Literature Circle Questions

Use these questions and activities that follow to get more out of the experience of reading *The Secret School* by Avi.

1. Why did Miss Fletcher stop teaching the school?
2. How did Ida change her appearance to transform into the teacher? What other changes does she make to step into her new role?
3. What does Tom want to be when he grows up? What device does he make and bring to school?
4. Why do the children decide they have to keep the school a secret?
5. How does Ida know that the Bixlers' have a "poor farm"? What does she see that tells her that? Compare it with the Kohls’ farm.
6. If you were Ida, would you be more worried about passing your exams or being the teacher? What are the consequences of failing at each one?
7. How does Ida make Herbert behave on her first day of teaching? How else could she have made him behave? Why doesn't she use the same method as Miss Fletcher?
8. Compare Herbert’s attitude towards Ida at the beginning and at the end of the book. What evidence can you find that his feelings have changed?
9. Why doesn't Ida go to recess when she first starts teaching? How might the students have behaved differently if she had gone to recess in the beginning?
10. What does Tom mean when he tells Ida "don't go forgetting who you are. It'll make it harder for you. And your friends"? Does Ida "forget" who she is?
11. How would the story be different if Ida's parents believed that girls didn't need an education? What if they had told her she couldn't go to high school next year?
12. If you had the same choice as Ida, would you have become the teacher? If you were a student there, would you have voted to keep the school open? Why or why not?
13. Who do you think learns more in the Secret School? Ida or her students? What extra lessons did she learn from becoming the teacher?
14. Do you think Ida eventually became a teacher? How do you think teaching the Secret School helped her make that decision? Do you think Herbert joined the Navy? How do you think going to the Secret School influenced Herbert’s decision?
Activities

1. Draw a scaled map of the town of Elk Valley, Colorado based on descriptions in the book. Include the school and the farms of the Bidsons’, the Kohls’ and the Bixlers’. Now take a survey of the students in your class and find out how far they travel to get to school. Make a scaled map of your town, with your school, and the houses of your classmates. Compare the two maps. Do you live closer to or farther from school than the children of the Secret School?

2. Imagine your local school board was having a "real quiet" meeting to decide whether or not to close your school. What would you do to get the word out? What methods are available to you today that the children of 1925 didn't have?

3. Would you like to go to a one-room school with mixed ages? Make a list of the advantages and disadvantages of such a school.