

BIRDIE'S BARGAIN

KATHERINE
PATERSON

ABOUT THE BOOK

In a poignant and unflinching new realistic novel from the Newbery Medal–winning author of *Bridge to Terabithia*, a ten-year-old girl makes a deal with God for her father's safe return from the Iraq war.

Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used in writing prompts for independent work.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katherine Paterson is a beloved and much-honored author who twice won both the Newbery Medal (for *Bridge to Terabithia* and *Jacob Have I Loved*) and the National Book Award (for *The Master Puppeteer* and *The Great Gilly Hopkins*). She received the Hans Christian Andersen Award in 1998 and the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award in 2006 for her body of work. In 2010–2011, she was the second National Ambassador for Young People's Literature.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The title of this book is intriguing. When you first read the title, what kind of a bargain did you imagine?
2. At the very beginning of the book, we learn that not only is Birdie's life falling apart because her father is going off to war, but her bike has been given away to a charity without her consent. Whose decision should it have been? Birdie's? Her parents'? Or should they have decided together? What were the factors that went into the decision?
3. Birdie chooses not to go with her mother to take her father to the airport when he is leaving for the year. Why do you think she made that decision?
4. On page 13, Birdie wonders, "Why did grown-ups lie all the time?" Do you think grown-ups lie a lot to children? What would your answer to Birdie's question be?
5. Light figures into Birdie's beliefs a lot. At the beginning of the book, when she makes a bargain with God, she sees light streaming through the window onto the floor. "It was like Noah's rainbow. A promise. God was telling her it was a bargain" (page 15). Shortly after that, she sees a tree encased in ice lit up by the morning sun, which she interprets as another sign from God. "The thought came to her that the tree was singing, singing a hymn to the sun" (page 19). Later, when she is on the airplane going to visit her father toward the end of the book, she sees a rainbow around the shadow of the plane on a cloud and feels like "God had sent her a secret message" (page 198). Do you believe in signs like these? Have you experienced similar things?
6. Alice, or Alicia Marie, as she prefers to be called, frequently says things like "I'm often told I have a gift for helping people in trouble" (page 22) or "People often say I have a special gift for friendship" (page 26). Do you think people do tell her this? And who are the "people"? If it is not true, why would Alicia say it?
7. Birdie's I ♥ JESUS shirt figures into the book a lot. What does it mean to Birdie?
8. A school cafeteria can be difficult for a new kid to navigate. Birdie would have liked to eat with Christie and her friends on her first day of school, but Alicia Marie grabbed Birdie first, which made the other kids look down on her right away. If you eat in a cafeteria, what is yours like? Is there a similar dynamic? Are there ways to make it better?
9. The first time Birdie encounters Alicia's mother, the woman comes in yelling. Alicia is obviously afraid of what she might do and tells Birdie to leave quickly. Why do you think the woman is so angry?
10. Counselor Ron, who was Birdie's counselor at the Bible camp she attended the previous summer, has very conservative views and thinks that fantasy stories are evil. However, Birdie's father has read *Harry Potter* to her. She has learned from Bible camp that she should honor her father and mother, so listening to her father read to her is a good thing. Or is it, when the book is fantasy? How do you reconcile opposing views from two authority figures?

11. Birdie skips the introduction in *The Diary of a Young Girl* because introductions are “always some grown-up telling you what to think” (page 71). Do you usually read introductions? Why or why not?
12. Partly because of being in the National Guard, Birdie’s father is very well organized, while her mother is messy. Whenever she can’t find something, Birdie’s mother says, “We creative types have trouble with organization” (page 75). Which do you consider yourself to be? Do you think creativity has anything to do with how messy people are?
13. Birdie confides in her diary after she sees how doing so helped Anne Frank. Do you feel more comfortable confiding in a friend or in a journal? Why?
14. When Birdie finds out that her father has been wounded in Iraq, she is mad at God because she thinks He didn’t hold up His side of the bargain. How did you feel about her reaction?
15. Did Birdie betray Alicia by telling their teacher about her home life? Do you think Alicia will be better or worse off now that she has been taken from her mother? Why do you think the author didn’t tell us what happened to Alicia?
16. When Birdie is on the plane, flying to see her daddy, the woman who sits beside her turns out to be quite obnoxious. But then Birdie discovers that the woman is very afraid of flying, and Birdie’s attitude toward her changes. How would you have behaved toward that woman?



These questions were prepared by Grace Worcester, a former youth services consultant for the Vermont Department of Libraries. She has spent her entire professional life working with books and children and served on the Newbery Medal, Caldecott Medal, *Boston Globe–Horn Book* Award, and National Book Award for Young People’s Literature committees.

