

~ **SAKAI READS** ~

Expanding Perspectives DISCUSSION GUIDE

“We may have different religions, different languages, different colored skin, but we all belong to one human race” ~ Kofi Annan.

“Fiction gives us empathy: it puts us inside the minds of other people, gives us the gifts of seeing the world through their eyes. Fiction is a lie that tells us true things, over and over” ~ Neil Gaiman

Introductory Discussion - (5 min.)

Begin by reading the definition and quote above. Invite student to discuss the following:

- Describe what compassion towards others looks like and give an example.
- Describe what compassion towards self looks like and give an example.

Title Specific Discussion - (15 min.)

- Choose some questions from the list provided for your group’s story to discuss.

Summary Discussion - (10 min.)

- How did reading the story help deepen your understanding of the importance of having compassion for others?
- Why do you think reading fiction novels can help inspire compassion in people?
- Do you have other suggestions for how to help increase compassion in our world?

Wishtree by Katherine Applegate (questions from Talking to Trees

Read the poem “Be Different to Trees” that is printed at the beginning of the book. Discuss what it means to you now that you have read the book. Did this book change your mind about trees?

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss Red’s comment:” Making others feel safe is a fine way to spend your days.”(p.26)
How does the tree make others feel safe? Is this statement referring only to the animal inhabitants of the tree? What does this comment tell you about the personality of the tree?
2. Why do the animals feel comfortable with Samar? Why does Bongo give her gifts? What qualities of her nature make the animals trust her? Why do these qualities make it harder for her to make friends with other children?

3. Red compares the neighborhood to a garden, “wild and tangled and colorful”(p.54). Why does the tree compare the people in the area to a garden? Why is the neighborhood not welcoming to Samar’s family?
4. Describe the boy who carves a word in the tree. What does the author tell you about him and what assumptions can you make about his character? Why do you think he would carve that word into the tree? How does this act affect Red, Bongo, Samar, and her family? What effect does the carving have on Francesca? What are the feelings of the police who come to investigate?
5. Why does Francesca want to cut the tree down? What do the police officers, Max and Sandy, think about her reasons? Discuss Max’s wish and what it means(p.74).
6. Discuss Red’s description -- “standing tall, reaching deep” -- as it applies to the tree and as it applies to Samar.(p.71) What personality traits do the tree and Samar have in common? How do those traits help them cope with the changes in their lives?
7. Discuss Red’s question, “How does friendship happen?” (p.82). What is Bongo’s answer? Why do you think Red and Bongo are friends? What makes them special to each other? What qualities do you look for in a friend? Why is it hard for Samar and Stephen to become friends?
8. Why does Red decide to speak to the children? How does this act change their relationship to the tree and to each other? Why will the tree not speak to Francesca?
9. How does Stephen help to make a difference in the neighborhood on Wishing Day? What is the message the children in the school deliver with their wishes? What makes Francesca change her mind about cutting down the tree?
10. Discuss Red’s statement: “I wanted to make a difference, just a little difference, before I left this lovely world” (p.126). What differences does Red make by talking to Stephen and Samar? Discuss Stephen’s comment: “My parents aren’t bad people. They’re just...afraid of things” (p.125). What do you think you can do to make a difference in this world?
11. Discuss the reasons that RED gives for each of the animals choosing their individual names-- raccoons, opossums, owls, squirrels, skunks, and crows. How does the choice of name reflect the characteristics of each animal as Red describes them?