

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Because of Winn-Dixie

by
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Book Information

Kate DiCamillo, Because of Winn-Dixie
Quiz Number: 39557
Candlewick Press, 2000
ISBN 0-7636-0776-2; LCCN
182 Pages
Book Level: 3.9
Interest Level: MG

Ten-year-old India Opal Buloni describes her first summer in the town of Naomi, Florida, and all the good things that happen to her because of her big, ugly dog Winn-Dixie.

Award: ABC (Assoc. of Booksellers for Children) Choice; ALA Notable/Best Books; BCCB Blue Ribbon Book; Book Sense Book of the Year Award/Honorees; Josette Frank Children's Book Award; Judy Lopez Memorial Award...Children's Literature; KIND Children's Book Award; NCTE Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts; Newbery Honor; Parent's Choice Award/Honor Book; Publishers Weekly Best Book; SLJ Best Book; Smithsonian's Notable Book; State Award; Young Reader's Choice Award/Nominee

Topics: Animals, Dogs; Family Life, Moving to a New Area; Popular Groupings, Middle Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Read Now Power Up Recommended Lists, Onward and Upward: Change; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 4-6; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 6-8; Recommended Reading, Book Sense 76 - Top Ten; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 3-5; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8; Recommended Reading, Children's Literature Choice; Recommended Reading, IRA/CBC Choice; U.S. States/Regions, Florida

Main Characters

Amanda Wilkinson a young girl who lost her brother in a drowning accident
Dunlap Dewberry a ten-year-old boy who, along with his brother, taunts Opal
Gloria Dump an elderly woman with an overgrown yard and failing eyes, in whom Opal confides
India Opal Buloni a ten-year-old girl, called Opal, who adopts a stray dog
Miss Franny Block the librarian in charge of the Herman W. Block Memorial Library of Naomi, Florida
Otis a clerk at Gertrude's Pets and a musician
Stevie Dewberry a nine-year-old boy who, along with his brother, taunts Opal
Sweetie Pie Thomas a five-year-old girl who loves Winn-Dixie
the preacher Opal's father, who serves the Open Arms Baptist Church

Vocabulary

criminal someone who is guilty of an illegal act or wrongful deed; a felon
fortunate lucky; coming by or resulting from good luck
judge to make a decision about worth; to form an opinion about; to evaluate or rate
manager a person who directs, handles, or is in charge of the affairs or dealings of a company, business, group, or individual
melancholy depressed; sad; glum; despondent; gloomy
memorized learned by heart; learned and recalled accurately; recalled events and people from one's past; committed to one's mind
pathological referring to illness; due to disease; abnormal or morbid
preaching the act of presenting a speech about religion; giving a sermon; giving advice on morals or beliefs; urging acceptance of an idea
talent a special or natural ability to do something; a skill
theme a main or central idea, especially of a written work, work of art, or piece of music; an assignment in which a student is to write about a particular idea or topic

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Synopsis

India Opal Buloni is a lonely girl who has just moved to Naomi, Florida, with her father, a preacher. Opal's mother left them when Opal was three years old. One day, Opal's father sends her to the Winn-Dixie grocery store, where she sees a dog running through the store, knocking over produce. To save the dog from the pound, Opal claims the dog is hers and hurriedly names him "Winn-Dixie." The dog is a mess--skinny with bald patches all over him--but he seems to smile at Opal, and he later charms her father, who decides she can keep him.

After Opal adopts Winn-Dixie, she makes some friends in Naomi: Miss Franny Block, the librarian, who tells Opal stories, including one about her great-grandfather Littmus; Otis, the pet store clerk, who magically calms animals with his guitar music; and Gloria Dump, who tells Opal to judge people only by what they are doing now, not by what they have done.

When a thunderstorm breaks out during a party hosted by Gloria and Opal, Winn-Dixie, who has a terrible fear of storms, runs away. As Opal and her father search for the dog, they both confront their feelings about Opal's mother leaving them. They return to the party and discover that Winn-Dixie was there all along. Opal and her father enjoy the rest of the party with all their new friends.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Inferential Comprehension

Early in the story, Opal says, "Just about everything that happened to me that summer happened because of Winn-Dixie." What things were a result or effect of Winn-Dixie coming into Opal's life?

The title of the book echoes this statement of Opal's, and nearly everything that happens in the story is because of Winn-Dixie, but the most important things involve Opal becoming closer to her father and Opal making friends in her new hometown.

Inferential Comprehension

Many of the characters in the story have clear weaknesses as well as strengths. Compare and contrast the characters in the story. What are their strengths and weaknesses?

The preacher was very serious and thought hard about things, but he avoided "sticking his head out into the world." Miss Franny was a good storyteller, but she sometimes had small shaking fits. Otis was a talented although shy musician, but he had once been arrested for hitting a police officer. Gloria Dump could see into a person's heart, but she had poor eyesight.

Teachable Skills

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning

Differentiating Fact and Opinion

Comparing and Contrasting

Extending Meaning