



## **THE SEVEN WONDERS OF SASSAFRAS SPRINGS** **DISCUSSION GUIDE**



### **THE WONDERS:**

1. Miss Zeldy, the apple head doll that saved Mrs. Pritchard
  2. Henry Upton's bookcase that saved a man's life and holds up Cully Pone's roof
  3. Calvin Smiley's musical saw that drove off the grasshoppers
  4. Eulie Rowan's table that walked through the graveyard
  5. Rae Ellen and the ship in the bottle with the story of "the live ship with a cargo of pure and terrible evil."
  6. Mayor Peevy and the piece of cloth with "Buddy" woven in it
  7. Uncle Alf's magical carved village
- (Plus Coogie Jackson and the flying outhouse)



### **FOR DISCUSSION:**

- Which wonders seem possible to you? Which ones are impossible or fantastical? Which wonder seems most wonderful to you? Silliest? Most surprising?
- What do you think Aunt Pretty was thinking of the night Eben saw her “sitting on the front porch in her white nightgown ... so quiet, just sitting and staring out at the farm.” (p. 114)
- Why didn’t Aunt Pretty want Eben to go away? “Sometimes folks go away and don’t come back.” Who do you think Aunt Pretty was thinking of?
- Do you think Pa was going to hold Eben to the agreement? Would he have allowed Eben to go on the trip if he didn’t find a total of seven wonders in a week?
- Or – was Pa so confident in Eben and the wonders of Sassafras Springs that he knew his son would succeed?
- What do you think Pa meant when he said, “If I give him an extra day, he’ll take an extra day.” (p. 154)
- Why do you think Eben thought, “five wonders, or even six, weren’t worth a thing.” (p. 155)
- Are you one of “those who are satisfied right where they are” or one of “those with an itch to see the rest of the world.” (p. 195)

### **FUN TO THINK ABOUT:**

- Author Betty G. Birney says one of the tales is based on a true story her grandmother told. Which one do you think it is?
- The author says another wonder is based on something her father built. Which one?
- One of the stories is based on a legend. Can you guess which one?

### **TO FIND OUT:**

Using the internet, try to find out the following:

- How to make an applehead doll
- Rainmaking (research Charles Hatfield – you might be surprised)
- Grasshopper (locust) infestations <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Locust>
- Musical saws (try <http://sawlady.com> to hear samples)
- Weaving on looms
- Legend of the Flying Dutchman

### **LEARNING ABOUT LIFE IN THE 1920S:**

- A root beer cost a nickel!
- A few farmers had tractors, but Pa said the problem with machines was that when you said “whoa” they kept on going, unlike Murph and Pat (the horses).
- There was no internet. Regular telephone service was not common, especially in the country. Did it seem to you that people had trouble communicating?
- Most folks still thought a bathroom inside the house was an unnecessary expense.

 **NEW WORDS AND COLORFUL PHRASES:**

<i>A lark</i>	What started out like a lark ... ended up being a job (p. 161)
<i>As the crow flies</i>	Gladiola is ...five hundred miles from Sassafras Springs <i>as the crow flies</i> .
<i>calamity</i>	This old outhouse.... Looks more like a <i>calamity</i> .
<i>congregated</i>	Later, folks <i>congregated</i> outside to chat (p. 118)
<i>fritter/moonshine</i>	You can <i>fritter</i> away considerable time looking at ... recipes for <i>moonshine</i> (p. 160)
<i>haint</i>	There was a ' <i>haint</i> ' in the graveyard (p. 106)
<i>hardscrabble</i>	Calvin Smiley lived ... in a cluster of small <i>hardscrabble</i> farms (p. 84)
<i>in a pickle</i>	I was in a <i>pickle</i> (p. 97)
<i>maiden aunt</i>	That's the kind of question a boy doesn't ask his <i>maiden aunt</i> (p. 115)
<i>outhouse</i>	We stopped ...in front of an abandoned old <i>outhouse</i> (p. 87)
<i>plague</i>	A <i>plague</i> of locusts had eaten all his crops in two days flat (p. 87)
<i>scalawag</i>	Buddy was the number one <i>scalawag</i> in Sassafras Springs (p. 167)
<i>wringer washers</i> <i>iceboxes</i>	Aunt Pretty sighed...when she read about <i>wringer washers</i> and <i>iceboxes</i> .



## **ACTIVITIES:**

- As a group or individually, search for the seven wonders of your school. Make a list and have the group vote on the top seven.
- As a group or individually, identify the seven wonders of your community. Some communities involve the local newspaper, having readers vote for their “wonders” and comparing the grown-up list and the student list.
- Visit the local history museum looking for wonders.
- Illustrate your favorite wonder from the book.
- Bring in a family object or photo and share your wonder with the group.
- Write about a family object that’s a wonder and share with the group.
- Make applehead dolls. [http://www.ehow.com/how\\_5525526\\_make-applehead-dolls.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_5525526_make-applehead-dolls.html) (students will need adult help with these)
- Make clothespin people themed to the book (good for boys, too)
- [http://www.ehow.com/how\\_2172009\\_clothespin-doll.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_2172009_clothespin-doll.html)
- Make a book of your group’s wonders with photos and writing.
- Bring in a local saw player – they’re around in some communities.
- Bring in a local weaver to describe the process.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Betty G. Birney started out as an advertising copywriter and worked in advertising in her home town of St. Louis, Missouri, as well as at Disneyland and the Disney Studio. She is an Emmy award-winning television writer who has penned over 200 episodes of children's TV shows and a TV movie. Betty now lives in Studio City, California with her husband, Frank, an actor. She has a son, two stepdaughters, two sons-in-law and a granddaughter.

For more information about the inspiration for the book, please go to:

<http://bettybirney.com/sassafras.html> and click on the links at the left, which are:

<http://bettybirney.com/sassafras/born.html>

<http://bettybirney.com/sassafras/LonedellMO.html>

<http://bettybirney.com/sassafras/village.html>

## **OTHER BOOKS BY BETTY G. BIRNEY**

*The World According to Humphrey*  
*Friendship According to Humphrey*  
*Trouble According to Humphrey*  
*Surprises According to Humphrey*  
*Adventure According to Humphrey*  
*Summer According to Humphrey*  
*Back to School According to Humphrey (summer 2011)*  
*The Princess and the Peabodys*  
*Tyrannosaurus Tex*  
*Pie's in the Oven*

*The Seven Wonders of Sassafras Springs is available in hardcover from Atheneum Books for Young Readers, a division of Simon & Schuster and in paperback from Aladdin Paperbacks, a division of Simon & Schuster.*