

## Week 1 at a Glance

**Book for the week:** *Sarah, Plain and Tall* by Patricia MacLachlan, Chapters 1–6

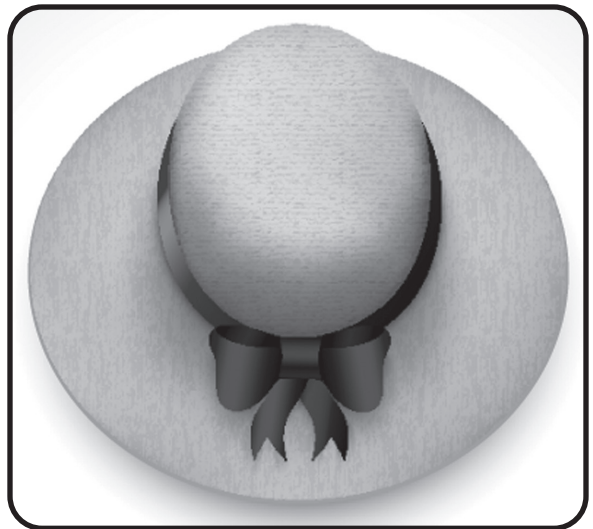
### Optional Materials:

Information on The Plains area of the U. S.  
Information on Maine, especially its coast  
Information on seabirds in Maine  
Information on the seashells mentioned in this story  
Ingredients for baking bread  
Ingredients for making a stew  
Art supplies

### Grammar and Mechanics:

Nouns and adjectives  
Sentences: subjects  
Sentence Diagramming

**Composition:** A description of a place



## Week 1: Sarah, Plain and Tall

### Day One

#### Literature

When this story begins, the children's mother is already dead. Other than this backstory, nothing here is potentially upsetting to most students. There are moments of uncertainty, but the mood of the book is positive, and the end is a happy one.

If your students want to read the entire book at once, that's fine. Although I have the reading broken down into days, you can tackle it (and the questions) at any pace that works for you. (This is true of any book in this course.) This can free up time on other days for grammar and/or composition, particularly if these areas are more challenging for your students. It can also free up time for extra activities or, if your students love this book, there are more in the series they can read.

Read **chapter 1** of *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. Ask the following questions:

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| Does Caleb remember his mother? Why or why not? (He does not because he was an infant when she died.)                                                                                                                      |  |
| Is there a story about your birth that you like to hear over and over, like Caleb does?                                                                                                                                    |  |
| What time of year is it when this story begins? (It is the end of winter.)                                                                                                                                                 |  |
| What clues from this chapter tell us this story happened a long time ago? (After Mama died, they took her away in a wagon. Papa has advertised for a wife, and so had their neighbor—not something we usually do anymore.) |  |
| What one question do the children have about Sarah when they first hear the letter? (They want to know if she can sing.)                                                                                                   |  |

#### Grammar and Mechanics

This week covers nouns and adjectives and the idea that a sentence has a subject. I also introduce sentence diagramming, including how to diagram adjectives. This will be review for some students, but parts of speech often take awhile for a student to fully grasp, so I address them repeatedly throughout this series, each time deepening the approach. Note that the grammar this week and next work in conjunction with the first composition assignment. Today covers nouns.

Reinforce the concept by looking through the chapter together for more nouns.

## Answers to Workbook Pages

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Students are to write three nouns in each of the following categories: people, places, things. It doesn't matter whether they are common or proper nouns. If your students already know that proper nouns need to be capitalized, check for this also. If this has not been thoroughly learned yet, don't worry about it. I teach it in a future lesson.

## Composition

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This week and next students write a description of a place. This composition has three purposes: to reinforce the parts of speech (nouns and adjectives) being taught in the grammar section this week; to make the student more aware of descriptive writing in fiction—in particular in *Sarah, Plain and Tall*; to introduce nonfiction descriptive writing.

Today, students should brainstorm ideas about various places to write about. The place needs to be someplace the student can actually be, not just someplace they remember. It can be a room at home, a store, a park, the beach, etc.

If a student immediately knows what place they want to write about and won't even consider other places, it's fine for today's composition work to be done. But if not, use this as a day to work on brainstorming skills. Have students brainstorm between five to ten possible places to write about. Then discuss (or students can consider on their own) the pros and cons of each. Maybe some would be too difficult to visit. Maybe others don't seem to have enough interesting things to describe. Others might have so many distractions it would make it hard to write while there (the student isn't going to write the paper while there, but they will need to take notes).

By the end of today, students should know what place they're going to write about. (Students will need to go to their chosen location on Days Two and Three or, if having to go on two days would be problematic, it's fine to skip composition tomorrow and save it all for one longer session on Day Three.)

The extra challenge for this composition is described on Day Two of next week.

## Day Two

### Literature

Read **chapters 2 and 3**. Ask the following questions:

#### Chapter 2

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| What questions did Anna ask Sarah in her letter? (She asked Sarah whether she could braid hair, make stew, and bake bread. She also asked what her favorite colors are.)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |  |
| What did Caleb enclose in his letter to Sarah? How do we know? (He enclosed footprints of their dogs. We know because Sarah writes that her cat is enclosing her footprints "in return.")                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |
| How does Caleb feel about Sarah coming? List at least three things he does or says that tell us this. (He is happy or excited about Sarah. He rereads her letters constantly, he reads the book she sends many times, he asks questions that show he is worrying about whether she'll like them or where they live, he says they should tell Sarah yes when she offers to come, he is excited when Sarah's last letter comes.) |  |

#### Chapter 3

|                                                                                                                                                            |  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| What is the first thing of Sarah that the children see? (her yellow bonnet)                                                                                |  |
| What are the children worried about at the end of this chapter? (They are worried that Sarah will miss the sea too much and won't want to stay with them.) |  |

### Grammar and Mechanics

Today I introduce adjectives.

Reinforce the concept by looking through the first three chapters together for more adjectives.

## Answers to Workbook Pages

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1. They sat by the large, warm, fire.
2. Anna thought Caleb was homely and plain when he was born.
3. The old, housekeeper was round and slow.
4. Sarah loved the blue, grey, and green, sea.
5. The gentle, loving, dog nuzzled her hand.

Students must also choose one noun from their Day One worksheet and write a sentence with that noun and two adjectives that describe it.

## Composition

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Today, students visit their chosen location. Today's note-taking focus is nouns. What does the child see, hear, feel, or smell in the location? (Taste is not likely to come into play, but if it does that's fine.) They should list as many nouns as they possibly can from the place. This is similar to brainstorming. There should be no editing, no holding back. Later the student will choose which of these nouns to include in the final paper and which to discard. The student should write each noun on its own line (whether on paper or on computer); this will help with tomorrow's activity.

Once the student thinks they are done, look at the list. If you feel the list is thin and notice many things missing, try to give hints rather than simply adding to the list yourself. Is the student doing well at what they can see, but less well paying attention to the other senses? Or maybe they're good at focusing on what's near them but not looking into the distance. Maybe they notice the beautiful things around them but not the plain or ugly ones.

The focus of today's work is observation, creative flow (as opposed to making judgments and editing—important parts of writing we will explore later), and reinforcing the concept of a noun.

## Day Three

### Literature

Read **chapters 4 and 5**. Ask the following questions:

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| Sarah encounters some new things on the plains that she didn’t have back by the sea. Name at least one from these two chapters. (a type of flower [bride’s bonnet], sheep, the rolling fields, probably also the windmill [since she is drawing a picture of it to send back to her brother])               |  |
| Sarah also brings some things from the sea with her that are new to Jacob and his children and that she shares with them. Name at least one from these two chapters. (seashells, a new way of saying “yes” (“ayuh”), the idea of scattering their cut hair for the birds to put in their nests, a new song) |  |
| There is one other thing in these chapters that Sarah misses from the sea, and Jacob provides their own version. What is it? (a dune)                                                                                                                                                                       |  |

### Grammar and Mechanics

Today, students choose five to ten words to put in the dictionary pages. They can be words from this week’s reading, from daily life, etc. For extra challenge, aim for ten words and require that one or more be from the book, preferably ones the student didn’t know before reading the book. Students should write the word, its definition, and if you wish, a sample sentence.

### Answers to Workbook Page

1. Papa stopped suddenly and leaned on his pitchfork.
2. Lambs pushed their wet noses into us.
3. We can draw sparkling pictures.
4. We have goldenrod and wild asters and wooly ragwort.

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## Composition

Again, students visit their chosen location. They should bring with them the list of nouns they wrote yesterday. Today's note-taking focus is adjectives. For each noun listed, the student should write between one and three adjectives describing the noun. Remind them that the adjectives can describe any of the sensory aspects of the noun or more intangible ones (happy, playful, calm, etc.).

Once a student thinks they are done, look at their list. One thing to watch out for is colors. Colors are perfectly respectable adjectives, but some students will lean too much on color and neglect other good words. Don't eliminate any colors from a student's list, but encourage them to add a second (or third) word when a noun's only adjective is a color. Also notice how many adjectives describe qualities other than visual ones. Many students will neglect the other senses or intangible qualities, so encourage the addition of those as well if they are lacking. Try to lead students to their own answers rather than offering your own ("What else could you say about the sand?" rather than "The sand isn't just yellow, but also coarse. And doesn't it seem unending?").

The focus of today's work is observation, creative flow (as opposed to making judgments and editing—important parts of writing we will explore later), and reinforcing the concept of an adjective.

## Day Four

### Literature

Read **chapter 6**. Ask the following questions:

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| Why does Sarah ask the children about winter? (She is considering staying, and she wants to know how winters there are different from the winters where she is from.)                                                                               |  |
| What does Sarah do in this chapter that shows us she is willing to learn new things to fit into this new place? (She learns how to plow the fields.)                                                                                                |  |
| What does Sarah do in this chapter that shows us she will not just change herself to fit in here, but she will also bring changes to how things are done? (She takes the children swimming in the cow pond, something they have never done before.) |  |

## Grammar and Mechanics

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Today I introduce the idea of the subject of a sentence and how to diagram the subject and adjectives. For students who have completed Lightning Literature Levels Cloud and/or Spark, this will be review. If you have never done sentence diagramming before, don't worry, there is plenty of opportunity for review throughout this guide. I do not pick up where I left off in Lightning Literature Level Spark. This means that some students who have completed that course will also know how to do some diagramming of these sentences that I don't introduce here, such as articles and compound predicates. They can do that diagramming as well if they wish. But if your students can't recall how to do it, don't worry. All they're responsible for here is what I teach here.

## Answers to Workbook Pages

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1. Papa | sang, too.  
|
2. A fat woodchuck | ate and listened.  
|  
fat
3. A speckled hawk | flew behind the barn.  
|  
speckled

## Composition

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Today we begin the selection process. Students should look at their list of nouns and adjectives from their place and decide what things they want to include in the final paper. This will vary a great deal from student to student, so it is difficult for me to give precise guidance.

The first consideration is how long your final paper will be, and this will vary depending on the student's ability and how interested they are in the assignment. I do not want to begin our language arts year on a frustrating note, so I would encourage you to be more lenient with this paper than you might be with others. For example, even if you know your student is capable of writing two strong paragraphs, if they aren't excited about this assignment, it's fine to let them get by with one paragraph.

The smaller the final paper will be, the fewer items should be included in the description. As most students will be writing fairly short and simple sentences at this point, there should be only one or two nouns described in each sentence. Use this as a rough guide for how many items to include in the final paper. So, if you think a five-sentence paragraph is reasonable from your student for this assignment, ask them to choose five to ten items to put in the paper. (As we work on the rough draft next week, this may change. Items can always be added or removed in the editing process.)

By the end of today, students should have chosen a subset of items to include in the description.

## Day Five

Today is a free day to use however you choose. Finish any unfinished work from the week, review, explore some of the ideas below, or simply take a day off language arts.

### Extending the Lesson

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Learn more about the Great Plains area of the United States.

Learn more about Maine, particularly its coast.

Visit a working farm or a “living history” museum of prairie life.

Anna tells Caleb that their mother sang about "...flowers and birds. Sometimes about the moon at nighttime." Work together to write a song (or poem) that their mother might have sung.

Make bread.

Make a stew.

Using any medium that you (or they) wish (paint, colored pencils, papers scraps for a mosaic, etc.), have students create pictures of the sea using only the colors blue, gray, and green.

Research the seabirds that live along the Maine coast.

Look up the different types of seashells mentioned in the story (moon snail, scallop, sea clam, oyster, razor clam, conch) so students can see what they look like.



## Week 2 at a Glance

**Book for the week:** *Sarah, Plain and Tall* by Patricia MacLachlan, Chapters 7–9

**Optional Materials:**

More books by Patricia MacLachlan

Art materials

**Grammar and Mechanics:**

Difference between fiction and nonfiction

Nonfiction descriptive writing

Review of nouns and adjectives

**Composition:** Finish description of a place



## Week 2: Sarah, Plain and Tall

### Day One

#### Literature

If necessary, review chapters 1 through 6 of *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. Read **chapter 7** and ask the following questions:

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| What two things in this chapter tell us how important flowers are to Maggie? (She has named both her children after flowers, and she brings flowers to Sarah, telling her that she must have a garden wherever she is.)                                                           |  |
| Maggie tells Sarah, "There are always things to miss, no matter where you are." What do you think Sarah would miss if she moved back to Maine? (Many answers are possible—Jacob, the children, the sheep, the house, the dogs—anything and anyone that we have seen Sarah enjoy.) |  |
| Have you ever missed a place the way Sarah misses Maine and Maggie misses Tennessee?                                                                                                                                                                                              |  |
| Why do you think people would walk to town where Sarah comes from, but on the plains she will need to learn to drive a wagon? (Most likely, the distance to town was much shorter, but farms on the plains are far from each other and from town.)                                |  |

#### Grammar and Mechanics

Today I introduce the distinction between fiction and nonfiction. This will be review for some students, but review is never bad.

Introduce the idea more gently by completing the workbook page together.

Reinforce the concept by discussing other books students have read recently and determining whether they are fiction or nonfiction.

#### Answers to Workbook Pages

1. NF Biography of Abraham Lincoln
2. F Short story about Abraham Lincoln traveling through time
3. F *My Adventures in Unicorn-Rainbow World*
4. NF Car repair manual
5. NF *How to Cook on a Budget*
6. NF *Introduction to Chemistry*
7. NF Book about how the movie *Star Wars* was made
8. NF French language textbook

## Composition

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Today is the last day of adding something new to the paper. The student is going to include themselves, in some way, in the description of the place. Read these two descriptive passages from *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, together. The first is Anna, the narrator, describing the prairie:

**“I wiped my hands on my apron, and went to the window. Outside, the prairie reached out and touched the places where the sky came down. Though winter was nearly over, there were patches of snow and ice everywhere. I looked at the long dirt road that crawled across the plains. . .”**

Later in the book, Sarah describes part of the seashore:

**“In Maine. . . there are rock cliffs that rise up at the edge of the sea. And there are hills covered with pine and spruce trees, green with needles. But William and I found a sand dune all our own. It was soft and sparkling with bits of mica, and when we were little we would slide down the dune into the water.”**

Ask your student if they can see how Anna’s description is different from Sarah’s. Ask where Anna is when she’s looking at the prairie and where Sarah is in her description of the shore. Anna is inside, looking out at the prairie. Her description is beautiful and evocative (for reasons beyond the scope of this lesson), but she is not interacting with the place she’s describing. Sarah, however, puts herself in the scene. She and William find a sand dune “all our own” and she talks about sliding down the dune.

Tell your student that, like Sarah, they must put themselves in the scene in some way, though it need not be as active as sliding down a dune. For example, if they chose to describe a park, they could be playing ball or simply sitting on a blanket on the grass. They should not allow any activity to overtake the description though.

Once the student has decided what they are doing in the scene, they need to brainstorm one last time on the question of how they feel being in that place. This list does not need to be long. It could be as simple as, “happy, having fun, energetic, safe.”

Previous work on this paper has been on external details for the description—that is, what students see (hear, feel, etc.) around them. Today’s focus is on internal details—what students feel inside themselves while at the location. By the end of today students should have all the raw material for tomorrow’s organization.

## Day Two

### Literature

Read **chapter 8**. Ask the following questions:

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| After reading this chapter, what do you think a <i>squall</i> is? (It's a sudden storm.)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |  |
| Caleb is worried that Sarah wants to learn to drive the wagon so she can go to town by herself and leave them. Why else might she want to learn? (If she stays, she will want to drive herself places, rather than depend on someone else in the family. Or she may want to drive the children to school so Jacob doesn't have to. Especially with all the work there is to do on a farm, she knows she has to be able to do as much as possible.) |  |
| Why do you think Jacob has the children bring the animals into the barn rather than asking Sarah to do it? (Most likely because the children have done it so often that he knows they will be quicker at it.)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |
| Along with food, Sarah brings in her shells and the roses. Why do you think she brings those things? (She brings the shells because they are all she has of the sea. She brings the roses because Jacob just picked them for her the night before. She is bringing something from each part of her life to be sure it is safe from the storm.)                                                                                                     |  |
| What do you think Caleb and then Sarah see when they look out the barn window at the storm? (They see the same colors in this storm as in a storm at sea—blue and gray and green.)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |  |
| After looking out at the storm and its colors, Sarah says to Jacob, "We have squalls in Maine, too. Just like this. It will be all right, Jacob." What two different things might Sarah be talking about? (Sarah could be saying that they will be all right in the storm. She could also be saying that she will be all right with moving here, that she won't miss the sea too much.)                                                            |  |

## Grammar and Mechanics

Today I introduce the idea that there is descriptive writing in nonfiction and fiction. Since the only difference is whether the object of the description is real or not, the tools for writing effective description are the same, and we can learn how to write effective description from fiction just as easily as from nonfiction.

In *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, the student has been exposed to some effective descriptive passages, and I highlight some of these in today's workbook page. In this and last week's composition, the student is writing their own nonfiction description. Both of these allow me to review nouns and adjectives, and that is the other focus of today's page.

Introduce the idea more gently by completing the workbook page together.

Reinforce the concept by looking through the example passages on the workbook page for nouns and adjectives.

## Answers to Workbook Pages

1. Hilly was round and slow and shuffling.
2. My house is tall and the shingles are gray because of the salt from the sea.
3. Strange clouds hung in the northwest low and black and green.\*
4. Our faces looked yellow in the strange light.
5. The chickens watched me, their eyes small and bright.

\*Some children will not catch *northwest* as a noun, and that's fine. It's a bit advanced for this grade, but these are sentences from *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, and I wanted to modify them as little as possible.

## Composition

Today, students will create an order for their paper. It need not be a formal outline with Roman numerals, etc.—a simple list is fine. What will they talk about first in the description, what second, etc.? For now, any choice students make about ordering is fine (looking around the room from left to right, favorite thing to least favorite thing, oldest thing to newest, etc.).

During this process, students may decide they want to change the content slightly—eliminate some things that had previously made the final cut or return some items they had taken out last week. That's fine. It may also be possible for students to group things. For example, in a description of his room, my son would love to describe each of his model airplanes in loving detail, but instead I would encourage him to lump them under the category "model planes" with a couple of adjectives that cover all of them. Then he can call out one favorite for extra attention. This can then allow him to give a better overall picture of the room by including more of its elements.

In the ordering process, students need to remember yesterday’s work as well. Where in the paper will they put themselves into the scene? Look back at yesterday’s examples from the book. In the first, we learn right away where Anna is. In the second, Sarah doesn’t mention herself until the middle, and her actions aren’t until the very end of the description. This means it can work any way—students need to find the way they like best. Also, in their outline they need to remember the internal details—how they feel about the place.

### Extra Challenge

The internal details are also a chance for extra challenge for a more advanced writer. Most students of this age will share these details simply (“In my room I feel happy and safe.”) This is fine. If you wish to push students, encourage them to communicate whatever feeling they have about the place without actually saying it. Read the passage about the sand dune together again. How do we know this was a special place for Sarah? One phrase tells us—“all our own.” The rest of the paragraph is lovely, vivid description, but this is the phrase that brings the emotion without actually naming any emotion. Can students think of a way to bring emotion to their description without naming an emotion?

## Day Three

### Literature

Read **chapter 9**. Ask the following questions:

|                                                                                                                                                                              |  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| What compromise do Jacob and Sarah reach about horseback riding? (Jacob agrees to teach Sarah to ride, but she has to ride the gentler horse, Old Bess.)                     |  |
| As Sarah drives away in the wagon, Jacob murmurs, “Very good.” What is he talking about? (He’s saying that she’s doing a very good job driving the wagon.)                   |  |
| When Sarah returns and Caleb tells her that “Seal was very worried!” what does he really mean? (He means that he has been very worried.)                                     |  |
| When Caleb tells his father that “Sarah has brought the seal” what is he talking about? (He’s talking about the colored pencils she brought that are the colors of the sea.) |  |

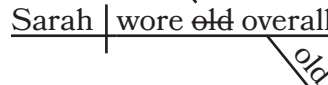
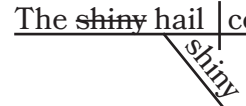
### Grammar and Mechanics

Today, students choose five to ten words to put in the dictionary pages. They can be words from this week’s reading, from daily life, etc. For extra challenge, aim for ten words and require that one or more be from the book, preferably ones the student didn’t know before reading the book. Students should write the word, its definition, and if you wish, a sample sentence.

Today's grammar is an optional review of what was learned about sentence diagramming last week.

### Answers to Sentence Diagramming

1. Dark clouds | gathered.  

2. Sarah | wore old overalls.  

3. The shiny hail | covered the ground.  


### Composition

Today students write the rough draft of their paper. They should already know all the objects (nouns) they're including and descriptors (adjectives) for them, the order for presenting them, and how they're going to put themselves in the scene. Now it's just a question of putting these into sentences. At this point, simple sentences are fine, and this paper can be as brief as a paragraph (though longer is fine too). The focus for this paper is on the description itself being as interesting as possible. If they find that their "final" list of nouns is too long or too short for how much they want to write today, it's fine to trim a few off or add some back in.

## Day Four

### Literature: Book Discussion

The family has already experienced the loss of their wife and mother when the book begins. Sarah has essentially lost her home with the marriage of her brother, but she also makes a decision that results in an even greater loss—complete removal from everyone and everything she knows and loves. But, in both cases, loss is replaced by someone and/or something new. *There is always loss in life, but loss also leads to things that are new and beautiful.*

When a woman answers an advertisement for a wife, she finds joy for herself and brings it to her new family.

Anna is the narrator of the book. (You can introduce this term to students—that the narrator is the person who tells the story. In some cases, the narrator isn't a character in the story, but here she is.) Anna is a good daughter and good sister—helpful, hard-working, obedient, and caring.

Caleb is Anna's younger brother. He is similar to Anna in that he is well-behaved and hard-working. But whereas Anna is subtler in how she interacts with Sarah, Caleb is transparent in his desire to have Sarah stay.

Caleb and Anna have another commonality—a dead mother. But the quality of how they miss her is different. Anna misses a mother she remembers fondly; Caleb can't remember her, so it's more accurate to

**Theme**

**Story**

**Character**

say he yearns to have a mother he’s never had. But both have a huge hole in their lives and hearts.

Sarah is competent, hard-working, fun-loving, and—as she says in her letter—not mild-mannered. She gets along well with everyone, including the animals. Although she has good reason to leave her home, she isn’t desperate to go just anywhere. It’s clear that she has become genuinely fond of Jacob and the children and the farm and isn’t simply staying because she has nowhere else to go.

Jacob is a good father, and his home is a happy, loving one in spite of the loss of his wife. Even though the way he looks for a new wife and mother is unusual by our standards, he never treats Sarah like mere property. He woos her—teaching her things about the farm, working side-by-side with her, bringing her flowers. And he doesn’t just work to have her fit into the farm but accepts the changes she brings as well—her songs, patterns of speech, etc. Perhaps the sweetest thing he does is showing her how to have a dune on the farm, albeit made of hay rather than sand, giving her a way to have a part of the sea in the prairie.

Jacob, Anna, and Caleb are missing something—what? What is Sarah missing? Although they are all missing something at the beginning of the story, how is this changed by the end of the story?

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The story takes place from late winter to early summer on a farm on the prairie. The prairie is very important to this story and is described in beautiful detail. It’s important because it represents a contrast to Sarah’s Maine seacoast (which is also beautifully described) and a new life for Sarah.

Sarah is losing her beautiful sea, but she is gaining the prairie. What things from the story show us that she will be happy to be there? (Look for times when there are resemblances between the prairie and the sea—the hay “sand dune”; the storm with its colors; the hail on the ground after the storm. Also look for things that do not necessarily correspond to the sea, but which Sarah enjoys anyway, such as her chickens.)

.....

We meet Jacob’s neighbors, especially Maggie, who answered an advertisement for a wife and mother just as Sarah has. Maggie is friendly and welcoming. She provides Sarah with her strongest assurance that moving there will be fine. She also provides the clearest statement of the book’s theme, “There are always things to miss. . . No matter where you are.”

Before pointing out this quote to your child, see if they can look through the things Maggie says to find an important message (theme) of this book. (Since Maggie doesn’t have much dialogue, this won’t take long.) How is Maggie a unique part to Sarah being happy in this new place?

.....

Since Anna is our narrator, we learn the most about her internal state. Throughout the book she is terrified Sarah is going to leave, though

## Setting

## External Details

## Internal Details

occasionally she has glimmers of hope. At the end she's thrilled that Sarah is staying. Caleb mirrors these same feelings. (We can guess that Jacob does too, though he keeps his feelings much more hidden.)

What are Anna's and Jacob's strongest feelings in this book?

.....

Conflict in this story is subtle, and if you wish, you can skip this section for this book. Or, you can use the questions I list here without necessarily framing them in the context of "conflict." The conflict is harder to see in this book than in most you will be reading this year because the main conflict does not belong to our central character and because it is an internal conflict rather than an external one.

## Conflict

The conflict in this story is not Anna's, it is Sarah's. Sarah's goal is to find a place to call home. She is losing the home she has always known, and she has to decide whether this place can be her new home. It is Sarah who has to make the decision and who experiences a change—although Jacob and the children are deeply affected by Sarah's conflict because they badly want her to stay. Also, since this conflict is internal and since we spend our time in Anna's head, not in Sarah's, we don't get to see the details of this conflict except when Sarah shares them through dialogue and her actions.

Why is Sarah so uncertain about staying? Why does she decide to stay?

.....

The first important symbol in this story is singing. The first sentence of the book is Caleb asking, "Did Mama sing every day?" She did, and so did Papa. But at the beginning of the story, Papa no longer sings, and when asked why he says he's forgotten the old songs. "But maybe there's a way to remember them," he says when telling the children about Sarah. When the children first hear about Sarah, they tell Papa to ask her if she sings. She does. Singing symbolizes happiness and love. (Jacob still loves his children, but it's clear that something is missing from their lives to make their happiness as a family complete.)

## Symbolism

The second important symbol here is the group of colors blue, grey, and green. Sarah tells the children that these are the colors of the sea, and when she sees them during a storm she gives her clearest (until the end) indication that she will stay. At the end of the book she goes to town and returns with three colored pencils of blue, grey, and green. These colors represent Sarah's home—not in the sense of a house, but in the sense of the feeling she carries inside her of where her true home is.

## Reading Journal

.....

Turn to the appropriate page in the reading journal for the week's book. Students write or dictate a brief summary of the story, a sentence summarizing the theme that they arrived at from your book discussion, then a sentence expressing something they felt about the book. Finally, students choose one sentence from the book to copy for handwriting practice.

## Grammar and Mechanics

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Today, students write five nouns and five adjectives. The nouns can be any sort—singular or plural, common or proper. They then write a sentence using at least one of the nouns and one of the adjectives. Finally, they need to circle the subject of their sentence.

## Composition

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Students complete their final draft. (If there is still a lot to do and it would be too stressful to complete the composition today, they can use tomorrow for this as well.) Review the paper together:

1. Are students happy with everything (nouns) they've included? Do they feel anything is missing that they want to add now?
2. Are students happy with how everything is described (adjectives)? Can they think of any additional or more specific descriptors they want to include?
3. Are students happy with how they are included in the scene?
4. Review for any grammar and mechanics that students are solid in (for example, beginning sentences with a capital letter and ending sentences with appropriate punctuation).
5. If someone chose the extra challenge for this composition, is the student's internal state effectively communicated without actually naming any emotions?

The final draft of the paper should be in the composition book.

## Day Five

Today is a free day to use however you choose. Finish any unfinished work from the week, review, explore some of the ideas below, or simply take a day off language arts.

## Extending the Lesson

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Read more books by Patricia MacLachlan. There are four more books in this series, and MacLachlan has written several other books as well. (Always preview any book before having students read it, if this is a concern for you.)

Learn more about Maine or the Great Plains (this can be extended from last week or introduced this week).

Using any medium you or they wish, students can create pictures of a natural landscape near their home.