

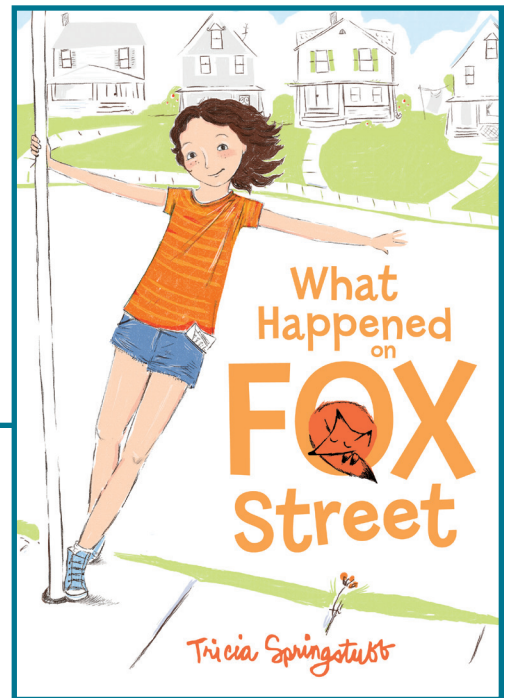
What Happened on FOX STREET

By Tricia Springstubb

TEACHING GUIDE

About the Book

For eleven-year-old Mo Wren, Fox Street in Cleveland, Ohio, is her physical home as well as home to all her memories, both happy and painful. *What Happened on Fox Street* is the story of Mo's unforgettable summer—a summer of alarming letters, mysterious errands, growing friendships, and surprising revelations—and how her quest to find an elusive fox gives her the courage she needs to move forward.

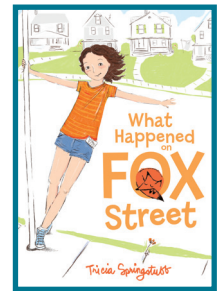


Discussion Questions

1. What are the literal and figurative meanings of the novel's opening line, "Fox Street was a dead end" (page 1)?
2. Although Fox Street is a close-knit community, many of its inhabitants suffer from loneliness. Which characters are lonely, and why do they feel this way?
3. Mo's father tells her, "What'd I tell you about thinking too much? You're going to get yourself in big trouble one of these days" (page 6). Do you think this warning rings true? Why does Mo spend so much time thinking and what does she think about?
4. Why is Dottie called the Wild Child? What do you think Dottie's bottle collection means to her? Is she as oblivious to the world around her as she sometimes seems? Explain.
5. How has Mercedes changed in Mo's eyes? Is she still Mo's best friend, even when Mo is mad at her? What are the qualities you look for in a best friend?
6. Describe Mr. Wren. Do you think he loads too much responsibility on Mo for caring for the house and Dottie? Why or why not? Do you think Mr. Wren's reasons for wanting to leave Fox Street are good ones? Is moving away a good idea for the Wren family? Explain.
7. What things on Fox Street remind Mo of her mother? Do certain things—objects, places, times of day, sounds, smells, or seasons—make you think of someone you miss or have lost? Explain.
8. Do you think it was a good idea for Mercedes's mother, Monette, to run away from Fox Street? Why or why not? What might she have done instead, and how might things have turned out differently?
9. How is Mrs. Steinbott as fastidious and prickly as her rosebushes? Why does she stare at Mercedes and give her strange gifts? Why do you think Mo is eventually kind to Mrs. Steinbott when no one else is? What does Da say about kindness?
10. How is the color red used throughout the novel? Which characters and what animal have red hair? Why is this color so important to Mo?
11. What does finding the mother fox and her den mean to Mo? Do you believe in signs? Why or why not?
12. How does the summer weather in Cleveland mimic the story's action and the changes in the lives of the people on Fox Street? Think about the drought, the storm, and the neighborhood after the storm. Does the weather affect your moods? Explain.

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Extension Activities

- 1. Da's Wisdom.** Da is a former teacher who imparts wisdom to the children of Fox Street. Divide the class into small groups and have each group select one of Da's sayings to present to the class, sharing its origin, meaning, and application to their lives. Each group should also create an illustrated banner of the saying. After all groups have shared their sayings, decorate the classroom or library with the banners of wise words.
- 2. Neighborhood Animals.** Fox Street has birds, bugs, raccoons, skunks, and maybe even a fox. Ask students to think about the animals that make themselves at home in their neighborhood. Then have each student choose one species to draw or photograph in its habitat and to do research about, including physical characteristics, eating habits, reproduction, and habitat as well as interesting trivia. Have students create short presentations about their findings to share with the class.
- 3. Lost and Found.** The spaces between the boards on Da's front porch are wide enough that things have fallen through over the years and become buried in the dirt. Mo and Mercedes imagine what an archaeologist would think if this ground were excavated many years from now. As a class, brainstorm objects that archaeologists might find under your students' front porches. What might archaeologists infer about today's culture based on these artifacts? Do these objects accurately represent your students' world? Why or why not?
- 4. What's in a Name?** Many of the characters in the novel have unusual names and nicknames. Ask students to make a list of these names as they read. Then take a class survey to find out your students' nicknames. Encourage students to learn the origins and meanings of their names and nicknames. Reconvene on this topic so that students can share what they've learned with the group.
- 5. Knowing More about Diabetes.** Diabetes is a devastating disease that deals with the processing of sugar in the body. Da suffers from diabetes and has had several toes amputated because of it. Help your students understand the two forms of diabetes and learn about its onset, treatment, complications, and possible prevention by lifestyle modifications. Ask a doctor, school nurse, or person who is living with diabetes to be a guest speaker and discuss the disease with your students.
- 6. Eminent Domain and Urban Renewal.** As populations and businesses move and economies rise and fall, new residential areas are built and old ones fall into decay. Help students think about their community and identify areas of urban blight and renewal. Discuss the concept of eminent domain and how it pertains to *What Happened on Fox Street*. With the assistance of parents, ask students to photograph areas of blight and renewal in their community and then make a presentation of what they have found. Based on the student presentations, choose an area in your community in need of renewal and organize a class project to improve the designated area.



Tricia Springstubb has been a teacher and a children's librarian. Like Mo, she has a red-haired sister, lives on a really cool street, and loves quiet, green places. She has seen a fox once in her life and will never forget it. Tricia is the mother of three daughters and lives in Cleveland, Ohio.

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Teaching guide prepared by Linda Z. Hamilton, Ph.D., Leawood, Kansas. 07/10