



Happy Birthday, Addy!

A Conversation Guide

Below are suggested topics and passages to use when reading *Happy Birthday, Addy!*

1. Poppa tells Addy, “I never did expect things to be easy in freedom, but I didn’t think things would be so hard either.” (p. 4) What challenges do Addy’s family face in the North?

Talk about the challenges Addy and her family face in the North. Examples include not being able to visit certain places, find work, or ride the streetcar freely. Discuss these moments and the information about racial prejudice in the Looking Back.

2. How do Addy and her family members show optimism and determination despite the challenges?

Use examples like the passages below to discuss how Addy and her family members show optimism and determination. Talk about why optimism and determination are important for getting through challenging moments.

- Addy spread out her arms. “Here in Philadelphia, it seem like my world getting bigger and bigger. Sometimes I can’t believe I really go to school, that I can read and write and do my figures. I used to dream about it, but now it’s real. And look at us, Poppa. We riding around the city on this big wagon! This is much better than worming tobacco plants.” (p. 5)
- Poppa stood for a moment looking at Addy. “I know what they gonna say, but I’ll ask anyway.” Poppa walked up to the building and knocked firmly on the door. Addy stood right beside him. (p. 40)

3. Why is it important to Addy to find a special day for her birthday? What day does she choose? How does her family make it special?

Discuss the passages below when Addy tells M’dear that she doesn’t know her birthday and M’dear’s response. Then discuss how Addy chooses her birthday in the last chapter and what the family does to celebrate.

- “I’m nine,” Addy said. “But I ain’t really sure about when my birthday is. I was born in the spring. My momma know that much.” Addy felt ashamed that she didn’t know her birthday. Her seatmate at school, Harriet, knew when her birthday was. On that day, Harriet’s mother had sent fancy raisin tarts for the whole class. (p. 15)
- “Slavery has taken a lot away from colored people,” Mrs. Golden said. “If we want to get some of it back, we’re going to have to take it. It’s going to be some time before your family gets back together. But I know one thing you can take for yourself right now, Addy. Whenever you want, you can choose a special day and claim it for your birthday.” (pp. 16–17)

4. At the beginning of the story, Poppa tells Addy that he is going to make her ice cream. Why does he promise this? Why do you think ice cream is important in the story?

Using the passages below, discuss what it means for Poppa to deliver the ice to make ice cream but not be able to buy ice cream from Natkin's Confectionary for Addy. Talk about how Poppa doesn't let the fact that he can't buy ice cream from Natkin's keep him and his family from making their own ice cream.

- "Was that Mr. Natkin?" asked Addy. Poppa climbed back onto the wagon. "Yes," said Poppa. "I'm telling you, Addy, this is some kinda freedom. I can deliver ice to make ice cream, but I can't even buy my own daughter a dish of it." (p. 8)
- "It's a busted-up ice cream freezer. I bet I can fix it up. Then we'll make our own ice cream." (p. 9)
- She turned to Momma and Poppa. "I want today to be my birthday," Addy said. "You picked one fine day for it," Poppa replied. "We should go on back home and have a party. The freezer I fixed is just waiting to make ice cream." (p. 50)

5. M'dear tells Addy, "That cage can't contain Sunny's spirit. It soars right out from behind those bars. That's what's important for all of us. To let our souls sing out." (p. 19) Why does M'dear tell this to Addy?

M'dear tells Addy this after learning that Addy doesn't know her birthday or how her brother and sister are doing. M'dear can sense the loneliness in Addy's voice as they talk. Discuss why M'dear would say this after learning these things about Addy. What is M'dear trying to tell Addy to do? Why is it an important lesson?



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