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Study Guide

for

The True  
Confessions of  
Charlotte Doyle

by Avi



 **Glencoe  
McGraw-Hill**

New York, New York   Columbus, Ohio   Woodland Hills, California   Peoria, Illinois

# Meet Avi



*I want my readers to feel, to think, sometimes to laugh.  
But most of all I want them to enjoy a good read.*

—Avi

Fans of novelist Avi know that his goal is to create stories that are exciting and fun as well as thoughtful and well written. He has attracted a loyal audience of young readers, teachers, and critics and has earned numerous awards and honors. The thirty books Avi has written include tales of mystery, history, adventure, comedy, and fantasy. He says:

*I take a great deal of satisfaction in using popular forms—the adventure, the mystery, the thriller—so as to hold my reader with the sheer pleasure of a good story.*

Avi Wortis was born in New York City, on December 23, 1937, and he grew up in the borough of Brooklyn. His parents held strong political views and fought actively against racism and for women's rights. Avi remembers that his home was always filled with lively discussions.

Despite the author's love of reading and learning, school was a constant struggle for

him. Later in his life, he realized that he had a learning disorder that affected his ability to spell and form letters. Because at that time people did not understand learning disorders, Avi was criticized at school and told that he would never be a good student or a writer.

Avi, however, would not be discouraged. With the encouragement of his family and a helpful tutor, and because of his love of books and his own stubbornness, he kept writing. While still in high school, he decided that he wanted to have a career as a writer. Avi based the experiences of many of his later fictional characters on his own experience of feeling like an outsider.

After high school, Avi studied at the University of Wisconsin and earned two degrees. He then moved back to New York City and took a job with the New York Public Library. He worked as a librarian for the next twenty-five years, and he continued to write.

Avi became interested in children's literature after the birth of his own children. His first published book, *Things That Sometimes Happen* (1970), was a collection of stories based on tales Avi told his two sons. After he published his first novel, *No More Magic*, in 1975, he realized that writing novels for preteens and teens was what he wanted to do most.

Today, Avi writes full time and travels around the country to give talks in schools. He likes to share his story of success with students, particularly students with learning disorders. Avi believes that being in touch with his readers helps him keep his stories realistic:

*I think it's very important for me to keep these kids in front of my eyes. They're wonderfully interesting and hold me to the reality of who they are.*

# Introducing the Novel

"Miss Doyle, please . . . I have something else to offer."

"No more tea, thank you."

"No, miss. It is this." He held out a knife.

With a scream I jumped back.

"No, no! Miss Doyle. Don't misunderstand! I only wish to give you the knife as protection—in case you need it . . . Miss Doyle doesn't know what might happen . . . A ship sails with any wind she finds," he whispered.

—*The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*,  
chapter 2

*The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*, published in 1990, is an adventure novel set in 1832. When the novel begins, Charlotte Doyle is a sheltered schoolgirl who knows only the wealthy world of her family. She is about to embark on a journey that will take her from her school in England to her family's home in Providence, Rhode Island.

From the moment she steps aboard the *Seahawk*, Charlotte Doyle has unsettling experiences. In the earliest days of her voyage, these experiences strengthen Charlotte's feeling that she should not be traveling across the Atlantic Ocean by herself on a ship full of strangers. The voyage cannot end soon enough for her. Charlotte has no idea that her time aboard the *Seahawk* will change her life forever.

Originally, Avi did not plan to focus this novel on one character. When he began to write, he was planning to create a mystery novel. He even titled his work-in-progress "The *Seahawk*." However, in working on the book, Avi found that he was drawn to the character of Charlotte. He began to care about how events might affect her. The element of mystery then became secondary to the story of Charlotte.

Of his writing style, Avi says, "I try to write about complex issues—young people in an adult world . . . in a narrative style that relies heavily on suspense with a texture rich in emotion and imagery." This style can be seen in his

characterization of Charlotte, his images of the ship and the sea, and his development of the story's events. Charlotte, like other characters in Avi's writing, struggles to find her true self in a world that is not always flexible or kind.

Suspense, vivid details, the believable characterization of Charlotte and others, and the emotional impact of its ending have earned this novel much critical praise and several awards. One reviewer described the book as a "sensuous novel evoking the sights, sounds, and smells of the ship and the sea; the moods of captain and crew; . . . and the nature of friendship and loyalty."

## THE TIME AND PLACE

Most of the action in *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* takes place in 1832 on an old two-masted sailing ship, called a brig. The brig is traveling from England to the United States to transport cargo. Another setting, used later in the novel, is the wealthy, orderly home of Charlotte's parents in Providence.

Early in the novel, Charlotte tells readers that her father "engaged in the manufacture of cotton goods" and had been working at an American business located in England. At the time in which the novel is set, the manufacture of cotton cloth was an important and profitable industry in both England and the northeastern United States.

In the 1800s, some people were reaping the benefits of what is called the Industrial Revolution—the period during which machines replaced skilled workers and their handtools. The new machines were kept in large factories. Goods, such as clothing and furniture, could now be manufactured much faster than ever before.

The Industrial Revolution started in England around 1750 and soon spread to other countries. Cloth-producing factories, called textile mills, were among the first businesses to

use machines. Inventors developed machines that could quickly spin large amounts of cotton into yarn and weave the yarn into cloth. In 1790 Rhode Island became the first state in the United States to copy the cotton-spinning machines used in England. By the late 1820s, the manufacture of cotton goods was Rhode Island's most important industry.

The Industrial Revolution made nations wealthier, but this wealth was not shared by all the people. In many countries, the gap between the rich and the poor widened, and distinct social classes became more noticeable. It was difficult, if not impossible, for factory workers to lift themselves out of poverty and climb to a higher social level.

### Did You Know?

In addition to being an adventure story, *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* is also a historical novel. In a historical novel, realistic details are used to show the conditions and the spirit of a specific time period in history. This type of writing may feature actual historical figures and events, fictional characters and scenes, or a combination of both. Avi believes that historical novels can help readers understand the past more effectively than can books that contain only facts. He says:

*Somewhere along the line, I can't explain where, I developed an understanding of history not as fact but as story. That you could look at a field and, with only a slight shift of*

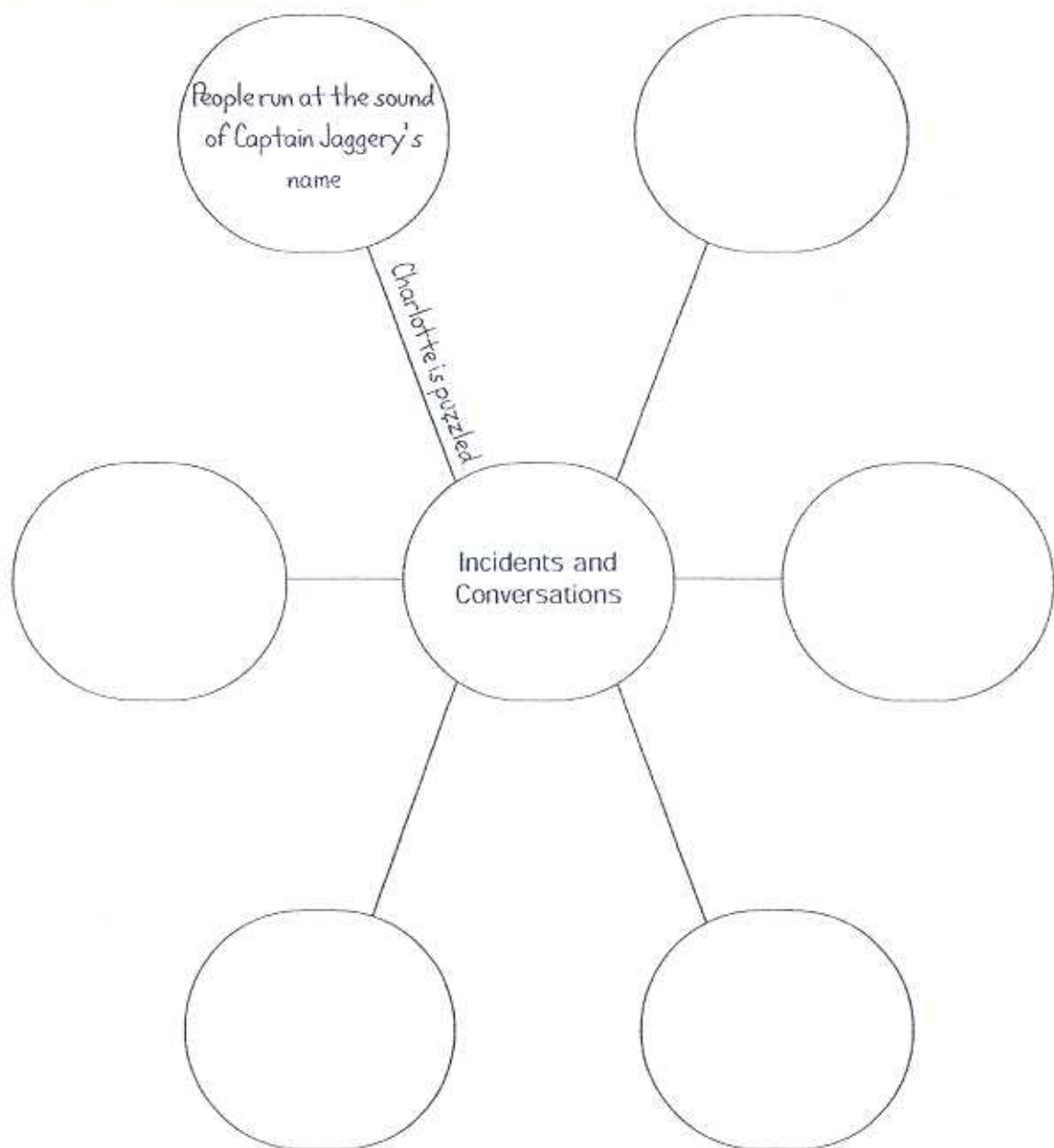
*your imagination, suddenly watch the battle that took place there.*

Through descriptive details, Avi helps readers understand what life was like for sailors and passengers aboard a nineteenth-century sailing ship traveling the open sea. Readers can think of the fictional characters as representative of persons who actually lived in 1832 and had similar experiences. A nonfiction book might tell readers how a ship was constructed, what a sailor's job involved, and where ships traveled. In Avi's historical novel, readers understand what it feels like to climb a ship's rigging in hurricane-force winds; to sit in a dark, rat-infested ship prison; or to pull into a busy port after months at sea.

# Active Reading

## *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* Chapters 1–8

In the first section of the novel, Charlotte experiences several incidents and overhears conversations that seem mysterious or disturbing to her. Note these instances in the graphic organizer below. In each circle, write a specific detail, word, or action that bothers Charlotte or raises questions in her mind. On the lines leading to the circles, write how these incidents make Charlotte feel or what questions they raise for her or for you.



# Responding

## *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* Chapters 1–8

### Personal Response

How did you react to the narrator and to the other characters in this section?

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Refer to the descriptive paragraph you wrote for the **Focus Activity**. How does Charlotte's experience compare with yours? Do you understand her feelings? Explain.

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### Analyzing Literature

#### Recall and Interpret

1. Why is Charlotte so uneasy about being on the ship? What do her reactions to the ship and its crew reveal about her character?

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2. According to Zachariah, why does Charlotte need a knife? How does Charlotte show concern for Zachariah when discussing the knife with the captain?

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3. What disturbing information does Zachariah give Charlotte about Captain Jaggery and the ship's crew? Why does she refuse to believe him?

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# Responding

## *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* Chapters 1–8

### Analyzing Literature (continued)

#### Evaluate and Connect

4. How does the scene in the dark cargo area, where Charlotte feels a presence and sees two faces, add to the story's mood? Describe how this scene affects you as a reader.

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5. What is your opinion of Captain Jaggery so far? Who do you think knows more about the captain's true nature—Charlotte or Zachariah? Why?

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### Literature and Writing

#### Critic's Review

Imagine that you are a literary critic. Write a short analysis of Avi's skill in setting up the novel as a mystery. Where in this first section does he build suspense and give clues about the future? Which chapters end with suspenseful situations? In your opinion, does Avi create an air of mystery that would make a reader want to continue reading?

#### Extending Your Response

##### Literature Groups

In this section, Charlotte's attitude toward the ship, the captain, and the crew is influenced by her upbringing. Working as a group, locate specific passages in the text that reveal how Charlotte's background has influenced her values and her attitudes toward others. You might look at her conversations with crew members and the captain and at her reaction to her room on the ship. With your group members, discuss how you think Avi wants readers to feel about Charlotte. Is she very difficult to like, completely likable, or a combination of both? Support your responses with details from the novel.

##### Performing

Working with a small group, dramatize a scene from chapters 1–8. Assign persons to act, direct, and adapt Avi's words for the stage. You might consider dramatizing the following scenes:

- Charlotte and Mr. Grummage arguing on the dock
- Charlotte in conversation with Zachariah
- Charlotte and the captain having tea
- Charlotte in the dark cargo area looking for her clothes

Rehearse your scene and then perform it for the class.

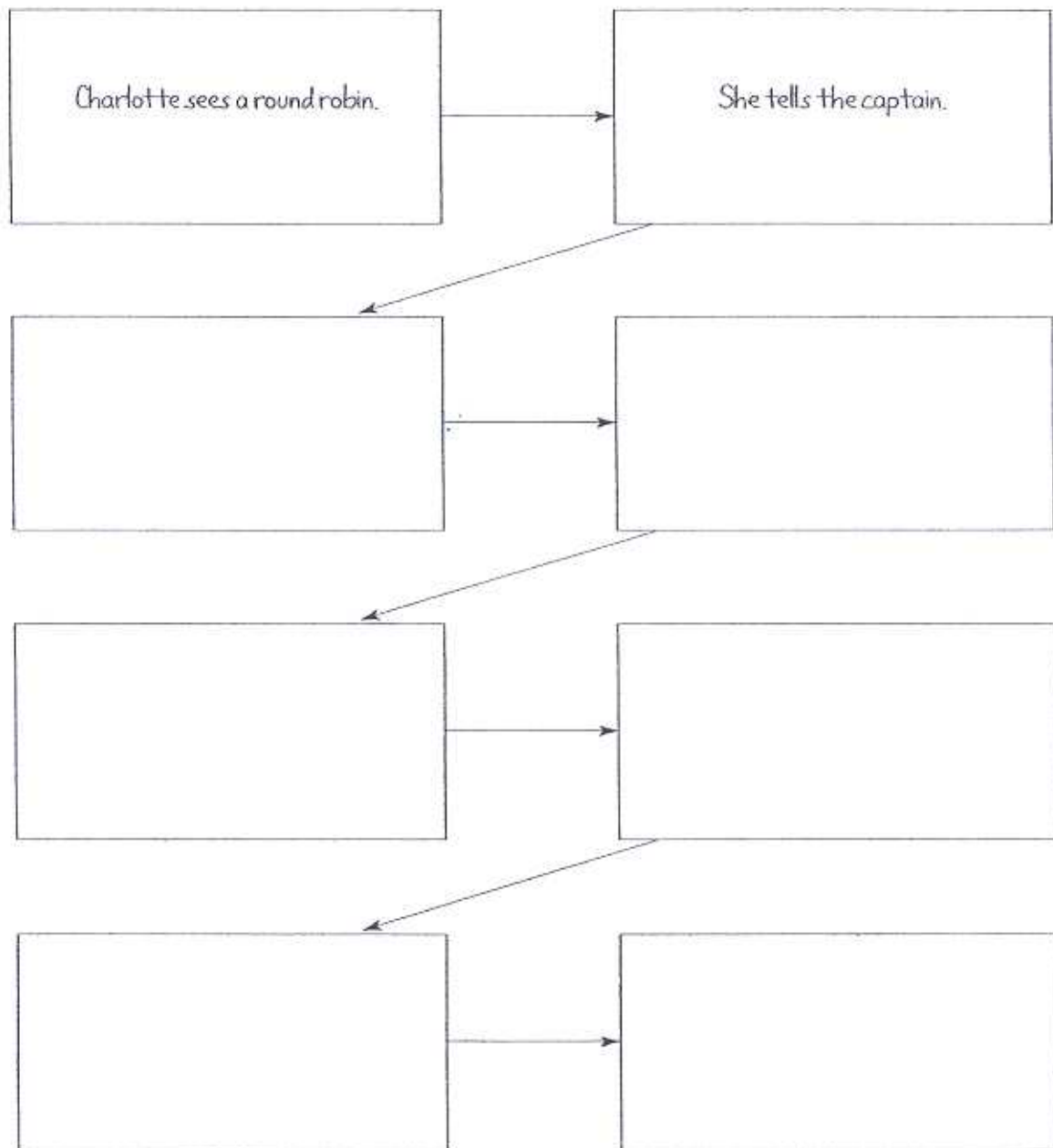


Save your work for your portfolio.

# Active Reading

## *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* Chapters 9–15

In these chapters, Charlotte's life takes an unexpected turn. In looking over the events so far, you can see that each event leading to this dramatic life change has been caused by an earlier event. As you read, fill in the cause-and-effect chart below with events from this section. Use as many boxes as you need.



# Responding

## *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* Chapters 9–15

### Personal Response

How did you react to Charlotte's behavior in this section? Which of her actions seems particularly wise or foolish to you? Why?

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### Analyzing Literature

#### Recall and Interpret

1. Why does Charlotte tell the captain about the round robin? What do you think she expects him to do?

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2. What does Charlotte do that angers the captain as he oversees the beating of Zachariah? What angers him most about her action?

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3. Explain the crew's attitude toward Charlotte after Jaggery squashes the mutiny. How does Charlotte feel about her actions?

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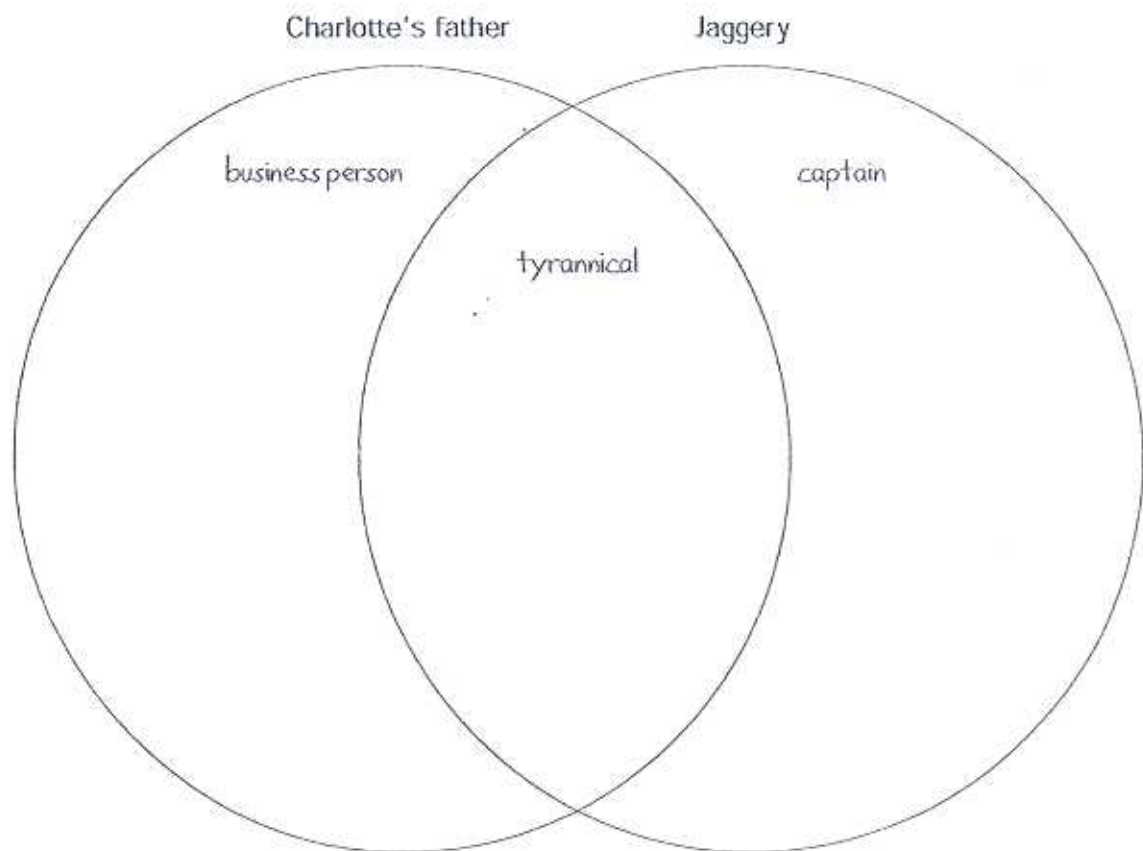
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# Active Reading

## *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* Chapters 16–22

Earlier in the novel, Charlotte tells Captain Jaggery that he reminds her of her father. At that point in the book, the similarities between the two men give Charlotte comfort. In chapters 16–22, Charlotte realizes that her father also resembles the Captain Jaggery whom Charlotte has learned to fear. Use the Venn diagram to compare and contrast the two men. In the space in which the circles overlap, write characteristics the men share. In the other areas, write characteristics they do not share.



# Responding

## *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* Chapters 16–22

### Personal Response

What were your feelings or thoughts as you read the last section of the novel? Record your ideas.

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Think about the word webs you created for the **Focus Activity**. In looking over your words, do you understand why Charlotte made the choice she made? Why or why not?

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### Analyzing Literature

#### Recall and Interpret

1. What reasons does Captain Jaggery give for finding Charlotte guilty of the murder?

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2. Why is Charlotte surprised to see Zachariah in the brig? How did he end up down there? Who brings him food?

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3. Explain the family's reaction to Charlotte when she first gets off the boat. What is Charlotte's attitude toward them?

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# Responding

## *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* Chapters 16–22

### Analyzing Literature (continued)

#### Evaluate and Connect

4. Evaluate Charlotte's relationship with Zachariah. Why did the two become close?

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5. If you had been Charlotte, would you have left home for a life on the sea? Why or why not?

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### Literature and Writing

#### Understanding Details

In the final chapter, Avi provides many details about Charlotte's life with her family. These details reveal much about her family and her feelings about being home. For example, when she removes her sailor clothing and puts on her old dress, Charlotte says, "I felt so much pinched and confined I found it difficult to breathe." How does this detail reveal her attitude about returning to her family? Find other details that show what Charlotte's family is like and what her attitude toward them is. Write a short explanation of the meaning of each detail.

#### Extending Your Response

##### Literature Groups

In your groups, discuss the following issue: Should the crew be more supportive of Charlotte when she is falsely accused? Discuss why the crew members are tempted to believe Jaggery and why, even if they feel that Charlotte is innocent, they remain silent. For more insight into their actions, think about how the crew members treat Charlotte after the captain is dead.

##### Learning for Life

Imagine that Charlotte wants people to know the truth about Captain Jaggery's behavior aboard the *Seahawk*. As the new captain of the ship, she must write an incident report and give it to the proper authorities. Write the report you believe Charlotte would write. Include details of all improper conduct.



Save your work for your portfolio.

