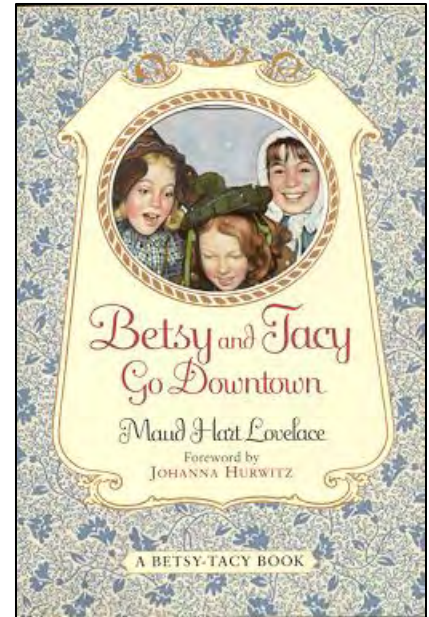


Betsy and Tacy Go Downtown

By Maud Hart Lovelace

“Papa said he was amazed and astounded’ [said Tacy]. ‘He said he thought he had brought us up to appreciate good literature. He said there was a set of Dickens in the house, and Shakespeare . . . and how did a child of his happen to be reading trash? Then he went out to the kitchen range and lifted the lid and threw it in . . .’”

Tacy’s troubles with “trash” literature open the fourth book of this delightful series. And that’s just the beginning of the girls’ varied adventures. From Winona’s tickets to a wonderful new invention, from stories and parties to the theater and Christmas, the three friends never lack for excitement. As their world expands to include new friends, Maud Hart Lovelace guides her twelve-year-old heroines through yet another volume of their growing-up journey, and “going downtown” alone is only the beginning.



Chapter 1.

What kind of stories has Betsy been writing?

What was the problem with Rena’s books?

Why do the girls keep Rena’s books a secret from their parents?

See what you can find out about “dime novels.”

Why do Betsy and Tacy make fun of Julia and Jerry?

How is Tib’s attitude different?

What are knickerbockers?

The girls hatch a plot to “earn” the money to replace Rena’s book. Describe their plan.

Chapter 2.

What do you think is the cause for the excitement that the girls find downtown?

What impression do you get of Winona Root? Describe her.

Tacy is afraid of the horseless carriage. Is Betsy afraid?

Tib? How do you know?

How does Tib wangle the first ride privilege away from Winona?

Describe Betsy’s and Tacy’s reactions. What about Winona’s?

What is Winona’s newest brag? How does that affect the three girls?

What is “flogging”?

Chapter 3.

Describe the girls' ploy to get Winona to take them to see Uncle Tom's Cabin.

Do you think it will work? Why or why not?

What do you notice about the way class is begun? Why does this seem unusual to us?

What ends the attempt at hypnotizing Winona?

Are the girls helping their cause by their actions? Explain.

Chapter 4.

Explain Betsy's reluctance to ask her father to take her to the play (there are at least two reasons).

Have you added any ideas to your impression (from Chapter 2) of Winona?

Describe the girls' next strategy. Does Winona catch on?

What is "passe-partout"?

Do you think giving up is the right thing to do?

How does Betsy's plan help the girls cope with their disappointment?

What new character "appears" in this chapter? What do we learn about him?

How does Mrs. Ray feel about him?

What is "camphor"?

What is the unexpected result of Betsy's play-writing?

Trace the "highs" and "lows" of Winona's tickets and the girls' hopes.

Chapter 5.

Have you ever been to a theater as grand as the Opera House is described? Where?

What for? Does a fancy theater make a difference in your enjoyment of the show? Explain.

Have you read Uncle Tom's Cabin? Can you share it with the class?

Give some examples of how Winona is showing off.

Chapter 6.

Discuss the information about Uncle Keith we get in this chapter.

Betsy's mother is a great believer in people having private places (p. 70).

Do you have a private place? Can you tell us about it?

What does it mean to "not let any grass grow under [your] feet"?

Can you think of any other figures of speech like this one? For example, "A rolling stone gathers no moss." Explain your examples.

Why is Betsy's excitement over her new desk dimmed?

How does Mrs. Ray react when she sees the novels Betsy has written? Why does she not want Betsy to read the dime novels like Rena's?

What is Mrs. Ray's secret plan? How does she think it will benefit Betsy?

How does the plan immediately affect Betsy?

Chapter 7.

- Betsy is excited to be going to the library. Why is she also a bit unhappy about it?
- What reasons are behind Maud Hart Lovelace's calling the library a "small white marble temple"?
- How does Miss Sparrow react to Betsy? Why?
- Do you ever get as caught up in your reading as Betsy does? Can you tell us about it – either generally or with a specific instance?
- Why does Betsy feel like crying after she is rescued by Mrs. Poppy?
Why won't she let herself cry?
- Look again at the last sentence of this chapter. What is the literary device Maud Hart Lovelace uses here?

Chapter 8.

- The statue of "Winged Victory" is a copy of a real statue that is on display in the Louvre in Paris. See what you can find out about it.
- What would be the pros and cons of living in a hotel?
- What are portieres? Gibson Girls? Remington cowboys?
- How does Mrs. Poppy personify the river? What river is it?
- What two reasons to be sad does Betsy discover about Mrs. Poppy?
- Why is Mrs. Ray doubtful about going to visit Mrs. Poppy?

Chapter 9.

- What is the significance of going out bobsledding at night?
- What is the meaning of Jerry's slang expression, "Go way back and sit down"?
- Why don't the mothers like bobsledding parties?
- How does Betsy amuse herself when she stays home from school? How do you amuse yourself when you have to stay home?
- What things does Betsy call on to incorporate into her story, "Flossie's Accident"?
Does this give you any tips or ideas about your own writing?
- Discuss Betsy's story and Tib's copy of it. What do you see that is wrong with it?
Will it be published? Why or why not?

Chapter 10.

- What is the fun of "going shopping to shop"? Do you ever do this?
- Is the ornament each girl buys a good purchase? Why?
- The girls are very clever about having an ice cream treat after shopping.
How do they manage it? Do you ever maneuver a parent like this? Does it work?
- Read again the last sentence from this chapter. What does it mean? How can you hold Christmas in your hands?

Chapter 11.

What makes the days before Christmas so exciting at the Ray house? Do we experience this sort of excitement today? Explain your answer (why or why not).

Compare and contrast the Rays' Christmas tree with your own.

Margaret's doll is the peak of the Christmas excitement for the entire Ray family. What does this tell you about them? Most children today know what they will receive for Christmas (or any gift-giving day). How make those holidays different for us?

Why do you think Mrs. Ray continues to have misgivings about Mrs. Poppy?

(Hint: think of what Mrs. Poppy's career was before she married Mr. Poppy.)

Why do you think Betsy has such serious thoughts while she is looking out Mrs. Poppy's window?

What "secret" does Mrs. Poppy tell Betsy? Why does she want to keep it a secret?

Why does Betsy's hug and kiss mean so much to Mrs. Poppy?

Chapter 12.

Why are the Ray girls so excited about seeing Rip Van Winkle?

Have you ever been as excited about something as Betsy, Tacy and Tib are about the play? Can you share your story with the class?

Do you know how to play the game of "Authors"? To what other card game is it similar? If you have the game, bring it in to share with the class.

Explain how the girls are invited to act in the play.

Chapter 13.

What is a "quick study"?

What do the girls mean by being "painted"?

What does Tib mean when she says, "Thank goodness I'm up in my part"?

Find out what "supernumeraries" (or "supes") are.

Rip Van Winkle slept for 20 years. The sign on the Inn changed from King George III of England to George Washington. Can you infer what happened while Rip was sleeping?

Were you surprised to find out that Mr. Kee is actually Betsy's Uncle Keith?

Why does Mrs. Poppy smile but look like she is ready to cry as she watches the Rays go off with Uncle Keith?

Chapter 14.

What are the "attacks" that Rena is afraid of?

Why do you think Mr. Ray makes jokes while everyone else is crying?

(There are at least two reasons.)

How has Mrs. Poppy played an important role in Uncle Keith's return?

How does Mrs. Ray react?

What last surprise happens to the Ray family?

GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS BOOK:

- Whom does Betsy "thank" for the success of her poem? Is this a good ending for this book? Explain your answer.
- What themes can you find in this book? Explain.
- Can you relate Tacy, Tib or Winona to anyone in your life? Explain.
- Who is your favorite character in this book? Why?
- Is there any character you do NOT like? Why?
- What do you learn about "trash" literature from this book?
What makes a book "trash"? How is our definition of "trash" different today?
- Uncle Keith was involved in "Santiago" in the Spanish-American War. Find out about this and share your findings with the class.

WRITING ACTIVITIES:

- Write a short chapter to show how the rest of the weekend with Uncle Keith goes.
- Write a paragraph to explain the title of this book.
- Now that you "know" Winona better, write a paragraph in which you describe how (and why) she changed over the course of this book.
- Do some research on Andrew Carnegie to share with the class.
- Find a copy of Whittier's poem, "Snowbound," to share with your classmates. Julia has obviously learned it nearly by heart, as she quotes from it. Perhaps you can find a poem that "speaks" to you to memorize.

DRAMA:

Find the story of Rip Van Winkle and read it. With a group, write a short scene from the story and act it out for the class.

With your group, take an imaginary shopping trip to choose your Christmas (or birthday or other holiday) gifts. As the girls did, visit a bookstore, a drugstore, a department store, a car store, a horse or pet store, and a toy store. Come up with both an individual list and a list that the group decides on as a whole. Share your lists with the class -- perhaps in a skit.

