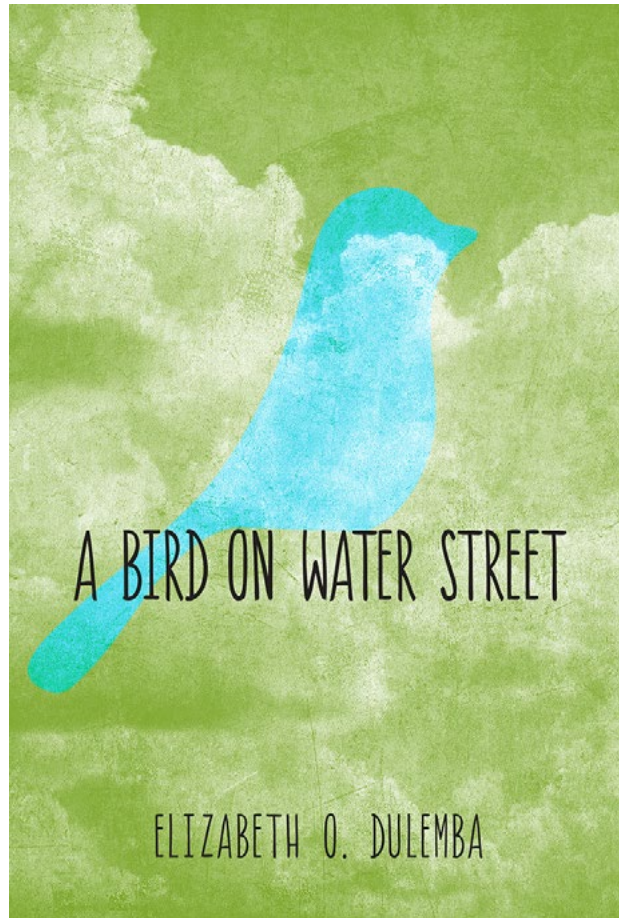


 **Little Pickle Press**



**Discussion Points for Teachers**  
**Grade 4 – 8**

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# Common Core State Standards Alignment

The *A Bird on Water Street* discussion points help teachers build student mastery of the Common Core State Standards<sup>1</sup> across grade levels. These discussion points are particularly relevant for development of the following standards for English Language Arts in Reading: Literature, in the strands of *Key Ideas and Details* and *Craft and Structure*:

## GRADE 4

### KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS:

**RL.4.1:** Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

**RL.4.2:** Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.

**RL.4.3:** Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).

### CRAFT AND STRUCTURE:

**RL.4.4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including those that allude to significant characters found in mythology (e.g., Herculean).

**RL.4.5:** Explain major differences between poems, drama, and prose, and refer to the structural elements of poems (e.g., verse, rhythm, meter) and drama (e.g., casts of characters, settings, descriptions, dialogue, stage directions) when writing or speaking about a text.

**RL.4.6:** Compare and contrast the point of view from which different stories are narrated, including the difference between first- and third-person narrations.

## GRADE 5

### KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS:

**RL.5.1:** Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

**RL.5.2:** Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

**RL.5.3:** Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

### CRAFT AND STRUCTURE:

**RL.5.4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes.

**RL.5.5:** Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, or stanzas fits together to provide the overall structure of a particular story, drama, or poem.

**RL.5.6:** Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.

<sup>1</sup>Full text of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts available at:

<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/>



## GRADE 6

### KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS:

**RL.6.1:** Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

**RL.6.2:** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

**RL.6.3:** Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

### CRAFT AND STRUCTURE:

**RL.6.4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

**RL.6.5:** Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.

**RL.6.6:** Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.

## GRADE 7

### KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS:

**RL.7.1:** Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

**RL.7.2:** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

**RL.7.3:** Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot).

### CRAFT AND STRUCTURE:

**RL.7.4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including

figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of rhymes and other repetitions of sounds (e.g., alliteration) on a specific verse or stanza of a poem or section of a story or drama.

**RL.7.5:** Analyze how a drama's or poem's form or structure (e.g., soliloquy, sonnet) contributes to its meaning.

**RL.7.6:** Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text.

## GRADE 8

### KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS:

**RL.8.1:** Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

**RL.8.2:** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.

**RL.8.3:** Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

### CRAFT AND STRUCTURE:

**RL.8.4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

**RL.8.5:** Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.

**RL.8.6:** Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.



# Discussion Points around Interdisciplinary Connections

*A Bird on Water Street* provides a wealth of opportunities for building connections across the curriculum. Several relevant disciplines and their topical connections are included here.

## **SCIENCE**

- Geology and Earth Science
- Mining and its Effect on the Regional Landscape
- Ecosystems and Interdependence
- Plant and Animal Life Cycles
- Flooding and Erosion

## **SOCIAL STUDIES**

- Relationships Between Mining and Local Community and Economy
- Union Labor and Strikes
- Capitalism

## **GEOGRAPHY**

- Regional Landscapes and Suitability for Mining and Farming

## **HISTORY**

- United States Context in the Mid-1980's
- NASA and the Challenger Tragedy







# Discussion Points around Central Themes

A collection of poignant social and cultural themes is woven throughout *A Bird on Water Street*. Each theme is rich with points of entry into discussion. Several of these themes, key questions around the themes, and accompanying relevant examples from the text (which you might choose to highlight for students in the course of the discussion) are described here.

## COMMUNITY

How do the words and actions of the characters highlight the cohesiveness of the community?

### Relevant examples from the text:

- The miners stand together like Jack's baseball team.
- Store patrons chip in to help Mr. Ledford purchase groceries.
- Economically advantaged families help sandbag the homes of their less fortunate neighbors.
- Jack and Piran work to return items lost in the flood to their original owners.
- "We were one big family."

## COMPASSION AND EMPATHY

How is Jack's growing compassion and empathy for all living things (e.g. humans, animals, plants) reflected in his thoughts and actions toward others?

### Relevant examples from the text:

- Sonny Rust
- Mr. and Mrs. Ledford
- Will McCaffrey's father
- Crazy Coote
- A poisonous copperhead snake
- Plants, frogs, and birds

## ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND STEWARDSHIP

How do Jack's feelings of ownership, empowerment, and the ability to cultivate life reflect his passion for protecting and enhancing the environment?

### Relevant examples from the text:

- "Each one a small treasure waiting to transform into somethin' grand."
- "They were beautiful, like living sculptures."
- "I smiled at the idea that I could bring things to life like that."
- "Mom's" garden becomes "Jack's" garden ("I think it has a better chance with you").
- "Knowing that what I did might make the difference between living and dying."
- "It needed us."
- "A forest was an amazing thing."
- "First come plants, then come bugs, and then come the critters who eat the bugs."



## INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

How does the author use subtle dialogue and description of gestures, expressions, emotions, and interactions to convey the evolving nature of interpersonal relationships between characters?

### Relevant examples from the text:

- Jack's growing desire to see Hannah is accompanied by frustration and disillusionment about her relationship with Eli.
- Jack's friends taunt him about Hannah; "She's out of your league."
- Jack considers his parents' relationship; "If anybody could get his mind off the mine, it was her."
- Mom's consideration of a job brings an unspoken tension to her relationship with Dad.
- As the job circumstances become more promising, Mom and Dad's relationship regains a sense of warmth and security; "Dad had his arm around Mom."
- Jack notices a ring on Miss Post's finger.
- Jack observes that males shake hands while females offer hugs.
- The boys notice the girls' giggling as signs of a crush.

## HOPE AND RENEWAL

What messages do Jack's words, actions, and emotions convey about his beliefs in hope for the future and renewal of the Coppertown livelihood?

### Relevant examples from the text:

- Jack's sketch for Grandpa depicts Coppertown full of life, as it once was and as he envisions it will be in the future.
- To Jack, the possibility of becoming a forest ranger who protects life "sounded like heaven."
- Jack's newly planted seedlings "looked a little bit like hope."
- "I'm gonna bring nature back."
- "The air buzzed with promise."
- "I will make things better."
- The tree planting flyer represents hope for renewed life in Coppertown (i.e. Jack "waved that flyer above [his] head like a victory flag").

In addition to the themes mentioned above, you might choose to discuss additional themes that surface in the text, including: **Friendship, Values, Change, Adolescence, Loyalty**. Students might also determine themes that they find personally relevant and offer those ideas for discussion as well.





# Discussion Points around Literary Devices

Throughout *A Bird on Water Street*, the author implements a variety of literary devices to enrich the narrative. Each literary device provides an avenue for substantive discussion. A collection of these literary devices, key questions to help illustrate the use of these devices, and accompanying relevant examples from the text (which you might choose to highlight for students in the course of the discussion) are detailed here.

## CHARACTER COMPARISONS

- What parallels can you draw between Eli and Buster (e.g. both act impulsively, both sometimes make questionable decisions)?
- How might you compare and contrast Jack and Eli (e.g. both seek Hannah's affection, both are engaged in a process of cultivation, each one has very different motives in these parallel actions)?
- What parallels can you draw between Jack and Little Man (i.e. both symbolize hope for the future; "There's a lot counting on you Little Man")?

## JUXTAPOSITION

How does the author present characters, events, and values in tandem as a tool to highlight their parallels and disparities?

### Relevant examples from the text:

- The values and interests of the family men (underground, dark spaces) versus Jack's interests (being above ground, surrounded by light, life, and trees)
- Jack's joy about his cast removal versus the malaise of being in the same place where his uncle died
- The movement of life (birds, leaves, squirrels, bugs) versus the stillness of Coppertown
- Dad's range of emotions upon hearing that the mine would be closed permanently: Defeat (i.e. "Well, that's it then") versus

Resolve (i.e. "His eyes were clearer than I'd seen them in months")

- Dad's praise for Jack because he displays the qualities of a miner versus the constraint Jack feels upon receiving this praise

## METAPHOR

How does the author use metaphor to illustrate setting and plot, as well as to build understanding of characters and their emotions?

### Relevant examples from the text:

- "the horizon ... looked like a wrinkled paper bag"
- "the train ... looked like an enormous iron monster with a front grill full of metal teeth"
- "like a great tangle of snakes"
- "like a deflating balloon shrinking into itself"
- "paced back and forth ... like a mad bull"
- "like an out-of-focus slide show"
- "heavy as cement"

## PARADOX

How does the author incorporate paradoxical elements and events to convey particular ideas throughout the story?

### Relevant examples from the text:

- Jack dreams of Dad no longer having to work in the mine, but losing this job would create negative economic consequences.





- The Company historically represented a source of income and livelihood for Coppertown, yet also took so much life away from the town.
- Shutting down the mine enables the possibility of new life.
- As Jack grows, Dad shrinks and Mom looks small and fragile.
- Jack's garden flourishes but the local land and economy begin to dry up.
- Jack's excitement about Dad potentially being hired at the carpet mill might also mean moving away from Coppertown.

## POIGNANT QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS TO PROMOTE REFLECTION

How and why does the author include poignant or nebulous questions and statements, through the voice of the narrator, to promote further reflection by the reader?

### Relevant examples from the text:

- "But life is like that sometimes."
- "Could our entire life fit into one truck like that?"
- "Dreamin' was free!"
- "Our town got under people's skin."
- "I knew my heart was someplace else."
- "Why did grown-ups always say, 'It's not that bad' when something was as bad as it could possibly be?"
- "Without smiles, everybody looked tired and old."
- "When did it all get so worn?"

## SPECIFIC WORD CHOICE

- How does the author's word choice reflect an irony in the status of community members (i.e. The Rust family controls the jobs at the copper mine upon which the town depends)?
- How does the author use language to depict physical emotion (i.e. "My heart dropped to my feet")?
- How does the author use words to paint a picture in the reader's mind (i.e. "peanut butter colored water")?
- How does the author use specific phrases to capture characters' emotions (i.e. "Time slowed and I ...")?

## SUBTLE DESCRIPTION TO INVITE INFERENCE

- What inferences might be made about Jack's relationship with Dad from the statement, "I never saw my dad look at me the way he did right then – it made me stand a little taller"?
- How do earlier story elements (e.g. seedlings, light bulbs) coalesce with later elements (e.g. observations made during the blackberry picking adventure, headlines in the newspaper) to invite inference about what Eli may be up to?
- How does the author invite inference making through a series of seemingly unconnected events (e.g. the phone rings, Mom smiles happily, Mom provides Jack with unexpected money for the movies, many other kids attend the movies as well)?



## SUSPENSE

How does the author use language, questions, subtle description, and sequence of events to build curiosity and suspense?

### Relevant examples from the text:

- Event Sequence: Company siren, running to the mine and subsequently the hospital, waiting endlessly with Aunt Catherine, wanting to wait even longer to delay bad news.
  - Event Sequence: Watching mine workers receive uncertain envelopes at the end of the day, waiting endlessly for Dad until he surfaces with the last shift out of the mine
  - Questions: "What do you suppose he'd need with that many light bulbs?"
  - Language: "The closer I got, the more I could hear somethin' was going on."
  - Subtle Description: General uneasiness about Eli Munroe, uncertainty about his fancy jeep and his comings and goings, Eli's references to unknown "crop," discovery of local marijuana fields.
  - Language and Subtle Description: New tire tracks leading to Tailings Pond, the gate to the pond had been opened for the first time in years; "I knew something was different."
- The cold, quiet stillness following the ice storm reflects an absence of life.
  - The warm fire that Jack's family builds together represents nourishment and togetherness.
  - The bird egg appears during one of Jack's most difficult moments, perhaps as a symbol of protection or hope.
  - Fairy Crosses once symbolized a sad event and have now become a source of hope and optimism.
  - The sparrow's sweet chirping is reminiscent of Mom's sweet voice; the sparrow is also Mom's favorite bird.
  - The sparrow symbolizes renewed life in the town, and chooses Jack's tree to build a nest, a symbol that Jack's family will also be able to remain in their "nest."

## SYMBOLISM

How does the author use symbolism to highlight relationships among characters, setting, ideas, and events throughout the story?

### Relevant examples from the text:

- The location of each family's home on the hill is a reflection of elevated or lessened economic status.
- The storm outside parallels the "storm" taking place in Piran's family.

## VARIATION IN STRUCTURE AND TONE

- How does the author vary the length of the chapters to produce a specific effect?
- How does the author modify sentence length to make a specific point (i.e. "Married.")?
- How does the author use descriptions of the landscape to set a specific tone throughout the book?
- How does the transition from several chapters of harsh conditions (Flood, Ice Storm) to several chapters about new life (Seeds, Frog Eggs, Garden) reflect a change in the tone of the story?





# Little Pickle Press Resources

This concludes our lesson plan for *A Bird On Water Street*. If you have comments, questions, or other ideas please share them with us at the special blog link we have created: <http://bit.ly/1etCbEF>

Additional lesson plans are available for other titles in our collection, so please check the resource link at our webpage often: <http://bit.ly/NuUaEC>

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