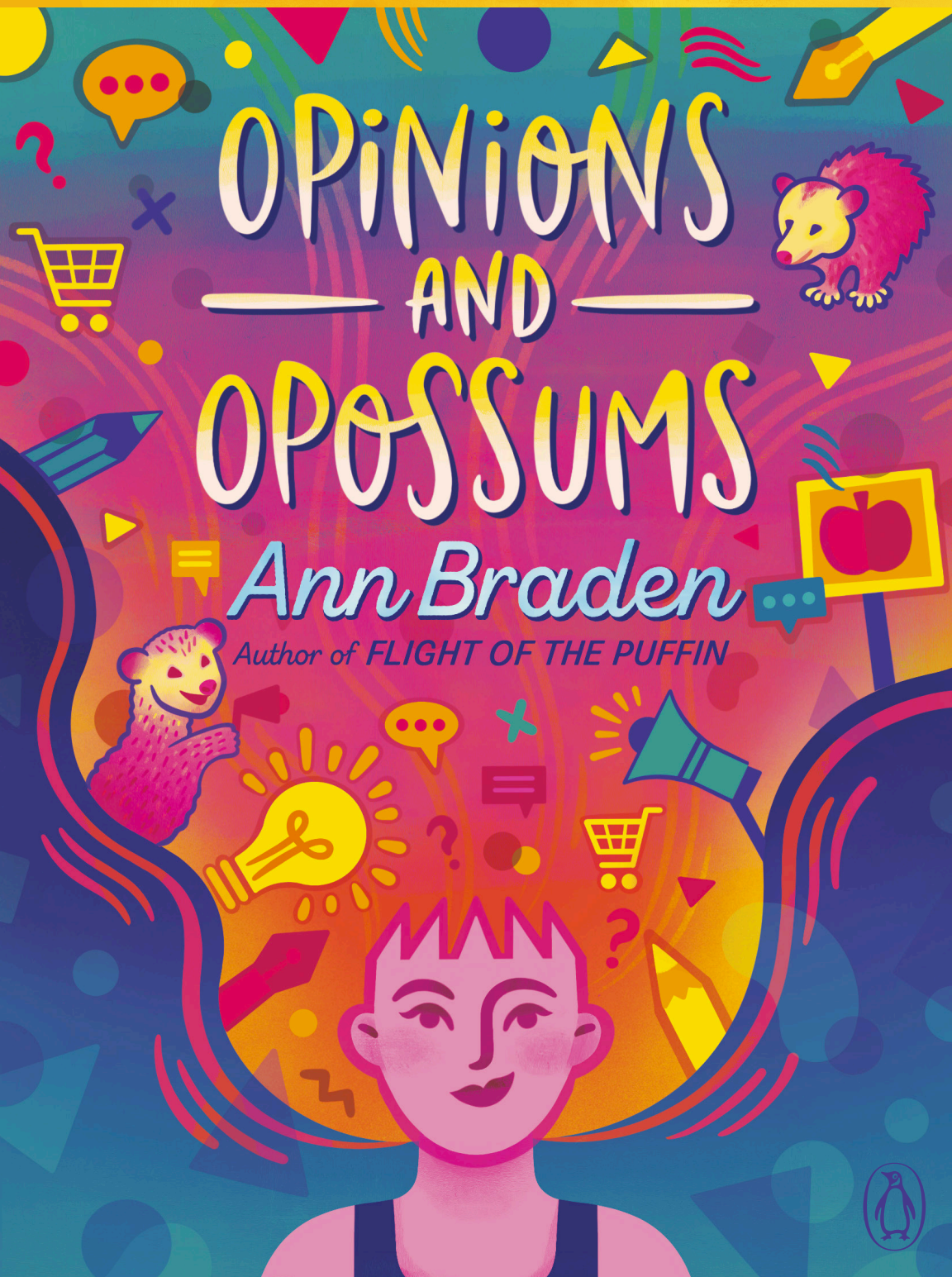


*A Discussion Guide to*

# OPINIONS AND OPOSSUMS

*Ann Braden*

*Author of FLIGHT OF THE PUFFIN*



## ABOUT *the Book*

Agnes has been raised to keep her opinions to herself, but how do you keep silent when you're full of burning questions? Ann Braden has written a fast-paced, funny novel that will resonate with anyone who's ever been afraid to say what they think or question the status quo.

*"I have never read a book like this. Thank you for writing a book about faith and feminism and friendship . . . **A masterpiece!**"*

–SHARI SAWYERS, LIBRARIAN IN TEXAS

*"**A must-read** to encourage empathy, understanding, and tolerance of ideas that differ from one's own."*

–KATHIE MACISAAC, LIBRARIAN IN MANITOBA

*"Books by Ann Braden continue to astound me! Every person deserves to have an opinion and to ask questions. **This will have an impact with readers of all ages.***

*(And it'll be a read aloud in my classroom next year!)"*

–JENNIFER HALBUR, ELA TEACHER IN MINNESOTA

*"I love how Agnes comes to realize that questioning something doesn't mean you're disrespecting it . . . So much story in these 163 pages. Agnes is a force to be reckoned with."*

–SARA THOMPSON, TEACHER IN TEXAS

*"Mind-expanding." – KIRKUS REVIEWS*

## ABOUT *the Author*



Ann Braden (AnnBradenBooks.com) is the author of *Opinions and Opossums* and *Flight of the Puffin*. She writes books about kids trying to stand up for themselves even when things are tough. Her debut middle-grade novel, *The Benefits of Being an Octopus*, was an NPR Best Book, and was named one of "the essential middle school reads from the last decade" by Edutopia, and has appeared on numerous state lists. Ann founded the Local Love Brigade, which sends love postcards to those who are facing hate. She also founded GunSenseVT, a grassroots group that helped pass landmark gun violence prevention legislation. Ann has been a middle-school teacher, the co-host of the children's book podcast *Lifelines: Books That Bridge the Divide*, and co-organizer of #KidsNeedMentors. Ann lives in southern Vermont with her husband, two children, and two insatiable cats.

# Discussion Questions

## 1. CHAPTERS 1-3 (P. 1-13)

- On page 4, Gracy says: “The opossum certainly isn’t the only animal that does what it’s done for years, even if it doesn’t make sense.” What are some things that people do simply because they’ve always done them? Which things make sense to you? Which ones don’t?

## 2. CHAPTERS 4-7 (P. 14-29)

- Are there situations in your life where you “play dead” instead of saying what you really think? When does “playing dead” make sense? When does it not?

## 3. CHAPTERS 8-11 (P. 30-40)

- Do you think Agnes should sign the form? Why or why not?

## 4. CHAPTERS 12-13 (P. 40-50)

- Before you read these chapters, what did you picture when you imagined early humans? Has that image changed? Why do you think Agnes finds it so mind-blowing?
- On page 44, Gracy says: “We can never understand the whole truth about something if we don’t wonder what we’re missing.” What’s something people might be “missing” in their day-to-day lives?

## 5. CHAPTERS 14-15 (P. 50-57)

- Why do you think Agnes cares about other people’s opinions (opinions!) so much more than Mo does?
- Why do you think Agnes would be so attracted to the idea of being able to “see beyond the boundaries other people built” like Maya Angelou does (p. 56)?

## 6. CHAPTERS 16-19 (P. 58-71)

- What are the “stories” that affect your life (assumptions, histories, generalizations, etc . . .)? Who are the main people telling those stories? Do you feel like they’re accurate?
- Why do you think it changes things for Agnes when she starts to use different pronouns for God?

## 7. CHAPTERS 20-24 (P. 72-88)

- If we’re afraid to do something, when do you think it makes sense to listen to that fear? And when does it make sense to ignore it?

## 8. CHAPTERS 25-28 (P. 89-103)

- What is the dress code like at your school? Do you think it’s fair? Why or why not?



## Discussion Questions CONTINUED

### 9. CHAPTERS 29–30 (P. 104–109)

- What unwritten rules (or “understood expectations” [p. 105]) shape the way kids interact at your school? Which do you think has more power: a rule that is written down or a rule that is quietly followed by almost everyone? Why?
- On page 108, Agnes’s mom says, “The longer you go without saying what you think, the harder it is to remember your thoughts don’t have to be the same as those around you.” Do you think that’s true? Why or why not?

### 10. CHAPTERS 31–33 (P. 110–118)

- Why is it so powerful for Agnes to see where certain assumptions about women have been coming from? How does it change her perspective?
- What’s one assumption that you live with that you’d like to understand the original source of?

### 11. CHAPTERS 34–36 (P. 119–128)

- What assumptions is Mo dealing with? Where do you think those assumptions came from?
- On page 126, Gracy says, “Culture shapes us and we shape culture. It’s just a matter of which one is stronger.” In what ways do you think the culture around you has shaped you? In what ways would you like to shape the culture?
- On page 127, Gracy describes “the defensiveness we feel when we’re forced to see things in a new way.” Why do you think people often feel defensive when presented with a change? How does that influence society?

### 12. CHAPTERS 37–41 (P. 129–144)

- If you feel comfortable talking about it, do you believe in some kind of higher power? How do you think about it or imagine it? What questions do you have? What do you wonder?
- If you were part of a FOOT group (Finding Our Own Truth), what kind of things would you want to discuss in it?

### 13. CHAPTERS 42–43 (P. 145–155)

- Who do you think Agnes is talking about when she gives Mo her speech about the sheep? Why?
- Why do you think Agnes and Mo at twelve years old don’t have the same confidence that Sadie has at six? What has changed? Do you think it will change again?

### 14. CHAPTERS 44–45 (P. 156–163)

- Agnes discovers a quote from the poet Rumi: “Set your life on fire. Seek out those who fan the flames” (p. 156). What does this quote mean to you? In your life, what would it look like for someone to fan your flames?
- On page 158 Agnes reflects: “It’s on us to not freeze up. To keep our eyes wide open.” What’s something you see as important enough to be sure to not freeze up for—and to keep your eyes wide open for?
- What would a giant monument about YOU say on it?

