

## Because of Winn-Dixie Summary/ Annotated Version

*Italicized sections are not in the book.*

**[chapter information in brackets indicate where movie and book overlap.]**

*Opal is a young girl. As the movie opens, we see her playing baseball. But she is playing by herself. She is imagining all the other players on the team. Opal narrates the movie, and she tells us that she has a good story to tell and she wants to tell it right. She and her father have just moved to the small town of Naomi. Her father is a preacher. Opal hints at being lonely. She and her father are not very close.*

*Opal has a bike, and she rides it all over town. She rides her bike along the river and through a car wash to a Pick- It-Quick Food Mart. But this isn't a store. It is a church, and her father is preaching. He is greeting people as they arrive. Some of them have brought their own chairs. He tries making a joke, but no one laughs. He is nervous. When Opal arrives, she quickly puts a skirt on over her shorts, and slips in the door. She is a little bit late. Her father introduces her. Opal prays for some friends. She looks around the church and sees Amanda, Sweetie-Pie, and the Dewberry twins. None of them seem like likely candidates to become her friend. She also thinks about her mama, whom she misses. Opal would like to see her again.*

*Opal and her father live in a trailer park. That night she is unpacking some of her belongings. She looks longingly at a picture of her baseball team. The preacher acknowledges that moving around is hard, but it is part of his job. In the morning, she makes some fresh-squeezed orange juice, and calls out to her daddy. He is not there. **[chapter one]** She finds a note that he has left for her. He wants her to go to the Winn-Dixie supermarket and pick up some macaroni and cheese, rice, and two tomatoes. She rides to the store and picks out the macaroni. Then she hears a commotion and a request for the manager to go to the produce area. There is a dog loose in the store. People are running around. Boxes and displays of produce get knocked over. The manager is ineffectually trying to control the situation. The dog looks at Opal, and then he knocks over the manager and puts his paws on the manager's chest. The manager is very upset. He does not like it when the dog licks his face. He yells, "Call the pound!" Opal makes a quick decision. She calls out, "Wait! Don't call the pound! That's MY dog." She knows that she has done something big and maybe stupid. She calls the dog but he doesn't move. Then she sees the name of the store and says, "Here Winn-Dixie." The dog comes to her. She apologizes to the manager for the trouble the dog has caused and promises not to bring him back into the store.*

**[chapter two--book has extra exposition and no conflict over keeping dog]** When she and Winn-Dixie get home, she instructs the dog to sit outside while she goes inside to talk to her father. Opal describes the preacher as a turtle hiding inside his shell, in there thinking about things and never sticking his head out into the world. She tells him that she found a dog and she wants to keep it. He tells her no, that she doesn't need a dog.

Opal agrees, but she says that the dog needs her. Winn-Dixie comes inside. She acknowledges that he stinks, but she argues that helping the dog is her duty. Winn-Dixie is smiling and Opal says, "Don't you love a dog with a sense of humor?" Winn-Dixie offers a paw to the preacher. The preacher examines it, and pulls out a thorn with a pair of tweezers. He likes Winn-Dixie, but he tells Opal they cannot keep him. Opal wheedles and pleads. Finally the preacher relents and agrees to let Winn-Dixie stay temporarily, until they can find him a home.

**[chapters three and four-- the preacher tells Opal the 10 things-this occurs later in the movie]** Opal proceeds to give Winn-Dixie a bath. She gets a tub and lathers him up with soap. *She is very happy as she dances around and puts barrettes in his hair. Winn-Dixie is not so keen on having a bath. The manager, Mr. Alfred, appears, holding a cat. He is following a trail of soapy water on the ground. He is very irritated about the mess, and the pools of water everywhere. He is also angry that Opal borrowed the hose without permission. She throws it on the ground and it sprays him. The cat jumps out of his arms, and Winn-Dixie starts chasing the cat, knocking down some clean laundry from the line. The manager starts to chase Winn-Dixie when he trips in some mud and falls down. Now he is really upset. He reminds the preacher that the trailer park has a policy of no kids, no pets and he is going to call the pound. The preacher is upset too. He needs to be on good terms with the manager because they live there for free.*

Later Opal talks to Winn-Dixie. Opal talks about missing her mama, who left when Opal was three. She tells him that the preacher won't talk to her at all about her mama. She guesses that Winn-Dixie doesn't remember much about his mama either, so they have that in common. When the preacher comes in to tuck Opal into bed, she asks him again about her mama. But the preacher just kisses her and turns out the light.

*The next day, Opal brushes Winn-Dixie's teeth. The preacher wants her to advertise for Winn-Dixie's owner. They take some signs that they have made and put them around town. They leave Winn-Dixie in the trailer. But when they get home, the trailer is a wreck. The refrigerator is open and there is food and wrappings and paper strewn everywhere. The preacher tries to remain calm. Winn-Dixie is banished to outside the trailer, but at night he begins to howl, so they bring him in.*

*The next day, Opal secretly takes down the signs they have put up. [chapter eight]* She and Winn-Dixie end up at a pet store. Winn-Dixie looks at a red collar in the window. Opal understands that Winn-Dixie really wants a collar. They both go inside. There's a parrot named Gertrude who repeats everything that Opal says. A man named Otis works here. Opal explains that she doesn't have any money, but she has an idea. She could pay for the collar on the installment plan by working at the store. Otis is skeptical. He doesn't want to hire anyone. Plus he says that Gertrude doesn't like dogs. But then Gertrude lands on Winn-Dixie's head, and Opal points out that she likes Winn-Dixie. Opal feels that she has the job, so she cheerfully says goodbye, while Otis tries to figure out what just happened.

*The next day, Mr. Alfred steps in dog poo. He is steaming mad. "Get rid of that dog," he tells the preacher. The preacher asks for some more time. Mr. Alfred says, "You want a home or a dog? Call the pound!" The preacher is torn. He needs the free rent. He makes a few phone calls, trying to find someone who will take Winn-Dixie. But finally he sees no other choice, and he calls the pound. The animal control people arrive and put Winn-Dixie in the van. Opal is hysterical. She screams, "Please Daddy, he's the only friend I have! Don't take him away, please, please, please!" The preacher cannot bear to see Opal so*

*upset. He tells the animal control people there has been a mistake. They let Winn-Dixie go. He takes out a loan to pay the rent. He works out a deal with Mr. Alfred that Winn-Dixie can stay for the summer.*

Opal starts her new job. That day she washes windows at the pet store. In her free time, she sits under a big tree and draws a map of the town. Winn-Dixie is with her. Suddenly he runs to town, and she follows him. **[chapters six and seven]** They end up at the library. Opal goes inside, and leaves Winn-Dixie on the porch. The librarian, Miss Franny, is dozing. When she wakes up, she screams, because she thinks that Winn-Dixie is a bear. Opal reassures her that it is not a bear; it is a dog. When Miss Franny calms down, she offers to tell Opal the story of when a bear wandered into the library. She allows Winn-Dixie to come inside and hear it too. Miss Franny was alone in the library and a bear came in. She took the book she was reading, *War and Peace*, and threw it at the bear. The bear picked up the book and ran away. The people in town teased her after that, about seeing a bear in the woods reading the book. At the end of the visit, Winn-Dixie smiles at Miss Franny. Opal asks Miss Franny about her family, but she doesn't have any family. She never married. Opal asks Miss Franny if she would like to be friends. Miss Franny is very pleased and touched by the idea. She says, "That would be fine. That would be grand." Opal thinks Winn-Dixie is better at making friends than anyone she ever met.

**[chapter twelve]** The next day when Opal goes to work, she finds Otis sitting on the floor playing the guitar. All the animals are out of their cages, standing still, listening to the music, mesmerized. But when Gertie flaps around, Winn-Dixie starts barking and the spell is broken. A big commotion starts. Animals are running everywhere. Opal and Otis run around trying to catch them all. Otis trips and falls on the floor. Then Opal has an idea. She tells Otis to start playing music again. This calms the animals down again. Sweetie Pie is watching this whole incident. She calls Otis a magic man. Opal asks Otis if the animals had escaped. He admits that he left the cages open. He says it is no good being locked up. He asks Opal to sweep the floor, and he plays some more music.

**[chapter five]** On Sunday, the preacher and Opal are getting ready to go to church. Opal does not want to leave Winn-Dixie behind. Winn-Dixie starts howling and Mr. Alfred walks by, so the preacher agrees to bring Winn-Dixie along and tie him outside the church. However, during the service, Winn-Dixie starts howling, and it seems like he is singing with the choir. People start laughing. One of the Dewberry twins starts howling too. The preacher interrupts the service and instructs Opal to bring Winn-Dixie inside. Opal brings him in, and he sits quietly for a moment, but then he sees a large mouse and starts to chase it. The preacher is trying to give a sermon about man learning to fly, but no one is listening to him. Everyone is watching Winn-Dixie chase the mouse. Now people are howling with laughter. They are astonished when he catches it. The preacher picks up the mouser and says, "Let us pray...for this mouse." People start to laugh. On the way home, Opal and the preacher let the mouse loose in a field. That evening, Opal and her father talk about the events of the day. The preacher tosses Winn-Dixie a leftover scrap from his plate.

**[chapters nine and ten]** The next day Opal is out on her bike and the Dewberry twins start razzing her. They tell her she is headed for the witch's house and she better be

careful. She trades insults with them. Winn-Dixie runs up the path into the witch's yard. Opal is nervous but she has no choice; she has to follow him. She climbs over the gate and calls his name, and then, suddenly, she sees him struggling with an old woman. She runs up and pulls them apart. The woman falls over. Opal is scared and starts shouting, "Don't eat me! Don't eat me! I don't taste good!" The woman starts to laugh and reassures Opal she is not going to eat her. She cannot see well, but she can hear Winn-Dixie eating her peanut butter sandwich. Opal apologizes for coming into her yard. Gloria and Opal compare their funny last names. Gloria's last name is Dump. Opal's last name is Baloney. Gloria invites her to lunch. As they eat, Gloria explains that she can only see the general shape of things so she relies on her heart. She invites Opal to tell her everything about herself so she can see Opal with her heart. Opal tells Gloria all about her life. Gloria is a good listener.

**[chapter eleven]** The next night there is a thunderstorm and Winn-Dixie freaks out. He starts running madly up and down the trailer, knocking things over. The preacher explains to Opal that Winn-Dixie's fear is pathological, that is it goes way beyond normal and he can't be reasoned out of it. Opal remarks that there are a lot of thunderstorms in the summer. Her father says they will have to make sure they keep Winn-Dixie safe. Finally the storm ends and Winn-Dixie calms down.

**[chapter three]** As they straighten up, Opal asks her father to tell her ten things about her mother since she is now ten years old. At first he resists, but then he agrees. They sit together on the kitchen floor. He says that she was funny. She could make just about anyone laugh. She had fair hair and big eyes. She liked to plant things and she had a real talent for it. She could run really fast. She couldn't cook at all; she burned everything. She loved a good story. She knew all the constellations and never got tired of looking up at them. She hated being a preacher's wife because it made her feel like a bug under a microscope. She loved Opal very much. Opal asks him why her mama left if she loved her. The preacher has no explanation. She just left. Opal wants to know the tenth thing, but he won't tell her. He kisses her goodnight. Opal writes down all the things he said so she can remember them forever. That night Opal dreams of her mother and all the things she has learned about her.

*The next day she goes to work and Otis shows her how to hold a newborn bunny. Then she visits Gloria and they plant a Wait-and-See tree together. Gloria says they have to wait to see what kind of tree it is. When she goes back to work, there is a policeman there. Otis is trying to explain that he is a cousin of Gertrude's, the storeowner, but the cop calls him a drifter. The policeman tells Opal to go wait outside. He tells her that Otis is a jailbird. Then a goat butts the car door and a goose attacks the policeman. Winn-Dixie smiles.*

**[some of this is in chapter thirteen]** On her way to Gloria's, Opal and Winn-Dixie run into the twins again. They make fun of Otis. At one point, Dunlap tries to defend Opal from his brother, but they all end up trading insults again. Gloria asks for a story. Opal says, "Once upon a time, I hated the Dewberry boys. The end." Gloria chuckles and suggests that they like her and that they are trying to get her attention. After a pause, Opal explains to Gloria that she is concerned that Otis is a criminal and has been in jail. Gloria stands up and asks Opal to follow her. **[chapter fourteen]** She shows Opal her bottle tree. This is a huge tree in

her yard with bottles of every kind hanging from the branches. She says it keeps the ghosts away of all the things she has ever done wrong. Opal is surprised because Gloria is a good person. Gloria explains that good people can do bad things. She explains that some folks have problems with drinking. She is one of those people. She suggests to Opal that they judge Otis by the music he makes and his kindness to animals because that's all they know about him. She leaves Opal under the tree to think about what she has said.

**[chapter fifteen]** Later Opal goes back to the library. She wants a book she can read to Gloria. Miss Franny suggests *Gone With the Wind*. It is a book about the Civil War. At that moment Amanda walks in. She wants a new book, but Miss Franny explains that she was just telling Opal a story and asks her to wait. They all sit on the porch and Miss Franny explains that her great grandfather fought in that war. He was only fourteen, and he learned that war is hell. Amanda is shocked to hear the word hell. She says it is a cuss word. But Miss Franny replies that war is a cuss word too. The Dewberry twins are standing on each other, eavesdropping, but they keep falling.

**[chapter sixteen]** Miss Franny's great grandfather had a terrible experience in the war. He was always hungry, covered with vermin, and was always being shot at. At the end of the war he walked all the way from Virginia to Georgia, only to find his whole family dead. He wanted to add some sweetness to the world so he built a candy factory and made Litmus Lozenges. This candy tasted both sweet and sad. Miss Franny offers both girls a piece. She explains that the secret ingredient was sorrow, and that not everybody can taste it. Both girls can taste it, so Miss Franny observes that they both must have had their share of sadness in their lives. As they walk home, Opal confesses how sad she was to move again, and that she misses her mama. Amanda mentions Carson. The twins show up and Amanda leaves. Opal asks Dunlap who Carson was. Dunlap explains that Carson was Amanda's brother and he drowned the previous summer. Opal thinks about what Gloria said, that Naomi was one big mistake tree, and every person was its own bottle, hanging empty and alone.

**[chapter nineteen]** The next day, Otis tries a Litmus Lozenge. He says it tastes like music, but it reminds him of being in jail. Opal asks him why he was in jail. Otis explains that he was in a park one beautiful day, and it was such a perfect day that he felt like playing music. He put out his hat. He wasn't really playing for money, but if someone was enjoying it, they might throw in a little change. But then he was arrested for disturbing the peace. The policeman tried to take his guitar away, and Otis got angry and punched him and broke his nose. Assaulting a police officer got him three years in jail. He says he isn't a bad man, just not a lucky man. Then he sings a song to Opal. "You are like a butterfly, a caterpillar's dream to fly. Bust out of your sole cocoon, and dry your wings off butterfly. Go ahead and fly."

Opal sweeps the floor slowly after she listens. She wants to keep him company and she doesn't want him to be lonely. She thinks that a lot of people are lonely. She wonders if her mama was lonely for her. She says that thinking about her mama was the same as the hole you keep on feeling with your tongue after you loose a tooth. "Time after time, my mind kept wandering back to that empty spot. The spot where I felt like she should be."

*Opal and Winn-Dixie go to a park where a bunch of kids are playing baseball. She has Litmus Lozenges to share with them. Winn-Dixie steals the ball. The boys chase Winn-Dixie around. Just then,*

*the same policeman who was harassing Otis shows up. Winn-Dixie chases him into his car and tears his pants. The officer is embarrassed and drives away.*

*Later that night, the preacher is looking at his wedding photos. Winn-Dixie ate many lozenges and he feels sad. He burps. Opal gives her father a piece of the candy. He spits it out. He says it tastes melancholy. It makes him think of his wife. Opal asks him gently if her mother drank. She wants to understand. The preacher says they were happy for a long time, but then she started drinking. Opal asks. 'Did she drink because I was bad? Was it my fault that she left?' Her father quickly and forcefully reassures her. "No! Don't ever say that it's your fault. Don't ever say that. Do you hear me?" He is near tears. **[this sentiment of Opal's is part of chapter eighteen]** Later, Opal reflects that life was like a Litmus Lozenge—the sweet and the sad all mixed up together. It was hard to separate them out.*

**[chapter twenty, though Gloria doesn't resist idea]** The next time Opal visits Gloria, she tells her that her father angry. Gloria suggests that he is hurting. Opal wants to help him, but she doesn't know how. The Opal gets an idea from the book that they are reading. Opal decides that they should have a party. She wants to plan it right away. Gloria becomes alarmed. She is not interested in having a party. She declares. "I said no and that's the end of it!" Opal argues that people have forgotten how to share their joy. "We need this party," she tells Gloria. "Please?" Gloria relents, but she says that Opal has to help her clean up her house and Opal has to invite those Dewberry boys. Opal makes invitations and delivers them.

**[chapters twenty-one, twenty-two, though preacher is on time]**

They invite Miss Franny, Otis, Amanda, Sweetie Pie, Mr. Albert, the Dewberry twins, and the preacher. When Opal delivers the invitation to Mr. Albert he is surprised. He comments that Winn-Dixie doesn't howl so much anymore. Opal explains that he is not so lonely anymore.

Opal and Gloria make decorations and fruit punch and sandwiches. They put lights and candles and flowers all over the garden. It looks beautiful and magical. Opal introduces Mister Alfred to Miss Franny, and she greets Sweetie-Pie and Amanda. Sweetie-Pie brings some pictures of dogs. Opal leads Gloria outside to greet the guests. Gloria is a little bit nervous about hosting the party. Otis arrives with Gertrude, his guitar, and a large jar of pickles. Gloria is very gracious and welcoming to everyone. Winn-Dixie eats some of the food off the table. Even though the preacher and the Dewberry boys have not yet arrived, they decide to begin. As they stand around the table holding hands, Gloria says a prayer of thanks for the food and the friends. Suddenly lightning appears. They race around to bring in the food as the rain starts pouring down. In the kitchen, Otis gives Opal the red collar she has worked so hard to earn.

**[chapter twenty-three]** At that moment, Opal realizes that Winn-Dixie has disappeared. She panics, and starts racing around outside, calling his name. The twins arrive, but Opal is distracted. Gloria fiercely insists that Opal greet them properly, as this is her party, despite her anxiety over Winn-Dixie. She tells Opal that no one can hold onto anything that wants to go. You can only love it while you've got it.

**[chapter twenty-four]** Opal does what Gloria asks, but she is distraught, and she rides home to see if Winn-Dixie is there. She yells at her father for not coming to the party. He offers to go look for Winn-Dixie with her. They search all over town. As Opal is wandering

around, she thinks of ten things that are true about Winn-Dixie. He is scared of thunderstorms. He smiles. He likes church. He snores at night. He can catch mice without squishing them. He likes to meet people. He likes peanut butter. He can't stand to be alone. He likes to sit on couches and sleep in beds. He knows how to be a friend. Opal memorizes this list so she will have some part of him forever, even if she never sees him again.

Eventually, the preacher is ready to go back. Opal doesn't want to give up the search. She suddenly accuses her father of giving up on everything, including her mama, and of not trying to stop her when she left. She and the preacher both start to cry. He explains that her mama was everything to him. He tried and tried. He failed her. He says it was his fault. It was all his fault. He tells her he loves Winn-Dixie too. Opal and her father embrace and express their love for each other.

The rain lets up and they walk around a little more. Opal asks her father if he thinks her mama will ever come back. He says no. He used to hope, but he doesn't anymore. Opal tells him what Gloria said about not being able to hold onto anything. He says that Gloria is very wise. As they walk back to the car, he tells her that her mama did leave behind one important thing-Opal. He is thankful she left him Opal.

**[chapter twenty-five]** They go back to Gloria's house. All the guests try and comfort Opal. Gloria gives Opal a hug and tells the preacher 'You're blessed with this one.' Opal goes outside and puts the collar around the Wait-and-See tree. She apologizes to the twins for calling them names. Dunlap offers her his hand to help her up. All the guests gather in the living room. The preacher asks Otis if he knows any hymns. The preacher hums one, and Otis starts to play it. **[chapter twenty-six--Winn-Dixie's return different]** As they all start singing, Winn-Dixie starts howling. Opal runs to open the door, and he comes in and shakes. Opal and all the kids hug him. Gloria laughs and asks, "Well, are we having a party?" They all sing the hymn, "I feel better, so much better, since I laid my burden down."

Opal looks around and reflects how her heart doesn't feel so empty anymore. It's full all the way up, and it's all thanks to Winn-Dixie.

## Vocabulary

### Verbs

to imagine  
to narrate  
to acknowledge  
to wheedle  
to plead  
to relent  
to proceed  
to lather  
to tuck  
to banish  
to howl  
to doze  
to tease  
to instruct  
to razz  
to trade  
to rely  
to resist  
to defend  
to chuckle  
to judge  
to eavesdrop  
to confess  
to drown  
to disturb  
to assault  
to harass  
to burp  
to reassure  
to declare  
to deliver  
to pour  
to wander  
to snore  
to squish  
to memorize  
to comfort  
to gather  
to hum  
to reflect

**Adjectives**

irritated  
skeptical  
hysterical  
touched  
mesmerized  
astonished  
pathological  
shocked  
alarmed  
magical  
distraught  
wise

**Adverbs**

longingly  
ineffectually  
temporarily  
madly  
gently  
forcefully  
properly  
fiercely

**Nouns**

preacher  
candidates  
trailer park  
commotion  
thorn  
tweezers  
barrettes  
wreck  
installment plan  
incident  
insults  
constellations  
microscope  
drifter  
jailbird  
vermin  
burden

**Idioms/Expressions**

up and at them

pick up

not so keen on

steaming mad

cannot bear

freaks out

can't stand