Whirligig
Paul Fleischman
Study Guide

Name:
Period:
Teacher:
Whirligig Chapter 1 – Party Time

1. Brent's mother always places the television remote to the right of Mr. Bishop's fork at the kitchen table. What does this "ritual" imply about Mrs. Bishop's priorities? What other behaviors does she exhibit that further defines her attitude towards “important issues”?

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2. Describe Brent's exit from Chaz's party. Who does Brent blame for his circumstances? Why? What is the significance of Brent's driving on the wrong highway? What decision does Brent make after realizing that he is in full control of stopping his own pain?
3. Discuss the similarities/differences between Alexandra and Steph. Provide supporting details. List the positive traits that each girl brings to their friendship.

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4. Describe the whirligig. What color is it? Why would it be important/significant that it is “non-descript” except for a woman's head at the top? What could the shells and chimes possibly symbolize? Write a paragraph exploring the significance of the whirligig's multi-colors. How are the colors analogous to relationships among friends?

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**Whirligig** Chapter 3 – The Afterlife

5. Discuss the analogy between the bus being his ferry across the Styx and restitution being the vehicle to take him into a new life. Write to explore the metaphors expressed by the river Styx, an unlit valley, and the "new souls" boarding the bus.

6. Discuss the role that Brent's guilt is playing in his relationship with his parents and others. Is his guilt a positive or negative force? Why does Brent see the detention center as a "positive" place to live? Why does Brent leave the court "relieved" and "unsatisfied?"
Chapter 4 – Maimi, Florida

7. What role does the shearwater bird play in the man's life? What does the man assume about the bird's life? Is this a logical assumption or just a daydream? Describe Flaco's revelation later on in the chapter about the shearwater bird he sees on his trip.

8. Explore the impact of the whirligig on Flaco's future life.
Chapter 5 – Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star

9. In Brent's life before the accident, why does he usually spend time with friends? Does he enjoy friendships with his peers? Why or why not? What is different about Brent's friendship with Emil than with Johnathan? Would Brent and Emil have been friends in Chicago? Why or why not? What makes it possible for their friendship to flourish in San Diego?

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10. In one or two paragraphs, describe at least three new realizations that Brent experiences from his stay in San Diego.

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Whirligig Chapter 6 – Bellevue, Washington

11. In what other activity does Tony have to participate because of his Korean background? What does his mother's attitude towards Tony's "cultural" intelligence say to Tony as an individual? Compare the stereotypes shown to Tony (Korean) and his sister (Peruvian) and to Melba Patillo (Black). What are the stereotypical expectations of White people?

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12. Why is the whirligig a problem for Tony? Explore how the whirligig has affected Tony's life both negatively and positively. Do you think Tony will now think differently about the whirligig?

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Whirligig Chapter 7 - Apprentices

13. Why is Brent choosing to make each whirligig more complicated than each previous whirligig he has made? Write an essay that explains how the whirligigs are becoming more complex. Explore the similarities between the whirligig's "myriad parts" and Brent's life.

14. In a paragraph of five to seven sentences, explain Brent's attitude towards understanding the world around him. How is this different from his former attitude about school? List at least five examples of Brent's efforts to improve his knowledge about himself and the world around him.
Whirligig Chapter 8 – San Diego, California

15. In two to three paragraphs, explore at least three possible reasons for Grandma's wanting to go for a ride with Jenny. Why might this ride be important for them to share together? Why did Grandma not want to tell Jenny where they were going?

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16. Although Grandma had been at Auschwitz concentration camp, she has maintained a positive attitude toward life. Using details from her comments, write to explain/prove why Grandma chooses to be optimistic in spite of her life experiences. How can you be optimistic about your life experiences even though you have to fill out a study guide?

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**Whirligig Chapter 9 – Everybody Swing**

17. Why does Brent finally tell the woman the story about his accident? What does Brent still not reveal about himself? Why not? Why is it important to the story that Brent meets a "real" artist as he sets about to make his last whirligig? How is she instrumental in constructing Brent's self-image?

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18. Write three to four paragraphs exploring how the world itself is a whirligig and how this fact has helped to change Brent's life.

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Section I: Brent’s Journey

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