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Synopsis

Chapter 1

"Did Mama sing every day?" Caleb asks his sister Anna. "Every-single-day," she answers. "Papa sang, too." Their mother died the day after Caleb was born. Their house on the prairie is quiet now, and Papa doesn't sing anymore. Then Papa (Jacob) puts an advertisement in the newspaper, asking for a wife. He receives a letter from Sarah Elisabeth Wheaton, of Maine. Papa, Anna, and Caleb write back to Sarah.

Chapter 2

Sarah decides to visit them for a month to decide if she wants to stay. She writes Papa: "I will come by train. I will wear a yellow bonnet. I am plain and tall, and tell them I sing." She brings her cat, named Seal. Anna and Caleb wait and wonder. Will Sarah be nice? Will she like them?

Chapter 3

Sarah arrives in the spring. She immediately notices the lack of a sea, and the children fear that she is lonely and will not stay. She brings a shell for Caleb and a smooth sea stone for Anna.

Chapter 4

The dogs love Sarah first. Sarah cuts Caleb's hair and Papa's hair, scattering the cuttings for the birds to use in their nests. Anna thinks she looks like she could be Sarah's daughter. Sarah sings and teaches her songs to the children.

Chapter 5

Sarah touches sheep for the first time and cries when one of the lambs dies. She draws pictures of the prairie to send home to Maine. When Sarah misses the sand dunes in Maine, Papa makes a dune from hay. They all slide down it and have a lot of fun.

Chapter 6

It is summer and Papa teaches Sarah to plow. The children describe the bitter prairie winters and they all go swimming in the cow pond. Anna learns to float and feels very happy. Anna can tell that Sarah is happy, too.

Chapter 7

Neighbors Matthew and Maggie come for a visit. Maggie is a mail-order bride from Tennessee. She brings Sarah some chickens for eating, but Sarah makes them into pets. Maggie also brings flowers for a garden and describes how she sometimes feels lonely for her former home in Tennessee. Sarah is homesick for Maine, especially for the ocean which she misses greatly. Maggie says that people can be lonely anywhere because there is always someone to miss. The women bond and become friends.

Chapter 8

At Sarah's request, Papa teaches her to ride a horse and drive the wagon. Sarah wears overalls like a man and helps Papa fix the roof. A sudden squall hits and they take refuge in the barn. Sarah says they have squalls in Maine, too. She tells Papa that everything will be all right.

Chapter 9

When Sarah goes off to town alone, Caleb and Anna fear that she has gone for good. However, she returns with colored pencils to illustrate for them the beauty of Maine, and to explain that, though she misses her home, "the truth of it is I would miss you more." The children know that she will marry Papa and stay with them. They are all very happy.

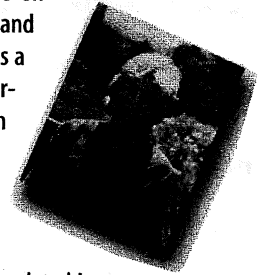


Timeline

- 1785 Ordinance of 1785. Provided for the rectangular land survey of the Old Northwest. This has been called "the largest single act of national planning in our history and ... the most significant in terms of continuing impact on the body politic"
- 1790 Thomas Jefferson initiates the first U.S. Census.
- 1803 The U.S. buys the Louisiana Territory from France, about 800,000 square miles between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains. The vast acquisition doubles the nation's size and opens it to westward settlement.
- 1825 Erie Canal completed. It connects the northeastern states to the newly settled areas of the West, facilitating the economic development of both regions.
- 1839 The National Road terminates in Vandalia, Illinois. Begun in 1811 in Cumberland, Maryland, it helps open the Ohio Valley to settlers.
- 1862 The *Homestead Act* allows a settler to acquire up to 160 acres of land by maintaining residence for five years, improving it, and paying a registration fee of about \$25.00. With the passage of the *Morrill Act*, Congress authorizes land grants from the public domain to the states. Proceeds from the sale used to establish colleges offering instruction in agriculture, engineering, and other practical skills.
- 1868 Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux begin Riverside, Illinois, a planned suburban community stressing rural as opposed to urban amenities.
- 1869 The first transcontinental railroad link is completed. The West becomes less remote.
- 1878 John Wesley Powell's *Report on the Lands of the Arid Region of the United States*.
- 1879 U.S. Geological Survey established to survey and classify all public domain lands.
- 1891 *General Land Law Revision Act* gives the President power to create forest preserves by proclamation.
- 1892 John Muir establishes the Sierra Club to protect and preserve the natural environment.
- 1897 *Forest Management Act*.

Author Sketch

Patricia MacLachlan was born in 1938 on the prairie in Cheyenne, Wyoming, and raised in Minnesota. She always carries a small bag of prairie dirt with her wherever she goes to remind her of her birth place. She is an only child. MacLachlan's parents were teachers and encouraged her to read; her mother urged her to "read a book and find out who you are," the author related in *Horn Book*. She read continuously, sometimes discussing and even performing scenes from the books with her parents.



After earning her BA from the University of Connecticut, MacLachlan taught English at Bennett Junior High School, in Manchester, CT, from 1963 to 1979. Since 1986, she has served as a visiting lecturer at Smith College in Northampton, MA. She is married to Robert MacLachlan. They have three children and currently live in western Massachusetts. MacLachlan did not begin to write until she was thirty-five years old. As her children grew older, she noted, "It dawned on me that what I really wanted to do was to write. How would I ever have the courage, I wondered. It was very scary to find myself in the role of student again, trying to learn something entirely new." MacLachlan started her successful writing career by creating picture books. Her first, *The Sick Day*, describes how a little girl with a cold is cared for by her father.

As with the mail-order bride in *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, MacLachlan often gleans elements of her stories from personal experience. As she once explained, "My books derive chiefly from my family life, both as a child with my own parents as well as with my husband and kids. *The Sick Day* could happen in almost any family." MacLachlan has also undertaken collaborations with her daughter, Emily.

When asked what advice she would have for beginning writers, MacLachlan commented in *Language Arts*, "I would certainly say only write books for children if you really love children's books and want to do it. . . . The other thing is to read. One must understand the far reaches of children's books because they're really about many of the same subjects as adults are concerned with. Don't be condescending. I hate the didacticism that sometimes comes through in children's books. I would read and read and read. There is no better model than a good book."

Critic's Corner

MacLachlan has received many awards in her celebrated career. *Sarah, Plain and Tall* is her most honored book to date. It received the Newbery Medal, the most prestigious award in children's literature, in 1985. In addition, the novel earned a Golden Kite Award, Society of Children's Book Writers; a Notable Children's Trade Book, National Council for Social Studies and the Children's Book Council; a *Boston Globe-Horn Book Award*; an Historical Fiction Award; a *School Library Journal's* Best Books of the Year; a *New York Times* Notable Children's Books of the Year; an American Library Association Jefferson Cup Award; a Virginia Library Association Christopher Award; a Child Study Association of America's Children's Books of the Year; a Garden State Children's Book Award, New Jersey Library Association; a Charlie May Simon Book Award, Elementary Council of the Arkansas Department of Education; and an International Board on Books for Young People Honor List nominee.

In a *New York Times* Book Review, Martha Saxton called *Sarah, Plain and Tall* "an exquisite, sometimes painfully touching little tale. . . The story closes on a scene of love and harmony made more complicated, but not diminished, by past sorrows. This gentle book cannot fail to touch readers." *School Library Journal* said the novel has "terse writing and poetic rhythm flow [that] create a tender story about the fragile beginnings of a family relationship..."

Other Books by Patricia MacLachlan

The Sick Day (1979)
Arthur, for the Very First Time (1980)
Moon, Stars, Frogs, and Friends (1980)
Through Grandpa's Eyes (1980)
Cassie Binegar (1982)
Mama One, Mama Two (1982)
Tomorrow's Wizard (1982)
Seven Kisses in a Row (1983)
Unclaimed Treasures (1984)
The Facts and Fictions of Minna Pratt (1988)
Journey (1991)
Three Names (1991)
Baby (1993)
All the Places to Love (1994)
Skylark (1994)
What You Know First (1995)
Caleb's Story (2001)
Painting the Wind (2003)
Bittle (2004)

Bibliography

Books

Authors and Artists for Young Adults, Volume 18, Gale (Detroit, MI), 1996.
Children's Literature Review, Volume 14, Gale (Detroit, MI), 1988, pp.177- 186.
 Russell, David L., *Patricia MacLachlan*, Twayne (New York, NY), 1997.
Twentieth-Century Children's Writers, 4th edition, St. James Press (Detroit, MI), 1995.

Periodicals

Booklist, May 1, 1985, Betsy Hearne, review of *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, p. 1254.
Books for Keeps, May, 1993, review of *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, p. 22.
Children's Book Watch, July, 1995, review of *Sarah, Plain and Tall* (audio version), p. 4;
Children's Literature Association Quarterly, spring, 1993, review of *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, p. 23.
Five Owls, November, 1993, review of *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, pp. 29-30.
Growing Point, March, 1987, Margery Fisher, review of *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, p. 4750.
Horn Book, July-August, 1986, "Newbery Medal Acceptance," pp. 407-413; July-August, 1986, Robert MacLachlan, "A Hypothetical Dilemma," pp. 416-419
Journal of Reading, March, 1992, review of *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, p. 174.
Language Arts, November, 1985, Ann Courtney, interview with Patricia MacLachlan, pp. 783-787
New York Times Book Review, Martha Saxton, review of *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, p. 20; 1
Times Educational Supplement, June 26, 1998, review of *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, p. 10.
Variety, July 29, 2002, Marilyn Stasio, review of *Sarah, Plain and Tall*.

General Objectives

1. To analyze the novel's title.
2. To understand how Jacob's wife dies.
3. To explore why Jacob sends for a mail-order bride.
4. To understand why children want a mother.
5. To describe the novel's plot.
6. To recognize the novel's theme.
7. To learn about pioneer life on the prairie in the 19th century.
8. To understand how Sarah adapts to life on the prairie.
9. To explore the ways that kindness can be shown.
10. To understand why Sarah stays and marries Jacob.

Specific Objectives

1. To explore why Sarah describes herself as “plain and tall.”
2. To sympathize with Caleb’s sorrow over his mother’s death.
3. To appreciate Caleb’s concerns that Sarah won’t like them enough to stay.
4. To analyze Sarah’s gifts to the children.
5. To compare and contrast life on the prairie to life in Maine.
6. To understand why Sarah makes the chickens into pets.
7. To analyze Sarah’s feelings for the sea.
8. To understand the symbolism of the hay dune that Jacob builds.
9. To appreciate the friendship that Mattie offers to Sarah.
10. To share the family’s joy at Sarah’s decision stay and become a wife and a mother.

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Patricia MacLachlan’s style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

symbol a person, place, or object that represents an abstract idea. For example, a dove may symbolize peace or a rose may symbolize love. In *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, singing becomes a symbol for happiness. The children’s mother sang all the time because she was happy. The children miss her singing—the happiness she brought into the house—once she is dead. Caleb wants to know whether or not Sarah sings. When Caleb learns that she does, he is greatly relieved because he knows that she will be a happy person.

style an author’s distinctive way of writing. Style is made up of elements such as word choice, sentence length and structure, figures of speech, and tone. An author may change his or her style for different kinds of writing and to suit different audiences. In poetry, for example, an author might use more imagery than he or she would use in prose. MacLachlan is celebrated for her style and justly so. In this novel, for instance, she uses relatively spare prose to let her meaning shine through. Her style here is marked by short sentences, simple words, and few figures of speech.

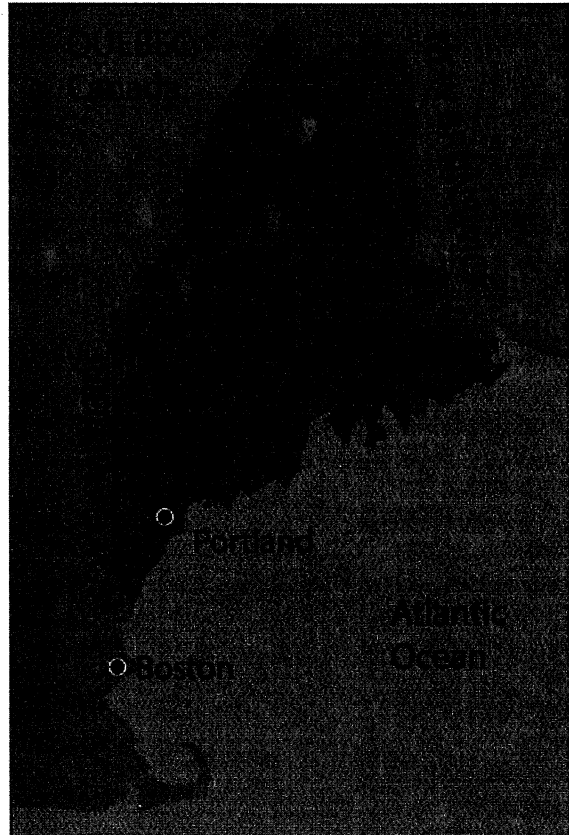
description a word picture of what something or someone is like. Description is made up of sensory details that help readers form pictures in their minds. Anna describes winter this way: “We can draw sparkling pictures and we can see our breath in the air. Papa builds a warm fire, and we bake hot biscuits and put on hundreds of sweaters. And if the snow is too high, we stay home from school and make snow people.” (page 35) This description captures a child’s joy at winter’s cold weather.

The Importance of Setting

Sarah, Plain and Tall is set in an unnamed place in the Midwest in the late 19th century. This setting is integral to the novel; it could not take place any where but the unsettled lands of the west. The setting showcases Sarah’s grit and willingness to adapt to her new surroundings, after leaving behind a comfortable, known life in the settled parts of the eastern United States.

At the end of the 18th century, the area west of the Mississippi River was a mystery to nearly all Americans. But in 1803, the West broke open. With one stroke of his pen, President Thomas Jefferson completed the Louisiana Purchase, opening up more than two million square miles and doubling the size of the United States. Eighty years later, twenty-two percent of the American people lived west of the Mississippi. Among them were Jacob and his children Anna and Caleb.

Like thousands of other resourceful and independent people, Jacob’s family and Sarah went west in search of a better life. Some, like Jacob, wanted land and independence; others, like Sarah, were building a new life when their previous day-to-day existence changed.



Cross-Curricular Sources

Novels

Carol Brink, *Caddie Woodlawn*
 Eve Bunting, *Dandelions*
 Paul Erickson, *Daily Life in a Covered Wagon*
 John Reynolds Gardiner, *Stone Fox*
 Fred Gipson, *Old Yeller*
 Barbara Greenwood, *A Pioneer Sampler*
 Dorothy Leland, *Sallie Fox: The Story of a Pioneer Girl*
 Reeve Lindbergh, *Johnny Appleseed*
 Honore Morrow, *On to Oregon!*
 Elizabeth George Speare, *The Sign of the Beaver*
 Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*
 Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little Town on the Prairie*
 Laura Ingalls Wilder, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*
 Laura Ingalls Wilder, *The Long Winter*

Audio/Media

Sarah, Plain and Tall audio (narrated by Glen Close)
Skylark (teleplay), CBS-TV, 1993
Sarah, Plain and Tall (Hallmark Hall of Fame presentation, 1991)
Sarah, Plain and Tall (filmstrip with cassette, 1986)
Sarah, Plain and Tall (musical)

DVDs and Videos

Blazing Saddles (1974)
Broken Arrow (1950)
High Noon (1952)
Hondo (1953)
Little House on the Prairie: The Collection (1974)
Pioneers! (1992)
Return to Snowy River (1988)
Zandy's Bride (1974)

Internet

Patricia MacLachlan Official Web Page
www.patriciamaclachlanbooks.com
 Patricia MacLachlan
<http://www.randomhouse.com>
 Meet Patricia MacLachlan
www.eduplace.com/kids/hmr/mtai/maclachlan.html
 Patricia MacLachlan
www.harperchildrens.com
 Patricia MacLachlan Biography
www.kidsreads.com
 Patricia MacLachlan Interview
www.bookwire.com/bookwire/MeettheAuthor/Interview_Patricia_MacLachlan.htm
 Reading Rockets interview, Patricia MacLachlan
www.readingrockets.org/books/authorbio.php?ID=69
 Patricia MacLachlan Teacher Resource File
falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/maclachlan.htm

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Patricia MacLachlan's *Sarah, Plain and Tall* should include these aspects:

Themes

- death
- love
- mail order brides
- motherlessness
- oceans
- pets
- pioneers
- prairies
- seasons

Motifs

- making a new life because of changing circumstances
- coping with the death of a parent
- being pioneers
- moving to a new environment
- learning new skills
- finding beauty in different environments
- becoming a mother to someone else's children
- learning to drive a plow and buggy
- making friends
- making a conscious choice to be happy

Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the novel. Explain the meaning of each. Chapter and page numbers indicate the context from which the item is taken.

1. "Did Mama sing everyday?" asked Caleb. (Chap. 1, p. 1)
(Caleb's mother died the day after he was born, so he has no memory of her. He knows from his older sister Anna that their mother sang every day. He wants reassurance of this, because singing symbolizes happiness. He wants to make sure that his family was happy before his mother died.)
2. "I've placed an advertisement in the newspapers. For help." (Chap. 1, p. 9)
(Jacob has advertised for a new wife. The practice was common during the 19th century, especially among pioneers. The practice is alive and well today in the personal ads that many people place in magazines and online, looking for companionship.)
3. "Dear Jacob, I will come by train. I will wear a yellow bonnet. I am plain and tall. Sarah." (Chap. 2, p. 17)
(Sarah is careful to describe herself so that Jacob does not expect more than he is getting. From the start, then, their relationship is based on truth and openness.)

4. "I looked taller, like Sarah, and fair and thin. And with my hair pulled back, I looked a little like her daughter."
(Chap. 4, p. 30)
(Anna, like Caleb, desperately wants a mother. Anna's feeling that she looks a little like Sarah's daughter shows her yearning for the care, stability, and love of a mother.)
5. "Our dune." (Chap. 5, p. 36)
(Both Caleb and Anna notice that Sarah refers to the pile of hay as "our" dune, not "your" dune. They correctly take this to mean that Sarah is beginning to think of staying at the farm and becoming part of the family.)
6. "There is always something to miss, no matter where you are," she said, smiling at Maggie. (Chap. 7, p. 49)
(Maggie, like Sarah, is a mail-order bride. Maggie shares her wisdom about adjusting, and Sarah agrees. This passage shows Sarah's awareness that in many cases, life is what you make of it. Jacob is a good man; his children are sweet and hard-working and Sarah is making the choice to adjust to a radically new environment and make a new life for herself. This suggests that she will be a fine wife for Jacob and a fine mother to his children.)
7. Overalls that were Papa's. (Chap. 8, p. 46)
(Anna is shocked when she sees Sarah wearing pants, in the 19th century, only men wore pants. Literally, Sarah needs the pants to climb on the roof safely; symbolically, by wearing the pants, Sarah is showing that she will be an equal partner in their hard life on the prairie. Her efforts—and Jacob's acceptance of unconventional gender roles—will help ensure the family's safety and growing prosperity.)
8. "We have squalls in Maine, too," she said. "Just like this. It will be all right, Jacob." (Chap. 8, p. 56)
(On the surface, Sarah is reassuring Jacob that the storm will cause little lasting damage to the crops and home. On a deeper level, however, she is showing that she has made her adjustment and will stay. This is the climax of the book.)
9. "Seal was very worried!" he cried. (Chap. 9, p. 64)
(Sarah has learned to ride a buggy. When she goes into town all alone, the children are convinced that she has decided not to stay. Nothing could be further from the truth. Her return, then, sparks deep emotion in the kids. Unable to admit his feelings, Caleb says that Sarah's cat Seal was worried. Of course, Caleb himself was panicked that he had somehow driven Sarah off by his behavior.)
10. "No," she said. "I will always miss my old home, but the truth of it is I would miss you more." (Chap. 9, p. 65)
(Sarah has bonded with the children and will be a fine mother to them. Tall, plain, and loving, she will fill the void in their lives.)

Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. What happened to Jacob's wife?
(She died the day after giving birth to Caleb.)
2. Jacob places an advertisement in the newspaper for a new wife. Who responds to the advertisement? Where is she from?
(Sarah Elisabeth Wheaton answers the ad. She is from Maine, the other side of the country.)
3. What gifts does Sarah bring to the children?
(She brings a shell for Caleb and a sea stone for Anna.)
4. Why are the children concerned that Sarah will not stay with them?
(Sarah is from a well-established town in Maine, by the ocean. The children and their father live on a primitive and isolated farm on the prairie, very far from the sea. Sarah has family and friends in Maine; in her new home, she will not know anyone at first.)
5. Why does Sarah take the buggy into town?
(She wants to buy colored pencils. She also wants to learn all the farm skills, such as driving a buggy, and have some measure of independence.)

Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. What does singing symbolize in the novel?
(It stands for happiness. This is shown by the fact that Caleb and Anna's mother had sung and the children want to know if Sarah does. They are very happy signing with her.)
7. Why does Sarah cry when the lamb dies?
(She has a tender heart and has not yet learned to separate animals raised for meat from animals raised as pets.)
8. Why does Sarah emphasize the fact that she is plain and tall?
(People—especially women—are judged on their appearance. Sarah does not want to represent herself as beautiful when she is not. She is also probably afraid that Jacob will reject her if he thinks she is beautiful and she is not.)

Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. What can you infer is the author's opinion of physical appearance?
(Students can infer that the author feels we place too much emphasis on physical appearance and not enough on character. Traits such as kindness, independence, and loyalty count more than beauty, although beauty is often more highly valued.)

10. What do the colored pencils represent?
(On one level, they stand for the sea in Sarah's home in Maine. On another level, however, they show that Sarah will bring color and life into Jacob's family.)

Questions 11-12 (Creative Level)

11. Imagine that you are Sarah. Decide whether or not you would have stayed on the prairie with Jacob and his children.
12. Working with a small group of classmates, debate the advantages and disadvantages of advertising for a mate.

Across the Curriculum

Art/Music

1. Draw the pictures of the prairie that Sarah sends back to her family.
2. Sing the song that Sarah teaches to the children, "Sumer Is Icumen in."
3. Using the Internet or books, find photographs of actual pioneer women. Find one that you think looks like Sarah. Explain why, using descriptions from the novel.
4. Learn an actual pioneer song. Transcribe the words for your classmates and sing or play the song for them.
5. Make a model of Sarah's home in Maine.

Language Arts

1. Imagine that you are a pioneer living in the same neighborhood as Jacob and his family. Write a journal entry describing your life.
2. Write the advertisement that Jacob put in the newspaper to attract a wife.
3. MacLachlan has written three sequels to *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. *Caleb's Story*, for instance, is the third book in the trilogy. Read the fourth and newest book, *More Perfect Than the Moon*, and explain whether or not you anticipated that Sarah's life would develop as MacLachlan describes it.
4. Isolate any three symbols from the novel and explain what they represent. Possibilities include the hay dune, the colored pencils, singing, Seal the cat, and the sea.
5. Imagine that you are Sarah. Write a letter to your brother William, telling him about your decision to stay with Jacob and explaining why you know this is a good thing.

Social Studies/Geography

1. Make a map showing some of the routes that the pioneers took to reach the West.
2. Explain the effect that the railroad had on the settlement of the West.

3. Choose one Native American tribe that had lived in the West. In a report, explain how their life changed as a result of the white pioneers.
4. Maggie is from Tennessee. Make an atlas for Tennessee, including at least ten state facts, such as population, educational level, state flag, state motto, and so on.
5. Imagine that you are a pioneer in the 19th century. List the objects you would bring with you on your long journey from the East coast to the Midwest.

Speech/Debate

1. In a roundtable discussion, explore why it was so important for widowed pioneers like Jacob to have a wife.
2. Working with some classmates, enact the scene in which Sarah first arrives at the house and meets the children.
3. Debate whether or not farm animals such as chickens and sheep should be pets.
4. Role-play a scene in which Anna explains to Sarah how happy she is that Sarah has decided to stay and marry Jacob.
5. With some classmates, decide what qualities a woman should have to be a good mother. Then discuss what qualities a man needs to be a good father.

Science/Math

1. Make some homemade bread, as Anna does. Explain how yeast makes the bread rise.
2. Choose one of the western states and make a chart showing its weather in the winter. Record temperature and precipitation. Then compare these statistics to the temperature and precipitation in your region during the same time.
3. Make a collection of shells from Maine. Draw each shell or download pictures of the shells from the Internet. Label each shell with its common and scientific names.
4. Explain the difference between woodchucks and gophers, two of the creatures mentioned in the novel.
5. Plant a flower garden, as Sarah does. Yours can be a windowsill garden or perhaps a small patch of land on the school grounds. Be sure to get permission to establish a school garden.

Alternate Assessment

1. Write a character sketch for Sarah.
2. Imagine what life is like for Sarah a decade in the future. Working with some classmates, perform a skit in which you show how things have changed for her.
3. Read another novel by Patricia MacLachlan and compare and contrast it to *Sarah, Plain and Tall*.

Vocabulary Test

Complete the crossword puzzle with the following words from *Sarah, Plain and Tall*.

ACROSS

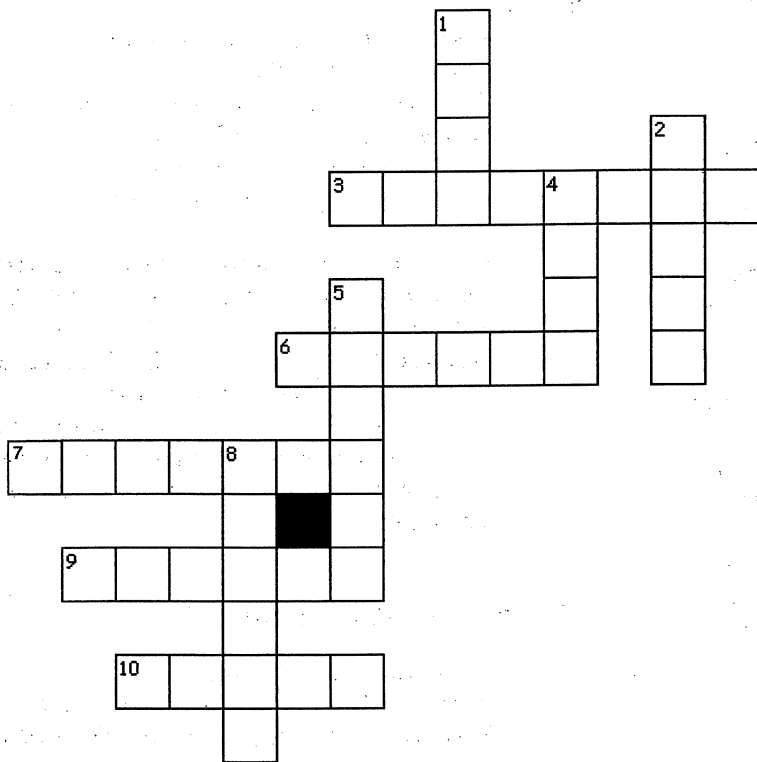
- 3. miserable
- 6. woman's old-fashioned hat
- 7. piece of land
- 9. spirited
- 10. not elaborate

DOWN

- 1. pile of sand
- 2. annoying
- 4. young horse
- 5. not attractive
- 8. scamp

Word Bank

- | | | | | |
|--------|--------|--------|----------|-------|
| pesky | colt | homely | prairie | dune |
| feisty | rascal | bonnet | wretched | plain |



Comprehension Test A

PART I: MATCHING (20 POINTS)

Match each description with a name from the list. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left.

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| A. Seal | F. Anna |
| B. Jack | G. Caleb |
| C. Hilly | H. Sarah |
| D. William | I. Jacob |
| E. Lottie and Nick | J. Mattie and Matthew |

- ____ 1. Two dogs
- ____ 2. The widowed pioneer with two children
- ____ 3. Jacob's neighbors
- ____ 4. Jacob's oldest child, his daughter
- ____ 5. Sarah's brother
- ____ 6. a colt
- ____ 7. The mail-order bride who will marry Jacob
- ____ 8. The housekeeper whom Jacob hired after his wife died
- ____ 9. Anna's younger brother
- ____ 10. Sarah's cat

PART II: SENTENCE COMPLETION (20 POINTS)

Circle the term that best completes each of the following statements.

1. "Did Mama (**cook, sing**) every day?" Caleb asks his sister Anna. "Every-single-day," she answers.
2. Jacob receives an answer to his advertisement for a bride from Sarah Wheaton of (**California, Maine**).
3. Sarah decides to come and visit for a (**month, year**).
4. Sarah writes Papa: "I will come by (**airplane, train**). I will wear a yellow bonnet. I am plain and tall."
5. She brings a (**baseball bat, shell**) for Caleb and a smooth sea stone for Anna.
6. When Sarah misses the sand dunes in Maine, Papa makes a dune from (**hay, snow**).
7. The children go swimming in the (**ocean, cow pond**).
8. Sarah wears overalls like a man and helps Papa fix the (**cellar, roof**).
9. When Sarah goes off to (**town, Kentucky**) alone, Caleb and Anna fear that she has gone for good.
10. She returns with (**beautiful fabrics, colored pencils**).

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

PART III: TRUE/FALSE (20 POINTS)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if a part is false.

- ___ 1. The children's mother died in a house fire.
- ___ 2. She died the day after Caleb was born
- ___ 3. Sarah cuts Caleb's hair and Papa's hair, scattering the cuttings for the birds to use in their nests.
- ___ 4. Sarah sees chickens for the first time and cries when one of the dogs dies.
- ___ 5. It is summer and Papa teaches Sarah to swim.
- ___ 6. At Sarah's request, Papa teaches her to ride a horse and drive the wagon.
- ___ 7. Caleb and Anna are afraid that Sarah will not adjust to her new life and will not stay with them.
- ___ 8. Sarah tells the children that although she misses her home, "the truth of it is I would miss you more."
- ___ 9. The children know that Sarah will not marry Papa but she will stay with them for a few years.
- ___ 10. Sarah dries flowers to use to decorate the house in the winter.

PART IV: ESSAY (40 POINTS)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences on the following page.

- 1. Explain why Sarah would be a successful pioneer.
- 2. Summarize the plot (storyline) of *Sarah, Plain and Tall*.
- 3. Describe how Sarah gets adjusted to her new life.
- 4. Compare and contrast Sarah's life on the prairie to Sarah's life in her hometown.

Comprehension Test B

PART I: MOTIVATION (20 POINTS)

Write a reason or motivation to complete each sentence.

1. Jacob advertises for a wife because

2. Sarah answers the advertisement because

3. Sarah tells Jacob that she is "plain and tall" because

4. The children very much want Sarah to stay with them because

5. The children are afraid that Sarah will not stay with them because

6. Sarah scatters the hair cuttings for the birds because

7. Sarah touches sheep for the first time and cries because

8. Papa makes a dune from hay because

9. Papa teaches Sarah to ride a horse and drive the wagon because

10. When Sarah goes off to town alone, Caleb and Anna are afraid because

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

PART II: IDENTIFICATION (20 POINTS)

Briefly describe each person, place, or thing and explain why it is important in the story.

1. Seal
2. the squall
3. singing
4. colored pencils
5. the sea

PART III: MATCHING (20 POINTS)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left. Use each name only once.

- | | |
|---|-----------------------|
| ____ 1. The narrator | A. Jacob |
| ____ 2. The former housekeeper | B. Sarah |
| ____ 3. Anna's brother | C. William |
| ____ 4. The mail-order bride from Maine | D. Seal |
| ____ 5. Two dogs | E. Jack |
| ____ 6. A neighboring couple | F. Hilly |
| ____ 7. Sarah's cat | G. Anna |
| ____ 8. The widower who advertises for a wife | H. Caleb |
| ____ 9. The colt | I. Lottie and Nick |
| ____ 10. Sarah's brother | J. Mattie and Matthew |

PART IV: ESSAY (40 POINTS)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences on the following page.

1. Explain why *Sarah, Plain and Tall* won the highest award in children's literature, the Newbery Medal. Give at least two specific reasons.
2. Compare and contrast your life to Anna's. How is it the same and different?
3. Describe two ways that the setting affected Sarah.
4. Analyze how the story would be different if told from Jacob's or Sarah's point of view.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY TEST

ACROSS

3. wretched
6. bonnet
7. prairie
9. feisty
10. plain

DOWN

1. dune
2. pesky
4. colt
5. homely
8. rascal

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. E | 6. B |
| 2. I | 7. H |
| 3. J | 8. C |
| 4. F | 9. G |
| 5. D | 10. A |

Part II: Sentence Completion (20 points)

- | | |
|----------|---------------------|
| 1. sing | 6. hay |
| 2. Maine | 7. cow pond |
| 3. month | 8. roof |
| 4. train | 9. town |
| 5. shell | 10. colored pencils |

Part III: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. T |
| 2. T | 7. T |
| 3. T | 8. T |
| 4. F | 9. F |
| 5. F | 10. T |

Part IV. Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Motivation (20 points)

1. his first wife died, his children need a mother, and he needs help with the farm and the chores.
2. her older brother William is about to get married and she wants to leave the newlyweds alone to establish their life together.
3. she does not want him to be disappointed that she is not a conventional beauty.
4. they want a mother with all the affection and comfort that one would bring.
5. she will miss her former life, especially the sea.
6. the birds use the hair in their nests.
7. one of the lambs dies.
8. Sarah misses the sand dunes in her native Maine.
9. Sarah asks to learn; she wants to be independent.
10. they think that she has gone for good.

Part II: Identification (20 points)

1. Seal is Sarah's cat. His name reminds readers that Sarah loves the sea. That she keeps a cat shows that she likes pets and thus is warm and affectionate.
2. A fierce squall— storm—passes through. Jacob hurries to shelter the children and animals. Sarah runs to get her chickens, which shows her kind heart. Papa helps her, which shows that he appreciates her tenderness. During the squall, Sarah tells Papa that everything will be fine. This shows that she is able to nurture Papa as well. It is also the climax of the novel, as this comment shows that she will stay and be his wife.
3. Singing represents happiness. Jacob's first wife sang; Sarah sings as well. This shows that the women bring happiness to the home.
4. Sarah buys colored pencils to enable her to draw her landscapes. On a symbolic level, this shows that she will bring color—life — into the family.
5. Sarah loves the sea because she was raised by it. Nonetheless, she is willing to leave it to become Jacob's wife and the children's mother.

Part III: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. G | 6. J |
| 2. F | 7. D |
| 3. H | 8. A |
| 4. B | 9. E |
| 5. I | 10. C |

Part IV. Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

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