

# Teacher to Teacher

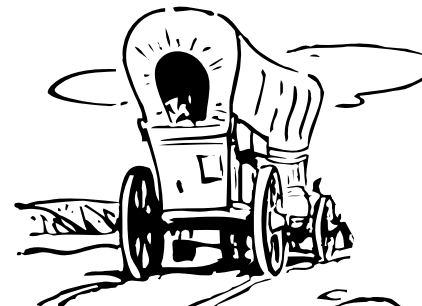
039-0300-0037

## Teaching Ideas from the OLRC Reading Group

### *Sarah, Plain and Tall*

**Author:** Patricia MacLachlan  
**Title:** *Sarah, Plain and Tall*  
 New York: Harper Collins  
**ISBN:** 0060241012

**Summary:** Sara, a mail-order bride comes from Maine to the midwest to marry a widower with two children, Anna and Caleb. Sarah misses Maine, but the children desperately hope that she will stay.



#### To the Student:

Before reading get a journal--a notebook or sketchbook or even many sheets of paper stapled together. As you read *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, write in the journal. (Please write at least one entry for each chapter!) You can write about anything that comes to mind as you read the story. You can draw in the journal, too. You can keep your journal private or share it with others.

Here are some possible topics for writing:

- ce How does this chapter make you feel? Write down key words or phrases that influence your feelings. Write down what from your own experience causes these feelings.
- cc What do you think about the characters' actions in this chapter? If you were in their shoes, would you do the same things or different things?
- ce Are things happening in the story that remind you of times in your life? Write about what you're remembering and explain which parts of the book make you remember.
- cc/cc Write down questions that the story spurs. Ask your tutor, teacher, or classmates the questions you think of.

Here are some possible ideas for drawing:

- cc Draw scenes from the story as you imagine they look.
- cc Draw pictures of the characters. Find words or phrases that help you to know how the characters might look or act, and use these words to guide you.
- cc Throughout the book, Sarah makes drawings. Draw pictures that might look like Sarah's pictures.
- cc Draw a picture of your favorite part in the story, and write a description of why it is your favorite part.

#### Chapter 1 (Teacher reads or students read)

- cc Read to the line " 'And I was,' Caleb finished." (HB, PB p. 4, LP p. 7) Stop reading there and discuss Anna and Caleb. Who are they? How are they related to each other? How old are they? How does Anna feel about Caleb? How does Caleb feel about Anna?
- cc Read to the line "And I forgot to say good-night." (HB, PB p. 5, LP p. 7) Stop reading there and add to your discussion about Caleb and Anna.
- cc What does Anna mean when she says the cousins, aunts, and cousins couldn't fill the house?
- cc Sarah lives in Maine. Can you find Maine on a map? Where might Anna and Caleb live?

#### Chapter 2 (Teacher reads or students read)

- cc/v In this chapter you read Sarah's letter to Caleb and her letter to Anna. Pick one of the two letters to read very carefully. Try to use clues from the letter to imagine what either Anna or Caleb wrote to Sarah. Imagine the questions they asked and the things they told her about themselves.
- cc/v Write that first letter to Sarah from Anna or from Caleb just as you imagine they would have written it. Share it with your class.

#### Chapter 3 (Students read from this point on)

- cc After finishing the chapter, discuss what you think will happen in the rest of the story. Some questions you might consider are: *Will Sarah get along with the family? Will the family get along with Sarah? Will Sarah stay or return to Maine?* Write down your predictions.

ce Have you ever had to make a decision about a big change in your life? Think about the things that helped you make your decision. (You can write these things down or discuss them with your class, too.) Now think about Sarah's decision. What will help her decide whether to stay with the family or return to Maine? What things will she consider?

cc You made predictions in Chapter 3 and you revised your predictions in Chapter 5. Return to those predictions. How did they match what happened throughout the rest of the story? Discuss this with your class.

ce *Sarah Plain and Tall* is based on a true story in Patricia MacLachlan's family history. What has happened in your lifetime or in your family's history that would make a good story? If you want to, write about it!

## Chapter 4

v On page 24 (HB, PB p. 24, LP p. 30), Caleb and his father do not know what "ayuh" means. Yet, moments after they hear the word, they start using it. Why do they start using this word? Discuss this with your class.

cc Caleb wants to believe that Sarah is going to stay. What things happen in Chapter 4 that help convince him that she will stay? Work in small groups to find answers, take notes, and then share answers with the entire class.

## Chapter 5

cc Look again at your predictions from Chapter 3. Have any of your predictions come true? Do you want to add to your predictions or change any of your predictions? (You can do this in small groups or with the entire class)

## Chapter 6

cc What kinds of things do you notice Anna doing to encourage Sarah to stay in Chapter 6? What about Papa? Caleb? Discuss and/or write answers.

## Chapter 7

cc/v In small groups, develop a list of words that describe Sarah. List as many words as possible. Be ready to use the story to illustrate why these words describe her. Small groups can share words from their lists with the entire class and discuss why they think these words describe her.

## Chapter 8

cc/v In small groups, add to your list of words that describe Sarah. Use words that come to mind after reading Chapter 8. Again, compare lists together as a whole class.

cc/v If you added words somewhat different than words from your previous list, you are noticing new things about Sarah. Why is Sarah making some traits more noticeable now than she did before? Discuss this with your class.

## Chapter 9

Pick one sentence or one paragraph from this chapter that is important to you. Explain why you find it meaningful. After finishing the book:

ce On page 58 (HB, PB p. 58, LP p. 67), MacLachlan writes "There will be Sarah's sea, blue and gray and green, hanging on the wall." Sarah is drawing a picture of the sea, because the sea means home to her. Sarah has also drawn pictures of the prairie, which is home to the family and ultimately, becomes Sarah's home. What means home to you? Think about it and draw a picture of what means home to you.



The keys next to activities show their emphasis on constructing meaning (cc), extending or examining meaning (ce) or vocabulary (v). Since cc and ce may be unfamiliar to ABLE teachers who do not have K-12 experience, brief definitions are provided below.

Comprehension: Constructing Meaning (cc)

These are activities designed to help students construct the author's meaning. They tend to stay fairly close to the text. They include factual or literal information (such as who, what, when, where), summaries, predictions, and text-based inferences (such as why a character did something or how a problem may be resolved).

Comprehension: Extending or Examining Meaning (ce)

These activities are related to but beyond the text. Examples might include comparing texts to one another, evaluating a character's actions based on the reader's own life, deciding how a piece of nonfiction might influence some real-world issue, or deciding if a text is useful or enjoyable for a reader.