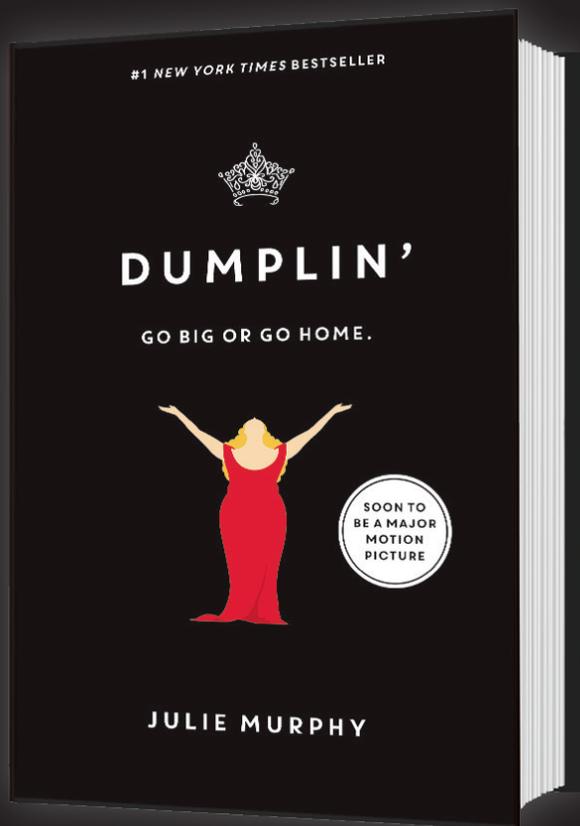


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ABOUT THE BOOKS



NICKNAMED DUMPLIN' BY HER MOTHER,

a former beauty queen, Willowdean never thought pageants were her thing. She's confident enough without having to enter a beauty contest, despite her mother's nagging to lose weight. But when Will takes a job at the local Harpy's and starts a relationship with her cute co-worker Bo, she begins to realize that she may not be as confident as she thought. Will sets out to reclaim her confidence by entering the Miss Teen Blue Bonnet pageant—but discovers more than she bargained for about friendship, romance, walking in high heels, and most of all, herself.



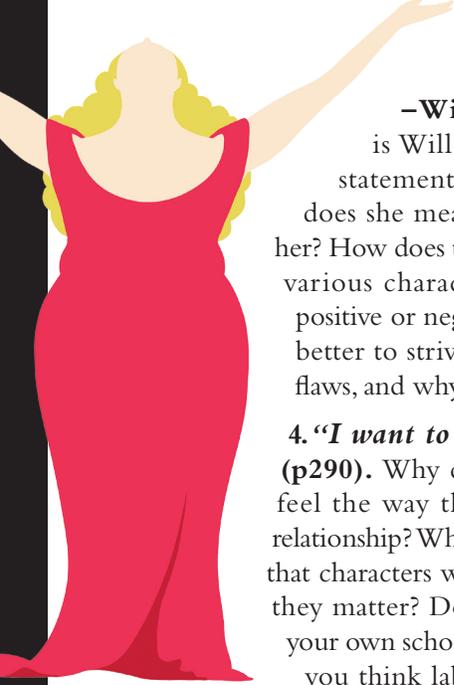
HIGH SCHOOL JUNIOR MILLIE MICHALCHUK

is well on her way to becoming a Girl Boss, and she isn't going to let anything—especially society's unrealistic expectations about beauty—stop her from becoming a famous journalist. Millie knows she doesn't have anything in common with queen bee Callie Reyes who's determined to lead the school's competitive dance team to Nationals and become team captain. But when a dance team prank goes seriously wrong and Callie takes the blame, she is forced to work side-by-side with Millie, even as her perfect life starts to fall apart. As the two girls form an unlikely friendship, they start to realize that they have more in common than they ever knew—and that they're going to need each other in order to make their dreams a reality.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

DUMPLIN'

1. ***“I was scared someone might look at me and decide I wasn’t good enough.”*** –Lucy (p26). How does the fear of what others will think affect Willowdean throughout the novel—not just her own fear, but that of her mother and her aunt Lucy? What other characters are scared they might not be good enough, and how do they deal with it? Have you or your friends ever felt the way Aunt Lucy describes? What helped you to overcome it?
2. ***“You don’t always have to win a pageant to wear a crown.”*** –Donna Lufkin (p67). What does Donna mean by her statement to Willowdean? What does the crown represent to Will, and how does she feel when she tries it on? Why do you think Will ultimately decides to enter the pageant? Do you think Will wants to win the Miss Teen Blue Bonnet crown? Why or why not?
 3. ***“Perfection is nothing more than a phantom shadow we’re all chasing.”*** –Willowdean (p212). Who is Willowdean referring to in her statement about perfection, and what does she mean by it? Do you agree with her? How does the search for perfection affect various characters in the novel, in either positive or negative ways? Do you think it’s better to strive for perfection or to accept flaws, and why?
 4. ***“I want to put a label on this.”*** –Bo (p290). Why do Willowdean and Bo each feel the way they do about labeling their relationship? What are some of the other labels that characters wear in the novel, and why do they matter? Do you experience labeling at your own school, or among your friends? Do you think labeling is positive or negative, and why?
5. ***“Loyalty is being there for someone. It’s selfless. It’s about standing by someone’s side even when you don’t want to.”*** –Willowdean (p333). How does Willowdean’s definition of loyalty apply to her relationships—family, friends, and romantic interests—throughout the novel? Do you think Will is loyal, and can you describe examples from the novel that support your conclusion? How would you define loyalty, and who are the people in your life who fit your definition?
6. ***“And now there’s no one here to remember her. Not in the way she’d want to be remembered.”*** –Willowdean (p22). What do you think Willowdean means by her statement, and do you agree with her? What are some of the ways that Will copes with her grief after Lucy’s death? Why do you think Will and her mother react so differently to the personal effects in Lucy’s room, and what does this reveal about each character? How do other people in her life help Will honor Lucy’s memory?
7. ***“I’m fat. It’s not a cuss word. It’s not an insult. At least it’s not when I say it.”*** –Willowdean (p9). Why does Willowdean embrace the word “fat” to describe herself, and what does her statement reveal about her character? How does the meaning of the word “fat” change based on the person saying or hearing it? What was your reaction to Will calling herself fat? Can you think of examples in the media or in your own life of people using the word “fat” to describe themselves or others? How was the word used, and why?
8. ***“Lucy always said that the greatest friends have nothing and everything in common all at once.”*** –Willowdean (p79). How does Lucy’s statement reflect the friendship between Willowdean and Ellen? What are the things they have in common, versus the ways they are different? How does Lucy’s statement apply to Will’s friendships with Millie, Amanda, and Hannah? Do you agree with Lucy’s description of friendship? How does it apply to your own friendships?
9. ***“This is what happens, I think, when a secret turns into a lie.”*** –Willowdean (p95). Why do you think Willowdean keeps her relationship with Bo a secret from important people in her life, like Ellen and her mother? Why do you think Bo keeps their relationship a secret? Why is Will angry at Bo, and do you think her anger is justified? What other examples of secrets turning into lies can you find in this novel? How does keeping secrets affect Will’s relationships?
10. ***“I think you gotta be who you want to be until you feel like you are whoever it is you’re trying to become.”*** –Mitch (p239). What does Mitch’s statement mean to you, and what does it reveal about his character? How do you think it might apply to Willowdean and her friends, or to other characters in the novel? What do you think it means to “be who you want to be,” and why is it sometimes hard to do that? Can you think of examples from your own life that demonstrate Mitch’s statement?



QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

P U D D I N ’

1. **“And no one cares who was there as long as someone pays the price.”** –Melissa (p128). Why do Melissa and the Shamrocks let Callie take the blame for their actions? Would Callie have done the same thing in their position, and why do you think so? Do you think that Melissa’s statement above is true, or do you disagree? What are the consequences of allowing Callie to be the scapegoat for the actions of the entire team, both for her and for the Shamrocks? Does Callie deserve what happens to her? Why or why not?

2. **“I very much know what it means for people to create expectations of you based on appearance.”** –Millie (p179).

What are some of the expectations people have of Millie based on her appearance, and why? How does Millie respond to these expectations in either positive or negative ways? Can you identify other characters in the novel who also struggle with unfair expectations based on appearance? How does it affect them? Are there examples in your own life when stereotypes like these affected you, or someone you know?

3. **“Every time you say some rude, biting thing, it’s a choice you’re making. And you don’t have to make that choice.”** –Millie (p204). What are some of the significant choices that each character makes throughout the novel? Do you agree with the choices you see each character making? Are there times when Millie and Callie feel like they don’t have a choice, and how does that challenge them? Do you agree with Millie’s statement about making choices? How do you think it applies to your own life?

4. **“If you only love what comes easy for you, you’ll find you don’t have much to love. Work for it, girl.”** –Abuela (p285). Why do you think Abuela gives Callie this advice, and what does she mean by it? Why does Callie struggle to find interests and activities outside of the Shamrocks? What are the things in her life that she is willing to work for? In your own life, what are the things that you love versus the things you have to work for? Do you agree with Abuela’s advice?

5. **“Stories change hearts and then hearts change the world.”** –Malik (p311). “Maybe it’s too much effort to change the world. Maybe the only way to survive is to change myself.” –Millie (p356). How do Malik and Millie’s statements about changing the world reveal their perspectives and character development? Do you agree with either of them? Why or why not? What do you think each one wants to change about the world, and why? How would you want to change the world?

6. **“Guess I wish someone would’ve given me a second chance at that age.”** –Vernon (p342). Do you agree with Vernon that Callie deserves a second chance? Does Callie make the most of the second chances she is given? Who are some of the other characters in the novel who make mistakes, and do you think they deserve second chances? Can you think of a time in your own life when you were given a second chance, and how did you respond?

7. **“If I’ve learned anything, it’s that you can’t force someone into being your friend.”**

–Millie (p373). How does Millie and Callie’s friendship grow and change over the course of the novel? What does each girl learn about friendship, not just from each other, but from other characters like Amanda, Melissa, Malik, and Mitch? Do you think Millie and Callie will still be friends in college, or after? What have you learned about friendship in your own life?

8. **“But whose rules are you even following?”** –Malik (p377). Why does Malik challenge Millie about following rules? Do you identify more with Millie’s approach to rules, or with Callie’s? What are some of the rules, either explicit or unwritten, that Millie and her friends follow or try to break? What are some of the rules that guide your own behavior and choices? How would you answer Malik’s question for yourself?



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9. "What's not impressive is our budget...our football team is allotted a budget twelve times the size of ours." –Callie (p422). Why do you think there is such a disparity between the resources given to the football team versus the dance team? Do you think it's fair that male and female athletes have different resources? If you were on the Shamrocks, how do you think you would react to losing your funding? Can you think of examples at your own school where some programs have more or less than others? If you were in charge of school resources, what would you do to make sure they were fairly distributed?
10. "I'm constantly left to wonder if the people we are online will ever materialize in real life." –Millie (p62). What roles do social media and technology play in Millie's life, and in the lives of her friends? How do Millie and Callie use their phones to connect with others, and what are the benefits or drawbacks of this? How does Callie respond to losing her phone privileges, and why do you think she takes the loss so seriously? Do you and your friends use phones and online communication in ways similar or different to Millie and Callie? What role does your own phone play in your social life?

DUMPLIN' AND PUDDIN' JOINT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS.

Consider the relationships that Willowdean, Millie, and Callie each have with their mothers. How is each girl similar to, and different from, her mother? What are the ways that each girl's mother shows support and love for her daughter? What are the times when each girl struggles to recognize or accept love from her mother? Do you see similarities between each mother-daughter relationship? Do any of them remind you of your own relationship with your parents?

TAKING RISKS.

When Willowdean and Millie take personal risks, such as entering the pageant, both their mothers and friends try to protect them from being hurt or embarrassed. Why do you think Will and Millie choose to take the risks that they do? Why do you think others respond by trying to protect them, and what does this reveal about their characters? Do you think that Will and Millie need to be protected from embarrassment or judgement? Has there been a time when you wanted to protect someone from feeling hurt, and how did that person respond?

FORGIVENESS.

Regarding her broken friendship with Ellen, Willowdean says, "I know I should apologize. But maybe she should, too." (*Dumplin'* p229). Do you agree that both sides deserve an apology? What are some of the other relationships in the novels that require apology and forgiveness? If you were in that character's position, would you be able to forgive? Why do you think each character struggles to apologize or to forgive?

BULLYING.

In both *Dumplin'* and *Puddin'*, multiple characters are bullied by their peers for being different. Callie even tells Millie, "I'm the jerk or the bully or whatever" (*Puddin'* p236). Do you agree with her? Why do you think Callie acts like a bully, and how does her character change over time? What are some of the instances of bullying that stood out to you in the novels, and why do you think the author included them? How does each character respond to bullying, and what does their response reveal about them?

CONFIDENCE.

In *Puddin'*, Callie struggles to feel good about herself, explaining that "The confidence I've always put on display for the world to see feels like a complete and total sham" (p165). Similarly, in *Dumplin'*, Willowdean asks, "And what's the point in acting confident if I'm not?" (p174). How would you answer Will's question? What are some of the ways that Callie, Will, and Millie demonstrate their confidence, or lack thereof, throughout the novel? Why does each character struggle to feel and act confident? What does being confident mean to you?



Q&A WITH JULIE MURPHY

DID YOU ALWAYS KNOW YOU WANTED TO WRITE A COMPANION TO *DUMPLIN'*?

Actually, I was just doing a massive re-organization of my inbox and saw the email I sent to my agent about wanting to continue in the *Dumplin'* world. I sent that email about a month after turning in my final draft of *Dumplin'*, so I had this nagging feeling almost immediately that I had more stories to tell in Clover City, especially after surprising myself with how much I loved writing Millie.

YOUR NOVELS INCLUDE STRONG MESSAGES OF GIRL POWER, BODY POSITIVITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCEPTANCE. WHAT INSPIRES YOU TO WRITE SUCH EMPOWERING STORIES

I am constantly inspired by the women in my life and their fortitude in the face of adversity. Not only does their strength inspire me, but so does their kindness, humility, and vulnerability. I also have a soft spot for prickly girls and girls who break the mold of what we expect femininity to be. And lastly, while living in a fat body isn't always easy, it's inspired my work in many ways and has given me the chance to view the world through a very specific lens. Writing from that perspective has given me the opportunity to find people who resonate with that experience, and in the end, that inspires me even more.

HOW DOES YOUR PAST WORK AS A LIBRARIAN INFLUENCE YOUR WRITING?

I loved working in the library field and would return in a heartbeat if I ever needed to. I was lucky to spend a lot of my time working with teens, building YA collections, and designing teen programming. I'd already loved reading YA, but working with my teens solidified my choice to write YA.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TEENS TAKE AWAY FROM YOUR NOVELS?

I spent so much of my teen years hunting for anything that made me feel less alone—and I still do that—so I think that will always be my ultimate goal. I want to create fiction that feels genuine and authentic and reflects actual experiences. But I also think there's something to be said for reading things that don't reflect your experience, so for as much as I want teens to see themselves in my work, I also hope that my work might expose some teens (and adults!) to a different reality than their own. The best books breed both compassion and camaraderie.

WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON NEXT?!

I am so thrilled to say that I am writing my first middle grade novel! I am so excited and it has been such a blast so far. I can't say much except that the book is called *Dear Sweet Pea* and it's set in West Texas. Can you tell I have a thing for Texas?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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, and planning her next great travel adventure. She is also the author of *Ramona Blue*, *Dumplin'* and *Side Effects May Vary*. You can visit Julie at www.juliemurphywrites.com.

