

GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION

I KNOW A LADY

by Charlotte Zolotow

I Know a Lady is a sensitive story about an elderly woman and the young children in her neighborhood. It provides a natural context for discussing intergenerational relationships. In particular, students reflect on the value of this unique kind of friendship.

The story also stimulates discussion about life-styles. A child does not freely choose his or her own life-style. It emerges from family background, socioeconomic status, and geographic location. Personal choices are limited by the expectations of parents, teachers, and peers. Adults may also feel constrained by a specific role in society, feeling they have no choice except to drop out.

Adults and children benefit from exploring a variety of plausible life-styles. Literature is a source for learning about life's possibilities. Friendships between older people and young children stimulate students to explore real-life interpersonal relationships, reflecting on people who act as role models for adult life-styles.

The value of intergenerational relationships is not limited to children. Ideally the open quality of this kind of friendship may be intrinsically rewarding to both participants. Unlike peer relationships, competition is likely to be insignificant, leaving both adult and child free to offer one another support and acceptance.

Living Alone (Question 1)

Many people live alone, either by choice or by circumstance. Even people who do not live alone need time away from others. This question provides opportunities to ponder the life-style of a single person and the importance of being comfortable with oneself.

Gardens (Question 2)

This question elicits discussion about gardens. Students who live in small towns may take home-grown gardens for granted; whereas students in large cities may find them exotic.

Presents (Question 3)

Sometimes people give gifts to meet another's needs. Giving may also be an expression of affection. In choosing the perfect gift, the giver combines the point of view of the recipient with his or her personal motives and feelings. Sharing gifts with friends enlarges and enriches the quality of life.

Gestures (Question 4)

Gestures are part of interpersonal communication. A wave or a smile acknowledges another's presence and fosters a sense of belonging. While discussing the nature and purpose of human gestures, you may wish to use animals as an analogy. In some ways, a person's relationship with his or her pet may be a desirable model for interpersonal relationships. In other ways, this analogy falls short.

Holidays (Question 5)

Celebrations mark significant dates for people, communities, countries, and religions. Celebrations are opportunities to appreciate family and friends, to identify one's racial, cultural, or ethnic heritage, and to promote a sense of community.

Holidays can also be divisive, designating one group as different from another. Open-minded teachers and parents encourage children to participate in their own holiday rituals, while building appreciation for the customs of others.

Names (Question 6)

In ancient times, people believed that knowing another person's name gave them power over that person. Today calling another person by name is a way of showing interest, friendship, or respect. Reflect on the reasons that this is true.

This question addresses the practice of naming people and objects. Adults and children may name their pets and other favorite objects, such as a doll or a car. Giving an inanimate object a proper name enables the owner to think of it as alive. Because

students are usually open to this discussion, it can be rewarding socially and intellectually.

Birds and Animals (Question 7)

Wild birds and stray animals belong to the greater community of animals. Children may be confused about how to behave toward these creatures. Stories and art often elicit a sentimental response. Yet adults may react in callous, even fearful ways toward stray or wild animals.

Stray dogs and cats are a natural concern for any sensitive person, whether a child or an adult. Caring for a stray animal fosters expectations that cannot be satisfied without some commitment of time and money. Students may realistically analyze their resources and their ability to accept this responsibility.

Life Stages and Personal Identity (Questions 8, 9, and 10)

People often perceive themselves and others as fixed at their current life stages. Even though children recognize that their parents and grandparents were once children, it is difficult for them to understand and appreciate this fact.

These questions invite children to reflect on various life stages in order to build an appreciation for the characteristics of each one. One way to prompt reflection is to look at pictures of parents, grandparents, and teachers as children. Another way is to seek similarities among family members across several generations. The latter activity shows the effects modeling and role-playing have on growing up.

Sample Discussion

The following transcript is a discussion that occurred during the tryouts of Wise Owl questions. This dialogue shows the way young children think and models the guidance teachers may offer.

(Question 1 — A and B)

The lady on the block lives alone.

- A. Is it easy for people to live alone? Is it easy for some people and not for others? Explain your answer.
- B. Is it difficult for people to live alone? Is it more difficult for some people than for others? Explain your answer.

Teacher: In the story we just read, the old woman lives alone. Think about other people you know who live alone. Do you think that it is easy for people to live alone?

Paula: It can be easy. Sometimes they might get lonely. But it can be good too — because it can be just the way you want it at your house.

Teacher: Tell me a little more about that . . . about how it can be just the way you want it at your house.

Paula: Well at my house, my mother doesn't mind that much if we make a clutter. We can have modeling dough here and books there and blocks and laundry everywhere.

Teacher: I see. So if you live alone, you can have things just the way that you want them.

Ken: Yeah, and you don't have to clean up if you don't want to. I wouldn't want to.

Sarah: I would want to clean up. But I would like to live alone because I could have meals that I like. No fish,

no Brussels sprouts, and no things that I wouldn't want.

Teacher: So Sarah has pointed out another reason why it might be easy to live alone.

Karen: But they'd get lonely.

Teacher: Who would be lonely?

Karen: The people who live alone.

Sarah: Maybe they don't have to live alone. Maybe they just want to live alone. My aunt wants to live alone. She's thirty-six, and she doesn't have any kids. She has only a boyfriend, and she likes to live alone. She likes private time.

Teacher: So maybe it's easy for some to live alone but not for others?

Ken: It's not easy for my grandmother. She used to live with her sister, but she was really old and she died. Now my grandmother has to live alone, and it's not that good.

Teacher: Tell us why it's not easy for her.

Ken: She was not that lonely before, but now she is. She doesn't have her sister, and she doesn't have her cat because it died too. And now my grandmother needs us to visit because it does her good. It does her good to have company, and she really loves children a lot.

Teacher: So Ken's grandmother lives alone, although this is not her choice. And Sarah's aunt chose to live alone.

Paula: So it's easy for some people and not easy for some other people.

Teacher: What do other students think about that? Paula thinks that living alone can be easy for some people but not for others. What do you think?

Ken: Some people could live alone and not be lonely.

Teacher: Douglas, what do you think? Ken says some people could live alone and not be lonely.

Douglas: They're probably just pretending they're not lonely. All people get lonely.

Sarah: My aunt doesn't get lonely.

Karen: She might get lonely.

Sarah: No, she just likes to live alone.

Douglas: She could like to live alone and still get lonely sometimes. That could happen. All human beings get lonely.

Sarah: You don't even know her, Douglas. She doesn't get lonely.

Douglas: We're having a disagreement.

Teacher: It's important to express your opinion, and sometimes that means you're going to disagree. I like the way you could disagree and understand that you were disagreeing. But you don't have to raise your voices or have an argument. This isn't the kind of question that has a right or a wrong answer.

Ken: I think it's okay to live alone if you want to. But it's sad if you don't want to.

Sarah: Hey! That's what I said!

Ken: But I think it's sad.

Karen: It's only sad if the person doesn't want to be alone. It's all right if you want to live alone.

Teacher: So Ken, would you think it's hard for some people to live alone?

Ken: If they're sad about it. If they wish that they didn't have to live alone, then it's hard.

Douglas: It can be hard if you don't have a car. How would you get to the grocery store? How would you do the laundry?

Sarah: Do it at home!

Douglas: Some people have to bring it to the Laundromat. What if it is snowing and you live alone?

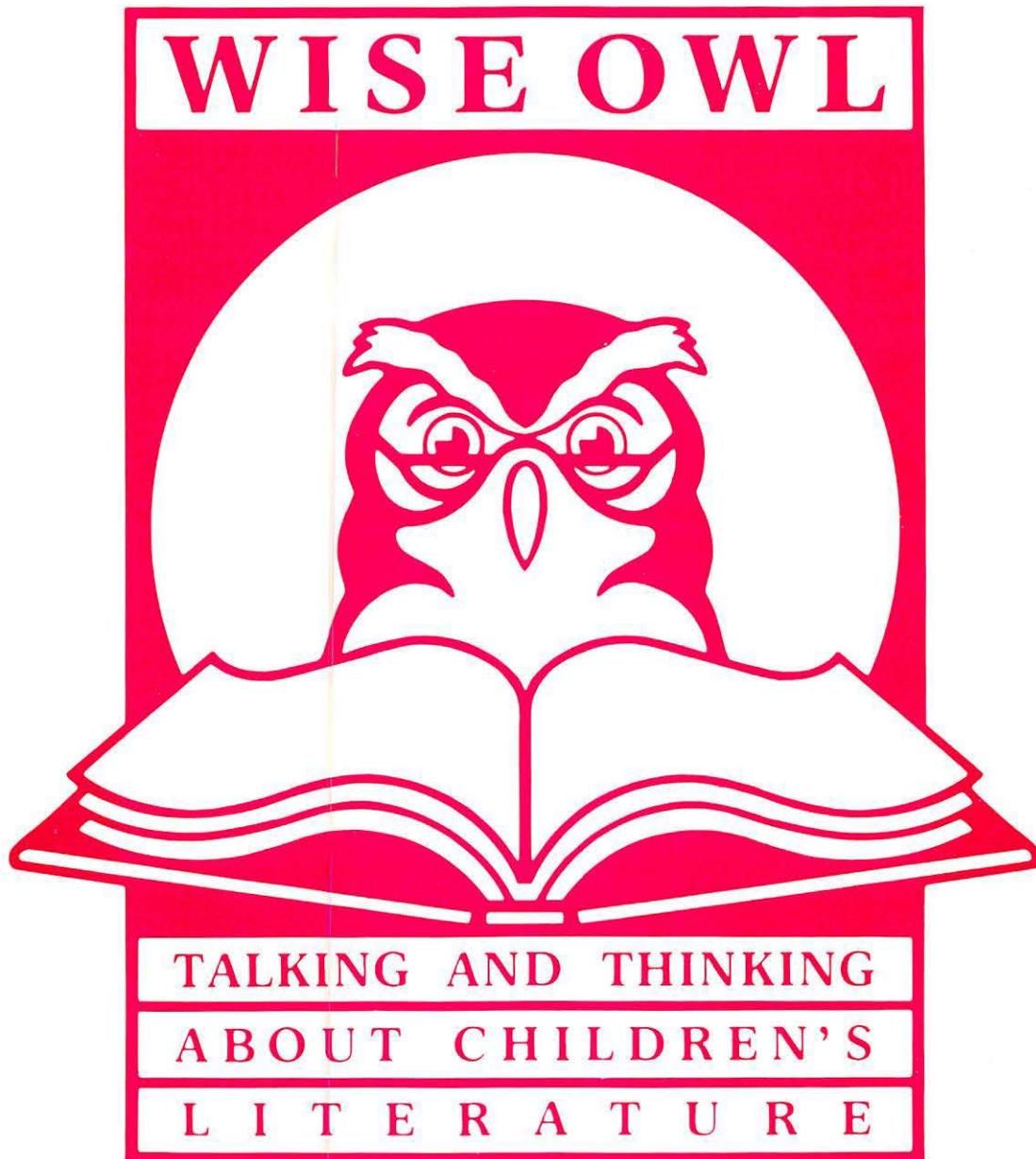
Karen: In the book, the old woman does pretty good. She doesn't have many problems. But some old people do, if they can't walk. That would make it hard to live alone. My grandmother, she walks great and she lives alone. It's not hard for her to be alone because she has lots to do.

Teacher: So it was hard for her before, but things are better now?

Karen: We got her a fish tank for her birthday and now she's so busy. She's wild about fish.

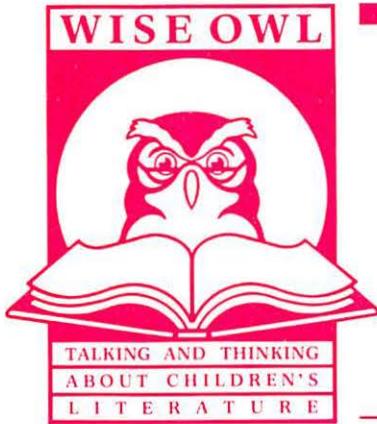
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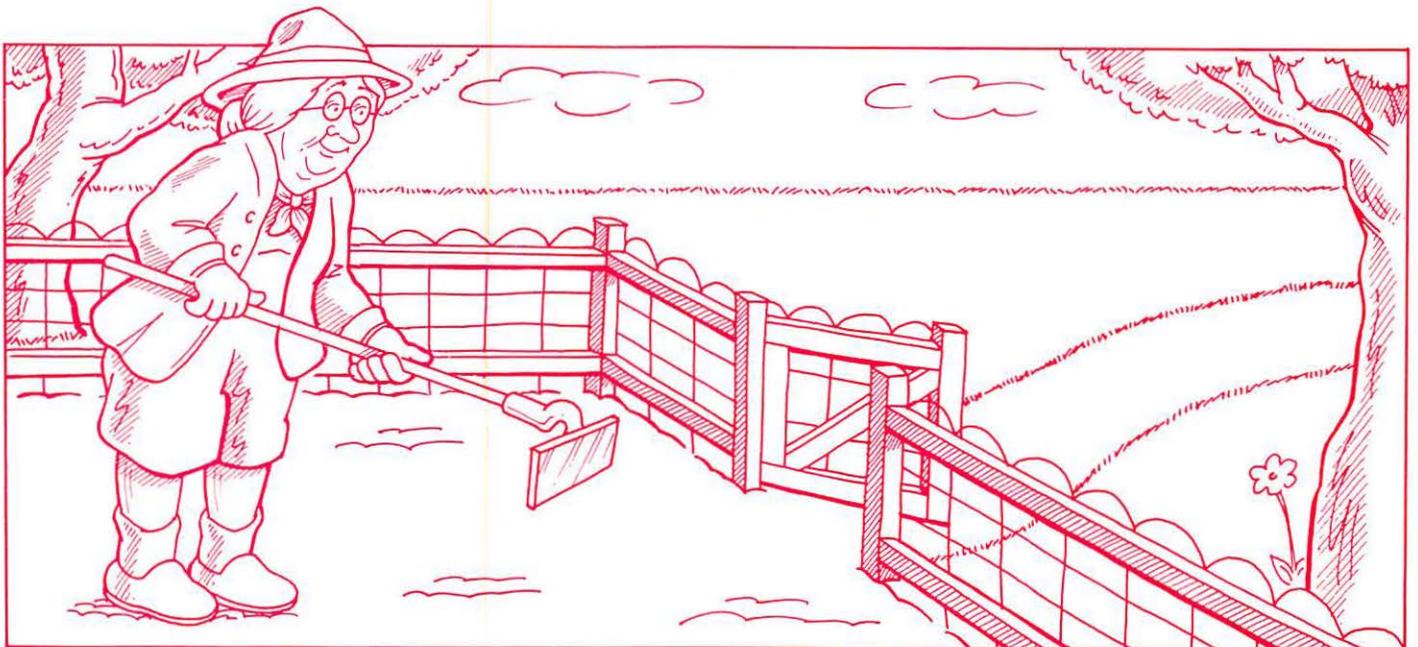
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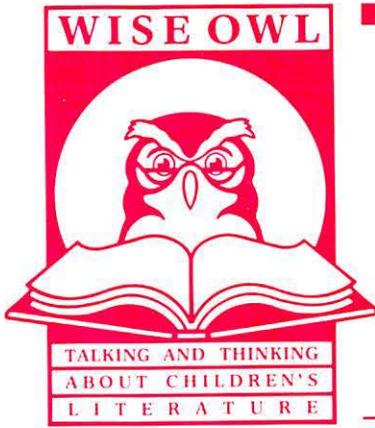


I Know a Lady

Wise Owl Questions

1. The lady on the block lives alone.
 - A. Is it easy for people to live alone? Is it easy for some people and not for others? Explain your answer.
 - B. Is it difficult for people to live alone? Is it more difficult for some people than for others? Explain your answer.
 - C. Most people live with a family. How do you feel about living with your family? Is living with a family right for everyone? Explain your answer.
 - D. Have you ever been alone for a long period of time? Was it easy or difficult? Is it good to experience being alone?

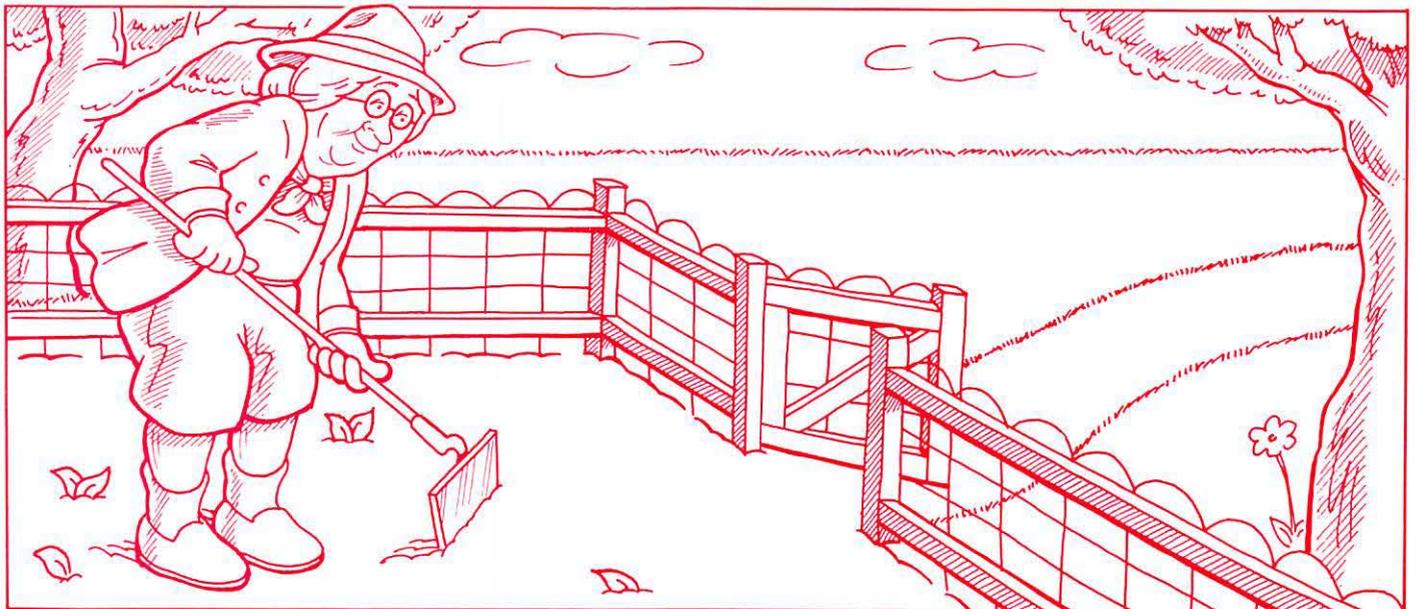


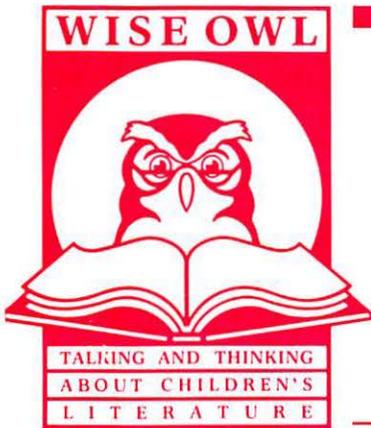


I Know a Lady

Wise Owl Questions

2. The lady works regularly in her garden.
 - A. Why do people grow gardens? Think of several reasons.
 - B. Should everyone have a garden? If not, what are some reasons that some people may not have one?
 - C. Is growing a garden like owning a pet? Is it like having children? Explain your answers.
 - D. How are gardens grown — by nature or by people? Explain your answer.

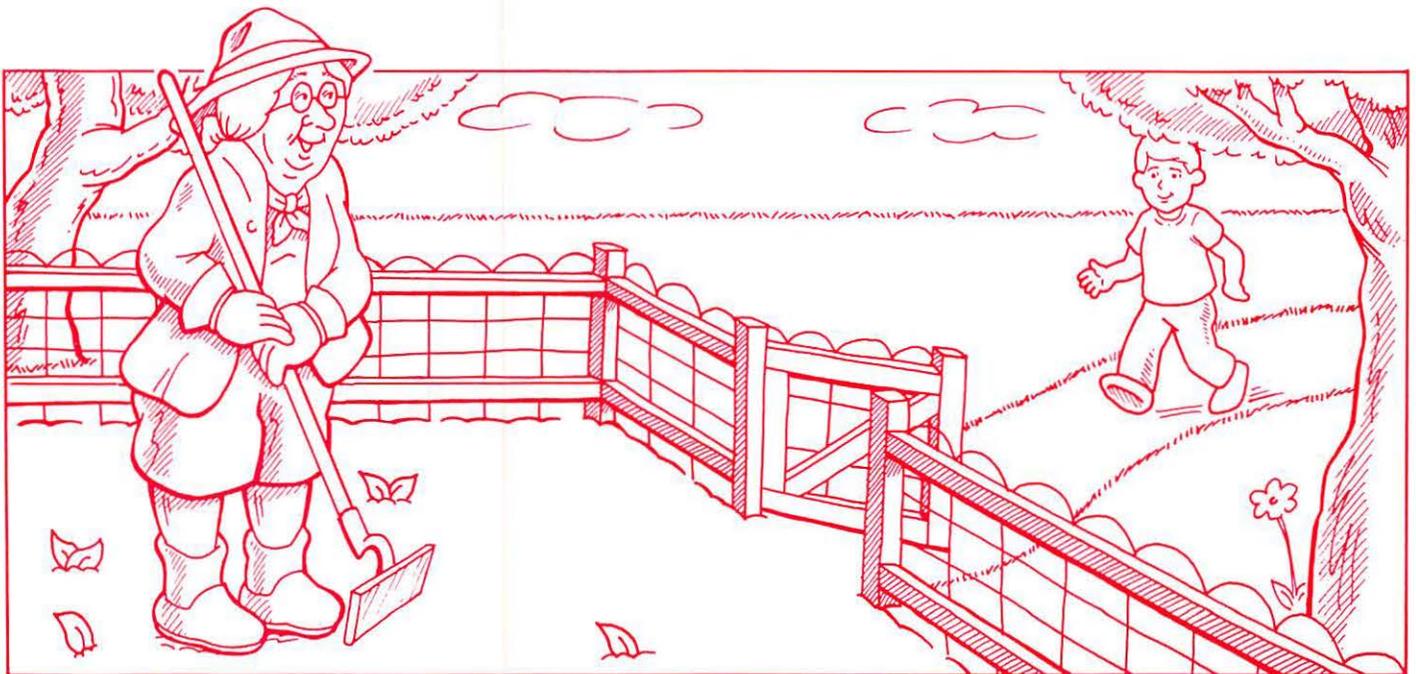


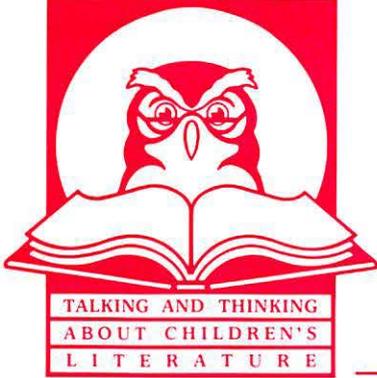


I Know a Lady

Wise Owl Questions

3. The lady gives her neighbors daffodils, zinnias, chrysanthemums, and red holly berries.
 - A. Is it nicer to give a gift that you have grown or a gift that you have bought? Explain your answer.
 - B. Why do people give presents? Think of several reasons.
 - C. How might you feel if there was no need for giving gifts?
 - D. Do you need a reason to give someone a present? Explain your answer.

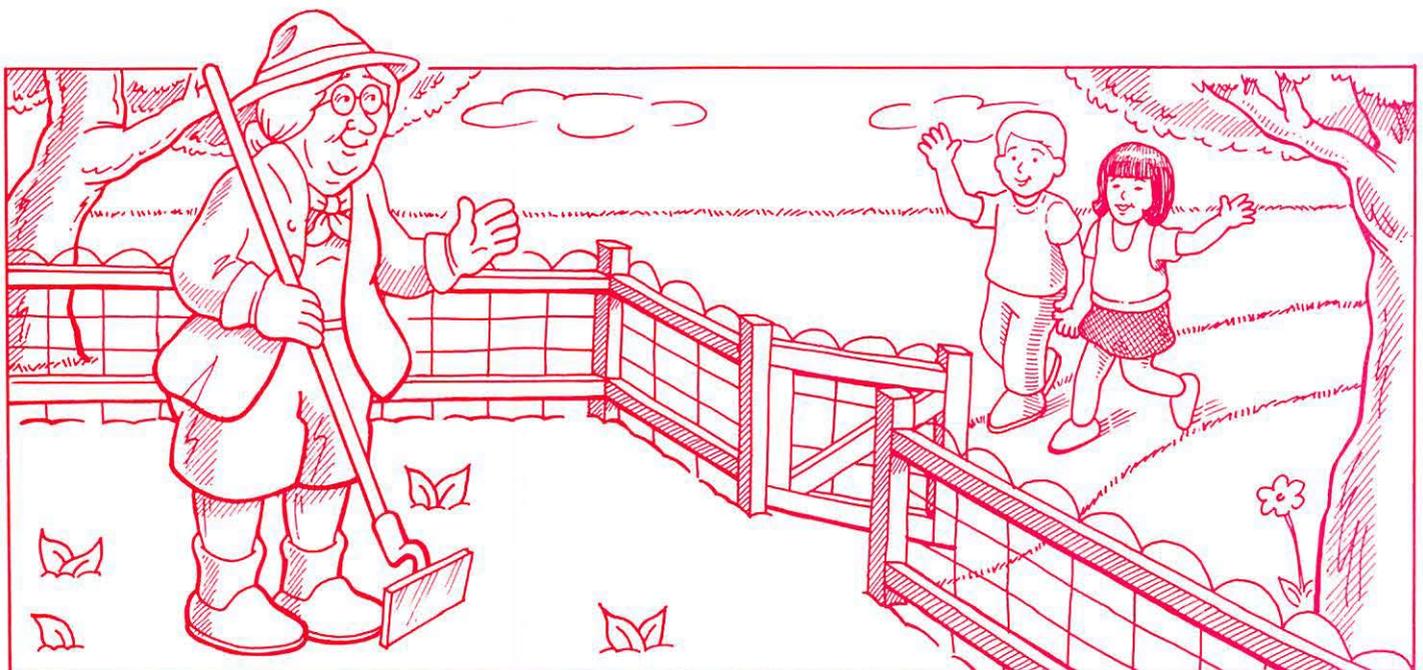


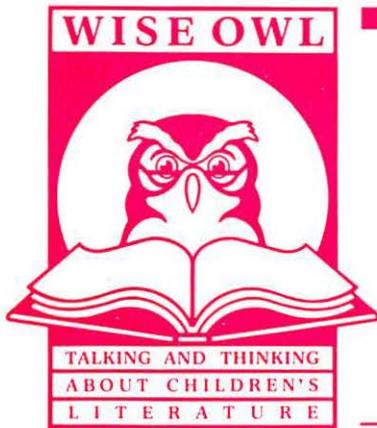


I Know a Lady

Wise Owl Questions

4. The lady waves to the neighborhood children on their way to school. She smiles at them on their way home.
 - A. Do you like it when people wave at you?
 - B. Do you wave at others? Why or why not?
 - C. How do you decide when to wave and when to smile? Do these gestures have different meanings?
 - D. Can dogs or cats do actions similar to a wave or a smile? If so, what? Are these actions important to understanding the animal?

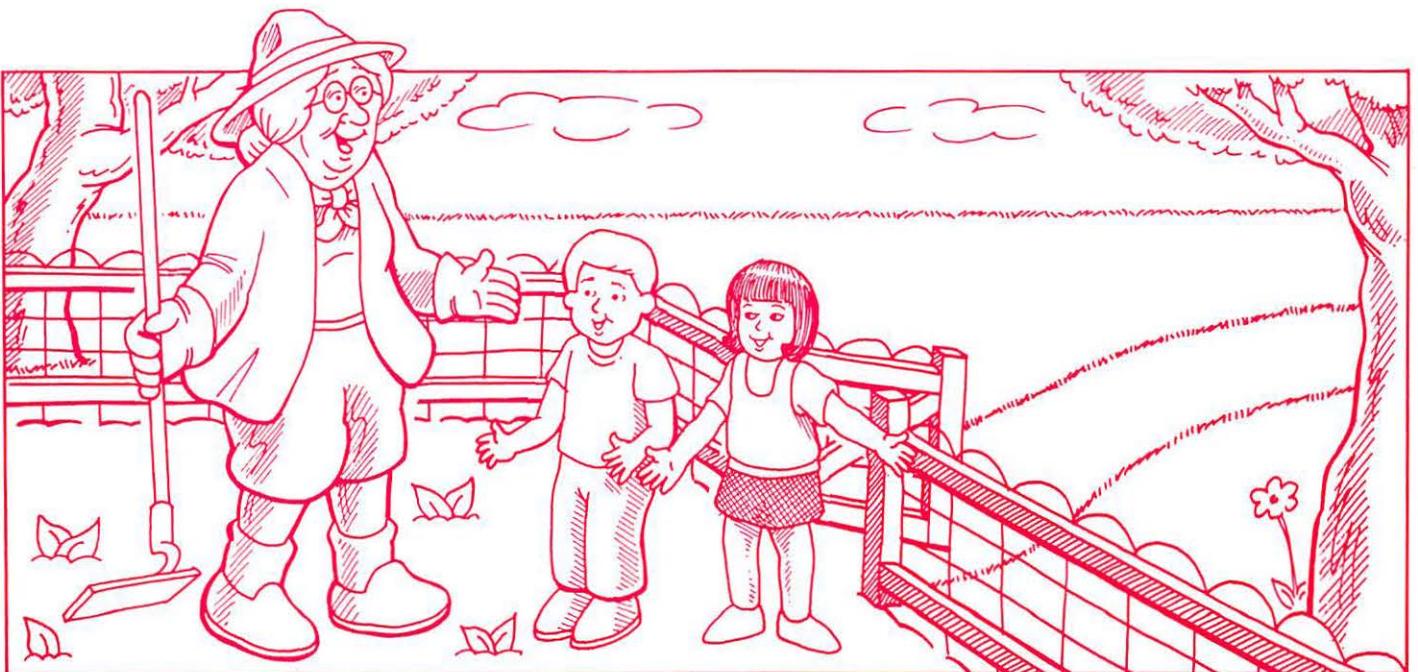


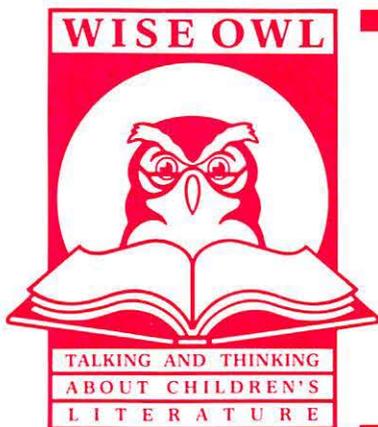


I Know a Lady

Wise Owl Questions

5. The lady invites the neighborhood children to celebrate Halloween and Christmas.
 - A. Why do people celebrate special days, such as Halloween, Christmas, and Hanukkah?
 - B. Does your family celebrate a special day that other families do not celebrate? Explain your answer.
 - C. What are some of the traditional stories that accompany holiday celebrations?
 - D. Is it important to know the customs for celebrating holidays? Explain your answer.



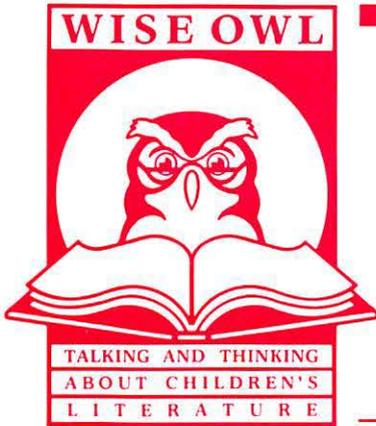


I Know a Lady

Wise Owl Questions

6. The lady knows Sally's name and the name of Sally's dog.
 - A. Why is it important to know a person's name? Think of several reasons.
 - B. Can you be friends with someone without knowing his or her name? Explain your answer.
 - C. Is it important to know the name of a cat or dog? Why or why not?
 - D. Can you give an object any name you wish? Why do some people name pets, places, and objects?





I Know a Lady

Wise Owl Questions

7. The lady feeds wild birds and a stray cat.
 - A. Should people feed wild birds? Does it matter whether people like the birds? Explain your answer.
 - B. The lady feeds a stray cat. What does this show about her personality?
 - C. Would you help wild birds or stray animals? Why or why not?
 - D. Do birds or animals ever do anything for you? Explain your answer.



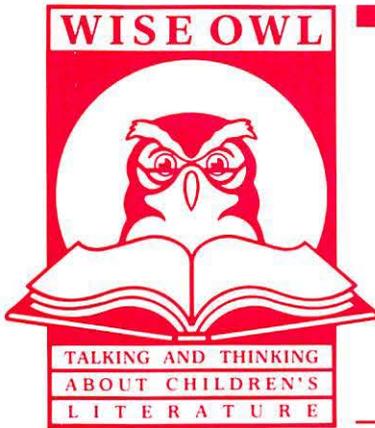


I Know a Lady

Wise Owl Questions

8. The old lady was once a little girl.
- A. Can you imagine what the lady was like as a little girl? If so, how can you tell?
 - B. Do you ever imagine yourself as an elderly man or woman? Explain your answer.
 - C. Have you seen photographs of your parents or grandparents as children? Are these pictures interesting? Explain your answer.
 - D. Have you seen a photograph of yourself as a baby? How do you feel about seeing yourself much younger?

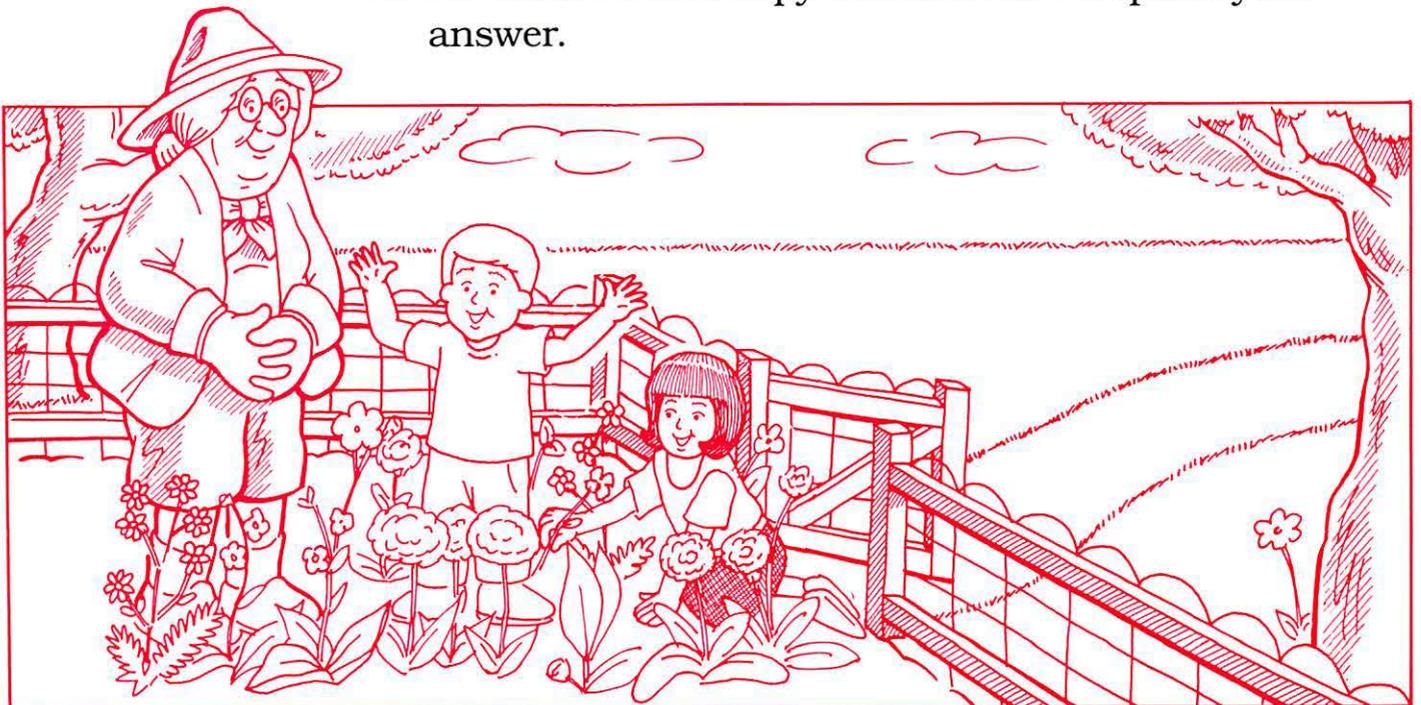


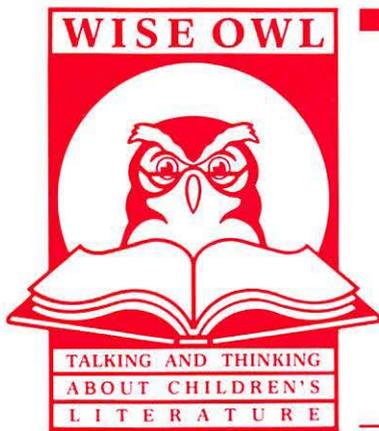


I Know a Lady

Wise Owl Questions

9. When the lady was a little girl, perhaps she knew an older woman who did the same things that the lady does now.
- A. Do you suppose your mother imitates what her mother once did or that your father imitates his father?
 - B. Do you ever copy your older brother's or sister's actions? Do you ever copy the older children at school?
 - C. Is it important to copy others? If so, when?
 - D. Do animals ever copy one another? Explain your answer.





I Know a Lady

Wise Owl Questions

10. Sally imagines trading places with the lady.
 - A. Can you imagine your parents as children? What might they have been like?
 - B. Can you imagine being the mother or father of your teacher? What might you be like?
 - C. Can adults and children be friends? Explain your answer.
 - D. Why is it good to have friends your own age? Why might it be good to have older or younger friends?

