

Because of Winn-Dixie



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF KATE DICAMILLO

DiCamillo was born in Pennsylvania, but due to her childhood chronic pneumonia, she moved to Florida with her mother and older brother when she was four years old. Her father, an orthodontist, didn't follow the family. DiCamillo went on to study English at the University of Florida; she graduated in 1987 and moved to Minneapolis in 1994. While working at a book warehouse in Minneapolis, DiCamillo became interested in children's fiction and published *Because of Winn-Dixie*, her first book, in 2000. Since then, DiCamillo has written prolifically, publishing other children's novels, chapter books for beginning readers, and picture books, as well as contributing short stories for various collections. Two of her novels, *The Tale of Desperaux* and *Flora and Ulysses*, were honored with Newbery Medals, while *Winn-Dixie* was a Newbery Honor Book. DiCamillo still lives in Minneapolis.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Though there's no mention of what might be happening in the wider world of the novel's present (which is unspecified but could be any time in the late 20th century), *Because of Winn-Dixie* does draw heavily on the history of the American Civil War. Florida, where the novel takes place, was one of the original seven states to secede from the Union after Abraham Lincoln's election as president in 1860. As a state with a small population, most of them slaves, few Floridians fought in the war—and as the war wore on, deserters from both the Confederate and Union armies escaped to the state. The war was, as Miss Franny Block declares, “hell”: at least 620,000 soldiers died over the course of the four-year conflict. Though the battles themselves were shockingly violent, most people died of disease or of injuries that, given the nature of medicine at the time, doctors couldn't effectively treat. Until the Vietnam War in the 1970s, the Civil War casualty number was higher than all casualties from other U.S. military conflicts combined.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

In *Because of Winn-Dixie*, as well as in DiCamillo's second novel *Tiger Rising*, DiCamillo explores how children handle the loss of a parent. Other novels that feature deceased or absent parents include Roald Dahl's novels *The BFG* and *James and the Giant Peach*, the Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling, and Rodman Philbrick's *Freak the Mighty*. As a novel about the relationship between a child and their dog, *Winn-Dixie* also shares a number of similarities with novels like *Shiloh* by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor,

Where the Red Fern Grows by Wilson Rawls, and Sharon Creech's verse novel *Love That Dog*. Within the book itself, the characters mention and read *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy, Esther Forbes's *Johnny Tremain*, and *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Because of Winn-Dixie
- **When Written:** 1999
- **Where Written:** Minneapolis, Minnesota
- **When Published:** 2000
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Children's Novel
- **Setting:** Naomi, Florida
- **Climax:** During their search for Winn-Dixie, Opal and the preacher voice that Mama isn't coming back and reaffirm their love for each other.
- **Antagonist:** Though Opal at first believes that kids like Dunlap, Stevie, and Amanda are her enemies, she discovers that few people in life are true antagonists.
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Double Whammy. Kate DiCamillo is one of only six authors who have won the Newbery Award twice; her novels *The Tale of Desperaux* and *Flora and Ulysses* won and earned her this distinction. Other authors who have won twice include Lois Lowry (for *Number the Stars* and *The Giver*), E.L. Konigsberg (for *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* and *The View from Saturday*), and Katherine Paterson (for *Bridge to Terabithia* and *Jacob Have I Loved*).



PLOT SUMMARY

One evening, when 10-year-old Opal goes to the local Winn-Dixie grocery store, she encounters a big ugly dog running wild in the produce department. To save the dog from going to the pound, Opal makes up a name for the dog—Winn-Dixie—and insists that he's hers. She leads the dog home to the Friendly Acres Trailer Park where she and her daddy, “the preacher,” live. Opal explains to Winn-Dixie that she and her daddy recently moved to Naomi, Florida so that he could become the preacher of the Open Arms Baptist Church in town. Because he spends so much time focused on the work of being a preacher, Opal refers to him as “the preacher” in her mind. She also often thinks of him as a turtle retreating into his shell to avoid

thinking about sad things. Fortunately, Winn-Dixie makes a good impression on the preacher, and he allows the dog to stay. Opal takes Winn-Dixie outside to bathe him. As she cleans him, she tells him everything she knows about her Mama. It isn't much: Mama left seven years ago, and according to the ladies at church, the preacher still hopes that she'll come back. Opal wants to know more about her, but she's afraid to ask. Winn-Dixie raises his eyebrows and sneezes in response, so Opal agrees to ask the preacher to tell her more. Back inside, Opal does just that. The preacher surprisingly agrees to Opal's request to tell her 10 things about Mama. He shares that she was a fun-loving woman who loved stories and growing things. However, she also hated being a preacher's wife and was an alcoholic. His final fact is that Mama loved Opal. Opal points out that Mama still left her, but the preacher corrects her that Mama left *both* of them. Opal goes to her room to memorize the list.

Winn-Dixie quickly becomes a part of the family. He gets to go everywhere with Opal and the preacher, even to church, as he howls if he's left alone. The first time he attends church, he catches a mouse to applause from the congregation. During the silent prayer, Opal tells God that she's lonely since none of the other kids want to be friends with her, and she wants to tell Mama the story of Winn-Dixie catching the mouse.

Opal spends a lot of her summer at her local library. Winn-Dixie waits outside and looks in the windows. One day, Opal hears a scream and discovers the elderly librarian, Miss Franny Block, cowering because the bear "came back." Opal infers that Miss Franny is talking about Winn-Dixie, assures the old lady that he's just a dog, and brings Winn-Dixie inside so they can listen to the story of the time a bear entered the library. When Miss Franny is done telling the story, she says sadly that there's no one alive who also remembers the incident—all her friends are dead. Opal suggests that she, Winn-Dixie, and Miss Franny be friends, thereby making her first friend in Naomi. When a "pinch-faced" girl named Amanda comes in and demands another book, Miss Franny winks at Opal.

As Winn-Dixie starts to look healthier, Opal decides he needs a collar. She goes to Gertrude's Pets and selects an expensive red leather set, but the employee, Otis, awkwardly refuses to let Opal work out a payment plan. Instead, he agrees that Opal can work for the set by cleaning the shop, but only if Gertrude the parrot likes Winn-Dixie. Surprisingly, she does. Outside the shop, Opal bumps into Sweetie Pie Thomas, a five-year-old from church. Sweetie Pie says she loves Winn-Dixie and wants a dog just like him. She also invites Opal to her sixth birthday party in September. Opal feels happy.

One day, as Opal rides home from Gertrude's Pets, two boys named Dunlap and Stevie ride behind her, whispering. She thinks they look like "bald-headed babies" since their heads are shaved during the summer. Suddenly, Winn-Dixie takes off and leaps a gate into an overgrown garden. Stevie insists that the

witch is going to eat Winn-Dixie, so Opal insults the boys and enters the garden. She discovers Winn-Dixie eating peanut butter out of the hand of a laughing old woman. The woman doesn't look like a witch at all. She introduces herself as Gloria Dump and offers to make Opal a peanut butter sandwich. As they eat, Gloria explains that she's nearly blind, so she needs Opal to share everything about herself so that she can get to know her without seeing her. Opal tells Gloria everything. When she's finished, Gloria suggests they plant a tree to see if Opal has a green thumb like Mama. The tree doesn't look like a tree and Gloria doesn't know what it is, so she calls it a "**wait-and-see tree**." Gloria tells Opal she can come back any time.

Opal wakes in the middle of the night to Winn-Dixie whining and beating his head against her bedroom door—there's a thunderstorm raging outside, and he's terrified. She lets him out of her room, which wakes up the preacher. Winn-Dixie runs and knocks the preacher to the ground. Then, Opal and the preacher sit and watch Winn-Dixie run around the trailer. They discuss that Winn-Dixie has a pathological fear of thunderstorms, but the preacher insists that they need to keep Winn-Dixie safe—he might run away by accident. Opal loves the preacher for saying this and for wanting to protect Winn-Dixie.

Opal arrives early for her first day of work. She enters Gertrude's Pets and encounters an odd sight: Otis is playing guitar for all the animals, which are out of their cages listening attentively. Otis stops playing when he sees Opal, and the shop plunges into pandemonium. Opal and Otis try to cage the animals until Opal tells Otis to start playing again. With the animals once again subdued, Opal puts them all away. When they're done, Otis admits that he takes the animals out on purpose—he's been in jail and knows what it feels like to be locked up. When Opal is finished working, she thinks that the preacher wouldn't like her working for a criminal. Sweetie Pie meets Opal outside and asks if Otis is a magic man; she saw him "charm" the animals. As Sweetie Pie runs ahead to tell her mama about Otis, Opal wishes she could tell her own Mama everything.

Every day, Opal goes from Gertrude's Pets to Miss Franny to Gloria's. Dunlap and Stevie taunt her daily on her way to Gloria's, so Opal always arrives exhausted. Gloria suggests that Opal is taking things too personally; the boys might want to be friends. Opal isn't convinced. Opal tells Gloria a new story every day, since Gloria can't get glasses strong enough anymore to be able to read. One day, Opal decides to share that Otis is a criminal and asks if she should be afraid of Otis. In response, Gloria leads Opal to a **tree** hung with alcohol bottles. She explains that the bottles are the ghosts of all the things she's done wrong and admits that she was once an alcoholic; she drank the contents of every bottle on the tree. Gloria insists that even nice people have done bad things and insists that she learned the most important thing—but rather than say what

that was, Gloria insists that it's different for everyone. Opal stares at the tree for a long time, wondering if Mama also has a tree of bottles.

Miss Franny has fits sometimes, and when she does, Winn-Dixie comforts her. Opal thinks that he comforts Miss Franny just like she comforts Winn-Dixie, but Opal is concerned that no one comforts Gloria. She decides to do that herself by checking out *Gone with the Wind* and reading out loud to Gloria. This prompts Miss Franny to tell Opal and Amanda the story of her great-grandfather Littmus W. Block, who fought in the Civil War. He was thrilled to fight for the cause, but he soon found out that "war is hell"—and when it was over and he returned home, he discovered that his entire family died. When Littmus realized he wanted candy, he vowed to concentrate on making the ugly world sweeter and opened a candy factory in Florida. It manufactured **Littmus Lozenges**. Miss Franny offers candies to both Opal and Amanda. Both girls agree that it tastes good but somehow also tastes sad. Miss Franny says the candy has a secret ingredient: sadness. Children usually can't taste it, so both girls must have experienced sorrow. Amanda looks ready to cry, says it makes her think of Carson, and runs away. Opal is perplexed by this, but she takes candies for all her other friends. On her way to Gloria's, she decides to wave at Dunlap. He waves back.

Gloria remembers eating Littmus Lozenges as a child and is happy to listen to *Gone with the Wind*. When Opal gives a candy to the preacher that night, he seems to withdraw and says that the candy tastes "melancholy." He tells Opal that he spoke to Dunlap and Stevie's mama; Opal needs to apologize for insulting them. When Opal asks, he also shares that Carson was Amanda's five-year-old brother—but he drowned last summer. Opal stays up for a long time, thinking that life is a confusing mix of sweetness and sadness. Opal gives a lozenge to Otis the next morning. It makes him cry, as it tastes like being in jail. He shares why he was jailed: he wouldn't stop playing music on the street and knocked out a cop when they tried to make him. Opal understands that Otis is just lonely. Sweetie Pie spits her candy out because it tastes like not having a dog. Opal thinks that *everyone* is lonely. That afternoon, as she reads about Scarlett's barbecue in *Gone with the Wind*, Opal says that the way to fix everything is to throw a party at Gloria's. Gloria agrees to host, but only if Opal agrees to invite Dunlap and Stevie.

All of Opal's friends agree to come to the party, even Amanda—though Opal has to promise to work for free for a week to convince Otis. Gloria teaches Opal to make egg salad sandwiches and a punch, and they decorate her garden with candles and crepe paper. The guests arrive and awkwardly greet one another, though Stevie and Dunlap are still missing. Just after Otis arrives, it starts to thunder and pour down rain. In the rush to get everyone and the food inside, Opal realizes that she forgot Winn-Dixie—and now he's gone. She grudgingly

greeted Dunlap and Stevie when they arrive. Gloria whispers to Opal that she can't hold onto anyone who want to leave, but Opal heads out with the preacher to look for Winn-Dixie. They look all over town and as they do, Opal compiles a list of 10 things about Winn-Dixie. She realizes, however, that a list cannot truly describe her best friend. When the preacher insists that they have to stop looking, Opal accuses him of not trying hard enough to keep Mama from running away. The preacher insists that he couldn't keep her and starts to cry. Opal embraces him and the preacher finally says that Mama isn't coming back. He says, however, that Mama left one important thing behind when she left: Opal.

Opal and the preacher return to Gloria's house without Winn-Dixie to find everyone singing. Opal is enraged until Gloria reveals Winn-Dixie, who was hiding under her bed and started sneezing when Otis played his guitar. Everyone became friends while Opal and the preacher were out. Content, Opal slips outside to the mistle tree and tells Mama that she won't think of her as much going forward, but she knows that Daddy will talk more about her in the future. Then, she checks her wait-and-see tree and discovers that it's still small, but it's stronger. Dunlap helps her up, and then they and Amanda head back inside to sing songs and eat Littmus Lozenges with their friends.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

India Opal Buloni – Opal is the novel's 10-year-old protagonist. Opal lives with her father, whom she refers to as "the preacher," in Naomi, Florida. Since they recently moved to town, Opal has no friends until she encounters a stray dog in the grocery store one night, whom she adopts and names Winn-Dixie. Winn-Dixie begins to help Opal's loneliness almost immediately. He's an attentive listener, so Opal tells him everything she wants to say—such as that she feels neglected by the preacher, who spends all his time preaching and thinking about Mama, who left when Opal was three. Opal wants Mama to come back and doesn't understand that this won't happen. When she learns that Mama loves storytelling, Opal begins to "collect" stories to tell Mama someday. With Winn-Dixie's help, Opal also begins making friends: first with the librarian, Miss Franny, and then with Otis the pet shop employee and an old woman named Gloria. Both Otis and Gloria pose dilemmas for Opal, who is somewhat judgmental: she briefly believes Dunlap and Stevie that Gloria is a witch, and she worries a lot about the fact that Otis has been to jail. Gloria, however, helps Opal to understand that even good people do bad things sometimes, and this doesn't make them entirely horrible. As Opal learns to see people with more compassion and nuance, she gradually begins to come of age. Though she never stops sharing her own stories, she makes a point to listen to those of others—she

understands that by listening, she can help people feel respected and worthy. Near the end of the summer, Opal and Gloria throw a party for all of Opal's new friends. When a thunderstorm strikes, Winn-Dixie goes missing. His absence forces Opal and the preacher to reaffirm their love for each other and voice that Mama isn't coming back, while Gloria later makes the case that though the party trappings were destroyed in the downpour, they can still focus on their new friends and their joy. Winn-Dixie is ultimately found, and Opal ends the novel with a community of friends and with the understanding that life is both sweet and sad—and having made the choice to not focus her attention exclusively on Mama.

Winn-Dixie – Winn-Dixie is the novel's titular character. He's a huge, scruffy-looking dog whom Opal encounters running wild in a local Winn-Dixie grocery store one evening. When Opal first meets Winn-Dixie, he's clearly a stray: he's dirty and skinny, he's missing patches of fur, and he smells horrendous. Opal ends up adopting him to save him from being taken to the pound. Over the course of the summer, Winn-Dixie puts on weight, grows in his missing fur, and becomes a handsome dog. He has a habit of smiling at people by pulling up his lips to expose his teeth and of sneezing when he smiles too hard. Winn-Dixie is an extremely friendly dog. He attempts to make friends (and often succeeds in doing so) with everyone he encounters, human and animal alike, usually by smiling at them. His friendliness and his quiet demeanor, combined with his bad behavior if separated too long from Opal, means that Winn-Dixie often gets to go into businesses that normally wouldn't allow dogs, such as the local library and Gertrude's Pets. He's often the one to "encourage" Opal to make new friends, as when he runs into Gloria's yard or dutifully puts up with Sweetie Pie's affections. In addition to being friendly, Winn-Dixie is also an exceptional listener. When someone talks to him directly or when listening to a story, Winn-Dixie cocks his head, perks up his ears, smiles, and sneezes. Despite his many good qualities, he does have one dangerous trait: he's deathly afraid of thunderstorms and turns into a wild, dangerous dog when they roll through. He only barely holds still during thunderstorms if Opal holds him and comforts him, and the preacher makes it clear that it's unsafe for Winn-Dixie to be loose outside during a storm. In Opal's mind, Winn-Dixie is also something of a stand-in for Mama—so it's even more distressing for her when Winn-Dixie goes missing in a thunderstorm. His absence spurs Opal and the preacher to speak openly about Mama, though Opal learns later that Winn-Dixie was never lost: he weathered the storm under Gloria's bed. Opal attributes everything that happens to her during the summer in which the novel takes place to Winn-Dixie.

Daddy/The Preacher – The preacher is Opal's father. Though she calls him "Daddy" to his face, in her mind, she refers to him as "the preacher." This is because the preacher spends all his time wrapped up in the work of being a preacher, which

includes writing sermons, praying, and thinking about suffering people. He and Opal move to the small town of Naomi, Florida so that the preacher can take over the Open Arms Baptist Church of Naomi. In addition to thinking about preaching, Opal also infers that the preacher spends a lot of his time thinking about his wife, Opal's Mama, who left him and young Opal when Opal was three. Opal believes that the preacher never recovered from losing Mama, as he avoids talking about her now. In Opal's understanding, her father is like a turtle retreating into its shell—any mention of something emotionally challenging, or something that turns his attention away from preaching or from thinking about Mama, makes him withdraw into his shell, where he can refocus on preaching and grieving. Winn-Dixie's arrival to the family begins to change this, as the dog showers the preacher with affection and, through his actions, encourages the preacher to talk to Opal about Mama. Despite the preacher's grief and bitterness about Mama's departure, when he and Opal do talk about Mama, he makes a point to imply that Mama leaving wasn't Opal's fault—he insists that Mama left *both* of them, not just Opal. Though he leaves it at this for most of the novel, the two finally speak openly and honestly about Mama and their grief when the preacher and Opal go out into a thunderstorm to look for Winn-Dixie, who ran away. When Opal accuses the preacher of not trying harder to hold onto Mama, the preacher insists that neither he nor Opal could stop her. More importantly, he expresses thanks for the first time that Mama left Opal behind. After this, Opal begins to refer to him as "Daddy" in her narration, offering hope that they'll be able to repair and improve their relationship going forward.

Gloria Dump – Gloria is one of Opal's friends in Naomi. She's a wrinkly old lady with dark skin whom many kids in town believe is a witch. However, Opal quickly discovers that this isn't true: Gloria is an immediate hit with Winn-Dixie, and within an hour of meeting Opal, she makes Opal feel more loved, heard, and accepted than almost anyone else in town. Gloria loves telling and hearing stories. In her younger years, she loved to read, but in the present, her eyesight has gotten so bad that she can't even read with the help of glasses. Even more than any of Opal's other adult friends, Gloria acts as a mentor and a teacher to Opal. Most importantly, Gloria is the one to introduce Opal to the idea that even good people can do bad things and make mistakes by showing Opal her "**mistake tree**." Since Gloria is the nicest and kindest person Opal knows, it's a shock for her to see the tree hung with alcohol bottles—all of which Gloria herself emptied when she was younger and struggling with alcoholism. Through this and through Gloria's insistence that it's impossible to keep someone from running away who wants to leave, Gloria helps Opal come to terms with Mama's abandonment. She also inadvertently teaches Opal that Opal has the ability to care for others and make them feel respected, which Opal does by reading *Gone with the Wind* to Gloria chapter by chapter. Gloria also facilitates Opal's party

and encourages her to make friends with Dunlap and Stevie.

Otis – Otis is the sole employee at the Naomi pet shop Gertrude’s Pets. He’s a shy, quiet man who wears his black hair slicked back on his head. He offers Opal a job sweeping the shop after the parrot Gertrude decides that Winn-Dixie is an acceptable companion. Despite his awkwardness with people, Otis is exceptional at dealing with animals. He’s a skilled guitarist and regularly gets all the animals in the store out of their cages so he can play for them—and the animals sit still and listen to him. Otis confides in Opal that he does this because he understands what it’s like to be locked up, since he’s been in jail. This gives Opal pause, as she’s been taught that it’s dangerous to hang out with criminals. Despite this, Otis never behaves in a way that concerns Opal. Eventually, Opal asks why Otis was in jail and he’s more than happy to tell his story. He used to play guitar on the street because he believes that music is meant to be heard by others—but the police asked him to stop, and when they tried to arrest him, Otis punched an officer. In the novel’s present, he exclusively plays for the animals at the pet shop because the police made him promise to never play on the streets. Hearing his story turns Otis into a far more sympathetic character for Opal, and she eventually begins to consider him a friend. She convinces him to come to the party she throws at Gloria’s house, and the other guests are instrumental in encouraging Otis to play music for humans for the first time in years. Playing for people makes Otis glow with happiness.

Miss Franny Block – Miss Franny Block is the elderly librarian in Naomi. She’s a tiny, frail, and wrinkled lady, but Opal soon discovers that Miss Franny has all sorts of stories to tell. Because Opal is willing to listen to these stories and begins to understand that Miss Franny is just as lonely as she is, Opal suggests that they become friends— Miss Franny is Opal’s first friend (other than Winn-Dixie) in Naomi. Aside from Opal, Miss Franny is, in many ways, alone. Though she tells stories about illustrious family members and residents of an older, wilder Florida, she laments that all her friends have died and that no one else in Naomi remembers events that she does. Telling stories is, in many respects, a way for Miss Franny to hold onto the past and keep it alive. She also does this by keeping her desk full of **Littmus Lozenges**, a candy that her great-grandfather Littmus W. Block developed in the aftermath of the Civil War. With the candies, which inexplicably taste like “melancholy,” Miss Franny teaches Opal and Amanda that life is made up of both sweetness and sadness.

Mama – Mama is Opal’s mother who never appears in person in the novel. She left Opal and the preacher when Opal was three years old, and since the preacher seldom if ever speaks about her, Opal knows little about her. When the preacher agrees to tell Opal 10 things about Mama, Opal learns that her mother was a bright and fun person who loved to grow things and listen to stories—but she also learns that Mama was deeply

unhappy in her marriage and turned to alcohol to deal with her unhappiness. Opal desperately wants Mama to come back, and the preacher does too—but neither of them will admit that Mama *isn’t* coming back until the end of the novel.

Amanda Wilkinson – Amanda is a girl in Naomi who’s about Opal’s age. Opal describes her as “pinch-faced,” or mean. In Opal’s assessment, Amanda is a stickler for rules and walks around looking like she smelled something nasty. To Opal’s credit, Amanda is cold to Miss Franny when she goes to the library to return and check out books. However, the novel eventually reveals that this behavior is a front to cover up Amanda’s grief. The story of Littmus W. Block begins to break down Amanda’s walls, and Opal later discovers that last summer, Amanda’s little brother, Carson, drowned. Opal infers that Amanda looks and behaves the way she does because she’s still grieving her brother, though the novel never confirms or denies this. Amanda is nervous but happy when Opal invites her to the party at Gloria’s, and at the party itself, Amanda seems less mean and stuck-up. Though Amanda is still intent on following rules to the letter and forcing others to do the same, Opal makes a point to be kinder to her and more understanding of where Amanda might be coming from.

Dunlap Dewberry – Dunlap is a local boy and Stevie’s older brother by about a year. He and Stevie make a point to chase, torment, and taunt Opal whenever possible. However, Dunlap offers clues throughout the novel that he’s much more mature and empathetic than Stevie. He occasionally waves to Opal and graciously accepts Opal’s invitation to the party at Gloria’s. When he and Opal finally talk honestly with each other, Dunlap reveals that he never really thought Gloria was a witch and only tormented Opal because he wanted to be friends. It seems likely that after the novel’s close, Dunlap and Opal will indeed become friends.

Stevie Dewberry – Stevie is a local boy; he’s Dunlap’s younger brother. Stevie is about a year younger than his older brother but looks much the same—the boys’ mother shaves their hair in the summertime, which inspires Opal to refer to them as “bald-headed babies” as an insult. Stevie is more interested than Dunlap is in tormenting Opal and with insisting that Gloria is a witch. Though he and Opal don’t make up at the end of the novel like Dunlap and Opal do, the fact that he willingly attends Opal’s party implies that his behavior toward her will change going forward.

Sweetie Pie Thomas – Sweetie Pie is a blonde five-year-old girl who befriends Opal. She’s one of the first friendly people Opal meets in Naomi; though it’s summer when they meet, Sweetie Pie excitedly invites Opal to her sixth birthday party in September. Sweetie Pie adores Winn-Dixie and desperately wants a dog of her own. She snuggles Winn-Dixie whenever they’re together. Sweetie Pie is nonjudgmental and simply wants to be around people who are kind and will care for her. The fact that Otis has been to jail isn’t even on her radar; she

simply loves that he plays guitar for the animals at the pet shop. Her youth, however, means that she's not interested in acknowledging sad things. When offered a **Littmus Lozenge (candies which cause older characters to reflect on the sadness that's inherent to life)**, Sweetie Pie spits it out and insists it doesn't taste good.

Littmus W. Block – Littmus is Miss Franny's great-grandfather and the inventor of the **Littmus Lozenge**. He fought in the Civil War when he was just a teenager and learned quickly that though he went into it with an idealized vision of what war was about, war is actually terrible and demoralizing. Littmus lost every other member of his family over the course of the war, but he decided to focus on putting sweetness into the world. This inspired him to create the Littmus Lozenge: the candy is sweet, but the secret ingredient is sorrow. The candy's production made the Block family extremely wealthy.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Carson – Carson was Amanda's little brother. Five-year-old Carson died the summer before the novel begins when he fell into the river and drowned. His death, Opal suspects, is what makes Amanda seem so mean and uptight.

The Manager – Winn-Dixie the dog attempts to make friends with the manager of the local Winn-Dixie grocery store, but the manager simply wants the dog out of his produce department.

Mr. Alfred – Mr. Alfred is the manager of the Friendly Corners Trailer Park. He doesn't like children and doesn't want them living in his trailer park, though he deems Opal an exception because she's quiet and the daughter of a preacher.

Gertrude – Gertrude is a temperamental parrot at Gertrude's Pet Shop. She's named after the human owner of the shop. Gertrude quickly becomes friends with Winn-Dixie and sits on the dog's shoulders whenever Opal and Winn-Dixie are in the shop.

Herman W. Block – Herman was Miss Franny Block's father. He was a wealthy man and agreed to build young Franny a library, which is now the public library that Opal frequents.

Mrs. Detweller – Mrs. Detweller is Opal and the preacher's neighbor in the Friendly Corners Trailer Park.

Samuel – Samuel is Mrs. Detweller's dog.



STORYTELLING AND LISTENING

Because of Winn-Dixie introduces readers to Opal, a 10-year-old girl who recently moved to the small town of Naomi, Florida with her daddy—and who

finds and adopts a scruffy-looking stray dog in the grocery store one day. The dog, whom Opal names Winn-Dixie after the store, is Opal's first friend in Naomi—and over the course of their adventures that summer, Winn-Dixie helps Opal make friends with others in her small town. As Opal befriends Winn-Dixie and others, and as she becomes increasingly curious about her absent mother, Opal begins to learn important lessons about the power of storytelling. Through telling her own stories and giving others the opportunities to tell their stories, Opal discovers that while storytelling can be a cathartic and positive experience for the storyteller, the act of listening is arguably even more important and meaningful. Listening to others' stories, the novel suggests, is a way to build community, show respect, and help people find a sense of dignity and purpose.

When the novel begins, Opal has been in Naomi for several weeks but doesn't yet have any friends. She craves someone to talk to, especially since her father (whom she calls "the preacher") "spends so much time preaching or thinking about preaching or getting ready to preach" and therefore doesn't have much time for Opal. When Opal finds Winn-Dixie at the local grocery store one evening and lies that he's her dog so that he doesn't get taken to the pound, Winn-Dixie promptly begins to fill the void in Opal's life. Opal begins talking to Winn-Dixie almost immediately. He's her first confidante, and simply having someone to talk to has almost instantaneous benefits for Opal. During Winn-Dixie's first bath, Opal tells him as much as she knows about her Mama, who left the preacher when Opal was three—and then, with Winn-Dixie's "prodding," she asks the preacher to tell her 10 things about Mama. This demonstrates how being able to tell her own story and verbally work through her problems gives Opal the confidence she needs to ask the preacher for information she's desired for years. Even if she's only speaking to a dog, not a fellow human, the simple act of telling her story and having someone listen to it makes her feel more secure, confident, and at ease in Naomi and in her family.

As Winn-Dixie assists Opal in befriending a number of Naomi's adult residents, Opal takes this lesson about the value of being able to tell one's story and pays it forward by asking for and listening to the stories of Otis the pet shop employee and the elderly ladies Miss Franny Block and Gloria Dump (the town librarian and a woman believed to be a witch, respectively). Especially when it comes to Franny and Gloria, Opal sees firsthand how meaningful it can be to have someone listen to one's story. Though Franny is a reasonably well-respected fixture in town as the librarian, Opal witnesses fellow library patrons treat Franny coolly and as though she's not a real



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

person. However, Franny opens up and becomes someone entirely different once Opal agrees to sit and hear a story. Gloria, too, transforms in Opal's mind from possibly being a witch to being a kind and generous lady who desperately needs a friend as the two exchange stories. The bond that she and Opal form is rooted in their daily practice of sitting outside, eating peanut butter sandwiches, and sharing stories and wisdom. Listening to these women and Otis is a way for Opal to demonstrate that to her, Otis, Franny, and Gloria are individuals who have rich histories of their own, entertaining tales to weave, and wisdom to impart. In turn, they show Opal that they believe she's worthy of their time and attention by telling her their stories—but the novel implies that the dignity and respect that these individuals gain by having someone listen to them is just as meaningful, if not more so.

Through this, *Because of Winn-Dixie* positions storytelling as something far more than an entertaining pastime. Rather, storytelling is how people learn about themselves and about their history—and most importantly, it's how people pass what they know onto others. While silence can isolate a person and make them feel alone in the world, telling stories and listening to the stories of others can build community, friendships, and family—and make even those who exist in the background come to life.



SADNESS, HAPPINESS, AND GROWING UP

At 10 years old, Opal is a child in every sense of the word—her perspective and understanding of the world are limited, somewhat selfish, and based purely on what adults have told her. However, over the course of the novel, Opal begins to grow up as she comes to terms with the fact that life is far more nuanced than she originally thought. Through her own experience and through her friends' stories, she learns that it's possible for life to be heartbreakingly sad—but also that it's always possible to find a silver lining or to focus on something beautiful. Similarly, Opal also discovers that it's impossible to lead a life that is 100 percent happy. In short, as Opal begins to come of age, she discovers that happiness in the adult world is about balance: one must understand that neither happiness nor sorrow are absolute. Sorrow may color someone's happiness, but there's also always something positive to celebrate.

From the beginning, the way Opal speaks and behaves suggests that, on some level, she already understands that one cannot wallow in sadness and expect to live a full life. Opal's father, the preacher, is still mourning that his wife, Mama, left him and young Opal seven years before the novel begins. In Mama's absence, Opal thinks of her father as a turtle, hiding in his "turtle shell"—and in that shell, he focuses only on the work of being a preacher and dwelling on the sadness he feels. Because he spends so much time in his "turtle shell," Opal's father is

mostly absent from her life. This is part of the reason she refers to him as "the preacher" to the reader (and in her mind), but calls him "Daddy" to his face—and his absence is the reason why she's at the grocery store alone on the night that the dog Winn-Dixie comes into her life. The preacher's way of living is a clear indicator that it's unhealthy for a person to dwell on their sadness—and it also suggests that doing so has the potential to hurt others, like Opal, and damage their chances at happiness. Because the preacher never voices the truth to Opal—that Mama is gone and isn't coming back—Opal fixates on the few things she knows about Mama and collects stories to share with her one day, which the novel overwhelmingly suggests hurts both the preacher and Opal. Rather than clinging to the past, it's necessary to accept the truth of one's current situation in order to find happiness.

Winn-Dixie's arrival injects life, happiness, and purpose into Opal and the preacher's life in a way that they hadn't considered possible. The dog begins to bring the preacher out of his shell—and most importantly for Opal, he helps her make friends with people in Naomi. Those friends then offer some of the novel's most important lessons in balance and the role that age and maturity play in achieving it. Miss Franny Block, the elderly librarian, tells Opal stories about her long-gone family members, the most important of which is her great-grandfather, Littmus W. Block. Littmus was 14 when the Civil War broke out, and he felt compelled to fight for the Confederate Army. He not only discovered through the course of his service that "war is hell," but when the war ended, he discovered that his entire family died and that Union soldiers burned his home. The war itself taught Littmus the importance of not idealizing something—everything, especially war, has its downsides, even if it seemed good and righteous as it did to Littmus. Rather than wallow in his sadness, however, Littmus decided to look for the bright spots and opened a candy factory. The factory made a candy called **Littmus Lozenges**, which contained a secret ingredient: sadness. Though the candy tastes sweet, it also tastes somehow sad. And while adults and kids Opal's age can eat the candy and appreciate the sadness in it, younger kids, like five-year-old Sweetie Pie Thomas, spit the candy out. This suggests that it takes a degree of maturity to understand the necessity of acknowledging sadness, even while engaging in something as enjoyable as eating candy.

Opal's other friend, Gloria Dump, offers another angle: that while people may go through sad times, it's possible (and necessary) to move on from them. However, she also suggests that it's foolish to forget the lessons that those sad times doled out. Gloria is an elderly, nearly blind woman who's an avid gardener and cultivates a genuine, loving friendship with Opal. However, she's also a recovered alcoholic who keeps a "**mistake tree**": a tree onto which she tied alcohol bottles to remind her of her past, how far she's come, and what she learned during the dark time when she was drinking too much.

The mistake tree and the Littmus Lozenges both help Opal and the preacher move through their grief and sadness over losing Mama. After the preacher finally admits that Mama isn't coming back, Opal stands in front of the mistake tree and promises Mama that she won't forget her, but that she'll think about her less in the years to come—and moreover, Opal insists that her heart is full. In other words, by the end of the novel, Opal has let go of Mama enough to be able to focus on all the good things in her life, like Winn-Dixie and all of her new human friends. While Mama's memory and its associated sadness will always be a part of Opal's life, the novel shows that it's possible to choose to focus on the bright spots. Only by doing this can people, grow, change, and become better, more mature people.



FAMILY AND LOSS

For Opal, family is a somewhat difficult subject. While she loves her father (whom she refers to as “the preacher” in her mind and in her narration), he is somewhat neglectful in important ways. When combined with the fact that Opal's mother, Mama, left the preacher and Opal seven years ago, it's clear that Opal has every reason to feel abandoned and neglected. As Opal makes friends in Naomi, Florida, convinces the preacher to talk about Mama, and learns about the family situations of her friends, Opal must come to a difficult conclusion: though the novel suggests that family is often marked by loss of some sort, it's still important to focus on and celebrate those family members, both blood and chosen, who are around.

As soon as Opal begins telling Winn-Dixie about Mama and shares what the church ladies say about the preacher (that he's still in love with Mama and hopes she'll come back), it becomes clear that Opal similarly focuses on what she *doesn't* have in her family: a mother to care for her. This, she implies, is the reason why she's the one making grocery runs, and it's why the preacher is so sad. Both Opal and the preacher blame their unhappiness on Mama's absence. While it's important to not minimize the grief and trauma that both Opal and the preacher clearly experience as a result of Mama's departure, Opal eventually realizes that nearly everyone else in the small town of Naomi has also suffered loss of some sort. Some individuals, like the pet shop employee Otis and the old lady Gloria Dump, live alone and never mention their families, leaving it up to the reader to decide if they have families and simply don't talk about them or if they're truly alone. Others, like Miss Franny Block, mention their families—but all her family members are long dead. Even Amanda, a “pinched-face” girl Opal's age, has experienced loss: last summer, her little brother, Carson, drowned in the river.

None of these situations are intended to make anyone else's fractured family situation seem better or worse. Rather, by offering such an array of families who have all been touched by loss, DiCamillo makes the case that loss is a normal part of a

family—and indeed, part of being human. The revelation that Amanda is still grieving the loss of her little brother is what helps Opal decide to try to befriend Amanda; she recognizes that they're going through similar processes of grief and may have more in common than she initially thought. Familial loss, in this case, can be a precursor to friendship. However, almost more important is the way that Opal's relationship with Gloria helps her to learn more about Mama and herself. When the preacher agrees to tell Opal 10 things about Mama, one thing he mentions is that Mama hated being a preacher's wife and turned to alcohol to deal with her unhappiness. At a previous point in her life, Gloria was an alcoholic as well, and she provides a valuable window for Opal into what it's like to deal with that kind of addiction. Though Opal doesn't necessarily make the connection, Gloria's story implies that while Mama's departure has undeniably hurt Opal and the preacher, Mama would've been wildly unhappy had she stayed. Gloria quietly makes the case that Mama's alcoholism was a symptom of something much worse, and it could've wrought far more damage on the family had Mama stayed. Sometimes, the novel suggests, it's necessary for people to experience some sort of loss in order to be able to heal.

Indeed, the preacher and Opal only begin to heal when, finally surrounded by friends who care about them, they speak openly and emotionally about Mama. Most importantly, Opal finally begins to take to heart the preacher's earlier insistence that Mama didn't just leave *Opal*—she left *them*. In other words, the preacher wants Opal to understand that she isn't the problem; she did nothing wrong and she didn't cause Mama to leave. Rather, Mama chose to step out of their family forever because she was unhappy—and now, the preacher and Opal must figure out how to form a family in the present, with the two of them and Winn-Dixie. While the novel ends before Opal and the preacher return home to begin the work of figuring out their mended relationship, their truthful and emotional conversation about Mama offers hope that it is possible for them to heal from Mama's loss and move forward into the future. Their family may be marred by the loss of Mama, but this doesn't mean that they have to dwell on it and make it the center point of their lives—they have each other and Winn-Dixie, which is a lot to be thankful for. Thus, the novel ends by insisting that when it comes to family, what's most important is to honor and take care of the family members that one does have, whether that family is made up of one's blood family or one's friends. If one does this, it's impossible for loss to define a family entirely.



OPENNESS, FRIENDSHIP, AND COMMUNITY

Because of Winn-Dixie is, in many ways, a study in both the negative consequences of prejudging others and what can happen when people approach others with curiosity, openness, and compassion. While the novel lays out

perfectly understandable reasons why a person may be inclined to judge someone, it overwhelmingly suggests that these reasons nevertheless keep people from being able to truly connect with others. Being open, curious, and compassionate with people, meanwhile, is one of the most effective ways to make and nurture friendships.

In most cases, 10-year-old Opal, who's new to the small town of Naomi, Florida, is a naturally nonjudgmental person. This is apparent when she first sees a dog running wild through the local grocery store. Though she describes the animal as huge, ugly, smelly, and in poor physical health, she nevertheless sees through this to the new friend waiting underneath. The dog, whom Opal names Winn-Dixie, is just as open to new people—though he's never seen Opal before in his life and has certainly never had anyone call him Winn-Dixie, he follows her when she calls him and is more than happy to accompany her home. Over the course of the novel, Opal has several opportunities to learn that she was right to not judge Winn-Dixie when they first met, and that she should continue in that spirit of openness. She and her father, the preacher, quickly discover that Winn-Dixie is deathly afraid of thunderstorms. He runs back and forth through their home, knocking over everyone and everything in his path. Though this scares and concerns Opal at first, the preacher counsels her that they can't hold this trait against Winn-Dixie. Rather, they need to understand that this isn't something he can control and help him through it as best they can. The preacher, then, reinforces the idea that individuals should be open and caring with those they consider friends. While friends may not always look or behave their best, it's important to treat them with compassion and understanding regardless.

Winn-Dixie himself sets one of the novel's greatest examples of openness and compassion. While Opal is a likeable protagonist—it's easy to see why a dog or a person would want to be friends with her—Winn-Dixie helps Opal understand that even in the case of individuals who don't seem so immediately likeable, it's important to try one's best to befriend them as well. Winn-Dixie is more than willing to approach and befriend everyone in Naomi: from the old woman Gloria, who's believed to be a witch, to the pet shop employee Otis, who spent time in jail and is thought of among Naomi's residents as a hardened criminal. While people, and children in particular, might avoid these individuals because of their supposedly sordid pasts, Winn-Dixie bursts through all of that prejudice and shows Opal that it's silly to believe a rumor about someone without first verifying it and getting the story from the person in question.

One day, Winn-Dixie races into Gloria's garden while neighborhood boys Dunlap and Stevie warn Opal that Gloria is a witch. Though Opal doesn't like the boys to begin with and therefore has less reason to believe them, it's telling that Opal decides almost instantly to follow Winn-Dixie's lead. She understands immediately that Gloria is in no way a

witch—though as a kid in a town where most others believe that Gloria is a witch, Opal would have lots of reasons to go along with it. Similarly, a “pinched-face” girl named Amanda warns Opal that Otis is a criminal, and therefore that Opal shouldn't be around him. Though this concerns Opal—she's always been told to avoid criminals—she pushes through her apprehension and discovers that although Otis has been to jail, he's also one of the kindest and most generous individuals in Naomi. In these instances, Opal's openness allows her to befriend those that Naomi society deems inappropriate friend material but who are actually longing for friends themselves and are happy to welcome Opal and Winn-Dixie into their lives.

The novel also goes to great lengths to show that as a person begins befriending people, this sets off a chain reaction of connections and friendships. In essence, the novel proposes that if a person opens themselves up to making friends, each friend will, in turn, expand a person's social group by connecting them to others. Opal goes from being friendless; to having Winn-Dixie; to having her adult friends Gloria, Franny, and Otis; to finally making friends with kids her own age—all by choosing to embrace Winn-Dixie on that fateful night in the grocery store and by choosing to follow his lead when he attempts to introduce her to others. With this, the novel offers an important lesson: making a friend and treating others with openness, kindness, and compassion doesn't just give a person a single friend—it can give a person a community.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



LITTMUS LOZENGES

Littmus Lozenges represent the idea that it's impossible to separate happiness and sadness from each other. Miss Franny Block's great-great-grandfather, Littmus W. Block, began manufacturing the lozenges after the Civil War, and he included a secret ingredient in the otherwise sweet candy: sadness. His experiences during and after the war taught him that even things which seem righteous and good can have hideous aspects—and that even in the midst of grief and horror, it's possible and necessary to take the time to celebrate the happy parts of life. People's reactions to the lozenges suggest that this understanding is something that comes with age. While adults and even 10-year-old Opal are able to appreciate the taste of the sadness (representing their grasp of this idea), young children like five-year-old Sweetie Pie Thomas spit the candy out—at their age, they're not yet ready to see the world in such a nuanced way.



THE MISTAKE TREE

Gloria Dump's "mistake tree" encapsulates the novel's insistence that it's important to learn from one's past mistakes. In Gloria's younger years, she was an alcoholic. She tied alcohol bottles that she emptied through the course of her alcoholism to a tree in her yard in order to, as she tells Opal, "keep the ghosts away"—that is, to keep her sober and to remind her of all the lessons she learned while she was drinking. With this, the novel insists that people cannot simply gloss over the embarrassing or imperfect parts of their lives. It's essential to try to find lessons in one's past experiences and follow them going forward. Even more than that, though, *Because of Winn-Dixie* suggests that it's also important to pass these lessons onto others wherever possible. Gloria does this by sharing the idea behind her mistake tree with Opal, which helps Opal become more understanding of her own Mama's alcoholism—and ultimately, to understand that Mama isn't coming back.



THE WAIT-AND-SEE TREE

The "wait-and-see tree" that Gloria helps Opal plant is a symbol for Opal herself. As the name implies, Gloria has no idea what kind of tree the young sapling is—it could be anything. Despite not knowing, she insists that it's important to plant it, nurture it, and see what it does. Through this, Opal learns that just like the tree, she deserves love, kindness, and support from those around her—even if it's unclear, given her young age, who or what she'll become as she grows.

Explanation and Analysis

Opal has just found a stray dog, whom she names Winn-Dixie, at the grocery store. On her way home from the store with Winn-Dixie, Opal tells the dog and the reader about her daddy, whom she calls "the preacher." The simple fact that Opal doesn't think of her father as her father suggests that in important ways, Opal feels neglected and alone—as far as she's concerned, she's not nearly as important to her father as his preaching is. Though it's debatable whether or not this is actually true (it's possible that the preacher is just distant and doesn't know how to show Opal that he cares), the fact remains that Opal feels alone and unmoored. Especially since Opal only has one parent in her life, this makes things especially difficult—she essentially has no adults to turn to for guidance or advice. Even though the preacher is technically in Opal's life, Opal still feels as though she's missing him—indicating that it's possible to feel as though one has lost a family member, even if that family member is still right there.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☞ “He won't talk to me about her at all. I want to know more about her. But I'm afraid to ask the preacher; I'm afraid he'll get mad at me.”

Winn-Dixie looked at me hard, like he was trying to say something.

“What?” I said.

He stared at me.

“You think I should make the preacher tell me about her?”

Winn-Dixie looked at me so hard he sneezed.

“I'll think about it,” I said.

Related Characters: India Opal Buloni (speaker), Mama, Daddy/The Preacher, Winn-Dixie

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 22-23

Explanation and Analysis

During Winn-Dixie's bath, Opal tells him everything she knows about her Mama and mentions that the preacher won't talk about Mama. The way that Opal interacts with Winn-Dixie—who may or may not actually have opinions about what Opal should do, since his responses could be simply Opal seeing what she wants to see—drives home how alone Opal feels and how badly she wants someone to talk to. It doesn't matter that Winn-Dixie isn't human. He's



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Candlewick Press edition of *Because of Winn Dixie* published in 2000.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ My daddy is a good preacher and a nice man, but sometimes it's hard for me to think about him as my daddy, because he spends so much time preaching or thinking about preaching or getting ready to preach. And so, in my mind, I think of him as “the preacher.”

Related Characters: India Opal Buloni (speaker), Winn-Dixie, Daddy/The Preacher

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 13

still a being who's easily able to make Opal feel like what she has to say matters—whether he understands what he's doing or not.

That Winn-Dixie can do this speaks to the power of both being able to tell one's story and of having someone listen to it attentively. It's a huge step for Opal to think seriously about asking the preacher to tell her about Mama. Having someone listen to her (even if that someone isn't human) is enough of a confidence-booster to spur her to previously unconsidered action.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☝☝ “Number ten,” he said with a long sigh, “number ten, is that your mama loved you. She loved you very much.”

“But she left me,” I told him.

“She left us,” said the preacher softly. I could see him pulling his old turtle head back into his stupid turtle shell. “She packed her bags and left us, and she didn't leave one thing behind.”

Related Characters: India Opal Buloni, Daddy/The Preacher (speaker), Winn-Dixie, Mama

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

When the preacher agrees to tell Opal 10 things about Mama, the final thing he mentions is that Mama loved Opal. The way Opal frames Mama's departure is telling: she thinks of it as though Mama left her specifically. This is, in part, reflective of Opal's lack of maturity—Opal is only 10 years old, so it's hard for her to understand that this sort of thing isn't about her. The preacher tries to impress this upon Opal when he notes that Mama left *both* of them. Telling Opal this will hopefully help her to understand that she didn't do anything wrong; it's not her fault that Mama left. Furthermore, the preacher wants her to understand that Mama leaving doesn't mean that Mama doesn't love Opal. It's possible for loved ones to leave.

Opal doesn't quite internalize this yet because she's still so young and immature. This is why she talks about the preacher retreating “back into his turtle shell.” In her mind, this is about her: the preacher is withdrawing for reasons she doesn't think matter as much, in light of the fact that she's motherless for all intents and purposes. Therefore, the preacher's clear grief is silly and not useful in her mind, though in reality, understanding the preacher's experience

would help Opal to better understand her own.

☝☝ I went right back to my room and wrote down all ten things that the preacher had told me. I wrote them down just the way he said them to me so that I wouldn't forget them, and then I read them out loud to Winn-Dixie until I had them memorized. I wanted to know those ten things inside and out. That way, if my mama ever came back, I could recognize her, and I would be able to grab her and hold on to her tight and not let her get away from me again.

Related Characters: India Opal Buloni (speaker), Daddy/The Preacher, Winn-Dixie, Mama

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 29-30

Explanation and Analysis

After the preacher tells Opal 10 things about Mama, Opal writes them all down so she won't forget them. At this point, storytelling is a way for Opal to make Mama real and a way to keep Mama's memory alive. It's not something cathartic, necessarily; it only focuses Opal's attention on the fact that Mama is gone and, in Opal's mind, what she can do to keep Mama from leaving again if she ever comes back.

Even if these 10 things are important, what Opal misses is that they're not going to be enough to keep Mama from leaving—even if Opal physically holds onto Mama and doesn't let her go. An inevitable aspect of being part of a family is experiencing loss, whether family members die or leave of their own volition like Mama did. However, by focusing so intently on this loss, Opal shuts herself off from happiness. It was a major step for the preacher to tell her anything about Mama, and Opal could open her mind to think of their conversation as a stepping-stone to strengthen their relationship. But by focusing so intently on Mama's absence, Opal makes it even more difficult for her to connect to the preacher.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☝☝ And none of them wanted to be my friend anyway because they probably thought I'd tell on them to the preacher for every little thing they did wrong; and then they would get in trouble with God and their parents. So I told God that I was lonely, even having Winn-Dixie.

Related Characters: India Opal Buloni (speaker), Daddy/

The Preacher, Winn-Dixie, Amanda Wilkinson, Sweetie Pie Thomas, Stevie Dewberry, Dunlap Dewberry

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 38-39

Explanation and Analysis

When the preacher asks the congregation to pray for the mouse that Winn-Dixie caught, Opal instead prays about her loneliness and tells God and the reader why none of the kids at church want to be her friend. While it's true that the Dewberry boys aren't always very nice to Opal, Opal is very purposefully not opening herself up to these friends. She's had little interaction with them (at least that she's shared with the reader), so her read on things could be incorrect—and indeed, as the novel progresses, it turns out that Opal was wrong and that these kids really *do* want to be her friend.

This all suggests that part of being a friend means opening oneself up to making new connections. Though Opal has already opened herself up to Winn-Dixie, she's still grieving the loss of her friends in her old town and therefore can't quite bring herself to try again in Naomi. Blaming the preacher and making him the reason why no one wants to be her friend is another way for Opal to distance herself emotionally from her father—she's not going to try to get closer to him or understand him when she believes he's the reason she's lonely in the first place.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☹☹ She sighed. “I imagine I’m the only one left from those days. I imagine I’m the only one that even recalls that bear. All my friends, everyone I knew when I was young, they are all dead and gone.”

Related Characters: Miss Franny Block (speaker), Winn-Dixie, India Opal Buloni

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

After telling Opal about the time a bear entered the library, Miss Franny sadly says that all her friends are gone and that no one alive remembers the bear. Hearing this helps Opal understand that Miss Franny, though much older, isn't all that different from Opal. Both of them are lonely: Opal's

friends are all still in her old town, and Miss Franny's friends are all deceased.

It's important to recognize that Miss Franny and Opal have made this connection with each other through storytelling. Agreeing to listen to Miss Franny's story was a way for Opal to show Miss Franny that what the old woman has to say is meaningful and worth listening to—and listening to someone else talk about her loneliness helps Opal to understand that lots of people feel alone. In this way, listening to people tell their stories can help people develop compassion and empathy for others, especially those who seem significantly different. This can, in turn, lead to friendship.

☹☹ She sighed again. She looked sad and old and wrinkled. It was the same way I felt sometimes, being friendless in a new town and not having a mama to comfort me. I sighed, too.

Related Characters: India Opal Buloni (speaker), Winn-Dixie, Mama, Miss Franny Block

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 49-50

Explanation and Analysis

As Opal and Miss Franny sit following Miss Franny's story about the bear, Opal begins to see that Miss Franny isn't all that different from her. This is a major turning point for Opal. Seeing that she and Miss Franny share a sense of loneliness helps Opal begin to come of age by moving away from thinking selfishly that she's the only one who has ever felt lonely. Now, she understands that lots of people feel alone—and that she can do something about it. Listening to Miss Franny tell the story about the bear was a way for Opal to show Miss Franny respect and conceive of her as a complex individual with a history and with stories to tell. Prior to hearing this story, Miss Franny was simply the elderly librarian in Opal's mind. Storytelling, compassion, and empathy, the novel suggests, can bring people to life and make them more real in the listener's mind.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☹☹ All of a sudden, I felt happy. I had a dog. I had a job. I had Miss Franny Block for a friend. And I had my first invitation to a party in Naomi. It didn't matter that it came from a five-year-old and the party wasn't until September. I didn't feel so lonely anymore.

Related Characters: India Opal Buloni (speaker), Mama, Miss Franny Block, Otis, Winn-Dixie, Sweetie Pie Thomas

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 59

Explanation and Analysis

After landing a job at Gertrude's Pets with Otis, befriending Miss Franny, and getting invited to Sweetie Pie's sixth birthday party, Opal feels much better about life. Very simply, this all suggests that being willing to speak to others and connect with them is the best antidote to loneliness. On another level, however, Opal's sudden happiness speaks to what good can come from healing one's feelings of sadness and loss through connections to others. It's telling, for instance, that Opal doesn't mention Mama here as she talks about what's going well in her life—Mama is, in Opal's mind, intrinsically connected to sadness. Whenever Opal talks about Mama, it's in a bittersweet way that is, in most cases, more bitter than sweet. That sadness, more often than not, keeps Opal from truly appreciating all the good in her life. By connecting with so many others, Opal is starting to understand that while she may be sad about Mama sometimes, if she chooses to reach out, things can and will feel better.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☝☝ “You know, my eyes ain't too good at all. I can't see nothing but the general shape of things, so I got to rely on my heart. Why don't you go on and tell me everything about yourself, so as I can see you with my heart.”

Related Characters: Gloria Dump (speaker), Stevie Dewberry, Dunlap Dewberry, Winn-Dixie, India Opal Buloni

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 65-66

Explanation and Analysis

While Gloria and Opal share peanut butter sandwiches for the first time, Gloria asks Opal to tell her everything about herself so that Gloria can get to know Opal, given that Gloria is nearly blind. Through this, Gloria introduces Opal to the idea that it's best to get to know people through their stories and who they are, not necessarily by judging them on how they look. This is an important lesson for Opal, given that while she's nonjudgmental in many ways, she nevertheless judges individuals based on their appearance

or on a single factor. Though she's understandably upset that the Dewberry brothers torment her, she returns their attacks by taunting their appearance—she calls them “bald-headed babies”—and doing this makes it far more difficult for Opal to come around to the idea that the boys might be friend material.

Similarly, even Opal believed for a minute that Gloria might be a witch, based only on the fact that she's an old woman who lives alone and has an overgrown garden. Opal can see now that she's spent some time with Gloria that this was silly, but she can only make this connection because she chose to look past her preconceptions. Since Gloria can't see, it's much easier for her to do this. She would have never known the Dewberry boys were bald unless she touched them or had someone tell her about their hair, for instance; it's much more useful for her to hear people talk about themselves and come to deeper conclusions about who they are based on what they say.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☝☝ And the whole time I was talking, Gloria Dump was listening. She was nodding her head and smiling and frowning and saying, “Hmmm,” and “Is that right?”

I could feel her listening with all her heart, and it felt good.

Related Characters: India Opal Buloni (speaker), Winn-Dixie, Gloria Dump

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

When Opal first tells Gloria everything about herself (per Gloria's request), Opal begins to understand the power of having someone truly listen to her. While prior to this, Opal had really only spoken intimately to Winn-Dixie about important things in her life (like her sense of being neglected and Mama's absence), this experience is far more meaningful. Winn-Dixie was able to put on a good show of listening to Opal's every word, but Gloria, being human, is even better able to do this. She's able to make Opal feel heard, understood, and cared for in a way that Winn-Dixie (as a dog) or someone like the preacher (who's emotionally absent from Opal's life) cannot. Importantly, in this moment, the novel implies that it's just as important for Opal that she's getting a chance to speak as it is that someone is listening attentively to her. For the time being, at least, storytelling and listening are given equal importance in the

book. This makes it clear that it's not always the case that listening is more important than having the opportunity to speak—though listening, this passage still shows, can make someone feel respected.

Chapter 11 Quotes

☝☝ All of a sudden it was hard for me to talk. I loved the preacher so much. I loved him because he loved Winn-Dixie. I loved him because he was going to forgive Winn-Dixie for being afraid. But most of all, I loved him for putting his arm around Winn-Dixie like that, like he was already trying to keep him safe.

Related Characters: India Opal Buloni (speaker), Mama, Winn-Dixie, Daddy/The Preacher

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

Following Winn-Dixie's terrified reaction to the thunderstorm, the preacher declares that they'll need to keep a close eye on him so they don't lose him during a storm. This concern for Opal's beloved dog makes Opal feel closer to her father than ever before. In Opal's mind, the preacher's desire to keep Winn-Dixie safe and at home suggests that he's come a long way from when he "let" Mama go years ago (something that Opal later insists was the preacher's fault).

From Opal's perspective, her father hasn't tried very hard thus far to keep loved ones around when things get tough, especially when they have issues akin to Winn-Dixie's fear of storms. His insistence that they need to keep Winn-Dixie safe makes Opal feel more secure, as it tells her that she can trust that the preacher isn't going to let anyone else walk out of Opal's life without a fight. This more broadly begins to suggest that in Opal's mind, it's not enough to just have her father. She needs a community and a larger family in order to feel secure and loved, even if that larger family is simply her, the preacher, and Winn-Dixie at this point.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☝☝ I waved at the woman on the porch and she waved back, and I watched Sweetie Pie run off to tell her mama about Otis being a magic man. It made me think about my mama and how I wanted to tell her the story about Otis charming all the animals. I was collecting stories for her.

Related Characters: India Opal Buloni (speaker), Mama, Otis, Sweetie Pie Thomas

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

After Opal's first day at work at Gertrude's Pets, during which Opal and (secretly) Sweetie Pie witnessed Otis's ability to charm the animals by playing his guitar, Opal watches Sweetie Pie head home to tell her mama about Otis. This drives home for Opal that she doesn't have a mama of her own to run home and tell this story to, something that makes Opal feel more alone even as she begins to make friends and form a small community in her new town.

More than anything, Opal's sudden emotional downturn highlights the issues she faces since the preacher won't make it clear to Opal that Mama isn't coming back. Opal is focusing all her energy on preparing for the day she sees Mama again—a day that, in all likelihood, won't come—and this focus makes her less likely to enjoy the fact that she's building a community of friends who aren't Mama, but who are still important. Sweetie Pie holds the distinction of being the first person in Naomi to invite Opal to a party, something that made Opal feel much better about life in Naomi. Otis, meanwhile, was willing to give Opal a job, and with it, a sense of purpose (and in the coming weeks, another friend in him). Given that Mama probably won't ever be a part of Opal's life in person, it reads as somewhat unhealthy for Opal to fixate so much on what she'll do when Mama returns, at the expense of celebrating the new friends she's making in Naomi.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☝☝ "Why are all those bottles on it?"

"To keep the ghosts away," Gloria said.

"What ghosts?"

"The ghosts of all the things I done wrong."

I looked at all the bottles on the tree. "You did that many things wrong?" I asked her.

"Mmmm-hmmm," said Gloria. "More than that."

"But you're the nicest person I know," I told her.

"Doesn't mean I haven't done bad things," she said.

Related Characters: Gloria Dump, India Opal Buloni

(speaker), Otis

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 94-95

Explanation and Analysis

As Gloria introduces Opal to her “mistake tree,” Opal is shocked to learn that even someone as kind as Gloria has done bad things in her lifetime. This exposes Opal’s youth, innocence, and naïveté—in her mind, good people are good, and bad people are bad. There’s not much room for a middle ground. She and Gloria got to this point in the first place because Otis already challenged Opal’s simplistic view of good and bad. Opal now knows that Otis has been to jail, which in her mind, makes him a bad person and someone she shouldn’t trust—and yet, he doesn’t act like a criminal or like a dangerous man. With the mistake tree, Gloria confirms for Opal that people don’t have to be virtuous 100 percent of the time to be good, nor do bad people have to be bad every minute of every day. Rather, all people are comprised of both good and bad parts, and it’s not useful to insist that a person is entirely bad just they’ve done one thing wrong. Learning this helps give Opal the courage to ask Otis for his story and to take him at his word: that he may have been in jail, but he’s not dangerous.

●● I stayed where I was and studied the tree. I wondered if my mama, wherever she was, had a tree full of bottles; and I wondered if I was a ghost to her, the same way she sometimes seemed like a ghost to me.

Related Characters: India Opal Buloni (speaker), Gloria Dump, Winn-Dixie, Mama

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

Following Gloria’s explanation of her mistake tree, Opal stares at it for a time and thinks about Mama. Opal is already turning the mistake tree into a symbol in her mind; she seems to imply that she now understands that all people have a mistake tree of sorts following them, even if it’s not a physical tree like Gloria’s. This represents maturation for

Opal, as it suggests she now grasps that people are comprised of good and bad deeds.

Even more important, however, is that Opal can think about Mama in these terms and recognize that Mama wasn’t as inarguably good as Opal wants her to be. Opal may idealize her mother and want her to come back, but part of the reason that Opal is able to get to this more nuanced understanding is because the mistake tree finally gives her a way to think about Mama’s alcoholism. Though Opal has now known about Mama’s alcoholism for a few weeks, she brushed off this detail until Gloria made it clear to her that even good people (like Gloria herself) can struggle with addiction. Now, this aspect of Mama is something that Opal can bring into her conception of her mother rather than ignoring it.

Chapter 15 Quotes

●● And I got real good at holding on to Winn-Dixie whenever they came. I held on to him and comforted him and whispered to him and rocked him, just the same way he tried to comfort Miss Franny when she had her fits. Only I held on to Winn-Dixie for another reason, too. I held on to him tight so he wouldn’t run away.

Related Characters: India Opal Buloni (speaker), Gloria Dump, Daddy/The Preacher, Mama, Winn-Dixie, Miss Franny Block

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis

Opal explains that as the summer wears on, she gets better and better at holding Winn-Dixie during thunderstorms so that he stays safe and doesn’t run away. This action serves two distinct purposes for Opal. First, she holds Winn-Dixie so she can comfort him and make him feel better. The dog is a friend and a family member to Opal, so this is a natural inclination for her to want to help him weather the storm and take care of him so that the experience isn’t as traumatic as it might be otherwise. Second, Opal holds on so tight to keep Winn-Dixie from running away, which is at once a valid practical concern—his fear means he’s liable to run and not be able to find his way home again—but it also reflects Opal’s belief that she can keep people from running by physically clinging onto them. Since Opal believes that the preacher didn’t hold on tightly enough to Mama when she left, it’s possible to interpret this as Opal trying to do

better than the preacher at keeping a loved one from leaving her. However, this is likely a naïve endeavor—it's impossible, Opal's friend Gloria later suggests, to hold onto something forever that wants to leave.

☝ It all made me think about Gloria Dump. I wondered who comforted her when she heard those bottles knocking together, those ghosts chattering about the things she had done wrong. I wanted to comfort Gloria Dump. And I decided that the best way to do that would be to read her a book, read it to her loud enough to keep the ghosts away.

Related Characters: India Opal Buloni (speaker), Mama, Winn-Dixie, Miss Franny Block, Gloria Dump

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis

As Opal watches Winn-Dixie care for Miss Franny during Miss Franny's fits, Opal begins to wonder who performs that kind of caring action for Gloria—and coming to the conclusion that no one does, she decides to do it herself. By making this choice, Opal realizes that it's up to her to care for members of her community whom she cares about. This is a way for her to show Gloria that she listens—Gloria has spoken before about how she used to read but can't any longer on account of her failing vision—and to help Gloria feel appreciated and respected. Opal also shows that she's beginning to understand the power of community and friendship to refocus people's attention away from "ghosts," or past mistakes. As Opal focuses more and more on her friends, she in turn focuses less and less on Mama—while she understands here that spending time with Gloria will make Gloria spend less time thinking about her own troubled past.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☝ "And the army took him, and Littmus went off to war, just like that. Left behind his mother and three sisters. He went off to be a hero. But he soon found out the truth." Miss Franny closed her eyes and shook her head.

"What truth?" I asked her.

"Why, that war is hell," Miss Franny said with her eyes still closed. "Pure hell."

Related Characters: India Opal Buloni, Miss Franny Block (speaker), Littmus W. Block, Amanda Wilkinson

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 105

Explanation and Analysis

In introducing the story of her great-grandfather, Littmus W. Block, Miss Franny reveals that nothing, no matter how good or righteous it might seem, is wholly good. Rather, everything has a dark side. Littmus left to fight in the Civil War because he thought it was the right thing to do. To him, the reasons for the war were worth defending, and it represented an opportunity for him to grow up and prove himself. However, Miss Franny makes it clear that this is in no way what happened. Though she never says whether or not Littmus's thoughts on the reasons for the war ever changed or if he ever regretted his service, he nevertheless discovered that even a supposedly righteous war is nothing but trauma and tragedy. Worst of all, she suggests, is that the war took Littmus away from his family. By including this detail, Miss Franny implies that one of the major issues with idealizing something, whatever that might be, is that it takes attention away from other things that the novel proposes are more important—such as family, friends, and community.

Chapter 17 Quotes

☝ I ate my Littmus Lozenge slow. It tasted good. It tasted like root beer and strawberry and something else I didn't have a name for, something that made me feel kind of sad. I looked over at Amanda. She was sucking on her candy and thinking hard.

"Do you like it?" Miss Franny asked me.

"Yes ma'am," I told her.

"What about you, Amanda? Do you like the Littmus Lozenge?"

"Yes ma'am," she said. "But it makes me think of things I feel sad about."

Related Characters: Amanda Wilkinson, Miss Franny Block, India Opal Buloni (speaker), Littmus W. Block

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

Both Opal and Amanda eat their first Littmus Lozenges, and both come to the same conclusion—that the candy has some odd flavor that makes them think of sadness. That both girls have the same assessment of the candy is a surprise for Opal who, up until this point, has regarded Amanda as a mean girl who can't possibly have experienced any sadness or hardship. It's shocking for Opal to receive proof that Amanda is indeed more than she might seem. She, like everyone else, isn't a one-dimensional villain—she may not be very nice, but there might be an underlying reason for her behavior.

The fact that the candy can taste both sweet and sad is proof that life itself is like this: it's impossible for anything to be only sad or only happy. Discovering that this is the case is one of the major things that propels Opal to maturity over the case of the novel, as she abandons her previous belief that people (and life) are either all good or all bad.

Chapter 18 Quotes

“I didn't go to sleep right away. I lay there and thought how life was like a Littmus Lozenge, how the sweet and the sad were all mixed up together and how hard it was to separate them out. It was confusing.”

Related Characters: India Opal Buloni (speaker), Carson, Amanda Wilkinson, Daddy/The Preacher

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 126

Explanation and Analysis

Once Opal has given away many of her Littmus Lozenges to friends and family and learned about the tragic death of Amanda Wilkinson's little brother, Carson, she begins to suspect that life is a mixture of sad and sweet, just like a Littmus Lozenge. The confusion she feels has to do with her youth. Opal is still largely an immature and naïve child, though she's learning to see the world in shades of gray—but in many ways, she still thinks of the world in black and white. While those clear delineations may have made it much easier for her to handle Mama's absence and her loneliness, for instance, she's now learning that it's impossible to simplify things to such an extent. In addition to being impossible, she's also discovering that life is much

richer if she looks for the nuance and the depth—suddenly, Amanda isn't so unlikeable when Opal knows that Amanda is still grieving for Carson. This paves the way for Opal to make other discoveries about her friends and family members as she learns to look deeper and not settle on a single conclusion about someone.

“I got up out of bed and unwrapped a Littmus Lozenge and sucked on it hard and thought about my mama leaving me. That was a melancholy feeling. And then I thought about Amanda and Carson. And that made me feel melancholy, too. Poor Amanda. And poor Carson. He was the same age as Sweetie Pie. But he would never get to have his sixth birthday party.”

Related Characters: India Opal Buloni (speaker), Sweetie Pie Thomas, Carson, Amanda Wilkinson, Mama

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 126-27

Explanation and Analysis

After the preacher defines “melancholy,” Opal focuses on the word and thinks of all the things in her life that make her feel melancholy. While Mama is, unsurprisingly and understandably, Opal's first thought, it's telling that Opal gives more of a description of her thoughts concerning Amanda and Carson. This begins to suggest that Opal is starting to refocus her attention onto others, rather than dwelling all the time on Mama's absence. The way that she thinks about Carson reflects Opal's growing maturity. He's not just a symbol or an abstract concept for her; he's a concrete individual and the reason why, in all likelihood, Amanda is so mean—and is probably the reason why, inside, Amanda feels much the same way that Opal does. Comparing Carson to Sweetie Pie Thomas drives home how much bigger Opal's community has gotten. She now has an actual five-year-old to compare Carson to, which helps make him real even though Opal has never met him. All of this together points to the fact that Opal is growing up and developing a more nuanced view of her world and the people in it.

Chapter 19 Quotes

☝☝ I swept the floor real slow that day. I wanted to keep Otis company. I didn't want him to be lonely. Sometimes, it seemed like everybody in the world was lonely. I thought about my mama.

Related Characters: India Opal Buloni (speaker), Mama, Otis

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 132

Explanation and Analysis

On the day that Otis reveals he went to jail for hitting a police officer while being arrested for playing music on the street, Opal finds that she feels very sympathetic toward him and wants to help him feel less lonely. This is a major shift for Opal. Though Opal has made it clear that she has always found Otis an interesting and sympathetic person in her life, she's also treated him with caution—she learned early on that he'd been to jail, but she never asked why. Since Opal has been raised to distrust people who have been to jail, she never allowed herself to truly trust Otis before this point. As she listens to the stories of others, she becomes increasingly sympathetic and even more aware of the fact that everyone is a little bit lonely, just like she is.

Now that Opal knows that Otis went to jail for a one-time mistake, she's also developing critical thinking skills that will help her see the world in a more nuanced way. She now understands that it's impossible to insist that someone is a bad person just because they've gone to jail—people end up in jail for all sorts of reasons, and many of those reasons are more complicated than they might initially seem.

and offers her this piece of advice. Though Gloria dispenses this advice in the context of Winn-Dixie's loss, it's important that Winn-Dixie's absence is, in Opal's mind, little different from Mama's absence. Opal sees them as much the same thing: someone she loves chose to run away from her, and she was unable to keep them from leaving. Though it's debatable how applicable Gloria's advice is to the situation with Winn-Dixie (he didn't necessarily *want* to go; his fear means that he ran without thinking and, being a dog, might not be able to find his way home again), it's important advice as Opal begins to think more about Mama's departure. What Gloria essentially suggests is that Opal couldn't have done anything to keep Mama from leaving. Mama's choice to leave had nothing to do with Opal—Mama was unhappy being a preacher's wife, and she turned to alcohol to deal with her unhappiness. There was nothing that Opal, as a toddler, could've done to make anything better. All Opal could've done—and, presumably, all she did—was love Mama while Mama was around.

In Winn-Dixie's case, Opal should take this advice to mean that she shouldn't beat herself up about the fact that Winn-Dixie ran. The storm wasn't in the forecast, and Opal was helping others—it's not like she let Winn-Dixie run away on purpose. And now, she's doing the best that she can to find him, which is another way of loving him.

Chapter 24 Quotes

☝☝ I kept on going over the list in my head. I memorized it the same way I had memorized the list of ten things about my mama. I memorized it so if I didn't find him, I would have some part of him to hold on to. But at the same time, I thought of something I had never thought of before; and that was that a list of things couldn't even begin to show somebody the real Winn-Dixie, just like a list of ten things couldn't ever get me to know my mama.

Related Characters: India Opal Buloni (speaker), Mama, Winn-Dixie

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 163-64

Explanation and Analysis

As Opal and the preacher look for Winn-Dixie in the thunderstorm, Opal puts together a mental list of 10 things about him before realizing that a list of facts isn't an effective way to describe someone or get to know them. As she puts this together, Opal must also grapple with the

Chapter 23 Quotes

☝☝ "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."

Related Characters: Gloria Dump (speaker), Daddy/The Preacher, Mama, Winn-Dixie, India Opal Buloni

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 159

Explanation and Analysis

As Opal and the preacher prepare to head out into a thunderstorm to look for Winn-Dixie, Gloria pulls Opal in

newfound realization that she's never going to get to know Mama the way she wants to—the 10 things she knows about Mama aren't enough to put together a three-dimensional picture of her. Realizing this is an indicator that Opal is coming of age and is learning about the limits of storytelling.

While both lists are a form of storytelling intended to help Opal get to know someone, Opal's experiences over this summer have taught her that simply talking about a person in list form isn't at all the same as getting to know someone in person. A list of facts is no substitute for face-to-face conversations and quality time. This list about Winn-Dixie may include things that are all true, but they don't get at who Winn-Dixie really is to Opal: her best and most loyal friend. That, the novel suggests, is impossible to describe in a list, just as it's impossible to describe one's mother in a list. Stories can bring people together, but they can't create the same kind of knowing that actually spending time with a person can.

“But do you know what? I just realized something, India Opal. When I told you your mama took everything with her, I forgot one thing, one very important thing that she left behind.”

“What?” I asked.

“You,” he said. “Thank God your mama left me you.” And he hugged me tighter.

Related Characters: India Opal Buloni, Daddy/The Preacher (speaker), Mama, Winn-Dixie

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 166-67

Explanation and Analysis

During Opal and the preacher's search for Winn-Dixie, who ran away because of his fear of thunderstorms, the preacher rethinks his assessment from weeks earlier that when Mama left, she took everything. Now, he recognizes that Mama left Opal behind. Being able to rework this assessment shows how much the preacher has grown over the course of the novel. While at first he was barely willing or able to acknowledge Opal's presence, having Winn-Dixie around showed him the value of connecting to other beings—most importantly, to his daughter. While his initial assertion that Mama took everything may have made Opal feel even more neglected, making it clear that Mama left her with the preacher—and that this is a good thing—helps Opal

feel more secure in the family she does have. This paves the way for Opal and the preacher to go home and begin to work on their relationship with each other and with Winn-Dixie, as now, they can appreciate the other and not focus entirely on the trauma of Mama leaving. In short, they have each other and should focus on that—the alternative makes them unable to connect, which in turn causes them more sorrow than is necessary.

Chapter 25 Quotes

“Well,” said Gloria Dump. “We didn't do nothin'. We just sat here and waited and sang some songs. We all got to be good friends. Now. The punch ain't nothin' but water and the egg-salad sandwiches got tore up by the rain. You got to eat them with a spoon if you want egg salad. But we got pickles to eat. And Littmus Lozenges. And we still got a party going on.”

Related Characters: Gloria Dump (speaker), Winn-Dixie, Amanda Wilkinson, Daddy/The Preacher, Miss Franny Block, Dunlap Dewberry, Stevie Dewberry, Otis, India Opal Buloni

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 175

Explanation and Analysis

Once Opal and the preacher discover that Winn-Dixie has been hiding at Gloria's house all along, things return to normal but with important changes—now, Gloria suggests, all of Opal's friends are friends with one another. This change makes it clear that befriending one person (or dog) doesn't just mean that a person made *one* friend. Rather, befriending someone opens a person up to making friends with many more people—and in a best-case scenario, one ends up with a situation like this, where those connections form one large community in which people all look out for one another.

Then, Gloria also gives voice to the relationship between sadness and happiness. By many standards, the party was a disaster: the rain destroyed the decorations as well as the punch and the food. People got wet, and Winn-Dixie briefly disappeared. However, Gloria also notes the bright sides: they still have food to eat and a fun party to participate in. The storm and the anxiety surrounding Winn-Dixie's departure, meanwhile, brought everyone together and created this warm community. In this sense, the party itself

is a lot like a Littmus Lozenge. It may have been unhappy and scary for a time, but it's more than possible to find the highlights—and it's necessary to focus on those happy parts and the relationships everyone formed in order to prevent being consumed by sadness.

Chapter 26 Quotes

“Mama,” I said, just like she was standing right beside me, “I know ten things about you, and that’s not enough, that’s not near enough. But Daddy is going to tell me more; I know he will, now that he knows you’re not coming back. He misses you and I miss you, but my heart doesn’t feel empty anymore. It’s full all the way up. I’ll still think about you, I promise. But probably not as much as I did this summer.”

Related Characters: India Opal Buloni (speaker), Daddy/The Preacher, Mama

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 177-78

Explanation and Analysis

With the party in full swing inside, Opal goes out to Gloria's mistake tree to talk to Mama. Everything that Opal says reflects how much she's come of age over the course of the novel. She now understands that a list of 10 things isn't a substitute for getting to know someone in person—and while she has every right to miss Mama and be sad that her mother is gone, it does her no good to dwell on her sadness. Rather, possibly most important of all is the fact that Opal is finally able to admit that her heart feels full because of the friendships she's made over the course of the novel. Her friends may not be direct substitutes for Mama, but they can nevertheless help her feel happier and more connected. Friendship, in this sense, is a way to remedy loss in one's own family.

It's also telling that Opal refers to the preacher as "Daddy" here. This is the first time she's referred to him like this in her own narration; she's only ever called him "Daddy" to his face thus far. This suggests that she and the preacher are beginning to patch up their relationship and see each other as real, important family members.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

India Opal Buloni, who goes by Opal, introduces herself. Last summer, Opal's daddy, the preacher, sent her to the store for groceries—and she came home with a dog. Opal enters the produce section of her local Winn-Dixie grocery store and almost runs into the store manager, who's screaming, demanding to know who let a dog in the store. Opal sees vegetables all over and employees running around. Finally, the dog races around the corner: he's big and ugly, and he looks like he's having the time of his life. The dog stops in front of Opal and smiles by pulling his lips back and showing his teeth. He wags his tail, knocks some oranges off a display, and then races for the manager. The dog smiles at the manager and gets up on his hind legs to say hello, but he ends up knocking the manager over.

The manager starts to cry, and the dog, concerned, licks the man's face. When the manager shouts for someone to call the pound, Opal says that the dog is hers. Everyone stares at her. She knows she just did something stupid, but she can't stand the thought of the dog going to the pound. She calls the dog and figures that like everyone else, he must have a name. Opal calls him the first thing that pops into her head: Winn-Dixie. The dog runs to her. The manager looks suspicious, but Opal apologizes for letting the dog into the store. She carefully walks out the door, Winn-Dixie trailing her closely. Outside, she looks him over and sees that he's skinny and dirty. He smiles so big that he sneezes, which makes Opal fall in love with him immediately. She tells him that they need to go talk to the preacher.

It's immediately apparent that the dog is extremely friendly. He sets an example for how, per the novel, people should view strangers: as potential friends. The dog also illustrates another of the main points, which is that there are always good things in life to celebrate. Even though the dog is ugly and isn't supposed to be running around a grocery store, he's still having a fantastic time. Though Opal doesn't understand how important these ideas are yet, she can recognize how well this dog is living—and this offers hope that Opal will be able to apply his example to her own life.



Right away, Opal begins to take Winn-Dixie's example to heart by insisting that he's hers—that is, that they're friends and have history together. Even though this isn't true, Opal discovers as soon as she falls in love with the dog that good things come when she goes through life willing to see others as potential friends—no matter how dirty, ill-behaved they are, or how seemingly bad of an idea making that friend might be. Winn-Dixie's concern for the manager is a testament to the idea that it's important to care for others, even when those others aren't willing to return the favor.



CHAPTER 2

Opal and her daddy just moved to Naomi, Florida so that he could be the preacher at the Open Arms Baptist Church of Naomi. Opal explains that her daddy is good, but sometimes it's hard to think of him as a father—he spends so much time thinking about preaching. This is why, in her head, Opal thinks of him as “the preacher.” He was a missionary in India before Opal was born, and that's why her first name is India, but her middle name and the one she goes by is Opal, the preacher's mother's name. Opal tells Winn-Dixie this as they walk home. She also mentions that the preacher is too caught up in praying and thinking about suffering people to go grocery shopping, but that maybe he'll be willing to take in a “suffering dog.” Winn-Dixie wags his tail. He's limping.

The fact that Opal doesn't refer to her father as “daddy” in her head and instead calls him “the preacher” suggests that their relationship isn't especially close. She backs this up when she explains that he spends so much time preaching and doesn't even have time to go grocery shopping. All of this indicates that Opal may feel neglected by her father and thus alone in her family. Winn-Dixie's response of tail-wagging suggest that he's a good listener. He's already giving Opal a venue to voice her woes—something that the novel portrays as cathartic.



When they get to the Friendly Corners Trailer Park, Opal informs Winn-Dixie that he must be quiet and well-behaved. It's an adults-only trailer park; Opal only gets to live here because she's the preacher's daughter and, according to the manager, Mr. Alfred, she's "an exception." She tells specifically tells Winn-Dixie to leave Mr. Alfred's cats and Mrs. Detweller's dog, Samuel, alone. Then, Opal tells him to sit and she goes into her trailer. The preacher is hard at work at the foldout table and barely acknowledges Opal when she says that she found a "Less Fortunate" at the grocery store. Opal stares at him. She thinks that sometimes, the preacher reminds her of a turtle hiding in its shell. In his shell, he thinks about things and never pokes his head out into the world.

Opal asks if the "Less Fortunate" could stay with them for a while. This gets the preacher's attention. She elaborates that she found a dog. The preacher reminds her that they don't need a dog, but she insists that Winn-Dixie needs her and calls for the dog. Winn-Dixie limps into the trailer and settles his head in the preacher's lap. The preacher inspects Winn-Dixie and wrinkles his nose at the smell, while Winn-Dixie pulls up his lips and smiles while wagging his tail. The preacher asks again what the dog's name is and Opal says it quietly; she doesn't want to speak too loudly and ruin anything. The preacher declares that the dog is certainly a stray and a Less Fortunate—he can stay.

CHAPTER 3

Opal bathes Winn-Dixie with the hose. Winn-Dixie looks insulted, but he stands still. Then, Opal brushes him with her own hairbrush. As she grooms him, she tells him that they're alike: they're almost like orphans. Opal has the preacher, but she doesn't have a mama—Mama left when Opal was three years old, so Opal doesn't really remember her. She says that Winn-Dixie probably doesn't remember his mother either. The dog looks relieved that someone understands. Opal says that she doesn't have any friends either, since she had to leave them all behind when she and the preacher moved from North Florida.

Opal admits that since she and the preacher moved, she's been thinking about Mama more than she ever did in her old town. Winn-Dixie raises his eyebrows as Opal continues. Opal says that she believes the preacher also thinks about Mama a lot. According to the church ladies, he's still in love with her and hopes she'll return. Despite this, the preacher won't talk to Opal about Mama. Opal wants to know more about Mama, but she's afraid that the preacher will get mad if she asks. Winn-Dixie looks hard at Opal, and Opal agrees to think about asking the preacher to tell her more about Mama.

Opal confirms that even if the preacher's behavior may not be neglectful in a legal sense, it nevertheless makes her feel overlooked on an emotional level. He's absent from her life, since he spends so much time preaching and in his "turtle shell." Though Opal doesn't say so outright, it's worth considering that her loneliness may be amplified and harder for her to remedy because she lives in an adults-only trailer park. If she lived somewhere where there were other kids around, she might have more friends in Naomi already.



Winn-Dixie's positive impression on the preacher makes the argument that friends don't need to be human to be meaningful. Befriending an animal, like Winn-Dixie, can help someone come out of their "shell" and pay more attention to what's going on around them—and hopefully, Winn-Dixie's presence will help the preacher open up and be more involved with Opal.



That Opal is laying out all these similarities between her and Winn-Dixie suggests that she desperately wants to connect with and relate to others who are in her same situation. The revelation that Mama left when Opal was little makes it even clearer that Opal is, in many ways, alone at home—she doesn't have another parent figure in her life aside from the preacher, who is emotionally absent. Winn-Dixie can begin to fill this void by giving Opal someone to talk to.



What Opal says about the preacher explains why he's so withdrawn and distant: just as Opal misses Mama, he, too, is wallowing in grief over his absent wife. Though it's hard to say whether Winn-Dixie understands what Opal is saying and responds accordingly, or if he's just an expressive dog, it ultimately doesn't matter—what matters is that Opal reads his responses and promises to take action on what he "says."



Winn-Dixie looks much better when Opal is done: he's still skinny and he wouldn't let her brush his teeth (he kept sneezing), but his fur is soft now. Opal parades him into the trailer to show the preacher. It takes a moment to get his attention, but the preacher smiles and tells Winn-Dixie that he looks handsome and smells nice. Quickly, Opal says that she's been talking to Winn-Dixie, and he agrees that the preacher should tell her 10 things about Mama since Opal is 10 years old. The preacher goes still, and Opal thinks that he's considering pulling his head back into his shell. Winn-Dixie nudges the preacher with his nose. The preacher tells Winn-Dixie that he knew he'd be trouble, and he invites Opal to sit down and hear about Mama.

Winn-Dixie doesn't just make Opal feel heard—his “responses” give her the courage to ask for what she needs and to overcome her fears, which suggests that he's a true friend who makes Opal a stronger person. That the preacher agrees to give Opal what she wants speaks again to the power of friendship and to forging connections with others. It's also possible that Opal has been needlessly afraid of the preacher's reaction and that he needs to talk about Mama just as much as Opal does, a possibility that would humanize him as a character and add another layer of complexity to his behavior toward Opal.



CHAPTER 4

The preacher and Opal settle in on the couch with Winn-Dixie between them. The preacher says that Mama was funny and could make anyone laugh. Second, she had red hair and freckles, just like Opal does. Third, she had a green thumb. Fourth, she could run very fast. Opal says that she's the same way—she even beats boys. The preacher is quiet for a moment, but at Opal's prodding, he tells her a fifth thing: Mama couldn't cook and even burnt water. Sixth, Mama loved stories, especially funny ones. The seventh thing is that she knew all the constellations. With his eyes closed, the preacher tells Opal the eighth thing: Mama hated being a preacher's wife. She hated the church ladies judging her.

The preacher tells Opal a mix of good, neutral, and bad things about Mama. This begins to make the case that all people are composed of a variety of different qualities of varying “goodness.” Some, like Mama's hair color, are just neutral descriptors. Others, like the fact that she hated being a preacher's wife (which presumably influenced her to leave), are negative, especially to someone like Opal who has to deal with the aftermath of her mother's departure.



The ninth thing about Mama is that she drank, which caused fights between her and the preacher. With a long sigh, the preacher says the tenth thing is that Mama loved Opal very much. Opal reminds the preacher that Mama left her, but the preacher corrects Opal that Mama left *both of them* and left nothing behind. Opal can see the preacher pulling his head back into his shell. She gets up, thanks him for telling her, and goes to her room. There, Opal writes down everything the preacher said so she won't forget. She reads them to Winn-Dixie until she has them memorized. She wants to make sure that if Mama ever comes back, she'll be able to hold onto Mama and not let her get away again.

Though the preacher doesn't say if Mama's implied alcoholism was something she dealt with even before their marriage, it's possible to read her substance abuse as a reflection of how unhappy she was as a preacher's wife. She may have had a very good reason to leave: her own physical and mental health. Opal's insistence that Mama left her specifically shows that in her mind, Mama's departure is personal. She isn't able to see that Mama may have had a good reason to go—or even that the preacher is suffering in equally meaningful ways.



CHAPTER 5

Winn-Dixie hates being left alone. At first, Opal and the preacher leave him in the trailer when they go out, but Winn-Dixie destroys things while they're gone. They try tying him up outside, but he just howls until Samuel starts howling too. Opal insists that Winn-Dixie is just lonely and feels empty when he's alone. Finally, the preacher relents and allows Opal to bring Winn-Dixie along on their outings—the dog even goes to church with them. The Open Arms Baptist Church of Naomi isn't a normal church; it's in a building that used to be a Pick-It-Quick store, and the store's motto is still visible on the floor tiles. There aren't any pews either, so congregants bring their own foldup chairs. Since it's so odd to begin with, Opal figures that Winn-Dixie will fit in.

The first time that Winn-Dixie comes to church, the preacher ties him up outside in the shade because the preacher informs Opal that dogs don't belong in church. After some singing and praying, the preacher begins his sermon. However, before he can get a word in, Winn-Dixie starts howling. Everyone looks around, confused, until the preacher yells at Opal to fetch Winn-Dixie. She and Winn-Dixie settle in at the front, and Winn-Dixie smiles at the preacher. The preacher smiles back and resumes his sermon. Winn-Dixie listens attentively.

Disaster strikes when a mouse runs across the floor; the mice have been in the building since it was a Pick-It-Quick. Though the preacher often says he needs to do something about the mice, he never does—Opal knows he just can't stand the thought of hurting a mouse. Winn-Dixie sees the mouse and begins to chase it. He barks, and the congregation claps and points—they all cheer when Winn-Dixie catches the mouse. Winn-Dixie presents the mouse to the preacher. It's still alive, so Winn-Dixie puts a paw on the mouse's tail and smiles at the preacher. The preacher asks everyone to pray for the mouse and then tosses it out the door.

Though bringing Winn-Dixie along certainly stops his bad behavior, Opal's insistence that he feels empty when he's alone is likely more a reflection of her than it is an accurate assessment of the dog's emotional state. This suggests that describing Winn-Dixie is a way for Opal to begin processing her own emotions and feelings by projecting them onto him. Though it may feel scary or impossible to voice how alone she feels, it is possible to say that Winn-Dixie is lonely—and this practice may help Opal express her own emotions in the future.



Allowing Winn-Dixie to sit in on the church service solidifies his place in the family. This helps Opal to feel less alone since now, there's no place in Naomi where she has to go by herself—she has a friend everywhere she goes. The attention that Winn-Dixie pays the preacher also sets an example of how people should listen to others, per the novel. It's important to listen attentively and quietly, as that helps the speaker feel validated and respected.



Even if Opal sees the preacher as someone she can't really get to know, her comment about his unwillingness to hurt mice suggests that they're closer than she might like to think. Clearly, he's a kind and giving man, so it's possible that Opal just doesn't see much of that attention directed at her—he may shower most of his kindness and attention on others because Opal reminds him too much of Mama. This makes it clear that it's absolutely necessary to be attentive and supportive of one's family members to avoid making them feel as alone as Opal does.



Opal prays for Mama. She knows that Mama would love to hear the story of Winn-Dixie catching the mouse in church. She wants to be the one to tell Mama that story someday. Opal also tells God that she's lonely in Naomi. The only kids at church are two brothers, Dunlap and Stevie; Amanda, who always looks like she's smelled something bad; and Sweetie Pie Thomas, who's only five. None of them want to be Opal's friend, presumably because they believe that Opal is going to tell on them to the preacher whenever they do something wrong. Finally, Opal prays that the mouse landed on soft grass and didn't get hurt.

Opal positions storytelling as a way for Mama to get to know her in the future. Though this is indeed an important thing that storytelling can do, it's worth noting how much time and energy Opal regularly puts into collecting stories for Mama. Much of the time, it takes away from her enjoyment of what happened. On another note, Opal's prayer about loneliness suggests that she may be more judgmental than she'd like to think. There's no indication she's really spoken to any of these other kids; these are just her first impressions—and she's unwilling to look past them to make friends. However, her sentiments about the mouse suggest that she is, in fact, an empathetic person—she may just be afraid of others rejecting her.



CHAPTER 6

Opal spends much of her summer at the Herman W. Block Memorial Library, which is just a tiny old house full of books. The librarian is the elderly Miss Franny Block, and Franny becomes Opal's first friend. Their friendship begins because Winn-Dixie is upset that he can't go into the library. He stands in the widow, and Opal makes sure he can see her. One day, as Opal browses the shelves, she hears a scream. She runs and finds Miss Franny cowering behind her desk, insisting that the bear came back. Miss Franny points to Winn-Dixie in the window, and Opal explains that it's just her dog. Opal helps the old lady up. Miss Franny is embarrassed but explains that she had a bad experience with a bear in the library long ago.

Even if Opal can't always make Winn-Dixie feel loved in the way that he'd surely like, she nevertheless demonstrates how important it is to make her friends and family members feel as though their wishes are important. Staying in Winn-Dixie's line of sight is a way of listening to him, and it means that Opal constantly thinks about how to best care for Winn-Dixie (something that makes her feel useful and purposeful). Opal's kindness toward Miss Franny shows how easy yet meaningful it can be to extend this kindness to others.



Opal asks what happened. Miss Franny insists that it's a long story, but Opal says that she's like her Mama and loves stories. Opal asks if Winn-Dixie can come listen too, and before Miss Franny can really respond, Opal fetches Winn-Dixie. He flops down at Miss Franny's feet. Miss Franny comments that he's a large dog, and Opal says that he also has a big heart. Miss Franny pats Winn-Dixie and settles herself in to tell the story of the bear.

The fact that Opal mentions Mama when she says how much she loves stories reveals that Mama is on Opal's mind much of the time. At this point, it seems that Opal isn't interested in being her own person. She wants to exist in relation to her mother and doesn't feel comfortable owning the fact that she loves stories, regardless of whether or not Mama does.



CHAPTER 7

Miss Franny says that back when Florida was still wild and she was still a little girl, her father, Herman W. Block, told her that she could have anything she wanted for her birthday. Leaning in close, Miss Franny says quietly that her daddy was very, very rich. Since she loved to read, Miss Franny asked for a small library so she could spend her days reading and share books with others. Mr. Block built her a house for her books, and that's how Naomi's library began. Miss Franny says that she became the librarian at a very young age. She reiterates that back then, Florida was full of wild beings—there were wild animals in addition to wild people. Miss Franny admits that as a girl, she was a know-it-all and felt like she knew the answer to everything, since she had a library.

One day, Miss Franny was reading in the library when a big shadow crossed her deck. Without looking up, she asked the patron if she could help them find a book. The patron didn't answer. Miss Franny figured that it was a wild person who was afraid of books, but then she smelled something odd and looked up: it wasn't a person, but a huge bear. When Opal asks how big the bear was, Miss Franny replies that he was probably three times the size of Winn-Dixie. After that, the bear sniffed the air. Miss Franny vowed to not go down without a fight, so she held up *War and Peace*, the book she was reading, and threw it at the bear. The bear ran and took the book with him. It never came back, but men used to tease Miss Franny that they'd seen the bear reading in the woods.

With a sigh, Miss Franny muses that she's probably the only one left from those days; no one else who remembers the bear is still alive. All her friends have died. Opal thinks that Miss Franny looks suddenly small and wrinkled, and she thinks that they're not so different—they're both friendless. Winn-Dixie looks between Opal and Miss Franny and then smiles at Miss Franny. Miss Franny smiles back. Opal suggests that the three of them could be friends. Miss Franny's smile grows and she says that'd be grand. Right then, "pinch-faced" Amanda Wilkinson walks in. She announces that she enjoyed *Johnny Tremain* but that she wants something more difficult to read. Miss Franny gets up to help Amanda and assures her that some dogs are allowed in the library. Miss Franny winks at Opal. Opal is thrilled to have made a friend and vows to not let Amanda ruin it.

In her old age, Miss Franny is better able to identify where she went wrong as a kid. For her, it wasn't her necessarily her wealth that warped her priorities—it was the fact that she was in charge of the town's library that made her feel superior to everyone else. In other words, Miss Franny may have cut herself off from meaningful relationships because she acted like such a know-it-all as a kid. Though Opal is perhaps less judgmental than Miss Franny was, this offers hope that as Opal ages, she, too, will become more accepting of others.



Here, Miss Franny's lack of awareness and her sense of superiority put her in a potentially dangerous situation—while she didn't think that a so-called "wild person" would hurt her, a bear definitely might. Though parts of this story seem potentially fantastical and fabricated, this is nevertheless a bonding experience for Opal and Miss Franny. By listening, Opal gives Miss Franny the ability to feel as though she has something to say.



Telling her story didn't just give Miss Franny a sense of dignity; it also provided a launch pad for her friendship with Opal. Listening, this suggests, can allow people to befriend others by showing that they're worthy of consideration and respect. It's telling that Opal is able to identify with Miss Franny. This indicates that Opal is starting to recognize that she's not the only person who feels the way she does; there may be others who feel alone or who are grieving for absent family members. The novel suggests that learning to see others in a more empathetic light is an important aspect of maturation.



CHAPTER 8

Winn-Dixie starts to look healthier, and his limp disappears. He seems proud that he no longer looks like a stray, so Opal decides that he needs a collar and leash. She goes into Gertrude's Pets, the local pet shop, and finds a beautiful red collar and leash. Winn-Dixie obeys the sign saying "no dogs allowed" and sits outside, but he smiles and wags his tail when Opal shows him the set through the window. It is, unfortunately, very expensive, so Opal asks the man at the counter if he could set her up with an installment plan. Someone screams, "Gertrude!" and Opal notices a parrot sitting on a fish tank. She ignores the parrot and explains that she'll hand over her allowance every week in exchange for the collar and leash—but the man at the counter says that the owner wouldn't like it. He looks down. Opal notices that his nametag reads "Otis."

Opal offers that alternatively, she could come in and clean. She notices that there are dust bunnies and pet food debris all over. The parrot screams, "Gertrude!" again, and Opal explains that she's trustworthy—her daddy is the preacher at the Open Arms Baptist Church. She says that her dog, Winn-Dixie, would need to come in with her though, otherwise he'll howl. Otis says that Gertrude doesn't like dogs—the parrot is named Gertrude, after the store's owner. Opal says that pretty much everyone likes Winn-Dixie and asks if she could have the job if Gertrude likes Winn-Dixie. Otis mumbles.

Opal lets Winn-Dixie in the store. Gertrude screams, "dog!" and then the two animals stare at each other. After a minute, Gertrude lands on Winn-Dixie's head. Otis says that Opal can start on Monday. As Opal and Winn-Dixie leave the shop, Opal tells the dog that he's the best at making friends and if Mama were here, she'd think he's the best dog. Winn-Dixie and Opal almost bump into Sweetie Pie Thomas, who's sucking her knuckle and staring into the pet shop. She asks if the bird really sat on Winn-Dixie's head and explains that after Winn-Dixie caught the mouse in church, she asked her mama for a dog like Winn-Dixie. Sweetie Pie strokes Winn-Dixie, announces that she's turning six in September, and invites Opal and Winn-Dixie to her party. Opal feels happy: she has a job, a friend in Miss Franny, and an invitation to a party.

Buying Winn-Dixie a collar and leash would, in Opal's mind, make Winn-Dixie's inclusion in the family seem more official. This is probably a very attractive prospect for Opal, given that Mama isn't around—anything that makes her family feel more whole and more secure likely appeals to her. The leash specifically suggests that Opal wants to be able to keep Winn-Dixie from running away like Mama did. However, it does read as somewhat excessive to get an expensive collar and leash, given that Winn-Dixie seems to have no problem staying at Opal's side. This seems to be about Opal's fears, not any bad behavior on Winn-Dixie's part.



Because Opal wants so badly to make her ownership of Winn-Dixie official, she's more willing than she might otherwise be to engage with Otis. Once again, Winn-Dixie encourages Opal to meet someone who could become a friend, even if he's doing so inadvertently in this situation. Meanwhile, Opal's insistence that Winn-Dixie come inside with her shows how loyal she is to those she considers friends or family members.



Whatever Mama might think, Winn-Dixie is exceptional at making friends. Thus far, he's proven everyone wrong about his behavior—which, in more cases than not, causes people to fall in love with him. At five years old, Sweetie Pie is one of the least judgmental characters in the novel. This suggests that, to some degree, prejudice is something that people learn as they grow up—but then it's something they must unlearn if they expect to make friends. By accepting Sweetie Pie's invitation, Opal has to let go of some of her own judgment—she previously wrote Sweetie Pie off because of her age. Now, she sees the value in having friends of all ages.



CHAPTER 9

Opal tells the reader that nearly everything that happened to her this summer happened thanks to Winn-Dixie. Without him, she wouldn't have met Gloria Dump. One day, as Opal rides her bike home from Gertrude's Pets with Winn-Dixie running alongside, they pass Stevie and Dunlap's house. The boys get on their bikes and follow Opal, whispering things that she can't hear. Opal thinks that the boys look like "bald-headed babies," since their mama shaves their heads in the summer. She shouts back that she can hear them, even though she can't. Winn-Dixie zooms ahead. Dunlap yells that the dog is headed for the "witch's house," and Opal sees an overgrown garden ahead. Winn-Dixie hops the gate and disappears.

Dunlap tells Opal that she should go rescue Winn-Dixie as Stevie insists that the witch will eat the dog. Opal calls for Winn-Dixie. Stevie says that the witch is probably already eating him, so Opal calls the boys bald-headed babies and tells them to get lost. Dunlap points out that this isn't very nice. Opal decides that she's more afraid of losing Winn-Dixie than she is of a witch, so she goes into the yard. Dunlap offers to tell the preacher what happened to Opal as she wades deeper into the mess of flowers, vegetables, and trees. She hears an odd laugh and sees Winn-Dixie eating out of the witch's hand. The witch says that one can always trust a dog that likes peanut butter. Opal thinks that the woman looks nice—not like a witch at all. Plus, Winn-Dixie likes her.

Opal apologizes for Winn-Dixie's foray into the garden, but the woman says that she enjoys the company. Opal introduces herself, and the woman introduces herself as Gloria Dump. Gloria remarks that her last name is horrible, and Opal shares that in her old town, some kids called her "Lunch Meat" since her last name is Buloni. She introduces Winn-Dixie, who tries to smile but can't through the peanut butter. Gloria offers to make Opal a peanut butter sandwich and tells her to sit down in a lawn chair. Gloria sits with her own sandwich, puts her false teeth in to eat, and then explains that she's almost blind. She says that instead of relying on her eyes, she has to rely on her heart; she asks Opal to tell her everything about herself. Opal has been waiting a long time to tell someone about herself, and so she tells Gloria everything.

Because the boys treat Opal so poorly, she has every reason to question their motives and whether or not they're people she should try to befriend. While it's certainly possible that the boys simply aren't good at making friends and don't have a dog like Winn-Dixie to show them how it's done, it's understandable that Opal has unkind thoughts about the boys. Dunlap's mention of a witch suggests that there's even more judgment happening in Naomi, given that labelling women as witches has historically been a product of other people's fear.



Stevie is a little bit younger than Dunlap, and it shows—he's far more interested in pestering Opal and insisting that this woman is actually a witch, while Dunlap (seemingly genuinely) offers to tell others what happened to Opal after she dies at the witch's hands. This woman's overgrown garden likely contributes to the local belief that she's a witch. She doesn't conform to normal standards of maintaining her yard, and therefore people don't find her trustworthy. Since Opal trusts Winn-Dixie, she's more than willing to trust this woman, showing how much she's learned about being nonjudgmental.



People who don't know Gloria (particularly children) likely assume that she's a witch because of her unkempt garden and the fact that she's an old, blind woman. But her kindness and genuine interest in Opal drives home that she's not a witch in any sense of the word: she's a lonely old lady who has to rely on other ways of learning about people, since she can't get much information visually. (This is likely also why Gloria's garden is overgrown—which would mean that kids like Stevie and Dunlap are judging her based on something she can't fix on account of her sight.) Offering to listen to Opal's story shows that Gloria recognizes the effect of having someone to confide in: it can make people feel seen and understood in a way nothing else can.



CHAPTER 10

Opal tells Gloria about moving to Naomi with the preacher and leaving her friends behind, about Mama leaving, and about the 10 things she knows about Mama. She talks about missing Mama and how the preacher hides in a turtle shell. Opal talks about finding Winn-Dixie, meeting Miss Franny, and getting a job with Otis at Gertrude's Pets. She talks about her excitement for Sweetie Pie's birthday and how Dunlap and Stevie think that Gloria is a witch. Opal insists that the boys are mean and stupid. Gloria nods, and Opal can tell she's listening with her whole heart. When Opal is done, Gloria suggests that Opal might be more like Mama than she thinks—maybe Opal also has a green thumb. She suggests they plant something and see how it does.

Gloria selects a tree, but it doesn't look much like a tree—to Opal, it looks like a plant. However, Opal dutifully digs a hole and pats dirt around it. When Opal asks what kind of tree it is, Gloria replies that it's a **wait-and-see tree**. In other words, she doesn't know what it is, but they'll find out when it grows up. Opal asks if she can visit the tree tomorrow. Gloria says that Opal is always welcome in her garden, but she warns her that the tree won't look much different by tomorrow. Opal suggests that she'd also like to see Gloria, which makes Gloria harrumph. That night, as the preacher tucks Opal in, Opal tells him about meeting all of her new friends. He kisses Opal and then Winn-Dixie. Winn-Dixie opens his mouth like he's laughing, and the preacher laughs back.

CHAPTER 11

Opal wakes up in the middle of the night to an awful thunderstorm, but the storm doesn't wake her—Winn-Dixie does, as he's whining and beating his head against her door. Opal gets up and discovers that he's trembling. Afraid, she tries to hug him, but he ignores her and continues to cry and beat his head against the door. Opal figures he wants out, so she opens her bedroom door. Winn-Dixie shoots past her like something is chasing him and races straight into the preacher's room. Opal hears him leap onto the bed, but then, Winn-Dixie comes racing back out again. The preacher comes out of his bedroom, looking confused, and asks what's going on. Thunder rolls, and Winn-Dixie tears toward the preacher. They collide, and both fall to the ground.

Gloria's suggestion that Opal may have inherited her mother's green thumb is telling—it's an attempt to get Opal to think about herself and her relationship to Mama in a new way. Essentially, Gloria is trying to help Opal understand that she has the power to grow things and nurture them. While Gloria is talking specifically about plants here, the underlying message is that Opal also has the power to nurture her friendships with others if she thinks of her connection to Mama in a positive way rather than allowing it to hold her back.



The wait-and-see tree symbolizes Opal. Like the tree, it's not clear exactly what Opal is going to be when she grows up—she, and those around her, will have to “wait and see.” However, this doesn't mean that Opal doesn't deserve kindness and care while she's in the middle of growing. In some ways, this is an indictment of the preacher, who makes Opal feel alone and neglected. On the other hand, it also speaks to what a community can do for a young person like Opal. Opal might not get as much attention as she wants at home, but she now has Miss Franny and Gloria to help her.



Opal is afraid because this isn't the affectionate Winn-Dixie she knows and loves—this dog is fundamentally unknowable and rejects her advances. Though Winn-Dixie's erratic behavior certainly spooks Opal, it's also likely that on a deeper level, Opal feels rejected—and given the fact that Mama left Opal and the preacher, essentially rejecting them in the process, this is probably especially disturbing for her. This reflects Opal's fear of losing people she considers family. Though losing loved ones is certainly something that most people fear, Opal's anxiety that this might happen at any moment is heightened because of Mama's abandonment.



From the floor, with Winn-Dixie on his back, the preacher explains that a pathological fear is a fear that's impossible to reason with. The thunder cracks again, and Winn-Dixie leaps up and runs. Opal gets out of his way. The preacher says that Winn-Dixie seems to have a pathological fear of thunderstorms. Opal helps the preacher up before Winn-Dixie can run him over again, and then they sit on the couch and watch the dog run. The preacher assures Opal that when the storm is over, the real Winn-Dixie will return. Eventually, Winn-Dixie calms down and crawls onto the couch. The preacher remarks that there are a lot of thunderstorms in Florida in the summer, so they'll have to keep an eye on Winn-Dixie so he doesn't run away. Opal loves the preacher for being willing to forgive Winn-Dixie for being afraid, and for wanting to keep Winn-Dixie safe.

To Opal, it's extremely comforting that the preacher wants to hold onto Winn-Dixie and make sure he doesn't run away—in Opal's mind, the preacher failed to do this when Mama left. From Opal's perspective, it likely seems as though the preacher has gotten better at holding onto his loved ones in the years since Mama left. The preacher's reaction here, then, has implications for friendship in general: he's not upset with Winn-Dixie for being afraid and not acting his best. Rather, he shows Opal that they should be generous and try to help their friends when they have problems, rather than leaving them out in the cold.



CHAPTER 12

On Opal's first day of work at Gertrude's Pets, she arrives so early that the "closed" sign is still in the window. She and Winn-Dixie enter and hear beautiful music. They notice that all the animals are out of their cages, still as statues, listening to Otis play the guitar and tap his boots. Winn-Dixie gets a dreamy expression and then lies down with the other animals. Gertrude perches on his head. Otis notices Opal, stops playing, and mayhem ensues. The animals all start to run around while Winn-Dixie barks and Gertrude shrieks. For a while, Opal and Otis run around trying to catch animals, but then Opal shouts for Otis to play some more music. He picks up his guitar, and within seconds, everything is calm. As he plays, Opal puts the animals back in their cages.

Otis doesn't yet trust Opal, so he doesn't want to reveal this part of his identity to her yet. The mayhem that breaks out when he stops playing, however, suggests that there's something to be said for being open and vulnerable with new people—it would've made everyone's morning a little less difficult. That Otis is seemingly able to charm animals with his music also suggests that he is able to make friends easily, just not necessarily with other people. In this sense, he's more like Opal than either of them seems to realize.



When the animals are back where they belong, Otis looks down and explains that he plays music for them since it makes them happy. The animals didn't escape; he takes them out. He feels sorry for them, since he knows what it's like to be locked up. Otis admits that he's been in jail, looks down at his boots, and then awkwardly gets Opal started on sweeping. As Opal sweeps, Winn-Dixie follows her, and Gertrude tails Winn-Dixie. When Opal is done, Otis thanks her. Outside, Opal thinks that the preacher wouldn't be happy to hear that her boss is a criminal.

Since Otis has done nothing to raise suspicion about his character—and especially since he seems like a shy, sweet man—it's interesting that Opal goes straight to thinking of him as a criminal just because he's been to jail. This suggests that she has a black-and-white view of good and bad.



Sweetie Pie is waiting for Opal. She announces that she saw all the animals out of their cages and asks if Otis is magic. Sweetie Pie takes her knuckle out of her mouth, takes Opal's hand, and walks with Opal and Winn-Dixie. She confirms that Opal is coming to her birthday party and reminds Opal that the theme is pink. Suddenly, Sweetie Pie says she has to go. She points to a house and says the woman on the porch is her mama. Opal waves and watches Sweetie Pie run to tell her mama about Otis. Opal thinks of how she wants to tell Mama about Otis too. She thinks that she's collecting stories for Mama. Someday, she'll tell Mama about Miss Franny and the bear and about briefly believing that Gloria was a witch.

Sweetie Pie clearly either has no idea that Otis is a supposed criminal, or she doesn't care—instead, she focuses on what Otis is doing now. The novel overwhelmingly implies that this is how people should look at others: it's not especially useful to take past events into account when someone is doing obvious good in the present. Again, when Opal shares that she's collecting stories for Mama, it shows that she's not necessarily living for herself on her own terms. Because of this, Opal isn't as able to enjoy life since everything she does is then tainted by grief and sadness.



CHAPTER 13

Every day, Opal and Winn-Dixie get up early so they can listen to Otis play at Gertrude's Pets. Sometimes Sweetie Pie joins them and sits rocking Winn-Dixie. When the concert is over, Sweetie Pie often tries to pick out which pet she wants. Sweetie Pie always gives up and heads home, since all she wants is a dog like Winn-Dixie. Then, Opal sweeps and organizes some shelves, and Otis records Opal's time. He never acts like a criminal. After work, Opal and Winn-Dixie go to the library to talk with Miss Franny and hear a story. Then, they head to Gloria's. It's Opal's favorite place to be, and she suspects that it's Winn-Dixie's favorite too.

Again, Sweetie Pie demonstrates that she's very nonjudgmental—she's here for the music, the animals, and especially the dog she loves. She doesn't know or care that Otis has been to jail. As Opal observes that Otis never acts like a criminal, she begins to question her own thoughts on what makes people good or bad. Essentially, she has to ask herself if Otis is a bad person just because he's been in jail, even though he's a sweet person now.



Dunlap and Stevie sometimes follow Opal and shout that she's visiting a witch. It makes Opal mad that they persist in saying that Gloria is a witch. One day, Stevie says that according to his mama, Opal shouldn't be spending her time with old ladies and should be playing with kids instead. Dunlap tells Stevie to stop and insists to Opal that Stevie didn't mean it, but Opal spits that Stevie's mama isn't *her* mama, so she can't tell Opal what to do. Stevie threatens to tell so that the preacher will shame Opal in front of the church. He hisses that Otis was in jail and is mentally disabled, but Opal insists that the preacher already knows.

Opal finally reaches the end of her rope when Stevie essentially insists that Opal's new friends aren't good enough. As far as Opal is concerned, her elderly friends are the best friends she's ever had—especially since their friendships are built on stories and listening to each other tell them. However, it's also worth noting that Dunlap again behaves as though he's not actually as interested in annoying Opal as she might think. Rather, Opal is cutting herself off from a potential friend because she lumps him in with Stevie's pestering.



This happens daily. By the time Opal reaches Gloria's garden, she's worn out and is happy to accept a peanut butter sandwich and a cup of coffee. One day, Gloria asks Opal why she doesn't play with Stevie and Dunlap. Opal insists that they're ignorant and still think that Gloria is a witch. Though Gloria insists that they're just trying to make friends, Opal maintains that she doesn't want to be their friend—and they're stupid and mean. Gloria shakes her head, sighs, and asks Opal if she has any stories to share. Opal always does.

This is hard to hear for Opal—to her, it likely sounds as if Gloria is essentially saying what Stevie said: that Opal's friends aren't good enough and don't count. Gloria's generous interpretation of what's going on with Dunlap and Stevie drives home the novel's assertion that it does no one any favors to judge others. In Gloria's assessment, Opal is remaining stubborn in despite evidence that Dunlap (and even Stevie) might not be that bad.



CHAPTER 14

Opal sometimes tells Miss Franny's most recent story to Gloria. Sometimes she imitates Otis playing for the animals, and other times, Opal makes a story up. Gloria shares that she used to love to read, but her eyes are so bad now that she can't read—they don't make glasses strong enough. One day, Opal decides to tell Gloria that Otis is a criminal. She reasons that she should tell an adult and asks Gloria if she should be afraid of Otis, since he's done bad things and was in jail. Gloria says she'd like to show Opal something and leads her to the back of the yard. There, Opal studies a huge **tree** with whiskey, beer, and wine bottles hung from it. The bottles clang and make a spooky noise.

Gloria explains that the bottles are there to keep away the ghosts of all the things she's done wrong. Opal is awed that Gloria has done so many things wrong when Gloria is such a nice person, but Gloria insists that being nice doesn't mean a person hasn't done bad things. When Opal observes that there are whiskey and beer bottles, Gloria says that she's aware—she drank the contents and hung the bottles on the **tree**. In a whisper, Opal whispers that Mama drank, and according to the preacher, sometimes she couldn't stop. Gloria says that it's like that for some people. She used to be one of those people, but today, she doesn't drink anything stronger than coffee.

Opal asks if the alcohol made Gloria do the bad things. Gloria says that they made her do some of them, but she would've done some of them anyway before she learned the most important thing. When Opal asks what the most important thing is, Gloria says it's different for everyone. The point, however, is that Opal can't judge people by what they've done; she has to judge them based on what they're doing now. She suggests that Opal judge Otis by his music and how kindly he treats the animals, and that Opal not judge Stevie and Dunlap too harshly either. Opal agrees. Gloria and Winn-Dixie walk away, but Opal studies the **tree**. She wonders if Mama has a tree full of bottles. She wonders if she's a ghost to Mama, since Mama seems ghostly to her sometimes.

Since Gloria can no longer read, her storytelling get-togethers with Opal are a way for her to fill that void. By listening to Opal's stories, Gloria is then also able to help Opal feel needed and respected in the community and in their friendship in particular. Leading Opal to this tree indicates that Gloria has much more to teach Opal than what she already has about stories. This positions Gloria as a parent figure of sorts who's able to guide Opal onto the right moral path—especially since the preacher isn't someone Opal feels comfortable confiding in.



Opal again reveals that she has a clear, black-and-white view of good and bad. In Opal's mind, it's difficult to accept that Gloria has done bad things since she seems so good. Seeing the tree and realizing what it represents shatters this simplistic worldview. This happens again when Opal notes the alcohol bottles. Seeing that someone like Gloria drank, just like Mama, also helps Opal to see that alcoholism is a problem that all different kinds of people have and to understand that just like Gloria, Mama was a multifaceted individual.



What Gloria essentially implies here is that Opal can't just blame Mama's choice to leave on the alcohol. It's possible that there was nothing anyone could've done or made Mama do to convince her to stay—but hopefully, Mama has learned her "most important thing," wherever she is. By asking Opal to consider people like Otis in terms of what they're doing now and not based on what they did in the past, it begins to teach Opal to be more open and accepting of others. Essentially, Opal should be on the lookout for the good in others, which she might find in unexpected ways.



CHAPTER 15

The air conditioning at the library doesn't work well, so as soon as Opal and Winn-Dixie get to the library, Winn-Dixie settles himself in front of the only fan. Opal worries about him hogging it and wonders if the air will blow all his hair out, but Miss Franny assures Opal that he's fine. Sometimes when Miss Franny tells stories, she has small fits. She forgets what she's staying and trembles. Whenever this happens, Winn-Dixie gets up and sits next to her until the fit passes. Then, he licks her hands. Miss Franny's fits remind Opal of how Winn-Dixie reacts to thunderstorms. Opal gets better at holding onto and comforting Winn-Dixie, but holding him is about more than comforting him: she doesn't want him to run away.

Both Winn-Dixie and Miss Franny's behavior reminds Opal of Gloria. Opal wonders who comforts her when the ghosts chatter about what she did wrong. Opal decides that she wants to comfort Gloria, and that the best way to do that is to read a book to her loud enough to scare away the ghosts. Opal asks Miss Franny for book recommendations and Miss Franny suggests *Gone with the Wind*. Opal hasn't heard of it, but she has heard of the Civil War. Miss Franny says her great-grandfather, Littmus W. Block, fought in the war as a boy, and that's a story. Opal asks to hear the story and settles in, but Amanda Wilkinson comes into the library. She bossily declares that she's ready for another book, but Miss Franny asks her to wait and invites Amanda to listen to her story. Amanda pretends she's not interested, but she stands to listen.

CHAPTER 16

Miss Franny says that her great-grandfather, Littmus W. Block, was 14 when the Civil War broke out. He was big and strong, and he told his mama that he couldn't stand by. He went to war. In a whisper, Miss Franny says that sadly, men and boys always want to fight, and nothing will convince them that war isn't fun. Littmus left to be a hero, but he soon discovered the truth: war is hell. Amanda says that hell is a cuss word, but Miss Franny declares that war should be a cuss word too. She says that neither Amanda nor Opal can imagine what it's like. Littmus was hungry, covered in vermin, cold in the winter, and hot in the summer. He was shot at, and he was only a child. Opal asks if Littmus died, but Miss Franny points out that she wouldn't be here if he'd died.

Again, Winn-Dixie sets a good example of how to be a caring friend. Just as Opal doesn't hold his fear of thunderstorms against him, he doesn't judge Miss Franny for her fits—instead, he does what he can to comfort her. Opal's mention that she holds onto Winn-Dixie to stop him from running away suggests that in addition to not wanting to lose her dog, she may also want to do with Winn-Dixie what she couldn't do with Mama and physically keep him in her life forever.



Opal's choice to take on the responsibility of comforting Gloria reflects her growing maturity: she now understands that she has a responsibility to care for others in the community in the same way that they care for her. Asking Miss Franny for book recommendations to read to Gloria shows that Opal's different friendships are beginning to converge. Even if they've never met, Gloria and Miss Franny now have a connection to each other through Opal. When Amanda is clearly interested in the story, it indicates that it's a natural inclination to be interested in stories like this—and if a person is willing to listen, they themselves can become more human and sympathetic in the eyes of others.



Littmus learns right from the beginning that it doesn't matter how much he might have romanticized the Civil War: fighting in a war isn't something to idealize. It's dirty, uncomfortable, and dangerous, and many people die in the process. Miss Franny's insistence that "war" should be a cuss word adds more nuance to the idea that nothing is black and white. Even though the word might be accepted and inoffensive, that doesn't mean that it doesn't connote something horrible and tragic. In a perfect world, its usage would reflect that.



Miss Franny says that Littmus came out of the war a changed man. He walked from Virginia home to Georgia, but when he arrived, there was no home—the Yankees had burned it. As Amanda joins Opal on the floor, she asks what happened to Littmus's sisters. Miss Franny says that Littmus's mama and sisters all died of typhoid fever, while his daddy died on the battlefield. Opal and Amanda remark that this is a sad story; Opal is surprised that Amanda agrees with her. Miss Franny insists she's not done yet. Opal nudges Winn-Dixie to make him stop snoring. She wants to know how Littmus survived after losing everything he loved.

Littmus's story reveals that the main consequence of idealizing something like war is that one can lose what's most important to them in the process—in Littmus's case, his entire family. This parallels Opal's own situation: because Opal idealizes Mama and her memories of her, Opal is probably missing out on opportunities to get to know the preacher. Meanwhile, Amanda's interest in the story makes her more real and sympathetic to Opal (and to the reader). By listening to Miss Franny's story, the girls don't just show the storyteller respect: they learn to respect each other too.



CHAPTER 17

Miss Franny continues that Littmus was all alone. He sat down on what used to be the front porch and cried for his parents and sisters. Oddly, when he was done, he found that he wanted candy. He made a decision: since the world is sad and ugly, he was going to concentrate on putting something sweet into it. Littmus walked all the way to Florida, planning a candy factory. There, Littmus made the famous **Littmus Lozenges**. Neither Amanda nor Opal have heard of the candy. Miss Franny explains that they're not in production anymore, but she still has some. She opens her desk drawers: they're full of candy.

Miss Franny's desk drawers full of candy make the case that it's not useful to move through the world going off of assumptions—even something as mundane as a desk might be filled with wonders. This reflects the main point of Littmus's story: that it's important to celebrate and look for the things that are beautiful, even when so much else seems either mundane or downright ugly.



Miss Franny offers Amanda and Opal **Littmus Lozenges**. Opal asks if Winn-Dixie can have one too. Winn-Dixie swallows his in one gulp, but Opal eats hers slowly. It tastes like root beer and strawberry, but it also tastes like something that makes Opal feel sad. Miss Franny asks the girls if they like it. Opal likes it, and so does Amanda, but it makes Amanda think of sad things. Opal wonders what Amanda possibly has to feel sad about, since she's been in Naomi for a long time and still has both parents. Miss Franny reveals that there's a secret ingredient in the candy: sorrow. Children usually have a hard time tasting it, so Opal and Amanda must've experienced great sadness. Opal says that she moved and left all her friends, that Dunlap and Stevie pick on her, and that her greatest sadness is that Mama left.

For Opal, it's unfathomable that anyone could be unhappy when they have two parents at home that love them. While her own family situation may make this view easier to understand, it also ignores the many other reasons that someone can feel sad—loss of all kinds is a part of life, and it's especially a part of being a member of a family or a community. Miss Franny's insistence that kids usually don't taste the sadness suggests that this kind of nuance is something that people develop with age. Both Amanda and Opal, Miss Franny implies, already know that life contains both happiness and sadness.



Amanda says that the candy makes her miss Carson. Looking ready to cry, Amanda runs away. Opal asks Miss Franny who Carson is, but Miss Franny shakes her head and says that the world is filled with sorrow. Miss Franny says that Littmus made a fortune because he was able to put sadness in the candy. Opal asks if she can have **Littmus Lozenges** to take to Gloria, Otis, the preacher, and Sweetie Pie. She stuffs her pockets, checks out *Gone with the Wind*, and heads for Gloria's. Opal almost sticks her tongue out at Dunlap and Stevie, but then remembers what Miss Franny said about war and what Gloria said about not judging the boys. She waves. The boys stare, but Dunlap waves back. Opal thinks it's cool that Amanda liked the story and she wonders who Carson is.

Littmus made a fortune because in his candy, he was able to capture the fact that nothing in life is entirely sweet or entirely sad—everything is, in some regards, a mixture of both. Given what Opal learned today, she now feels more willing to entertain the possibility that Dunlap and Stevie aren't just jerks. Even if she only waves, she's taking a step toward befriending the boys. And importantly, she's doing so because of what her other friends taught her. This reinforces the idea that making friends has a domino effect: making one friend helps a person continue to make them.



CHAPTER 18

When Opal and Winn-Dixie get to Gloria's, Opal says she has a big surprise and a small one. Gloria asks for the small one first, so Opal hands her a **Littmus Lozenge**. Gloria remembers the candies; she pops the lozenge in her mouth and agrees that it tastes sad. Then, Opal announces that she's going to read *Gone With the Wind* out loud. It has 1,037 pages, so it'll take a long time. Opal reads the first chapter "loud enough to keep the ghosts away." That night, Opal gives the preacher his candy as he kisses her goodnight. He eats the candy and says it has a peculiar flavor. Opal watches him seem to get further away and withdraw into his shell. He says the candy tastes "melancholy," a word Opal has never heard before. The preacher says it makes him think of Mama.

The revelation that Gloria remembers the candies suggests that despite Miss Franny's insistence that there's no one alive who shares her memories, she might be wrong. The novel never reveals the women's ages, but it's possible that they're close enough in age to remember a lot of the same things. This suggests that there are friends lurking everywhere, if one knows where to look—and through their connections with Opal, it's possible that Miss Franny and Gloria will be able to connect with each other and expand their communities even further in the future.



The preacher sighs that it must be a bad batch if it tastes sad, but Opal explains that it's *supposed* to taste that way. She tells the preacher Littmus's story and how he invented **Littmus Lozenges**. Winn-Dixie starts eating the candy wrapper and refuses to let Opal take the wrapper from him. Then, the preacher says that Stevie and Dunlap's mama mentioned that Opal called Stevie a bald-headed baby. Opal says she did, but only because Stevie calls Gloria a witch and calls Otis bad names. The preacher says that Opal needs to apologize, since she hurt Stevie's feelings and he just wants to be friends. He insists that some people have an odd way of making friends.

The preacher, just like Gloria, insists that Opal can't think horribly of the boys just because they haven't been able to express their desire to be friends—and in any case, their bad behavior is no excuse for Opal to behave badly in return. However, it's also important to commend Opal for her desire to stand up for her friends. She likely feels compelled to defend others because there are so few right now who stand up for her, especially since the preacher seems unwilling to make the boys stop pestering his daughter.



Opal asks if the preacher knows anything about Amanda Wilkinson and a person named Carson. The preacher says that Carson was Amanda's brother. He drowned last year; he was only five years old. Opal asks why the preacher neglected to mention that, but the preacher insists that they shouldn't gossip about other people's tragedies. Opal insists that she needed to know, since Carson's death explains why Amanda is so "pinch-faced." The preacher kisses Opal, pats Winn-Dixie, and leaves the room.

Opal has no interest in gossiping, but she does want to have information that will help her understand why the people in her community behave the way they do. Knowing that Amanda has suffered such a loss helps Opal to identify with her and to understand where Amanda is coming from. It also shows Opal that loss like this is a normal, if tragic, part of life.



Opal lies in bed and confusedly thinks about how life is like a **Littmus Lozenge**. It's a mixture of sweetness and sadness, and it's impossible to separate the two. She shouts for the preacher, and when he returns, she asks him what word he used to describe the candies. She ponders the word *melancholy*, eats another candy, and thinks of Mama leaving. She thinks of Amanda and Carson. Carson was Sweetie Pie's age, but he's never going to have a sixth birthday party.

That Opal makes the connection now between the Littmus Lozenges and life is the entire point of the candies: life is both happy and sad, and it's impossible to have one without the other. As she turns over this fact, she becomes increasingly empathetic—and even more importantly, she spends more time thinking about Carson than about Mama. In this way, she's becoming less selfish as she comes of age.



CHAPTER 19

When Winn-Dixie and Opal get to the pet store the next morning, Opal gives Otis a **Littmus Lozenge**. He asks if it's Halloween and awkwardly accepts the candy. When he puts it in his mouth, he begins to cry and thanks Opal. He says it tastes good, but it also tastes like being in jail. Opal scolds Gertrude, who tries to steal the wrapper, and then asks Otis if he was in jail because he's a murderer or a burglar. Otis looks down at his boots and says he's not dangerous; he's just lonely. Opal accepts this and fetches her broom. When she returns, Otis is still staring at his shoes. He says that he went to jail for music—he used to play his guitar on the street. Sometimes people gave him money, but he did it mostly because “music is better if someone is listening to it.”

It's clear that Otis has a story to tell if someone were to ask for it—and in all likelihood, it's one that is both happy and sad. When Opal easily accepts Otis's insistence that he's not dangerous, it shows that she's learning how to be a good friend. She knows that it wouldn't necessarily be polite to pry, but it is polite for her to listen attentively when Otis does finally share his story. That Otis loved playing music in public suggests that deep down, Otis wants to connect with other people—but because of his time in jail and how others judge him for that, it's much harder for him to do that now.



Otis says that the police came and told him to stop, since he was breaking the law. Otis kept playing, so the police tried to put handcuffs on him. Since handcuffs would've prevented Otis from playing his guitar, Otis hit an officer and knocked him out. Otis was locked up in jail for a while, and when they let him out, they made him promise to never play guitar on the street again. This is why Otis only plays in here, for the animals. The human Gertrude gave him his job at the pet store when she read about Otis in the paper, and she doesn't have a problem with Otis playing for the animals. Opal points out that Otis also plays for her and Sweetie Pie, but Otis says that they're not on the street. Opal thanks Otis for telling her his story.

Otis's connection to his guitar, the music, and the other people who heard him play was strong enough to make him knock out a police officer for the right to keep playing. Learning Otis's story makes it clear that he isn't a cold-blooded criminal—he's just a person who made a mistake in the heat of the moment. Now that he can no longer connect with others via music, he's stuck in the pet store because of his shyness.



Sweetie Pie arrives later, and though she accepts a **Littmus Lozenge** from Opal, she spits it out immediately. To her, it tastes bad and like not having a dog. Opal sweeps the floor slowly so she can keep Otis company and help him be less lonely. She thinks that everyone in the world is lonely and thinks about Mama. Opal decides that thinking about Mama is like poking the hole left behind when you lose a tooth: the spot should be full, but it isn't.

The fact that Sweetie Pie immediately spits out the lozenge again proves Miss Franny's point that emotional intelligence is something that comes with age and experience. Meanwhile, now that Opal knows Otis's story, she understands just how important it is to listen to others and bear witness to their tragedies. Doing so allows people to better help others by offering them support and companionship. Otis's story also makes Opal realize even more that she's not the only one who feels sad, a marker of her growing maturity.



CHAPTER 20

Opal tells Gloria about how Otis got arrested, which makes Gloria laugh so hard she almost loses her false teeth. She says that sometimes things are so sad that they become funny, but she agrees with Opal that Otis is just lonely. Opal then shares that Amanda's brother Carson drowned last year at five years old. Gloria remembers hearing about that and agrees that this is probably why Amanda is so "pinch-faced." Opal asks if everyone misses someone, like she misses Mama. Gloria agrees and suggests that the world has an aching heart. Tired of thinking about sad things, Opal reads the next chapter of *Gone with the Wind*. As she reads about Scarlett going to a barbecue, she thinks about Otis wanting to play music.

Opal slams the book shut and says *that's* what they need to do: throw a party and invite Otis, Miss Franny, the preacher, and Sweetie Pie. She suggests they have the party in Gloria's garden and serve peanut butter sandwiches, but Gloria insists that most people don't like peanut butter that much. Opal says they could make egg salad sandwiches instead. She admits that she doesn't know how to make egg salad since she doesn't have a mama to teach her, but she wonders if Gloria could teach her. Gloria says maybe, but Opal knows she's saying yes. Opal thanks Gloria and hugs her hard. Surprisingly, Gloria says that there's one condition: Opal has to invite Stevie and Dunlap. Opal doesn't like it, but she promises.

Opal starts inviting people immediately. The preacher agrees to come. Miss Franny is thrilled and suggests that Opal invite Amanda. Opal is surprised that Amanda nervously says yes. Later, Opal asks Stevie and Dunlap. Stevie says he's not going to a party at a witch's house, but Dunlap elbows his brother and tells Opal they'll come. Opal insists that she doesn't care if they come or not, but Dunlap smiles and says they'll be there. Sweetie Pie is thrilled to get her invitation and asks what the theme is. She hugs Winn-Dixie and suggests they make it a dog theme. When Opal invites Otis, he says no—he doesn't like parties. Opal promises to work for free for a week and assures Otis that he won't have to talk to people. When Opal says that he can bring his guitar and play it at the party, Otis says that he might come after all. Opal thanks him.

*Gloria's reaction to hearing about Otis's arrest reinforces the novel's assertion that one can't have happiness without some sadness; laughter is necessary when things are too sad. As Opal's primary mentor at this point, it also falls to Gloria to confirm for Opal that everyone in the world is sad about something, even if it's just something trivial. But despite this sadness, even Opal and Gloria have happiness in their lives in the form of reading *Gone with the Wind* out loud.*



The party serves several purposes. First, it's a way for Opal to inject sweetness into a summer that's been sad for her in a variety of ways. It's also a way for Opal to actively combine all her friendships and hopefully to create a community of people. In the best case scenario, some of the people at the party will become friends, thereby proving the novel's point that making one friend opens a person up to making many more.



Getting Otis to come to the party and have the experience of playing music for others—something Opal knows would help Otis to come out of his shell and feel more confident—is something worth fighting for, even if it means that Opal might have to wait longer for Winn-Dixie's collar and leash by working for free. As she makes this choice, Opal starts to discover that sometimes, it's more important to nurture one's community than it is to try to hold onto an individual who seems to have no intention of going anywhere.



CHAPTER 21

Party preparations are fun. Opal and Gloria decide to hold the party at night. The afternoon before, Gloria teaches Opal to make egg salad sandwiches. Winn-Dixie watches, wags his tail, and smiles at Gloria. Opal catches Gloria giving him one when she thinks Opal isn't looking. Gloria also teaches Opal to make a drink called Dump Punch, which she's famous for. Finally, Opal strings crepe paper through the trees and puts candles in bags. When Opal lights the candles before guests arrive, she and Gloria agree that the garden is beautiful. It's so pretty that it makes Opal's heart feel weirdly swollen and full. Opal wishes she knew where Mama is so that Mama could come too.

Miss Franny arrives in a green silk dress and heels with a bowl of **Littmus Lozenges**. Sweetie Pie's mother drops off Sweetie Pie and asks Opal to walk her daughter home later. Sweetie Pie has come prepared with dog pictures from magazines, and she tapes the pictures to everything. The preacher arrives wearing a coat and a tie. Winn-Dixie stands in the middle and wags his tail. When Amanda arrives, her hair is curled and she doesn't look as mean as usual—she looks shy. Opal is glad to see her and wants to mention that she knows about Carson and losing people, but instead, Opal is just extra nice. When Opal hears Gertrude shrieking, she goes to the front of the house and finds Otis with his guitar and a huge jar of pickles. She assures him that there aren't many people and gently leads him to the yard.

CHAPTER 22

Before Otis can run away, Opal introduces him to the preacher. The preacher puts out a hand to shake. Otis tries to figure out what to do with his big jar of pickles. He puts it on the ground, but when he leans forward, the guitar slides forward and bonks him in the head. Sweetie Pie laughs, but Otis wipes his hand and shakes the preacher's hand. Opal introduces Otis to the other guests and Gloria last. Gloria asks when Dunlap and Stevie are arriving. Opal doesn't know, but she privately suspects that they won't come to a party at a witch's house. Gloria says that regardless, they have food, punch, dog pictures, **Littmus Lozenges**, and the preacher to bless the party.

The preacher clears his throat and thanks God for friends, and the "complicated and wonderful gifts" that friends are. Everyone says "amen," and Sweetie Pie asks if they can eat. They hear thunder in the distance. Gloria says that it wasn't supposed to rain as Miss Franny frets over the possibility of her silk dress getting wet. Just as Amanda suggests they go inside, it starts to pour.

Even something as objectively beautiful and positive as the party decorations are, for Opal, colored by Mama's absence. In this moment, Opal becomes hyperaware of the fact that everything good in her life doesn't seem as good, simply because she is, for all intents and purposes, motherless. Focusing on being motherless, however, means that Opal doesn't give a lot of thought to Gloria's mentorship and their friendship—something that is similar to a mother-daughter relationship in itself.



Seeing everyone converge helps Opal to refocus her attention on all the good things she has in her life. She has a fantastic dog, a loving if closed-off father, and lots of friends who are more than willing to get together and celebrate for the fun of it. Now, she also has the understanding that even someone like Amanda is someone she should take seriously and treat compassionately, which opens up the possibility of Opal and Amanda becoming genuine friends in the weeks to come. Otis's decision to come to the party speaks to his affection for Opal, since this seems like a social situation he's not entirely comfortable with.



Opal hasn't abandoned all of her prejudice; Stevie and Dunlap are, in her opinion, unimportant to the party and still not worth considering. Gloria's choice to turn everyone's attention to the food, the friends, and Sweetie Pie's dog pictures shows that she truly embraces the idea that one should focus on the good things in life.



It's telling that the preacher describes friends as "complicated and wonderful gifts." It suggests that he understands how difficult it can be to make friends, but also that he recognizes the richness they add to one's life—and therefore, cultivating them and throwing parties like this are extremely important.



CHAPTER 23

Gloria yells at Opal to save the sandwiches and the punch. Opal and the preacher grab the food while Sweetie Pie rescues her dog pictures. Amanda helps Miss Franny into the house, and Opal goes back out to help Gloria. Opal looks around at the soggy decorations and notices that Otis is still standing in the rain with his jar of pickles. She yells for him to come in the house. Inside, Amanda and Miss Franny laugh. When Gertrude squawks “dog,” Opal freezes: she forgot about Winn-Dixie and protecting him from the thunder. The preacher assures Opal that he’s probably hiding under a chair in the yard. Opal races into the yard and looks everywhere. She feels like crying. She knows this is her fault, since she forgot to hold onto him.

The preacher calls for Opal. Opal turns around and sees that the preacher and Gloria are with Dunlap and Stevie. Opal refuses to greet the boys, but Gloria makes her come onto the porch and tell the boys what’s going on. Dutifully, Opal thanks Stevie and Dunlap for coming but says that she needs to go find Winn-Dixie. Dunlap offers to help, but Opal shakes her head and tries not to cry. Gloria calls Opal close and whispers that it’s impossible to hold onto something that wants to leave. People can only love what they have while they have it. With that, she sends Opal off into the rain. The last thing Opal sees is Dunlap on Gloria’s porch. The sight makes her sad. Dunlap raises a hand to wave, but Opal doesn’t wave back.

CHAPTER 24

Opal and the preacher call for Winn-Dixie. The rain makes it easy to cry, so Opal sobs the entire time. They walk through the downtown and out to the Friendly Corners Trailer Park, and then to the Open Arms Baptist Church of Naomi. They even head out to the highway. Opal worries that a car hit Winn-Dixie, but the preacher insists that they can’t worry about what may have happened. As they look, Opal mentally compiles a list of 10 things she knows about Winn-Dixie. She thinks she could write them on posters to help people find him. First, Winn-Dixie has a pathological fear of thunderstorms. He likes to smile and run fast, and he snores. He can catch mice gently. He likes to meet people and eat peanut butter, and he can’t be left alone. He likes to sit on furniture and doesn’t mind going to church.

Because the storm is such a surprise, Opal turns toward who and what she cares about most in this moment: preserving the party elements and helping the people she loves most. Not thinking about Winn-Dixie is entirely forgivable given the circumstances—so Opal’s insistence that this is her fault reflects her belief that when people leave or disappear from her life, it’s because she did something wrong. In other words, this may be about Mama as much as it is about Winn-Dixie.



Gloria makes Opal understand that even though she has every right to be upset, that’s no excuse to be rude and shut out potential friends. Her whispered advice, meanwhile, may apply more to Mama than it does to Winn-Dixie—Winn-Dixie ran out of sheer terror, not necessarily because he wanted to leave. Mama, however, did want to leave—there’s probably nothing Opal could’ve done to keep her from doing so, even if she’d been older and more aware of what was going on.



Compiling the mental list of things about Winn-Dixie is a way for Opal to memorialize her best friend. Telling this story to herself helps her to fuel her love for him and keep their relationship alive, even if Winn-Dixie might not come back for one reason or another. In essence, this is a way for Opal to brace herself for a loss that she believes is imminent. However, even though Winn-Dixie’s possible loss is traumatic, it’s still important to recognize that loss is a part of life—and coming up with lists like this won’t make Winn-Dixie any less lost.



As Opal goes over the list and memorizes it like she memorized the one about Mama, she thinks that if they don't find Winn-Dixie, at least she'll have the list to remember him by. She also starts to think that a list can't really describe the real Winn-Dixie—or Mama. That thought makes Opal cry even more. Finally, the preacher says they have to give up. Opal is indignant and upset. She accuses the preacher of always giving up and withdrawing. She suggests that he never looked for Mama either, and that he let her go. The preacher says he couldn't stop Mama from leaving, and he starts to cry. He says he loves Winn-Dixie too and is just as upset that he's missing.

Opal goes to the preacher, hugs him, and tells him it'll be okay. When the preacher stops crying, Opal asks if he thinks Mama will ever come back. The preacher says he's been praying she will for years, but he doesn't think she will. Opal repeats Gloria's advice that they can't hold on to anything; they can only love people while they're around. The preacher says that Gloria is right. Opal announces that she's not ready to let Winn-Dixie go. The preacher says they'll keep looking, but he realizes he forgot to mention the one important thing that Mama *did* leave behind: Opal. Opal tells the preacher that she's glad they have each other. They walk back into town holding hands, calling for Winn-Dixie.

CHAPTER 25

Opal and the preacher hear guitar music, singing, and clapping a block away from Gloria's house. When they enter Gloria's kitchen, they see Otis playing his guitar while everyone else claps and sings. Opal can't believe that they're so happy when Winn-Dixie is gone. She shouts that they didn't find Winn-Dixie. Otis stops playing and Gloria says that he's been in her house all along. She pokes her cane under her chair and Winn-Dixie stands up. Opal runs to him and hugs him as he smiles and sneezes. Gloria says that they were all sitting around, waiting for Opal to get back. She convinced Stevie and Dunlap that she wasn't a witch, and then Otis agreed to play his guitar. Otis and Gloria smile at each other.

Finally, Opal realizes that storytelling has its limits: these lists are no way for her to truly describe either her mother or Winn-Dixie. This forces her to accept that she doesn't actually know Mama, no matter how hard she clings to what the preacher told her. In turn, this makes her even angrier with the preacher for his possible role in Mama's departure. In her mind, the preacher just gives up when the going gets tough—he's not the sort to try and weather through the hard times.



Finally admitting that Mama is gone and not coming back allows Opal and the preacher to make room in their hearts for each other. This experience essentially gives them closure and forces them to refocus their attentions on the people they do have in their lives. The preacher's choice to make it clear that Mama's leaving Opal behind was fortunate for him offers hope that going forward, he's going to try harder to be there for his daughter and make her feel loved, seen, and respected in their family.



To Opal, it's unthinkable that all her friends aren't mourning Winn-Dixie. In her mind, the loss is great enough that the entire world should stop and take notice. Though this is understandable and somewhat moot, given that Winn-Dixie isn't lost after all, Gloria still makes the case that it's important to focus on friends, happiness, and music in sad times like these. It's impossible and foolish, she suggests, to put off making friends and connecting to others just because one individual is missing.



Gloria says that she and Franny talked about the songs they knew from childhood. They got Otis to play them, since he can pick up any tune if someone hums it. They taught the words to Stevie, Dunlap, Amanda, and Sweetie Pie—and then they heard a sneeze. Otis found Winn-Dixie hiding under Gloria’s bed. The dog sneezed whenever Otis played the guitar. Otis managed to coax Winn-Dixie out by playing, and once the storm stopped, Winn-Dixie fell asleep under Gloria’s chair. Opal thanks everyone. Gloria says they didn’t do anything; they just all became friends while Opal and the preacher were out. She turns everyone’s attention to the food and the party. The preacher asks if Otis knows any hymns, and Otis plays a tune that the preacher hums. Opal looks around at all her friends and feels her heart swell. She slips outside.

It’s especially meaningful that the group found Winn-Dixie’s hiding spot because they chose to focus on the happiness and their growing community rather than wallow. While it’s likely that they would’ve found Winn-Dixie eventually either way, the manner in which they found him impresses upon Opal that it’s always a good thing to look on the bright side. Importantly, Gloria insists that they all became friends in Opal’s absence, another indicator that making one friend—in this case, Opal—opens people up to becoming friends with many others.



CHAPTER 26

The night sky is clear as Opal walks to the back of Gloria’s yard to look at the **mistake tree**. As she stares up at the bottles, Opal addresses Mama. She tells Mama that she knows 10 things about her, but that won’t be enough. Opal says she knows that Daddy will talk more about Mama now. Even though Opal misses Mama, her heart doesn’t feel empty anymore. Her heart is full. Opal promises to keep thinking about Mama, but she says she probably won’t think about her as much as she did this summer. When Opal is finished, she remembers the **wait-and-see tree** that Gloria helped her plant. Opal finds it and is shocked by how much it grew. It’s still small, but the branches feel strong.

Now that Opal feels more secure in her relationship with the preacher, she feels as though she can let Mama’s ghost go and focus on both her family and her new friends. It’s also significant that Opal calls the preacher “Daddy” here. This suggests that after speaking openly and honestly with him, Opal is able to think of him as her father and a real person, not just a preacher. Revisiting her wait-and-see tree and noticing how much it grew symbolizes Opal’s own growth over the novel. She’s still a kid, but she’s much stronger and more mature than she was a few months ago.



As Opal inspects her tree, Dunlap interrupts and asks if she’s praying. Opal says she’s thinking and apologizes for calling Dunlap and Stevie bald-headed babies. Dunlap says it’s okay and admits that he never thought Gloria was a witch; he was just teasing Opal. Dunlap surprises Opal by offering her a hand to help her up. They race back to the house, and Opal wins. From the porch, Amanda warns that it’s dangerous to run in the dark. Both Dunlap and Opal say, “Aw, Amanda,” but then Opal thinks of Carson and takes Amanda’s hand.

Given everything else that Opal has learned in the last few weeks, it now seems only right to her that she should do what the preacher asked and apologize to Dunlap. And her difficult choice pays off—his willingness to race and their shared scorn for Amanda’s warning suggests that Gloria was right: Dunlap is friend material. However, this doesn’t mean that Amanda isn’t—she still deserves compassion and kindness, something that Opal now recognizes.



Inside, the preacher smiles and says he’ll teach them all some songs. Miss Franny passes Opal the bowl of **Littmus Lozenges** and Opal eats one. She turns down Otis’s proffered pickle. Winn-Dixie leans into Opal, who leans into the preacher. Amanda doesn’t look mean at all. Opal focuses on the taste of her sweet and sad Littmus Lozenge and pays close attention to the song so she can learn it.

Now that Opal is free from worrying about Mama all the time, she can focus on the many good parts of her life and help others do the same. This doesn’t mean that Opal won’t still miss Mama or that the trauma of her abandonment wasn’t real. Instead, it means that Opal now has a healthier way of thinking about that experience, and about life in general.





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