

 Prestwick House

# Instant Short Story Pack



**Each pack contains:**

- Objectives
- Full Text of Story
- Student Questions
- Activities and Graphic Organizers
- Teacher Answer Guide

## *A White Heron*

BY SARAH ORNE JEWETT

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1, 2, 4  
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1, 2, 3, 4



## Objectives:

After completing the activities in this packet, the student will be able to:

- cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text (RL.9-10.1; 11-12.1),
- determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text (RL.9-10.2),
- determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text (RL.11-12.2),
- analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., how the characters are introduced and developed) (RL.11-12.3), and
- determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings (RL.9-10.4; 11-12.4).

## Time:

1-3 class periods

## Materials:

✓ 1 copy of each handout per student:

- **Handout #1** (2 pages) – Purpose-setting and Motivational Activities
- **Handout #2** (11 pages) – Text of Story
- **Handout #3** (1 page) – Student Questions
- **Handout #4** (10 pages) – Activities and Graphic Organizers

✓ Teacher Answer Guide

## Procedure:

1. Reproduce all handouts.
2. Distribute **Handouts #1** and **#2**.
  - Allow students to read the short biography of Jewett (approximately 10 minutes).
  - Read and discuss the information about Jewett's work and ideas (approximately 20 minutes).
  - Assign the story to be read for homework OR
  - Allow students to read the story in class and perform the two **As you read...** activities.
3. Distribute **Handout #3**.
4. Give students time to read the questions (approximately 5 minutes).
5. Review with students what each question is asking for and what type of information is required for a thorough answer (e.g., references to prior knowledge, quotations from the story, additional reading or research, etc.).
6. Distribute **Handout #4**.
7. Walk the class through Question 1, demonstrating that in order to address a complex issue, it is often helpful to divide it into smaller subtopics. Students can then use the ideas generated by each subtopic to build a complete and thoughtful answer to the full question.
8. Have students answer the questions.

Sarah Orne Jewett

## *A White Heron*

Today, “A White Heron” is one of Sarah Orne Jewett’s most famous stories. In 1886, when she first wrote it, however, her friend and publisher James Fields did not consider it suitable for publication in *The Atlantic Monthly*. Jewett herself wrote to her close friend, Fields’s wife, “What shall I do with my ‘White Heron’ now she is written? She isn’t a very good magazine story, but I love her, and I mean to keep her for the beginning of my next book.” That book, *A White Heron and Other Stories*, was published later that year.

Because the story is so simple on its surface, many critics and scholars oversimplify the powerful themes it illustrates. Even James Fields and William Dean Howells at *The Atlantic Monthly* dismissed the story as “too romantic.”

Many modern critics, however, give Jewett credit for introducing ideas that would become very important in the twentieth century, especially feminism and environmentalism. Don’t allow the main character’s age to trick you into thinking “The White Heron” is an unimportant story. Remember that Jewett loved her “White Heron”; as you read the story, try to discover why.

### **Before you read:**

#### **Know something about the life of the author:**

Sarah Orne Jewett was born in South Berwick, Maine, on Sept. 3, 1849. Her family had been residents of New England for several generations. She began her formal education with Miss Olive Raynes, who operated a school out of her family’s home. She then attended Berwick Academy, graduating in 1865. She insisted, however, that the most important parts of her education came from her own reading and what she learned while accompanying her father, who was a doctor, on his rounds. She also took long walks as a treatment for rheumatoid arthritis, which she developed when she was a young child.

Although she was a member of the Episcopal Church, she was not known to be particularly devout. Today, she might be described as “spiritual, but not religious.” Her writing suggests she believed that the Divine could be found everywhere in nature.

Sarah Orne Jewett

---

## *A White Heron*

Lexile Measure: 1240L

### I

THE WOODS WERE already filled with shadows one June evening, just before eight o'clock, though a bright sunset still glimmered faintly among the trunks of the trees. A little girl was driving home her cow, a plodding, dilatory, provoking creature in her behavior, but a valued companion for all that. They were going away from whatever light there was, and striking deep into the woods, but their feet were familiar with the path, and it was no matter whether their eyes could see it or not.

There was hardly a night the summer through when the old cow could be found waiting at the pasture bars; on the contrary, it was her greatest pleasure to hide herself away among the huckleberry bushes, and though she wore a loud bell she had made the discovery that if one stood perfectly still it would not ring. So Sylvia had to hunt for her until she found her, and call Co' ! Co' ! with never an answering Moo, until her childish patience was quite spent. If the creature had not given good milk and plenty of it, the case would have seemed very different to her owners. Besides, Sylvia had all the time there was, and very little use to make of it. Sometimes in pleasant weather it was a consolation to look upon the cow's pranks as an intelligent attempt to play hide and seek, and as the child had no playmates she lent herself to this amusement with a good deal of zest. Though this chase had been so long that the wary animal herself had given an unusual signal of her whereabouts, Sylvia had only laughed when she came upon Mistress Moolly at the swamp-side, and urged her affectionately homeward with a twig of birch leaves. The old cow was not inclined to wander farther, she even

Sarah Orne Jewett

## *A White Heron*

### STUDENT QUESTIONS:

---

1. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1; 11-12.1) Explain the circumstances under which Sylvia came to live with her grandmother on the farm. What might the reader infer about the grandmother's need or desire in these circumstances? About Sylvia's? What support does the text offer for these inferences?
2. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3) What narrative and thematic purpose(s) does Jewett achieve with her occasional shifts in verb tense, narrative voice, and perspective?
3. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3) What techniques does Jewett use to give the reader a full understanding of Sylvia's affinity with Nature? What dramatic and thematic purpose is achieved by Jewett's carefully establishing this affinity?
4. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3) What is the significance of the name *Sylvia*? For what possible reason(s) would Jewett have chosen this name for her protagonist?
5. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4; 11-12.4) Explain the two contradictory ideas the narrator expresses when she says, "the splendid moment has come to speak of the dead hemlock-tree by the green marsh."
6. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2; 11-12.2) "A White Heron" is Sarah Orne Jewett's best-known and most anthologized short story. Critical interpretations of the story have run the gamut from praising it as the first example of United States literature to address ecological ideas to dismissing it as an over-romanticized coming-of-age story for young readers. Consider the following ideas, all of which, among many others, have been advanced as central ideas of the story:
  - the dilemma that occurs when conscience conflicts with personal desire, when the individual knows that doing the "right thing" will involve great personal sacrifice;
  - the difficult process of a girl's growth into womanhood, especially the need of the woman to discover and maintain her sense of independent selfhood;
  - the coming-of-age awakening of conflicting desires—
    - » to be free in the "outside world" while still longing for the security of "home,"
    - » to belong to a social group while also developing a sense of personal identity and values.

Choose two of these ideas (or consider some of your own) and explain how those views are expressed in the story. Support your explanations with examples and evidence from the text. Then, explain how the themes you've discussed work together and contribute to the overall meaning of the story.

**ACTIVITIES AND GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS:**

Sarah Orne Jewett, *A White Heron*

**Question 1: Explain the circumstances under which Sylvia came to live with her grandmother on the farm. What might the reader infer about the grandmother’s need or desire in these circumstances? About Sylvia’s? What support does the text offer for these inferences?**

STEP 1: On the following chart, find and record any phrases that detail the circumstances under which Sylvia came to live with her grandmother on the farm.

STEP 2: In the same chart, describe what these phrases mean on the surface, in terms of Sylvia and her grandmother’s circumstances.

STEP 3: Determine what these quotations and circumstances suggest on a deeper, inferential level, especially concerning Sylvia’s past and the relationship between her and her grandmother.

Quotation	Surface Level Meaning	Inference
"houseful of children"	Sylvia's mother had a lot of children to take care of.	The mother asked the grandmother to help ease her burden of raising so many children. Therefore, the grandmother had to choose Sylvia out of many (for a reason?).
"afraid of folks"	Sylvia is shy and quiet around people.	
"never had been alive at all before she came to live at the farm"		