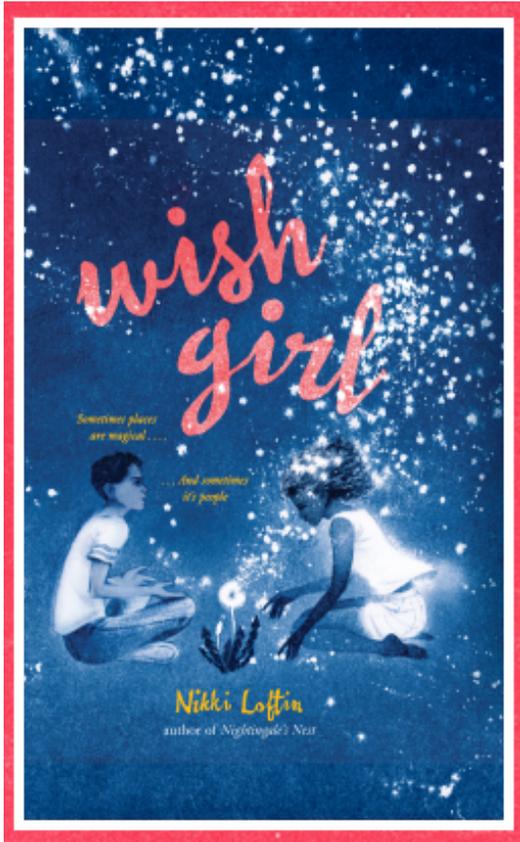


Discussion Guide for

Wish Girl

by Nikki Loftin



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Razorbill

Ages 9 – 12

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Praise for “Wish Girl”

“A moving, mesmerizing story of wishing, listening and hope.” –*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

“*Wish Girl* is a book that knows *real* magic exists— that art, nature, and true friendship have the power to save lives and transform the world. It’s at once earthly and ethereal, heartbreaking and hopeful. It dazzles.” –Laurel Synder, author of *Bigger than a Breadbox*

Summary

Annie Blythe is dying, but she can give Peter Stone the strength to live.

Peter Stone’s parents and siblings are extroverts, musicians, and yellers—and the louder they get, the less Peter talks, or even moves, until he practically fits his last name.

When his family moves to the Texas Hill Country, though, Peter finds a tranquil, natural valley where he can, at last, hear himself think. There, he meets a girl his age: Annie Blythe. Annie tells Peter she’s a “wish girl.” But Annie isn’t just any wish girl: she’s a “Make-A-Wish Girl.” And in two weeks she will begin a dangerous treatment to try and stop her cancer from spreading. Left alone, the disease will kill her. But the treatment may cause serious, lasting damage to her brain.

Annie and Peter hatch a plan to escape into the valley, which they begin to think is magical. But the pair soon discovers that the valley—and life—may have other plans for them. And sometimes wishes come true in ways they would never expect.

About the Author

Nikki Loftin is a writer of many genres including short stories, poetry, literary fiction, essays, and online blogging. *Wish Girl* is her third book for young readers, following *Nightingale’s Nest* in 2014, and *The Sinister Sweetness of Splendid Academy* in 2012. She completed two degrees in language and writing at the University of Texas at Austin: Bachelor of Arts in French, and a Master of Arts in English/Fiction Writing.

Across her writing-life journey, she has held many different jobs, including work as a teacher, a director of family ministries, a bookstore employee, a waitress, a Zumba dance/aerobics instructor, and even a popcorn seller! She also enjoys baking and, of course, chocolate! Just like the characters of *Wish Girl*, Ms. Loftin spent summers in the Texas Hill Country, and lives there now with her husband, sons, and a bevy of animals.

Ms. Loftin not only loves reading, writing, and supporting other writers, but she also delights in speaking with readers and writers. On her website, www.nikkiloftin.com, you can find more information about the many topics Ms. Loftin can share with learners, as well as the variety of speaking formats, from in-person author visits to conferences and even online Skype sessions. She also connects with readers and writers via her Twitter account (@nikkiloftin) and her Ask the Author Goodreads page (https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/5157472.Nikki_Loftin).

Discussion Guide

Just as Peter and Annie have unique ways of exploring their identities and wishes, so too might different groups of readers take up unique ways of engaging with Annie’s & Peter’s story. Perhaps this is a book to be shared in a whole-class read aloud, exploring a chapter at a time and taking notes together on *anchor charts* (e.g., character traits,

beautiful language, noticings/wonderings/questions, or text-to-text, text-to-self, text-to-world connections). Alternatively, this book could be a selection for **book groups** with small groups of readers discussing and writing responses together. In addition, consider conducting an **author study** on Nikki Loftin, with students comparing the use of magical realism or centering of place across Ms. Loftin’s books and short stories. Whichever method of reading best suits your readers, the sections that follow include activities for cross-curricular connections as well as discussion prompts.

Responding Through Writing

- ☉ With sticky notes or in your own copy, use icons to highlight key points you want to remember: important parts, favorite parts, confusing parts, funny parts, surprising parts, parts that make you wonder.
- ☉ Take some time to jot down ideas about some of your own wishes. A few possibilities from which you might **choose** include:
 - ◆ What is a special skill or talent about which you wish you could learn more?
 - ◆ If you could “make a wish” to visit a special place or do a special thing, what would it be?
 - ◆ What are characteristics you wish for in a best friend?
 - ◆ What is something you wish your family knew about you?
 - ◆ What do you wish you could tell your friends?
 - ◆ What is something you wish you could talk about but might be afraid to do so?
- ☉ Annie and Peter each grapple with how to be their own authentic selves. Write about (and maybe draw, or create a poem, or song) about how you see yourself. What would you like others to know about you?
- ☉ Annie loves discovering and using new words. Begin keeping a journal (maybe even include pictures) of some of your favorite words.
- ☉ Annie desires to learn more about and how to make art, Peter’s dad is into music, and Peter enjoys learning about animals. Describe some things that interest you and about which you would like to learn more.

Connections Across Content Areas

Art

- ☉ Annie mentions many artists and museums throughout the book, including: Frida Kahlo, Andy Goldsworthy, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York (www.moma.org), and the Contemporary Art Museum in Houston (www.camh.org). Gather books about these and/or other artists and research the kind of art they made. Also, you might be interested to research some art museums near you: <http://www.artcyclopedia.com/museums-us.html>
- ☉ Annie and Peter have each discussed or even explored a variety of artistic media, including paint, yarn, graffiti, trash, natural materials, clay, mud. Explore art material(s) of interest to you and consider how you might create with this material.

As you create, think about Annie’s words on how art can be transformative and can “change you.”

- 🌀 Annie talks about outdoor art installations. Examine the work of other art installation artists like Andy Goldsworthy, Christo & Jeanne-Claude (e.g., *The Gates* or *Wrapped Trees* or *Surrounded Islands*), Yayoi Kusama (e.g., *The obliteration room*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xNzr-fHQw>), and others. Gather together a group of friends and design an indoor or outdoor art installation of your own.

Science/Math

- 🌀 Throughout the book there are references to many creatures and natural features in the valley. Explore more about some of these creatures. You might even consider classifying them and drawing pictures or finding images in online resources:

Animals: snakes, hawks, deer, swallows, sparrows, scissortail, armadillos, turkey vultures, minnows, tadpoles, bullfrogs, feral hogs, mourning dove, thrushes, rabbits, cougar, whippoorwill, owl, nightjar

Insects: dragonflies, damselflies, water striders, wasps, cicadas, grasshoppers, fireflies, swallowtail butterflies

Geological features: limestone fossils, embedded ammonites, clam-shell fossils, caves, underground streams, limestone rock

- 🌀 A variety of wildflowers and plants are mentioned throughout the book, including: black-eyed Susans, firewheels, Indian paintbrush, dandelions, rain lilies, honeysuckle. You can look up images of some of these wildflowers here: <https://www.wildflower.org/gallery/> What wildflowers are indigenous to where you live?
- 🌀 Many trees and plants grow in the valley, including: cypress, oaks, cactus, Virginia creeper, sticker vines, grapevines, poison ivy, Johnson grass, and dewberries. (See <https://www.wildflower.org/gallery/> for images.) Research trees and/or vegetation around your own geographical region.
- 🌀 The story takes place in the Texas Hill Country, which includes geological features like limestone rock, caves, underground streams, and hill country pond ecosystems. What type(s) of ecosystems exist in your geological region?

Language Arts

- 🌀 Ms. Loftin uses magical realism to describe the things that happen in the valley. Investigate the definitions, uses, and examples of magical realism in this text and other literary texts.
- 🌀 Review some of Annie’s and Peter’s favorite words from the list below and select one or two you would like to explore. Write a poem or create a piece of art that uses or exemplifies your chosen word(s). Alternatively, research some of your own favorite words and create an artistic representation. A few of Annie’s/Peter’s favorites include: ephemeral, leprosy, serendipity, effervescent, exquisite,

mellifluous, sumptuous, lachrymose, evanescent, amplification, reverberation, transitory, juxtaposition, caterwaul, lugubrious, sempiternal, plebeian, transformational, evocative, phenomenological

Social Studies

- ☉ Annie goes to art camp, Peter’s parents want to send him to young leaders’ camp. If you could design a camp of your dreams, what would it include? Consider multiple aspects: location, lodging, food, activities, schedule, and special events. Make a brochure to advertise your camp.
- ☉ Although Annie got to visit a couple of art museums through her “Make a Wish” experience, she longed to see more. However, even if you cannot go in person, there are still museums you can visit virtually! Examine these online art museum features offered by the Smithsonian:
<http://americanart.si.edu/education/resources/activities/>

Responding Through Discussion

Connecting with Characters

- ☉ Peter discovers he is good at being quiet and still. However, he also says “there is a lot wrong with me.” What characteristics do you notice in Peter that he doesn’t, at first, notice in himself? What characteristics does Annie notice in him?
- ☉ Like the valley, Mrs. Empson (the colonel’s wife) seems to have some magical qualities. Describe some of those magical qualities and how they contribute to her experiences and the experiences of other characters.
- ☉ In Chapter 6, Annie says she is intuitive and can tell that Peter needs company even though he tries to say he wants to be alone. She seems to see things in Peter that he can’t yet see in himself. What qualities might he not yet recognize in others? In Annie? In his family members? In Mrs. Empson?
- ☉ Annie wants to get her mom’s attention so that her mom will listen to her about treatment. What would you do if you were Annie’s mom? How would you respond to Annie?
- ☉ Jake & Doug engage in many different ways of trying to hurt objects, animals, and people. Why do you think they behave in this way? Are there ways that other characters in the book also “hurt” one another?
- ☉ The valley itself plays a role in the lives of many characters in the story. Share how the valley affects individuals differently: Peter, Annie, Mrs. Empson, Jake & Doug, Peter’s family.
- ☉ How do the characters’ names—Peter Stone and Annie Blythe—fit their personalities?
- ☉ Create an identity portrait of each character in the book and add descriptive words and phrases as you progress through the novel. In addition to adjectives about the

characters, also include their interests, fears, hopes, talents, and gifts. Do any of the descriptions change over time? If so, how?

Making Meaning

- ④ Peter and Annie find the valley to be a space where they can be themselves. Discuss the qualities they discover about themselves and each other while in the valley.
- ④ Annie is a “wish girl” but Peter has lots of wishes, too. Their sharing of wishes together helps them build a friendship. How are Peter’s and Annie’s wishes different from and similar to one another?
- ④ Peter makes promises to the valley, to Annie, to himself—some of which he kept and some of which he had to break. Who else made promises in the story and how did they keep or break them? Why did characters sometimes break their promises? Are there times you make promises that you have to break?
- ④ Throughout the story, Peter, Annie, and others struggle with lying and being honest. Discuss the ways in which specific characters deal with being truthful about their experiences and understandings of themselves and/or others.
- ④ Discuss how art was healing to Annie and to Peter.
- ④ Peter, Annie, Ms. Empson, Peter’s parents, Laura, Jake & Doug, each have unique ways to “escape” or “run away.” Talk about the instances in which “escape” was problematic and instances in which it was helpful.
- ④ Talk about the different ways Peter, Laura, Ms. Empson, Peter’s father, Peter’s mother, and Annie respond to Jake and Doug. What might you do if you were around people you didn’t agree with or who do something you think is wrong?
- ④ “Getting attention” of others is a recurrent theme throughout the story. Discuss some of the different ways characters try to and/or do get the attention of others?
- ④ Talk about the ways in which different characters do things that are brave. Talk about ways some fears might hinder them. Talk about ways some fears might help them.
- ④ Annie Blythe has leukemia, but she is not the only person dealing with sickness. Other characters in the book must also find ways to heal their spirits. Discuss how nature was healing to different characters: Annie, Peter, Mrs. Empson, Peter’s family.
- ④ Jake and Doug find Peter and wonder how he survives “The Valley of Death” but Peter, Annie, and even Mrs. Empson say the valley is alive. How did each of these characters deal with the concepts of life and death?
- ④ Annie & Peter talk about the very serious subject of death. What do they help each other see about death and about life?

Discussion Guide Compiled by Holly Carrell Moore