

Sarah, Plain and Tall

Study Guide

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For the novel by
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Synopsis

The day after Anna's brother Caleb was born, their mother died. Anna and her father, Jacob, miss her terribly, and young Caleb has never known what it is like to have a mother. So Jacob decides to advertise for a wife and mother for his children; someone to bring song and laughter back into their prairie home.

Sarah Elisabeth Wheaton from Maine answers his ad. After exchanging a few letters with the family, Sarah decides to travel west to spend one month with them. When the month ends, she will decide if she will stay and marry Jacob or if she will return to Maine.

Sarah arrives as promised and both Caleb and Anna grow to like her. But the children worry that their home will not be "good enough" for Sarah. They know that Sarah is lonely for her home in Maine, and they are afraid she will not stay because of the things she would miss. As they get to know and care for each other, they find that they all must make adjustments to create a new family. And Sarah realizes that though she will always miss the sea, she would miss Caleb, Anna, and Jacob even more.

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Setting:

The *setting* of a story is the location and time period in which the story takes place. Write a paragraph describing the location of *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. Describe the family farm, how it looked, and the things around it. Then answer the following questions:

Where do you think the story is set? (In what state, for example.) Why do you think so?

In what time period do you think the story is set? Why do you think so?

Questions:

1. What happened to Anna and Caleb's mother?

2. How did Anna feel about Caleb when he was first born? What changed her attitude toward him?

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8. Anna says, "I wished everything was as perfect as the stone. I wished that Papa and Caleb and I were perfect for Sarah." Why do you think Anna wishes for everything to be perfect for Sarah?

Dig Deeper:

9. Read Deuteronomy 5:16:

Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

Look up *honor* in a dictionary. Write down the definition. _____

While Papa goes to town, Anna and Caleb do their chores. How can doing your chores honor your parents?

10. Do you need reminders to get your own chores done or do you do them on your own like Anna and Caleb?

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7. When they pick flowers to dry, Sarah says, “we can have flowers all winter long.” After Sarah puts the hair out for the birds, she tells Caleb, “Later we can look for nests of curls.” In her letter to William, Sarah refers to the dune of hay as “our dune.”

8. Answers will vary. Students may guess anything, but we discover later in the story what it is that is missing.

9. To be homesick means to be longing for home and family while absent from them. Answers will vary. Possible examples to show that Sarah was homesick: she looks sad and far away when listening to the sea in the shell; she looks out the window when she talks about her brother’s fishing boat and the sea birds; when Caleb wishes he could touch a seal “right now,” Sarah agrees, and she sighs.

10. Answers will vary. Anna does not want Sarah to miss the sea. She wants Sarah to be happy on their farm. Anna calls her dream “perfect” because in her dream, the fields had turned to “a sea that gleamed like sun on glass” and Sarah was happy.

Dig Deeper:

11. Jacob was finishing the plowing. Answers will vary. The work needed to be done and someone had to do it. On the farm the family had to do the work at the right time in the right season. Survival depended on working the land.

12. Answers will vary.

13. Our attitude toward work should be that when we are working, no matter who we are working for, we are actually working for the Lord. We should therefore work with all our hearts. We know that we will receive our inheritance from the Lord as a reward for our work, so we are serving Him when we are working.

Chapters 7–9

Vocabulary:

1. whinnying; 2. formally; 3. clever; 4. section; 5. storm; 6. acrid; 7. frightening; 8. circled; 9. scurrying; 10. harsh; 11. peered.

Similes:

1. dandelion heads / soft feathers; 2. three old aunts talking / crows squawking together at dawn; 3. Caleb running behind Sarah / Sarah’s chickens running along behind her; 4. Sarah’s chickens / small red bundles; 5. the sound of hail / the sound of stones tossed against the barn; 6. white hail on the ground / sun shining on glass; 7. the cold winter wind on the prairie / a cold wind blowing off the sea in Maine.

Questions:

1. Matthew and Maggie come to visit. They come to help plow Papa’s new corn field.

2. Maggie brings a sackful of chickens and a box of flowers.

3. Maggie tells Sarah that there are always things to miss no matter where you are.

4. Anna predicts that they would not be for eating. Yes, she is right.

5. Sarah helps Jacob fix the roof.

6. Together they face a prairie storm, gathering the animals into the barn and taking refuge there themselves. They also plow and replant the storm-damaged field together. Descriptions may vary.

7. Caleb wanted Sarah to see the colors of the storm: blue, gray, and green—the same as the colors of the sea when it storms in Maine. Sarah goes to look. She touches Jacob’s shoulder and Jacob puts his arm around her. They stand there together for a long time. This makes Caleb smile because the colors of the sea when it storms—the colors missing from Sarah’s drawing—are also there on the prairie when it storms. Sarah will not miss these colors. He also smiles because he sees affection expressed by Jacob and Sarah for each other.

8. Sarah wants Jacob to teach her to ride a horse and to drive a wagon. She wants to learn these things so she can go to town by herself.

Thinking About the Story:

9. Answers will vary.

10. Answers will vary. Possible examples include: she wears overalls; she argues with Jacob about riding Jack; she insists on helping Jacob fix the roof; she runs back into the storm for her chickens.

11. Caleb is afraid that Sarah wants to go to town to leave them.

12. Answers will vary. While Sarah and Jacob fix the roof, Caleb worries that Sarah wants to go to town to leave them. While Sarah is learning to ride Old Bess, Caleb considers getting sick or tying Sarah up to make her stay. Caleb and Anna go in the barn to cry. Caleb watches while Sarah learns to drive. Caleb spills ashes on the porch and yells “I am