



Figure 1 A map of Kansas in the 1900's

Sarah, Plain and Tall is an engaging and enjoyable film that has appeal to 7-9 year-olds while also being relevant to several areas of the North Carolina Standard Course of Study.

Some subject areas addressed in this guide include English Language Arts, Science, and Healthful Living.

The guide is organized to clearly connect scenes to state standards. For example, Third Grade Healthful Living Goal 1, Objective 1.03 *Identify feelings and emotions associated with loss and grief and resources for help.*

Using This Guide

In using film and other media in the classroom, research suggests that students learn more and are more engaged if

- they view short scenes followed by activities.
- they have been given cues and clues to look and listen for prior to each screening. For example, they might be asked to make inferences about characters or comment on how different media techniques contribute to the mood created in a scene.

This technique is based on a concept called A.I.M.E., which was developed

by Gavriel Salomon. The term stands for the Amount of Invested Mental Energy or Effort. Salomon's work proved that students engage in 'shallow processing' or 'cognitive economy' if they have not been told what to focus on during the viewing of a scene. When teachers preview a scene or clip ahead of time, they are able to provide significant viewing guidance, which results in higher student expectations, recall and comprehension.

Synopsis

When widower, Jacob Witting, puts an advertisement in the newspaper for a new wife in 1910, his children are stunned. Anna, his oldest daughter, is especially closed-minded when it comes to getting a new mother.

Sarah Wheaton is looking for a change of scenery and a new life, so she answered Jacob advertisement. But when she moves from Maine to Kansas with the intention of seeing if the relationship might work, she had no idea how hard it would be to fill the shoes of an unforgotten mother and wife. In the end, she is able to make a difference for this struggling family, and decides that she needs Jacob, Anna, and Caleb as much as they need her.



Figure 2 Sarah Wheaton - Main Character

English Language Arts

Character Profiles

Anna Witting - Anna is a young girl, although it is never disclosed exactly how old she is. Anna is old enough to do many of the chores around the house, like cooking, but she is still young enough to want a mother figure in her life to guide her. Anna in many ways has taken over the role of mother. She is very responsible and does many of the chores around the farm, like feeding the animals. She prepares meals for the family and watches over Caleb.

Caleb Witting - Caleb is Anna's younger brother, who is around seven or eight years old. Caleb and Anna's mother died the day she gave birth to him. He never got a chance to know his mother because he was only a day old when she passed away. Caleb worries constantly that he will be left again, as he was when his mother died. This makes him very vulnerable.



Figure 3 Anna and Caleb – Main Characters

Jacob Witting (Papa) - Jacob is the father of Anna and Caleb. He has a home and farm for his family on the prairie. Jacob is a very hard worker who maintains the house, cares for the animals on the farm, and works the

land himself with the help of Caleb and Anna. He is a strong and silent type that prefers actions to words.

Sarah Wheaton - Sarah is a woman from Maine who responds to Jacob's advertisement in the newspaper. The advertisement was for a companion for Jacob and a mother for Anna and Caleb. Sarah is very straightforward, independent, and stubborn when she needs to be. Sarah is the type of woman who does not like to be told what she can and can't do, or what she is capable or is not capable of doing. She is a free spirit that does things that make her happy, even when others might think her actions are unusual or silly.

Matthew Grant - Matthew is the family's neighbor to the south. Matthew, just like Papa, is a widower with two young children, and a farm to run. It is Matthew who gives Papa the idea to advertise for a wife in the newspapers, for Matthew found his new wife, Maggie, through this very avenue.

Maggie Grant - Maggie is a young woman who has much in common with Sarah. Like Sarah, Maggie responded to a classified advertisement by a farmer seeking a wife. Like Sarah, Maggie travels far from her home state of Tennessee to be with Matthew and his two young daughters.

ELA Standards

Students will meet third and fourth grade English Language Arts competency goals. Through the use of A.I.M.E. (Amount of Invested Mental Energy), students will:

- make predictions about characters and settings
- determine problems and solutions
- explore friendly letter writing
- determine cause/effect relationships
- identify the author’s use of figurative language

English Language Arts Standards:

- Competency Goal 2, Objective 2.02 *“Interact with the text before, during, and after reading, listening, or viewing”*
- Competency Goal 2, Objective 2.04 *“Identify and interpret elements of fiction and nonfiction and support by referencing the text”*
- Competency Goal 2, Objective 2.05 *“Draw conclusions, make generalizations, and gather support by referencing the text”*
- Competency Goal 3, Objective 3.01 *“Respond to fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama using interpretive, critical, and evaluative processes”*
- Competency Goal 3, Objective 3.02 *“Identify and discuss similarities and differences in events, characters, concepts and ideas”*
- Competency Goal 4, Objective 4.03 *“Share written and oral products in a variety of ways”*
- Competency Goal 4, Objective 4.09 *“Produce work that follows the conventions of particular genres”*



Figure 4 Jacob at work in the fields of the prairie.

Activity 1

Scene 1: Main Title/“When You Were Born”

Start Time 0:01; Run Time 1:52

Teachers should start viewing at very beginning of movie when opening credits begin and camera pans over the landscape. Students will be divided according to gender. Michael Gurian’s text, Boys and Girls Learn Differently! A Guide for Teachers and Parents (2001), dealt with brain-based differences. Girls are more language oriented with better listening skills, whereas boys need pictures and moving objects (aka “action”) in order to be stimulated. Girls (with their backs to the screen) will be responsible for listening only, while boys will be responsible for listening and watching.

This scene shows the main characters going about their daily chores on a farm during the late nineteenth century.

The purpose of this activity is for students to make inferences and observations about main characters and setting. Students will predict what life on a farm might be like for a child during the time period in the movie.

Before viewing the scene, students should be instructed to pay close attention to the setting. When and where does Sarah, Plain and Tall take place? How do you know? What might it be like to be a child living on a farm? What responsibilities are part of daily life on a farm?

During the scene, students will take notes on the attached activity sheet while viewing the scene, then use a Venn diagram to compare and contrast life on a farm to their own lives. Instruct them to look at:

- Characters
- Landscape
- Activities

After viewing the scene, students will complete a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting characteristics of life on a farm to their own individual lives. Students are expected to list three similarities and six differences concerning the different lifestyles. (See Appendix A)

Activity meets 3rd/4th grade English Language Arts objective 2.02.



Figure 5 Caleb pondered the idea of a new mother.

Activity 2

Scene 1: Main Title/"When You Were Born"

Start Time 1:30; Run Time 1:32

Teachers should begin viewing when Caleb starts questioning his sister, Anna, about his deceased mother and the events surrounding his birth.

The purpose of this activity is to determine the mood of scene by listening to what the characters say, how they say it, and by watching how the characters interact with each other. Students will also draw conclusions about previous events in the story that were not directly stated in the preceding scene of the movie.

Students should be instructed to listen for changes in tone of voice and watch for body language cues that communicate emotion and mood. Before viewing, ask students, "What is the overall mood of the scene? How do you know? What events caused the main characters to feel the way they do?"

After viewing the scene in which Caleb and Anna react emotionally to memories surrounding their mother's death, students will illustrate a time in their own lives when they were very upset or sad. In addition, students will write 3-5 sentences explaining what happened, how they felt, and how they reacted at the bottom of their pictures. When the activity is

complete, the teacher will encourage students to share.

Activity meets 3rd/4th grade ELA objectives 2.02, 2.04, 2.05, 3.01, 4.02, and 4.03.



Figure 6 Sarah was ready for a change.

Activity 3

Scene 2: “Wanted: A Wife” &

Scene 3: “Letters of Introduction”

Start Time 4:20; Run Time 2:51

Teachers should begin viewing this scene when Jacob, Anna, and Caleb sit down to eat. Papa/Jacob begins telling his children about the advertisement he placed in the newspaper for a new wife. It should end when Sarah tells her brother she must answer the ad and move out West for a change.

The purpose of this activity is for students to identify problems and solutions that were shown in the clip. Remind students that a **problem** is anything that is hard to deal with, solve or overcome. **Solutions** are ways problems are fixed or resolved. This particular scene should be viewed twice,

once to watch/listen for problems and once to identify the solutions.

Students will use a T-chart to organize and differentiate between problems and solutions. (See Appendix B) Before the first viewing, students should be instructed to listen for:

- Papa’s problem
- Anna and Caleb’s problem
- Sarah’s problem

After scene, discuss what problems occur in the story for which characters. List these on the board. Before the second viewing, students should be instructed to identify:

- Papa’s solution
- Anna and Caleb’s solution
- Sarah’s solution

Be sure students understand how to write the solutions in the proper location (beside the corresponding problem) on their T-charts.

After viewing, discuss the solutions given in the movie, and evaluate whether those solutions were good solutions or not. What new problems might these solutions cause? Discuss with class.

Gardner’s work with Multiple Intelligences teaches us that students enter the classroom with special skills, or intelligences, in one or more areas. When teachers utilize these intelligences, students tend to learn more quickly and deeply. They are also better engaged in the learning process.

In order for students with linguistic, intrapersonal, and interpersonal skills, to utilize their inherent strengths (and for others to grow in this area), the teacher will introduce an activity that deals with communication, problem solving, and advice.

The “Dear Blabby” activity, a kid-friendly spin-off of the Dear Abby column, involves students anonymously writing about a real problem that they, or someone their age, might be faced with, like jealousy over a new brother or sister. When students are finished, they will switch papers to offer thoughtful, written advice on someone else’s problem. Share when completed, discussing whether the advice was good or not. What other solutions might the class offer?

Activity meets 3rd/4th grade ELA objectives 2.02, 2.04, 4.02, and 4.03.



Figure 7 Friendly letters were exchanged between Sarah and the family before she arrived to visit.



Figure 8 Anna read Caleb a letter from Sarah.

Activity 4

Scene 4: “I’m Plain and Tall”

Start Time 12:02; Run Time 00:46

Start Time 12:48; Run Time 00:52

This scene is broken into two parts. Teachers should begin viewing the first scene segment when Caleb takes Sarah’s letter out of his pocket for Anna to read to him when they’re in the barn. Teachers should begin viewing the second segment when Jacob begins reading his letter from Sarah to Caleb.

The purpose of this activity is to learn how to write a friendly letter. Students will also compare and contrast information within the two letters using a double bubble map. (Appendix C)

For the first segment, students should be instructed to listen for the parts of a friendly letter. Before viewing the scene, ask students: “How does Sarah’s letter to Caleb start? What does she tell or ask him? How does the letter end?”

After the segment is over, discuss what students noticed. List these observations on the board for future reference later in the activity. Note:

- How does a friendly letter begin?
- What information is included in a friendly letter?
- How does a friendly letter end?
- What other sorts of information or items can be included in a letter?

Before viewing second segment, instruct students to listen to the content of Jacob's letter. Ask: "What sorts of things does Sarah write about to Jacob? What is her tone? How is Jacob's letter different from Caleb's letter?" Students will listen carefully for answers to these questions.

After viewing the scene, the teacher and students will discuss differences and similarities in information and tone concerning the two letters. Students will complete a double bubble map for Jacob's letter and Caleb's letter, and fill in ways in which they are the same and different.

Next, using the information the class gathered about the composition and content of friendly letters, the teacher will briefly model how to write a friendly letter. Finally, students will compose their own letters to friends, neighbors, or family members, following the conventions of the friendly letter

(ex. date, opening, body, closing, signature, post-script)

Activity meets ELA objectives 2.02, 2.03, 2.04, 3.02, and 4.09.



Figure 9 Anna, Caleb, and Sarah named the sheep, then went for a swim.

Activity 5

Scene 12: "Dreams and Memories"

Start Time 56:05; Run Time 4:37

Teachers should begin this viewing when Sarah, Anna, and Caleb are in the fields naming sheep. It should end after Jacob rolls down the "dune" which is really a haystack.

The purpose of this activity is to identify and interpret the use of figurative language, specifically metaphors and similes. Students will be able to distinguish between the two at the end of the activity. Students will also practice creating metaphors and/or similes in various ways.

Prior to students viewing the scene, the teacher will tell students: "There are many ways authors create lasting and detailed images inside the reader's mind.

One way is to use *figurative language*. Figurative language is when you describe something by comparing it to something different. It creates a clear image in the mind using words. In the scene you about to watch, Sarah tries to teach Anna and Caleb how to float in the pond. She tells them, 'You just take a big breath and you'll float like a balloon.' Floating like a balloon is a simile because it's comparing a person to a balloon."



Figure 10 Sarah taught Caleb how to float like a balloon.

Students will be instructed to listen for other uses of figurative language in the selected scene. Note taking is encouraged, but it shouldn't interfere with listening for all the uses of figurative language in the dialogue of the scene.

After viewing the scene, students will think individually first, then get together in groups of two or three to discuss direct examples of figurative language from the movie. After about five minutes, come back together as a group and share examples aloud. Allow students to write these dialogue examples on the board.

Next, the teacher will explicitly model/show the difference between **similes** (compares two unlike things using the words *like* or *as*) and **metaphors** (compares two unlike things by saying something *is* something else) through examples. Be sure to underline the key comparison words in the film phrases on the board.

Once students have grasped the difference between similes and metaphors, give two activity cards (Appendix D) to each student. These cards begin with stems that lend themselves to metaphors or similes. Makes sure each student has one of each (two total cards) and a Vis-à-vis marker. Instruct students to use the activity card to write an example of figurative language. Do a couple together before releasing students to work on their own.

Words on card/ **Teacher Example:**

- A stream is a winding snake.
- Thunder is as loud as a gunshot from a rifle.

Students will choose one example of figurative language to share, either aloud with words (can be lyrics or poetry), through a picture/illustration, and/or by acting it out. Combinations of two can be used.

According to Gardner's work with Multiple Intelligences, students are gifted in one or more ways (ex.. Musical, Bodily-Kinesthetic, Spatial, Naturalistic, Logical-

Mathematical, Linguistic, Intrapersonal, and Interpersonal) Teachers must create opportunities for students to utilize their gifts. The activity here allows for four different intelligences to be used.



Figure 11 After a violent storm, the farm was a mess. So was the family.

Activity 6

Scene 15: "Guess!/Enough Space for Everyone"

Scene 16: "You Don't Need!"

Start Time 1:12:18; Run Time 5:27

Teachers should begin viewing this scene when a storm is brewing and Sarah offers to help fix the roof. It should end after Sarah and Jacob's argument in the barn.

The purpose of this activity is to identify and interpret the cause and effect relationships within this scene. Students will be divided up into two equal groups: a CAUSE group and an EFFECT group.

Before viewing, teacher will review cause and effect relationships. A **cause** is why

something happened. The **effect** is what happened next/after.

Students should be instructed, based on what group they are in, to listen and watch specifically for either causes or effects. Students will be given a handout (Appendix E) with six items total, three of which will be their job to complete during the scene.

After viewing, students will partner with a person of the opposite group and discuss the cause and effect relationships from the scene. During this time, students will complete the entire graphic organizer.

Activity meets ELA objective 2.04.



Figure 12 Sarah decided to stay because she believed she could make a difference.

Activity 7

Scene 19: "Will She Come Back?"

Scene 20: "Sarah Brought The Sea"

Start Time 1:30:07; Pause Time 1:33:14

Restart Time 1:33:14, End Time 1:37:07

Teachers should begin viewing this scene when Sarah is leaving to go into town for unexplained reasons. Teacher should PAUSE movie when the train leaves the station and Jacob rides up on his horse. There will be a prediction activity in the middle of the scene, then the movie will resume with Sarah stepping out of the train station. It will end with Jacob and Sarah's marriage.

Before viewing, the teacher will instruct students to listen and watch for reasons why Sarah might or might not leave to go back to Maine.

After pausing the scene in the middle, students will pair up to complete a "Rally Partner" activity. Students will use T-chart handout (Appendix F) to list reasons why Sarah might leave and reasons why she probably won't leave. Student A will use red pen to write a reason why Sarah might/might not stay. Partner B will write the next reason, and so on.

When activity is complete, take 3-4 minutes to regroup as a class. Each pair will suggest one reason why Sarah might/might not stay in Kansas with the Witting family. Ask each student to make a decision (in their minds) whether or not she will stay.

In order to confirm predictions, the scene will resume at 1:33:14 when Sarah walks out of the train station.

Reflect as a group at the end of the movie. Ask: "Were your predictions right? What were Sarah's reasons for staying?"

Activity meets ELA Standard 2.02.

Science Standards

Essential Standard 3.E.2,
Objective 3.5.2.1 *"Compare Earth's saltwater and freshwater features (including oceans, seas, rivers, lakes, ponds, streams, and glaciers)."*

Essential Standard 3.E.2,
Objective 3.E.2.2 *"Compare Earth's land features (including volcanoes, mountains, valleys, canyons, caverns, and islands) by using models, pictures, diagrams, and maps."*

Essential Standard 3.L.2,
Objective 3.L.2.3 *"Summarize the distinct stages of the life cycle of seed plants."*



Figure 13 Sarah jumped into the pond for a swim.

Activity 1

Scene: "Letters of Introduction"

Start Time 6:18; Run Time 2:42

Start Time 56:26; Run Time 1:16

This activity is broken into two parts. Teachers should begin viewing the first segment as the scene changes to the dock and Jacob is reading his response to Sarah. Teachers should begin viewing the second segment when Sarah, Caleb, and Anna are sitting in the field with the sheep.

The purpose of this activity is for students to compare and contrast fresh water and salt water features. Students will compare and contrast the information within a Venn diagram.

Gurian's work with brain-based differences teaches us that boys and girls learn differently. Boys will be stimulated in this activity by interacting with the materials through touch and taste. Girls will be stimulated in this activity through group discussion.

The first segment begins with Sarah walking out on the dock. Students should be instructed to pay attention to the setting. Ask: "What might life be like at the sea?" "What kinds of jobs might people have living near the sea?" Students should also be instructed to listen to Sarah's description of the sea in her letter to Anna. Ask: "What does the sea look like?" "What types of animals would you find in the sea?"

After the segment is over, discuss what students noticed about the sea. List these observations in a

circle map on the board for future reference later in the activity.



Figure 14 The Maine seacoast, where Sarah's brother, William, worked as a fisherman.

Before viewing the second segment, instruct students to pay attention to the setting and listen to Sarah's comparison of the sea. Ask: "What differences are there between the sea and the pond?" "What similarities?" "What types of animals would you find in the pond?"

After viewing the scene, discuss what students noticed about the pond. List the observations in a separate circle map on the board. Also discuss any details that can be added to the sea circle map.

Students should be placed into groups. Each group should be given a Venn Diagram to compare and contrast the pond and the sea. (See Appendix G) Each group should also be given the following items:

- Bucket of sand (to examine what the bottom of the sea would be like)
- Bucket of dirt (to examine what the bottom of the pond would be like)
- Container of salt water

- Container of fresh water
- iPod Touches (to research the differences and similarities; and any other information needed)
- Sea Shells (to examine items found at the sea)
- Rocks (to examine items found in a pond)

Students will explore and discuss the items above to complete their Venn diagram and answer the following questions about each type of water:

- What might you see?
- How might it taste?
- What might you feel?
- Where might you find this type of water?
- What types of animals might you find?
- What other observations can you make?

Activity meets Science Standard 3.E.2.1



Figure 15 Sarah picked wildflowers from the prairie.

Activity 2

Scene: “Missing the Sea”

Start Time 32:23; Run Time 2:07

Teachers should start viewing when the camera pans over the landscape.

The scene shows Sarah and Caleb picking flowers while Jacob and Anna work on the farm.

The purpose of this activity is for students to compare and contrast the ocean and the prairie using a Diamonte poem.

Students should be reminded of the characteristics of the ocean as seen in the previous activity. Before viewing, students should be instructed to pay attention to the setting and how it compares and contrasts to the ocean. Students should also be instructed to listen to Sarah as she discusses the similarities and differences of the prairie and the ocean. As they view this scene, students should think about what they might see and hear in both settings?

After viewing the scene, students should create a diamonte poem to compare and contrast the prairie and the ocean. Students must place an illustration for both settings at the point of each side of the poem. Each poem should include what you might see and hear in each setting.

Activity meets Science Standard 3.E.2.1

Activity 3

Scene: “Thank You For Sending Us Sarah”

Start Time 36:20; Run Time 1:23

Teachers should begin viewing this scene as Sarah and the children are on the porch singing, “Sumer Is Icum In.”



Figure 16 Singing on the porch with Sarah.

The purpose of this activity is for students to learn the life cycle of a seed.

This activity allows for Gardner’s visual/spatial and musical intelligences to be utilized.

Before viewing, teachers should introduce students to the life cycle of a seed. As the teacher introduces each part of the cycle students will draw pictures to represent each phase. The teacher should teach the following phases: seed, germinate, grow, bloom, and pollination.

As students are viewing the scene they should pay attention to the words of the song that Sarah and the children are singing. Ask: “how does it relate to the life cycle of a seed?”

After viewing, the teacher should show the students the lyrics of “Sumer Is Icum in.” (See Appendix H) The teacher will lead the students in singing. After singing altogether several times the class will sing in a round.

Activity meets Science Standard 3.L.2.3

Activity 4

Scene: “An Old Family Friend”

Start Time 58:21; Run Time 2:22

Teachers should be viewing this scene when Sarah is drawing a picture for William.

The purpose of this activity is for students to learn about different landforms.

Before viewing the scene, the teacher should tell students that a landform is any natural formation of rock and dirt, found on Earth. A landform can be as large as a mountain range, or as small as a hill. It can be as large as a continent, or as small as a pond.

Students should be instructed to pay attention to Sarah’s description of dunes. Dunes are a type of landform. Students should also watch carefully as Jacob shows off the “dunes” of the prairie.



Figure 17 The hay dune by the barn.

After viewing the scene, students will be placed into six groups to participate in a jigsaw activity. Each group will be assigned two landforms from the following group:

- Mountains
- Hills
- Valleys
- Canyons

- Coast
- Ocean
- Lake
- Gulf
- Peninsula
- Island
- River
- Plateau

Students will use iPods to research the given landforms in order to become the experts. Students will present information about the landforms to the class. All students should divide a piece of paper into six sections. Groups should include an illustration as part of their presentation. Students will draw an illustration for each landform in one of the twelve sections on their papers.

Activity meets Science Standard 3.E.2.2

Healthful Living Standards

Competency Goal 1, Objective 1.03
Identify feelings and emotions associated with loss and grief and resources for help.

Activity 1

Scene: “Unclaimed Treasures”

Start Time 43:24; Run Time 4:28

Teachers should begin viewing when Sarah is startled in her bed by Anna’s nightmare about her mother. This scene shows how different people deal with grief.



Figure 18 Anna experienced nightmares about the death of her mother.

The purpose of this activity is for students to identify the different emotions associated with grief.

Before viewing the scene, the teacher should ask the students if they have ever lost a family member or a pet. Also, ask how they felt after the loss? Students should be instructed to pay attention to the differences between how Papa and Anna are dealing with the death of Mama.

After scene, discuss the differences between Anna and Papa and how they are dealing with Mama’s death. The teacher should explain that sometimes when people deal with loss they experience many different emotions. Anger and sadness are two of those emotions. Students should now create a collage using magazine images that displays the emotions that they have felt when dealing with loss.

Activity meets Healthful Living Objective 1.03.

Activity 2

Scene: “Jacob’s Guilt”

Start Time 1:25:26; Run Time 3:42

Teachers should begin viewing when Sarah is walking into the barn. Jacob is crying and seems angry as Sarah is coming in. Through this scene Jacob talks to Sarah about Mama.



Figure 19 Jacob cried over the loss of his wife.

The purpose of this activity is for students to recognize that there are many ways to deal or help someone deal with the loss of a loved one.

Before viewing, instruct the students to study Sarah and Jacob's actions. Ask: "How is Jacob reacting to the loss of his wife?" "What does Sarah do to help Jacob?"

After viewing ask the students to brainstorm ways that someone might cope with a loss. The following are possible student answers:

- Holding onto the loved one's things
- Drawing a picture about the person
- Writing a poem
- Talking to someone

Now instruct students to brainstorm ways that they might help someone

dealing with a loss. The following are possible student answers:

- Listen to them
- Play a video game with them
- Take a walk with them

Have students to create a plan for how they might deal with the loss of a loved one.

This activity allows for Gardner's interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences to be utilized.

Activity meets Healthful Living Objective 1.03.

Reference List

Picture/Clipart Resources:

<http://www.collectingpapermemories.com/collecting-memories.html>

<http://www.oceansofkansas.com/images2/ks-1872.jpg>

http://www.moviegoods.com/movie_poster/sarah_plain_and_tall_1991.htm

Movie Resources:

Sarah, Plain and Tall. Dir. Glenn Jordan. Perf. Glenn Close, Christopher Walken. Hallmark Hall of Fame Productions, 1991. DVD.

Other Resources:

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/>