Unit /Week

Title: Hattie’s Birthday Box

Suggested Time: 5 days (45 minutes per day)

Common Core ELA Standards: RL.5.1, RL.5.2, RL.5.3, RL 5.4, RL.5.9, SL.5.1, SL.5.3, SL.5.4, RF.5.4, L.5.2, L.5.4, L.5.5, L.5.6, W.5.1, W.5.3, W.5.4, W.5.7

Teacher Instructions

*Refer to the Introduction for further details.*

**Before Teaching**

1. Read the Big Ideas and Key Understandings and the Synopsis. Please do **not** read this to the students. This is a description for teachers, about the big ideas and key understanding that students should take away **after** completing this task.

**Big Ideas and Key Understandings**

Gifts don’t have to be expensive to be special. Love between family members, even if you haven’t seen them for a very long time, endures and is more important than material things such as expensive gifts. The consequences of a lie are more serious for the person who tells the lie than for the person who believes it.

**Synopsis**

Spencer and Hattie are sister and brother. Seventy-four years ago, Spencer gave Hattie a wooden box as a wedding gift.

The box was empty because Spencer didn’t have the money to put in a special present, so he lied and said there was something special but not to open it unless times were very hard. He worried about the box being empty, and the lie, for 74 years. Since Hattie didn’t know

about the lie, she believed that the box contained something to get her through her hardest times, and because of her love for Spencer and her belief in him and, ultimately, herself, it did. Now, Hattie returns for Spencer’s 100th birthday party and brings the box with her.

Instructional Focus

For this text, there needs to be some instructional focus on the temporal challenges of this selection- the present (now, when the kids are reading the story), the 1940’s after the war (the setting of the story but distant past for students), and the 1870’s when Hattie takes off for Nebraska. The first sentence is very complex and sets the stage for going back and forth in time: “The sign stretching across the ceiling of the nursing home’s rec room says “HAPPY ONE HUNDREDTH BIRTHDAY, SPENCER McCLINTiCK, and on the wall in bright numbers and letters it says JULY 5, 1847 TO 1947.” The second sentence establishes the narrator’s identity and point of view: “Spencer McClintick is my great-great-grandfather, and our whole family is coming to celebrate.”

1. Read entire main selection text, keeping in mind the Big Ideas and Key Understandings.
2. Re-read the main selection text while noting the stopping points for the Text Dependent Questions and teaching Vocabulary.

**During Teaching**

1. Students read the entire main selection text independently.
2. Teacher reads the main selection text aloud with students following along.

(Depending on how complex the text is and the amount of support needed by students, the teacher may choose to reverse the order of steps 1 and 2.)

1. Students and teacher re-read the text while stopping to respond to and discuss the questions and returning to the text. A variety of methods can be used to structure the reading and discussion (i.e.: whole class discussion, think-pair-share, independent written response, group work, etc.)

Text Dependent Questions

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| **Text Dependent Questions** | **Answers** |
| A narrator tells the story. Who is the narrator in this story? What are the settings of this story? Where and when does it take place, and in how many different time periods? How do you know? | The great-great-granddaughter is the narrator of this story.  The story takes place between the years of 1873 – 1947. The setting is an elderly care facility. |
| An idiom is a fixed distinctive expression whose meaning can not be deduced from the combined meanings of its actual words. (example: It’s raining cats and dogs) This story contains figurative language. One type of figurative language is an idiom.  How do the idioms “She’s going to skin me alive” and “Love her to pieces” add to the reader’s understanding of how Spencer feels about his sister coming to see him after so long? | Answers may vary. Spencer was obviously apprehensive about facing his sister after the lie he told regarding the empty box. He also had a lot of love and affection for his sister. |
| What are three reasons mama said they would really celebrate? | The three reasons mama said they would really celebrate are the war is over, everyone is back home, and rations are things of the past. |
| What makes granddaddy so nervous about seeing his sister at his 100th birthday party? | Granddaddy is nervous because he wanted to buy her something to put in the box when things got better. He didn’t have any money, so he lied and told her that something special was in the box, but not to open it until times were hard. He always meant to send her something special, but never did. |
| Compare how Hattie and Spencer feel when they see each other after 74 years. | Hattie is calm, but excited to see her brother. Spencer is nervous and upset because he’s been worrying for 74 years that Hattie is mad at him for lying to her so long ago. |
| Gifts are not always objects we can see. Who received the gifts at the end of the story? What were the gifts? | Hattie’s gifts were that she learned to “let people be neighborly,” to let her husband “have his pride,” and that “no matter how bad things got, they never got their worst.” The narrator shares the ultimate gift- “a wondrous wild and lasting hope.” |
| In Hattie’s box, the granddaughter smells “A young farmer’s stubbornness, a pioneer mother’s sorrow, and a wondrous wild and lasting hope.” Name one event for each. | A young farmer’s stubbornness was shown when Otto refused to ask for help when their whole crop was lost in a prairie fire.  A pioneer mother’s sorrow was shown when Hattie’s son drowned. A wondrous wild and lasting hope was that learned to have faith in herself, her husband, and her neighbors and to always have hope that things will get better. |
| How and why do granddaddy’s feelings change from the beginning to the end? | In the beginning of the story, granddaddy was nervous about Hattie coming to his 100th birthday party. Once Hattie arrives, and tells him the story of her Birthday Box, he is filled with pure and undeniable love. |

Vocabulary

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|  | **KEY WORDS ESSENTIAL TO UNDERSTANDING**  Words addressed with a question or task | **WORDS WORTH KNOWING**  General teaching suggestions are provided in the Introduction |
| **TEACHER PROVIDES DEFINITION**  not enough contextual clues provided in the text | rations  times  hard  brooded  concocted  undeniable  prairie | homestead  lantern  chink  soddy  stovepipe |
| **STUDENTS FIGURE OUT THE MEANING**  sufficient context clues are provided in the text | perch  despair | Upturned |

Culminating Task

* Think about how granddaddy’s feelings changed from the beginning to the end of the story. Write a narrative about a time you received or gave a special gift to someone and compare your experience to that of Hattie’s or Grandpa McClintick’s. Describe how you felt about receiving or giving the gift. Was the gift used or received as the giver intended?

The author of Hattie’s Birthday Box wants the reader to believe that the box was more valuable to Hattie empty than if it had contained a special piece of jewelry such as a gold pin. Do you agree or disagree? Discuss with a partner or small group. Find evidence from the text to support both an agreement or disagreement. For example, was there a time in Hattie’s life when a special piece of jewelry would have been a comfort more valuable than what she learned from not opening the box? Finally, write your own opinion that includes evidence from the text.

Additional Tasks

* Have students complete a story map for Hattie’s Birthday Box. The story must include a box for each of the following: characters, setting, problem, important events, and solution.
* Create a timeline for key events in the story, starting with when Hattie was small and Spencer took care of her and showed her the special things in their world, like new calves being born.
* Research what life was like for the first pioneers in Nebraska in the 1870’s. What were some of the hardships that people endured. What made these hardships worth enduring?

Note to Teacher

This selection fits well into the 5th grade study of American History, and would be enhanced by reading biographies of people who experienced life in Nebraska during the 1870’s, as well as historical fiction set in that time and place. Check state standards in history/social science for key standards that relate.