

Sarah, Plain and Tall

Recommended for Grades 2-4

Book Summary: Sarah, Plain and Tall

Caleb and Anna live with their papa in a small house on the prairie. Their mother died giving birth to Caleb and their father hasn't sung since. One day their father tells them that he has put an advertisement in the newspaper for a wife and someone has written in response. She will come and visit to see if they will suit and the children desperately want her to like them more than she loves the sea off the coast of Maine, where she is originally from.

[SPOILER] The children are convinced that Sarah is planning to leave when she insists on learning how to drive the wagon. She drives into town and they don't think she will be back, but she returns. She went into town so she could buy colored pencils to finish her drawing of the sea. She says that she misses the sea, but she would miss them more. Finally, the children can relax, knowing they are going to be a real family.

Author Biography: Sarah MacLachlan

Sarah MacLachlan was born in Cheyenne, Wyoming in 1938. She grew up in Minnesota and was an only child. She had a strong relationship with her parents and an active imagination. She spent much of her childhood reading, often bringing the stories to life by acting them out with her parents.

She earned her B.A. from the University of Connecticut in 1962. She married and had three children. It wasn't until she was thirty-five and married with children that she began to write. She began by writing picture books, often focusing on difficult topics. Later, she began writing books for a slightly older audience. In 1986, Sarah MacLachlan received the Newbery Medal for her most famous book, "Sarah, Plain and Tall." Since winning this prestigious award, she has written several other books, all of which have been highly praised.



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Discussion Questions: Sarah, Plain and Tall

1. Can you imagine being a mail-order bride? Why do you think someone would be willing to do this? What would be the benefits of being a mail-order bride? What would be the negatives? Does anything like this exist today?
2. In the beginning of the story, it seems as though Anna blames Caleb for the death of their mother (p. 5) Why do you think she feels this way? Is it fair of her to feel like this? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think it was important to Anna and Caleb that Sarah sings (p. 10)? What do you think singing signifies to them?
4. Imagine you are Anna and you have spent your life working hard to take care of your brother and father since your mother died. How would you feel about someone new marrying your father? Do you think it is the same today when a parent marries someone new?
5. Sarah brings things from the sea and draws pictures of the sea and other things she misses. Do you think it is good for her to have so many reminders of her old home, or would it be better for her to try to forget it and start over on the prairie? Why do you think so?
6. Sarah's neighbor Maggie says, "There are always things to miss. No matter where you are." (p. 40) Is this true? Why or why not? What would you miss most if you suddenly moved across the country?
7. Sarah's neighbor Maggie also says, "You must have a garden. Wherever you are." Why would having a garden be important? Does a garden symbolize anything other than what it actually is? What? Do you agree with the idea that you must have a garden? Why or why not?
8. Why is it so important to Sarah that she learns to drive the wagon by herself? (p. 44) Why do you think the children don't want her to learn? Are they being fair? Why or why not?
9. When Sarah goes into town, the children think she is leaving them because they weren't perfect enough (p. 54) Are they right? Why or why not? Do children today ever worry about things like that? When? Have you ever worried that you weren't good enough? What did you do about it?



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