



**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 6-8**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# **Sing Down the Moon**

Scott O'Dell

**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# Sing Down the Moon

Scott O'Dell

## 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

### Comprehension

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

### Writing

Descriptive, expository,  
sentences

### Vocabulary

Words in context

### Thinking

Classifying and categorizing,  
comparing and contrasting,  
evaluating, analyzing details,  
synthesizing ideas

### Listening/Speaking

Participation in discussion

### Literary Elements

Character, setting, plot  
development, conflict

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**About the Novel:**

*Sing Down the Moon* tells the story of “The Long Walk” to Bosque Redondo Reservation (New Mexico) from the Navaho point of view. Although the white man’s cruel and insensitive treatment of the Indians killed or broke the spirit of many, the heroine of *Sing Down the Moon*, Bright Morning, refuses to give up. She knows in her heart that her true home is Canyon de Chelly in northeastern Arizona. She would rather die than live away from her homeland.

**Historical Background:**

For several hundred years before the white man arrived, the Indians of the Southwest had been mistreated by the Spaniards. Explorers in search of gold had terrorized the tribes with their guns, iron swords, and horses. Many Indians had been killed or enslaved, and many more had been forced to convert to Christianity and honor the Spanish king.

By 1848, most of the land the Spaniards had colonized had been won by the United States. Settlers began moving west, taking over land the Indians held sacred and slaughtering buffalo by the thousands, taking only the choice parts and leaving the meat to rot. As the settlers moved along the Santa Fe Trail, bands of marauding Indians and Mexican bandits were often waiting to ambush them. Although most Indians wanted to live in peace with the white man, the Union Army sent General Stephen Kearny and his troops to “subdue the Navahos and Apaches” by killing all the men and boys he could find and taking the women and children prisoner.

Kit Carson was sent to assist in the effort, and was largely responsible for defeating the Mescalero Apaches and forcing them to move to Bosque Redondo, a miserable reservation on the Pecos River near Fort Sumner, New Mexico. Carson burned Navaho cornfields and peach trees, slaughtered flocks of sheep, and destroyed millions of pounds of stored grain, causing starvation and demoralization. Finally, in 1864, Carson invaded Canyon de Chelly, the home of the Navahos in *Sing Down the Moon*. Although he had orders to kill all the men and boys, he let those who surrendered live.

That winter 8,000 half-naked starving Indians were forced to march 300 miles to Bosque Redondo. Hundreds died on the trail. The resettlement at the reservation was a disaster due to disease, starvation, and crop failure. Another 2,000 Indians died on the banks of the Pecos. Most of those who remained were defeated spiritually.

In 1868, the federal government allowed the Navahos to return to their homeland in the four corners region. Modern-day Navahos still speak of “The Long Walk” to Bosque Redondo and of the *Nahondzod*, the “fearing time,” spent there.

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## Chapters 1-5 Pages 7-29

### *Summary:*

Spring is coming to Canyon de Chelly, and before dawn Bright Morning hears the river running with the spring thaw. She thinks of the previous spring when she took her mother's sheep to the mesa to graze and left them there because a storm came and she was afraid. She hopes to make up for this mistake now that spring has come again. She has learned that the sheep must never be abandoned. Bright Morning and her friends, Running Bird and White Deer, are soon spending happy days on the mesa with their families' flocks. The other girls joke with Bright Morning about Tall Boy, the leader of the warriors. She fears Tall Boy may be interested in marrying her only because of the sheep her family owns. One day the girls watch a group of white soldiers march along the river. They stop at Old Bear's hogan. They later learn that the soldiers threatened to burn the village and kill all the residents if there are any more raids by the Navahos. There is unrest in the village, but the following day the girls' troubles multiply. Two Spaniards come to the mesa and kidnap Bright Morning and Running Bird. The girls know they will be taken to a town and sold as slaves. There is no chance for escape on the trail.

### *Vocabulary:*

mesas 7	barrancas 7	aspen grove 10
fend 12	mesquite 12	leagues 12
lance high 13	sheared 15	goading 15
astride 17	haughty 18	hogan 20
plunder 21	foolhardy 21	hobble 28

### *Initiating Activities:*

1. Direct students' attention to a map of the United States. Ask if they know where the Navaho (more often spelled Navajo) Indians live today. Point out the "Four Corners," where Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico meet. Ask student volunteers to find the large Navaho reservation in this area. Locate Canyon de Chelly National Monument and Fort Defiance in northeastern Arizona.
2. Discuss Indian life before the arrival of the white man. Elicit students' knowledge about how the Indians came to live on reservations, and what the quality of life there is like today. Tell the students you will be reading a story that tells, from the Indian point of view, what happened in the 1860's in America's West.
3. Tell the students that O'Dell chose not to tell us the name of the narrator of the story until quite late in the book. You may want to direct their attention to the reviews on the back cover and use Bright Morning's name to clarify characters in your discussions.

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**Discussion Questions:**

1. What made the waters flow so swiftly in the spring? (*the runoff from snow melting in the mountains*) Does this still happen today? (*yes*)
2. To what two sounds does the narrator compare the sound of the water? (*whispers, warrior's feet*) To what else could you compare the sounds? (*Answers vary.*)
3. What happened to the narrator's brother? (*He was struck by lightning because he was "too happy" about killing a deer.*)
4. What mistake did Bright Morning make the previous spring? (*She left the sheep on the mesa in a storm because she was afraid.*)
5. What does Bright Morning hope to do now that it is spring again? (*be trusted to take the sheep to graze*)
6. What jokes do Running Bird and White Deer make? (*They say Bright Morning is too thin and that Tall Boy may bring back a Ute girl to marry.*)
7. Why did it make Bright Morning feel better to tell Running Bird one of her sheep was eating poison weed? (*She had been hurt by the joke about the Ute girl.*) What does this tell you? (*Bright Morning has serious feelings about Tall Boy.*)
8. List some words to describe Tall Boy. (*haughty, brave, conceited, bold, serious, etc.*)
9. Where did the soldiers get the name "Long Knives"? (*from their bayonets*)
10. What threats did the white soldiers make? (*that they would kill the Indians and burn their village if they learned the warriors were out on a raid*) Do you think they had the right to make such threats? (*Answers vary.*)
11. Could the girls have escaped being captured by the Spaniards? What would you have done? (*Answers vary.*)
12. What do you think the Navaho Wolf was? Did the girls really see it? (*Answers vary.*)
13. Start attribute webs for the main characters. (See page 10 of this guide.) Start a story map. (See page 11 of this guide.)

**Supplementary Activities:**

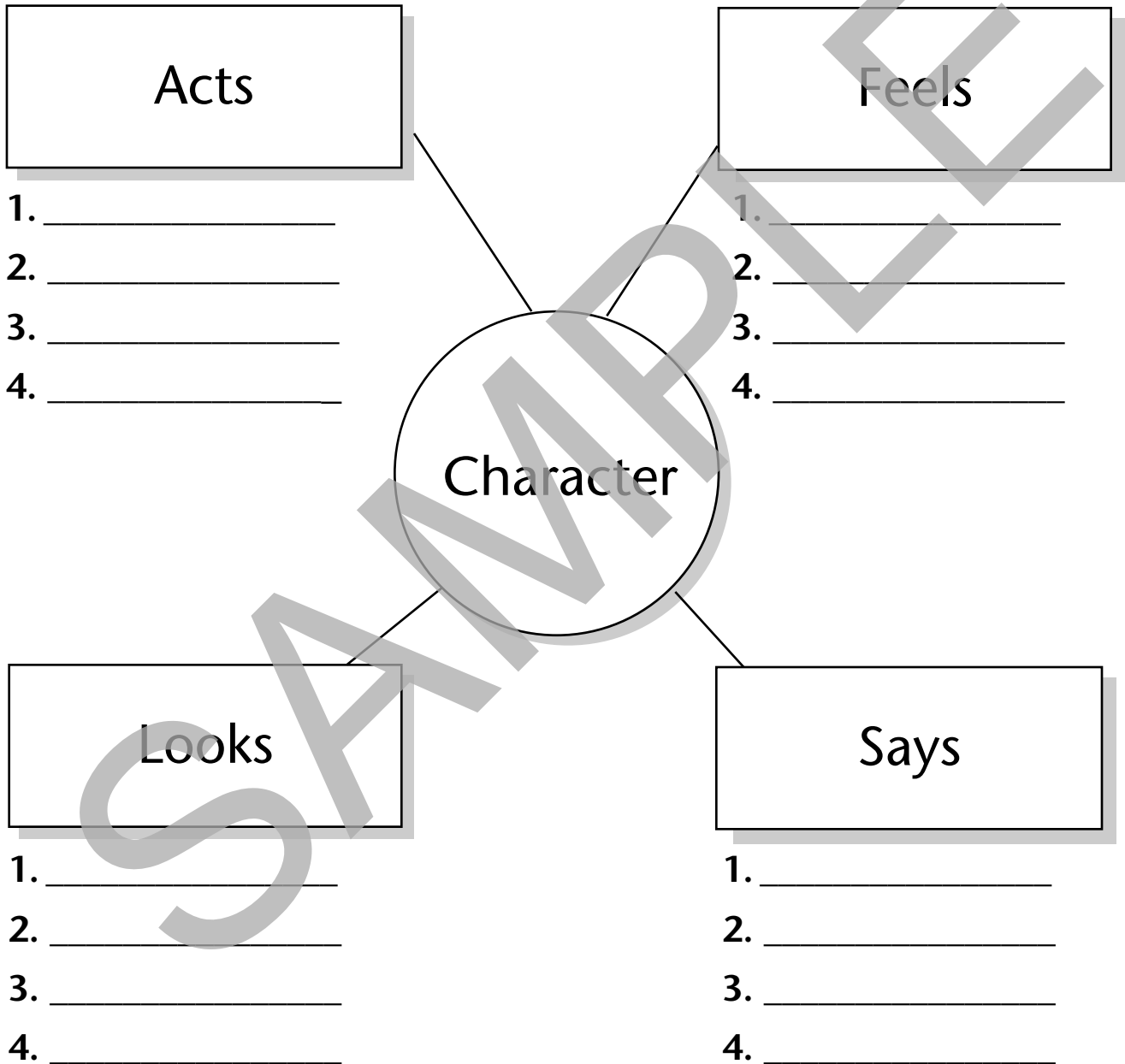
**Writing**

Skim chapters 1-5 for clues that tell you what Canyon de Chelly and the Navaho village are like. Then write a paragraph describing how it would look if you were standing on the mesa looking down. Be sure to include descriptions of what is going on in the village, as well as what it looks like.

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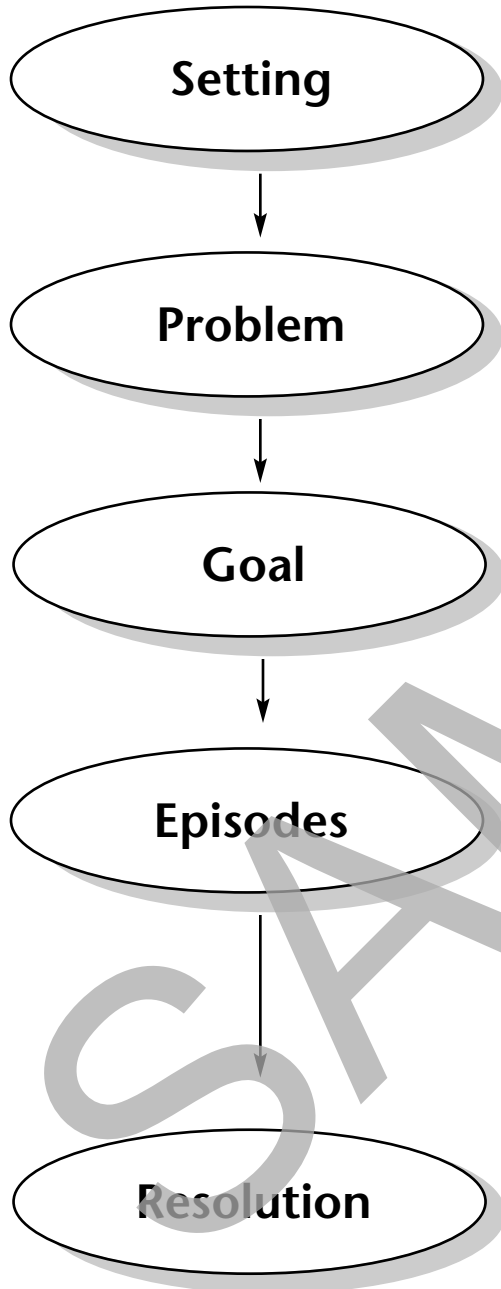
## Attribute Web

The attribute web below is designed to help you gather clues the author provides about what a character is like. 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.



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## Story Map



Characters \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Time and Place \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Beginning → Development → Outcome

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