

Critical Literacy Questions

Freedom

Former US President, Franklin Roosevelt proposed four fundamental freedoms every person in the world should enjoy:

- Freedom of speech
 - Freedom of religion/belief
 - Freedom from fear
 - Freedom from want.
- Thinking about the four freedoms above, consider:
 - In what ways are the characters in the story free/unfree?
 - Who in the story enjoys the most freedom? Why?
 - Who in the story has the least freedom? Why?
 - What threatens the freedom of the characters in the story? Do these threats affect some characters more than others? Do the same threats exist for your own freedom?
 - What, if anything, promotes or protects the freedom of the characters in the story? Is this true for you?
 - Which people or organisations are responsible for promoting/protecting your freedom? Does having more freedom mean we have more responsibility? How is this shown in the story?
 - Do you feel you have more/less freedom than the characters in the story? Why/why not?
 - In the story, do any characters have to give up any personal freedom for the wellbeing of the community? Does this ever happen in real life? Is it a good thing?

Diversity and community

Thinking about the different communities represented in the story:

- Why do you think the author has chosen to write about these groups/communities?
- How are they represented? E.g. positively/negatively, strong/weak, tolerant/intolerant?
- Does the author choose to represent any groups/communities in the story which we don't often see/hear from in books, films etc.?
- Would everyone agree with the way the different people/groups/communities are represented?
- Are there any points of view lacking or not represented in the story which you think should be included? Why might the author not have included these views?
- Do you think the author might favour some groups/communities over others? How do you know? How might the story have an impact on the reader's thoughts or beliefs about certain groups/communities?
- How do the actions of different characters/groups in the story have an impact on the wellbeing of the different communities?
- Does the story contain any message about diversity and/or community? Do you agree with the message(s) in the story?

Justice

- What does this story make you think about the way the world works? Does the story suggest the author thinks the world is a place of justice and fairness or something else?
- What examples or events can we see in the story which connect to justice? Do you agree with how justice is represented in the story?
- What messages connected to justice does the story contain? Who might benefit if the message in the story is accepted? Who, if anyone, might be disadvantaged?
- What are the greatest threats to justice presented in the story? Do you think the same is true in the wider world? Do you agree with the way the author has tried to represent the world? Would anybody disagree? Why/why not?
- Are all the characters treated fairly in the story? Does the story encourage readers to challenge injustice? If so, how?
- How do the characters' choices and actions work to increase or reduce justice in their communities/the world?
- Would the world be any different if everybody read this story? If so, how? If not, why not?
- Would you like to live in the world described in the story? Does the story reflect your understanding of how the world works?

Change and action

- Does the author think the world needs to change in some way? If so, how?
- Would everybody agree with the author?
- How do the actions and choices of the characters in the story have an impact on their lives and their communities? Do the characters' actions help to change the world for the better or worse?
- How might reading this story change the way a person thinks about:
 - a. Themselves
 - b. Other people
 - c. Society/their community
 - d. The wider world?
- Does the story make you think you need to change in some way? If so, how? If not, why not?
- Do you think the world would be a better place (even in a very small way) if everybody read this story? Why/why not?
- Does the story contain any ideas/suggestions/examples for how to change the world for the better?
- Does the story contain any messages about how we should/should not to act in society?
- How might people who have read the story work to change the world for the better?

Power and control

- Who in the story has the most power? How did they get this power/where does this power come from? Do the characters in the story use their power in a positive/negative way?
- Who in the story has the least power? Why don't they have much power? What would need to change for them to become more powerful?
- Who in the story has control/who doesn't have control? Where and/or how is this represented?
- How are power and control related in the story? Are the more powerful characters more in control (over their own thoughts and actions, over others in their community, of their place in society)?
- Does the amount of power/control the different characters have shift or change at all throughout the story? Why/how does this happen?
- What might the story teach us about power and control in the real world?
- Thinking about your own experiences, do you think the representation of power and/or control in the story is realistic?

Identity

- How are different identities, e.g. gender, race, class etc. represented in the story? To what extent does the author present the different characters' identities as complex and multiple, i.e. consisting of many parts? Are some characters identities more complex than others? How does the author represent this?
- Do you agree with the way different identities in the story are represented?
- Are any parts of your identity represented in the story/ by the characters? Are you happy with this representation?
- What factors affect and shape the characters' identities in the story? Does the author present identity as something we are in control of or something that is decided for us?
- How are different voices presented in the story? Are any voices stronger/ weaker than others? What makes them strong/ weak?
- Is there a voice/ identity missing from the story? If you could add this voice into the story, what would it say?
- Do you think everybody would read and respond to the story in the same way? How might people's identities affect how they feel about the story?
- What, if anything, might the story suggest to the reader about the author's own identity?

Tolerance, rights and respect

- To what extent is the society represented in the story 'tolerant and respectful'? Is the story a realistic depiction of society?
- Does anything happen in the story which you don't agree with but *would* tolerate? Should we have to tolerate things we don't agree with? Why/why not?
- Are there any actions/events/beliefs in the story which you think *should not be tolerated*? Why not? How do the characters in the story respond to such events? Do you agree with their response?
- Are there any views or beliefs represented in the story which you don't agree with? Are these views held by many in wider society? Is it a bad thing when people disagree in society?
- Are there any characters, groups or communities who are treated disrespectfully in the story? Where do we see this? Does this reflect real life?
- To what extent do you think the characters in the story demonstrate respect for:
 - a. each other's and their rights
 - b. their communities
 - c. rules, laws and institutions of society (e.g. police, government etc.).
- What lessons, if any, does the story contain about how we ought to treat each other? Do you agree with these messages?

Democracy

- Think of some important features of a democratic society (e.g. freedom of speech). To what extent is the society presented in the story a 'democratic' society? How do we know?
- To what extent do the different characters in the story feel happy/content with the world? How does the author represent their feelings? Do you identify with any of these ideas/feelings?
- To what extent are the characters in the story able to express their views/ideas/beliefs hopes/frustrations effectively?
- Are some characters in the story more able to communicate their views/ideas/beliefs etc. than others? What enables them to do this?
- Should people ever be stopped from expressing their views/beliefs?
- Within a democracy, what methods can we use to communicate our views/beliefs responsibly and effectively? Do we see any of these in the story? Is there a positive outcome?
- Who/what might stop characters in the story from expressing their views and beliefs? Does the same thing happen in our society?
- Do the views, actions and choices of the characters reflect the ways in which people think and act in the real world? If so, how? If not, how is it different?

Equality and responsibility

- Are there any issues/themes in the story connected to either rights, equality or both?
- In the story, can you see any instances of people:
 - Claiming their rights
 - Protecting/promoting the rights of others
 - Having rights denied or restricted
 - Denying the rights of others?
- How is this shown? Is it ever necessary to limit or restrict someone's rights? Why/not?
- Where can inequality be seen in the story? What form(s) does it take? Is inequality ever desirable in society? Why/not?
- In the story, who/what are the greatest threats to equality? How do we see this?
- In the story, who/what, works to promote equality? How does this happen? In your opinion, does this reflect reality?
- Thinking about your own experiences of equality/inequality, does the story match your own understanding of how the world works? Is this a good thing?
- What would need to change in the story to increase the equality for the characters? Would this make it a better or worse story?
- How would reading this story influence the way people think about equality and/or rights in society?