



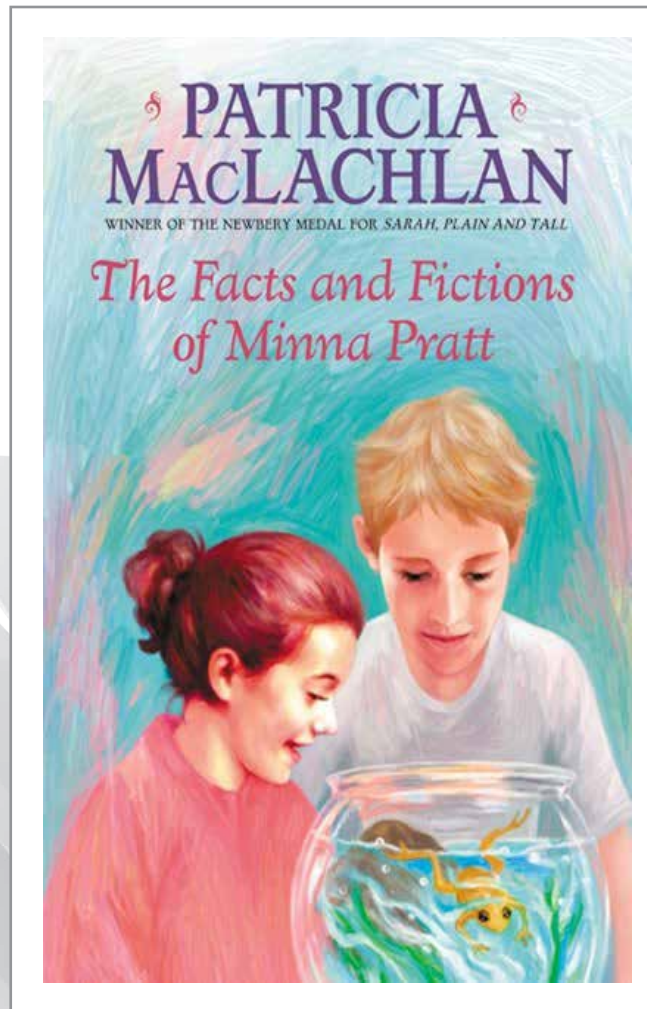
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Facts and Fictions of Minna Pratt

Patricia MacLachlan



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Facts and Fictions of Minna Pratt

Patricia MacLachlan

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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Summary

Minna Pratt, age 11, takes weekly cello lessons at the conservatory but rarely practices—until the new boy, Lucas, shows up with his vibrato. Minna has a pair of offbeat, loving parents and a zany younger brother, McGrew. Lucas, on the other hand, is the only child of a wealthy couple who are models of decorum. Minna falls instantly in love with Lucas when he joins her chamber group, which also includes Imelda, a girl who adores spouting facts, and Orson, a boy who can always be counted on to bring in the new word of the day.

Minna's mother is an absent-minded writer who answers every letter her young readers send and keeps mysterious messages to herself by her desk, such as "Fact and fiction are different truths," and "Fiction is fact's elder sister." Minna doesn't usually mind her mother's disinterest in housekeeping, but she wishes her mother would ask her more of the right sort of questions. Her father is a cheerful, absent-minded clinical psychologist, and Minna sometimes wishes that he, too, understood her better. It seems to Minna that McGrew understands her best.

Lucas invites Minna to dinner at his spacious, antiseptic home. He introduces his very polite parents and the spirited young housekeeper, "Twig," and shows her his room—which is, unbeknownst to his parents, lined with glass tanks full of frogs. The next day Mr. Porch, the music teacher, announces that he has entered the quartet in a competition to be held in eight weeks. Suddenly, Minna begins to practice in earnest, but she just can't seem to find her vibrato. One night Minna invites Lucas to dinner and McGrew invites his best friend (and expert ballplayer) Emily Parmalee. Lucas enjoys the scene of family mayhem immensely.

Two weeks before the contest, Porch is not pleased with his students and has them play facing different parts of the room to force them to listen to each other. One week later, disaster strikes Lucas: His parents discover his frogs and say they must go. Minna's mother agrees to let the frogs stay in her writing room until Lucas is ready to release them in the park.

The night of the contest is stormy, and Minna's quartet wins, despite having to play in the dark. Minna and Lucas agree to give their prize money to Willie, a street musician, so that he can take Twig on a trip to his family's home in the Midwest. That night, Minna awakens and picks up her cello. Finally she has the vibrato for which she has wished so hard.

About the Author

Patricia MacLachlan was born in 1938 in Cheyenne, Wyoming, the daughter of two teachers. An only child with an active imagination, she had an imaginary friend, "Mary." Her parents encouraged her to read, and her father often acted out stories with her, but she did not start writing stories until she was thirty-five, when she was married and had three children. She began with a picture book for young children, *The Sick Day*, and later started to write young adult novels (beginning with *Arthur, for the Very First Time*).

Her stories are praised for their realistic and often humorous portrayal of family life and the problems children face. Many of the elements for these stories are taken from her own experience. Like Minna's

mother, she is a writer married to a clinical psychologist who finds it hugely gratifying to know that kids from all over read her stories. Details from her own childhood, from her later experience working with foster mothers, and from her own family life often appear in her stories. In 1986, she received a Newbery Medal for *Sarah, Plain and Tall* (in which the central character, like one of MacLachlan's distant relatives, is a mail-order bride).

In talking with student writers, she stresses that rewriting and revising are an essential part of the writing process. She advises aspiring writers, above all, to read all that they can.

Initiating Activities

Choose one or more of the following prereading discussion questions and activities. Each will help students draw knowledge from their backgrounds about the themes they will meet in *The Facts and Fictions of Minna Pratt*.

1. Prediction: Have students examine the cover illustration and the title. Ask students to predict what they think the story will be about. (What are "facts and fictions"? What can you tell about the girl and boy in the picture? How old are they? What are their interests? What kind of mood are they in? What do you suppose happens after what is shown in the picture?)
2. Critical Thinking:
 - On Friendship: What does it take to be someone's friend? What qualities do you look for in a friend? Is it hard for a boy and a girl to be friends? Is it hard for two kids from different backgrounds to become close friends? How does a new kid make friends? How can you be friendly to a new kid?
 - On Playing a Musical Instrument: Do you play an instrument? If so, do you prefer to play alone or in a group? What are the good and bad things about playing an instrument? Why do some kids enjoy playing an instrument more than others?
 - On Parents: What is your idea of the ideal parents? What are the two or three main things parents and their children argue over? Kids often say that their parents don't really listen to them. Why do you suppose that is? How much freedom should parents give to an 11-year-old? How do parents embarrass their kids sometimes? What is the one thing you would most like to change about your parents? Who understands you best—your parents, or someone else?
 - On Wishes: What are some of your strongest wishes? Have you ever wished and wished for something—and gotten it? How do you cope with disappointment when you don't get what you wish for? Are you working toward getting what you wish for right now? Is anyone helping you get what you wish for? Is there a time to stop wishing for something?
3. "Book Hook": Read the beginning of the story aloud (page 1 through the top of page 3, "...waiting to be a woman.") Have students brainstorm all that the passage tells them about Minna and have them predict what she will think about and do in the rest of the story.

Chapters 5-6

Vocabulary

iconoclast (31)	thesaurus (32)	intoned (33)	solarium (36)
beckoned (36)	traitorous (37)	ominously (39)	congealed (41)
boundaries (43)	caboodle (47)	allegro (47)	pianissimo (48)
incentive (49)	flourish (52)	arpeggio (52)	

Vocabulary Activity

- Have students read the sentence in context (the sentence in which the word is found and perhaps the one before and after it).
- Provide students with questions and statements (incorporating the vocabulary words) that require them to use information from personal experience or observation. For example: "When is the last time you used a **thesaurus**?" "Write down something an **iconoclast** might do." "What causes you to experience **apprehension**?" "What would you do if spaghetti sauce had **congealed** on a plate?"
- Have students pair up, discuss the questions, and respond in writing.

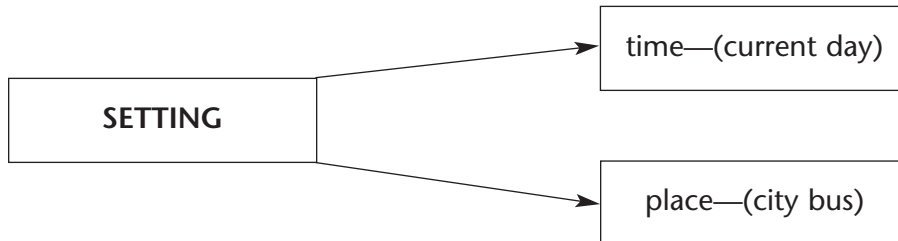
Discussion Questions

- Why does Minna press the elevator button even though she'd rather choose the stairs (p. 31)? (*Maybe she wants to overcome her fear of elevators, now that she is with Lucas.*) Do you have any fears like hers? (*Answers will vary.*)
- What does Minna offer to teach Lucas? Why? (*She offers to teach him hopscotch when he tells her that he doesn't know how to play.*) Do you think she will ever teach him? (*Answers will vary.*)
- Why does Minna stare when she sees where Lucas lives? (*He lives in a huge house.*) Does she like it? (*She seems both impressed and a bit overwhelmed by its emptiness—"It is like a wonderful barn"—p. 34*) Is he proud of it? (*Lucas merely shrugs and says, "Home."*) How is his home different from hers? (*His is huge, empty, quiet, spotless; hers is smaller, messy, chaotic.*)
- What odd question does Lucas ask Minna? (*He asks what animal she would like to be reincarnated as.*) Why do you think he asks? What is her answer? (*ferret*) Why does she hesitate—but then tell him? (*She is embarrassed—but shares her secret after he shares his about the frogs.*) What would your answer be? (*Answers will vary.*)
- What are Lucas's parents like? (*proper, never raise their voices*) What does he think of them? (*He makes an ironic comment on how his mother sits around thinking up dinner conversation topics.*) What does Minna think of them? (*She finds them polite, but stuffy.*)
- What is Lucas's room like? (*Tanks of frogs take up one wall; there are boxes, books, music, a child's violin.*) What does it tell you about him? What does your room say about you? (*Answers will vary.*)

-
7. Who is Twig? (*the Ellerby's housekeeper*) What is she like? (*young, eccentric, with an oddball sense of humor*) What do you imagine about her life and her past? Would you get along with her? (*Answers will vary.*)
 8. What does Lucas want to be? (*biologist or naturalist*) Why, do you suppose? What does Minna think of his plans? (*She thinks it would be a waste of his musical talent.*) Do you agree with Minna's father that nothing is a waste? (*Answers will vary.*)
 9. Why do you think Porch responds "sharply" when Minna says that even Willie has a vibrato (p. 44)? (*He finds her comment unintentionally patronizing and knows that Willie is a skilled musician.*)
 10. **Prediction:** How well do you think the quartet will do at the contest? Will they win?

Supplementary Activities

1. Minna smiles at the memory of the time her mother taught her to play hopscotch. Describe a memory you have of a time your parent taught you something.
2. You are Minna. Write down the hopscotch rules for Lucas.
3. Explain that setting is the time and place of the story. Write this graphic on the board. Have students describe the setting in which the story opens.



Point out that the setting helps to establish the mood—and that the setting may well change. Minna is in a rather dismal mood as she gets off the bus and heads up the conservatory steps to her lesson, but her mood changes when she meets Lucas. Tell students to pay special attention in the next few chapters to the descriptions of two new settings—Lucas' and Minna's homes.