



*A Common Core State  
Standards-Aligned  
Discussion/Activity Guide for Grades 4 to 6*

# BIRDIE'S BILLIONS

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Written by Edith Cohn  
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Children's Books

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*A savvy young girl finds half a million dollars and wonders if she can keep it in this charming middle grade mystery that asks big questions about right, wrong, and what you'd do for family.*

*For as long as eleven-year-old Birdie can remember, it's always been just her and her mom, which means there's not a lot of extra money to spend on things like new clothes and batons from the fancy gymnastics store. Still, they always find a way to make ends meet. Then Birdie makes one silly mistake that has a big consequence: Mom loses her job. Now things are more dire than ever, and Birdie knows it's up to her to fix it.*

*When Birdie discovers a huge stash of cash in an abandoned house, she just knows it must be the answer to their problems. But the people who left that money behind aren't willing to give it up so easily. Does "finders, keepers" count when it's half a million dollars?*

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Guide created by  
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## Meet Author Edith Cohn

Edith Cohn was born and raised in North Carolina where she grew up exploring the unique beaches of the Outer Banks. This provided inspiration for her debut middle grade novel, *SPIRIT'S KEY*, a mystery novel about a girl, her ghost dog, and a remote island filled with superstitious characters. Edith currently lives and writes in Los Angeles.



## Discussion Questions

***Silence in which Jacob Powers stared gape-jawed at Birdie like he’s never seen her before, and well, maybe he hadn’t, really. Rich kids like Jacob saw Birdie’s beat-up sneakers and off-brand clothes and quickly looked away (pg. 19).***

- In this scene, Birdie takes a huge risk by bartering for a cover up with her sketchy skater skills. Landing an ollie is a dangerous feat, yet Birdie is willing to take a chance to protect Hailey and herself from being implicated of guilt for what they were actually doing. What is her motivation for doing so?
- Birdie demonstrated deft skill and prowess when she landed the ollie. The word prowess means courage, grit, and spunk. Discuss reasons why Birdie felt the need to prove her skateboarding prowess to Jacob and Travis.
- Consider Birdie’s need to conspire with Hailey in fabricating stories about owning a home in the new development. Who is Birdie trying to impress by doing so, Hailey or the boys? Explain your answer.

***“If you learn to think before you speak, you will be...richer, in the ways that matter the most” (pg. 35).***

- In this scene, Birdie finds herself in Mrs. Alvarez’s, the assistant principal, office as a consequence for impulsively using a profanity to describe Hailey’s mother. Examine Birdie’s motivation for her outburst. Why would being judged for where she lived cause Birdie to react so spontaneously?
- Birdie perceives that Mrs. Alvarez could “see through Birdie’s used clothes and dirty sneakers to the heart of the problem” (pg. 35). Identify the heart of Birdie’s problem. What is deeply troubling her?
- The word rich means abundance, lavish, and plentiful. Is it possible to be rich without possessing a great deal of wealth? Explain your answer.
- Examine Birdie and Hailey’s relationship. List their similarities. Describe their differences.

***“You are trustworthy, Mama. You didn’t try to hide what I’d done at Mrs. Hillmore’s House. You called her right away” (pg. 91).***

- The word *irony* is defined as using words that represent an opposite meaning. Consider the irony of this scene in which Mama and Birdie are discussing trustworthiness and integrity, while Birdie has taken thousands of dollars from the abandoned house.
- Earlier, when Birdie first woke up, in her “hazy, mind-jumbled state” she wondered about trusting herself to believe that she had truly discovered such treasure (pg. 90). Why do you think the money would cause Birdie to doubt herself? Can she be trusted? Explain your answer.
- A white lie is defined as being a harmless, small lie usually told to avoid hurting someone’s feelings. Examine the lies Birdie has told thus far in the story. Do they qualify as white lies?



***This was the problem with lying. You told one lie, and then you had to think of another, and before you knew it, you were caught (pg. 158).***

- In this scene, Birdie not only lies about inheriting money from her grandfather, she elaborated by claiming that he had died. Explain why Birdie felt the need to “lighten the mood” after she made this false statement.
- What motivates Mrs. Kirkland to disprove Birdie’s stories?
- Trace the intricate series of lies Birdie has told Mama, Kellog, Hailey, Mrs. Kirkland, and others. Consider the difficulties required to keep all of the falsehoods under control.
- Ultimately, who is Birdie lying to, herself or the others? Explain your answer.

***Well, now she knew, even though she wished she didn’t. The money in her bookbag belonged to Evercrest’s elderly residents--people the men from the gray house had befriended then swindled (pg. 171).***

- How does knowing who the money was stolen from change Birdie’s situation? Tell how this awareness changes Birdie.
- Note that Birdie’s initial reaction to this information is to reach out to Kellog, who, up to this point, she had been avoiding contact with. Why Kellog and not Hailey?
- When Kellog accuses Birdie of being a liar, she confesses. Why is Birdie able to be truthful to Kellog? Why does Birdie find Kellog trustworthy enough to know about the stolen money?
- The word *conscience* is defined as a sense of right and wrong, morals, and values. Determine how talking with Kellog challenged Birdie’s conscience.
- At the end of the scene, instead of feeling better by confessing to Kellog, Birdie felt worse. Explain why this is so.

***And Birdie almost wanted to tell her the truth – that her dad was in prison and she hardly knew a thing about him (pg. 191).***

- Earlier in this scene, in efforts to “top” Samiya, Birdie had transformed the false story of her grandfather’s death into an “elaborate tale involving a billion-dollar chocolate fortune” (pg. 189). Determine why, just moments later, Birdie yearned to tell Samiya the truth about her father.
- Describe Birdie’s impression of Samiya. Identify which of Samiya’s character traits Birdie admires the most.
- Instead of fabricating another story of her grandfather’s inheritance, Birdie tells Samiya a little about her life in Polkville. Samiya seemed genuinely intrigued and interested. Do you think Hailey would have responded in the same way? Why or why not?



***Hailey watched Birdie, a deep distrust etching into her face.  
“You’re not telling me the truth” (pg. 202).***

- While attending the school field trip, Hailey notices when Birdie becomes alarmed when discovering the man in a nuclear atom jacket. Hailey led Birdie away from the group beyond a no-trespassing sign to a secret passageway in the old Biltmore library. What motivated Hailey to do such a thing -- concern for Bailey’s well-fare or a desire for adventure? Explain your answer.
- Hailey becomes furious when Birdie refuses to reveal the truth about the money she found. Their relationship is founded on secrecy and lies. Explain why Birdie refused to tell Hailey about the money or the man in a nuclear atom jacket. Why is this situation different?
- When Hailey’s leg punched through the floor, Birdie instinctively responded by attempting to save her friend’s life. Much like when she saved Hailey from drowning in the beginning of the story, Birdie sacrificed her own safety for the welfare of another. Explain why someone as bold and brave as Birdie feels the need to lie so frequently.

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***They shared a look. A look that said that Hailey had rescued Birdie’s money from the treehouse and was trying to cover for her. And Birdie could play along. With Hailey backing her up, she could get out of this mess or at least avoid the police. She knew she could (pg. 235).***

- In this scene, Hailey is the one trying to save Birdie from certain danger. Hailey knows, full well, what Birdie has to hide and attempts to cover for her friend. What motivated Hailey to do so?
- Birdie considers going along with Hailey’s plan, which might have worked, in the short term. Instead, she confessed and returned the money to Mr. Garrett. Explore reasons why she chose to give in, rather than continue with living a lie. What did she have to gain by surrendering?
- How is Birdie’s character changed as a result of returning the money to Mr. Garrett? Explain your answer.

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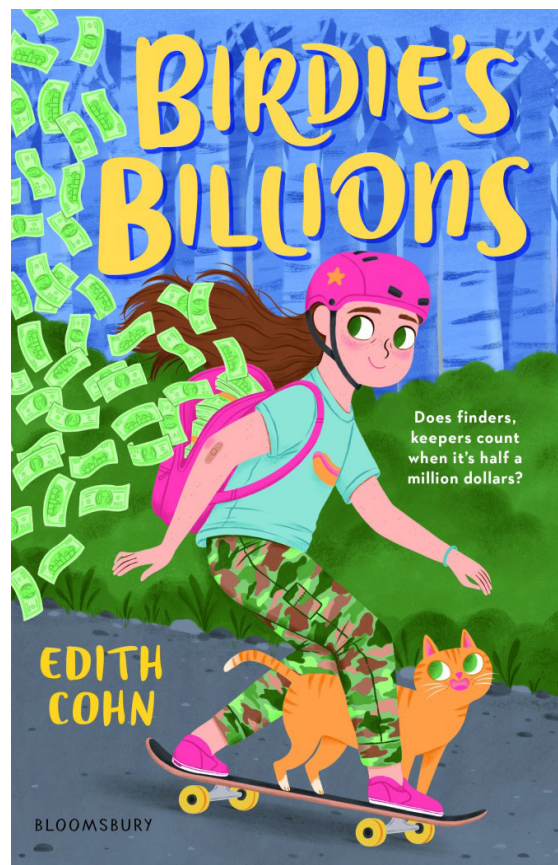
***Keeping her integrity was a sweaty business (pg. 243).***

- *Integrity* is defined as honesty, trustworthiness, and sincerity. The word *accountability* means to assume responsibility for one’s actions. Make a connection between the two definitions. Is it possible one of these character traits without the other?
- When a person repeatedly tells lies, they become disregarded as someone who cannot be trusted. Liars become dismissed and ignored by others. By lying, Birdie’s dishonesty destroyed relationships. Discuss how reestablishing her integrity will help others learn to trust her once again.
- Make a connection between keeping one’s integrity and Mrs. Alvarez’s advice, “If you learn to think before you speak, you will be...richer, in the ways that matter the most” (pg. 35). How will being truthful bring about riches in one’s life?



*“I understand what she means. It’s hard when you’re different. You want to hide it” (pg. 271).*

- It was the confidence Samiya exhibited during her presentation about Hinduism that Birdie found to be impressive. In this scene, Birdie discovered that Samiya used the opportunity to overcome her fears about being “different.” Tell why Birdie finds Samiya’s ability to be true to herself, despite concern of being rejected, to be assuring.
- Earlier in the story, Lily gave Birdie bags of second-hand clothes to wear. In this scene, Birdie told Lily that, though none of the clothes fit, she removed one shiny button from a dress to save as a reminder of the sadness she felt due to being “different” than the rest of the girls. Examine the significance of the button. How does it serve as a reminder of the person Birdie does not want to be?
- The word *acceptance* means approval, confidence, and trust. Determine the importance of self-acceptance when striving to overcome limiting thoughts about being different.
- To judge someone means to form an opinion or to draw a conclusion. Birdie, Lily, and Samiya make a vow to establish a “Friendship pact” in which no judging is allowed (pg. 272). Determine why being nonjudgmental is important to establishing true and trustworthy friendships.



## Character Trait Analysis

*Samiya looked impressed, “That’s so incredibly sweet” (pg. 139).*

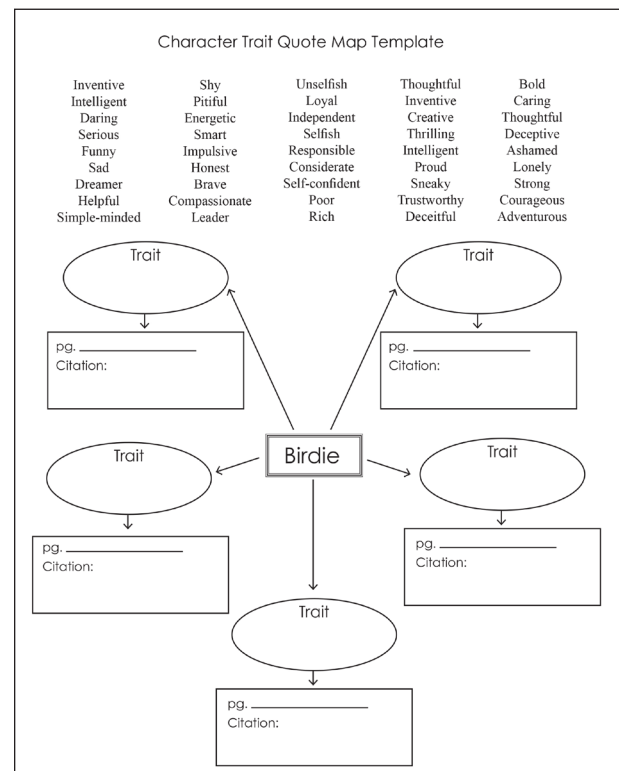
**Objective:** Determine how a character demonstrates innate motivation and desire by reacting to various challenges presented in the story.

### Materials:

- BIRDIE’S BILLION’S, the book
- Character Trait Quote Map Template (Guide, pg. 8)
- Writing Materials

### Procedure:

- Lead a discussion exploring the complexities of Birdie’s character traits. Using the list of character traits featured on the **Character Trait Quote Map Template**, identify moments in the story in which Birdie demonstrated each trait. Note that some of the traits describe Birdie’s character more effectively than others.
- Instruct students to choose five traits that they feel best describe Birdie’s character. List these traits in the spaces provided on the template.
- Instruct students to cite examples in the text documenting instances in which Birdie demonstrated each trait. Add page number and citation in the spaces provided on the template.
- Have students identify two traits: one that caused Birdie to lie about her circumstances and another that empowered her to face her issues truthfully.
- Instruct students to write an informative essay about the two selected traits describing how they demonstrate



# Character Trait Quote Map Template

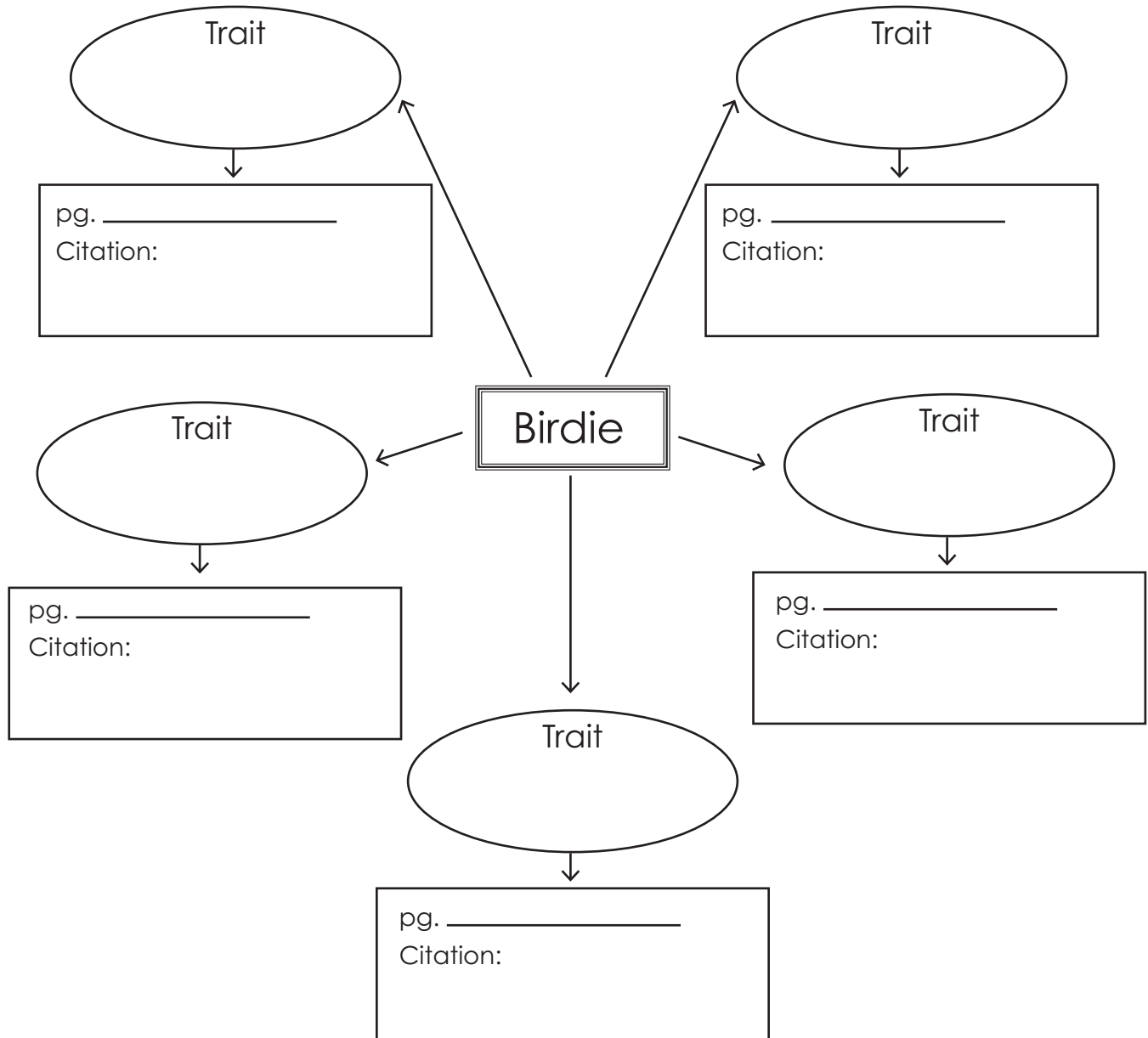
Inventive  
Intelligent  
Daring  
Serious  
Funny  
Sad  
Dreamer  
Helpful  
Simple-minded

Shy  
Pitiful  
Energetic  
Smart  
Impulsive  
Honest  
Brave  
Compassionate  
Leader

Unselfish  
Loyal  
Independent  
Selfish  
Responsible  
Considerate  
Self-confident  
Poor  
Rich

Thoughtful  
Inventive  
Creative  
Thrilling  
Intelligent  
Proud  
Sneaky  
Trustworthy  
Deceitful

Bold  
Caring  
Thoughtful  
Deceptive  
Ashamed  
Lonely  
Strong  
Courageous  
Adventurous





## The Anatomy of a Lie

*“At least I’m not a liar, poor girl,” Travis shouted over the lake (pg. 24)*

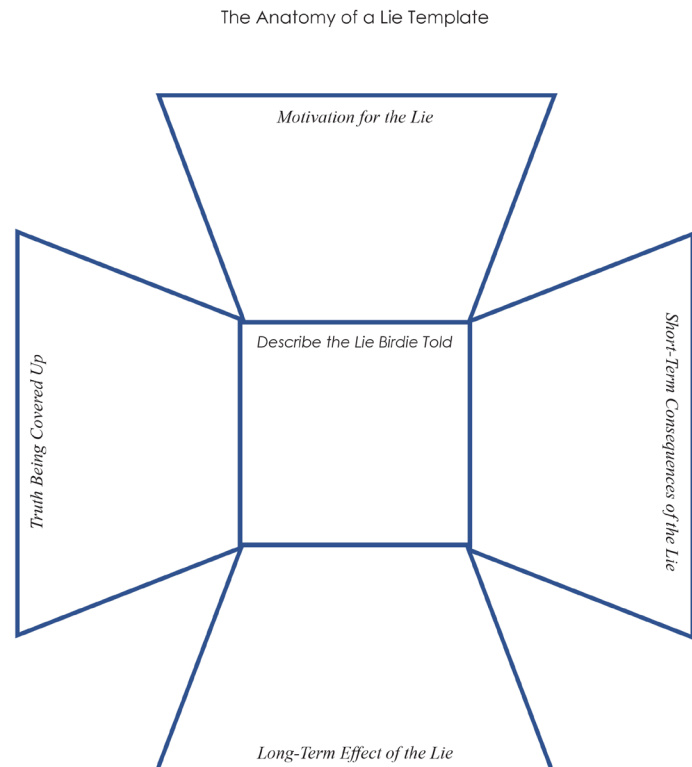
**Objective:** Describe an event in the story by deeply examining the motivations, intentions, and predicted consequences of a character’s actions.

**Materials:**

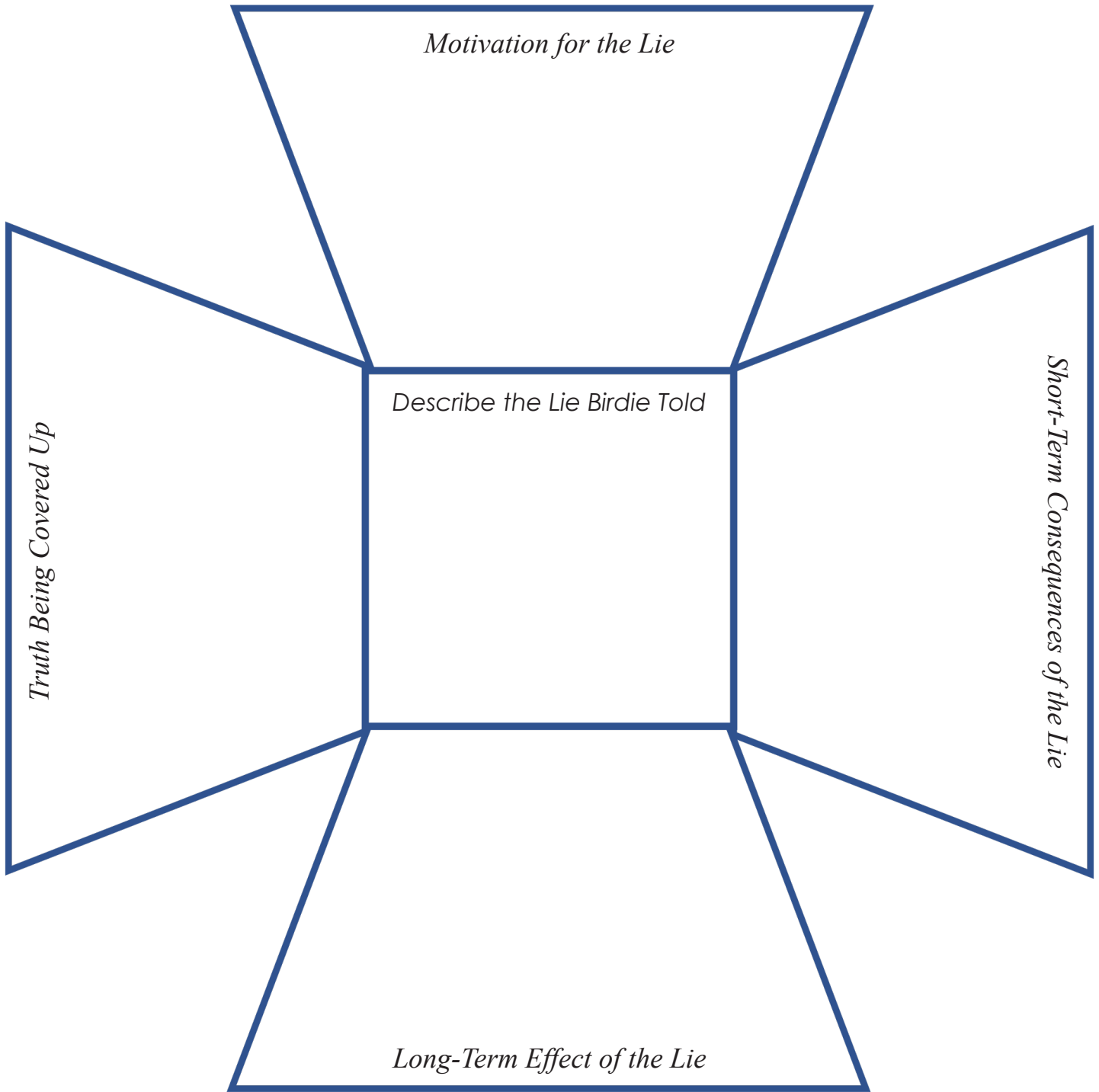
- BIRDIE’S BILLION’S, the book
- The Anatomy of a Lie Template (Guide, pg. 10)
- Writing Materials

**Procedure:**

- Instruct students to use the **Anatomy of a Lie Template** as a guide to examine the complexity and consequences of one of Birdie’s lies.
- Choose a lie and analyze it using the following topics:
  - Motivation for the Lie: List reasons why Birdie chose to lie rather than being truthful about the situation.
  - Truth Being Covered Up: Describe Birdie’s need to lie. What facts was she attempting to conceal by lying?
  - Short-Term Consequences of the Lie: Express how telling the lie gave her some immediate stress relief.
  - Long-Term Effect of the Lie: Explain how the lie served to complicate Birdie’s life and/or affect her credibility with others.
- Instruct students to write an informative essay about describing the motivations, intentions, and predicted consequences of one of Birdie’s lies.
- Encourage students to share their work with the class.



## The Anatomy of a Lie Template



## Write the Final Chapter

*Mama nodded okay. “If you’re willing to risk it, you have my blessing” (pg. 274).*

**Objective:** Make predictions regarding a character’s reaction by drawing inferences from the text to write a new ending to the story.

### Materials:

- BIRDIE’S BILLION’S, the book
- Write the Final Chapter Template (Guide, pg. 12)
- Writing Materials

### Procedure:

- In the final pages of BIRDIE’S BILLION’S, Birdie boldly contemplates telling others the truth about her father being in prison. In her determination to live an authentic life, she is willing to speak honestly, then permit her friends to respond in any way that they see fit.
- Using the **Write the Final Chapter Template** as a guide to write a new ending to the story, instruct students to write one last chapter by predicting how a chosen character would respond when Birdie confesses that her father is a prisoner. Predict the character’s reaction to the truth by exploring the following topics:
  - Identify risks involved in telling the truth: Describe what Birdie stands to lose if the character responds in a negative manner.
  - Predict character’s reaction to the truth: Imagine how the character will respond. Give reasons for their reactions.
  - Predict the impact the truth will have on their relationship: How will their relationship be altered by knowing the truth.
  - Establish the scene:
    - Location: Where will the conversation take place?
    - Dialogue: How will the conversation unfold?
    - Tone/Mood: How will Birdie feel before, during, and afterwards?
  - Anticipate resolution: Will there be any long term effects? Describe how this information will define their relationship going forth.
- Write the dialogue exchange between the characters.
- Encourage students to share their work with the class.

Write the Final Chapter Template

Character's Name	
Identify risks involved in telling the truth	Predict character's reaction to the truth
Predict the impact the truth will have on their relationship	
Establish the scene	Anticipate resolution
- Location:  - Dialogue:  - Tone/Mood:	



## Write the Final Chapter Template

<i>Character's Name</i>	
<i>Identify risks involved in telling the truth</i>	<i>Predict character's reaction to the truth</i>
<i>Predict the impact the truth will have on their relationship</i>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Establish the scene</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Location:</li> <li>- Dialogue:</li> <li>- Tone/Mood:</li> </ul>	<i>Anticipate the resolution</i>



# Common Core State Standards Alignment

		Discussion	Character Traits	Anatomy of a Lie	The Final Chapter
<b>English Language Arts Standards » Reading: Literature</b>					
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1	Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3	Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including those that allude to significant characters found in mythology.	•	•		
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.7	Make connections between the text of a story or drama and a visual or oral presentation of the text, identifying where each version reflects specific descriptions and directions in the text.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.10	By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poetry, in the grades 4-5 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1	Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2	Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.	•			
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3	Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).	•	•		•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes.	•	•		
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.10	By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poetry, at the high end of the grades 4-5 text complexity band independently and proficiently.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1	Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2	Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.	•	•		
<b>English Language Arts Standards » Writing</b>					
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.2	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.			•	•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.4	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.			•	•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.9	Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.			•	•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.2	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.			•	•
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CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.9	Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.			•	•

		Discussion	Character Traits	Anatomy of a Lie	The Final Chapter
<b>English Language Arts Standards » Writing</b>					
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.2	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.			•	•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.4	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.			•	•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.9	Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.			•	•
<b>English Language Arts Standards » Speaking &amp; Listening</b>					
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.1	Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on <i>grade 4 topics and texts</i> , building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.4	Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience in an organized manner, using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.		•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1	Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on <i>grade 5 topics and texts</i> , building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.2	Summarize a written text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.1	Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.2	Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.5	Include multimedia components (e.g., graphics, images, music, sound) and visual displays in presentations to clarify information.	•	•	•	•

