

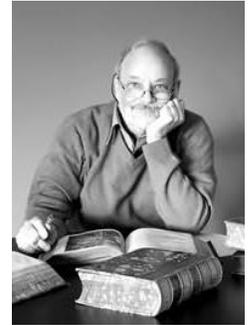
## Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie Discussion Questions

by Alan Bradley

### Author Bio: (Lit Lovers & Fantastic Fiction)

Alan Bradley was born in Toronto and grew up in Cobourg, Ontario. With an education in electronic engineering, Alan worked at numerous radio and television stations in Ontario before becoming Director of Television Engineering in the media centre at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, SK, where he remained for 25 years before taking early retirement to write in 1994.

He is the author of many short stories, children's stories, newspaper columns, and the memoir *The Shoebox Bible*. He co-authored *Ms. Holmes of Baker Street* with the late William A.S. Sarjeant. Bradley lives in Malta with his wife and two calculating cats.



The novel *"The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie"* won the Debut Dagger Award, the Agatha Award, the Barry Award, the Dilys Award, the Arthur Ellis Award, the Macavity Award, and the Spotted Owl Award.

### Characters:

- **Flavia de Luce:** (11 yrs old) A young lady who loves chemistry and poisons.
- **Ophelia de Luce:** (17 yrs old) Flavia's sister. She is a lovely girl very involved in her looks and the piano. Her sisters call her "Feely."
- **Daphne de Luce:** (13 yrs old) Flavia's sister. Loves books and stories. Her nickname is "Daffy."
- **Harriet de Luce:** Flavia's mother. Died when Flavia was 1 in a mountain climbing accident.
- **Colonel Haviland de Luce:** Flavia's father. Collects stamps.
- **Buckshaw:** The de Luce estate.
- **Mrs. Mullet:** Housekeeper and cook for the de Luce's. Her husband's name is Alf.
- **Dogger (Arthur Wellesley Dogger):** Col. de Luce's servant/gardener/butler.
- **Horace Bonepenny:** Redheaded man who ends up dead in the Buckshaw cucumber patch. School mate of Col. de Luce's from Greyminster. A good magician.
- **Grenville Twining (Cuppa):** Housemaster at Greyminster, Col. de Luce's alma mater. Died from falling from a tower at Greyminster 30 years ago. Stamp collector and aspiring magician.
- **Inspector Hewitt:** Police officer in charge of the investigation.
- **Detective Sergeant Woolmer:** Police officer helping in the investigation.
- **Detective Sergeant Graves:** Police officer helping in the investigation.

- **Dr. Darby:** Coroner.
- **Mrs. Mountjoy:** Retired librarian. Twinning was her uncle.
- **Dr. Kissing:** Greyminster's schoolmaster (retired). Stamp collector. His most valuable stamp (a TL Ulster Avenger) was stolen 30 years previous.
- **Bob Stanley:** Greyminster schoolmate. Good friend of Horace Bonepenny. Introduced himself as Pemberton to Flavia.

### Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. What do you think of the title and book cover? What's the meaning of the title?
3. With her high level of knowledge, her erudition and her self-reliance, Flavia hardly seems your typical eleven-year-old girl. Or does she? Discuss Flavia and her personality, and how her character drives this novel.
4. What does Flavia care about most in life? How do the people around her compare to her chemistry lab and books?
5. Do you think Flavia is as clever as she gives herself credit for?
6. With her excessive interest in poisons and revenge, it's no surprise that Flavia is fascinated, not scared, as she watches the stranger die in her garden. In your view, is her dark matter-of-factness more refreshing or disturbing?
7. Flavia's distance from her father, the Colonel, is obvious, yet she loves him all the same. Does their relationship change over the course of the novel in a lasting way? Would Flavia want it to?
8. Buckshaw, the estate, is almost a character in its own right. How does Bradley bring the setting to life in this novel—not only Buckshaw itself, but Bishop's Lacey and the surrounding area?
9. Why do you think Col. de Luce didn't tell Dr. Kissing that Bonepenny had stuck the Ulster Avenger up de Luce's sleeve the night of the viewing and then retrieved it after shaking de Luce's hand later?
10. Why do you think Dr. Kissing burns the "TL" stamp?
11. Was the letter from King George an appropriate reward for Flavia's efforts in returning the stamp?
12. Why did the murderer kill Bonepenny, when he could have just knocked him unconscious and then searched for the stamps?
13. Inspector Hewitt uses a capital "P" to refer to Flavia in his report. What might the P stand for?
14. Did you find the characters believable? Which of the characters did you like the most?

15. Which character(s) did you dislike?
16. What did you think of the plot line development? How credible did the author make the plot?
17. What is your favorite scene from *The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie*?
18. What twists in the plot surprised you the most? Any comments about the way the book ended?
19. Bradley said he set his book in the 50's because he wanted to highlight some of the ideas and traditions of the time which do not exist in the modern world. Do you think he was successful? What era would you set a book in?
20. In an interview, Alan Bradley commented, "I don't think we trust children enough anymore or leave them alone enough... I recall being that age, and one the greatest blessings was being left to myself. You find your own interests and amusements and pursue them." Are kids today given enough freedom? Is Flavia given too much?
21. There are currently 9 books in this series. Will you read them? Will you either of Bradley's nonfiction titles?

**References:**

- Book Browse - [https://www.bookbrowse.com/read-alikes/index.cfm/book\\_number/2272/the-sweetness-at-the-bottom-of-the-pie](https://www.bookbrowse.com/read-alikes/index.cfm/book_number/2272/the-sweetness-at-the-bottom-of-the-pie)
- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/b/alan-bradley/>
- Galesburg Library – <http://galesburglibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/SweetnessattheBottomofthePie.pdf>
- Goodreads – <https://www.goodreads.com/book/similar/4543476-the-sweetness-at-the-bottom-of-the-pie>
- Lit Lovers - <http://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/13-fiction/1008-sweetness-at-the-bottom-of-the-pie-bradley?start=3>
- The Reader – Halifax Public Library - <http://www.thereader.ca/2009/03/readalikes-sweetness-at-bottom-of-pie.html>

## Bradley's Books

### Flavia de Luce Mystery

1. The Sweetness At the Bottom of the Pie (2009)
2. The Weed That Strings the Hangman's Bag (2009)
  3. A Red Herring Without Mustard (2011)
  4. I Am Half Sick of Shadows (2011)
5. Speaking From Among the Bones (2013)
6. The Dead in Their Vaulted Arches (2014)
7. As Chimney Sweepers Come To Dust (2015)
8. The Curious Case of the Copper Corpse (2014)
9. Thrice the Brinded Cat Hath Mew'd (2016)

### Non fiction

- Ms. Holmes of Baker Street (1980) (with William A S Sarjeant)
  - The Shoebox Bible (2006)

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### If you liked **Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie**, try...

- [Major Pettigrew's Last Stand](#) – Helen Simonson
  - [The Lost Art of Keeping Secrets](#) – Eva Rice
  - [The Nature of the Beast](#) – Louise Penny
  - [The Uninvited Guests](#) – Sadie Jones
  - [The Mapping of Love and Death](#) – Jacqueline Winspear
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