

TEACHER'S GUIDE

ALBERT'S TOOTHACHE

by *Barbara Williams*

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What is Wise Owl?

Wise Owl is both a new approach to using classics of children's literature and an effective method of developing critical and creative thinking skills. Wise Owl capitalizes on young children's natural philosophical temperament by providing a series of questions on philosophical issues based on distinguished children's books.

Each Wise Owl packet includes copies of the related paperback book, reproducible Activity Cards with philosophical discussion questions based on the book, and a Teacher's Guide.

What is Critical Thinking?

With the growing emphasis on critical thinking in education, there is some confusion about what critical thinking is and how it should be taught. Critical thinking is best described as a process of inquiry. Critical thinking involves the assessment of ideas, information, and experience. It involves the skills of questioning, clarifying, analyzing, and evaluating, and the attitudes of open-mindedness, curiosity, flexibility, imagination, and reasonable doubt. Critical thinking likes to get to the heart of things, where often there are no easy answers. In the teaching of critical thinking, teachers will often find themselves thinking along with students, rather than telling them what to think. Although critical thinking may not always yield conclusions, the teacher will want to emphasize the value of the thinking process, and perhaps observe, as Socrates did, that a good part of wisdom is knowing that you do not know.

What is Creative Thinking?

Creative thinking can be defined as the process of generating and combining ideas and experiences to transform them into new ways of thinking and acting. In philosophy, creative thinking stimulates the imagination, encouraging thinkers to ask the crucial philosophical question "What if...?" in order to make illuminating and often unusual connections between ideas and experience.

What is Philosophy?

The ancient Greeks thought of philosophy as the broadest of all sciences, embracing all subject areas in the search for understanding about our world. Etymologically, *philosophy* means "the love of wisdom." There have been

countless philosophical treatises written over the centuries, but philosophy should not be thought of as a body of knowledge. Rather, it is an activity, a special way of thinking about ideas, information, and experience. Philosophical inquiry — the activity of philosophy — is a dynamic combination of method, curiosity, and wonder that probes the foundations of all our opinions, observations, ideas, and experiences.

How are Philosophy and Critical and Creative Thinking related?

Critical and creative thinking are the backbone of philosophy. Critical thinking is the discipline of inquiry with which philosophical issues are examined; creative thinking extends the scope of inquiry, bringing into it a variety of issues, ideas, and experiences relevant to students' own lives. Children turn out to be particularly adept at making creative connections, and their natural curiosity and wonder often bring an unexpected richness to philosophical thought. As Gareth Matthews points out in *Philosophy and the Young Child* (Harvard University Press, 1980, p.73):

Children of five or six, or, perhaps, seven years are much more likely to ask philosophical questions and make philosophical comments than children of twelve or fourteen years. The explanation for this phenomenon is complex.

In part it has to do with the nature of philosophy. There is a certain... naivete' about many, perhaps most, philosophical questions. This is something that adults... have to cultivate... It is something quite natural to children.

How does Wise Owl relate to an already full curriculum?

These materials use quality children's literature as their base, and can easily be made part of any language arts curriculum. In fact, exploration of literature should always involve critical thinking. This program, however, need not be limited to language arts. We think you will find that the critical and creative thinking skills encouraged through philosophy will enhance students' thinking in all subject areas.

If I don't know anything about Philosophy, or about teaching Critical Thinking, will I be able to use Wise Owl?

Yes. If you can read and think, if you believe that exploring open-ended questions is a legitimate pursuit, if you believe that children can think about interesting ideas and if you are willing to explore ideas along with them, then you've got all it takes!

With which students will I be able to use Wise Owl?

All children need to learn how to stretch their minds in new directions. These stories and materials have been carefully chosen and developed for use with children's literature for any ability group in grades 1-3. In fact, the open-ended nature of some philosophical questions allows children of varying abilities to work at their own level while participating in a group activity. The material can be used with large or small groups and occasionally by individual students.

Management

When using Wise Owl materials, the teacher must be sensitive to the changing needs and abilities of the students and must be flexible in responding to them. There is no rigid prescription for working with Wise Owl. Some questions may produce extensive responses from one group of students but not from other groups. Some questions provide enough material for an entire lesson. In other lessons you may cover two or three questions. Here are some general guidelines that can help Wise Owl work for your students.

1. Begin by making it clear that the materials will be used by the entire class. Read the story out loud to everyone, announcing first that students will be working with ideas found in the story (for example, bravery or honesty). It is good practice when reading aloud to children to make some pre-planned stops to let students predict what will happen.
2. You will probably want to work with fairly small groups, no more than eight to ten, to allow for responses from each student. While you work with a group,

other students may be engaged in reading/writing activities that they can work on independently. These activities may be related to Wise Owl or they may involve material related to basal materials, sustained silent reading in trade books, or other assignments.

3. Place the Wise Owl cards in a central location. One student may be responsible for choosing the cards for the group to work on. Read the first question on the card aloud. Students can either follow along as you read or chorus-read with you, depending on their ability. Refer the students to relevant page numbers if the question cites a particular episode in the text. Remember that you are not asking students to pull answers from the text; you are simply helping them relate to the story. Read the question again and ask for responses.
4. A circle is usually best for promoting an atmosphere of equity. Begin by asking for a volunteer to share his or her ideas first. Explain that you will then continue around the circle. Allow children the option to "pass" if they really feel they have nothing they want to share. You may have to limit the passes to one or two a day.

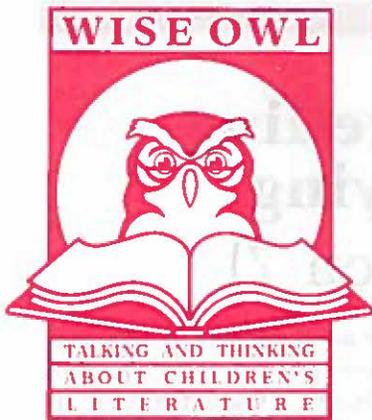
Once the children have become accustomed to exchanging ideas, you will probably want to abandon the round-the-circle responses. If there is a child who seems particularly reluctant to share, you will have to use your best information-pulling techniques. Try mentioning people, incidents, likes and dislikes from the child's own experience that might be relevant to the discussion. Assure students that their ideas will be respected by the group. If you have children who habitually respond with one-word answers, tell them that you need more information. If possible, avoid questions which invite yes/no answers.

5. Try to promote an atmosphere of calm acceptance. Stress the fact that all opinions are valuable. Discussion will

sometimes become very lively. A spirited exchange among students, so long as it is within the realm of respect for the feelings and ideas of other persons, is a good thing. Keep the discussion moving without causing the children to feel that they are being turned off. If you find that some children are continually trying to dominate the discussion, try returning to the round-the-circle method, explaining why you are doing it. Make clear that you want everyone to have a chance to share his/her thoughts.

6. Sometimes you will have to push the discussion in new directions. Stay tuned in to what is being said and, without manipulating the discussion, look for opportunities to lead students to expand on the ideas they have come up with. By acting as a facilitator, you will allow the children's ideas to emerge. You can maintain some balance in the group and help to move the discussion in new directions if the children are getting bogged-down, confused, or repetitious.
7. There are no set time limits. You will know whether or not the group has finished with a particular question by their responses. When a natural break occurs, you may move to another question, begin working with another group, or discontinue the work until another day. The Wise Owl cards represent approximately a week's work, which can usually be accomplished during the reading/language arts period each day. If *all* of the activities are undertaken, more than a week may be necessary. For example, if students decide to interview people, they will need more time for organizing, interviewing, and reporting findings.
8. Bringing everyone together for some kind of culminating activity can be very satisfying to the class. Since children of all ability groups have worked with the questions, everyone can participate. You might work on a classroom bulletin board related to the discussions, or you might have the

children compile their own stories into one large book. In addition, you might invite students to make up their own Wise Owl questions.



Guidelines for Discussion

ALBERT'S TOOTHACHE by Barbara Williams

Real and Imaginary; False and True

This is the story of a young turtle named Albert, who claims to have a toothache but doesn't have any teeth. Poor Albert must be mistaken, we think at first — a trifle condescendingly — but perhaps his mistake is not so naive as it seems. It is possible to have sensation where a tooth, or another body part, used to be. Sometimes after a visit to the dentist the presence of an aching tooth lingers a while after the tooth has been pulled. Descartes wondered about the reliability of the senses when thinking about the "phantom limbs" of amputees. Conversely, we sometimes don't have any sensation in a body part, for example, when our foot falls asleep, even though we're sure, without having to look, that the foot is still there.

This is only one of the philosophical puzzlers raised in *Albert's Toothache*. There are other equally intriguing theories to explain why Albert makes the claim he does. The Wise Owl questions are designed not so much to elicit the "right answer" as to invite young students to think critically and imaginatively about philosophical ideas, using their own language and drawing upon their own experiences.

The Wise Owl questions have been divided into seven categories. As class discussions deepen, you may find that these categories overlap and illuminate one another.

Communication — Speaking without Words (Questions 1 and 2)

Words aren't the only way to tell somebody something. Often we point to things or use other kinds of body language to communicate a message. Albert's father, for example, points to his toothless mouth to "tell" Albert that turtles don't have teeth. But is "toothlessness" something that can be pointed to? How do we know he isn't pointing to his gums, or his tongue? Students may want to explore this issue by experimenting in the classroom with communicating without words.

What is "Impossible"? (Question 3)

One explanation Albert's father gives for why it is impossible for Albert to have a toothache is that it has never happened to anyone else in the Turtle family: i.e., it hasn't happened in the past so it can't happen now or in the future. Students will want to question this reasoning and look in their own lives for examples of things that have never happened to anyone else.

Real and Imaginary (Question 4)

Sometimes it's hard to tell the difference between real and imaginary things, especially when it comes to something that can't be seen, like feelings. We call people hypochondriacs when they complain of illnesses we don't believe really exist. But does this mean their pain is less "real"?

Forgetting (Question 5)

Memory is a curious thing. One young student suggested that Albert may have forgotten he didn't have teeth, or maybe even have forgotten that he was a turtle! Might we ever forget who we are? Surely we forget some things about ourselves, like our new phone number or the date of our last check-up. Could we forget about a body part? Is having your foot fall asleep like your body "forgetting" that it has a foot?

Words and Meaning (Question 6)

Much of philosophy gets started by a person thinking carefully about the meanings of words. In everyday language a word can refer to several different things: for example, the word "mind." We might have a good mind for figures, mind our manners, or not mind if someone steps on our toes. Could "toothache" refer to an ache that comes from the tooth of someone who has just bitten you?

Truth-telling and Lying (Question 7)

Albert's father accuses his son of lying. In logic, things are either true or false, but in real life this is not always the case. Is making an honest mistake like lying? We may always mean what we say, but even the most articulate of us cannot always say exactly what we mean. Philosophers have often wondered about intention and the difference it makes in judging people's actions. If we mean to do good, or tell the truth, should that count for something? Our answers to questions like this affect how we judge others.

Believing (Questions 8 and 9)

Deciding what to believe is a difficult task, for adults as well as for children. It is dangerous either to believe everything or not to believe anything. Sometimes we use the words "know" and "believe" interchangeably. If we believed, say, in the tooth fairy, then found out she didn't exist, would we then believe she didn't exist, or "know" it? Do we believe that two plus two equals four, or know it? What changes belief into knowledge?

SAMPLE DISCUSSION

Following is a transcript of a discussion that occurred during the tryouts of the Wise Owl questions. This dialogue provides examples of the way young children think and of the guidance teachers may offer.

Questions 1 — A and B

Albert Turtle says he has a toothache. Albert's father says it is impossible and points to his own toothless mouth.

- A. Can you point to something that isn't there, like no teeth? Suppose you ask your friend for a cookie, and she points to the cookie jar. You reach in and find that the jar is empty. Is your friend pointing to something that isn't there?
- B. Is pointing a way of saying something?
What can you say by pointing?
Does Albert's father say something by pointing? What?

Teacher: OK, I want you to think about this for a minute. Can you point to something that isn't there, like no teeth, for example? Just think about it for a minute. Can you point to something that isn't there? All right, let's think about this: Suppose you ask your friend for a cookie and she points to the cookie jar over on the counter. You go over, reach in, and find out that the jar is empty. Is your friend pointing to something that isn't there?

Debbie: Well, sort of. I mean she thinks she is pointing to cookies, but maybe she doesn't know there aren't any left. So she is pointing to cookies.

Teacher: What about when she finds there are no more? Then would she be pointing to something that isn't there?

Tim: Yes. But maybe the idea she is... Well, maybe she is saying by pointing, "That's where we keep the cookies. Go ahead and see if we have any." So she isn't just pointing to cookies or no cookies; she's saying a whole idea when she points her finger.

Teacher: Oh, is pointing the same thing as saying it? (The teacher has moved right in to part "B" of the question.) Albert's father never says, "To have a toothache you need to have teeth, but turtles don't have teeth." Is pointing to something the same as saying it?

Tim: It's not always the same.

Teacher: Explain that to me. I need a little more information there.

Tim: Well, like if I'm pointing to the cookie jar, and it's my idea that I'm trying to say when I point, then it's the same. But if I'm the other person, not the pointing person, then maybe the pointing can say something different; so it's not the same thing any more.

Becky: You think you know everything. I think you're wrong.

Teacher: We all have the right to express our ideas, Becky. We're not interested in whether something is absolutely wrong or absolutely right. We want to share our thoughts, how we think about things, with each other. And I feel very strongly about how important it is for us to be kind and respectful of each other's ideas. Even if it sounds strange or funny or wrong to you, we are going to listen to what everybody has to say. And no one has to be afraid of having others laugh at him or her. It's not going to happen here. OK? Understood? Let's keep thinking. Are there times when you don't understand what someone is pointing to?

Meghan: Yes!

Teacher: When?

Meghan: Well, when my baby sister points out the big sliding glass door, sometimes I don't know what she's pointing at. It could be a squirrel. Or it could be a cat or the dog next door or I don't know what. She calls everything doggie, or else she just points. And sometimes she points when she wants something and me and my brother start handing her anything it might be. Sometimes it takes us a long time to figure out what she wants.

Cynthia: Sometimes I ask my mother where something is and she points and I still can't find it. Is that right?

Teacher: What do you think, friends? If Cynthia's mother points to something that Cynthia has asked for and Cynthia still can't find the thing, is that like not understanding what her mother is pointing to?

Trevor: Well, maybe she knows what her mother is pointing to 'cause she asked for it, but she might not be able to understand where her mother is pointing to.

Cynthia: Um. That's what I meant.

Tim: So I think it is the same thing. Almost the same thing.

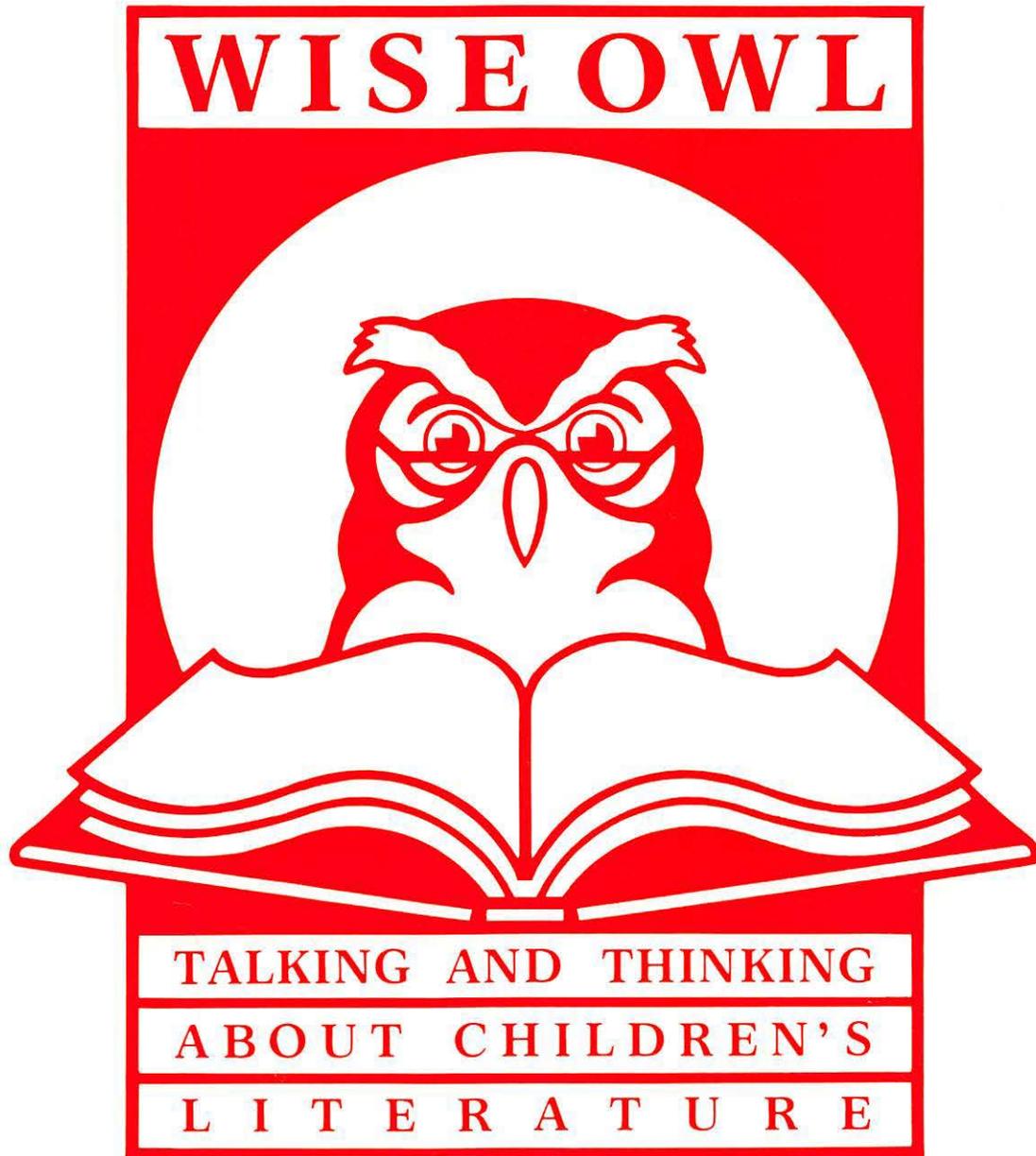
Teacher: Are there times when you point to something and people don't know what you mean?

Allison: I think that happened more when I was little. Now I just explain it with words. Once you get to be five or six or seven, I don't think you point the way you used to when you were a baby.

Notes:

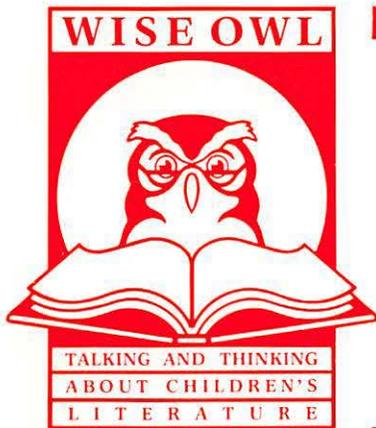
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- **Guidelines for Discussion**



Albert's Toothache

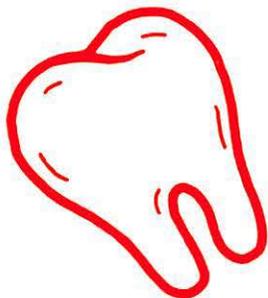
Wise Owl Questions

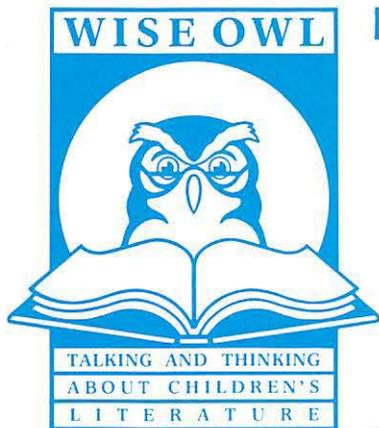
1. Albert Turtle says he has a toothache. Albert's father says it is impossible and points to his own toothless mouth.
 - A. Can you point to something that isn't there, like no teeth? Suppose you ask your friend for a cookie, and she points to the cookie jar. You reach in and are disappointed to find that the jar is empty. Is your friend pointing to something that isn't there?
 - B. Is pointing a way of saying something?
What can you say by pointing?
Does Albert's father say something by pointing?
What?
 - C. Can you think of a time when you didn't understand what someone was pointing to? Tell about it.

Sometimes you feel very sure you know what someone is pointing to. Give an example. Could you be wrong?

- D. Can you think of a time when you pointed to something and nobody understood what you meant? Tell about it.

What can you do to help people understand what you are pointing to? Give an example.





Albert's Toothache

Wise Owl Questions

2. When Albert's father points to his mouth, how do we know what part of his mouth he's pointing to? Could it be his gums? his tongue? his toothlessness? his smile?
 - A. Find something in the room and point to it. Now, without moving your finger, try to think of three different things someone *might* think you're pointing to. What are they?
 - B. Are fingers the only part of your body you can point with? If not, what else can you use?

Can animals point? Which ones?
Can plants point?
 - C. Are there any other ways that we might communicate? What are they?





Albert's Toothache

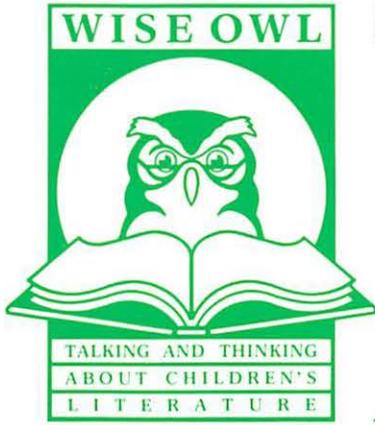
Wise Owl Questions

3. Albert still insists he has a toothache. His father says that Albert's brother has never had a toothache, his sister has never had a toothache, and his mother has never had one. "It's impossible" Albert's father says, "for anyone in this family to have a toothache."
- A. If something has never happened before, does that mean it is impossible that it will ever happen? Can you think of something that has never happened in the past, but might happen in the future? What might it be?
- B. Can you think of something that has never happened in the past, and you're sure will never happen in the future either? What might it be?
- C. Has anything ever happened to you that has never happened to anyone else? What?

How do you know it has never happened to someone?

- D. When things happen to you, like aches and pains, does it matter if you know they have happened to other people too? Does it matter sometimes more than others? Why?





Albert's Toothache

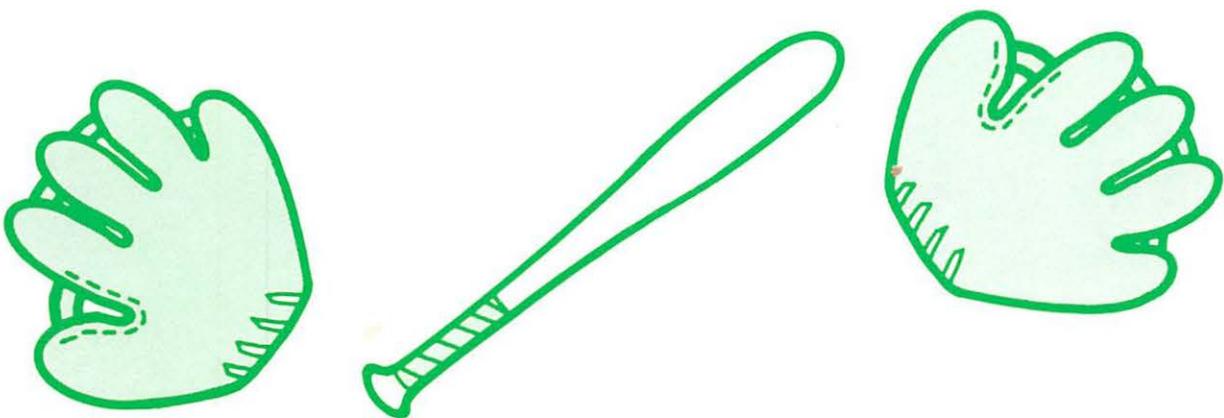
Wise Owl Questions

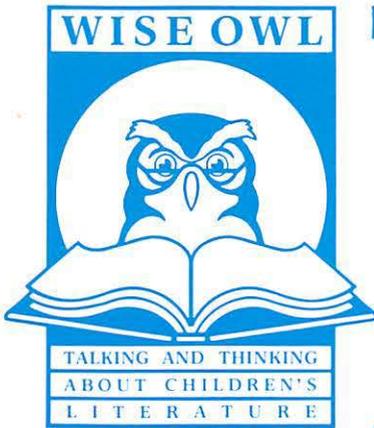
4. Sometimes we believe it is impossible for certain things to be real, for example, an ice cream tree with different flavored "blossoms." But we can still imagine them. (Can you imagine an ice cream cone tree?)
- A. Do you need to have a real tooth to have a toothache?

If you lost a tooth while you were sleeping and thought you had a toothache when you woke up, would it hurt any less when you found out you didn't have the tooth any more?

- B. Is there such thing as an "imaginary" ache? Give an example.

Do imaginary aches hurt less than real ones?



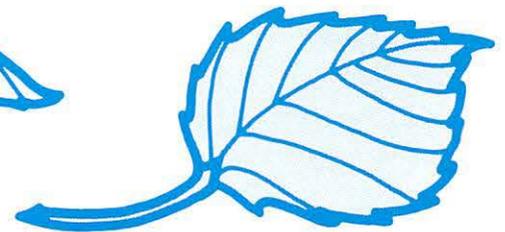
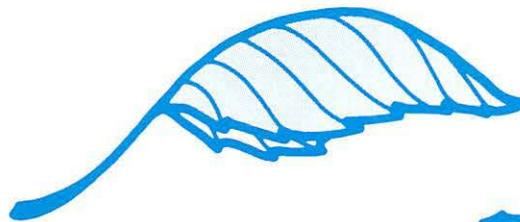


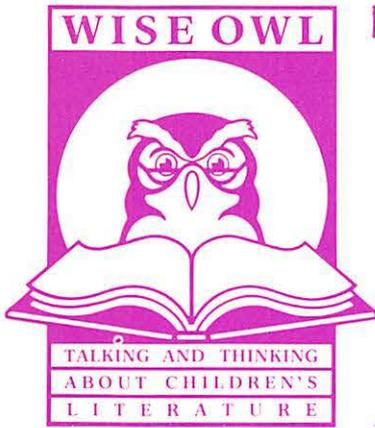
Albert's Toothache

Wise Owl Questions

5. Turtles don't have teeth, but Albert says he has a toothache.
- A. Could Albert have forgotten he is a turtle?
Could Albert have forgotten he doesn't have teeth?
 - B. Could you ever forget who you are?
Could you forget you are a person?
 - C. Is there anything about yourself you've forgotten, then remembered later on? (Your birthday? your friend's last name?) Give an example.
 - D. Could you ever forget about a part of your body?
Which part?

Sometimes your hands or feet get a tingly feeling and "fall asleep." Is that like your body forgetting a part of itself when it's "sleeping"?



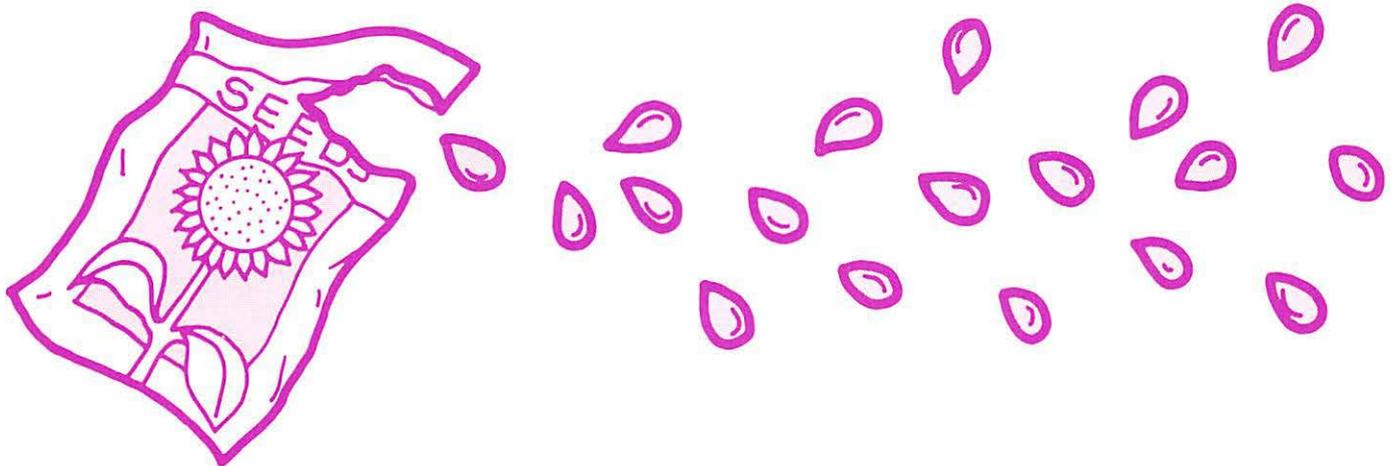


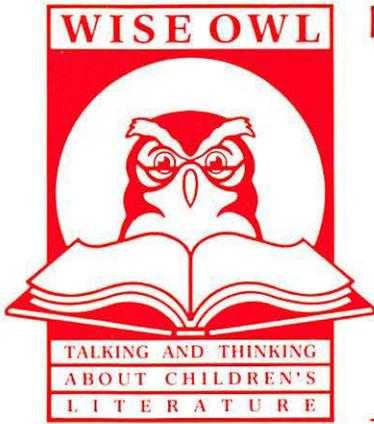
Albert's Toothache

Wise Owl Questions

6. Albert says the gopher bit him. Could Albert have a toothache from the bite of a gopher's tooth?
- A. If someone bites you, could the pain you get be called a toothache?
 - B. Suppose someone says, "You're a pain in the neck." What does that mean?

Why do people say things like that?

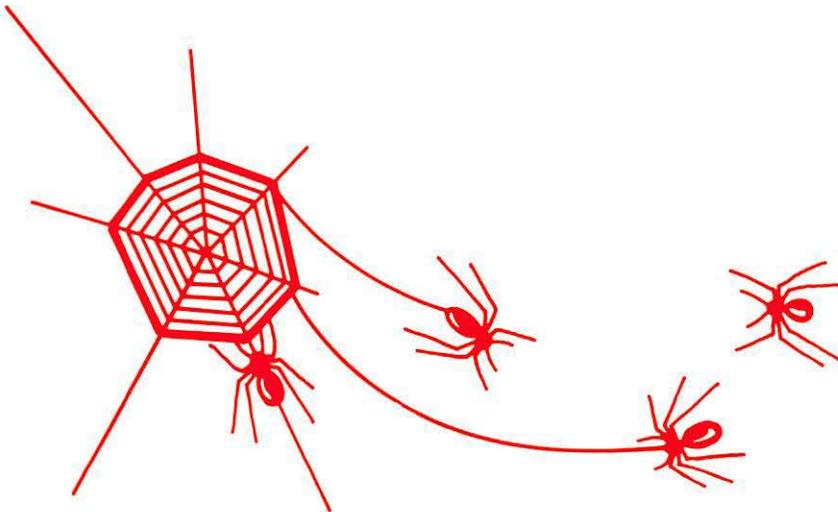




Albert's Toothache

Wise Owl Questions

7. Albert's father thinks Albert is lying.
 - A. If you think today is Wednesday, and say so, and then you look at a calendar and find out it's really Thursday, does that mean you have lied?
 - B. When is saying something false a lie? Give an example.
 - C. Can you think of something you've said that wasn't true, but wasn't a lie, either? What?
 - D. Can you tell a lie without knowing that it is a lie? How?



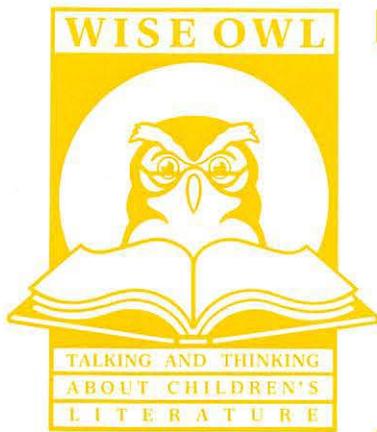


Albert's Toothache

Wise Owl Questions

8. Albert says his father never believes him. Albert's father says he'd believe Albert if Albert told the truth.
- A. Does Albert know he's not telling the truth?
 - B. Is there a difference between believing something (like believing in the tooth fairy) and knowing something (like knowing that $2 + 2 = 4$)?
 - C. What is something you believe?
What is something you know?
 - D. Have you ever believed something, then changed your mind? What?
What made you decide not to believe it?





Albert's Toothache

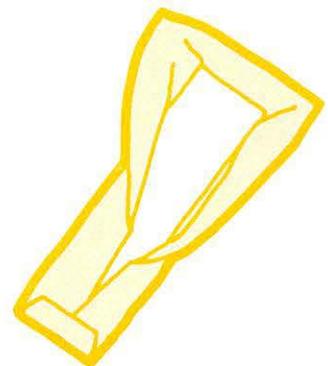
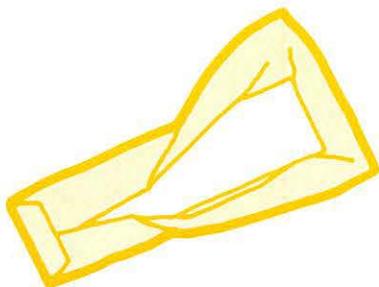
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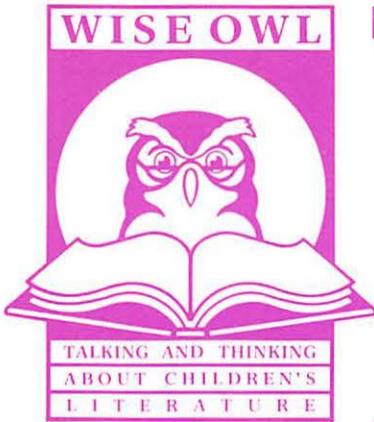
9. Albert's grandmother says the trouble with Albert's family is that they never believe Albert.
- A. Can you believe what someone means, instead of what he or she says?
 - B. Which do you think made Albert feel better, having his toe wrapped in his grandmother's handkerchief, or having his grandmother believe him? Why?

Which would make you feel better if you were Albert?

- C. It hurts when people don't believe you. Is the hurt a kind of ache, like a toothache?

Is there a special place where it hurts when people don't believe you? If so, where? If not, why not?





Albert's Toothache

Wise Owl Questions

10. MAKE UP A STORY – EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. Make up a story in which Caroline wakes up one day and decides not to speak any more, but only to point to things. Describe what Caroline's day is like, and how, at dinnertime, her family convinces her to start speaking.



B. Make up a story about a planet where people are just like human beings, except that they feel aches and pains in parts of their bodies that they have lost, like teeth, hair, and fingernails. Describe how the doctors on this planet would treat their patients.

C. Make up a story about Joseph, who never believes anything he hears.



D. Make up a story about Josephine, who believes everything she hears.

