Unit 2

Title: “The Smallest Dragonboy”

Suggested Time: 5-7 days (45 minutes per day)

Common Core ELA Standards: RL.7.1, RL.7.2, RL.7.4; W.7.2, W.7.4, W.7.9; SL.7.1; L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.4, L.7.5

Teacher Instructions

**Preparing for 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

Characters who face conflicts can overcome these challenges through the power of determination and perseverance.

Synopsis

This fantasy takes place on the planet Pern, an imaginary world where dragons help protect the inhabitants from the dangerous Red Star, which rains deadly plant spores every 200 years. These spores can devour every living thing if they land on the planet. Each year, in an Impression ceremony, each newly hatched dragon selects its own rider from among the young people of Pern. The hero of this story is Keevan, a boy facing his first Impression ceremony. Small for his age, Keevan must work twice as hard as the other boys and endure their taunts and teasing, especially those of the bully Beterli. Goaded into a fight with Beterli, Keevan is badly injured. However, he calls on his courage and determination to hobble to the Hatching Ground, where he is chosen by a bronze dragon, the highest honor a dragonrider can achieve.

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

**During Teaching**

1. **Day 1:** Teachers read text or play the audio version of the story (unencumbered read).
2. **Days 2-4:**  Students read the chunked text independently. Students should begin filling out an internal and external conflicts chart (Tree Map) and answering assigned questions. At the end of each day’s reading, students will work in groups or pairs to share their conflicts charts and question responses. Teacher should discuss answers with students.
   1. **Day 2**: Fill out conflicts chart, answer questions 1-4, and share out
   2. **Day 3**: Fill out conflicts chart, answer questions 5-7, and share out
   3. **Day 4:** Fill out conflicts chart, answer question 8, and share out

\*Teacher may provide language frames for students to share their charts and responses.

Example: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is an example of an \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ conflict because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

1. **Day 5:** Teacher reviews types of sentences as a grammar mini-lesson. Students answer questions 9-11 independently.

Text Dependent Questions

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| **Text-dependent Questions** | **Evidence-based Answers** |
| Based on the information provided in the “Background” part of the text, how is Pern protected from the deadly Red Star that emits thread-like spores on the planet? | In order to protect Pern, the colonists of Pern have “bioengineered a race of great winged dragons.” Dragonriders and their dragons fly through the sky to “char Thread to ashes” before they fall on Pern soil. |
| Keevan’s goal is to become a dragonrider. What are some of the things he states, that make him look forward to becoming a dragonrider the most? | Keevan looks forward to having a personal connection with a dragon: “to sit astride the neck of a winged beast with jeweled eyes; to be his friend, in telepathic communion with him for life; to be his companion I good times and fighting extremes.”  He also looks forward to the excitement of flying through the air on a dragon, “to fly effortlessly over the lands of Pern! Or, thrillingly between to any point anywhere on the world! Flying between was done on dragonback or not at all, and it was dangerous.” |
| Keevan thinks to himself, “What if his muscles weren’t as big as Beterli’s? They were just as hard. And if he couldn’t overpower anyone in a wrestling match, he could outdistance everyone in a footrace.” What does this tell you about Keevan’s character? | Based on the evidence, I can infer that Keevan is confident and believes in himself. He is greatly determined to reach his goal of becoming a dragonrider. Even though he is physically small, he still finds a way to cite in which ways he is stronger: “they were just as hard” and “he could outdistance everyone” |
| According to Mende, Keevan’s foster mother, what qualities do dragons look for in a candidate? How might her words help Keevan’s confidence? | Mende tells Keevan that she believes dragons look for “goodness, honesty, a flexible mind, patience, courage…someone not so strong or tall or handsome.” She continues on to assure Keevan that he has all of these qualities. This helps Keevan feel even more confident that he can achieve his goal of impressing a dragon, even if he is the smallest candidate. |
| The author writes, “Yes being the smallest candidate was not an enviable position. It was therefore imperative that Keevan impress a dragon in his first hatching.” Why was this so important to him? | At the beginning of the story, Keevan’s goal is “To be chosen-to be a dragonrider!” Because being the smallest candidate was something that was not “enviable” and because he was constantly bullied by Beterli, it was especially important to him that he “Impress a dragon in the first hatching.” |
| Based on what you’ve learned about Beterli’s past, why do you believe Beterli continues to taunt (tease) Keevan? Use evidence from the story to support your response. | In the story, we have learned that Beterli is “the most senior of the boys” and that he has not been chosen in the last eight Impressions. This leads me to believe that he may be angry or bitter about not being chosen and is picking on Keevan for this reason. He also seems desperate this time around as he steps up “officiously to ‘his’ egg, daring anyone to come near it.” |
| What tone does the phrase “grave expression” convey in this part of the story? | Possible Answer (answers may vary):  The phrase “grave expression” is used by the author when he expresses that there are only “forty eggs for seventy-two candidates.” This fact, along with the phrase “grave expression,” give this part of the story a (sad, gloomy, disappointed, serious, melancholy…) tone. |
| What decision were the dragonriders trying to make over dinner? How does Keevan feel about the possible options? | The dragonriders are trying to decide whether or not they will eliminate any of the candidates. The options are to eliminate the youngest, the ones who have been passed four or more times, or both. Keevan felt he could face the elimination as long as Beterli was also eliminated. |
| What events lead to the fight, between Beterli and Keevan? | From the beginning of the story, the conflict between Beterli and Keevan is apparent. Beterli begins by constantly teasing Keevan about his size and abilities stating things like:   * “Maybe if you run fast enough you can catch a dragon,” * “They’ve got to be able to find you first, babe!” * “You can’t even see over an egg”.   Keevan becomes less and less tolerant of Beterli’s comments as the story continues until he finally has had enough. When Beterli asks Keevan to “guess what the news is,” he refuses to guess. Beterli then gets upset and pulls the shovel away from Keevan leading to a struggle between the two boys. The arguing and struggle with the shovel continues as Keevan holds on tight, until Beterli “rammed the handle into Keevan’s chest…” |
| Lessa asks Keevan, “Keevan, will you tell me what occurred at the black-rock bunker?” What is his inner reaction to this conflict? What can you infer about Keevan from his actions? | Keevan is faced with the internal conflict of whether or not to tell on Beterli. “Much as he hated Beterli, he couldn’t bring himself to tattle on Beterli and force him out of candidacy”. This action demonstrates the “goodness” and “courage” that Mende refers to at the start of the story. |
| Keevan asks Mende if he is still a candidate. Her response to him is, “Well, you are and you aren’t lovey.” What do you think she means by this comment? How does this add conflict to his life? | Even though he has not been disqualified, like Beterli has, it is still assumed that he will not be able to participate because of his injuries. This adds more stress and pressure to him. Now he has to deal with his new physical limitations also impeding his chances of impressing a dragon at this first hatching or even being able to attend. |
| The author states, “The hum began to grow. Two things registered suddenly in Keevan’s groggy mind: The only white candidate’s robe still on the pegs in the chamber was his, and the dragons hummed when a clutch was being laid or being hatched. Impression!” What is Keevan’s reaction when this occurs? | Keevan was bitterly disappointed that he was lying in bed, injured when the hatching began. However, he takes this as a challenge and decides to prove to everyone that he is worthy of becoming a dragonrider by “fighting against the tears that threatened to choke him” and getting out of bed. Through his pain, he continues to struggle down the ramp to the hatching ground. |
| “Never had the Weyr been so breathlessly silent. It was as if the multitude of people and dragons watching the hatching held every breath in suspense. **Not even the wind muttered down the steep sides of the bowl.** The only sounds to break the stillness were Keevan’s ragged gasps and the thump-thud of his stick on the hard-packed ground.”  In this passage, why does the author use the metaphor, “Not even the wind muttered down the steep sides of the bowl”? | Possible Answer (answers may vary):  The author uses this metaphor in the story to build suspense and show the desperation and anticipation Keevan feels as he is hobbling down to the hatching ground. |
| Why did the bronze dragon refuse to choose a rider at the Hatching Ground? | According to the Weyrleader and Weyrwoman, the bronze dragon had not made a choice “because the right boy” wasn’t present and the ones present were not “acceptable.” |
| How does Keevan’s inner strength and determination pay off in the end? How does he continue to prove that he is strong and determined? | In the end, Keevan is impressed by the coveted bronze dragon. His motivation and perseverance win the bronze dragon over. Even as he is laying there on the floor, Keevan continues to show how strong and motivated he is by not accepting help from F’lar and taking care of his new dragon on his own. |
| In the end, what is the significance of Keevan’s name change to K’van? | The name change signified that he was now a dragonrider. “Then he gave her a radiant smile, recognizing the traditional shortening of his name that raised him forever to the rank of dragonrider.” |

Tier II/Academic Vocabulary

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|  | **These words require less time to learn**  (They are concrete or describe an object/event/  process/characteristic that is familiar to students) | **These words require more time to learn**  (They are abstract, have multiple meanings, are a part  of a word family, or are likely to appear again in future texts) |
| **Meaning can be learned from context** | spore  bioengineered  Impression  grave expression  gesture  retrieve | candidates  prestige  heretical  exasperation  prospect  exhalation |
| **Meaning needs to be provided** | spanking pace  render  tactics  errand  turf the babes  sniggered  consternation  speculation | obscure  enticing  tantalized  evasion  prime  desolation  constriction  dismay  crooning |

Culminating Writing Task

* Prompt

Reflect back on the conflicts Keevan faces throughout the story. How does his determination and perseverance help him overcome these challenges? Use your conflict chart, responses to the questions, and additional evidence from the story to write an essay in which you:

1. explain various internal and external conflicts Keevan faces,
2. discuss how he responds to them, and
3. describe how Keevan’s determination to overcome these conflicts contribute to the achievement of his vision of becoming a dragonrider.

* Teacher Instructions

1. **Day 6** should be used for students to prewrite/plan their essays. Students will be writing their essays on **Day 7.**
2. Students identify their writing task from the prompt provided.
3. Students complete an evidence chart as a pre-writing activity (this may also be in the form of a Thinking Map). Teachers should remind students to use any relevant notes they compiled while reading and answering the text-dependent questions.

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| ***Evidence***  ***Quote or paraphrase*** | ***Elaboration / explanation of how this evidence supports ideas or argument*** |
| “set that spanking pace just to embarrass him, the smallest dragonboy” | Shows the external conflict Keevan faced with Beterli. |
| “worked twice as hard as any other boy his age, to prove himself capable” | This demonstrates how Keevan reacts to his conflict with Beterli. Instead of giving in to the bully, he continues to work hard to prove himself worthy. |
| “Maybe if you run fast enough you could catch a dragon” | Again, shows the kinds of conflicts Keevan had with Beterli, which then leads us to see how Keevan reacted to these conflicts. Throughout the story, Keevan’s reactions to all of these conflicts make him a stronger person inside with more confidence and determination. |
| “You can’t even see over an egg” | Again, shows the kinds of conflicts Keevan had with Beterli, which then leads us to see how Keevan reacted to these conflicts. Throughout the story, Keevan’s reactions to all of these conflicts make him a stronger person inside with more confidence and determination. |
| “You’d better make sure a dragon sees you this time, Beterli. You’re almost over age aren’t you?” | Another example of how Keevan stands up to Beterli showing that he doesn’t have to be physically strong to stand up for himself. |
| “Why waste four to five years of a dragon’s fighting prime until his rider grows up” “Let the babes wait” | This quote leads us to examine an internal conflict Keevan faces after hearing the Weyr leaders have this discussion. He is afraid that he, along with other young candidates, will not be allowed on the Hatching ground because of their age. |
| “He couldn’t bring himself to tattle on Beterli and force him out of candidacy” | This quote is an example of Keevan’s inner strength and kindness. He could have told on Beterli to make sure his main competition was eliminated, but he chooses not to do so. He follows a more righteous path. |
| “This was the Impression that mattered! This was his chance to show everyone… that he, Keevan, was worthy of being a dragonrider” | His determination, against all odds, to become a dragonrider is most apparent in this part of the story. Even though he is in great pain, he still goes out and drags himself to the Hatching Ground. |
| “The Weyrmen looked on, amused and surprised at the draconic choice, which could not be forced.” | This is the climax of the story where the coveted bronze dragon chooses, or Impresses, with Keevan. Everyone is in awe at the choice the dragon has made, including Keevan himself. |
| “I like to believe that dragons see into a man’s heart” | Although this is stated early in the story, this is a good culminating quote that ties it together. It was not Keevan’s physical strength or age that mattered when it came to impressing a dragon. What mattered was all that he did to deem himself worthy of this honor. In the end, we can say that he has earned this honor by the way he acted in the face of conflict. |

1. Once students have completed the evidence chart, they should look back at the writing prompt in order to remind themselves what kind of response they are writing (i.e. expository, analytical, argumentative) and think about the evidence they found. From here, students should develop a specific thesis statement. This could be done independently, with a partner, small group, or the entire class. Consider directing students to the following sites to learn more about thesis statements: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/545/01/ OR http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/ thesis\_statement.shtml.
2. Students compose a rough draft. Teachers should decide how much scaffolding they will provide during this process (i.e. modeling, showing example pieces, sharing work as students go).
3. Students complete final draft.

* **Sample Answer:**

In the short story, “The Smallest Dragonboy” by Anne McCaffrey, a young boy by the name of Keevan faces a challenging situation. Set in the imaginary planet Pern, young Keevan yearns to earn the respected title of dragonrider in order to protect his planet from the deadly Red Star. However, his age and small physique make the Weyr leaders question his ability to become a dragonrider as well as making him the object of constant teasing by the bully Beterli. Throughout the story, Keevan’s determination and perseverance help him overcome the many conflicts he faces and prove that he is indeed a worthy dragonrider.

From the start of the story, we find out that one of Keevan’s major conflicts is with an older boy named Beterli. This older boy continually bullies Keevan and makes things difficult for him. For example, as they are walking towards the Hatching Ground, Beterli “set the (that) spanking pace just to embarrass him, the smallest dragonboy”. Instead of giving up and complaining about the situation, Keevan shows his determination by simply working “twice as hard as any other boy his age, to prove himself capable”. On several occasions, Keevan also becomes the target of hurtful words from Beterli. Beterli says things like “Maybe if you run fast enough you could catch a dragon” and “You can’t even see over an egg”. Most people would let these kinds of words get to them and would simply give up, but not Keevan. Keevan continually stands up to Beterli by talking back and using words like, “You’d better make sure a dragon sees ***you***this time, Beterli. You’re almost overage aren’t you?” Over and over again, we see how Keevan continues to strive to become a dragonrider against all odds.

As the story progresses, the odds continue to stack up against Keevan. Not only does he have his physical limitations and problems with Beterli, but the Weyr leaders begin to question whether or not young boys should even attend the Impression. Words like “Why waste four to five years of a dragon’s fighting prime until his rider grows up” and “Let the babes wait” cause an internal conflict in Keevan as he begins to worry about whether or not he will even be allowed to attend this hatching. This is one of the few instances when Keevan’s confidence begins to waver. Nevertheless, he continues on believing that he can impress a dragon and that he is ready to become a dragonrider.

The final standoff between Keevan and Beterli occurs when Beterli begins to taunt Keevan about some “news” that is floating around in the Weyr colony. Showing his confidence and determination again, Keevan does not give in to Beterli’s games and instead gets himself involved in a physical struggle with the bully. As a result of this physical conflict, Keevan gets “rammed” with a shovel handle by Beterli and is left with many painful injuries. Anyone else would have told on Beterli as soon as he was well enough to do so, but that was not Keevan’s first reaction. Instead, Keevan tries to cover for Beterli thinking to himself that “he couldn’t bring himself to tattle on Beterli and force him out of candidacy”. This shows the kindness and confidence Keevan has in himself.

Keevan’s injuries potentially take him out of the Impression ceremony since he is too hurt to walk. One would think that this was the end of the story and Keevan would have to wait another year to impress a dragon. Not so. Once more we see the perseverance and determination in Keevan. As soon as he hears the humming begin, signaling that the hatching has begun, he immediately thinks, “This was the Impression that mattered! This was his chance to show everyone… that he, Keevan, was worthy of being a dragonrider”. Through excruciating pain, Keevan manages to drag himself to the Hatching Ground, proving that his strength was not in his physical size, but instead, his strength was within him. As “the Weyrmen looked on, amused and surprised at the draconic choice, which could not be forced,” Keevan finally realizes that he has been chosen by a bronze dragon.

In the end, Mende’s words, “I like to believe that dragons see into a man’s heart” prove to be true. Facing the many challenges he encountered, instead of cowering away from them, made Keevan a stronger, more confident boy inside. Throughout the story, he proves he can handle any situation without ever losing sight of his kindness and righteousness. This, along with his perseverance to achieve his long-lived dream of becoming a dragonrider, results in Keevan impressing a coveted bronze dragon.

Additional Tasks

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| Identify the following sentences as simple, compound, complex, or compound-complex and state why you labeled it as such:   1. “His worry increased, because although he heard excited comings and goings in the passageway, no one tweaked back the curtain across the sleeping alcove he shared with five other boys.” 2. “He couldn’t wait.” 3. “The population of the Weyr began to assemble for the evening meal, and the dragonriders came in from the Feeding Ground on their sweep checks.” 4. “As the evening progressed, more riders were favoring eliminating the youngest and those who’d passed four or more Impressions unchosen.” | 1. Compound-complex: the sentence contains two independent clauses “His worry increased” and “no one tweaked back the curtain across the sleeping alcove he shared with five other boys” as well as a dependent clause “back the curtain across the sleeping alcove he shared with five other boys.” 2. Simple: the sentence contains only one subject and one predicate. 3. Compound: the sentence contains two independent clauses joined by the conjunction “and.” 4. Complex: the sentence contains one dependent clause that begins with the subordinate conjunction “as” and one independent clause. |

* Students will be responsible for selecting a person they feel has succeeded in the face of adversity through their hard work, determination, and perseverance (may be someone current or from the past). Students will take notes that will include a short biography, the challenges he/she faced, and how he/she overcame them. The information gathered will be presented by using multi-media such as Power Point, Prezi, or any Web 2.0 tool such as *Little Bird Tales* (littlebirdtales.com). Note: If the technology is not available, students may present their research in any other visual format.

Note to Teacher

* This lesson should take approximately 5-7 days depending on the level of students you have. Teachers will go over vocabulary and stop to check comprehension during the chunked reading of the text. Students should answer text-dependent questions and fill out their charts independently before sharing out with their groups/partners.
* Web 2.0 sites allow users to interact and collaborate with each other in a virtual community. Some examples are social networking sites, blogs, wikis, video sharing sites, and web applications.