



# Sunflower

## INGRID LAGUNA

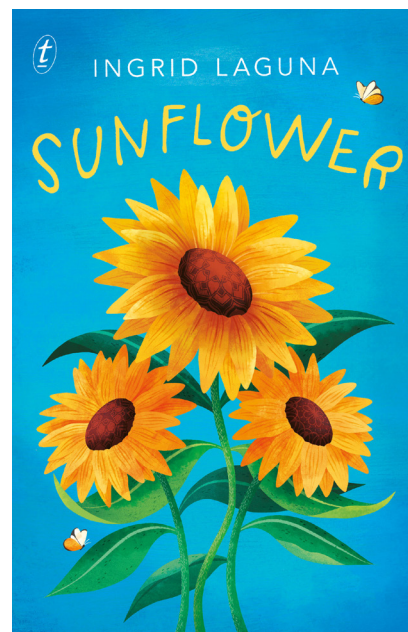
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Fiction

RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 8+

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### CURRICULUM GUIDE

*The following teaching guide has been designed to embrace shared curriculum values. Students are encouraged to communicate their understanding of a text through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.*

*The learning activities aim to encourage students to think critically, creatively and independently, to reflect on their learning and connect it to an audience, purpose and context. They encompass a range of forms with a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they promote the integration of ICT and life skills.*

### SYNOPSIS

Jamila is happy in her new home in Australia, though she still misses her old life in Iraq. She and her new best friend Eva sing side-by-side in the choir at school and have picnics together on the weekends.

One day, Jamila gets some exciting news: Mina, her oldest friend from Iraq, is coming to Australia. Jamila can't wait to see her and introduce her to Eva. But when Mina arrives, things do not go as planned.

Jamila feels torn between her two friends, and sad that Mina isn't the same person she remembers. Can Jamila be a true friend to Mina, and help her feel safe and happy in her new home?

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ingrid Laguna is a writer, teacher and musician. She lives in Melbourne and has taught English to children and adults from all over the world, many of whom have refugee backgrounds. *Sunflower* is her second book for children.

### BEFORE READING

1. What do you know about asylum seekers? Make a list of reasons that people might seek asylum in Australia. What challenges might they face when they get here?
2. What makes your family different? Bring something unique to your family to share with the class – a word, a recipe, or something special to you. Share your family treasure and tell your classmates what it means to you.
3. In the book, Jamila is excited to share her life in Australia with her best friend. She looks forward to introducing her to tim tams, Milky Ways, and the class dog. Imagine that you are about to meet someone who is arriving in Australia for the first time. Make a list of five things that you would share with them.

### WHILE READING

1. Where does Jamila's family come from? What information is provided in the opening pages of the book that tell you this? What else do you learn about her family from these pages?
2. Jamila 'knew how hard it was to learn English. She knew it made your head hurt and your eyes want to close' (2). Have you ever learned a second language? How did it make you feel?
3. Why is Jamila shocked by Mina's appearance when she sees her? Why do you think Mina doesn't want to come to school?



4. Jamila wants 'her classmates to know that her friend from Iraq was clever' (30). But does Mina need someone to speak for her? What do you think Mina wants from Jamila?
5. How does Mina's arrival change Jamila's friendship with Eva?
6. 'Jamila was usually good at fixing problems. But here she was being pulled in two directions at once when there was only one of her' (52). What problems does Jamila encounter in the book? Is it her job to fix them all?
7. Jamila is devastated when choir is cancelled because it is the place that makes her feel like she belongs. What might give Mina the same sense of belonging?
8. Jamila's Baba tells her that she needs to listen. What makes her finally realise this for herself?

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## AFTER READING

### CHARACTER

1. Jamila describes Eva as 'quiet like the sky at night' (3). This is a simile (when one thing is compared to another to make the description more vivid). Can you come up with a simile to describe one of your friends? How does Eva describe Jamila?
2. How do you think Mina feels when Jamila is telling her about her life and her friends?
3. Jamila just wants Mina to 'be happy here' (20). What is making Mina unhappy? Is Jamila right to be frustrated with her friend? Share a time when you've been frustrated with a friend for not sharing your excitement in something. How did you work it out?

### STYLE AND STRUCTURE

1. *Sunflower* is a story that follows on from the author's first book, *Songbird*, but it can be read as a standalone. Are there any moments in the story where you feel confused? What do you think the first book was about?
2. The author uses cooking and food as a way to bridge the differences between characters. Find two examples in the book where two characters bond by sharing food. How important is food in your relationships? Are there any special meals or routines you share with your friends and family?
3. Are there any words in the book that are new to you, or that you don't understand? Make a list of them and try to find out their meaning – some might be in the glossary at the back of the book, or your friends or classroom dictionary might be able to help with the rest. Why do you think the author has chosen to include some Arabic words in the book?

## THEMES

### Friendship

1. Jamila can't wait for Mina to arrive in Australia, but she 'saw a shadow of worry cross Eva's face' (9) when she tells her. Why do you think Eva is worried? Do you predict that Eva and Mina will get along?
2. 'It was true that Mina was brave' (11). Find five other adjectives that Jamila uses to describe her friends in the book. Which five adjectives would you use to describe your best friends?
3. The word wall contains words that describe people and feelings: energetic, creative, interesting, hopeful, stressed and enthusiastic. Which three words do you think Mina, Eva and Jamila would each choose to describe their first day at school together?

### Seeking asylum

1. How does Jamila describe her life in Australia and her life in Iraq. What is the difference? How would you describe your life in Australia to someone who hasn't lived here before?
2. Do you think it was easy for Jamila and Mina to leave their home? What have they left behind? Imagine that you have to leave your home suddenly. What would you take with you? What would you miss if you had to leave it behind?
3. 'Jamila guessed what Mina was thinking. She could not see one word in her own language' (23). How do you think it feels to lack the language to describe or explain yourself? List three things you do regularly that would be harder if you couldn't speak English.
4. 'Jamila decided she could tell Georgia's dad her family came to Australia because the people are friendly and the beaches are nice. She had said that before and people nodded like it made sense. As if coming to Australia was a happy choice they had made, instead of a run for their lives' (72-72). Why does Jamila think this lie will be easier than the truth? What reaction do you think she's afraid of getting?

### Fear and anxiety

1. 'Jamila thought back to her first weeks in Australia. She remembered fear tingling in the palms of her hands at shop counters. She remembered her heart thumping when she was just sitting at her desk in the classroom. Even once you're safe, the worry doesn't go away. Jamila knew that.' (18-19) What do each of the characters in the book worry about? What do you worry about?
2. Singing gives Jamila a place to escape, where her fears don't matter as much. Describe the place or activity that brings you this kind of comfort.
3. 'Before Jamila left Iraq, there had not been even the tiniest of secrets between herself and Mina. Now it seemed that Mina's life in Iraq since Jamila had left was a dark thing, a secret they didn't share' (25). What secret is Mina keeping? How does she feel



when she shares it with Jamila? Have you ever kept a secret from one of your friends? How did it make you feel?

4. When Mina feels sad she wants to stay in bed all day, and when Eva feels sad she doesn't want to eat. What does Jamila do when she feels sad? What do you do when you're feeling sad?

## RESPONDING

1. Read aloud the scene where Mina goes to school with Jamila for the first time (21). This must have been a very different experience for each of the three girls. Rewrite this scene from either Eva or Mina's perspective.
2. Jamila asks her Baba if they're 'Australian now' (80). What does being Australian mean to you? Share your definition with the class – is it the same or different to everyone else's?
3. Imagine that you're in Mina's position and are moving to Australia. What would you want to know? Make a mini guidebook that you could give to someone moving to Australia. What words or phrases would they need? How would they get around?
4. Do you think Jamila means it when she tells Eva that she isn't her best friend (120)? Have you ever said something to a friend that you regretted later? How did you resolve it? Write a letter to a friend that tells them how important they are to you.