

Minnesota Discussion Questions

For All Ages

Opal judges some of the characters in the book, such as the Dewberry brothers, Otis, and Amanda Wilkinson, quickly only to change her opinions once she gets to know them. Have you ever judged someone too quickly and then later changed your opinion? What made you change your mind?

A stereotypical character is a character that has traits you may recognize from characters in other books, such as a lonely little girl and a preoccupied father. Do you see other stereotypes in the book? Do stereotypes prevent us from seeing people for who they really are?

In Chapter 15, the librarian, Miss Franny, suggests *Gone with The Wind* to Opal as a "wonderful story about the Civil War." *Gone with the Wind* was written in 1936 and contains racist ideas that were popular at the time. How does race play a role in Miss Franny's recommendation of *Gone with the Wind* as 'wonderful'? How does our identity influence what stories we think are wonderful?

Gloria Dump has a bottle tree, an African American tradition that dates back to Africa. What do you know about this tradition and the meaning behind them? See <https://smithsoniangardens.wordpress.com/2013/02/28/the-american-bottle-tree/> for more information.

For Teens and Adults

Are there social and/or cultural values that *Because of Winn-Dixie* reinforces or challenges? Are they explicitly defined or just implied?

Miss Franny's family fought for the South in the Civil War. Opal says that war was about slavery, and Miss Franny says "Slavery, yes," and "It was also about states' rights and money" (p. 101). Does this agree with what you know about the Civil War? What do you think the cause of the Civil War was? Why might Miss Franny want to believe something different?

This book raises issues around the history of the South and the Civil War, including award-winning *Gone with the Wind*. Where do you see nostalgia in *Because of Winn-Dixie*? How might reading classic texts like *Gone with the Wind* impact our understanding of history?

Discuss the statements below and their relation to the book. What insights have you gotten through discussing this book?

- Books can mean different things to different readers; there is no single meaning in a book. A book can be interpreted differently than how the author intends.
- Books can have a profound effect on readers' lives, presenting them with ideas that impact their lives deeply.
- Books can offer more than just the surface intention. Readers can gain understanding from seeing more than what they saw the first time they encounter a book; thinking carefully about a book does not ruin it.