DISCUSSION GUIDE
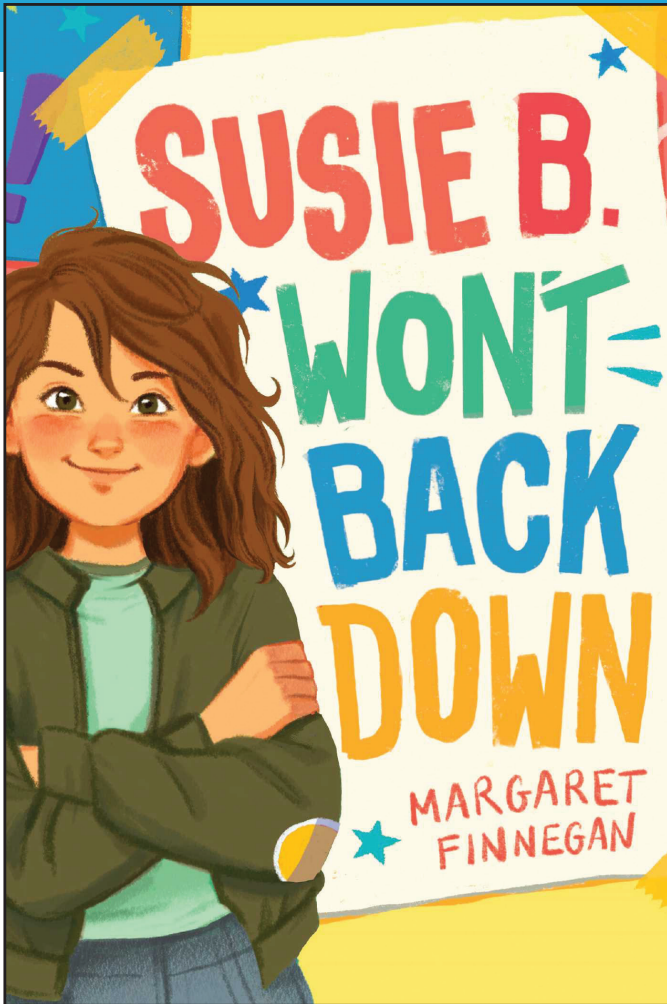
SUSIE B. WON'T BACK DOWN

BY MARGARET FINNEGAN

Susie B. HAS A LOT TO SAY.

Like how it's not fair that she's called Susie B. instead of plain Susie. Or how the usual geniuses are always getting picked for cool stuff over the kids like her with butterflies in their brain. And it's because Susie B. has a lot to say that she's running for student council president! If she's president, she can help the underdogs and be just like her hero and fellow Susie B., Susan B. Anthony.

But when the most usual of the usual geniuses also enters the student council race, Susie realizes this may be a harder-won fight than she thought. Even worse, Susie discovers that Susan B. Anthony wasn't as great as history makes it seem. Soon, Susie has some tough decisions to make. But one thing is for sure—Susie B. won't back down.

"Susie is energetic, breathless, enthusiastic, and genuinely, charmingly funny." —*Kirkus Reviews*

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Unless otherwise noted, discussion questions address the following standards:
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1

⭐ Describe the way that the author organizes the story. How does this format help to connect the worlds of Susie B. at home and at school? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.5; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.5; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.5; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.5; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.5

⭐ To whom is Susie writing for her class assignment? What connection does Susie make between herself and this person?

⭐ How does Susie describe her "butterfly brain" and her participation in her school's reading lab in her first letter for the Hero Project?

⭐ Susie B. discovers through reading about Susan B. Anthony in the reading lab that Susan B. Anthony was a fighter of "good fights." What did Susan B. Anthony champion?

⭐ Who is Lock? Describe the type of relationship that Lock and Susie B. share.

⭐ Why does Susie B. call Chloe and her three R's (Rachelle, Rachel, and Rose) "fakey fakes?"

⭐ In contrast, Susie B. has Joselyn Salazar as her best "spark." What connects these two as friends?

⭐ Susie B. feels like she's waited her whole life to run for student council. What are the reasons that draw her to the race?

⭐ Susie B. is not only annoyed by the "fakey fake" kids at school but also by what she calls the "usual geniuses." Give an example of one of the usual geniuses at Susie B.'s school and why she finds this group of kids so irritating.

⭐ Susie B. learns about the rules involved in running for student council when she attends an assembly. Which rule did Susie B. consider unfair? How did Joselyn's pep talk to Susie compare to the reaction Susie's family has to her running for class president?

⭐ Susie B. is a very enthusiastic candidate for class president. Describe how her intense enthusiasm influences what she thinks the job of president will entail and how she prepares for the required essay.

⭐ Compare the characters of Susie B. and her classmate Carson. How are they similar and how are the two different from one another?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3

⭐ What do you think of Joselyn's assessment that the right kind of mean can make you popular when she and Susie B. are talking about Chloe?

⭐ Joselyn zeroes in on the fact that school elections are all about popularity. She proposes that she and Susie buddy up to Chloe to secure votes in the election. Contrast how the suggested strategy works for Susie B. and for Joselyn.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3

⭐ How does Dylan's poster presentation about Steve Jobs upstage Susie B.'s class presentation about Susan B. Anthony?

⭐ Describe the process of Joselyn pulling away from her friendship with Susie B. What do Joselyn's actions reveal about her character? What is your opinion of Joselyn as her friendship with Susie changes?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3

⭐ When Susie turns to her brother, Lock, for guidance, he is too busy dealing with his own issues at school to help. He tells Susie that she is high maintenance. How does Lock's judgment along with negative comments from her teacher and parents about her anger affect how Susie B. sees herself?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3

⭐ Why did Susie B. vote for Helena Rubenstein as the greatest hero in the class hero election?

⭐ Each of the characters copes with the social scene at school differently. How does Soozee Gupta manage to not be alone at lunch? What is your opinion of her social strategy?

⭐ Susie B. wrangles with the idea of fairness and justice. She believes that they are two different things. What do you think is the difference between being fair and being just?

⭐ After losing Joselyn to Chloe, Susie's sadness is doubled when she finds out that her campaign posters have been stolen. What is revealed about the culprit who stole the posters?

⭐ How did Dylan and Susie B.'s friendship change as a result of the election and the meeting with Mr. Springer after the hero parade?

⭐ What do you think is the most important lesson that Susie B. learned in this story? Give reasons for your opinion.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL5.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.2

ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

"Failure is impossible" is Susan B. Anthony's famous motto. Think of an athlete, inventor, scientist, explorer, or any other individual who had to overcome difficult circumstances to achieve their goals. Research this individual and explain in a short report how Susan B. Anthony's motto could apply to the challenges and successes of your selected person's life. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.2**

POSTER ANALYSIS

Susie B. ended up designing two different campaign posters when she ran for class president. Draw a picture of the two campaign posters by following the description of each in the story. Add a critique of each poster. What was successful about each poster? What elements of each poster were not successful?

HERO, OR NOT?

For most of the hero project, Susie B. expresses admiration for Susan B. Anthony and all of Anthony's accomplishments as part of the women's suffrage movement. As Susie learns more about Anthony, she discovers some unfavorable truths about Anthony's life and choices. Research more about the life of Susan B. Anthony. Use the information you gather to help you construct an opinion piece about Susan B. Anthony. Is she a true hero, or do some of her choices disqualify her from hero status? Be sure to provide a clear argument for why Anthony should or should not be considered a hero and to include evidence to the contrary to construct a counter argument. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.1**

VOTE FOR YOUR FAVORITE!

Mr. Springer, Susie B.'s teacher, suggests that the class have hero elections since the school is in the midst of student council elections. Have your own class hero election like the characters in the story. Have students select and research a hero. Then have them create posters and give short speeches about why each student's selected hero is special. Did any heroes become tarnished once students learned more about their lives? After sharing the speeches and posters, hold an election for the "best hero of all time" according to your class. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.4; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.4; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.4; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.4; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.4**

The discussion questions, activities, and worksheets in this guide were created by Leigh Courtney, Ph.D. She teaches in the Global Education program at a public elementary school in San Diego, California. She holds both masters' and doctoral degrees in education, with an emphasis on curriculum and instruction.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Think carefully about the events and characters in *Susie B. Won't Back Down.* How can you connect this story to other books you've read, experiences you've had, or similar things that have happened in the real world? Record your connections in the chart.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.9; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.9; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.9; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. RL.6.9; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.9

TEXT TO SELF	Connections you can make between the story and your own life experiences

TEXT TO TEXT	Connections you can make to other things that you have read—stories by the same author or stories from a similar genre or with a similar plot or characters

TEXT TO WORLD	Broader connections that you can make to something that you have learned from television, movies, newspapers, or magazines

JOIN THE CLUB

Soozee is the master at starting clubs at school to help people connect through common interests. After her friendship with Joselyn fades, Susie B. becomes closer friends with Soozee and the two decide to create some clubs together. Their first club together is the Justice Club. With a partner, brainstorm a list of other possible lunchtime clubs that Susie B. and Soozee could start together. Are any of these ideas a starting place for clubs you could start at your own school?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

PERPLEXING PARADOXES

Toward the end of the novel, Dylan and Susie B. talk about paradoxes. Susie B. defines a paradox as "when something is both one thing and an opposite thing at the same time." Dylan gives as an example that Susan B. Anthony is both a hero for her important work on women's suffrage and not a hero for her unjust actions in deciding to not promote voting rights for Black Americans. Write about how the following characters from the story might each be considered a paradox. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3

Mr. Springer

_____

_____

Carson

_____

_____

Dylan

_____

_____

BONUS QUESTION!

Are you a paradox?

_____

_____