



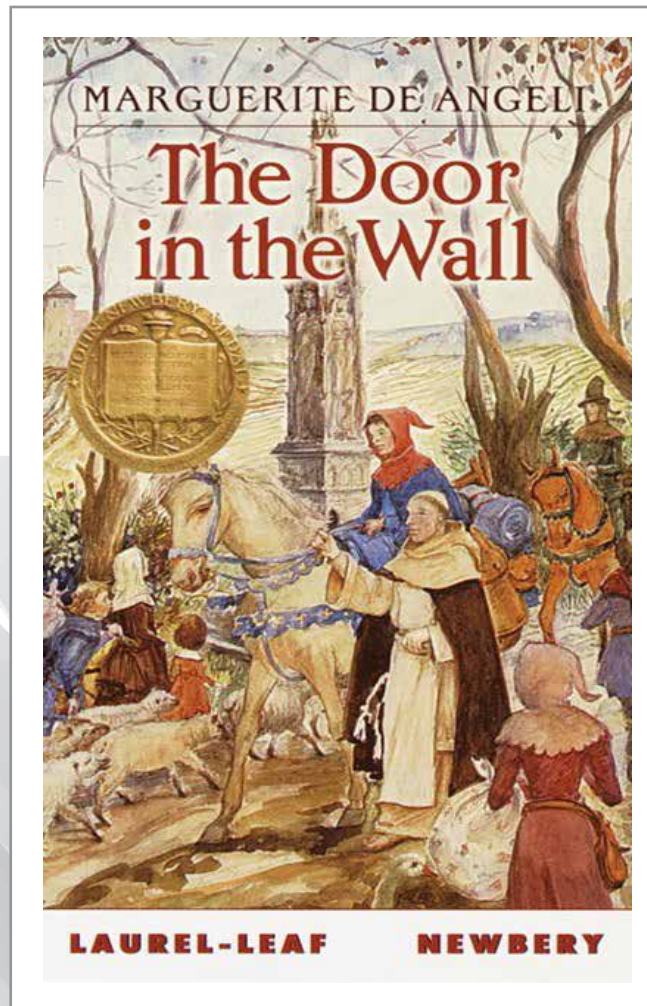
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Door in the Wall

Marguerite De Angeli



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Door in the Wall

Marguerite De Angeli

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Brainstorming, classifying
and categorizing, evaluating,
analyzing details

Comprehension

Predicting, sequencing,
decision-making, using
reference materials,
inference

Vocabulary

Antonyms/synonyms, word
maps, context

Writing

Narrative, schedule, chart-
report, chapter titles, letter,
dialogue, descriptive

Listening/Speaking

Participation in discussions,
participation in dramatic
activities

Literary Elements

Character, setting, plot
development, symbol

Summary

In this 1949 Newbery Medal winner, 10-year-old Robin is separated from his parents for several months. During this time, he does a lot of growing up as he copes with a new handicap, suffers physical and emotional hardship, and risks death to save his people from the enemy.

Robin's father goes off to the Scottish wars and his mother leaves to be the Queen's lady-in-waiting. Dame Ellen is supposed to care for Robin until John-the-Fletcher arrives, but the plan falls apart unbeknownst to Robin's parents.

Robin falls ill and Dame Ellen faithfully tends him for awhile despite his peevishness; fortunately it is not the deadly plague which afflicts many around him, but unfortunately Dame Ellen is soon stricken, herself. Brother Luke, a kind wandering friar, hears that Dame Ellen has been taken of the plague, and goes to Robin. Since Robin can no longer walk, Brother Luke plants him on a horse and supports him during the ride to St. Mark's. A few months later finds Robin quite settled in the monastery routine. He enjoys listening to the chanting of the monks and watching the visiting pilgrims, knights, merchants, and minstrels. One day Brother Luke sets up a bench and brings Robin a knife and piece of pine for whittling. When the little boat is finished, Brother Luke brings him some pieces of walnut and suggests making a cross. Then he takes Robin to the scriptorium, where records, poems, and psalteries are copied and promises to teach Robin to read and write. Stopping at the chapel on the way back, Robin and Brother Luke meet a cheerful, lame boy maneuvering easily on crutches who greets Robin as "Brother Crookshanks"—to Robin's consternation. Brother Luke scolds the boy, Geoffrey Atte-Water, saying that Robin's legs will one day be as good as his. Spring comes, and Brother Luke takes Robin to the garden, where Brother Matthew shows him how to use some better cutting tools. Unfortunately, the chisel slips and breaks the cross, bringing an angry outburst from Robin. Seeing the boy's frustration, Brother Luke explains that they shall divide the days into teaching Robin's mind and teaching his hands, so that he will be occupied, and not get so easily discouraged.

Summer comes and Robin whittles a small doll for a poor little girl who has been hanging onto him. On an outing with Brother Luke one day, Robin sees Geoffrey swimming, and agrees with Brother Luke that he can learn to swim, which he does daily from that point on—rain or shine. He makes friends with the boys, whittling a boat for each, and playing outdoor games with them. After much careful work, he makes himself some crutches and learns to use them. A messenger, John-go-in-the-Wynd comes with a letter from Robin's father, who asks that Brother Luke and John accompany Robin on a journey to Shropshire. Preparations are made and the three set out, sharing one horse between them, only to get lost on their way to the White Swan. To Robin's great joy, they consequently sleep under the stars. The next night brings worse calamity; they stop at a run-down inn where thieves plot to steal their possessions. Luckily Robin overhears them, and wakes the others, who escape out the back window in the nick of time with the would-be-robbers in hot pursuit.

The fourth day finds them at Oxford, surrounded by poor students in multicolored gowns, where they spend the night. The next day they stop at a fair, where Robin is delighted by the food, tournaments, wrestling, bear-baiting, and Punch and Judy (puppet) show—and spend the night at an abbey. The next night they are welcomed into the cottage of a woodman, grateful to John for the help the latter had previously rendered when the woodcutter once injured himself.

Finally they arrive at the Castle Lindsay where they are welcomed by Sir Peter, whom Robin is supposed to serve as page. John stays for a time while Robin finds his way about and learns his routine (helping the boys cut their meat, learning to use the bow-and-arrow, etc.). Robin makes a new friend—D’Ath, the hound, and begins making a wooden harp, with John’s help. November arrives and John decides it is time to leave to pay a visit to his mother, first describing the route to Robin. Meanwhile, those in the castle grow increasingly ill at ease; the Welsh are threatening to attack. Indeed, word comes that the Welsh are hammering at the town gate and have killed the watchman. The town is taken; fog enshrouds the castle; Robin learns patience as he works on his harp; food and water dwindle.

Finally Robin decides to embark on a bold mission. Telling only Brother Luke and a fellow page, Robin slips out before dawn to seek help from Sir Fitzhugh. He is almost captured by a Welsh guard, who luckily mistakes him for a poor shepherd. Finally Robin finds the house of John-go-in-the-Wynd’s mother; John and Robin enter the town through a shoemaker’s house, after John gives the secret harp-tune signal. Passing through the shoemaker’s garden, they make their way to the church, where they wait an hour, then sound the alarm by ringing the great bell. Sir Hugh’s men enter, take the town from the Welsh, and march the invaders out of town.

Sir Peter praises Robin and rewards John with a holding of land and portion of sheep. The days pass, winter comes, and preparations are made for Christmas. Then, at last, the King and his company arrive—including Robin’s mother and father! There is a happy reunion, after which Robin is summoned before the King, who presents “Sir Robin” with a jeweled collar in token of his grateful thanks for Robin’s brave actions. In return, Robin gets out his harp and offers a song of Christmas. In response to Robin’s anxious question, his parents tell him that they don’t care about his misshapen legs, but are just happy that all can return home to London together—with Brother Luke as Robin’s tutor—after the Feast of Christmas.

Prior to Reading

You may wish to choose one or more of the following prereading discussion questions/activities. Each is designed to help students draw from their store of background knowledge about the events and themes they will meet in the story they are about to read.

Pre-reading Discussion Questions

You may elicit or provide the following background information:

On The Middle Ages: Why was the Middle Ages also known as the “Dark Ages”? Who was Charlemagne? Do you think he should have been called Charles the Great? Why or why not? What were “pilgrimages”? What did people wear? eat? play?

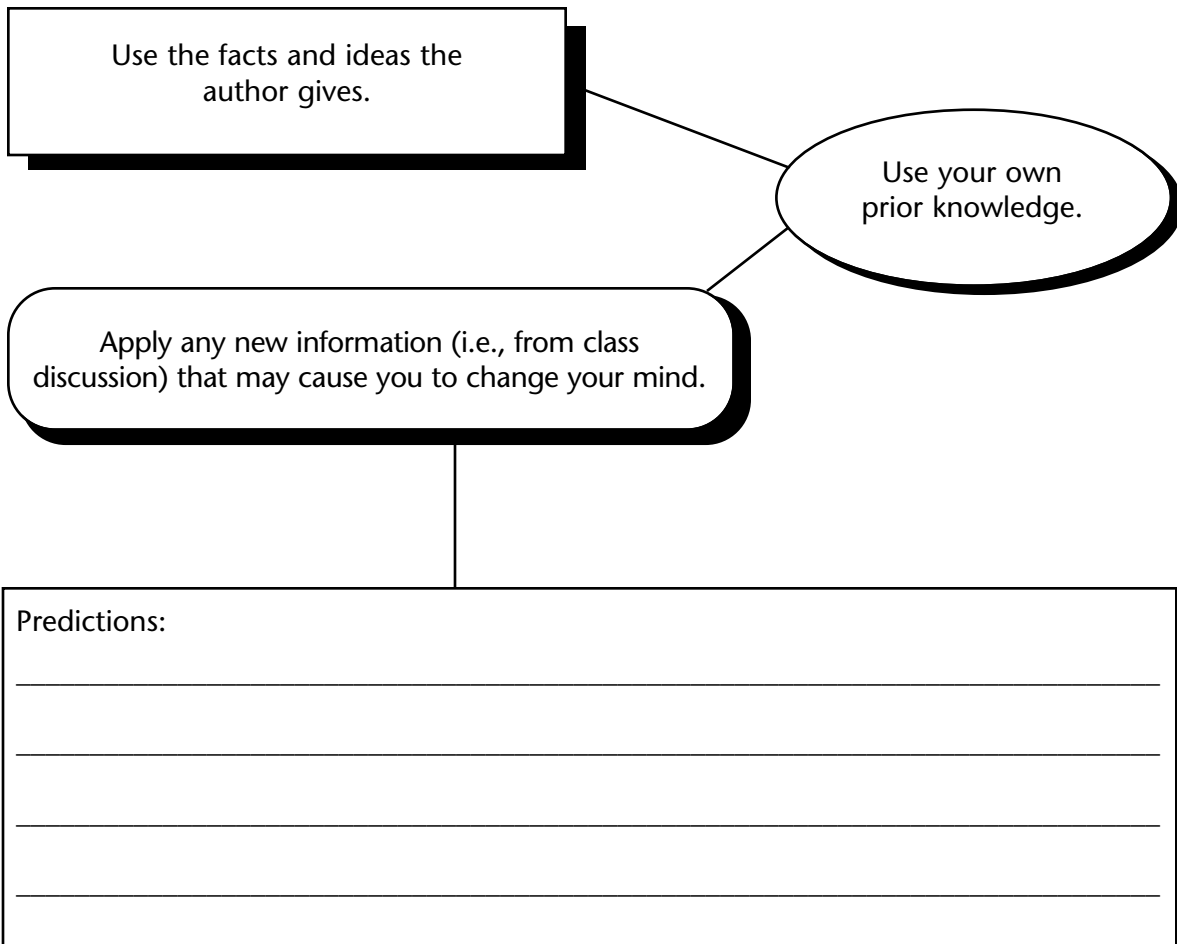
On Being Disabled: What problems would you have if you lost the use of your legs? How would your difficulties be different from those of someone who had never been able to walk? How could you compensate in today’s world? Without all the high-tech devices available in today’s world, how would a person compensate for the loss of use of his or her legs?

Using Predictions

We all make predictions as we read—little guesses about what will happen next, how a conflict will be resolved, which details will be important to the plot, which details will help fill in our sense of a character. Students should be encouraged to predict, to make sensible guesses as they read the novel.

As students work on their predictions, these discussion questions can be used to guide them: What are some of the ways to predict? What is the process of a sophisticated reader's thinking and predicting? What clues does an author give to help us make predictions? Why are some predictions more likely to be accurate than others?

Create a chart for recording predictions. This could be either an individual or class activity. As each subsequent chapter is discussed, students can review and correct their previous predictions about plot and characters as necessary.



Chapter 9, Pages 86-103

Vocabulary

catapulting (86)
lancers (99)
pikestaff (103)

garrison (87)
drovers (99)
windlass (103)

sally port (90)
cumber (99)

benedicite (91)
priory (100)

Vocabulary Activity

Complete each sentence in a way that shows you understand the meaning of the underlined word.

1. We need food because the garrison _____
2. The monk said, "Benedicite _____
3. The company of lancers _____
4. When you get to the priory _____
5. The sentry's pikestaff _____
6. You might use a windlass to _____

Discussion Questions

1. How do people pass the time while waiting for the attack? What would you do? (*Women do spinning, weaving, embroidery; children play with soldiers, hobbyhorses, dolls; Robin tells stories, sings, works on his harp.*)
2. What hardships do the people in the castle face as time goes on? How is this like what still happens to civilians in war time, today? (*Supplies of food and water dwindle.*)
3. Why does Robin decide to leave the castle? Why does he plan to keep the trip secret from Sir Peter? Is that right? (*He plans to go seek help from Sir Fitzhugh, but doesn't want Sir Peter to know because he would forbid Robin—with his disability—to go.*)
4. What does Robin plan to take? Would you have taken anything else? (*a smock, rags for his legs, a hood, thongs for tying his crutches to his back*)
5. How does the friar react to the plan? Were you surprised? (*He doesn't try to discourage Robin, just encourages him and asks him if he is afraid.*)
6. What does Robin say to himself as he swims? Do you have any favorite thoughts which give you courage when you are afraid or frustrated? (*He tells himself, "Anyone could NOT do it."*)
7. How does the enemy guard treat Robin? Why? (*quite kindly; He thinks Robin is a poor shepherd boy who has fallen into the water.*)
8. How does Robin find John? Why? (*He remembers the description John gave of his mother's cottage; Robin needs John to ask Sir Hugh for help.*)

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9. Why might Sir Hugh help? Why might he not? *(He might help because he doesn't want the Welsh to bother him and because he is related to Sir Peter, who is threatened; he might not, because he does not really get along with Sir Peter.)*
 10. What is the plan for getting into the church? Why? *(They will creep along the river, enter John's friend, the shoemaker's house, go from there to the church, where they will sound the alarm which lets Sir Hugh's men know when to attack.)*
 11. How do Robin and John get into the shoemaker's house? *(After giving the harp signal, they grab a rope the shoemaker winds out his window.)*

Prediction

How will Robin's parents react when they see him? What will they say? How much will his disability bother them?

Drama Activity

Prepare a Reader's Theatre performance of this chapter. Record on tape, complete with sound effects (such as the clumping of the guard's pikestaff and the secret signal which gets John and Robin into the shoemaker's).

Chapter 10, Pages 104-121

Vocabulary

sacristan (104)
routed (109)
doublet (118)

belfry (105)
viol (111)
realm (119)

turrets (105)
banners (115)

deliverance (106)
dais (118)

Vocabulary Activity

Complete a word map like the sample below for target vocabulary words.

