

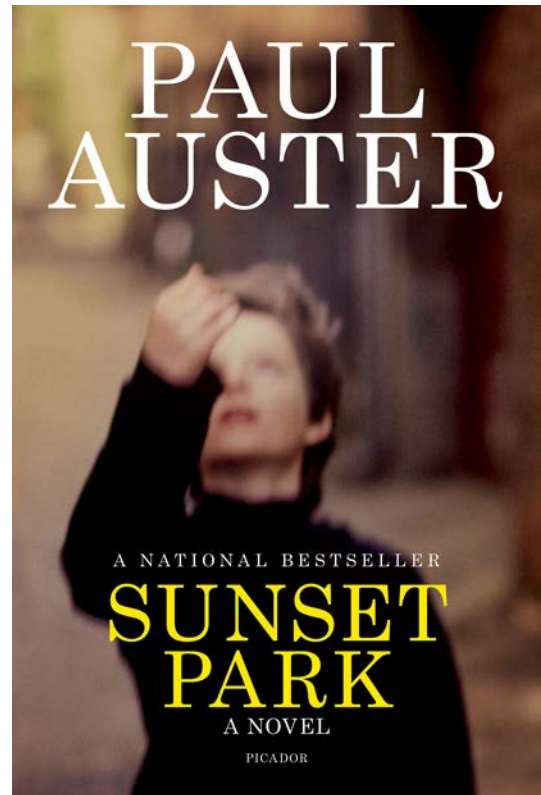
# READING GROUP GUIDE

## *Sunset Park*

*A Novel*

by Paul Auster

ISBN-10: 0-312-61067-X  
ISBN-13: 978-0-312-61067-8



### About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Sunset Park* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Sunset Park*.

### About the Book

From the bestselling author of *Invisible* and *The New York Trilogy* comes a new novel set during the 2008 economic collapse. *Sunset Park* opens with twenty-eight-year-old Miles Heller trashing out foreclosed houses in Florida, the latest stop in his flight across the country. When Miles falls in love with Pilar Sanchez, he finds himself fleeing once again, going back to New York, where his family still lives, and into an abandoned house of young squatters in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. Woven together from various points of view—that of Miles's father, an independent book

publisher trying to stay afloat, Miles's mother, a celebrated actress preparing her return to the New York stage, and the various men and women who live in the house—"Auster seems to carry all of humanity inside him" (Jan Stuart, *The Boston Globe*).

## About the Author

**Paul Auster** is the bestselling, award-winning author of 16 novels, including *Sunset Park*, *Invisible*, *Man in the Dark*, *Travels in the Scriptorium*, *The Brooklyn Follies*, and *Oracle Night*. His work has been translated into more than 40 languages. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.

## Discussion Questions

1. What is the meaning of baseball to each of the three generations of Heller men, especially in terms of luck and chance?
2. Morris ponders his own father Alvin's wounded eye from a baseball, thinking that it is no different than a war wound because "part of his life had been shot down." Do you agree?
3. The 1946 movie *The Best Years of Our Lives* figures prominently in the novel. How are the horrors of World War II linked to the struggles of the characters in *Sunset Park*? Do they speak to a fundamental contradiction to the idea of the American dream?
4. Do you agree with Alice's idea in her thesis that after the devastating effects of war, families can never go back to the way they were?
5. Why does Alice believe that Miles is an old man on the inside, but Morris think that he is a very young man at heart, stunted by his lost years (hence his relationship with Pilar)?
6. Do you have long-term hopes for Miles's relationship with Pilar? Does Pilar herself embody the idea of the American dream, as a beautiful, intelligent immigrant girl with a bright future?
7. Renzo is a writer who struggled for many years before achieving success and stability. Miles's mother Mary-Lee is a renowned, still-working actress. Are these kinds of careers possible for Miles or any of his friends? Do present economic and cultural conditions allow for talents in the art world to break out and find success?
8. Suki and Miles both shared a sense of doom and nihilism despite their beauty, intelligence, youth and opportunity. What does Morris make of this phenomenon?
9. Bing feels a moral obligation to alert Miles's parents of his doings. Was he right to do so? Should Miles have had a right to privacy and anonymity?
10. What aspects of Alice's character make her perhaps "heartier" and better suited to difficult circumstances than her housemates? Why is she so beloved by her housemates?

11. Ellen describes her love of “pure thingness” early on in the novel, which in turn inspires her art and an eventual reunion with her former lover. Can physical wellbeing, comfort or pleasure directly cause emotional wellbeing?
12. If the house in *Sunset Park* is a family, what traditional familial roles do each of the characters play in terms of their responsibilities and relationships to each other?
13. Why is Willa, Miles’s stepmother, so deeply hurt by Miles’s disappearance and unable to forgive, while his mother is able to accept him back almost immediately?
14. Throughout *Sunset Park*, Auster references classic works of literature and theatre from Homer’s *Odyssey* to Beckett’s *Happy Days*. How might the structure and storytelling of the novel itself echo these works of literature?



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