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Because of Winn Dixie

by Kate DiCamillo

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SUMMARY

Ten-year-old India Opal Buloni has just moved to Naomi, Florida. Her mom has left their family, her father's been hiding in his old "turtle shell," and all she wants is a friend. And that's when she meets Winn-Dixie, a stray dog she rescues at the local grocery store. Having Winn-Dixie for a dog is great. She starts to meet people in town, her father starts poking out of his shell, and India Opal begins to understand why her mother may have left. All this happens because of Winn-Dixie.

3rd grade and up



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

It's the pipe dream of many an aspiring author: publish your debut novel, claim a spot on The NEW YORK TIMES bestseller list, and rack up an astonishing array of awards, including a Newbery Honor, the Oscar of children's books. For Kate DiCamillo, author of the runaway charmer **BECAUSE OF WINN-DIXIE**, it was a dream come true, and nobody could have been more surprised than she was. "After the Newbery committee called me, I spent the whole day walking into walls. Literally," she says. "I was stunned. And very, very happy."



Kate DiCamillo was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, but moved to Florida when she was five years old on the advice of a doctor who suggested that a warmer climate would help soothe her chronic pneumonia. "People talked more slowly and said words I had never heard before, like 'ain't' and 'y'all' and 'ma'am,'" she recalls of her first impressions. "The town was small, and everybody knew everybody else. Even if they didn't, they acted like they did. It was all so different from what I had known before, and I fell swiftly and madly in love."

Indeed, it was homesickness for Florida's warmth that helped inspire **BECAUSE OF WINN-DIXIE**, which Kate DiCamillo describes as "a hymn of praise to dogs, friendship, and the South." The author was experiencing one of the worst winters in Minnesota, where she had moved when she was in her twenties. "I was missing the sound of Southern people talking," she says. "And I was missing having a dog. One night before I went to sleep, I heard this little girl's voice with a Southern accent say, 'I have a dog named Winn-Dixie.' I just started writing down what India Opal Buloni was telling me."

Until recently, Kate DiCamillo faithfully set her alarm clock for 4:00 A.M. to put in some writing time before heading off to work at a store

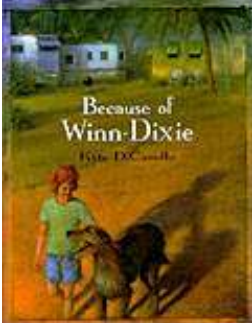
selling used children's books. While she now is able to devote her time to writing--and so can wake at a more reasonable hour--her regimen remains as disciplined as ever: two pages a day, five days a week.

"E. B. White said, 'All that I hope to say in books, all that I ever hope to say, is that I love the world,'" Kate DiCamillo says about her passion for writing. "That's the way I feel too."

Courtesy: <http://www.kidsreads.com/authors/au-dicamillo-kate.asp>



BOOK REVIEWS



The summer that 10-year-old India Opal and her preacher father move to tiny Naomi, Florida, is one of the loneliest ones Opal has had yet. She doesn't know anyone in town, and it seems like the local kids who attend her father's church aren't interested in knowing her, either.

But all that changes when Opal is sent to the nearby Winn-Dixie grocery store. As she tells it: "...my daddy, the preacher, sent me to the store for a box of macaroni-and-cheese, some white rice and two tomatoes and I came back with a dog."

At the Winn-Dixie, Opal sees a big, ugly dog making a ruckus. When the manager threatens to call the pound to take the mutt away, Opal fibs and says the pooch belongs to her. The dog, now named Winn-Dixie, loves the idea and is thrilled when Opal takes him home.

Winn-Dixie soon becomes part of the family, and Opal's best friend. She tells him everything, especially about how much she misses her mama, who left Opal and the preacher when Opal was three. Besides being a great listener, Winn-Dixie has a knack for making friends all over town, too. Before long, Opal's days --- and her heart --- begin to fill up with all the special (and unusual) people in her life. You won't want to miss this tender story about a girl and the dog that changed her world.

Shannon Maughan

Executive Editor

<http://www.kidsreads.com/reviews/0763625582.asp>



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Warning! Some of the questions contain key elements of the plot. Do not read if you don't want to know what happens!

1. What brings India Opal and her father to Naomi?
2. Describe Winn-Dixie. What is it about him that makes him appealing to India Opal?
3. How does India Opal's father react to Winn-Dixie? How does she convince him to let the dog stay?
4. What are the ten things about India Opal's mother that her father tells her. Connect these ten things to the rest of the story. (For example, #3 She liked to plant things. - India Opal plants a tree with Gloria Dump).
5. Gloria Dump says that the most important thing in life is "different for everyone . . . You find out on your own. But in the meantime, you got to remember, you can't always judge people by the things they done. You got to judge them by what they are doing now." (96). What do you think this means? What does this mean to you?
6. Why is Gloria Dump so important to India Opal?
7. Who were some of your favorite characters in town? Describe them.
8. How does a Littmus Lozenge work? Would you want to try one? Why or why not?
9. What happens at the party to bring India Opal and her father together? What do you predict for their relationship in the future?
10. What does the title mean to you?

Katie O'Dell Multnomah Public Library in Portland, Oregon
www.multcolib.org/kids



AUTHOR INTERVIEW

Teenreads: Where did the idea for BECAUSE OF WINN-DIXIE come from?

Kate DiCamillo: I think it came from longing: longing for home and longing for a dog. I wrote the story during the worst winter on record in Minnesota (brrrrr!) when I was missing Florida (where I grew up); also, my apartment building does not allow dogs. But imaginary dogs aren't against the rules. So I made one up to keep me (and Opal) company.

Teenreads: When did you decide that you wanted to write/illustrate children's books?

Kate DiCamillo: I've always wanted to write and to tell stories; but I didn't start working on children's books until I got a job at a book warehouse on the children's floor. When I started reading some of the books, I was so impressed and moved that I decided I wanted to try it, too.

Teenreads: Have you had formal writing training?

Kate DiCamillo: I have a Bachelor's of Art in English, which means I had a lot of formal training in READING. But all that reading has served me well as a writer, I think.

Teenreads: How do you support yourself (are you writing full-time?)

Kate DiCamillo: I work full-time in a used bookstore.

Teenreads: What's a typical day like for you?

Kate DiCamillo: I get up. I drink a cup of coffee. I think, ""the last thing I want to do is write,"" then I go to the computer and write. My goal is two pages a day, five days a week. I like that Dorothy Parker quote: ""I hate writing, I love having written."" I never want to write, but I'm always glad that I have done it. After I write, I go to work at the bookstore.

Teenreads: And what would be your ideal arrangement?

Kate DiCamillo: Ideally, I'd like to work part time at the bookstore.

That would give me more time to contend with all the ""office work"" of writing: answering mail, returning phone calls, submitting manuscripts, going to the post office, etc.

Teenreads: Whose work has influenced you?

Kate DiCamillo: As an adult reading children's books, I have been deeply influenced by Katherine Paterson, Karen Hesse and Patricia MacLachlan.

Teenreads: What was your favorite book(s) as a kid?

Kate DiCamillo: I read everything I could get my hands on when I was a kid. And I loved it all. Some favorites were: THE TWENTY-ONE BALLOONS, THE SECRET GARDEN, THE YEARLING, RIBSY and a strange little book called SOMEBODY ELSE'S SHOES.

Teenreads: Were there books you loved as a child that continue to be important to you as either models or inspiration for the work you do now?

Kate DiCamillo: Every well-written book is a light for me. When you write, you use other writers and their books as guides in the wilderness. I am deeply appreciative of all those writers who work hard to tell their stories right and true, thereby showing me the way to tell my own stories.

Teenreads: What has been the biggest thrill about having your first children's book published?

Kate DiCamillo: Hands down, the biggest thrill is to get a letter from a kid saying, "I loved your book. Will you write me another one?"

Shannon Maughan at <http://www.teenreads.com/authors/au-dicamillo-kate.asp>



If you liked *Because of Winn-Dixie*
by Kate DiCamillo,
you might like the following books, too!

Love that Dog by Sharon Creech

Love you, soldier by Amy Hest

Double act by Jacqueline Wilson

Next-door neighbors by Sarah Ellis

Crossing the Starlight Bridge by Alice Mead

Buttermilk Hill by Ruth White

The Silent boy by Lois Lowry

Praying at the Sweetwater Motel by April Fritz

Prairie summer by Bonnie Geisert

Bread winner by Arvella Whitmore

The dog with golden eyes by Wilbur, Frances

Blue eyes better by Ruth Wallace-Brodeur

The boy who loved alligators by Barbara Kennedy

Captain's command by Anna Myers

Preacher's boy by Katherine Paterson

Websites

Learn more about Kate DiCamillo

<http://www.katedicamillo.com/>

http://www.mce.k12tn.net/dogs/dixie/because_of_winn_dixie.htm

Because of Winn– Dixie: The Movie

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0317132/>