

Larry Woiwode Videoconference Prompts by Rick Watson

The videoconference will include a couple of songs from *Beyond the Bedroom Wall* vintage--I will interview/discuss with Larry the book itself; the how of the book, the plot--the move forward through the blizzard as he is constantly looking over his shoulder at his own past.

To help your student's get into the book, I have some "prompts" from *What I Think I Did*:

- 1) Read the section on the name Woiwode. What does the writer discover about his name? Research your own name. Write a few paragraphs describing what you learned. What can names tell us about ourselves? (4, 5, 8, 10, 11, 245)
- 2) The writer is a meeting, called upon to "admonish" a church group. Someone points out his daughter's resemblance to him. Why is he surprised and touched? Who in your family do you resemble, in behavior or looks? Write a few lines describing this experience. Is it good to know we bear a resemblance to those who came before us? Why? Why not? (92-94, 300-301)
- 3) Think about the sections in the book where the writer remembers his mother and her death. What happens to us when we lose someone so close to us? In what ways might grief, usually a bad thing, shape us in ways that make us stronger people? (34-35, 36, 72-73, 154, 180-181)
- 4) Check out the places in the book where the writer reflects on the experience of "God". Why is this experience important to him? Are people you know generally comfortable with talk about God? Are you? Why or why not? How could conversation about religious faith be helpful in our time? How might those conversations cause trouble? Which amendment to the constitution guarantees freedom of religion? Why do you think it is there? (134-140, 237-244, 292, 304)
- 5) Read the part of the book in which the writer's son mistakenly wounds himself with a pistol. Notice the father's reaction. What would happen if you were in an accident like this? How would your father or mother react? If something like this has happened in your life, write about it. (304-308)
- 6) Is the jump around affect in this story confusing? Why? Picture the writer in a chair in a room. We are there with him. He tells his story. We ask questions as he moves along. He jumps back and forth, between the blizzard and the other events of his life. We follow. How is this form of story telling like the form we use when we are sitting around remembering out loud? Look up the word Memoir. Tell each other a story. (whole book)
- 7) Why is the blizzard the center of this book? Think about storms we have been through. What do we do in a storm like this? What hints does the writer give us about why the blizzard story is so important to the whole book?
- 8) What is it like to see our state portrayed in an internationally known book written by an author who thinks of himself as one of us?

9) Why does a writer write? (239, 255)

10) As our writer grows up, he learns, and he makes some terrible errors in judgment; is he a good boy gone bad, a bad boy gone good? Look at his journal on page 216-217.

11) What has he learned about goodness from "Care", his wife, he friends the Kibblers, his children, Robert De Niro, and William Maxwell?

12) Read the paragraph about memory on 15 and 16--look at the William Maxwell quote about memory: what has Larry learned from William?

Note to the teacher: you know your students. Find prompts that continue to move them into the heart of the book. Use the interview with Larry to give hints. The real catch to this beautiful story is in the structure. Help the students see that we don't remember "in a straight time line," we remember with words and imagination. Write your own prompts to help student begin to imagine language in deeper ways. Good luck.