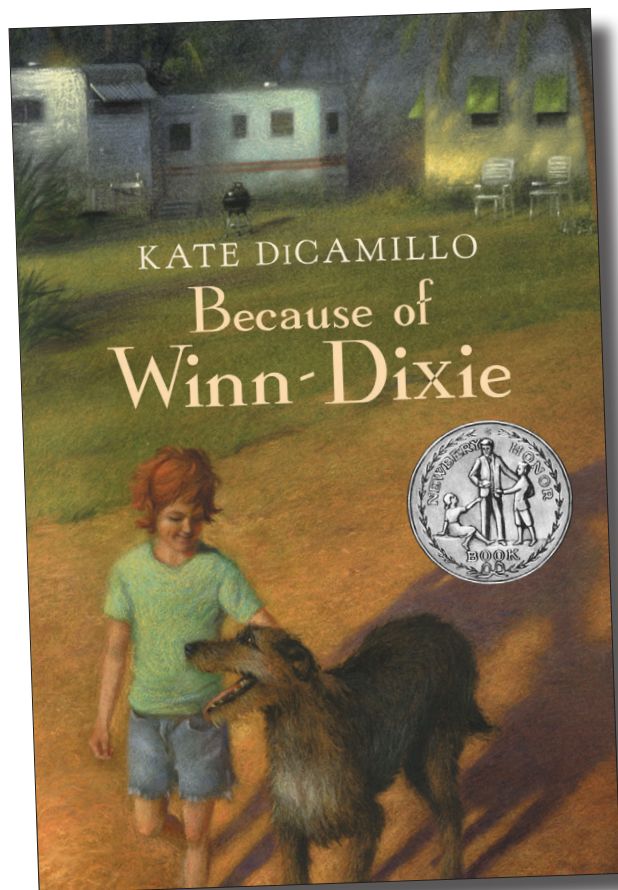


❖—Candlewick Press Discussion Guide —❖



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Because of Winn-Dixie

by Kate DiCamillo
A Newbery Honor Book

❖—About the Book

One summer day in Naomi, Florida, India Opal Buloni goes into a grocery store for a box of macaroni-and-cheese and comes out with a dog. He is big and ugly, and Opal knows right from the start that his name is Winn-Dixie—and that he doesn't belong to anyone but her. How a girl with an ache in her heart and a stray with a great toothy grin transform their lives—and the lives of those they love—is the joyful adventure at the center of this perennial bestseller, the first book in Kate DiCamillo's extraordinary career.



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❖ Discussion Questions

1. Some literary characters make a very strong first impression, just the way some people do. Take a closer look at the novel's opening paragraph. How does Opal introduce herself to the reader? What do you discover about her life and her personality right from the start?
2. "Wait a minute!" Opal says to the store manager (page 9) when he threatens to send Winn-Dixie to the pound. "That's my dog." How is she deceiving the man? How is she, at the same time, being truthful?
3. Opal usually calls her father *Daddy*, but she thinks of him as *the preacher*. Why does she use different terms for the same man? Which role does Opal think he prefers: preacher or daddy? Why does he sometimes remind her of something completely different: a turtle?
4. Winn-Dixie is ugly, limping, and smelly, but Opal knows within moments that she loves him with all her heart (page 14). What makes the stray so irresistible? Why is Opal so ready for something to love?
5. Opal's father is initially reluctant to let Opal keep Winn-Dixie. What are his objections? Why does he change his mind?
6. Discuss the ten things that Opal learns about her mother from her father. What do they reveal about her mother's strengths? What do they reveal about her weaknesses? Do they help explain why she left? Do they excuse her actions?
7. Miss Franny Block claims to have chased away a bear by hurling a big fat book at him. The bear left but kept the book. Do you think this incident really could have occurred? How might it also be a story about the power of literature?
8. Discuss the Open Arms Baptist Church of Naomi. How does it live up to its name? In what ways is it different from churches in your community? In what ways is it similar?
9. Because her sight is failing, Gloria Dump wants to see Opal with her heart (page 66). What does Gloria mean by this? Does she succeed? Do you think a heart can see more truly than eyes can?
10. According to Opal's father, Winn-Dixie has a pathological fear of thunderstorms. What is a pathological fear? Do any other characters in the novel suffer from fears? What frightens them?
11. Otis was in prison as a younger man. How has that affected the way he treats the animals in the pet shop? Have any other characters in the novel been confined, not behind bars but in other ways?

❖ Discussion Questions (continued)

12. Why do the Dewberry boys infuriate Opal? What does Gloria Dump mean when she tells Opal that the boys want to make friends with her “in a roundabout way” (page 91)? How is Gloria proved right?
13. Discuss the tree in Gloria Dump’s backyard. What hangs from its branches? What are the ghosts from Gloria’s past? How does the tree keep them away? Why does the tree make Opal wonder about her mother, and about herself?
14. Opal is fascinated by the story of Littmus W. Block, the great-grandfather of librarian Franny Block. “It was important to me to hear how Littmus survived after losing everything he loved,” she notes (page 109). Why is his story so meaningful to Opal?
15. Littmus Lozenges, created by Mr. Block after the Civil War, aren’t like other candies. What makes them so special? Examine how each character in the novel responds to his or her Littmus Lozenge. What does the candy reveal about each of them?
16. Explaining why he kept something from Opal, the preacher says, “Other people’s tragedies should not be the subject of idle conversation” (page 125). How does Opal respond to her father? Do you agree with her or him?
17. “Sometimes, it seemed like everybody in the world was lonely,” Opal observes (page 132). What do you think? Are most of the characters in *Because of Winn-Dixie* lonely? Or is it Opal who suffers most from loneliness?
18. Opal’s father blesses her party with a prayer to God. “We appreciate,” he says, “the complicated and wonderful gifts you give us in each other” (page 153). What are the complicated gifts of friendship? What are the wonderful gifts?
19. Gloria Dump says, “There ain’t no way you can hold on to something that wants to go, you understand? You can only love what you got while you got it” (page 159). What does she mean by that?
20. “Just about everything that happened to me that summer happened because of Winn-Dixie,” Opal says (page 60). Do you agree with her? Is Opal underestimating her own role? How does Opal help her father out of his sadness? Because of her, what does he learn about himself as a father and a husband?
21. According to Sweetie Pie Thomas, a party isn’t a party without a theme (page 141) — and books need themes, too. In fact, good books can have several themes, important ideas readers can take away. What are the major themes of this novel?

❖— About the Author

Kate DiCamillo spent most of her childhood in the South, and moved to Minnesota when she was in her twenties. She was inspired to write *Because of Winn-Dixie*, her first novel, during a bout of homesickness one brutally cold winter. The book was an immediate success: it is a Newbery Honor Book, has won more than twenty-five state awards, and has been made into a popular family film. Kate DiCamillo's subsequent books include the Newbery Medal-winning *The Tale of Despereaux*, *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*, *The Magician's Elephant*, and *Flora & Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures*. She lives in Minneapolis.



Photo by Catherine Smith Photography

❖— Praise for *Because of Winn-Dixie*

- ★ “A real gem.”
— *Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)
- ★ “Exquisitely crafted. . . . Will hold readers rapt.”
— *Publishers Weekly* (starred review)
- “Poignant and delicately told.”
— *The New York Times Book Review*
- “The kind of book people love and tell their friends to read.”
— *The Washington Post*