



READERS' GUIDE: The Infinite Questions of Dottie Bing

by Molly B. Burnham

Guide Key Questions for Caregivers & Educators
 Questions for AARP Audiences
 Questions for Both Audiences

Guide By Christine Paglia Baker

1. Why does Dottie describe her feelings as animals trapped inside of her? Why do you think she chooses the animals that she does?
2. Try matching each animal below to a feeling you might experience. Talk about why you think each match makes sense. Then think of another animal and brainstorm what feeling it might show.

Purring lap cat	Unsettled
Wriggly worm	Scared
Curled-up armadillo	Relaxed and calm
Hopping toad	Fidgety

3. Read the following quote from page 13:

“(Ima) told me how she was sure if there was a tree house to play in, she would have been the happiest kid in the world....And since I want to be happy...I’ve decided we need to build a tree house.”

Make a prediction: do you think Dottie will complete the tree house?
Do you think it will help her to feel happy? Why or why not?

4. Read the following quote from page 24, and then think about the question that follows.

“Dottie frowned. When Ima was still alive, she was constantly asking questions: Why does toast smell so good? How was butter invented? Who could make the tallest cookie tower? And, Dottie’s all-time favorite, how many oranges could Ima juggle? (The answer was none, but Ima always tried.”

Does Dottie really ask a lot of questions? How does asking questions help her feel close to Ima, or help her to cope with Ima’s death?





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5. Read the list of Sam Batty's words below with an experienced reader. Then use the secret code to sort them into categories. You can use more than one symbol for each word, or no symbols for some words.

Symbol	Code For
!	Fun word to say or hear
?	This word is new to me
♥	I want to try using this word soon
😊	Describes a comfortable feeling
😬	Describes an uncomfortable feeling

A Majestic List of Sam Batty's Words (with page numbers so you can find them)

Word	Code	Page
ferocity		10
abdicate		17
majestic		21
pugnacious		28
flabbergasting		29
exemplary		34
exasperating		47
foraging		49
scavenging		50
brilliant		50
futile		53
argumentative		56
evasive		56
phenomenal		60
scowl		62
intrepid		66

Word	Code	Page
oblivious		69-70
cacophony		71
mesmerizing		72
baffling		77
tergiversate		82
befuddled		107
compelled		115
emanated		128
concur*		156
transformative**		160
dread		163
infuriated		170
dilemma		175
exuberant		177
Being over the moon		178
overzealous		188

* Miles' word

**Dottie's word



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- Why do you think Molly Burnham created a character who uses such big words? How does Sam Batty's vocabulary help to tell the story?
- Read the following quotes that Dottie remembers from Ima (page numbers included). How does each quote show what kind of person Ima was? Write a word or two to describe her next to each quote.

Page	Quote	Describing Words
3-4	"Walter, you are charming. Worst waiter, best husband."	
8	"Life is too short to waste being far away from people."	
18	"Remember every solution starts with a question. The hard part is finding the right one."	
23	"There's no time like the present."	
29-30	"You never know a person until you walk in their shoes."	
33	"Miles Huckatony is a thorn in your side, but don't forget, Dottie, whenever there's a thorn there's also a rose."	
35	"Sometimes all you've got is yourself."	
44	"Well, the cat is out of the bag....Or in this case, a chicken is out of the bag."	
65	"Looks like I've really turned a corner, Dot."	
82	Everyone fails, but champions never give up."	
95	"Surprises pop up in the most unusual places. That's what makes them a surprise."	
129	"Everything looks better after a good night's sleep."	
155	"There's more to life than meets the eye."	

- Re-read Ima's quotes. Which one(s) would you choose for Dottie's motto? (A motto is a saying that someone remembers to help them find strength or inspiration). Why would you choose the one you did? Would you choose a different one for yourself? Why?





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9. We get to know Ima through Dottie's and Grandpa Walter's memories. Are there people in your life who you miss and remember the way that Dottie and Grandpa Walter remember Ima? Talk about who they are, and how often you think of them. How does thinking about them feel for you?
10. Why do you think Dottie likes to play Truth or Fake with her friends? What do you notice about the times when she decides to play it?
11. Dottie, Sam Batty, and Miles use Truth or Fake to distract themselves and to entertain themselves. They create the questions by using weird-but-true facts, or by making things up that seem like they could be true.

Now it's your turn. Choose a fact from the table below. Then keep it the way it is, or tweak it a little to create your own Truth or Fake question. There's an example to get you started.

True Fact	Truth or Fake Question	Which is it?
Snails poop out their mouths.	Truth or fake: Snails poop out their mouths	Truth!
The inventor of the telephone wanted people to say "Ahoy ahoy!" when they answered.	Truth or fake:	
Astronauts get taller in space.	Truth or fake:	

12. Try making up your own Truth or Fake question. Start by thinking of a true, but surprising fact. (Google weird but true facts to find some examples). You can use that fact to surprise people, or you can change it a little, to make it a fake. Try it with someone you like talking to, then ask them to make up their own Truth or Fake.





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13. Dottie, Sam Batty, and Miles Huckatony admit to each other that they know what it feels like to have animals inside of you. They are describing uncomfortable feelings: Dottie has lost Ima, Sam Batty is sad that his family will have a new baby, and Miles is upset about his parents' divorce. What do these situations have in common?
14. Once Dottie hides the coffee can, Grandpa Walter starts talking to Dottie and she gets to know him better. What do these changes show about their feelings about Ima's death?
15. On page 161, Grandpa Walter says: "When you love someone so much, you become a part of them, and they become a part of you. And then...they leave. And you have to keep doing everything you did except without them."

How do you think Ima will continue to be a part of Dottie?

If you've lost someone you loved, how has that person continued to be a part of who you are?

16. In Chapter 52, Dottie describes something called "Ima-ing." What do you think this means to her?
17. In Chapter 54, Dottie and Ima seem to get into big trouble with Mr. Shark in the cafeteria. What does Dottie think has happened? What does Sam Batty think that is different from Dottie?
18. Pay close attention to the illustrations at the beginning of each chapter, particularly those at the beginning of chapters 54 and 57. What do you notice? Why do you think the illustrator, Fanny Liem, chose to start the chapters in this way?
19. Grief is an emotion that can be uncomfortable and unfamiliar, even though everyone experiences it sometimes. It's a feeling of great sadness over a loss, such as someone dying or moving away. Grief can make people feel sad, tired, distracted, lost, or confused.

Look back at Sam Batty's word list. Are there words that might describe grief?

Talk with a trusted adult about times they have felt grief. What was it like?

How did they work through it?





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20. Three of the main characters have big changes happening in their lives: Dottie Bing, Sam Batty, and Miles Huckatony. How do they each feel about these changes by the end of the book? You can fill out the table below to help you think about this question.

Character	Life change	Feelings at the beginning (words or animals)	Feelings at the end (words or animals)
Dottie	Ima's death		
Sam	New baby on the way		
Miles	Parents' divorce		

21. After finishing the book, return to your prediction (question 3) about the tree house. How does your prediction compare with what happens? How does building it affect each character? Was Ima right about it?
22. Think about an older person who you know and care about. It could be a grandparent or great-parent, an aunt or uncle, a family friend, a teacher—your choice.
23. What do you appreciate about spending time with that person? Are there things they say or do that you like to think about when you're apart?

Try writing or drawing about that person's words or actions. You might keep what you make for yourself, or share it.





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ELA Common Core standards addressed:

Grade 3:

3. Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.
4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, distinguishing literal from figurative language.
5. Identify common structural elements of fiction (e.g., problem, solution); describe how each successive part of a text builds on earlier sections.
6. Distinguish their own point of view from that of a text's narrator or those of its characters
7. Explain how specific aspects of a text's illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g., create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting).

Grade 4:

1. Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text states explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
3. Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).
4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including those that allude to significant characters found in mythology (e.g., Herculean); explain how figurative language (e.g., simile, metaphor) enriches a text.

Grade 5:

3. Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).
4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text; identify and explain the effects of figurative language such as metaphors and similes.
5. Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, or stanzas fits together to provide the overall structure of a particular story, drama, or poem.

