

Literature Circle Questions

Use these questions and the activities that follow to get more out of the experience of reading *Olive's Ocean* by Kevin Henkes.

1. When the book opens, what career choice is Martha's father facing? Why is Martha relieved by the choice he makes?
2. Why is Martha so fascinated by Olive Barstow, a girl she barely knows? Revisit chapter 3, and list at least three reasons why Martha feels a deep connection with Olive.
3. Why does Martha confide in her grandmother more than in her parents? What is it about Godbee that makes it so easy for Martha to talk to her?
4. After realizing that Jimmy has tricked her into liking him, how does Martha cope with her disappointment? What makes her feel better?
5. On her last night at her grandmother's house, Martha has a strange dream involving each member of her family and the Mannings (185). Does her dream give us some insight into Martha and her relationships? What do you think her dream means?
6. While Martha is filling her jar with ocean water for Olive, she falls into the ocean trying to escape the sight of Jimmy Manning. Explain how this event is an important one for her. How does this event affect the decisions she makes and her relationships with others? What might the ocean symbolize in this novel?
7. Would you enjoy being a member of the Boyle family? How would you feel about having a sister like Lucy or a brother like Vince? Can you relate to the way Martha feels toward each of her parents?
8. Were you surprised to learn that Tate Manning was the one who liked Martha? Did we have any clues about this early in the novel? How is Tate different from his brother Jimmy?
9. Godbee tells Martha, "You are brave. And you always were." How is Martha brave? Find several examples from the novel that demonstrate Martha's bravery. What are some other adjectives that you would use to describe Martha?
10. What do you think Martha has learned about friendship from her experiences with the Manning brothers, her conversations with Godbee, and her contact with Olive Barstow? After finishing the novel, what kind of person do YOU think would be the ideal friend for Martha? Imagine just such a person, and describe him or her.

11. What if Olive Barstow hadn't died? Do you think Olive and Martha would ever have grown to become friends like Olive hoped? What difference did seeing the page from Olive's journal make in Martha's life?
12. Predict how Martha's life will change after the end of the novel. Will she continue to grow closer to Godbee? Will she and Tate become better friends? Will she grow up to be a writer? Will she always remember Olive Barstow?
13. What do you think about the methods Jimmy uses in making his video? Do you think he should have the right to videotape private conversations between others? What about the way he got Martha to talk about death and Olive Barstow for his video?
14. Is Vince a good brother to Martha? On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the score for Best Brother Ever, rate Vince as a brother. Explain why you gave him the rating you did, using examples from the novel.
15. Is Martha Boyle a believable character? Is it surprising to you that Kevin Henkes, a male author, would choose to write about a girl as his main character? If you had the opportunity to find out more about Martha from Mr. Henkes, what questions would you ask him?

Note: These literature circle questions are keyed to Bloom's Taxonomy as follows: Knowledge: 1-2; Comprehension: 4-6; Application: 7-8; Analysis: 9-10; Synthesis: 11-12; Evaluation: 13-15.

Activities

1. In Martha's experience, "The world can change in a minute, and at the same time remain unchanged" (165). Write about a time in your life when your world changed in a moment. What changed, and how did you respond? Tell your story using specific details to help your writing come alive. If Martha's experience is represented by a jar of ocean water, what tangible object would represent your life-changing minute?
2. Martha tries to write a poem after her near death experience, but ends up with a page of first lines. Reread these first lines on p. 175. Which line is your favorite? Beginning with this line, write a poem from Martha's perspective to depict what she's experienced and learned in the novel. Use as many of the other "first lines" as you can, and include your own thoughts, combining them into a poem. Your poem doesn't need to rhyme; instead, focus on choosing the most precise, vivid words that you can to describe Martha's experience in this novel.
3. Draw a Boyle family tree, including Martha, her parents, Vince, Lucy, and Godbee. For each character, include a drawing using details from the novel. Also for each character include a description of that character's relationship with Martha and a characteristic quote—something the character says that seems to represent him or her—from the novel.

After you've finished your family tree, compare yours to a classmate's and discuss the choices you made.

Author's Web Site: www.kevinhenkes.com

Other Books by This Author:

The Birthday Room, HarperTrophy, 2001

Protecting Marie, Puffin, 1996

Sun and Spoon, Puffin, 1998

Two Under Par, Puffin, 1997

Words of Stone, Puffin, 1993

Zebra Wall, Puffin, 1989