

In a time not too long ago,  
There was a prairie,

Where a lonely little boy,  
A grieving young girl,  
And a father too sad to sing  
Were waiting.

And then happiness came from a far-away sea.

Her name was **Sarah**.  
She was not mild mannered.  
She wore a yellow bonnet, and she was **plain and tall**.



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***Sarah, Plain and Tall***  
by Patricia MacLachlan  
***A Novel Teaching Pack***  
by Margaret Whisnant

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# Chapter Summaries

## Chapter 1

- Anna Witting, her younger brother Caleb, and Papa live on the prairie.
- Anna misses her mother, who died after giving birth to Caleb.
- Caleb's smile makes Anna love him when he is three days old.
- Caleb constantly asks questions about their mother and the day he was born.
- Ann and Caleb's mother sang every day, but now Papa doesn't sing any more.
- Papa announces that he has advertised for a wife, like their neighbor Matthew, whose wife Maggie came from Tennessee. Sarah Elizabeth Wheaton of Maine has answered Papa's advertisement.
- Sarah lives with her brother who is about to be married, and she feels a move is necessary. She loves the sea, but she is willing to travel. She is not mild mannered and she has a cat.

## Chapter 2

- There is a get-acquainted exchange of letters between Caleb, Papa, Anna and Sara.
- Caleb reads and rereads Sarah's first letter many times. He wonders if she will come, if she will stay, and if she will think he and Anna are loud and pesky.
- In her letter to Caleb, Sarah writes about her cat Seal and her house by the sea. She confesses that she does not know if she snores.
- Sarah agrees to travel by train to the prairie and stay for a month. She will wear a yellow bonnet. She is plain and tall.
- Sarah wants the children to know that she sings.

## Chapter 3

- Sara arrives in the spring.
- Before he leaves for the day's trip to the train and back to fetch Sarah, Papa brushes his hair, wears a clean blue shirt, and a belt instead of suspenders.
- Anna and Caleb wait impatiently for Sarah. Caleb wonders if she will like them.
- Sarah brings Seal, her cat, which Papa says will be good in the barn, but Sarah says it will be good in the house, too.
- Sarah gives Caleb a shell, and she gives Anna a sea stone.
- The children notice that Sarah is not smiling when she turns and looks out over the plains. They worry that Sarah is already lonely for the sea.

## Chapter 4

- The dogs, Lottie and Nick, love Sarah first. They sleep beside her bed. Seal is a roamer, and no one knows where he sleeps.
- Papa and Anna are shy around Sarah, but Caleb talks to her with ease.
- Sarah and the children pick wildflowers. They talk about the prairie roses and bride's bonnet and the flowers that grow by the sea.
- Sarah makes stew. Papa bakes bread for the family. Sarah nods, "Ayuh," when Papa says the stew is fine.
- After dinner, Sarah tells them about her brother William. At dusk she cuts Caleb's hair on the front steps and scatters his curls for the birds to use for their nests. Caleb is pleased when she says they can look for the nests of curls later.
- Sarah cuts Papa's hair, too. Anna finds him behind the barn tossing pieces of his hair into the wind for the birds.
- Sarah brushes Anna's hair and ties it with a rose velvet ribbon. Anna thinks the hairstyle makes her look like Sarah's daughter.
- As they sit on the porch, Sarah sings a song the children had never heard before. Papa sings as if he had never stopped.
- Sarah announces that she has never touched a sheep, and she wants to see one the next day. Then they talk of seals. Both Caleb and Sarah wish they could touch one right at that moment.

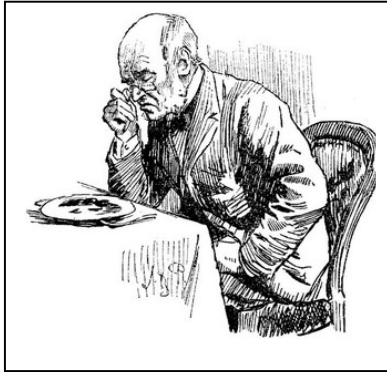

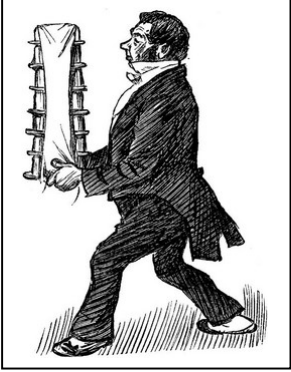
## Vocabulary Definitions

(Arranged According to Story Order)

- hearthstone** Stone used in the construction of the floor of a fireplace, usually extending into the room (p. 1)
- stirred** 1. Moved slightly with irregular motion  
2. Agitated something, as a liquid, by a continuous circular movement (p. 1)
- homely** Not attractive or good looking; plain (p. 5)
- horrid** Dreadful; disagreeable; awful (p. 5)
- wretched** Miserable; distressed; very unhappy (p. 5)
- feisty** Full of spirit; spunky; ill-tempered; cantankerous (p. 7)
- harshly** Done in an unpleasant, cruel, or severe way (p. 7)
- shuffling** Sliding the feet along the ground while walking; intermixing so as to change the position of cards in a deck (p. 8)
- energetic** Full of activity, vigor, or power (p. 9)
- limited** existing within a boundary; confined; restricted; having limits (p. 9)
- pesky** Troublesome; annoying (p. 12)
- peering** looking closely or searching, as in an effort to see clearly; peeping out or appearing slightly; staring (p.15)
- clattered** Made a rattling sound (p. 19)
- roamer** One who moves about aimlessly from place to place (p. 22)
- scallop** 1. A free-swimming mollusk (marine animal) having fan-shaped bivalve shells with a radiating fluted pattern  
2. To edge (cloth, for example) with a series of curved projections  
3. To bake in a casserole with milk or a sauce and often with bread crumbs  
4. To cut (meat) into thin boneless slices (p. 22)
- paddock** A fenced area, usually near a stable, used chiefly for grazing horses.(p. 23)
- coarse** Rough, especially to the touch; homespun; rude; offensive.(p. 28)
- charcoal** 1. A drawing pencil or crayon made from the material obtained by heating or charring wood or other organic matter that contain carbon  
2. The product resulting from heating or charring of wood or other organic matter that contains carbon (p. 29)
- collapsed** Broke down suddenly in strength; fell down (p. 35)
- treaded** 1. Kept the head above water while in an upright position by pumping the legs  
2. Went about on foot; walked (p. 37)
- primly** Properly; precisely; orderly; stiffly and formally (p. 39)
- nasturtium** 1. a plant whose blooms are usually yellow, orange, or red  
2. a brilliant orange-yellow (p. 41)
- portion** 1. A part of a whole  
2. A part that is allotted to a person such as a serving of food (p. 45)
- squall** 1. A brief, sudden violent windstorm, often accompanied by rain or snow  
2. To scream or cry loudly (p. 47)
- pungent** Sharp, biting, or acrid especially to the taste or smell (p. 47)
- eerie** Strange; frightening; mysterious (p. 48)
- scuttling** 1. running or moving with short, hurried movements; scurrying (p. 53)  
2. *Nautical:* The act of sinking a ship by cutting or opening a hole or holes in its hull
- stern** 1. firm, strict, or uncompromising, hard, harsh, or severe in manner; of an unpleasantly serious character; austere  
2. *Nautical:* The rear part of a ship or boat (p. 53)
- dusk** The time of day immediately following sunset; the darkest part of twilight, especially in the evening (p. 56)
- wailed** Made a prolonged, high-pitched sound suggestive of a cry p. 56)

## Dictionary Digs

Dig into your favorite dictionary to find the answers to the following questions some special words from **Sarah, Plain and Tall**. Write the letter of the correct answer in the blank before each number.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Which word can be substituted for *harshly* in the following sentence so that its meaning is not changed? *Mom wagged her finger **harshly** at the sight of my feet on the couch.*  
(A) quickly, (B) sternly, (C) absentmindedly
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The most likely place to find a **hearthstone** is (A) near an entrance door, (B) in a fireplace, (C) on a roof, near a chimney.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. A **antonym** of **pesky** is (A) annoying, (B) vexing, (C) delightful.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Which of the following is something that probably would **not** be described as **homely**?  
(A) a person dressed in old, tattered clothing, (B) a sparkling clean room with new furniture, (C) a dog with a matted coat and crooked ears.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. In addition to *a brief, sudden violent windstorm, often accompanied by rain or snow*, what is another definition of the word **squall**? (A) a long alleyway between buildings, (B) to scream or cry loudly, (C) to erupt in a short burst of energy.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Which of the following cartoons best illustrates the act of **peering**?  
(A)  (B)  (C) 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. **Charcoal** is (A) a substance that is mined from rock and earth, (B) useful as a type of medicine, (C) produced when wood or other matter containing carbon is heated or charred.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. A **synonym** for **erie** is (A) bizarre, (B) delightful, (C) cumbersome.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Which of the following phrases illustrates the correct use of **pungent**? (A) a **pungent** time at the amusement part, (B) a **pungent** ending to the story, (C) the **pungent** aroma of chili peppers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. The animals *most likely* to be kept inside a **paddock** are (A) kangaroos, (B) large dogs, (C) horses.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Which word can be substituted for **horrid** in the following sentence so that it is changed to an opposite meaning? *The band's performance was **horrid**.*  
(A) awesome, (B) disgusting, (C) repugnant
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. The phrase that means the same thing as a **portion of the pie** is (A) an ingredient of the pie, (B) a piece of the pie, (C) an admirer of the pie.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Which of the following is **not** a correct definition of **treaded**? (A) walked, (B) kept the head above water in an upright position by pumping the legs, (C) increased in weight.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. **Dusk** is the time of day (A) immediately following sunset, (B) between midnight and sunrise, (C) immediately after the sunrise.

## Short Answer Questions

### **Chapter 1**

1. Why didn't Anna love Caleb right away when he was born? What caused her to love him?
2. What was Caleb's reason for wanting Anna to remember the songs his mother sang?
3. What was the problem with the old housekeeper?
4. Where did Papa get the idea to advertise for a wife?
5. Where did Sarah live?
6. What was it that Sarah had always loved and why was she now willing to leave it?
7. How did Sarah describe her personality?

### **Chapter 2**

1. Instead of cooking and braiding hair, what did Sarah say she preferred doing?
2. What did Sarah's brother do for a living?
3. Of Papa, Anna, and Caleb, who seemed the most eager for Sarah to come?
4. What description did Sarah send of herself so the family would recognize her?

### **Chapter 3**

1. What did the grass fields look like when Sarah came in the spring?
2. Where were the children when they spotted the dust from the wagon and Sarah's yellow bonnet?
3. How do you know that Seal will get to come into the house?
4. How did Anna and Caleb know that Sarah was already lonely on the day of her arrival?
5. What did Anna wish?

Chapter 1 Pages 3-10

Write the **letter** of the correct answer in the blank before each question.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. What question did Caleb ask about his mother? (A) Was she pretty? (B) Did she sing every day? (C) Why did she leave?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. How many dogs were lying on the hearthstone? (A) two, (B) three, (C) four.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Who named Caleb? (A) his father, (B) his sister, (C) his mother.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Caleb's mother (A) died the day after he was born, (B) left last spring, (C) was killed in a storm three years ago.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. What were the last words Anna's mother said to her? (A) "Isn't he beautiful, Anna?" (B) "See you in the morning." (C) "You did a good job, Anna."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Caleb and Anna lived (A) in California, (B) in the mountains, (C) on the prairie.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. When this story began, (A) summer was only a week away, (B) winter was almost over, (C) it was a glorious spring day.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. After Anna's mother died, Papa didn't (A) sing any more, (B) want any relatives around, (C) want to keep Caleb.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. How long did it take Anna to love Caleb? (A) a year, (B) months, (C) three days.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. What was it about Caleb that made Anna love him? (A) his resemblance to their mother, (B) his smile, (C) his small size.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Caleb thought he might remember his mother if Anna (A) would tell him all her memories, (B) could remember the songs she sang, (C) would tell him more about the day he was born.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Jack was (A) Papa's brother, (B) one of the dogs, (C) Papa's horse.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. What food did the family eat? (A) stew, (B) rabbit, (C) potato soup.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. Caleb asked his father (A) why he didn't sing any more, (B) what he did in town, (C) what his mother looked like.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. The family once had a housekeeper who (A) snored and let the fire go out, (B) didn't like the dogs, (C) never smiled.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. Papa told Anna and Caleb he had advertised for (A) a housekeeper, (B) a caretaker, (C) a wife.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. Sarah Elizabeth Wheaton was from (A) Tennessee, (B) Maine, (C) Kansas.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. Which of the following was **not** a fact about Sarah? (A) She had never been married. (B) She didn't like cats. (C) She was not mild mannered.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. Why did Sarah want to leave Maine? (A) She didn't like the sea. (B) Her brother made her work too hard. (C) Her brother, with whom she lived, was getting married.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. Anna and Caleb wanted to ask Sarah (A) if she sang, (B) if she liked children, (C) if she liked dogs.



# Sarah, Plain and Tall

By Patricia MacLachlan

## Whole Book Test

Write the **letter** of the correct answer in the blank before each question.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Caleb and Anna's mother (A) disappeared in a storm, (B) died the day after Caleb was born, (C) left to go back to her old home.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Caleb and Anna's mother (A) sang every day, (B) was not very strong, (C) told fantastic stories.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Sarah was from (A) Tennessee, (B) Maine, (C) California.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Caleb, Anna, and Papa lived (A) in the mountains of Tennessee, (B) near a desert, (C) on the prairie.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Sarah wanted to leave her brother's house because (A) he was getting married, (B) he was cruel to her, (C) he was planning to sell it and move.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Caleb and Anna had two pet (A) horses, (B) sheep, (C) dogs.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. What was the name of Sarah's cat? (A) Sandy, (B) Seal, (C) Dune.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. What color was Sarah's bonnet? (A) red, (B) yellow, (C) blue.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. How did Papa find Sarah? (A) He advertised in newspapers for a wife. (B) Maggie and Matthew introduced them. (C) She had relatives in town.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. What gift did Sarah bring to Caleb and Anna? (A) books, (B) songs, (C) sea shells.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Who loved Sarah first? (A) Papa, (B) the dogs, (C) Anna.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Who talked to Sarah from morning till night? (A) Papa, (B) Caleb, (C) Anna.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. What did Sarah do with Caleb's curls (A) gave them to the birds to use in nest building, (B) saved them, (C) wove them into a blanket.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. The first song that Sarah sang was about (A) summer, (B) the sea, (C) a cat.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. The thing Sarah missed the most was (A) William, (B) her aunts, (C) the sea.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. Sarah really loved (A) windy days, (B) cooking, (C) animals.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. Which of the following did Sarah **not** do with Papa? (A) fix the roof, (B) plow, (C) go into town.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. What did Sarah send to her brother in Maine? (A) recipes, (B) drawings, (C) Caleb's curls.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. Papa made a dune for Sarah from a ladder and (A) a mound of hay covered with canvas, (B) a grassy hill, (C) the barn roof.

# Think, Write, Create

## Chapter Activities

### Chapter 1

Which of the following words do you think **best** describes the way Anna treated her little brother?  
*loving      sympathetic      patient      affectionate*

- Use Anna's words and behaviors to support your choice.
- In what way had Anna become the "mother" in her family?
  
- How do you know that Papa missed Anna and Caleb's mother?
- What proof do you have that he loved Anna and Caleb?

By the time he told Anna and Caleb about the letter from Sarah, Papa had already advertised in the newspapers for a wife.

- Write the advertisement that you think Papa put in the newspapers. Try to imagine the things that attracted Sarah's attention as you compose Papa's words. (See **Graphic Organizer #1**)

In her first letter, Sarah gave several clues that she was ready for a new life. For example, she had never been married, though she had been asked.

- Imagine what the story behind these words might have been and write an explanation.
- Explain how Sarah reveals the following things about herself

*She tells the truth.  
She is considerate.  
She is a responsible person.  
She will not be pushed around.  
She loves animals.*

---

### Chapter 2

Sara's favorite colors were blue and gray and green—the colors of the sea. What are your three favorite colors? Use the combined set of colors to create a piece of art. You may use paper, colored pencils, paint, crayons—whatever you like best.

In her letter to Caleb, Sarah answered lots of questions. Write the letter that you think she had received from Caleb. (See **Graphic Organizer #2**)

Find evidence in the chapter to prove that Caleb really wanted Sarah to come. Can you explain why he seemed to be more eager for a mother than Anna?

## Think, Write, Create

### Whole Book Activities

In her last letter before she began her journey to meet Papa, Anna, and Caleb, Sarah described her appearance as “plain and tall.” Beginning with the color of the bonnet she wore, explain how Sarah proved throughout the story that she definitely was not “plain” in the personality department.

---

Papa complimented Sarah on her fine stew, and he allowed her to cut his hair, which he tossed into the wind for the birds as Sarah had done with Caleb’s curls. Then he sang with her as if he had never stopped singing.

These are only three of the story clues that Papa is falling in love with Sarah. Find at least **four** more bits of evidence to prove that Sarah made Papa happy, and he wanted her to stay—just like Anna and Caleb. Use your information to write a composition with the title **Papa Loves Sarah**.

---

Sarah loved the sea. Her first word was *dune*, and her cat was named *Seal*.

- What did Sarah find with Papa, Anna, and Caleb that made her love them more than the sea?
  - Could Sarah have found exactly the same thing if she had stayed in Maine? Explain your answer.
- 

- Find **four** examples from the story to prove that Sarah was an adult tomboy.
  - Do you think Papa approved? How do you know?
- 

Sarah arrived in the spring with a promise to stay for a month to see how things were. Caleb was the first to notice—when Sarah picked flowers to dry so they would last all winter long—that she wanted to stay longer than a month. What are some other things that Sarah did or said that meant she intended to stay?

---

It was color that was missing from Sarah’s drawing of the fields.

- How was the color missing from Sarah’s life before she found Papa, Anna, and Caleb?
  - Assign a color for each of the three people in Sarah’s new family. For example: Papa could be *red*, to represent the heart that loved Sarah and the summer roses that he picked for her.
  - What color would you assign to Sarah?
  - Use all the colors you chose in a design. Write a composition to explain your design and give both of them a name.
- 

Papa said “*Sarah is Sarah. She does things her way, you know.*” Choose **four** words from the list below that you think best fit Sarah. Explain why you chose each one. Use things she did or said in the story to support your choices.

*loving*  
*intelligent*  
*sensitive*

*playful*  
*athletic*  
*friendly*

*independent*  
*adventuresome*  
*resourceful*

*creative*  
*considerate*  
*nurturing*

*energetic*  
*stubborn*  
*funny*

## Papa's Advertisement

In the center space write ***Papa's Advertisement for a Wife***  
On the four lines radiating from the oval write the following subtopics:

*Himself and the Children*  
*The House and Farm*  
*The Prairie*  
*What I'm Looking for*

In the ovals, list the things you think Papa might have said about each of the four subtopics.  
Write Papa's advertisement for a wife.