

Literature Circle Questions

Use these questions and the activities that follow to get more out of the experience of reading *Each Little Bird That Sings* by Deborah Wiles.

1. When Uncle Edisto died, everybody cried before adjusting and carrying on with their jobs. List the types of activities that the family does when death comes calling.
2. In Chapter 19, what does Declaration do to try to upset Peach when they are walking to the cemetery for Aunt Florentine's graveside service? What is the result of Declaration succeeding in upsetting Peach?
3. At the end of Chapter 26, Declaration writes a letter asking Comfort's permission to attend the life service for Dismay. Comfort responds with a note that says, "Do not come." Why did Comfort not want Declaration to attend?
4. What does Comfort mean when she tells Declaration, "You just need to go to more funerals... You get used to death if you live around it long enough" (p. 43)?
5. Comfort prefers to conduct her thinking in her closet. On page 71–72, the author describes to the reader what Comfort's closet, or thinking area, looks like. Illustrate how her closet is organized. Compare Comfort's thinking area with the place where you like to do your best thinking. How are the areas the same? How are they different? How did you discover your thinking area?
6. Although it is unusual for a funeral home to conduct a life service for an animal, why do the Snowbergers and the community hold a "Life" service for Dismay, the dog?
7. What approach would you use to help Peach in become more accepting of death?
8. On page 188, Peach explains that he "ran down Purgatory Hill and into the oak grove" because he was scared of death. However, he says that now he is "not so scared." Why are Aunt Goldie and Comfort so surprised by Peach's statement about death?
9. What conclusion can you draw when Declaration finds the dog collar in the drainage ditch near Lake Tallyhoma?
10. Comfort seems to have a comfortable relationship with her family. Describe the relationship she has with one of her family members. How does that relationship influence her actions and decisions in the story?
11. When the Snowberger family finds Great Aunt Florentine in the flower garden, they all work together to make sure that the arrangements are completed correctly. Imagine that you find one of your family members dead in the

garden. What do you predict your response (and the response of your family) will be?

12. The Snowberger family seems to have unique names. The mother is Joy. The son is Tidings. The daughters are Comfort and Merry. Where do you think the family members got their names? What might be the name of the next Snowberger? Discuss your choice.
13. In explaining why Peach cries at funerals, Mama says, “We each do something to cope with our feelings when life feels overwhelming” (p. 63). Explain what you do to cope with life. Would it be better if you tried something different? Or are your coping skills successful for you? How do you think others perceive your choices?
14. Uncle Edisto seems to possess a wealth of knowledge and often provides words of advice and wisdom to various family members. On page 129, when Comfort and Declaration are in the middle of an argument, Comfort remembers that he has said, “A real friend sees past the trouble and into your heart.” What words of wisdom or saying(s) might you offer the girls to help them to resolve their differences? What is your opinion of Uncle Edisto’s advice? What advice have you often heard? Explain why you remember that advice.
15. Imagine that *Each Little Bird That Sings* was written in the third person, instead of the first. How would the change in narrative perspective affect the story? Do you think the novel would be more or less powerful? Support your opinions with examples from the book.

Note: These questions are keyed to Bloom’s Taxonomy as follows: Knowledge: 1 – 3; Comprehension: 4 – 5; Application: 6 – 7; Analysis: 8 – 10; Synthesis: 11 – 12; Evaluation: 13 – 15.

Activities

1. According to Comfort’s Rule Number Nine (pages 51–52), people should bring a covered dish to the funeral home. She describes the types of foods that are favorite dishes, as well as the dishes that people do not eat. Then she invites the reader to submit their recipes for her and Aunt Florentine’s forthcoming cookbook, *Fantastic (and Fun) Funeral Foods for Family and Friends*. Research and write down your favorite food recipe to include in the cookbook. With permission and assistance from your guardian, make the recipe to share with your classmates.
2. After Aunt Florentine has died, Comfort visits the graveyard to share her thoughts with Uncle Edisto. While she is there, she describes Uncle Edisto’s headstone as having a finger pointed upward with an inscription under the hand that reads, “*God’s finger touched him and he slept.*” Then she describes Aunt Florentine’s headstone as perfect for her since it has a granite telephone with an inscription that

reads, “*Jesus called her home.*” Ask your guardian to take you to a cemetery to look at the inscriptions and carvings on the headstones. While you are there, make rubbings or etchings of some of the epitaphs using plain white paper and a pencil or crayon. Challenge: Try to find the oldest headstone in the cemetery. When you get home, create your own headstone complete with a design and inscription that would represent your life up to this point (be sure to leave the death date open). *NOTE: If you are not able to visit a cemetery, create the perfect headstone for yourself.*

3. Comfort writes a Life Notice to be submitted to The Aurora County News each time a special person in her family dies (see page 11 for Uncle Edisto’s, page 20 for Aunt Florentine’s and page 217 for Dismay’s life notices). Additionally, on Deborah Wiles’s website, www.deborahwiles.com, Comfort Snowberger has written a Life Notice for the author; however, this Life Notice is different because it has been written while Ms. Wiles is still alive. After reading the various Life Notices that Comfort has written, including, if possible, the one for Ms. Wiles, select a person that you would like to interview about his or her life. Create a list of questions that will be important to ask him or her. Then conduct the interview (be sure to take notes or use a tape recorder so you can remember what he or she tells you), and write a Life Notice for that person.

Other Books by this Deborah Wiles

Novel: *Love, Ruby Lavender*

Picture books: *One Wide Sky: A Bedtime Lullaby*
Freedom Summer