

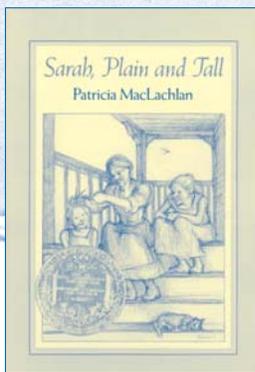
A Teacher's Guide to

Patricia MacLachlan's

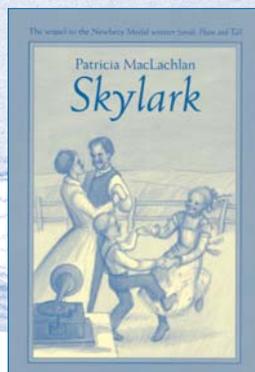
continuing story of

Newbery Medal–winning *Sarah, Plain and Tall*

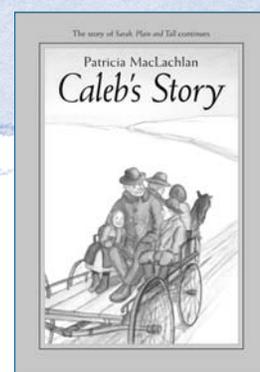
Grades 3–5



Sarah, Plain and Tall
Newbery Medal Winner
Pb 0-06-440205-3
Au 0-89845-635-5
A Charlotte Zolotow Book



Skylark
Pb 0-06-440622-9
Au 0-694-52595-2
Joanna Cotler Books



Caleb's Story
Pb 0-06-440590-7
Au 0-694-52596-0
Joanna Cotler Books

About the Books

Newbery Medal–winning author Patricia MacLachlan tells three seamless tales of a family living on the Great Plains in the early 1900s and the love, forgiveness, and ties that bind them together.

Sarah, Plain and Tall

Mama died when Caleb was born, and Papa hopes the sorrow and loneliness will go away if he marries again, so he places an ad for a wife and mother in the paper. Sarah, a young woman from Maine, responds to the ad and begins to write letters to Papa, Anna, and Caleb. They all fall in love with Sarah through her letters, and when she comes to visit, they pray she will stay. Although Sarah misses Maine and the ocean, after a trial visit, she marries Jacob and the four of them become a family.

Skylark

When a drought forces neighbors to leave their land and the barn is lost in a wildfire, Sarah returns with Anna and Caleb to Maine. Although Anna and Caleb love the ocean, the lush green grass, and tall trees, they miss their father and the home they left behind. When Jacob shows up in Maine to tell his family “It rained,” they are all eager to return to the plains, especially with the news that there will be a baby added to their family.

Caleb's Story

When Anna moves to town to finish high school, she turns over the responsibility of writing the family history to Caleb. He is sure nothing worth writing about will happen, but he is proven wrong when a mysterious old man shows up. Sarah finds out that the old man is Jacob's father, who had left his family when Jacob was a young boy. Anger engulfs Jacob as he tries to deal with the pain of his past. Eventually Jacob and his dad make peace, and the family welcomes their “new” grandfather. Caleb records each event in the family journal and in the process teaches his grandfather to read and write.

In the Classroom

American families living on the Great Plains in the early 1900s had to rely on one another to meet their needs, and the Witting family was no exception. Love is the knot that ties them together and brings them through birth and death, loss and gain, and joy and sadness. Themes of relationships, hope, conflict, and love make these works of historical fiction ideal for classroom use. Cross-curricular activities in social studies, science, geography, music, and language arts are also included in this teacher's guide.

Pre-Reading Activity

Ask students what they know about life in the early 1900s and write their responses on the board. Have pictures available of the modes of transportation, the types of homes, and the style of clothing worn in that time period to help them. After the list is complete, discuss life in the 1900s compared to life in the 21st century. You might want to explain the practice of mail order brides to your students to help prepare them for Sarah's arrival.

Across the Curriculum

Language Arts

Anna and Caleb keep a journal of their family history, writing down all the significant events that occur in their lives. Have students interview their parents or grandparents about events in their families' past that have affected or will affect their families. Students should write their findings in a journal and keep it to pass on to younger brothers or sisters.

Language Arts / Geography

Sarah and the Witting family became acquainted through a series of letters. Search these websites:

<http://www.iecc.com>

<http://www.pen-pal.com>

<http://www.ePALS.com>

Find a class in another area of the country with whom your students can exchange letters to learn how their state and way of life differ from their own. Have students keep a copy of all the letters and bind them into a journal.

Post a large map of the United States on a bulletin board and mark with a colored pushpin the location of each pen pal the students are corresponding with. Ask your students to interview their pen pals about the wildlife, plants and trees, climate, and terrain of the place they live. Students can then report to the class what they find out.

Science

The Witting family and their neighbors suffer from a drought that causes much devastation to the land. Ask students to research the history of droughts and write a report of their findings. Be sure to include information about a specific drought, where it occurred, number of lives lost, how long it lasted, and how it altered peoples' lives.

Students may also research the natural resources that would have been available in the Great Plain states in the 1900s. What natural resources were available to the Witting family and how did they use them to meet their needs? How would they have obtained other supplies that they needed to survive?

Geography

Sarah traveled a long distance to get from Maine to the Witting farm. Have students draw a map and trace the route she would have taken. Be sure to include the mode of transportation she used to get from one place to the other and how long the trip took. How did the trip Sarah took with Anna and Caleb differ from her first trip?

Social Studies

The Great Plains states and the Northeast states have different types of flowers, trees, animals, seasons, and weather. Discuss the two areas and make a poster on each one illustrating the differences.

Music

Singing was an important aspect of entertainment in the early 1900s because there was no television or radio. Families spent their free time together reading out loud or singing, and many of the songs were about their lives and how they lived. Have students write a song or poem about the life of a frontier child to share with the class.

Thematic Connections:

Family Relationships

Describe the Witting family before and after Sarah's arrival. Discuss with the class the reason Jacob felt it necessary to find a wife and someone to care for Anna and Caleb. When Cassie was born the family changed. How did her arrival change the family? Do you think there was some sibling rivalry between her and Caleb? How did the arrival of Grandfather affect the family dynamics? A family constantly changes and grows. How has your family changed or grown?

Hopes and Dreams

Every character in Ms. MacLachlan's books has a dream that gives them hope for the future. Jacob wanted a companion, Anna and Caleb wanted a mother, Sarah wanted a family, and Grandfather wanted to be reunited with his son and family. Define hope and how it played a role in the life of each character. Were there things they hoped for that they did not receive? What were they and why didn't they receive what they wanted? Can you think of a time when you had hope for something that you received? That you did not receive? What are you hoping for now and what can you do to assure yourself that you will get what you are hoping for?

Overcoming Conflict

Discuss internal and external conflict with your students and the different ways people deal with conflict. Discuss the ethical aspects of internal conflict and making decisions with integrity. Site an example of external conflict (problem with parents or teacher), and an example of internal conflict (making a decision). Discuss with students the internal and external conflict in the lives of the Witting family and their neighbors. How did they make their decisions and how was the conflict resolved?

Power of Love

The love between the Witting family brought them through great difficulty and helped them overcome severe challenges. Love enabled Anna to care for Caleb and take care of her papa, love brought and kept Sarah on the farm, love kept the family together through the drought, love brought joy in the birth of Cassie, and love healed the hurt between Jacob and his father. Brainstorm with students other ways the books illustrate the power of love. Then ask students to write about a time in their life that love helped sustain them and their family.

About the Author

Patricia MacLachlan was born in Wyoming, and to this day carries a small bag of prairie dirt with her wherever she goes to remind her of what she knew first. She is the author of many beloved books for young readers, including *Arthur, for the Very First Time*, winner of the Golden Kite Award for Fiction, and Newbery Medal-winning, *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. She is also the author several picture books for children, including *What You Know First*, *All the Places to Love*, and *Three Names*. Ms. MacLachlan lives and works in western Massachusetts.

Have you written all your life, and what experiences helped to direct your writing?

I have written since I was a child, but mostly in private. I wrote a lot of fiction in my diary, believe me. I decided that my life was not very exciting, so I made it exciting there. I invented a great life for myself. I was always a reader, and my parents read constantly. My father also acted out books with me, over and over again. That is where I learned character and plot.

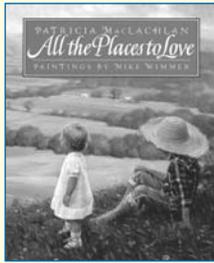
The Witting family members in *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, *Skylark*, and *Caleb's Story* demonstrate relationships in familial ties and loyalty. Have personal relationships in your own family inspired these characters?

I think all my books are about family. Families fascinate me—how they work or don't work; how the members affect each other. I have a wonderful family, and I have a great husband and three great children who have given me so many ideas for books.

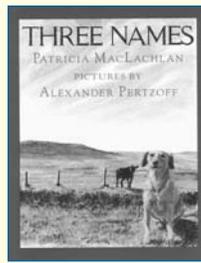
In *Caleb's Story*, when Caleb discovers that his grandfather cannot read or write, he decides to help teach him rather than to act out in shame or embarrassment. His choice has an important message for literacy concerns. Do you actively campaign for literacy, and would you want this book used?

I do actively campaign for literacy. Literacy is far more than learning to read—it is how to think and make decisions. I truly hope *Caleb's Story* is used to further literacy issues. And it makes me happy, always, when a child like Caleb teaches an adult—the least powerful teaching the more powerful.

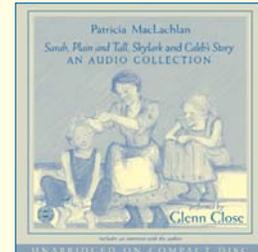
Additional Books by Patricia MacLachlan



All the Places to Love
Illustrated by Mike Wimmer
 Tr 0-06-021098-2
 Joanna Cotler Books



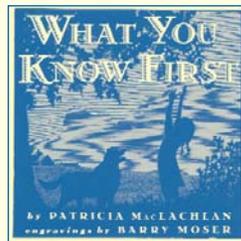
Three Names
Illustrated by Alexander Pertzoff
 Pb 0-06-443360-9
 A Charlotte Zolotow Book



Sarah, Plain and Tall
Audio CD Collection
Performed by Glenn Close
 All three Sarah, Plain and Tall novels
 collected in one deluxe CD collection.
 Au 0-694-52602-9



Through Grandpa's Eyes
Pictures by Deborah Ray
 Pb 0-06-443041-3
 A Charlotte Zolotow Book
 A Reading Rainbow Book

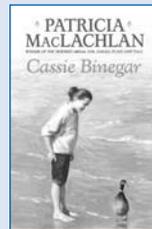


What You Know First
Illustrated by Barry Moser
 Pb 0-06-443492-3
 Joanna Cotler Books

Newly Repackaged!



Arthur, For the Very First Time
Pictures by Lloyd Bloom
 Pb 0-06-440288-6
 A Charlotte Zolotow Book
 ALA Notable Children's Book
 Golden Kite Award for Fiction



Cassie Binegar
Pictures by Lloyd Bloom
 Pb 0-06-4401095-2
 A Charlotte Zolotow Book



The Facts and Fictions of Minna Pratt
 Pb 0-06-440265-7
 A Charlotte Zolotow Book
 ALA Notable Children's Book
 Horn Book Fanfare
 Teachers' Choice



Seven Kisses in a Row
Illustrated by Maria Pia Marrella
 Pb 0-06-440231-2
 A Charlotte Zolotow Book



Unclaimed Treasures
 Pb 0-06-440189-8
 A Charlotte Zolotow Book

Teaching ideas prepared by Susan Geye, Library Media Specialist, the Crowley Ninth Grade Campus, Ft. Worth, Texas. Guide ISBN: 0-06-050979-1