



Case Study: Tara, Grade 3

Student Background: Tara is beginning third grade at age 8. She has cerebral palsy with spasticity and limited use of her arms and legs. She relies on a wheelchair for mobility. Tara also is legally blind. She can perceive some enlarged images. Although Tara’s precise intellectual level is uncertain, she is currently diagnosed as having a severe intellectual disability. Tara’s strength is her social ability. Tara loves read-aloud stories and has learned to show recall by selecting between two objects placed on her lap tray by moving her arm right or left. One of Tara’s interests is dogs. Her parents hope that someday she might learn to work with a therapy dog. Her teacher worries about how Tara will perform in her first experience with the state’s alternate assessment this spring. Tara needs a lot of adaptations in the form of objects to supplement the assessment materials.

High-Quality Planning and Instruction: The general education 3rd grade class will spend the next six-to-eight weeks using “Because of Winn Dixie” as a foundational text to explore how characters change based on their relationships with one another. Tara’s teacher is excited for the focus of this theme because it plays to Tara’s strengths in the social realm. The selection of this text also incorporates her interest in dogs and good humor. Tara’s teacher wants to begin his approach to the standards by introducing Tara to the vocabulary of the text and then build her understanding of character traits, motivations, and feelings. He references the [Louisiana Connectors](#) aligned to RL.3.3 and finds in them an appropriate benchmark to supporting Tara’s mastery of describing characters in a story more generally.

Louisiana Student Standard	Louisiana Connector
RL.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.	LC.RL.3.3b Describe a character's traits in a story using details from the text and illustrations.

Because Tara is legally blind, the teacher will not be able to use picture responses that he would with other students. Using the [Student Response Modes](#) resource found on the Louisiana Believes website, he determines that using manipulative materials will provide Tara with opportunities to demonstrate what she has learned. The teacher decides to use small figures for each word. He chooses a small figurine of a girl for Opal and a man for the preacher. She uses a can to represent the grocery store and a stuffed dog for Winn Dixie. For Florida, she uses a cut-out cardboard shape of that state from a puzzle she has in the room. The teacher cannot simply point to the correct answer as her prompt because Tara will not see it. Instead, his prompt will be to guide Tara’s hand to scan the objects in the array and then gently lay Tara’s hand on the right object.

To teach the vocabulary, the teacher puts two objects on Tara’s tray (girl, dog) and says, “I have two things on your tray. Let’s touch each one.” She lets Tara touch each to explore her options. Then the teacher says, “This is Winn Dixie, the dog,” while placing Tara’s hand on the dog. After Tara puts her hand back in her lap, the teacher checks right away for understanding, “Now you find Winn Dixie, the dog.” Tara does and the teacher praises her. He repeats this for all the objects. Then, just to be sure, the teacher goes through them all again, allowing appropriate time for Tara to respond. Having consulted the [Essential Element Cards](#) aligned to standard RL.3.3, Tara’s teacher anticipates that Tara’s understanding of character development begins with physical appearance and, in increasing complexity, moves to character action, dialogue, and inner monologue. Because Tara cannot use the visual graphic organizer suggested in the Essential Element Card, the teacher creates a series of questions that allow for making a choice of correct versus incorrect answers.

The teacher begins by asking, “Who is the main character in the story?” Tara selects Winn Dixie, the dog. The teacher affirms that the dog is a central figure in the story but probes further. “Think about who the action of the story is centered around. Who is the leading figure who learns and grows the most in the story?” Tara sets the dog figurine



back on the tray, and selects Opal in its place which the teacher affirms. “That’s right; it’s Opal. Now I am going to ask you, Tara, ‘What does the main character look like?’” The teacher pauses, giving Tara a moment to think about this and then adds, “Is she an elderly woman who has crinkly brown skin, wears a big floppy hat with flowers all over it and has no teeth?” Tara shakes her head vigorously, indicating her disagreement. “That’s right – I was thinking of Gloria Dump.” The teacher then describes Winn Dixie, “Is she big, ugly, and hairy with a funny sense of humor”? Once more, Tara signals her dissent, this time with a playful laugh. “You are correct, Tara – that sounds much more like Winn Dixie, doesn’t it?” The teacher then explains, “Is the main character a fast runner with red hair and freckles?” he asks. Tara nods in affirmation and reaches for the figurine of Opal once more. The teacher praises Tara’s response and then repeats this line of questioning for each of the major characters in the story.

Satisfied with Tara’s grasp of the major characters of the story, Tara’s teacher knows that she is ready to discuss other aspects of the story’s characters. He begins to think about questions for the next day’s lesson related to the characters’ words, actions, and feelings throughout “Because of Winn Dixie”.