

Text-Based Critical Analysis Prompts

Based upon *Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe*

1. A story opening should create questions in the reader's mind. Read the first paragraph on page 1 of *Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe*. What are some questions that you had after reading that passage? Where in the story were they answered? Were any of your questions left unanswered? Why do you think that the author left them unanswered?
2. One way to let the reader know about a strong emotion that your character is feeling is to show them the character's physical reaction. What emotion is being conveyed on page 3 when Cricket says, "My neck hairs went prickly"? List at least three other physical descriptions that the author could have used instead to convey that emotion. Which one is your favorite and why?
3. Read the text on page 14 beginning with "One, it was still hunting season" through "It was like I was born ready to blend into the woods" on page 15. What does it reveal about Cricket's state of mind and physical appearance? Was there anything that surprised you? If so, what?
4. Read the text on page 19. What senses did the author use to help you, the reader, create a scene in your head? Think of a new place that you've visited recently. What details would you use to describe it to help make your reader feel as though they were in that setting? What mood do those details set? What would those details lead you, the reader to expect?
5. The author described Cricket entering the ghost town in chapter 4. How does that setting impact Cricket and her quest? Does it make her journey easier or harder? Please explain. If you could set the story anywhere, where would you set it and why?
6. In chapter 21, Cricket met Miss V. In Chapter 46, she was reunited with Aunt Belinda. How are the speech patterns of Cricket, Miss V, and Aunt Belinda different? What is revealed about each character's personality and values in how she expresses herself?

7. Authors often try to include opening and closing scenes that mirror each other in some way. Re-read chapters 1-2 and 48. In what ways do those scenes mirror each other? In what way are they different? How do those differences reveal ways in which Cricket has changed?
8. Read the text on page 64 beginning with “Now I clutched the plastic bag that had held Daddy’s book.” Continue reading through page 67. In this passage, the author used at least three of the techniques listed on the revision bookmark (available at this [link](http://www.JoHackl.com/activities/) to www.JoHackl.com/activities/). What techniques did the author use? Why do you think the author used them here? How would you write this passage differently? What techniques from the revision bookmark would you use?
9. In the Author’s Note beginning on page 223, the author revealed some real-life elements that inspired parts of the book. Were you surprised to learn about the real-life inspiration for the secret room? Visit the [website](#) of the Walter Anderson Museum of Art to view images of the inspiration for the Bird Room. What changes did the author make in the fictional version of the room? Why do you think that the author made those changes?
10. In revising the manuscript, the author went through the pages line by line looking for ways to make sure that every word was the best word choice and that every element was as interesting as it could be. The scarlet tanager started out as another bird. Brainstorming for ideas is an important part of the writer’s process. Would it surprise you to learn that the author investigated over 150 birds before she decided to include a scarlet tanager? The author chose the scarlet tanager for symbolic reasons as well as for interest. Can you identify at least two reasons why she chose the scarlet tanager as a central image in the book?

Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1-8.1
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3-8.3
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.4-8.4
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.5
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.6