



TEACHER'S PET PUBLICATIONS

LITPLAN TEACHER PACK™

for

Letter from Rifka

based on the book by
Karen Hesse

Written by
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A FEW NOTES ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karen Hesse

HESSE, Karen (August 29, 1952–) Karen Hesse was born and grew up in Baltimore, Maryland. As a child, she often wrote in her journals. Her fifth grade teacher encouraged her writing and gave Hesse the idea that she could one day become a professional writer. In 1975 she graduated from the University of Maryland. While there, she studied theater, anthropology, psychology, and English.

In 1976 Hesse and her husband settled in Brattleboro, Vermont, where they still live. She joined a writing group and had various jobs including waitress, nanny, librarian, book reviewer, and proofreader. She also raised two daughters.

Hesse's books have won many awards. Her first book, *Wish on a Unicorn*, was published in 1991 and The Hungry Mind Review selected it as a Children's Book of Distinction. *Letters from Rifka*, her second book, won a Christopher Medal and was chosen by the American Library Association as a Best Book for Young Adults. It was also named an ALA Notable Children's Book and a School Library Journal Best Book of the Year. *Sable* was also chosen as a School Library Journal Best Book of the Year. *Phoenix Rising* was cited as an ALA Best Book for Young Adults, an ALA Notable Children's Book, and an SLJ Best Book. *The Music of Dolphins* was chosen as an ALA Best Book for Young Adults. *Out of the Dust* won the Newbery Medal and the Scott O'Dell Award in 1998, and was also named an ALA Best Book for Young Adults, an ALA Notable Children's Book. It won honors from Publishers Weekly, the School-Library Journal, and Booklist.

Hesse credits her writers group for encouraging her to expand a draft of a picture book into the full-length novel *Out of the Dust*. She does extensive research for all of her books. She has been a member and leader of the Southern Vermont chapter of the Society of Children's Writers and Illustrators.

In 2002 Hesse received the prestigious MacArthur Fellowship award, which is often called "the genius award." According to the School and Library Journal, the Foundation praised Hesse for "expanding the possibilities of literature for children and young adults." Her books have been translated into Spanish, French, and German.

List of Hesse's Books:

- *Wish on a Unicorn*, 1991
- *Letters from Rifka*, 1992
- *Lavender* 1993
- *Poppy's Chair*, 1993
- *Lester's Dog*, 1993
- *Phoenix Rising*, 1994
- *Sable*, 1994
- *A Time of Angels*, 1995
- *The Music of Dolphins*, 1996
- *Out of the Dust*, 1997
- *Just Juice*, 1998
- *Come On, Rain!* 1999
- *A Time of Angels*, 2000
- *Witness*, 2001
- *Young Nick's Head*, 2001
- *A Civil War Diary of Amelia Martin*, 2002
- *Stowaway*, 2003
- *Aleutian Sparrow*, 2003
- *The Cats in Krasinski Square*, 2004

INTRODUCTION *Letters from Rifka*

This unit has been designed to develop students' reading, writing, thinking, listening, and speaking skills through exercises and activities related to *Letters from Rifka* by Karen Hesse. It includes twenty lessons, supported by extra resource materials.

The **introductory lesson** introduces students to *Letters from Rifka*. Following the introductory activity, students are given an explanation of how the activity relates to the book they are about to read. Following the transition, students are given the materials they will be using during the unit. They are also introduced to the nonfiction assignment. At the end of the lesson, students begin the pre-reading work for the first reading assignment.

The **reading assignments** are approximately 25 pages each; some are a little shorter while others are a little longer. Students have approximately 15 minutes of pre-reading work to do prior to each reading assignment. This pre-reading work involves reviewing the study questions for the assignment and doing some vocabulary work for 9 to 10 vocabulary words they will encounter in their reading.

The **study guide questions** are fact-based questions; students can find the answers to these questions right in the text. These questions come in two formats: short answer or multiple choice. The best use of these materials is probably to use the short answer version of the questions as study guides for students (since answers will be more complete), and to use the multiple-choice version for occasional quizzes. It might be a good idea to make transparencies of your answer keys for the overhead projector.

The **vocabulary work** is intended to enrich students' vocabularies as well as to aid in the students' understanding of the book. Prior to each reading assignment, students will complete a two-part worksheet for approximately 9 to 10 vocabulary words in the upcoming reading assignment. Part I focuses on students' use of general knowledge and contextual clues by giving the sentence in which the word appears in the text. Students are then to write down what they think the words mean based on the words' usage. Part II gives students dictionary definitions of the words and has them match the words to the correct definitions based on the words' contextual usage. Students should then have an understanding of the words when they meet them in the text.

After each reading assignment, students will go back and formulate answers for the study guide questions. Discussion of these questions serves as a review of the most important events and ideas presented in the reading assignments.

After students complete extra discussion questions, there is a vocabulary review lesson which pulls together all of the separate vocabulary lists for the reading assignments and gives students a review of all of the words they have studied.

Following the reading of the book, a lesson is devoted to the **extra discussion questions/writing assignments**. These questions focus on interpretation, critical analysis and personal response, employing a variety of thinking skills and adding to the students' understanding of the novel. These questions are done as a **group activity**.

Using the information they have acquired so far through individual work and class discussions, students get together to further examine the text and to brainstorm ideas relating to the themes of the novel.

The group activity is followed by a **reports and discussion** session in which the groups share their ideas about the book with the entire class; thus, the entire class gets exposed to many different ideas regarding the themes and events of the book.

There are **three writing assignments** in this unit, each with the purpose of informing, persuading, or having students express personal opinions. The first assignment is to **express personal opinions**. Students write from the point of view of Rifka and explain why she wants to go to America. The second writing assignment is to **inform**. Students write a series of travel tips to share with other students. The third writing assignment is to **persuade**. Students write from the point of view of Rifka and persuade someone back home to immigrate to America.

In addition, there is a **nonfiction reading assignment**. Students are required to read a piece of nonfiction related in some way to *Letters from Rifka*. After reading their nonfiction pieces, students will fill out a worksheet on which they answer questions regarding facts, interpretation, criticism, and personal opinions. During one class period, students make oral presentations about the nonfiction pieces they have read. This not only exposes all students to a wealth of information; it also gives students the opportunity to practice public speaking.

The **review lesson** pulls together all of the aspects of the unit. The teacher is given four or five choices of activities or games to use which all serve the same basic function of reviewing all of the information presented in the unit.

The **unit test** comes in two formats: all multiple choice matching true/false or with a mixture of matching, short answer, and composition. As a convenience, two different tests for each format have been included.

There are additional **support materials** included with this unit. The **resource materials sections** include suggestions for an in-class library, crossword and word search puzzles related to the novel, and extra vocabulary worksheets. There is a list of **bulletin board ideas** which gives the teacher suggestions for bulletin boards to go along with this unit. In addition, there is a list of extra class activities the teacher could choose from to enhance the unit or as a substitution for an exercise the teacher might feel is inappropriate for his/her class. Answer keys are located directly after the reproducible student materials throughout the unit.

UNIT PLAN ADAPTATIONS – *Letters from Rifka*

Block Schedule

Depending on the length of your class periods, and the frequency with which the class meets, you may wish to choose one of the following options:

- Complete two of the daily lessons in one class period.
- Have students complete all reading and writing activities in class.
- Assign all reading to be completed out of class, and concentrate on the worksheets and discussions in class.
- Assign the projects from the daily lessons at the beginning of the unit, and allow time each day for students to work on them.
- Use some of the Unit and Vocabulary Resource activities during every class.

Gifted & Talented / Advanced Classes

- Emphasize the projects and the extra discussion questions.
- Have students complete all of the writing activities.
- Assign the reading to be completed out of class and focus on the discussions in class.
- Encourage students to develop their own questions.

ESL / ELD

- Assign a partner to help the student read the text aloud.
- Tape record the text and have the student listen and follow along in the text.
- Give the student the study guide worksheets to use as they read.
- Provide pictures and demonstrations to explain difficult vocabulary words and concepts.
- Conduct guided reading lessons, asking students to stop frequently and explain what they have read.
- Show the movie version of the novel and help students identify characters and events, and relate the action in their own words. You may want to show the movie without the sound and explain the actions in your own words.

UNIT OBJECTIVES – *Letters from Rifka*

1. Through reading *Letters from Rifka* students will analyze characters and their situations to better understand the themes of the novel.
2. Students will analyze the setting and discuss its importance in the novel.
3. Students will demonstrate their understanding of the text on four levels: factual, interpretive, critical, and personal.
4. Students will identify the sequence markers in the novel and discuss the importance of sequence in the novel.
5. Students will practice reading aloud and silently to improve their skills in each area.
6. Students will enrich their vocabularies and improve their understanding of the novel through the vocabulary lessons prepared for use in conjunction with it.
7. Students will answer questions to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the main events and characters in *Letters from Rifka*.
8. Students will practice writing through a variety of writing assignments.
9. The writing assignments in this are geared to several purposes:
 - a. To check the students' reading comprehension
 - b. To make students think about the ideas presented by the novel
 - c. To make students put those ideas into perspective
 - d. To encourage critical and logical thinking
 - e. To provide the opportunity to practice good grammar and improve students' use of the English language.
10. Students will read aloud, report, and participate in large and small group discussions to improve their public speaking and personal interaction skills.

READING ASSIGNMENT SHEET *Letters from Rifka*

Date Assigned	Reading Assignment	Completion Date
	September 2, 1919, Russia through October 5, 1919, Motziv, Poland	
	November 3, 1919, Motziv, Poland through December 1, 1919, Warsaw, Poland	
	February 25, 1920, Antwerp, Belgium through September 14, 1920, Antwerp, Belgium	
	September 16, 1920, Somewhere on the Atlantic Ocean through October 7, 1920, Ellis Island	
	October 9, 1920, Ellis Island through October 11, 1920, Ellis Island	
	October 14, 1920, Ellis Island through October 22, 1920, Ellis Island	

WRITING ASSIGNMENT LOG *Letters from Rifka*

Date Assigned	Writing Assignment	Completion Date
	Writing Assignment 1	
	Writing Assignment 2	
	Writing Assignment 3	
	Non-fiction Assignment	

UNIT OUTLINE *Letters from Rifka*

1	2	3	4	5
Introduction	PVR Sept. 2, 1919, through Oct. 5, 1919 Nonfiction Assignment	Study?? Sept. 2, 1919, through Oct. 5, 1919 PVR Nov 3, 1919, through Dec. 1, 1919	Study?? Nov 3, 1919, through Dec. 1, 1919 Minilesson: Character Traits	Oral Reading Evaluation
6	7	8	9	10
Writing Assignment #1 Personal Opinion	PVR Study?? Feb. 25, 1920, through Sept. 14, 1920, Minilesson: Setting	PVR Study?? Sept. 16, 1920, through Oct. 7, 1920	Quiz Sept. 2, 1919 through Oct. 7, 1920 Writing Conference	PVR Oct. 9, 1920, through Oct. 11, 1920
11	12	13	14	15
Study?? Oct. 9, 1920, through Oct. 11, 1920 Minilesson: Sequence	Writing Assignment #2 Inform	PVR Study?? Oct. 14, 1920, through Oct. 22, 1920	Extra Writing/Discussion Questions	Quotations
16	17	18	19	20
Writing Assignment #3 Persuade	Vocabulary Review	Unit Review	Test	Nonfiction Assignment

Key: P = Preview Study Questions V=Vocabulary Work R= Read

LESSON ONE

Objectives

1. To introduce the *Letters from Rifka* unit
2. To distribute books, study guides and other related materials
3. To give students background information about *Letters from Rifka*

Activity #1

A&E Home Video has a Multimedia Classroom American History Series which has one volume on Ellis Island. The DVD has an accompanying Interactive Lesson Plan CD-ROM with transcripts of the DVD segments, related questions for each segment, and activity ideas for each segment. If you choose to acquire and show the DVD as background information, you will need more than one class period. The whole DVD takes a couple of hours to see, and if you decide to use any of the materials that accompany the DVD, it will take even longer. It is, however, in this editor's opinion, well worth the time and money spent because the DVD is right on point with many of the events, comments, and issues presented in *Letters from Rifka*. To purchase the Ellis Island video, go to www.history.com click on STORE and type in Ellis Island in the search field.

Activity #2

Distribute books, study guides, and reading assignments. Explain in detail how students are to use these materials.

Study Guides Students should read the study guide questions for each reading assignment prior to beginning the reading assignment to get a feeling for what events and ideas are important in the section they are about to read. After reading the section, students will (as a class or individually) answer the questions to review the important events and ideas from that section of the book. Students should keep the study guides as study materials for the unit test.

Vocabulary Prior to each a reading assignment, students will do vocabulary work related to the section of the book they are about to read. Following the completion of the reading of the book, there will be a vocabulary review of all the words used in the vocabulary assignments. Students should keep their vocabulary work as study materials for the unit test.

Reading Assignment Sheet You need to fill in the reading assignment sheet to let students know by when their reading has to be completed. You can either write the assignment sheet up on a side blackboard or bulletin board and leave it there for students to see each day, or you can "ditto" copies for each student to have. In either case, you should advise students to become very familiar with the reading assignments so they know what is expected of them.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT #1 *Letters from Rifka*
Writing to Express a Personal Opinion

PROMPT

Have students reread the chapter that is titled “November 27, 1919 en route to Warsaw.” Point out the quote by the Polish peasant girl who talked with Rifka: *She said, “Why would you want to go to America? You can do everything you want right here. I would never leave Poland.”* Rifka did not respond to the girl’s question. Imagine that you are an immigrant coming to America. How would you answer the question?

PREWRITING

Remember that a personal opinion piece should include your thoughts and feelings. As often as possible, support these thoughts and feelings with factual evidence or examples. Make a list of reasons that Rifka or another immigrant might have for leaving their home country and coming to America. Organize the list starting with the most important or most convincing reasons first, and proceeding to the least important reason. You may want to make a concept web with the word *America* in the center. List positive words to describe America. You may also want to do some research on one or more foreign countries so that you have facts to use to compare that country with America.

DRAFTING

You will probably want to use the first person point of view. Refer to the concept web you developed as you write. Write your first draft. Check to make sure you are including your opinion. Use as many descriptive words and images as you can. You may want to use a thesaurus to help you get a variety of words and their exact meanings.

PEER CONFERENCING/REVISING

When you finish the rough draft of your personal opinion piece, ask another student to read it. After reading your rough draft, the student should tell you what he/she liked best about your work, which parts were difficult to understand, and ways in which your work could be improved. Reread your text considering your critic’s comments, and make the revisions you think are necessary.

PROOFREADING/EDITING

Do a final proofreading of your opinion piece, double checking your grammar, spelling, organization, and the clarity of your ideas. Turn the piece into your teacher for grading. Follow your teacher’s guidelines for completing the final draft of your piece.

FINAL DRAFT

Follow your teacher’s directions for making a final copy of your paper.