



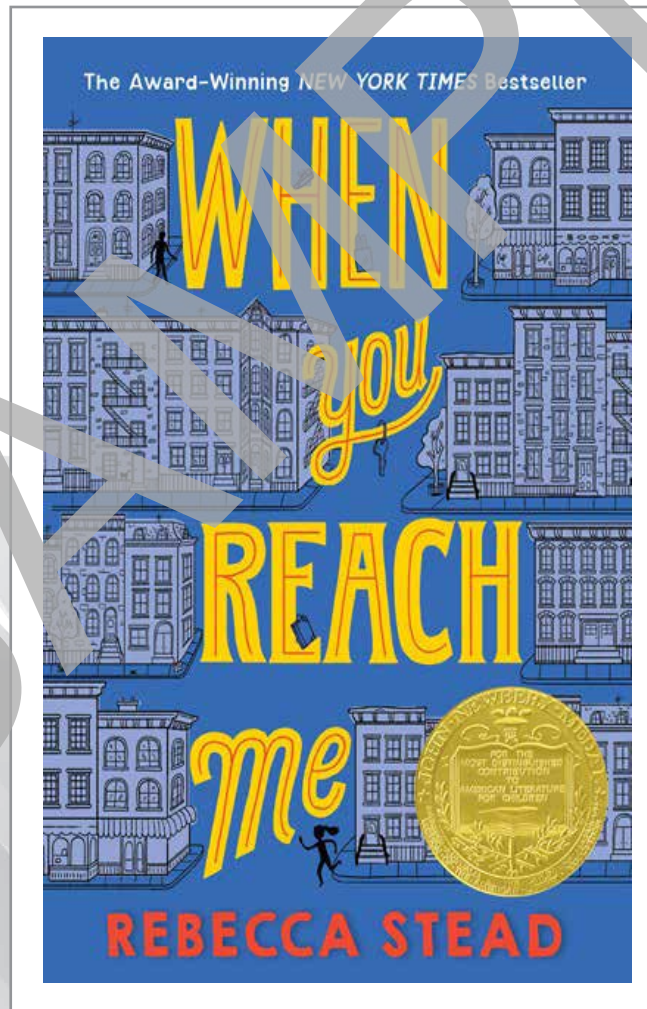
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 6-8**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# When You Reach Me

Rebecca Stead



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

# When You Reach Me

Rebecca Stead

## 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!

---

**ISBN 978-1-50204-317-7**

Copyright infringement is a violation of Federal Law.

© 2020 by Novel Units, Inc., St. Louis, MO. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any way or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise) without prior written permission from Novel Units, Inc.

Reproduction of any part of this publication for an entire school or for a school system, by for-profit institutions and tutoring centers, or for commercial sale is strictly prohibited.

Novel Units is a registered trademark of Conn Education.

Printed in the United States of America.

To order, contact your  
local school supply store, or:

Toll-Free Fax: 877.716.7272

Phone: 888.650.4224

3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

[sales@novelunits.com](mailto:sales@novelunits.com)

[novelunits.com](http://novelunits.com)

## Table of Contents

Summary .....	3
About the Author.....	3
Characters .....	4
Background Information .....	5
Initiating Activities.....	6
Vocabulary Activities.....	7
Seven Sections .....	8
Each section contains: Summary, Vocabulary, Discussion Questions, and Supplementary Activities	
Post-reading Discussion Questions .....	21
Post-reading Extension Activities .....	24
Assessment.....	25
Scoring Rubric.....	38

## Skills and Strategies

### Comprehension

Creative thinking, identifying attributes, inferring, predicting, supporting judgments

### Literary Elements

Characterization, story mapping, setting, conflict, theme, point of view, author's purpose, figurative language, genre

### Vocabulary

Definitions, synonyms/ antonyms, word maps, root words, compound words

### Listening/Speaking

Discussion, oral presentation, dramatizing

### Writing

Creative writing, personal narrative, poetry, journalism, essay, report

### Critical Thinking

Brainstorming, research, compare/contrast, cause/effect, analysis, evaluation

### Across the Curriculum

Social Studies—history, Miranda rights, culture, friendship, relationships, homelessness; Science—time travel; Health—epilepsy, laughter; Math—hexagons, tesseract; Art—illustration, design; Music—composing

**Genre:** mystery with elements of realistic, historical, and science fiction

**Setting:** late 1970s; New York City

**Point of View:** first person and second person

**Themes:** time travel, friendship, family, city life, second chances, coming of age

**Conflict:** person vs. person, person vs. self, person vs. society, person vs. nature

**Style:** narrative; present and past tense

**Tone:** conversational, thought-provoking, ominous, humorous

## Summary

*When You Reach Me* is a mystery about 12-year-old Miranda, a girl growing up on New York's Upper West Side during the 1970s. Miranda's mom is scheduled to be a contestant on *The \$20,000 Pyramid*, hosted by Dick Clark. Miranda helps Mom practice for the game show because they need the prize money, but Miranda has problems of her own. Her lifelong friend Sal suddenly ignores her after Marcus, an odd but brainy kid, punches him. Without Sal, Miranda has to walk home alone past bullies and the crazy, homeless man who sleeps under the mailbox. Then, Marcus annoys Miranda by pointing out a time travel flaw in her favorite novel, *A Wrinkle in Time*. However, Miranda's biggest problem is the mysterious notes she keeps finding. The notes' anonymous author accurately predicts future events and wants Miranda's help to save the life of her friend. When Sal almost dies in a tragic accident, Miranda finally discovers who has been communicating with her and why. Miranda's final realization is that time travel is possible.

## About the Author

A native New Yorker, Rebecca Stead still lives in the Upper West Side neighborhood where she grew up and where *When You Reach Me* takes place. Stead used her childhood as a starting point for the novel's main character, Miranda. Stead's mother was a contestant on the TV game show *The \$20,000 Pyramid*, her best friend was a boy in her apartment building, and the mysterious laughing man lived on her street corner. As a child, Stead loved *A Wrinkle in Time* and did not like to see other people reading "her" book. She was awed meeting Madeleine L'Engle at a bookstore, where the author inscribed her book with the message, "Tesser well."

Stead's first published story appeared in a grade-school magazine. She studied creative writing at Stuyvesant High School with writer Frank McCourt and then graduated from Vassar College. Stead returned home to attend law school at New York University, where she received a degree in jurisprudence, and went on to work as a public defender. Her first children's novel, *First Light*, was named to the 2007 Book Sense Children's Pick List and won the 2007 Parents' Choice Award. The highly-acclaimed *When You Reach Me* won the 2010 John Newbery Medal and is being made into a film.

## Things You Keep in a Box—Mom’s Rules for Life in New York City

Miranda is a latchkey kid who knows the rules for living in New York City. For example, she visits the local grocery store to tell the owner about her favorite novel, but she avoids the laughing man, a homeless guy who sleeps under a mailbox. Mystery seeps into Miranda’s ordinary life when she begins receiving mysterious, anonymous notes. One note accurately predicts the date Miranda’s mom will appear on the game show *The \$20,000 Pyramid*; another asks Miranda to write a letter about everything leading up to one tragic day last winter, a day Miranda would prefer to forget. Miranda concludes the letter should begin with the day she lost her best friend Sal after a kid punched him for no apparent reason.

### Vocabulary

obstruct  
omen  
budget  
fundamental  
burden  
scoured  
expired  
prosecutor  
attorney  
swivel  
tenant  
processed  
radiators  
theories  
obvious

### Discussion Questions

1. How does the author create suspense in the first chapter? Is this an effective way to begin a novel? (*Answers will vary. The author provides details that raise questions: Who wrote the notes? What are the notes about? Where has this person gone? Why doesn't Miranda want to remember past events? Hinting about a mysterious person and events draws readers into the story to find out what happens.*)
2. Why is the name Miranda important to Mom? Do you think Mom should have chosen that name for her daughter? (*Mom wants to be a criminal defense lawyer. She respects the United States' legal system and understands the importance of the Miranda warnings. Answers will vary. Some students may think being named after a criminal is wrong. However, Mom chose Miranda's name because it stands for people's rights, not the kidnapper whose case brought about the Miranda warnings. Discussion could also compare Shakespeare's Miranda, who in The Tempest lived a sheltered life, to Miranda in When You Reach Me, who is an independent latchkey child.*)
3. Miranda’s favorite novel begins, “It was a dark and stormy night” (p. 8) and features a main character named Meg. Do you know the title of the novel and who wrote it? Can you summarize the novel? (*A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L’Engle; Answers will vary. Discussion could cover A Wrinkle in Time’s genre, plot, and themes and how they may apply to When You Reach Me. A Wrinkle in Time is an adventurous fantasy story combined with science fiction, including time travel. The novel is about Meg who, with the help of three angelic beings, travels through space and time to other planets to rescue her scientist father. Major themes include good vs. evil, the power of love, individuality vs. conformity, faith, trust, courage, fate, and free will.*)
4. What does Richard mean when he says, “Keys are power” (p. 4)? How else are keys important to the story? (*Answers will vary. Richard does not consider himself a trusted family member because he does not have a key to the apartment and has to ask permission to enter Mom and Miranda’s home. Miranda is a “latchkey child” who needs keys to the apartment because Mom is at work when Miranda gets home from school. After Miranda forgets her keys at school, Mom decides to hide a spare key inside the fire hose. The key is stolen. The author of the notes asks Miranda to mention the key’s location. Miranda needs to discover the key to unlock the story’s mystery.*)
5. For what game show is Mom practicing to become a contestant? How are people helping her practice? Why does Mom need to win? (*The \$20,000 Pyramid; Louisa takes notes as she watches the show, and then Miranda writes the day’s words on index cards. At night, Miranda and Richard take turns quizzing Mom. Mom needs the money, and she would love to change jobs.*)

6. Describe Miranda's relationship with Sal. What does losing Sal mean to Miranda? (*Miranda and Sal have been best friends since they were babies. Miranda knows Sal so well that she considers him a part of her and feels something is missing when he is gone. Answers will vary. Miranda can no longer depend on Sal for moral support. Instead, she is forced to face life and her fears on her own.*)
7. Why does Miranda think the guy who Mom calls the laughing man is crazy? Why does she pretend not to notice him? (*The man lives on Miranda's street corner, where he sleeps with his head under the mailbox. He does odd things, such as kicking suddenly and laughing wildly. He also shakes his fist at the sky and yells, "What's the burn scale? Where's the dome?" [p. 16], and he hits himself in the head while mumbling, "Bookbag, pocketshoe" [p. 18]. Answers will vary. The laughing man frightens Miranda so she does not want to draw his attention or acknowledge him.*)
8. Why hasn't Miranda written the letter she was asked to write? (*The person who asked her to write the letter is gone. This person wanted to know the story of something that happened and everything that led up to the event; however, Miranda does not know where she is expected to begin the account.*)
9. Compare and contrast Mom's rules for living in New York City with Miranda's trick for dealing with someone who frightens her. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of each? (*Answers will vary. Mom promotes common-sense safety rules focusing on avoiding strangers and blending into crowds; however, her rules could make Miranda overly fearful of strangers. Miranda's trick of asking strangers for the time usually results in her learning that most people are friendly; however, she also risks talking to someone who may be dangerous. Discussion could cover the line between being paranoid and being careful and aware.*)
10. **Prediction:** Why did the kid in the green army coat punch Sal?
11. **Prediction:** Who is writing the notes to Miranda?

### Supplementary Activities

1. **Literary Analysis:** Begin a Character Attribute Web (see page 30 of this guide) for Miranda. Add information as you read the story.
2. **History:** Why does Miranda's mom boycott grapes? Choose César Chávez or the 1960s and 1970s grape pickers' strikes as a topic. Write a report about your topic's importance to migrant farm workers. Share your findings in class.
3. **Government/Speaking:** Listed below is one version of the Miranda warning. Lead a classroom discussion about these rights and why they are important.  

*You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to speak to an attorney and to have an attorney present during any questioning. If you cannot afford a lawyer, one will be provided for you at government expense.*
4. **Science:** Miranda is correct that yawning is a mystery of science. Research theories about why people and some animals yawn. Then, create a poster that gives your opinion on the purpose of yawns.
5. **Creative Writing:** Imagine that you are Sal. Write a diary entry about the day you got punched. Explain why you ended your friendship with Miranda.

## Things You Wish For–Things You Keep Secret

Miranda and Richard help Mom practice for *The \$20,000 Pyramid*, but they keep secret their plan for how to spend the winnings. Meanwhile Sal permanently ends his long-time friendship with Miranda, forcing Miranda to make friends with Annemarie. Later, while serving as an office monitor, Miranda meets Marcus, the boy who punched Sal. Marcus points out a time-travel flaw in Miranda's favorite novel, *A Wrinkle in Time*. The ensuing conversation about time travel confuses Miranda; regardless, Marcus compliments her as a "pretty smart kid" (p. 52).

### Vocabulary

nonexistent  
official  
panic  
linoleum  
hexagonal  
et cetera  
prolong  
warped  
reveal  
technology  
proposal  
pathetic  
revolved  
assumption  
physics

### Discussion Questions

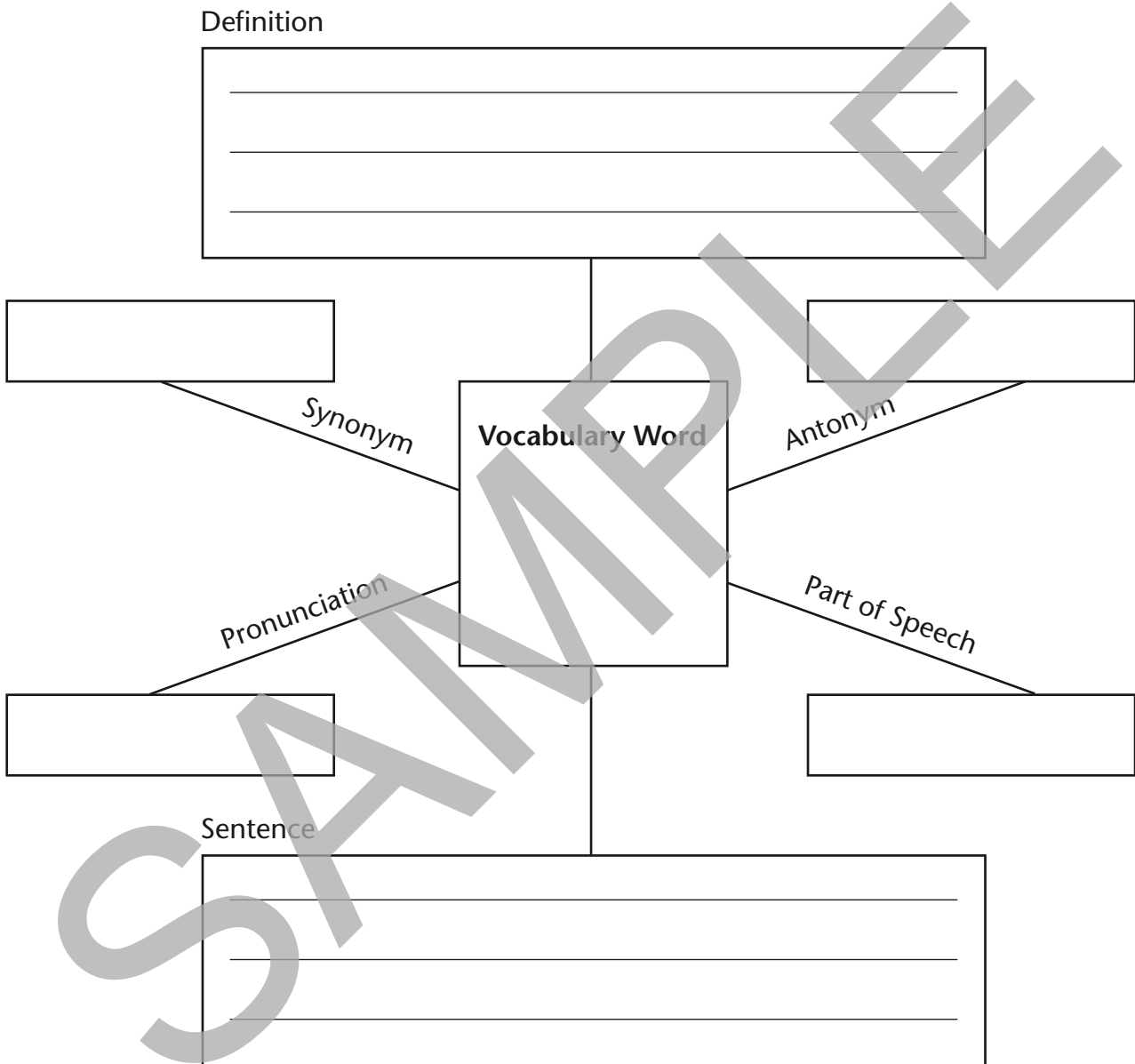
1. Miranda does not miss her nonexistent dad. Do you agree with Miranda that "a person can't miss something she never had" (p. 28)? *(Answers will vary. Miranda is comfortable with her life, and Mom and Richard fulfill her needs. However, in Miranda's favorite novel, the main character is searching for her missing father. Miranda may relate to the story and wonder about her father and how her life would be different if he were around.)*
2. What can you infer from Miranda's observations of the kid in the green jacket? *(Answers will vary. The kid does not seem like a bully even though he did punch Sal. He is intelligent and knowledgeable as shown by his ability to tell time without a watch. Miranda's description of the boy's home, the apartment above the garage with dead plants and bedsheets for curtains, implies his family may be poor.)*
3. Why hasn't Miranda paid much attention to the other girls at school? What has she noticed about them? Do you think making friends with Annemarie means Miranda will be okay without Sal? *(Miranda spent her time with Sal instead of the girls.*

*She has noticed that the girls are mean to one another, often pair up and trade best friends, and some of them tease Alice Evans. Answers will vary. Discussion could cover that the chapter title, "Things That Bounce," may refer to Miranda bouncing back from Sal's rejection by making new friends.)*

4. What does Miranda mean when she says, "Mustard always makes my lips burn, but I didn't care. It was worth it" (p. 38)? *(Answers will vary. Miranda wants to fit in and is willing to put up with small discomforts, such as burning lips, to be Annemarie's friend. Also, Annemarie's apartment is nicer than Miranda's and Annemarie's father cooks for the girls. Miranda enjoys the luxuries at Annemarie's house.)*
5. Why does Mom need the two weeks left before going on the game show? Do you think Miranda and Richard are doing everything possible to prepare her? *(Mom only answers four of six categories in the allotted time, which will prevent her from winning \$20,000. She needs more time to practice. Answers will vary. Miranda, Richard, and Louisa are making practice sessions resemble the show. However, Mom is not practicing in front of an audience, which may make her nervous at the TV studio.)*
6. What reason does Mom give for Mr. Tompkin's class studying buildings every year? Do you think Mr. Tompkin made the right career choice? *(According to Mom, Mr. Tompkin wanted to be an architect but became a teacher to avoid becoming a soldier in Vietnam. Answers will vary. Discussion could cover the reasons men avoided the Vietnam era draft and the resulting consequences. Also, discuss staying true to yourself and whether Mr. Tompkin could still become an architect if he wanted to badly enough.)*

# Word Map

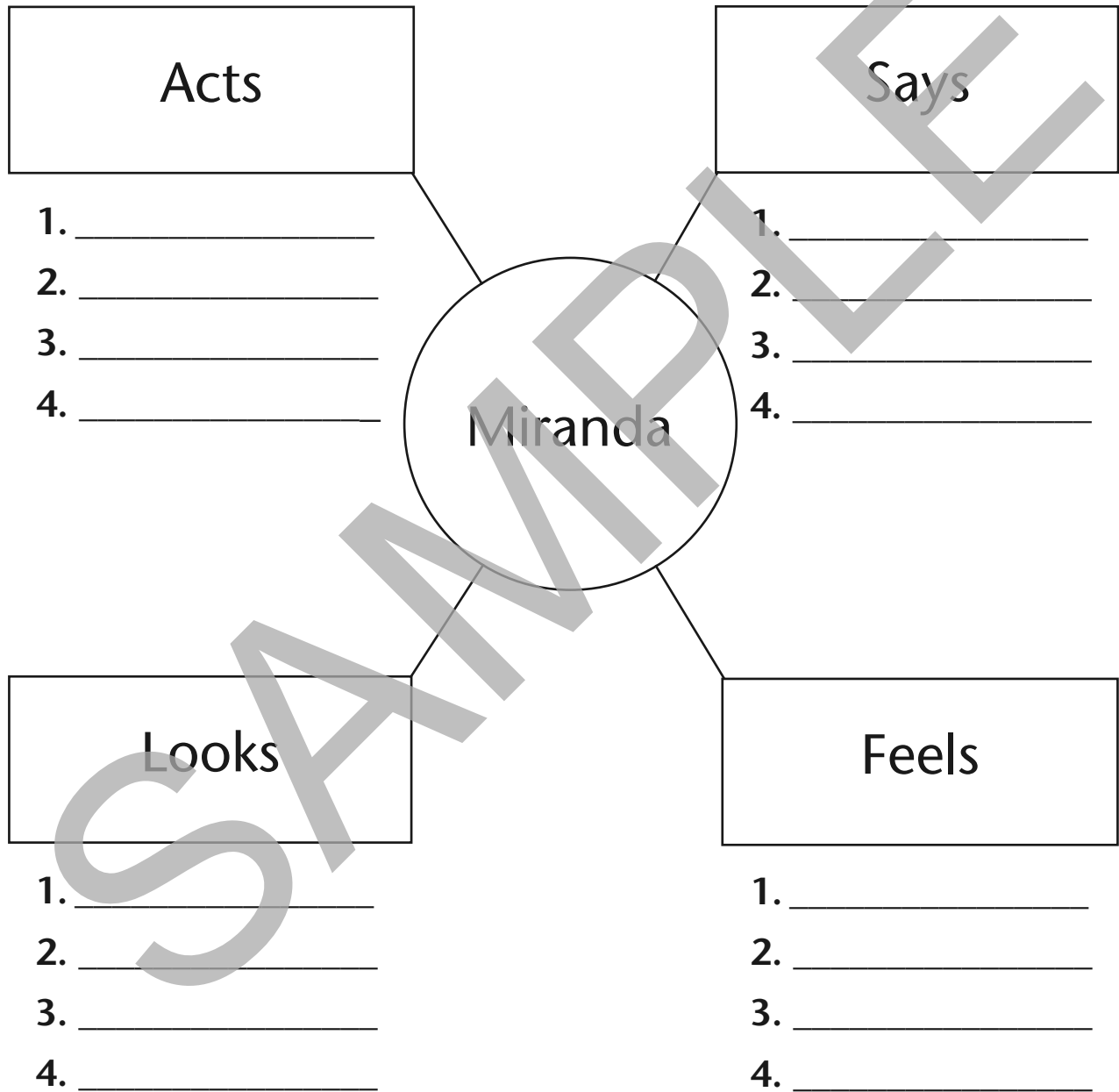
**Directions:** Complete the word map by filling in information specific to the chosen vocabulary word.





## Character Attribute Web

**Directions:** The attribute web below will help you gather clues the author provides about Miranda in the novel. Fill in the blanks with words and phrases that tell how Miranda acts and looks, as well as what she says and feels.



A character attribute web for Miranda. The central circle is labeled "Miranda". Four boxes are connected to the center: "Acts" (top-left), "Says" (top-right), "Looks" (bottom-left), and "Feels" (bottom-right). Each box has four numbered lines for notes.

**Acts**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

**Says**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

**Miranda**

**Looks**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

**Feels**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

## Think About It

**Directions:** Use the chart below to answer a question you have about the novel. Provide three reasons and three examples that help answer your question.

The diagram consists of a central 'Question:' box on the left. Three arrows point from this box to three separate rows on the right. Each row contains a 'Reason #' box and an 'Example from the story:' box. The rows are labeled 'Reason 1:', 'Reason 2:', and 'Reason 3:' respectively. A large, light gray 'SAMPLE' watermark is oriented diagonally across the entire chart area.