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Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Dacey's Song

by Cynthia Voigt

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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Dicey's Song

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. cite incidents that mark the text as a coming-of-age story for Dicey.
2. discuss the title's significance to the story.
3. discuss Dicey's growth over the course of the novel.
4. identify examples of various types of conflict (man vs. man, man vs. himself) in the novel.
5. discuss Gram's evolution over the course of the novel.
6. recognize examples of similes and personification.
7. find sensory images that enhance the description of the setting.
8. compare and contrast Dicey and Mina, Dicey and Gram, as well as Dicey and Sammy.
9. cite incidents from the story to illustrate conflict between, and integration of, the themes of "holding on," "letting go," and "reaching out."
10. discuss how poetic devices, such as alliteration, personification, etc. can be used to enhance the effectiveness of prose.
11. cite incidents from the story to illustrate the following themes:
 - Every person is unique, and, therefore, has valuable contributions to make.
 - Facing adversity often brings people closer together.
12. discuss how Dicey's mother's illness has affected Dicey

Dicey's Song

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Discuss how Gram changes from the beginning of the story to the end. What events from earlier in her life might have been responsible for her disposition in the beginning? What events in the story affect her outlook and her personality?
2. Compare and contrast Dicey and Mina. How are their life experiences different, what do they have in common, and what can they learn from each other?
3. How does Millie fit into the story? Compare her to any other character in the book? Does Dicey learn anything from being around her?
4. From what perspective is this novel written; who is the narrator? Is the narrator able to know what any or all of the characters are thinking?
5. In one of the first classroom scenes, Mr. Chappelle leads a discussion about the role of conflict in literature. What different purposes does Voigt achieve by including this discussion?
6. One thing that Dicey has to let go of is her role as the caretaker of her siblings. What are some of the ways she copes with this change?
7. What role(s) does Dicey play in her relationship with Sammy? Are there any similarities in their personalities or experiences that might help Dicey to understand Sammy?
8. Discuss the relationship between Dicey and Jeff. Do you think their relationship will change or develop in the future? Why or why not?
9. What are some similarities between Dicey and Gram? How do you think they each feel about their relationship? Do you think they will grow closer or further apart as Dicey gets older?
10. What impact do you think the loss of her mother has had on Dicey's personality? Describe how you think this experience has influenced her relationship with at least two other characters.
11. How would you describe the relationships among the four Tillerman children? How have the difficulties they faced together affected their sense of kinship and teamwork? Are there any examples of them working as a team in the story?
12. Discuss Mr. Lingerle's relationships with the Tillerman children and Gram. How have both sides been affected by knowing one another?

Dicey's Song

Chapter One

Vocabulary

confer – compare views; trade opinions
enamel – a type of smooth, glossy surface
fallow – uncultivated, unplanted
marsh – an area of soft, wet land
mottled – multicolored, spotted
turgid – swollen
turpentine – a type of paint thinner
underpinnings – things or ideas that serve as a foundation

1. Find a passage in this chapter or the italicized introduction that illustrates the author's use of sensory images to describe the area around Gram's farmhouse.

2. What was Dicey's reaction when the sailboat sank at the dock? Why was her grandmother surprised by this reaction?

3. What had been Dicey's "...single biggest worry all summer long"?

4. Who are Dicey's three siblings, and why does she feel responsible for them? What kinds of worries has she had about each of them?

5. How does Jeff's music affect Dacey?

6. How does Dacey's developing role at Millie's store contrast with the changes in her role at home?

7. What is the significance of Dacey's boat?

8. James has Dacey read his report on the pilgrims. What about the pilgrims relate to the Tillerman children?

9. What interesting fact does Dacey reveal as she is contemplating the topic for her paper?

10. What conflict does Dacey find in Will?

5. While in class one day, Dicey begins to draw. When she finishes her picture, "...there was a little boat on an ocean, without any land around...Dicey decided not to put in anybody steering the boat; she knew who it was anyway." It is already clear that the boat symbolizes Dicey's search for a sense of freedom, but how does this drawing add to the symbolism?

6. One thematic idea in this novel is the conflict Dicey feels between holding on to people and things in her life, and releasing past emotions. What do you think "holding on" means to Dicey in the following passage? Why is it complicated in this case?

"This holding on that Gram had talked about was more complicated than she'd thought. She had to hold on to James, for what he wanted, and hold on to Maybeth for what she needed."

7. What happens that helps in resolving the conflict that Dicey feels between James's wants and Maybeth's needs? How is Sammy affected by this situation?

8. Gram, James and Dicey are discussing how to approach Maybeth's situation. Dicey began talking about Maybeth's previous education: "'But if it's the way Maybeth was taught in Provincetown,' Dicey said—then she stopped, noticing that she didn't even think to say *back home*." What does this thought say about Dicey? What is happening to her?

9. What else does Dicey learn about "holding on" in this chapter?
