

Books with Class

In this section, I'll share books with many uses in the classroom. This month's choice, even though it's a picture book, can be used at any grade level from first grade through the middle grades and beyond. I hope you'll like it!

The Journey by Sarah Steward with illustrations by David Small (2001, Farrar Straus Giroux, New York)

The Journey, written by Sarah Stewart and beautifully illustrated by David Small, is the story of a young Amish girl's first visit to the big city. Hannah's journey leads her to a world very different from her own. Written entirely as a journal, the book has unique features that juxtapose the simple Amish lifestyle to the fast-paced big city life of Chicago. Each double-page spread throughout the book includes illustrations of the big city with Hannah's diary entry sharing her discoveries, followed by another double-page spread, starkly contrasting the Amish way of life.

Here are some ways you might consider using this book:

Self-Selected Reading

This will make a great read-aloud for your class at every grade level. The students will no doubt enjoy the character and the pictures that speak as loudly as the words of this story. You may also want to include it in your classroom library collection for students to read.

Guided Reading

The book allows for a number of rich mini-lessons:

Compare and contrast - This would be the most obvious of skills to teach using this book. The choices are numerous: Amish lifestyle/traditional lifestyle; extrinsic and intrinsic values; cultures; urban/rural; transportation of rural and urban settings; styles; etc. This would be an ideal lesson to use a Venn diagram, showing visually how issues and ideas are alike and different. After a mini-lesson on this skill, you might have cooperative groups explore different aspects

of the story to gather the evidence they can to compare and contrast. Then, after the reading and information gathering, have the groups share their findings back with the whole group.

Making Inferences - The silence in this book is as powerful as the words! The double-page spreads that show the Amish way of life are always wordless. Have students infer what the illustrator is "saying" on these pages. Also, study the artwork to see the clever use of color and technique to further emphasize the comparisons.

Theme - Use what is learned through the other two skills of making inferences and compare/contrast to figure out exactly what the author's message is. Patricia MacLaughlin once wrote a story about living in different places and that we usually love best what we know first whether that might be the desert, the mountains, the beach, the plains. Explore with students whether they feel that might be true in this story.

Making Connections - Lead students to make connections between this story and visits or journeys they've made that took them to places very different from their homes. What was it like?

Character Development - Teach students how in so few words the author of this story is able to develop her character. Make three columns on the chalkboard: 1) Things Hannah says; 2) Things Hannah does; 3) What we learned from other characters. Give students three different colors of sticky notes. Have them read the selection (or have them listen carefully and make notes on the sticky notes) to mark the evidence that they find to match with one of these headings. As closure, have the students come to the board and share briefly their piece of evidence as they attach their sticky note under the correct column.

**At upper grades, remember that using a short tradebook can be the ideal way to introduce a skill and have a quick chance to apply it before transferring the use and application to a more difficult context.

Writing Block

Voice - Hannah's diary has a clear voice that reveals much about this young girl. Explore with students what word choices and expressions establish this voice. Explain to students that voice is like a "personality" in writing.

Inference/Creative Writing - Mix students' understanding of inferences in the book with expressing those inferences in writing. For the wordless pages of the book, have students continue Hannah's diary to explain her way of life. Can students continue the voice? Are they perceptive about the illustrator's clues?

Journal Writing - Hannah's diary is a good model of journal writing. Use this model as your mini-lesson to show how journals are an opportunity to reflect on life.

I sincerely hope you'll love this book as much as I do!