

# CLOUDS over CALIFORNIA

KARYN PARSONS **BOOK CLUB GUIDE**

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Stevie's life is fluctuating rapidly. She's starting over in a brand-new middle school, her parents' arguments are becoming more frequent, and to top it all off, Stevie's older cousin Naomi is coming to live with the family in an attempt to keep her from a "bad" crowd—the Black Panthers. Stevie can't help but notice the happy, positive effect the Black Panthers are having on Naomi's confidence and identity—just like how Mom is making decisions for herself, even when Dad disapproves. Stevie feels herself beginning to change as well. Can her family stay in one piece despite the world shifting around them?



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think this title was chosen? What might the “clouds” in the title refer to?
2. What did you know about the 1970s and the Black Panthers before you read this book? Did you learn anything new that changed your perspective?
3. Why do you think Mona and others in the story view the Black Panthers as a “club of troublemakers” (p. 132), even though we see Naomi helping them provide important community support?
4. Stevie discovers several new role models in this story, including Chaka Khan and Tamara Dobson. How do they influence her? Why are role models and representation so important?
5. Throughout the book we see examples of Stevie's dad being “old-fashioned” according to her mom, and “a chauvinist” according to Naomi. Do you think people with those viewpoints can change? How can we best help them do so?
6. How do themes of privacy and trust show up throughout the book? Is it ever okay to listen to someone's conversation or go through their things? What do the characters learn from their experiences doing so?
7. How do Stevie and her mom's feelings about their hair (and how other people react to their hair) change throughout the book?
8. Stevie experiences a lot of bullying from kids at school and even her old friend Jennifer. How does she overcome it? How could she, her new friend Ally, or her teachers help other kids in similar situations?
9. The book ends with a scene of Stevie and her dad at the beach as he helps her realize her independence and overcome her fear of swimming. Why do you think the author chose to end the book with that scene? What did you feel as you finished the book?
10. What has changed since the 1970s, when this book was set? What still needs to change? What can you do to be a part of that change?