Unit 1, Week1

Title: Cliffhanger

Suggested Time: 5 days (45 minutes per day)

Common Core ELA Standards: RL.3.1, RL.3.2, RL.3.3, RL.3.4, RL.3.7; RF.3.3, RF.3.4; W.3.2, W.3.4, W.3.10; SL.3.1, SL.3.2, SL.3.6; L.3.1-5

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 their work with this text.

Big Ideas and Key Understandings

“People take dangerous risks to help those they love.”

Synopsis

In this story, Dag and his son Axel are at their climbing school in the Teton Mountains when the family dog, Grits, is stranded on Cathedral Wall as a violent storm approaches. Both characters must confront their fears and rely on their climbing experience and each other to safely rescue their pet.

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 without interruption.
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 return to the text. A variety of methods can be used to structure the reading and discussion (e.g., whole class discussion, think-pair-share, independent written response, group work, etc.)

Text Dependent Questions

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| **Text Dependent Questions** | **Answers** |
| **Where are Axel and Dag when the story begins? What are they doing there?** | They are at the Teton Mountains Climbing School. Dag runs the mountain climbing school, and we can assume Axel is doing a lot of mountain climbing because he says he “was glad he wasn’t rock climbing now.” |
| **What language does the author use to describe the weather?** | “storm cloud darkened,” “lightening flashed,” “lightening exploded,” “Kaboom, drummed the thunder” |
| **How did Dag know that he and Axel had time to get Grits?** | He counted the time between the lightning strike and the thunder and got to 40. Knowing it took 5 seconds for each mile, he figured the storm was eight miles away and that would give them time to safely reach Grits. |
| **What does the word trekked mean? Why didn’t the author say they “walked” to Cathedral Wall?** | Dag and Axel had to go through wooded trails (probably not a very smooth path), climb over rock avalanches (probably not small), and “finally” arrive at the Cathedral Wall (finally implies after some effort). Trek is a stronger word for the kind of walking or hiking they had to do. |
| **How can we tell that Dag and Axel have experience climbing in this area?** | They know the trail to take to get to the wall. Axel knows Monkey Ledge, the place Grits is stranded. Dag and Axel both know about an alternate route – “back to the trail split and up the ridge” – that Axel says will take too long. Dag says to “think of your moves.” They also know how to communicate that they are working together “on belay” and “climbing.” |
| **As Axel is climbing, why did the author say, “He relaxed”?** | At this point, Axel was able to place a climber’s nut into a crack and put a carabiner through it. When he put his rope through the carabiner, he would not plunge “to his death” if he fell now. |
| **In your own words, describe how Axel finishes the climb to reach Grits.** | Axel is careful and concentrates even though the storm is only a quarter mile away. He moves slowly and places his hands firmly on the ledge before standing up. He also secured himself and the dog by placing another nut and carabiner and roping them both to it. |
| **How does the author describe being *in* the storm? How does the illustration help tell the story?** | The author says, “The cloud opened and rain poured down.” This time there is “no count” for the storm’s approach. “Electricity lifted the hair straight up on Axel’s head and arms. The air hummed. Sparks snapped…” The illustration shows stars sparkling around the pair and rain pouring down. |
| **How does the author show how Axel is managing his descent (his climb down)?** | Axel is being careful and slow as he descends. He puts a harness on Grits and “eases” him down slowly. He calls to Dag – “Dog on belay!” – and he shows Dag he has a plan for getting to a good ledge. The author repeats the phrases, “he jumped out, dropped, caught himself” to show he is coming down slowly. |
| **What does it mean when Dag “foresaw a disaster”?** | The word foresee means to “see” or predict something will happen **before** it actually happens. Dag thinks about the strong possibility of Axel falling and getting hurt. |
| **Describe the two different ways Dag and Axel want to solve the problem of Axel’s not finding a handhold near the planned route.** | Dag wants to go get help, but Axel says it will be too dark. Axel is determined and swings back and forth until he can get a secure handhold and get balanced so he can drop the rope and finish the descent by free climbing. |
| **What does Dag do once the rescue is over? How does he feel and how do you know?** | He counts the seconds between the lightning and thunder again, makes soup for all of them, and suggests they all wait since the storm is at the hut. He is relieved: “That was so close, I can’t talk about it”; he is feeling “beat”. |
| **Axel, Dag, and Grits were all afraid. Of what was each one scared and how do you know?** | Grits was afraid of the storm. Axel had to tell him to stay so he wouldn’t jump to him. Axel also had to comfort Grits through the storm. Dag was afraid of Axel’s getting hurt, and Axel was scared of losing Grits: “I thought I had lost my friend forever.” |

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 | Belay  Carabiner  Rappel  Concentration |  |
| **STUDENTS FIGURE OUT THE MEANING**  sufficient context clues are provided in the text | Trekked, avalanches,  Descent/descend  Plunging  Foresaw | bracing  Securely |

Possible Culminating Tasks

* Re-Read, Think, Discuss, Write

1. *Why didn’t Dag stop Axel from climbing to rescue Grits? How does “the old pro” help him as he climbs?*

Answer: Dag knows that Axel is a good climber and that he must save Grits. He has been climbing with him this summer and reminds him, “Remember your moves.” He also knows the area and takes precautions, i.e. wearing his helmet, carrying what he needs, concentrating and planning his moves. Dag belays for Axel, is quiet so he can concentrate, and helps him plan good routes.

1. *Axel takes risks in the story to save Grits, but at the same time he is careful. Give examples from the text that show how he is careful as he rescues his pet.*

Answer: Axel wears his helmet and packs the gear he will need for the rescue – ropes, carabiners, nuts, and the dog’s harness. He moves slowly, plans his routes, and makes sure he is balanced before completing moves. He secures himself and tells his dad what he is doing. He also concentrates and takes his time descending.

1. *Describe how the author shows time passing in the story.*

Answer: Time is measured by the storm’s approach, hit, and passing. Dag and Axel keep track of the storm by counting the seconds between the lightning strikes and the claps of thunder. At the beginning of the story, the storm is 8 miles away and then a half-mile away as they reach Cathedral Wall. It is only a quarter mile away as Axel gets to Monkey Ledge, and it hits as he secures him and Grits. The storm retreats as they begin the descent and is at the hut when they are back on the ground.

Additional Tasks

* *Simile – Find examples of where the author uses similes in the story. Why does he describe Axel’s movements this way?*

Answer: The author says that Axel was “moving like a ballet dancer” and “bent like a hairpin.” He also “ran like a track star back and forth across the vertical wall.” The author uses these similes to give the reader an understanding of Axel’s rock climbing. It helps the reader to visualize the moves.

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**“Cliffhanger”**

1. Where are Axel and Dag when the story begins? What are they doing there?
2. What language does the author use to describe the weather?
3. How did Dag know that he and Axel had time to get Grits?
4. What does the word trekked mean? Why didn’t the author say they “walked” to Cathedral Wall?
5. How can we tell that Dag and Axel have experience climbing in this area?
6. As Axel is climbing, why did the author say, “He relaxed”?
7. In your own words, describe how Axel finishes the climb to reach Grits.
8. How does the author describe being in the storm? How does the illustration help tell the story?
9. How does the author show how Axel is managing his descent (his climb down)?
10. What does it mean when Dag “foresaw a disaster”?
11. Describe the two different ways Dag and Axel want to solve the problem of Axel’s not finding a handhold near the planned route.
12. What does Dag do once the rescue is over? How does he feel and how do you know?
13. Axel, Dag, and Grits were all afraid. Of what was each one scared and how do you know?