Unit 5/Week 2

Title: Pioneer Girl

Suggested Time: 5 days (45 minutes per day)

Common Core ELA Standards: RL.5.1, RL.5.4, RL 5.6, RL.5.7, RL.5.10; RF.5.3, RF.5.4; W.5.1, W.5.2; SL.5.1; L.5.1, L.5.2, L.5.4

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

Despite harsh conditions, homesteaders, with the support of community and family, depended on a strong sense of purpose to carry them through hardships. In particular, Homestead children were expected to work very hard, experiencing the challenges of pioneer life head-on.

Synopsis

“Pioneer Girl” relates the real-life experiences of the McCance family, Nebraska homesteaders in 1885. In this story, Andrea Warren combines narrative writing with quotes from Grace McCance's memoir, *No Time on My Hands,* as she recounts the hardships that Grace's family faced while working toward owning a piece of the American dream. In “Pioneer Girl” the McCances endure prairie fires, crushing rainstorms and intense loneliness as they learn that optimism and hard work create endless opportunities for their family. Read entire main selection text, keeping in mind the Big Ideas and Key Understandings.

1. 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.)
3. 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** |
| What are some claims this poster is making about the farmlands? | The poster is trying to draw settlers West along the Union Pacific Railroad through Nebraska by advertising rich farming lands for $1.50 to $8.00 per acre; it also offers town lots for sale. It promises a mild and healthful climate, dark soil that is good for growing corn, wheat, oats, barley and offers to provide coal to settlers at inexpensive costs. |
| Why does the author begin the story with the poster? | The poster frames the promised greatness of becoming a Homesteader, which contrasts the experiences described by the McCance family. |
| Homesteaders were those settlers who headed West to claim land and build a house. Who is Grace McCance, and how is her experience as a homesteader woven into the story? | Grace is the 5 year-old daughter of Poppie McCance. She had written a memoir when she was older, and her experience is woven into the story with the direct quotations from her memoir. (A memoir is an account or description of one’s personal life and experiences—an autobiography.) |
| What does Grace learn about the land of her new home in Nebraska? | Millions of years ago glaciers covered the land and then melted into seas/ Rocky Mountains block moisture from the Pacific Ocean/ Nebraska is one of the driest states/ Few trees/ Grass is shorter in western Nebraska and taller in eastern Nebraska |
| What threats to families and farms does the weather cause? How do homesteaders handle the challenges? | Hailstorms, lightning, prairie fires, rainstorms are all present on the prairie. With prairie fires, often caused by lightening, the settlers work together, setting backfires. Poppie plowed firebreaks around his land. After the huge rainstorm, the family worked together to clean up the pieces and rebuild the house. |
| Many settlers lived in sod houses, or houses made from the prairie grass and dirt. Re-read the last paragraph on page 503, what does Grace mean when she remembers, “Then there was a cracking, tearing sound, and the soddy seemed to quiver?” Why is it in quotation marks? | She is describing what it was like when a huge rainstorm struck, the lightening flashed and her house shook. These are Grace's exact words from her memoir. |
| The author states that Poppie is “hard put to keep a cheerful expression on his face.” What does “hard put” mean? | After the huge rainstorm where he had to look for pieces of the roof to rebuild, he put on a cheerful expression and cooked breakfast for the family. He responded quickly as soon as he saw the prairie fire, and worked hard to put it out. Poppie was not easily discouraged; he was hardworking and lived on hope. |
| How did the McCances celebrate their first Christmas on the prairie? | The girls wore new dresses their mother had sewn from fabric sent by their grandmother. They used a plum bush for a Christmas tree, which they decorated with paper chains and popcorn strings. They didn’t have any presents. The neighbors shared in the celebration by joining them for a turkey dinner. |
| “Poppie said, for the hundredth time, that he had never seen such a land as this, so rich, so fertile. But Mama said only that she wished we had a well in our own yard.” What does fertile mean and what is a well? | Fertile land is rich soil for growing plants. Poppie was very thankful for the rich land for growing crops. A well is where homesteaders would get water. Her mother really wanted a well so she could easily get water for the family. Because they did not have enough money for a well, Poppie would drive elsewhere to fill up water barrels. |
| How does Grace’s description, above, of Poppie and the fertile land and Mama and the well, show how her parents experienced homesteading life differently? | Poppie was optimistic, looking at the opportunities or potential that the fertile land offered. Mama saw the challenges of homesteading life, hoping to have a well to make these a little easier. |
| What does “relent” mean? What was the fun that Grace and Florry wanted to have? | Mama would give in and let Grace and Florry go with Poppie to fill up the water barrels. They looked forward to the wagon ride when they could bounce along with the water barrels, singing and having a good time. |
| An immigrant is someone who leaves one country to settle in another. Why did immigrants come to the Midwest? | Immigrants came for the rich farmland because they either couldn’t afford it in their homeland or weren’t allowed to own it. Some came to find religious freedom or to avoid serving in the military. Some came to avoid paying unfair taxes. |
| Why did Americans want to come to the Midwest? | Some people had lost their homes in the Civil War, while others wanted to leave the east because it was too crowded. For freed slaves, it was a way to leave the South and own their own land. |
| How did children work to help their families? | Youngest children might be human scarecrows to protect crops or they gathered cowchips for fuel. Older children ran errands, took water to workers, pulled weeds or milked the cows. |

Vocabulary

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|  | **KEY WORDS ESSENTIAL TO UNDERSTANDING** | **WORDS WORTH KNOWING**  General teaching suggestions are provided in the Introduction |
| **TEACHER PROVIDES DEFINITION**  not enough contextual clues provided in the text | memoir, homesteaders  immigrants | sod  legacy, optimism  glaciers  backfires  soddy  hardscrabble  steadfastness |
| **STUDENTS FIGURE OUT THE MEANING**  sufficient context clues are provided in the text | homestead, relent  hard put  fertile  first table | discouraged  heifer  petticoats |

Culminating Task

* Re-Read, Think, Discuss, Write

1. *What role did family and community play in helping the McCance family navigate the hardships of prairie life?*

Answer: When lightening started prairie fires, settlers worked together to fight the fires. They would light backfires or dig trenches to keep the fires from spreading. When a rainstorm caused major damage to the McCance sod house, the family worked together to pick up the pieces that had blown into the fields. At Christmas, when their family was too far to celebrate with them, neighbors joined together to feast on a roast turkey dinner. From a very young age, the children always helped with work on the prairie.

1. *Select 2-3 quotes that the author included from Grace McCance’s memoir. How does weaving in Grace’s point of view influence the author’s description of Homestead life?*

Answer: While the author writes about Homestead life, Grace’s quotes add credibility to the descriptions. For example (and selected quotes may vary), after the huge rainstorm that causing extensive damage, Grace remembered, “Mama went around in a kind of a daze, picking some of her torn and broken things out of the hash on the floor and sweeping out the worst of the mud.” The author explained that the children had to wait until the adults finished eating before they could eat their Christmas dinner. Grace remembers, “Homestead children had to put up with a lot of hard things, but one of the hardest was waiting for second table.” By including Grace’s experience, through the direct quotes, the author is providing an “insiders perspective” on how Homesteaders experienced life.

Additional Tasks

* *Pioneer children endured many hardships on the prairie. Still, they found ways to have fun. Give examples of several hardships as well as some of the happy times the children had. Then, think about your own experiences. Make at least one connection between an experience you have had with an experience that the pioneer children had.*

Answers could include, but are not limited to: All of the children worked on various chores throughout the day. Small children acted as human scarecrows; four and five year olds ran errands and worked in the fields. In times of danger, the children pitched in: they prepared for the prairie fire and cleaned up after the huge storm. Children were last to eat at Christmas time (adults ate first). They found fun in many of the chores they had to do; Grace and Florry enjoyed “jouncing” in the wagon when going to get water. At Christmas time, they made paper chains and popcorn strings to decorate the tree. They played with corncob dolls. Few complained as they worked alongside their parents caring for crops and cattle.

* *Reread the poster. Pay special attention to how the soil and the climate are described. Now that you have read “Pioneer Girl”, do you think the poster was telling the truth? Use evidence from the story to support your opinion.*

Answer: The poster claimed that the climate was mild and healthful and that a large variety of crops would grow. However, the harsh weather (hailstorms, prairie fires, lightening and rainstorms), made living on the prairie very challenging. As one of the driest states, some crops were challenging to grow. According to Poppie, the land was very fertile, though there wasn’t much rain where they lived.