

GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION

THE BEE-MAN OF ORN

by Frank R. Stockton

The Bee-Man of Orn is an enjoyable yarn, beautifully illustrated by Maurice Sendak. It is also an intellectually stimulating story. Use it to think with your students about these challenging ideas.

Friendship and Bees

(Question 1)

Friendship is as important to human life as it is difficult to understand. Most children make new friends rather easily and often lose old ones quickly. For this reason, the school setting is a natural context for children to think about friendship: What is friendship? Why is it important?

One of the ways to learn about friendship is to compare relationships between people with relationships between people and their pets. Stockton's story invites students to extend this comparison to the unique friendship between a bee-keeper and his bees. Delight in the comparisons and contrasts your students come up with! You may be pleased and surprised at how well children grasp and express the complexities of their relationships to one another and to other creatures.

Magic (Question 2)

Young children believe in magic. As adults, they grow away from magical ways of thinking. We often fail to recognize that the idea of magic is part of the culture that children assimilate. Literature, films, and TV often include magical themes, characters, and events. We tell stories of magic and we expect children to understand and enjoy them. Without assuming the attitude of an "enlightened" adult, encourage your students to reflect on magic and to make as much sense of it as they can. You may be surprised at how shrewd, imaginative, and resourceful they can be.

Transformations (Questions 3, 4, and 5)

This topic is at the very heart of the story. Try to let it develop as fully and as naturally as you can.

Childhood is a time of surprising transformations. Children grow out of clothes quickly and learn new skills daily. They struggle to understand their human potential as they observe baby animals grow into adulthood—not to mention tadpoles into frogs and caterpillars into butterflies. It is especially challenging for children to imagine themselves as babies, since they have no memory of their own infancy.

Almost as soon as children learn to talk, they are asked about the future: “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Yet the idea of being an adult is almost as baffling as the idea of being a baby. Children are thus ideally motivated to think about the intriguing issues of transformation. Some of these issues are difficult even for the most clever philosopher to understand. Yet no one comes to them with more freshness than children. Treasure that freshness and enjoy their unique insights.

Energy (Question 6)

It is difficult for children to make useful and responsible connections between what they feel and what they know about their own bodily states. Reflecting on energy levels at different times is, perhaps, a way to start building this kind of self-knowledge.

Sleep and Change (Question 7)

In this question, the transformation theme focuses on the environment, rather than on the individual. Rip Van Winkle awakes from a long sleep unchanged, but the world around him has changed. Even the night when we go to sleep is different from the morning when we awake. Encourage students to delight in the newness of each day as well as reflect on the continuities of their daily lives.

Bravery and Character (Question 8)

We ask children to be brave even when they are very young. “Don’t cry! Be brave!” we say to them in the doctor’s office. Yet it is difficult, even for

an adult, to know exactly what is required to be brave.

This question asks students to reflect on bravery as a simple virtue and leads to a consideration of character, motivation, and duty. The purpose is not to develop a moral theory. It is to think ideally, with concrete examples in mind, about moral life. We develop habits of character that lead us to morally acceptable behavior. Sharing our experiences plays an important role in reinforcing good habits and discouraging the less desirable ones.

Growing Up (Questions 9 and 10)

These questions focus on human transformation. The first question explores what is good about each stage of life. The second question invites students to speculate how their own lives might have been different.

Children get mixed signals about the value of childhood. Some adults idealize childhood as a period of innocence from all significant responsibility. Other adults devalue childhood and consider it only a preparation for adulthood. Help your students to appreciate the advantages of childhood so that they can naturally move on to the next stage. Adults and children need to be thoughtfully appreciative of their own life stages—past, present, and future. Thinking about the question, “Could my life have been different?” leads students to discover themselves as unique individuals and to accept responsibility for their own thoughts and actions.

According to a myth of the Yoruba tribe in Nigeria, each human being chooses his or her own body. After making that choice, the soul passes through the “veil of forgetting.” The project of each person’s life, according to this myth, is to discover why he or she made this choice and to accept it. In other words, we can come to terms

with ourselves, if like the Bee-man of Orn, we can affirm our character and accept our life's circumstances.

SAMPLE DISCUSSION

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

(Question 1—A, B, and C)

Bees are the Bee-man's only friends.

- A. Are bees our friends too? Think of some reasons why bees are our friends. Think of some reasons why bees are not our friends.
- B. Could bees be a bee-keeper's friends? What might show that they are? What might show that they are not?
- C. Do you have a pet who is your friend? Is every pet somebody's friend? (Think of different kinds of pets.)

Teacher: Are bees our friends too?

Sam: Well, they could be your friends. I don't really think they are my friends, though.

Teacher: Why not?

Sam: I got stung three times this summer. Once I was in tall grass and a yellow jacket stung me right on the foot. And the other times were in the car.

Teacher: So you don't have very good feelings toward those particular bees. But how about all the bees that have not stung you. Do you think they are your friends?

Sam: Not really, not like real friends.

Chloe: But they are our friends. We saw a movie about it. And bees make flowers.

David: They do not exactly make flowers, Chloe.

Chloe: Well, they carry pollen so flowers can grow more flowers.

Teacher: And that makes them our friends?

Chloe: Sure! Flowers are beautiful. That's nice that they do that. Plus they make honey to have with sweet apples. And honey is so good!

Thomas: Well, two things. One is that I'm allergic to a lot of flowers. I get hay fever and asthma. And two is that I do not like honey. To me, it tastes like oil and rubber.

Teacher: So do you think bees are friends to some people and are not friends to others?

Chloe: Yes, that's what I think.

Sam: I don't think they can be our friends even if I like honey. Because a bee can't be your friend. They don't even have that much of a mind. They can't really think or anything.

Chloe: Well, they make honey. So if they know how to make that honeycomb thing and how to find their way back to their hive, they must be really smart.

Sam: That's not smart. That's already in their mind when they are born. Their mind is all used up with directions for how to be a bee. A bee could not decide, "Hey, I think I will play hockey instead of making some honey," like a person can. They don't have a choice.

Teacher: So to be a friend you have to be able to make choices about your job?

Ben: No! No! He means that a bee isn't smart enough to really be your friend. Like Sam is my friend. A bee can't be that kind of a friend. They can't be real friends even if you like them. They can't like you back.

Teacher: In *The Bee-Man of Orn*, the bees seem to be friendlier to the Bee-man than they are to other people. Do you think those particular bees are his personal friends?

Ben: No way! They are just used to him.

Chloe: It says his skin got all leathery and hard cause he got stung so much. And in the movie, we saw some bee-keepers stung so often that to them it was more like a mosquito bite. They got used to it.

Teacher: So you think the Bee-man still got stung?

Chloe: Yes, but it did not bother him.

Teacher: Say he does get stung, but it really doesn't bother him. And he really enjoys the buzz of the bees and their busy working about his house. Would you say the bees are his personal friends?

Sam: I still say bees can't be your friends. Not the way people can. Ben already explained the answer. Because bees can't like you back. They are just bees.

Teacher: How about other pets. Can other pets be your friends?

Betsy: My cat is my best friend. Better than people.

David: It cannot even talk!

Betsy: It is like she talks. She purrs and she crawls up on my lap at the table. And she is very friendly to other people, not just to the people in my family.

Teacher: What do you think? Those people who feel that bees cannot be our friends, can cats and dogs be our friends?

Ben: Sort of. It is closer to people.

Teacher: What makes it closer to people?

Ben: Well, because cats and dogs are smarter.

Sam: Dogs are smarter. They can do tricks.

Betsy: My cat does tricks.

Sam: It is not the same. Dogs are smart because their brains and minds are big. They can decide if they like you. Dogs can remember you by your smell and they can find their way home from a long way away. They are much smarter than cats.

Betsy: No, they are not.

Teacher: Who thinks a pet has to be smart to be a friend?

David: I do! I have these hermit crabs. I play with them and get them to claw and grab pennies and stuff, but they are not friendly like my Nana's dog. They are a different kind of pet. Not so smart.

Teacher: So a pet has to be smart to be a friend?

Chloe: No! It just has to like you back! A crab cannot like you back.

Thomas: You can't tell if it likes you back—it can't talk.

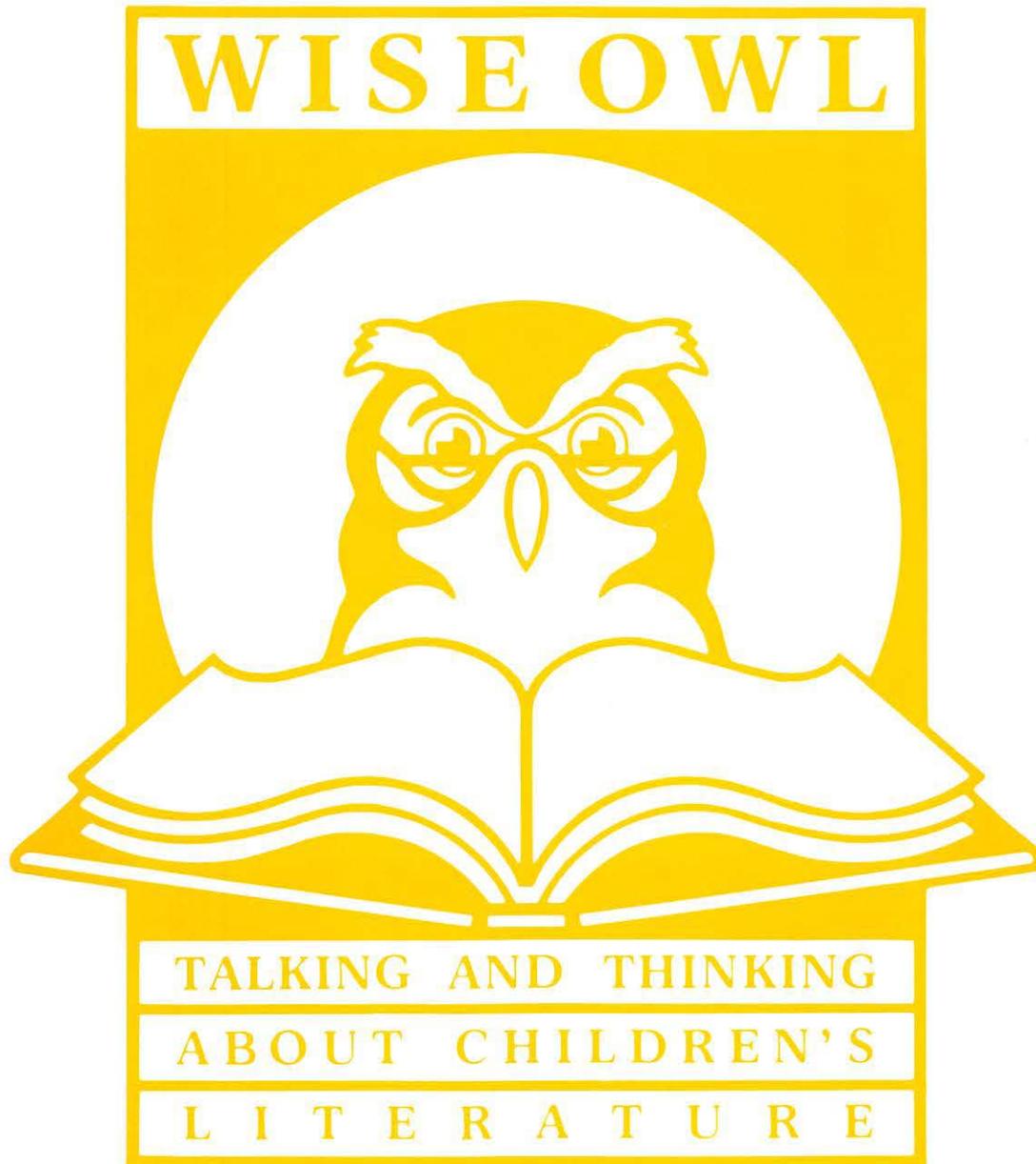
Betsy: And a bee can't like you back either.

Chloe: But bees are our friends because they make good things for us!

Teacher: So, in this group, some students feel that bees are our friends and some students feel that they are not.

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Contents:

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- **10 Question Cards**
- **Guidelines for Discussion**



The Bee-Man of Orn

Wise Owl Questions

1. Bees are the Bee-man's only friends.
 - A. Are bees our friends too? Think of some reasons why bees are our friends. Think of some reasons why bees are not our friends.
 - B. Could bees be a bee-keeper's friends? What might show that they are? What might show that they are not?
 - C. Do you have a pet who is your friend? Is every pet somebody's friend? (Think of different kinds of pets.)
 - D. Why is it important to have friends?





The Bee-Man of Orn

Wise Owl Questions

2. A Junior Sorcerer is someone who is studying to be a magician.
 - A. Can you learn to be a magician? What might you study?
 - B. How might you tell the difference between someone who is learning to be a magician and someone who has become one?
 - C. If you were a magician, could you explain how to perform your tricks?
 - D. Do you ever pretend to be a magician? Explain your answer.



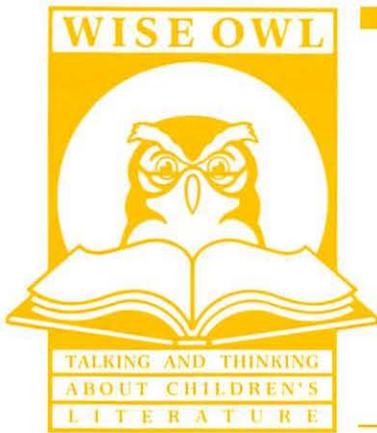


The Bee-Man of Orn

Wise Owl Questions

3. The Junior Sorcerer says that the Bee-man has been transformed, that is, changed from something else into a bee-keeper.
 - A. Caterpillars change into butterflies. What other living things are transformed in nature?
 - B. Bees transform nectar from flowers into honey. What animals transform foods they eat into foods for people?
 - C. The Junior Sorcerer says that people and animals are sometimes magically transformed. What is the difference between being magically transformed and being transformed through growth?
 - D. Growing up has changed you from a baby. How are you different from the baby you once were?

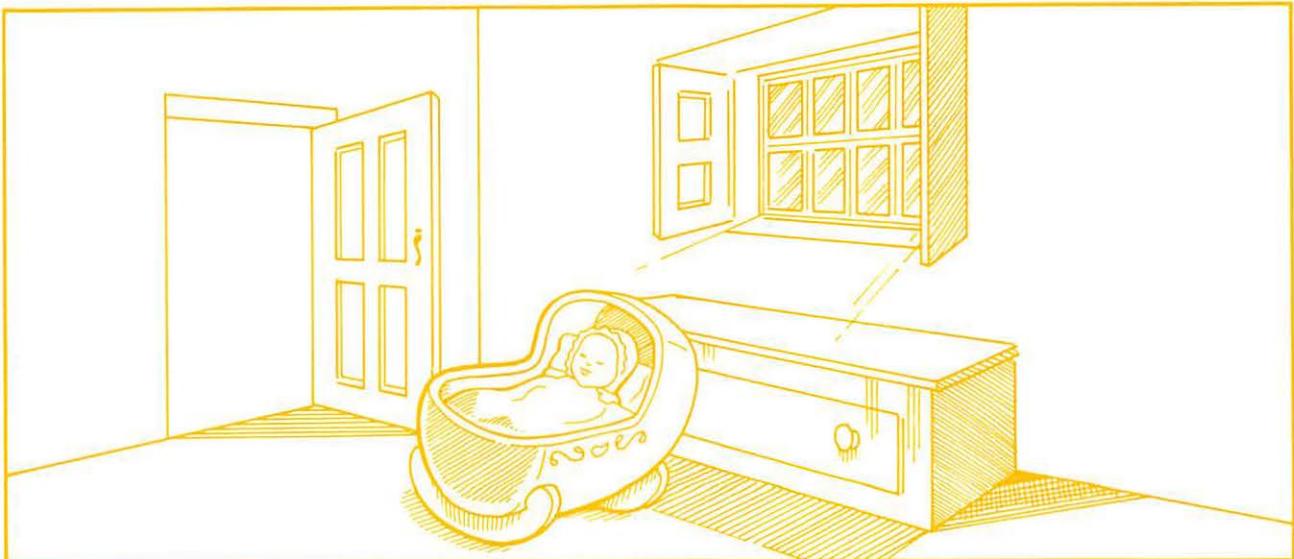




The Bee-Man of Orn

Wise Owl Questions

4. The Bee-man wonders whether he was once a giant, a prince, or someone that the magicians or fairies wished to punish.
 - A. Imagine that you have been transformed from a queen, a giant, a Hollywood actress, or a football star. What difference would it make to you now?
 - B. Are you interested in what you were like as a baby? What difference does it make to you now?
 - C. Can you imagine your mother or father as a baby? What difference would it make to the way you think about them now?
 - D. Suppose you could change into someone very different by magic. What kind of person would you like to be?



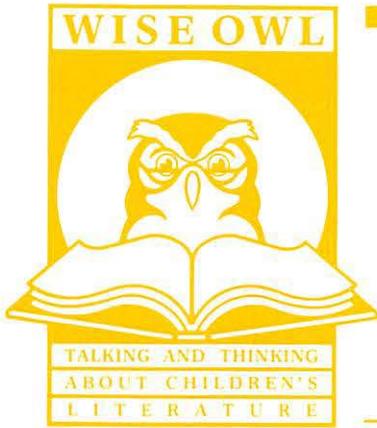


The Bee-Man of Orn

Wise Owl Questions

5. When the Lord of the Domain kicks him, the Bee-man decides he could not have been a mean person.
 - A. Do people who were once good and kind sometimes become mean and cruel? What might change them?
 - B. Do people who were once mean and cruel sometimes become good and kind? What might change them?
 - C. Think of a way that you are different than you were a year ago. What changed you?
 - D. How would you like to be different when you grow up?



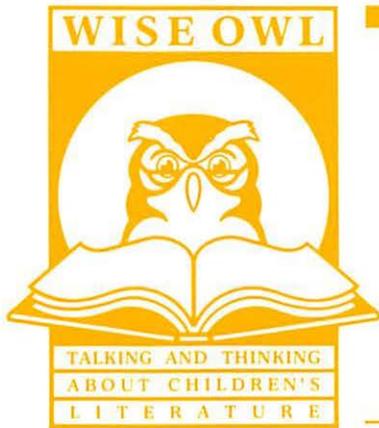


The Bee-Man of Orn

Wise Owl Questions

6. The Languid Youth wants his energies “toned up,” that is, he wants to get more energy.
 - A. Think of a time when you did not have much energy. Why didn't you?
 - B. Think of a time when you had lots of energy. Why did you?
 - C. What is a good way to feel more energetic? What is a bad way?
 - D. Do you like to be with people who have lots of energy or with people who have no energy? Why?



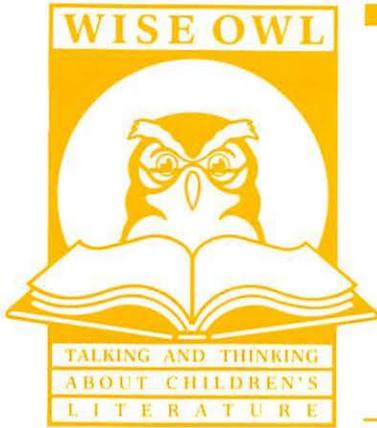


The Bee-Man of Orn

Wise Owl Questions

7. The Very Imp says the Ghostly Griffin is enchanted and won't wake up for a thousand years.
 - A. Suppose someone wakes up after sleeping for a thousand years. How might the world look different? Why?
 - B. Suppose someone wakes up after sleeping for fifty years. What might seem new and strange?
 - C. Suppose someone wakes up after sleeping for one year. Would everything be the same? Or would some things be different?
 - D. How is the world when you wake up in the morning different than when you went to bed at night?



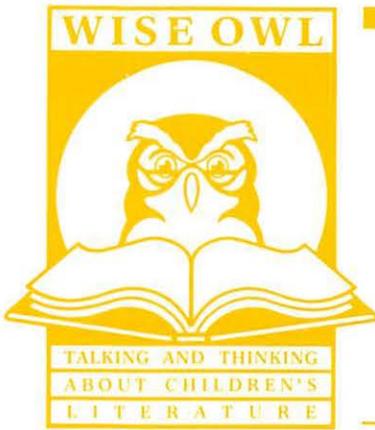


The Bee-Man of Orn

Wise Owl Questions

8. The Bee-man throws his bees at the dragon and rescues the baby.
 - A. This is a brave thing to do. Is the Bee-man always brave, or is this the first brave thing he ever did?
 - B. The Bee-man knows what to do. Have you ever been in a difficult situation when you did not know what to do? What happened?
 - C. The Bee-man feels good about saving the baby. Do you feel good about something you did? What? Why?
 - D. Can you predict whether or not you will be proud of yourself for doing something? Why or why not?

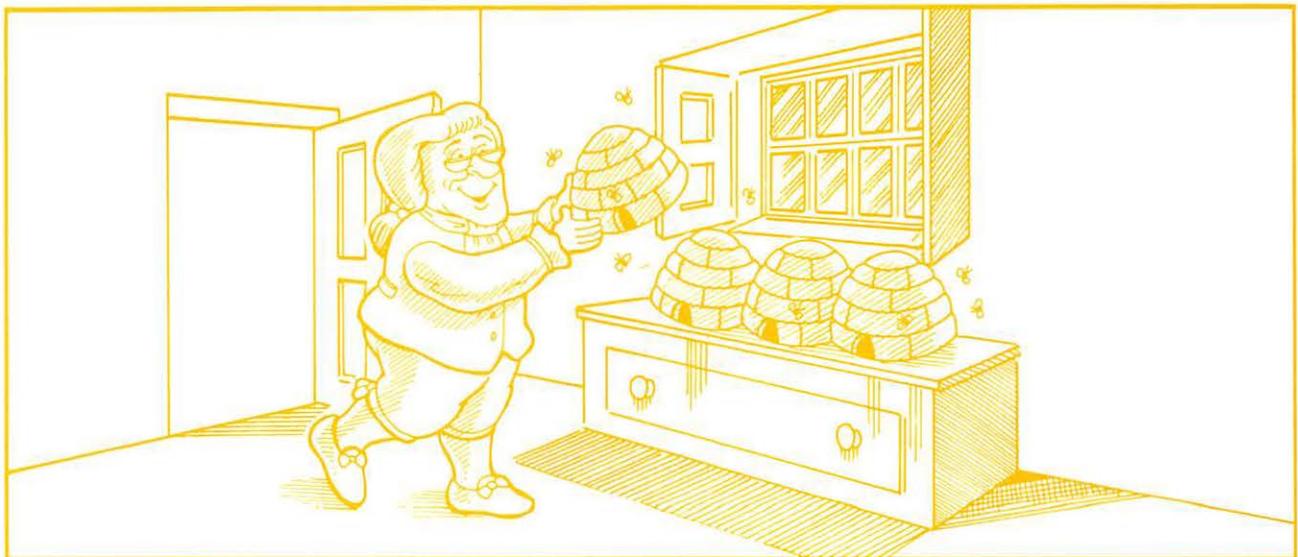


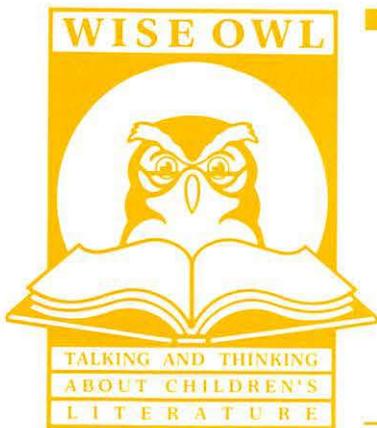


The Bee-Man of Orn

Wise Owl Questions

9. When the Bee-man returns the baby to the mother, he realizes that he was once a baby. He wants to be changed back.
- A. What is something good about being a baby?
 - B. What is something not good about being a baby?
 - C. What is something good about being your age?
 - D. What is something good about being a grown-up?





The Bee-Man of Orn

Wise Owl Questions

10. The Sorcerer returns to the country of Orn and discovers that the Bee-man has grown up to be a bee-keeper, just as he did the first time.
 - A. Do you think some grown-ups might like to start life over and become someone different? Why?
 - B. Do you think it might be fun to have more than one chance to grow up? Why or why not?
 - C. Can you imagine being born in a different country? Speaking a different language? Enjoying different customs?
 - D. What is something about you that might not change? Why?

