Book: Because of Winn-Dixie

Reviewed by: Gail Myers

Level of Difficulty: Easy

My thoughts about the book and its suitability for my group:

This is a book about a girl whose mother had left her, and whose father (a preacher) had just moved them to another town to “start over.” She is quite lonely until she finds an unusual stray dog, whom she names “Winn-Dixie.” Through the dog, she begins to meet the people in her new town – adults and children, who are rather eccentric and also in need of friends. As these relationships unfold, the girl begins to understand why her mother left and how she can move past her grief to a new community of friends.

The book has wonderful character development and some very funny scenes, which everyone enjoyed. It was quite accessible to the students. Most of the new vocabulary words were the colorful idioms that are used in the South.

Students’ reaction to the book:

My class loved this book, and so did I! We had lively discussions about each unique character, and the stories they told. The most interesting relationship was that between the girl and her rather taciturn father, both grieving their loss, but not really connecting with each other until the end.

Tips for other tutors who may want to use this book:

This author tends to “show, not tell” the story, which means that the characters’ traits must be understood by their actions, rather than descriptions. It was a good way to practice making inferences: “How do you know that character is _______________? What are the clues in the story?”

Because the book was rather short, we had time to do many extension activities. The colorful characters in the book were a great source of new vocabulary and writing skills. First we brainstormed adjectives that described each one, then everyone wrote a paragraph describing their favorite character and why they chose that one.

Have fun with this book!