

ESL Book Club 2024 – Discussion Questions for:

Because of Winn-Dixie by Kate DiCamillo

Discussion Date: Oct Nov 1, 2024, 10:30 am – 12 pm in Central Park Library – Sycamore Room

1. Take a 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. 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?

3. Were you surprised that Opal's father agreed right away to let her keep the dog? What were his objections? Why did he change his mind? Would you have let your kid keep the dog?

4. Opal usually calls her father Daddy, but she thinks of him as the preacher. Why does she use different terms for the same man? Why does he sometimes remind her of something completely different: a turtle?

5. Opal learns ten things 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?

6. Miss Franny Block claims to have chased away a bear by hurling a big fat book at him. (page 48) The bear left but kept the book. Do you think this incident really could have occurred? If not, why do you think she told it to Opal?

7. Because her sight is failing, Gloria Dump wants to see Opal with her heart (page 65-6). What does Gloria mean by this? Does she succeed? Do you think a heart can see more truly than eyes can?

8. 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?

9. 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?

10. 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?

11. Littmus Lozenges, created by Mr. Block after the Civil War, aren't like other candies. What makes them so special? How does the candy help the characters in this book?

12. "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?

13. In Opal's father's prayer, he says, "We appreciate 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?

14. 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?

15. "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? What does he learn about himself as a father and a husband?

16. 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?