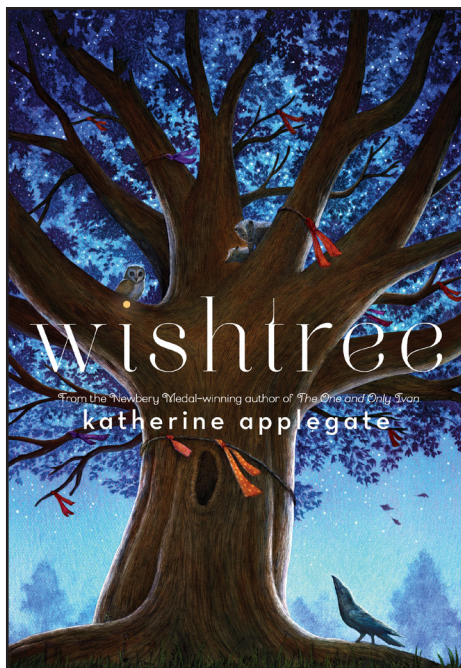


A Teacher's Guide to wishtree

FOR
USE WITH
COMMON CORE
STATE
STANDARDS



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ABOUT THE BOOK

Red is an oak tree who is many rings old. Red is the neighborhood “wishtree”—people write their wishes on pieces of cloth and tie them to Red’s branches. Along with a crow named Bongo and other animals who seek refuge in Red’s hollows, this wishtree watches over the neighborhood. You might say Red has seen it all. Until a new family moves in. Not everyone is welcoming, and Red’s experiences as a wishtree are more important than ever. Funny, deep, warm, and nuanced, *wishtree* is Newbery Medalist and *New York Times*–bestselling author Katherine Applegate at her very best—writing from the heart, and from a completely unexpected point of view.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KATHERINE APPLGATE is the author of *The One and Only Ivan*, winner of the Newbery Medal. Her most recent novel, *Crenshaw*, spent over twenty weeks on the *New York Times* children’s bestseller list, and her first middle-grade stand-alone novel, *Home of the Brave*, continues to be included on state reading lists, summer reading lists, and class reading lists. Katherine Applegate lives in Northern California, with her family.

This guide is aligned with Common Core Standards for 5th grade but can be applied to grades 3–8. To attain specific Common Core grade level standards for their classrooms and students, teachers are encouraged to adapt the activities listed in this guide to their classes’ needs. You know your kids best!

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Fun with Words

☞ Look up the meaning of the following words as they relate to plants and trees: photosynthesize, dioecious, monoecious, scaffold branch, crepuscular.

☞ Look up the meaning of these words relating to behavior: introvert, pessimist, optimist, compromise, busybody, buttinsky.

CCSS.RL.5.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes.

Talking to Trees

Read the poem “Be Different to Trees” that is printed at the beginning of the book. Discuss what it means to you before you read the story. After finishing the book, look at this poem again and discuss whether your understanding of the poem has changed.

CCSS.RL.5.5 Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, or stanzas fits together to provide the overall structure of a particular story, drama, or poem.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Discuss Red’s comment: “Making others feel safe is a fine way to spend your days” (p. 26). How does the tree make others feel safe? Is this statement referring only to the animal inhabitants of the tree? What does this comment tell you about the personality of the tree?
2. Why do the animals feel comfortable with Samar? Why does Bongo give her gifts? What qualities of her nature make the animals trust her? Why do these qualities make it harder for her to make friends with other children?
3. Red compares the neighborhood to a garden, “wild and tangled and colorful” (p. 54). Why does the tree compare the people in the area to a garden? Why is the neighborhood not welcoming to Samar’s family?
4. Describe the boy who carves a word in the tree. What does the author tell you about him and what assumptions can you make about his character? Why do you think he would carve that word into the tree? How does this act affect Red, Bongo, Samar, and her family? What effect does the carving have on Francesca? What are the feelings of the police who come to investigate?
5. Why does Francesca want to cut the tree down? What do the police officers, Max and Sandy, think about her reasons? Discuss Max’s wish and what it means (p. 74).
6. Discuss Red’s description—“standing tall, reaching deep”—as it applies to the tree and as it applies to Samar (p. 71). What personality traits do the tree and Samar have in common? How do those traits help them both cope with the changes in their lives?
7. Discuss Red’s question, “How does friendship happen?” (p. 82). What is Bongo’s answer? Why do you think Red and Bongo are friends? What makes them special to each other? What qualities do you look for in a friend? Why is it hard for Samar and Stephen to become friends?
8. Why does Red decide to speak to the children? How does this act change their relationship to the tree and to each other? Why will the tree not speak to Francesca?

9. How does Stephen help to make a difference in the neighborhood on Wishing Day? What is the message the children in the school deliver with their wishes? What makes Francesca change her mind about cutting down the tree?
10. Discuss Red’s statement: “I wanted to make a difference, just a little difference, before I left this lovely world” (p. 126). What difference does Red make by talking to Stephen and Samar? Discuss Stephen’s comment: “My parents aren’t bad people. They’re just . . . afraid of things” (p. 125). What do you think you can do to make a difference in this world?

CCSS.RL.5.1 Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.RL.5.2 Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

CCSS.RL.5.3 Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

CCSS.RL.5.6 Describe how a narrator’s or speaker’s point of view influences how events are described.

COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

The Science of Trees

Look up information about *Quercus rubra*, the red oak tree. What qualities of this type of tree make it a good choice for this story? How many facts about the red oak tree can you discover? Write a paragraph about the unique characteristics of a red oak tree and where it is most likely to grow.

CCSS.RI.5.6 Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.

CCSS.W.5.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

The Power of Wishing

Research the history of wishing trees in various cultures. How many ways can you discover that people have used wishing trees throughout history? What is the importance of these trees for the people who bring wishes to them? Look up folktales and legends in which trees are an important element or symbol in a story.

CCSS.RI.5.7 Draw on information from multiple print or digital sources, demonstrating the ability to locate an answer to a question quickly or to solve a problem efficiently.

CCSS.RL.5.9 Compare and contrast stories in the same genre (e.g., mysteries and adventure stories) on their approaches to similar themes and topics.

Get Creative with Art

Create a wishtree for your classroom out of natural materials—branches, twigs, vines, etc.—that you find in your neighborhood. Have each person in the class attach a wish to the “tree” and write a paragraph about that wish and why it is important to them. Discuss the many ways in which wishes can come true and the ways in which wishes can be “grand and goofy, selfish and sweet” (p. 12).

CCSS.RL.5.5 Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, or stanzas fits together to provide the overall structure of a particular story, drama, or poem.

CCSS.W.5.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

The Power of Names

Discuss the reasons that Red gives for each of the animals choosing their individual names—raccoons, opossums, owls, squirrels, skunks, and crows. How does the choice of name reflect the characteristics of each animal as Red describes them? Look up the collective nouns that are used for each animal group and make a chart of the animals, their habitats and habits, and the names they are called as a group.

CCSS.RL.5.3 Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

CCSS.RL.5.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes.

Immigration Through the Years

Red talks about seeing many changes in the neighborhood over the years and the wonderful variety of people who have come to live there. How many different nationalities can you list based on what Red says about the foods and customs the people brought with them, from Maeve to Samar's family? Draw a picture or write a description of what you think the neighborhood looks like when everyone comes to hang a wish on the tree.

CCSS.RL.5.1 Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.W.5.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

Discussion Guide prepared by Connie Rockman, Youth Literature Consultant