**Reading Task:** Students will silently read the passage in question on a given day—first independently and then following along with the text as the teacher and/or skillful students read aloud. What is important is to allow all students to interact with challenging text on their own as frequently and independently as possible. Students will then reread specific passages in response to a set of concise, text-dependent questions that compel them to examine the meaning and structure of DiCamillo’s prose.

**Discussion Task:** Students will discuss the exemplar text in depth with their teacher and their classmates, performing activities that result in a close reading of DiCamillo’s story. The goal is to foster student confidence when encountering complex text and to reinforce the skills they have acquired regarding how to build and extend their understanding of a text. A general principle is to always reread the passage that provides evidence for the question under discussion. This gives students another encounter with the text, helping them develop fluency and reinforcing their use of text evidence.

**Text Selection:** This exemplar text, taken from Kate DiCamillo’s award winning novel of the same title introduces readers to some of the principal characters in the book and to the unique “talents” of the dog, Winn-Dixie.

### The Text: DiCamillo, Kate. *Because of Winn-Dixie*

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| I spent a lot of time that summer at the Herman W. Block Memorial Library. The Herman W. Block Memorial Library sounds like it would be a big fancy place, but it’s not. It’s just a little old house full of books, and Miss Franny Block is in charge of them all. She is a very small, very old woman with short gray hair, and she was the first friend I made in Naomi.  
  It all started with Winn-Dixie not liking it when I went into the library, because he couldn’t go inside, too. But I showed him how he could stand up on his hind legs and look in the window and see me in there, selecting my books; and he was okay, as long as he could see me. But the thing was, the first time Miss Franny Block saw Winn-Dixie standing up on his hind legs like that, looking in the window, she didn’t think he was a dog. She thought he was a bear.  
  This is what happened: I was picking out my books and kind of humming to myself, and all of a sudden, there was a loud and scary scream. I went running up to the front of the library, and there was Miss Franny Block, sitting on the floor behind her desk.  
  Miss Franny sat there trembling and shaking. |
“Come on,” I said. “Let me help you up. It’s okay.” I stuck out my hand and Miss Franny took hold of it, and I pulled her up off the floor. She didn’t weigh hardly anything at all. Once she was standing on her feet, she started acting all embarrassed, saying how I must think she was a silly old lady, mistaking a dog for a bear, but that she had a bad experience with a bear coming into the Herman W. Block Memorial Library a long time ago, and she never had quite gotten over it.

“When did it happen?” I asked her.

“Well,” said Miss Franny, “it is a very long story.”

“That’s okay,” I told her. “I am like my mama in that I like to be told stories. But before you start telling it, can Winn-Dixie come in and listen, too? He gets lonely without me.”

“Well, I don’t know,” said Miss Franny. “Dogs are not allowed in the Herman W. Block Memorial Library.”

“He’ll be good,” I told her. “He’s a dog who goes to church.” And before she could say yes or no, I went outside and got Winn-Dixie, and he came in and lay down with a “huummmppff” and a sigh, right at Miss Franny’s feet.

She looked down at him and said, “He most certainly is a large dog.”

“Yes ma’am,” I told her. “He has a large heart, too.”

“Well,” Miss Franny said. She bent over and gave Winn-Dixie a pat on the head, and Winn-Dixie wagged his tail back and forth and snuffled his nose on her little old-lady feet. “Let me get a chair and sit down so I can tell this story properly.”

“Back when Florida was wild, when it consisted of nothing but palmetto trees and mosquitoes so big they could fly away with you,” Miss Franny Block started in, “and I was just a little girl no bigger than you, my father, Herman W. Block, told me that I could have anything I wanted for my birthday. Anything at all.”

Miss Franny looked around the library. She leaned in close to me. “I don’t want to appear prideful,” she said, “but my daddy was a very rich man. A very rich man.” She nodded and then leaned back and said, “And I was a little girl who loved to read. So I told him, I said, ‘Daddy, I would most certainly love to have a library for my birthday, a small little library would be wonderful.’”

“You asked for a whole library?”

“A small one,” Miss Franny nodded. “I wanted a little house full of nothing but books and I wanted to share them, too. And I got my wish. My father built me this house, the very one we are sitting in now. And at a very young age, I became a librarian. Yes ma’am.”

“What about the bear?” I said.

“Did I mention that Florida was wild in those days?” Miss Franny Block said.

“Uh-huh, you did.”

“It was wild. There were wild men and wild women and wild animals.”

“Like bears!”
“Yes ma’am. That’s right. Now, I have to tell you. I was a little-miss-know-it-all. I was a miss-smarty-pants with my library full of books. Oh, yes ma’am, I thought I knew the answers to everything. Well, one hot Thursday, I was sitting in my library with all the doors and window open and my nose stuck in a book, when a shadow crossed the desk. And without looking up, yes ma’am, without even looking up, I said, ‘Is there a book I can help you find?’

“Well, there was no answer. And I thought it might have been a wild man or a wild woman, scared of all these books and afraid to speak up. But then I became aware of a very peculiar smell, a very strong smell. I raised my eyes slowly. And standing right in front of me was a bear. Yes ma’am. A very large bear.”

“How big?” I asked.

“Oh, well,” said Miss Franny, “perhaps three times the size of your dog.”

“Then what happened?” I asked her.

“Well,” said Miss Franny, “I looked at him and he looked at me. He put his big nose up in the air and sniffed and sniffed as if he was trying to decide if a little-miss-know-it-all librarian was what he was in the mood to eat. And I sat there. And then I thought, ‘Well, if this bear intends to eat me, I am not going to let it happen without a fight. No ma’am.’ So very slowly and carefully, I raised up the book I was reading.”

“What book was that?” I asked.

“Why, it was War and Peace, a very large book. I raised it up slowly and then I aimed it carefully and I threw it right at that bear and screamed, ‘Be gone!’ And do you know what?”

“No ma’am,” I said.

“He went. But this is what I will never forget. He took the book with him.”

“Nu-uh,” I said.

“Yes ma’am,” said Miss Franny. “He snatched it up and ran.”

“Did he come back?” I asked.

“No, I never saw him again. Well, the men in town used to tease me about it. They used to say, ‘Miss Franny, we saw that bear of yours out in the woods today. He was reading that book and he said it sure was good and would it be all right if he kept it for just another week.’ Yes ma’am. They did tease me about it.” She said. “I imagine I’m the only one left from those days. I imagine I’m the only one that even recalls that bear. All my friends, everyone I knew when I was young, they are all dead and gone.”

She sighed again. She looked sad and old and wrinkled. It was the same way I felt sometimes, being friendless in a new town and not having a mama to comfort me. I sighed, too.

Winn-Dixie raised his head off his paws and looked back and forth between me and Miss Franny. He sat up then and showed Miss Franny his teeth.

“Well now, look at that,” she said. “That dog is smiling at me.”

“It’s a talent of his,” I told her.
“It’s a fine talent,” Miss Franny said. A very fine talent.” And she smiled back at Winn-Dixie.

“We could be friends,” I said to Miss Franny. “I mean you and me and Winn-Dixie, we could all be friends.”

Miss Franny smiled even bigger. “Why, that would be grand,” she said, “just grand.”

And right at that minute, right when the three of us had decided to be friends, who should come marching into the Herman W. Block Memorial Library but old pinch-faced Amanda Wilkinson. She walked right up to Miss Franny’s desk and said, “I finished *Johnny Tremain* and I enjoyed it very much. I would like something even more difficult to read now, because I am an advanced reader.”

“Yes dear, I know,” said Miss Franny. She got up out of her chair. Amanda pretended like I wasn’t there. She stared right past me. “Are dogs allowed in the library?” she asked Miss Franny as they walked away.

“Certain ones,” said Miss Franny, “a select few.” And then she turned around and winked at me. I smiled back. I had just made my first friend in Naomi, and nobody was going to mess that up for me, not even old pinch-faced Amanda Wilkinson.
Activities
1. Teacher introduces the day’s passage with minimal commentary and students read it independently.
2. Teacher or a skillful reader then reads the passage out loud to the class as students follow along in the text.
3. Teacher allows students to read the passage again, making annotations, underlining words they do not know, and notating interesting passages.
4. Teacher asks the class to discuss a set of text-dependent questions.

(Q1) Why was Miss Franny so scared by Winn-Dixie? Why was she “acting all embarrassed?”

Miss Franny thought Winn-Dixie was a bear. When she realized he was a dog, she was embarrassed because she thought Opal would think she was a “silly old lady, mistaking a dog for a bear.”

(Q2) How did the Herman W. Block Memorial Library come to get its name?

The library was a gift to Miss Franny from her wealthy father. When she was a little girl, “a very rich man” told her she could have “anything she wants” for her birthday. So, Miss Franny asked for a library. She wanted a “little house full of nothing but books”. Herman W. Block was Miss Franny’s father.

Both events are fairly straightforward, but it is important for students to understand them, as they set the stage for what is to come.

(Q3) Opal says, “She looked sad and old and wrinkled.” What happened to cause Miss Franny to look this way?

Students should realize that she was thinking about friends and people who are no longer alive, and that she does not have any friends now: “All my friends, everyone I knew when I was young, they are all dead and gone.”

(Q4) What were Opal’s feelings when she realized how Miss Franny felt?

Students should realize that Opal felt she and Miss Franny were both lonely: “It was the same way I felt . . . friendless . . .”

(Q5) Earlier in the story, Opal says that Winn-Dixie “has a large heart, too.” What does Winn-Dixie do to show that he has a “large heart”?

Students should see that Winn-Dixie was responding to Opal and Miss Franny feeling sad when he looked between them and showed Miss Franny his teeth: “Winn-Dixie raised his head off his paws and looked back and forth between me and Miss Franny. He sat up then and showed Miss Franny his teeth. ‘Well now, look at that,’ she said. ‘That dog is smiling at me.’”
Using your answers from the questions above and class discussion, explain why this is an appropriate title for the selection. Be sure to clearly cite evidence from the text for each part of your answer.

A proficient answer should have at least two parts:

- Students should explain - using evidence from the text - how Winn-Dixie looking into the library was the cause of Miss Franny falling, which in turn led to the story about the bear and Opal’s realization that she and Miss Franny were both lonely.
- They should then relate how Winn-Dixie’s response to Miss Franny (“That dog is smiling at me”) endeared her to Winn-Dixie and led Opal to suggest that they could be friends.

The answer should show a clear understanding of how this progression of events led to the three characters becoming friends. An answer pulling on more from the text would include that Winn-Dixie’s “talent” and “huge heart” were traits that made all this possible.

Examples of NON-TEXT DEPENDENT QUESTIONS

Was there ever a time where an animal scared you?

Should Ms. Franny have felt embarrassed?

Can bears really eat people?