

# Teachers' Guide to *The Gift*

by Marcia S. Freeman

## 1. READING

**Vocabulary:** (Note: the numbers represent the page where each vocabulary word is found.)

oxen - 4	harnesses - 14	perch - 18	dandelion - 24
weary - 4	chirp - 14	beam - 18	melody - 30
loam - 6	twitch - 14	dud - 19	wobbly - 30
parsnips - 8	inspected - 16	spied - 21	warbly - 30
blizzard - 12	nubby - 16	eaves - 22	

Make copies of the vocabulary list and give them to your students before you read the book to them. Have them discuss, in groups, the meanings that they already know. Have them place a check mark next to the words they are not sure of. Repeat after the reading, during which you highlight or emphasize the word and the context. See if they can find the meanings of the words from the usage and context. Have them look up the remaining words.

### History Connection:

*The Gift* is the story of one child's experience during the settlement of the prairie. A homesteading family had to be self-sufficient and cope with hardship, severe weather, and loneliness.

Read other homesteading stories to your students. (See Bibliography)

Have them make lists of:

- things a family made instead of buying
- weather and natural calamities they faced
- means of transportation
- what they did for entertainment
- sources of food

## 2. WRITING

### Comparison:

Show students how to write a comparison paper about the differences and similarities of the life of a child during the homesteading days (the settlement of the mid-west and west) and their life in modern times. (See *Building a Writing Community: A Practical Guide*, by Marcia S. Freeman, Maupin House.)



### Literature Response:

Grades 2, 3, 4, 5: Have pairs of students select one of the responses suggested below, discuss the response, and then write individual entries in their literature response journals or notebooks.

I learned...  
I think that...  
I felt....when...

My question is....  
This book is like....(another book)....because....

### Cause and Effect — Discussion or Writing Task:

#### Cause

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Canary taps on cage.

Canary chirps in response to Mama's chirps.

#### Effect

Mama stops singing.

Relatives can't come.

Animals in the house.

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### Inference and Supporting Details:

Help students formulate statements about the setting or characters. Samples: This story takes place on the prairie. This story takes place on a farm. This story happened in the "old days." Sonja's mother is lonely. Sonja is worried about her mother. Sonja's family is Norwegian.

Next ask them to write what they remember from the story that makes them think their statement or thesis is correct. Next have them, in pairs, find specific examples, both in the pictures and text, (cite the page and the text — phrases or sentences, that prove they are correct.

### Writer's Craft:

**Alliteration:** Lesson in alliteration: both side-by-side examples (*..mitten money...*) and others separated by one or two words (*..plowing and planting...*) and (*..steady while I stood...*). How many examples of alliteration can you hear or find in the story?



### **Strong Verb Writing:**

#### **Verbs in *THE GIFT*:**

*tossed, howled, wrapped, drink, crept, taught, pretended, buried, gaze, trade, longed, hugged, patted, sigh, stare, oiled, greased, packed, spend, pressed, unwrapped, counted, inspected, gathered, touched, taste, tapping, pecked, tipped, tugged, lifted, throw, added, packed, tucked, followed, wrapped, snuggled, neared, spied, unload, saved, hiding, hung, fluttered, plowing, planting, knitting, snapped, whistled, chirped, floated, puffed, burst, bowed, leaping.*

#### **Acting Verbs:**

Asked young students to act out three of their favorite verbs. Have them draw animals or people (stick figures are fine) doing the verb actions they choose. .

#### **Writing With Strong Verbs:**

Model description for your students, both orally and in written form.

Have students look at a picture (photograph) and tell what is happening in the photo. Then write a paragraph about the animals or people in the photo, making the use of verbs the Target. Have students peer conference, giving each other stickers whenever they hear the writer use a verb.

**Onomatopoeia:** Find the examples of onomatopoeia in the story (Pages 6, 10, 18, 26). Read other books with onomatopoeia. Have children make a class list of the spelling of the onomatopoeic words they find. Have student use onomatopoeia as a Target Skill in a short piece. (Use a photographic picture as something to write about.)

#### **Books As Models for Onomatopoeia:**

DeZutter, Hank. *Who Says a Dog Goes Bow-Wow?* NY, NY: Stewart, Tabor, and Chang, 1993

Robinson, Marc. *Cock-a-Doodle-Do!* NY, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1993

Spier, Peter. *Crash! Bang! Boom!* Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1972

## **3. ART (GRADES 2, 3, 4)**

### Painting Sonja's Landscape:

Have the students imagine that they are their family are settlers on the South Dakota plains. The land is flat, yet beautiful and unspoiled. It is the early fall harvest season, and the grasses are turning yellowish brown as the greens begin to fade. The sky is in rich shades of reds and golds with soft bands of violet at the horizon. The garden is abundant with many vegetables in yellows, oranges, and dark greens.

Have the students try their hand at watercolor, the same medium used for *The Gift*. Explain to them that watercolors are transparent so that the colors, when mixed, will flow together and change.

They should begin painting by sketching lightly the shape of the land and any main objects they want to include. They then moisten their watercolors with a few drops of clear water. On a separate sheet of paper, ask them to practice



combining thin washes of a few colors, one on top of the other, while the surface is still wet. You can suggest that they try a blue wash for the sky, overlaid with pink to create a violet effect, for example. By combining yellow with various amounts of blue and a little brown, many shades of green can be made.

When objects closer to the viewer are painted larger and brighter, the artist creates the illusion of depth. Scenes in the distance are smaller and lighter.

Grades K-1:

- Mittens: (include pattern to cut out and staple), color, and collect real ones and hang on line.



- Draw a scene that you liked best.
- How many animals are in the book? Can you draw one of them?
- Compare your clothes to the story character's clothes.

#### 4. GEOGRAPHY (GRADES 3-5)

Research prairie lands of the US, and suggest several places Sonja and her family could have settled and locate them on a US map.



#### 5. MATH (GRADES 3-5)

Over how long a period does the story take place? Seasons, years?

Use a time line or storyboard squares to calculate the time. Cite pages and text that revealed the information you used.

#### 6. VALUES

The main character of *The Gift* is a child who acts out of compassion and love to help her family. Use *The Gift* as a part of class discussions about core American values, such as independence, initiative, generosity, compassion, and responsibility to family.

#### Bibliography:

MacLachlan, Patricia. *Sarah Plain and Tall*. NY, NY: Harper&Row Publishers, 1985

Nixon, Joan Lowery. *The Orphan Train Quartet, In the Face of Danger*. Toronto, NY: Bantam Books, 1988

Sandin, Joan. *The Long Way to New Land*. NY, NY: Knopf, 1982

Winter, Jeanette. *Klara's New World*. NY: Harper & Row, 1981

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