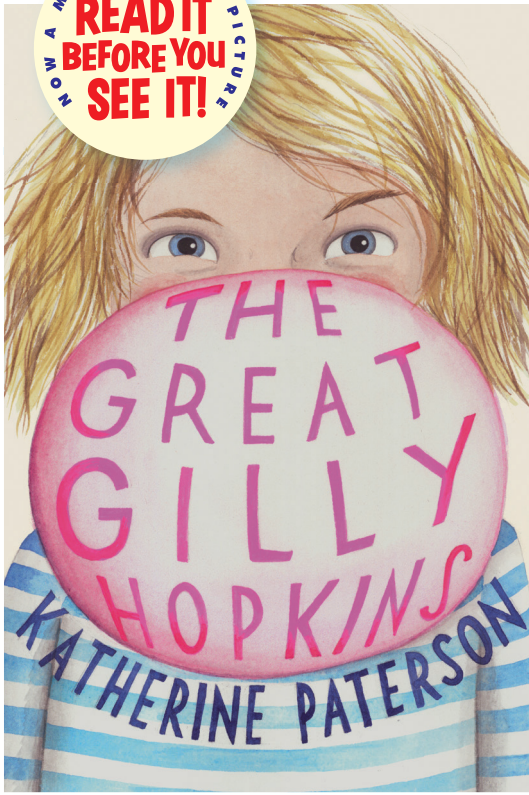


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**READ IT
BEFORE YOU
SEE IT!**

THE GREAT GILLY HOPKINS

by Katherine Paterson **DISCUSSION GUIDE**



ABOUT THE BOOK

Eleven-year-old Gilly has been stuck in more foster families than she can remember, and she's disliked them all. She has a reputation for being brash, brilliant, and completely unmanageable, and that's the way she likes it. So when she's sent to live with Maime Trotter and another foster child named William Ernest Teague—by far the strangest family yet—she knows it's only a temporary problem.

Gilly decides to put her sharp mind to work and get out of there fast. She's determined to no longer be a foster kid. Before long she's devised an elaborate scheme to get her real mother to come rescue her. But unfortunately, the plan doesn't work out quite as she hoped it would. . . .

BEFORE READING

Study the book cover image and the title. Discuss possible meanings of the title. What does it suggest about Gilly's personality? Based on the title, what predictions can you make about the story? *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5-7.1; SL.5-7.1*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Miss Ellis takes Gilly to live with Maime Trotter and William Ernest Teague. What does the narrator reveal about Gilly's history, and how is this information important to the story? What attitude does Gilly have about her new home?
2. Characterize Maime Trotter. What impression does she have of Gilly in the beginning? Does she seem to understand Gilly? Why or why not? Why does she protect William Ernest?
3. The author depicts Gilly as a tough but vulnerable character. Find examples from the story of both. Discuss what contributes to these two opposing traits. How does the author evoke sympathy for Gilly in the reader?
4. Gilly arrives at Trotter's house angry and determined to terrorize William Ernest and others at school. Trace the development of her character. Identify and discuss events that impact how her character changes.
5. How does Gilly manage to steal money from Mr. Randolph? What plans does she have for the money? Why does her plan fail? Does the fact that she steals the money make you like her less? Why or why not?
6. Who is Miss Harris and what role does she play in the story? Discuss Gilly's relationship with her. Do you think Gilly grows to regret the prank she played on her? Why or why not?
7. Gilly makes an airplane for William Ernest. Discuss the importance of this scene. What does it say about Gilly and her relationship with William Ernest?
8. At one point in the story, Mr. Randolph, William Ernest, and Trotter all get the flu, and Gilly has to care for them. There is much humor in these scenes. Why do you think the author chose to have the characters contract the flu? What does Gilly's response say about her character and her relationship with the others?
9. Why does Gilly's grandmother come to get her? What reaction do Gilly, Trotter, and William Ernest have to her appearance? Does Gilly have a choice about whether or not to go with her? Why or why not?
10. Describe the scene between Gilly and her mother at the airport. What does this scene tell the readers and Gilly about her relationship with her mother? What does it say about her mother's relationship with Gilly's grandmother?

Discussion questions continued on the next page . . .

THE GREAT GILLY HOPKINS DISCUSSION GUIDE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS *(continued)*

11. Discuss the ending of the story. Will Gilly see Trotter again? Explain. Would the story be better if Gilly returned to Trotter? Why does Trotter refuse to let her return?
12. Racism is a theme in the story. Gilly Hopkins expresses her biases through her thoughts and behaviors. Identify the scenes in which Gilly's actions and thoughts illustrate her bias, then discuss her transition. What events contribute to her evolution? What can we learn about prejudice and racism from this story?

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3-5.4; RL.5-7.1, 2, 3; SL.5-7.1

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. **Re-Creating Story Endings.** Reread the ending of the story and discuss why the author chose to end the story as she did. Working in small groups, discuss an alternate ending. Write a short scene that represents the ending your group discussed. Share your ending with the class and discuss why you chose this alternate ending. Be sure to include dialogue in your ending and to use quotation marks appropriately.
2. **Social Studies Connection.** Working with a partner, research the foster care services or the social worker system in your area. What supports are available for families? Prepare a presentation for the class in which you discuss your findings.
3. **Poetry Connection.** Working in small groups, brainstorm as many themes as you can that appear in the story. Choose one theme and write a short poem that represents it, and share your poem with the class. You might try a "found poem." To do so, find a descriptive scene and write a poem using key words from the paragraph.
4. **Shifting Viewpoint.** Identify a favorite scene and discuss in small groups how the scene would be written were it told from William Ernest's point of view. Working with a partner, rewrite the scene and then read it out loud in class.
5. **Character Study.** Readers learn about characters multiple ways: through the character's own words or actions, through what others say or how they react to the character, and through words by the narrator. Choose a major character and skim through the story for evidence that contributes to that character's development. Write a short paper that describes the character based on your findings.
6. **Understanding Humor.** While this is a poignant story about a young girl searching for a place to call home, the author also uses humor. Identify several humorous scenes and discuss the words, language, and actions that create humor. Using any character from the story, write your own humorous scene about that character. Share your scene with the class.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5-7.3, 7; SL.5-7.1

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Samantha Loomis Paterson



Katherine Paterson is one of the world's most celebrated and beloved authors. Among her many awards are two Newberys and two National Book Awards, and she was recently named a "Living Legend" by the Library of Congress. She has been published in more than 22 languages in a variety of formats, from picture books to historical novels. Ms. Paterson lives in Montpelier, Vermont.

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