



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Sign of the Beaver

Elizabeth George Speare

READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

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Elizabeth George Speare

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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!

ISBN 978-1-50204-173-9

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Brainstorming, classifying
and categorizing, comparing
and contrasting, evaluating,
analyzing details

Literary Elements

Character, setting, plot
development, story map,
figurative language, conflict

Vocabulary

Synonyms/antonyms,
context clues

Comprehension

Predicting, sequencing,
cause/effect, inference,
compare information from
more than one source

Writing

Reports, journal, summary,
chapter titles, comparison/
contrast, narrative

Listening/Speaking

Participation in discussion,
presentation of reports

Summary

In the summer of 1769, twelve-year-old Matt is left to guard the cabin in the Maine wilderness while his father journeys to Massachusetts to bring the rest of the family to the new homestead. A series of disasters puts Matt in serious trouble—so serious that his survival is in doubt. He is rescued by Saknis, chief of the Beaver Indian tribe. Matt is taught survival skills by the Indians. Saknis, realizing that more and more white men will come, wants his grandson, Attean, to learn survival skills, too—he wants Attean to learn to read the white man’s writing. If Matt will teach Attean to read, then the Indian boy will bring him food and game each day.

The boys are not comfortable with the bargain or with each other. They resent the position that Saknis has put them in, but slowly they learn to respect each other and to become friends.

Prereading Activity

This novel is a historical fiction book. What does this mean?

- (a) Historical — The characters of the story may be people who actually lived during the story’s time period or be fictitious individuals.

The setting of the story will be a previous time period. It is important that the customs and ideals of characters and events of history are accurate in relation to the historical setting.

- (b) Fiction — A story invented by the writer.

- (c) Historical Fiction may be based on real events, but includes made-up characters and experiences.

Initiating Activities

1. How long have your parents left you alone at home? a day? overnight? What did you like about it? How did you feel?
2. Have you ever gone camping? What did you need to survive?
3. Brainstorm the word “survival.” The teacher will put the sketch on the following page on the board or large sheet of paper and record student responses. Students will relate survival to their camping experiences, then later they will use these same points for Matt’s survival.

Chapter 1 — Pages 1-6

Vocabulary

fetch 2
mite 5

puncheon 3
ruefully 5

daubed 3

blunderbuss 4

Vocabulary Activity

Ask the class to see if they can figure out the meaning of each underlined word by reading the following sentences. Discuss their responses and the true definitions. Find these words on the pages listed in the novel. This may be used as a pre- or post-reading activity.

1. The man made the puncheon table with a broad piece of wood having one flat side.
2. The child daubed the peanut butter on the bread.
3. The boy tried to teach the dog to fetch the newspaper.
4. A blunderbuss is not used by hunters today.
5. Grandpa says that fishing is a mite better in the big pond.
6. Ruefully, I admitted I'd made a mistake spending my allowance.

Discussion Questions and Activities

1. Story Map: Many stories have the same parts—a setting, a problem, a goal, and a series of events that lead to an ending or conclusion. These story elements may be placed on a story map. Just as a road map leads a driver from one place to another, so too a story map leads a reader from one point to another. There are many different types of story maps. Students may use the one included or make up their own. (See page 10 of this guide.)

Read only page 1. What information do we have to begin a story map?

- What is the setting?
- Who is the main character?
- What is the problem?

As the story is read, more characters are added, and the setting and the problem (especially in this story) may be changed.

2. Begin an attribute web for Matt. (See pages 11-12 of this guide.)

Story Map

Characters _____

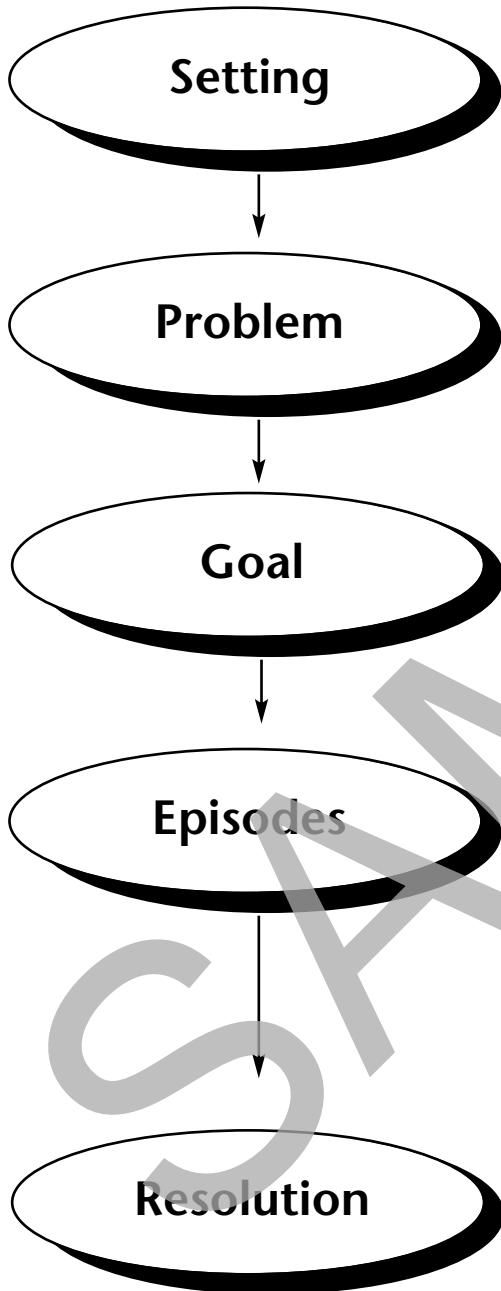
Time and Place _____

Problem _____

Goal _____

Beginning → Development → Outcome

Resolution _____



Using Character Webs

Attribute webs are simply a visual representation of a character from the novel. They provide a systematic way for students to organize and recap the information they have about a particular character. Attribute webs may be used after reading the novel to recapitulate information about a particular character, or completed gradually as information unfolds. They may be completed individually or as a group project.

One type of character attribute web uses these divisions:

- How a character acts and feels. (How does the character act? How do you think the character feels? How would you feel if this happened to you?)
- How a character looks. (Close your eyes and picture the character. Describe him/her to me.)
- Where a character lives. (Where and when does the character live?)
- How others feel about the character. (How does another specific character feel about our character?)

In group discussion about the characters described in student attribute webs, the teacher can ask for backup proof from the novel. Inferential thinking can be included in the discussion.

Attribute webs need not be confined to characters. They may also be used to organize information about a concept, object, or place.

Attribute webs are a kind of semantic mapping. Students can move on from attribute webs to other creative kinds of mapping. They can be encouraged to modify attribute webs, use subdivisions, in whatever ways are useful to them personally. It is important to emphasize, especially to older children, that attribute webs are just a visual way to remember concepts. They provide the students with a tool to remember.

Attribute Web

The attribute web below will help you gather clues the author provides about a character in the novel. Fill in the blanks with words and phrases which tell how the character acts and looks, as well as what the character says and what others say about him or her.

The diagram is an attribute web. It features a central circle with a horizontal line inside. Four lines radiate from the circle to four rectangular boxes: 'Acts' (top-left), 'Feels' (top-right), 'Looks' (bottom-left), and 'Says' (bottom-right). Each box has four numbered lines (1-4) extending downwards for notes. A large 'SAMPLE' watermark is overlaid diagonally across the entire page.

Acts

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Feels

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

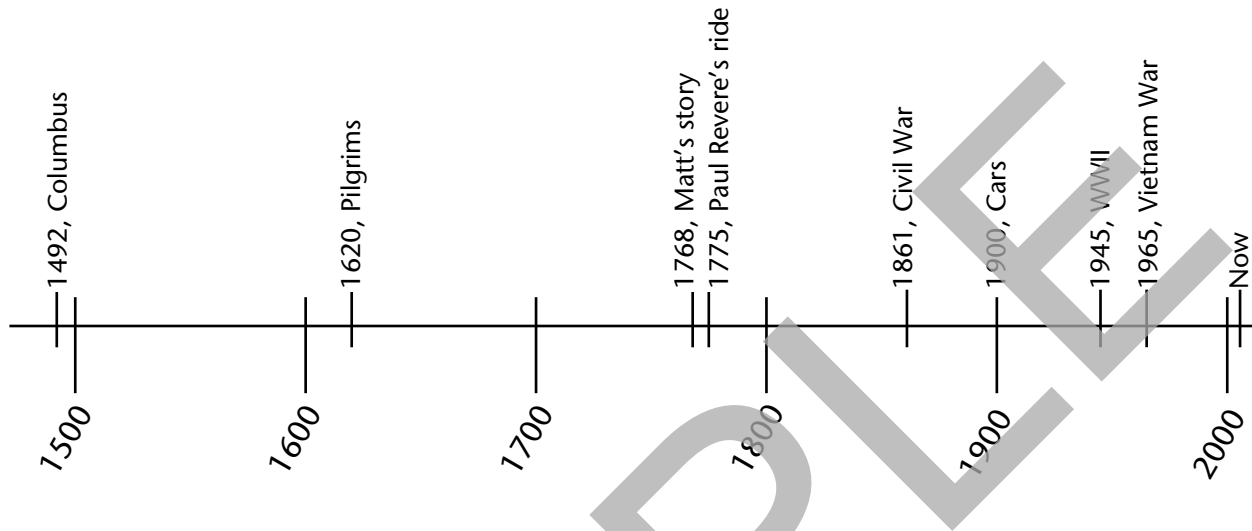
Looks

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Says

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

3. Begin a time line.



4. Why was Matt's father leaving him alone? Why couldn't he go with his father? Was Matt's father right to leave Matt in the wilderness? Why or why not?
5. Did children grow up faster in those days? Why?

Prediction

What do you think could happen to a twelve-year-old boy left on his own for seven weeks in the wilderness?

Group Research Activity

Divide the class into cooperative groups for research and making charts on each of the following topics: *trees, plants, animals, birds and insects, pioneer food, Indians, Indian values, and white man's values*. After each chapter is read, each group will add to their chart any new information learned from reading the novel or their outside reading. The charts will be displayed on the bulletin boards throughout reading of the novel.

Chapter 2 — Pages 7-10

Vocabulary

chinking 7
stock 9

coaxed 8
hemlock 10

blazed 9

proprietors 9