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# ***Because of Winn Dixie***

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Written by Kate DiCamillo

## **STORY SUMMARY**

Ten-year-old India Opal Buloni, called Opal, has recently moved to the small town of Naomi, Florida, U.S.A., with her father, who is a preacher at the local church. Ironically, Opal's life at the Friendly Corners Trailer Park, where the family lives, is a lonely one because no other children reside there. The few children Opal knows from church are not very friendly to her. It has been seven years since her mother deserted the family, and Opal longs to know more about her. However, her father is busy with church work and rarely mentions his wife.

One summer day, Opal walks into the Winn-Dixie Market, and her life begins to change for the better when she encounters a dirty, scruffy, but lovable homeless dog. She brings the stray dog home, and after much prodding, persuades her father to keep the dog, now named Winn-Dixie after the market, as a pet. Winn-Dixie becomes a needed companion for Opal, helping her make new friends.

At the Herman W. Block Memorial Library, Winn-Dixie helps Opal establish her first new friendship with Franny Block, the librarian who loves to tell family stories. Because of Winn-Dixie's expensive taste in collars and leads, Opal gets a job at Gertrude's Pet Shop in order to pay for the purchases. While at the pet shop, she meets and befriends Otis, a shy ex-con guitar player, whose musical talent keeps the pet shop animals happy. Opal and Winn-Dixie also connect with Gloria Dump, a kindly half-blind woman, who always takes time to listen to Opal's problems and offers her wise advice.

One night at a neighbourhood party there is a thunderstorm and Winn-Dixie, who is terrified, vanishes. Opal and her father leave the party to search for him. They once again experience a sense of loss, but this time they are able to comfort each other. Opal finally realises that her mother will not return and that she must move on with her life. When Opal and her father return to Gloria's house, they learn the good news that Winn-Dixie has been found hiding under Gloria's bed. Opal's loneliness is gone and she happily faces the future surrounded by new friends, family and, of course, Winn-Dixie.



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# Meet the Author

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Kate DiCamillo



As a girl, Kate DiCamillo always loved to read. Among her favourite books were *The Secret Garden*, *The Yearling* and *Twenty-One Balloons*. “I read almost everything I could get my hands on,” she remembers. She hoped to become a vet, but changed her mind as she grew older. During her university years, she began to focus more on writing. Although she graduated with a degree in English, one of her first jobs was at Disney World. She also worked at a children’s camp.

Kate found employment in a children’s book shop. Influenced by what she read, she began to write her own stories. “Every well-written book is a light for me.” Her first novel, *Because of Winn Dixie*, was based on her own experience. “I was lonely

and couldn’t afford to go home. It was the first time I didn’t have a dog.” The story’s main character, Opal, is a lonely girl who adopts a dog named Winn Dixie, and the tale is set in Florida in the United States. Kate’s first effort in writing a novel earned her a Newbery Honour Award in 2001.

The author’s second book, *The Tiger Rising*, was published in March 2001. This novel was deemed an American National Book Award Finalist and won other honours as well. *The Tale of Despereaux*, a novel about a brave mouse who falls in love with a princess, brought Kate the greatest honour of all—the 2004 Newbery Medal. Kate wrote the book for the son of one of her friends. “He wanted a story about an unlikely hero,” she recalls. It took her three years to complete the novel and honour his request. Other popular books by Kate DiCamillo include *Mercy Watson Fights Crime*, published in 2006, and *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*, published in 2007.

© Kate is busy working on her newest projects, a picture book and a middle-year level novella. She enjoys answering mail from her young readers. “It’s thrilling when a kid writes to you,” she states. The author looks ahead to writing more children’s novels. “I’m at the mercy of whatever character comes into my head. Every day I get up and write two pages and only two pages. It’s an easy goal that I know I can do, whether I am working on a novel or not.”

# Pre-Reading Activities

## Thinking Ahead

In order to better understand *Because of Winn-Dixie*, the following real-life topics can be assigned to cooperative-learning groups to investigate and then discuss with classmates as a whole.

### TOPIC 1: Responsibilities of Pet Ownership

What are the main responsibilities that pet owners have?

How can owners satisfy their pets' needs?

### TOPIC 2: Single-Parent Families

What are the main problems that single parent families must face?

How can these problems be rectified?

### TOPIC 3: Phobias (Pathological Fears)

What are some common phobias?

How can these phobias be modified?

### TOPIC 4: Making and Keeping Friends

Why are friendships so important to people?

What are some ways that we can make and keep friends?

## About the Winn-Dixie Market Chain in America

The Winn-Dixie Market chain started as one small general store, the Clark Mercantile, in Burley, Idaho, U.S.A. Carl Davis worked there along with his younger brother, William. In 1914 William Davis purchased the store and in 1925 he moved the store to Florida and renamed it the Davis Mercantile. After their father's death, William's sons continued to acquire more stores and renamed the chain Table Supply Stores. In 1939, the Davis brothers merged their stores with those of Bill Lovett, head of Winn and Lovett. The company continued to grow, and by 1955 there were 117 stores and the name was changed to Winn-Dixie Stores, Inc. The company is now based in Jacksonville, Florida, and there are a total of about 520 markets. The Winn-Dixie slogan is "Getting better all the time".

If you could own a chain of retail shops like this in Australia, what kind would you like to own? Think of a name for the chain. What would be a good slogan for the shops? Do chains like this work as well in Australia as they do in America?



# Post-Reading Activities

1. When she couldn't find Winn-Dixie, Opal searched everywhere. Design a poster for a missing dog. Include a picture with the description on your poster.
2. With members of your cooperative-learning group, prepare a short script dramatising one part of the story. Add dialogue where necessary. Design simple props and costumes. Perform it for the rest of the class, other classes and/or parents.
3. Party themes were mentioned several times in the story. Plan a party with a theme. Describe the decorations, tableware, centrepieces, games, prizes, food and music.
4. Think about the lessons you learned from reading this story. Describe these lessons and how they can be applied to your own life.
5. Create a board or card game based on the characters and events in the story.
6. Compare and contrast this story with another you have read recently. Use a Venn diagram to show your information.
7. What happened next? Write a sequel to the story and predict the future for Opal, her father, her friends and Winn-Dixie.
8. Design a poster advertising this story. Think about advertisements you have seen. Your poster should make others want to read the book. Use textas, illustrations and other art supplies to make your poster attractive.
9. Create a PowerPoint presentation of the main points of the story. Share your presentation with others.
10. Make a shadow box or a scrapbook representing characters and events in the story.
11. Franny told about her great-grandfather who served in the Civil War. Create a fact file with five to ten important facts about this part of American history.
12. Winn-Dixie might have been sent to the pound if Opal had not rescued him. Learn about an animal shelter or a dog rescue group in your area. Report to the class what you learn.
13. Opal owes much to Winn-Dixie. Because of him, she has adapted well to her home, made new friendships and learned an important lesson about life. Pretend that you are Opal and write a thank-you letter to Winn-Dixie. Tell him why you appreciate having him in your life. Be sure to give details from the story in your letter.
14. Opal often uses an adjective when she should use an adverb. Find five examples from the story and rewrite the sentences correctly.

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# ANSWERS

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## Chapters 1–2: Vocabulary

1. distracted
2. produce
3. stray
4. concerned
5. fortunate
6. Yorky
7. skidded
8. exception
9. trotting
10. yapped

## Chapters 1–2: Comprehension and Discussion Questions (Answers may vary.)

1. He came right to her when she called him even though she had made up the name.
2. No children were allowed except Opal. She was “the exception to the rule”.
3. She called the dog a “less fortunate”. She said she didn’t need the dog, but the dog needed her.
4. She compared him to a turtle and said the dog was making him poke his head out of his shell.

## Chapters 3–4: Vocabulary

1. J
2. M
3. F
4. L
5. K
6. H
7. B
8. A
9. G
10. C
11. D
12. I
13. E

## Chapters 3–4: Comprehension and Discussion Questions (Answers may vary.)

1. She had no mother to care for her. Winn-Dixie had no one to care for him. Neither of them had any friends.
2. Answers may vary. Perhaps it was too painful for him to talk about her because he still loved her. Perhaps he thought Opal would ask about her when she was ready.
3. She pretended that Winn-Dixie agreed. She asked for one fact for each of her ten years.
4. She felt like a “bug under a microscope” because she felt as though the women were judging her and all she did.

## Chapters 5–6: Vocabulary

1. members of a church
2. yelling sadly
3. a dog of mixed breeds
4. correctly
5. a dog trained to find and return an object to its owner
6. made a soft indistinct sound
7. shaky, shivering

## Chapters 5–6: Comprehension and Discussion Questions (Answers may vary.)

1. Possible Answer: Winn-Dixie smiled, causing the preacher to smile back.
2. The preacher hadn’t done anything about the problem because he didn’t want to hurt the mice. Even when the dog brought him the mouse, he didn’t harm it. Winn-Dixie was gentle with it although he wouldn’t let it escape. Opal prayed for the mouse and hoped it landed safely.
3. Answers will vary, but she seemed kind and liked to tell stories.
4. She thought Winn-Dixie was a bear.

## Chapters 7–8: Vocabulary

1. peculiar
2. select
3. stroked, expensive
4. palmetto
5. proud
6. absolutely
7. snatched
8. advanced
9. trustworthy
10. instalments

## Chapters 7–8: Comprehension and Discussion Questions (Answers may vary.)

1. She used hyperbole when she described mosquitoes as being “so big they could fly away with you”.
2. Miss Franny was old and her friends had died. Opal knew what it was like because she had to deal with the loss of her mother and the loss of her friends when she moved.
3. She said that “select” dogs were allowed.
4. The mood is happy. She had a dog, a job, a friend and an invitation to a party.

## Chapters 9–10: Vocabulary

1. surprised
2. wrinkled
3. filled with
4. green plants
5. depend
6. same

## Chapters 9–10: Comprehension and Discussion Questions (Answers may vary.)

1. She was more afraid of losing Winn-Dixie than she was of the witch.
2. Gloria could not see well. She judged people by what she know about them and not by how they looked.
3. She knew Winn-Dixie liked her and she trusted his judgement. She was anxious to tell someone about her life.
4. They called her “Lunch Meat” because her last name, Buloni, sounded like *bologna*.

## Chapters 11–12: Vocabulary

Answers will vary.

## Chapters 11–12: Comprehension and Discussion Questions (Answers may vary.)

1. Answers will vary.
2. He understood Winn-Dixie’s phobia and comforted him and showed him that he loved him. The preacher made it clear that he would do his best to keep Winn-Dixie safe.
3. Otis had been in jail, so he knew how it felt to be confined. He played his guitar and they became spellbound.
4. When the parrot saw Winn-Dixie, she flew onto his head, causing Otis to stop playing, thereby breaking the spell. Opal suggested that he resume his playing. He did and the animals quieted.