

Sarah, Plain and Tall: A 4th Grade Literacy Focus Unit

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Featured Selection:

MacLachlan, P. (1985). *Sarah, plain and tall*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

Reading Level: 4.2

Sarah, Plain and Tall takes place in the late 19th century. It is about a farmer, from the Midwest, who is widowed with two children, Caleb and Anna. After trying to raise his children by himself, he finally decides he needs help, so an advertisement for a wife is placed. A response to the advertisement is then received all the way from Maine. The woman's name is Sarah and she tells the family that she will arrive by train, wearing a yellow bonnet. After spending a month with the family, she is to decide if she wants to stay and marry the children's father. By the end, the children have grown close to her and hope that she will stay, and luckily their aspirations come true.

Related Materials:

The following books will be on display throughout the unit, in which students may read them when they have completed their work for that day:

- Greenwood, B. & Collins H. (1994). *A Pioneer sampler: The daily life of a Pioneer family in 1840*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Reading Level: 5.5

This book tells the story of the Robertson family and how they handled their daily struggles during the mid 1800s time period. Two important topics that are related throughout the book are self-sufficiency and an uncompromised work ethic, which are crucial for the survival of a Pioneer family.

- Harvey, B. (1986). *My Prairie Year*. New York: Holiday House.

Reading Level: 4.8

It's 1889 and Elenore Plaisted's family has just arrived in the Dakota Territory, far away from her former home in Maine. The first year they live in this land is the most difficult, but they work together to overcome their many hardships.

- Kalman, B. & Everts, T. (1994). *A child's day*. New York: Crabtree Publishing Company.

Reading Level: 3.5

This book includes details of the lives of two Pioneer children, John and Emily. The reader is given an insight into their daily chores, schooling, trips into town, and even the events they celebrated.

- Kamma, Anne. (2003). *If you were a Pioneer on the prairie*. New York: Scholastic Paperbacks.

Reading Level: 3.8

This book contains a little over 30 questions, with answers included, that children of eight to ten years of age might formulate about a Pioneer's life. Children will be given an insight as to how people lived on the Great Plains more than 100 years ago.

- Wilder, L. I. (1971). *Little house in the big woods*. New York: HarperCollins.

Reading Level: 4.2

In 1871, the Ingalls family decided to move to Wisconsin. The family begins to realize that the Pioneer life is not as simple as they thought it would be, but in time they grow to begin to adapt to their new life.

Goals:

- Students will gain a better understanding of the lifestyle from the 1800s, in particular the mid-to-late 1800s.
- Students will compare and contrast the lives of the Pioneers to their own lives.
- Students will examine the historical events of the United States in the mid-to-late 1800s.
- Students will identify different themes from within *Sarah, Plain and Tall*.
- Students will comfortably participate in book discussions.

Skills:

- Students will learn about the causes of the Civil War.
- Students will utilize the comprehension strategies of prediction and connection.
- Students will be taught how to use context clues while reading.

Academic Standards:

- Social Studies 4.1.7 - The Civil War Era and Later Development: 1850 to 1900. Explain the roles of various individuals, groups and movements in the social conflicts leading to the Civil War.
- Language Arts 4.4.4 - Use logical organizational structures for providing information in writing, such as chronological order, cause and effect, similarity and difference, and posing and answering a question.
- Language Arts 4.3.6 - Determine the theme.
- Language Arts 4.5.2 - Write responses to literature that:
 - demonstrate an understanding of a literary work.
 - support statements with evidence from the text.
- Language Arts 4.5.6 - Write for different purposes (information, persuasion, description) and to a specific audience or person.

Unit Plan:

Pre-reading:

-The teacher will introduce the Civil War to the students. To make this more interesting, the teacher will divide the class into two halves, the North and the South. The halves will be unequal, in which the Northern half will have twice as many students as the South. This is to represent the number of soldiers fighting on each side, meaning there were more soldiers defending the North. Next, the teacher will explain what each side supports, such as the South agriculture and slavery, while the North wanted to free the slaves. Additionally, the teacher will explain that the war changed all people's lives, even those who moved to the West, in which this is the main focus for this unit.

Grouping: Whole

Monitoring: The teacher will make sure that the students are listening to the explanation and not distracting any other students.

-The teacher will show a 2 minute video clip (http://www.pbs.org/civilwar/film/videos/clip1_220.html) about the Civil War, so students will have a better understanding. Other such video clips may be obtained at that website, if time permits.

Grouping: Whole

Monitoring: The teacher will observe the students, to make sure that they are paying attention.

-The teacher will pass out Civil War photographs, one to each student. These photographs can be obtained from <http://www.mikelynaugh.com/VirtualCivilWar/New/Originals2/index.html>. Students are to predict what they think is going on in the picture by quickwriting for 5 minutes in their writing journal

Grouping: Individual

Monitoring: The teacher will observe the students as they write, in addition to answering any questions that arise.

Assessment: The teacher will collect the quickwrites at the end of the unit, in which they will be checked for completion- at least half a page long is considered a reasonable length.

Reading:

-The teacher will read the first chapter aloud to the class. At the end of the chapter students will be asked to respond to the question of “what do we know about the family so far?” This question will need to be answered in their writing journals.

Grouping: Whole

Monitoring: The teacher will observe the students as they write, in addition to answering any questions that arise.

Assessment: The teacher will collect their writing journals at the end of the unit and check to see if they answered the questions posed. Their responses are expected to be at least one paragraph, containing 7 sentences, in length.

-As for the rest of the chapters, the students will either read independently and with a partner. In addition to this, students are to write down questions, comments, and/or concerns they have about the reading on post-it notes.

Grouping: Depending on the day, individual or partner

Monitoring: The teacher will make anecdotal notes about the students’ reading process, such as how long it takes them to read and whether or not they utilize their time well by making sure they place post-it notes within their book as they read.

Assessment: The teacher will collect their books at the end of the unit and check to see if they placed any post-it notes in their book.

-After the students have finished reading chapters 3 and 7, students will meet in small groups to discuss the book. For chapters 5 and 9, the class will partake in a grand discussion.

Grouping: Depending the chapters, either small groups or whole.

Monitoring: The teacher will meet with the small groups and listen to their discussion. With the whole class, the teacher will observe and make anecdotal notes, in addition to interjecting with comments if the discussion is having difficulty in developing.

Assessment: Students will be awarded points for their participation in the discussions.

Responding:

-Students will write one response journal entry after reading chapter 3. This response journal should be addressed to the teacher and should follow the format of a formal letter. Paragraphs that should be included in the letter include: a brief summary of chapter 3, new information learned, such as vocab words, and one type of connection needs to be made. The teacher may have to present minilessons with students if they do not remember how to correctly set up the letter.

Grouping: Individual

Monitoring: The teacher will hold individual conferences to discuss the student’s writing style and see how much improvement was made from previous journal entries. At this time, the teacher may present minilesson conferences with those students who are struggling with following the correct format of a letter.

Assessing: The teacher will use a rubric to assess the student’s journal entry.

-Students will create a Venn diagram that compares and contrasts the lives of people from the mid-to-late 1800s to their own life.

Grouping: Individual

Monitoring: The teacher will compare this work sample to previous ones, to see how far they have progressed.

Assessment: The diagrams will be turned in at the end of the unit and awarded points based on completion. In order to obtain all the points, at least 3 ideas/facts need to be written down for each part of the diagram, making the total number of items 9.

Exploring

- Each student will make a quilt, of at least 6 squares, that highlights one of the themes in the story.

Grouping: Individual

Monitoring: The teacher will briefly meet with students at their desk as they work to complete this project. These conferences will be brief, only a minute or two will be spent with each student.

Assessing: The quilt will be assessed according to a rubric that the teacher creates.

-The teacher will present a mini-lesson on context clues. This will help students to identify the meaning of unfamiliar words that are used throughout the book. Students are then to work with one other partner, in which they are to select at least 8, but no more than 12 words to explore with their new learned skills. Along with writing down their definitions, they should draw a picture to show their understanding of the word.

Grouping: Partners

Monitoring: The teacher will observe the students as they read and write, in which they will check to see if they are correctly using the newly learned strategies. If students appear to be confused, then the teacher will hold a minilesson conference with those students.

Assessing: The teacher will collect their word explorations the day after it was assigned, in which they will be scored according to a rubric the teacher will create.

Applying

-Students will be placed into small groups of about 4 students. They will be given the task of creating a mural that depicts 4 important scenes from the book. Each group is to decide what 4 scenes they think are important and then they are to work together to create the final product. All projects will then be presented to the class on the last day of the unit.

Grouping: Small groups

Assessing: The teacher will assign a grade based on a rubric that was created.

Time Schedule:

*Note it is only tentative- it may be changed at the teacher's discretion.

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| Day 1: Introduction to the Civil War: -explanation/causes of war -video clip(s) | Day 2: Introduction to Civil War continued: -quickwrite -Read chapter 1 aloud to student, then pose question at end | Day 3: Students buddy read for chapters 2 and 3 -Small group discussions -Response Journal #1 assigned | Day 4: Students read chapters 4 and 5 independently -Grand discussion -Venn Diagram | Day 5: Teacher presents mini-lesson on context clues -Students reread chapter 5 with one partner and complete the vocab exploration activity |
| Day 6: Students buddy read for chapters 6 and 7 -Small group discussions -Quilts are assigned | Day 7: Students independently read chapters 8 and 9 -Grand discussion -Work on murals | Day 8: Work on murals | Day 9: Work on murals | Day 10: Present murals to the class |

ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST:

Sarah, Plain and Tall- Literacy Focus Unit

Name: _____

As you complete the following activities check them off:

- _____ 1. Read *Sarah, Plain and Tall*
- _____ 2. Write in journal:
 - a. Quickwrite (The student wrote at least half a page)
 - b. Reply to chapter 1 question (Needs to be at least one paragraph, of at least 7 sentences, long)
- _____ 3. Response Journal #1 (The following paragraphs need to be included: brief summary of chapter 3, new information learned, such as vocab words, and one type of connection)
- _____ 4. Venn Diagram (At least 3 ideas/facts need to be written in each part of the diagram, making for a total of 9 ideas/facts)
- _____ 5. Vocabulary Exploration (Between 8 to 12 words need to be explored using context clues)
- _____ 6. Quilt (At least 6 squares should be constructed within the quilt)
- _____ 7. Post-it notes containing questions, comments, and/or concerns are placed throughout the *Sarah, Plain and Tall* as you read.

_____ 8. Mural (Each student needs to have participated in the creating of the scenes and not letting the other students do all the work)