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Teaching Guidelines

TEACHER PREPARATION:

A. Thoroughly read these Teaching Guidelines.

B. Read the Introductory Essay that follows the Teaching Guidelines.

C. Contemplate the Essential Questions after the Introductory Essay, which should guide major discussions for this book.

D. Read through the textual evidence lists in the Appendix.

E. If included, read through Elements of Story and familiarize yourself with the Plot Diagram of the novel in the Appendix. Filling in the plot Diagram will be assigned in the last chapter of the study guide. Young students (3rd-5th) will need this modeled for them on the board, and then they should copy it into their guides. Older students will also benefit from discussion and guidance before completing the Plot Diagram.

PREPARING TO READ:

I. Review

A. Review the plot of the book as read so far.

B. Periodically review the concepts of character, setting, and plot (see Appendix).

II. Study Guide Preview

A. Reading Notes: Read aloud together. This section gives students key characters, places, and terms that are relevant to a particular time period, etc.

B. Vocabulary: Read aloud together so that students will recognize words when they come across them in their reading.

C. Comprehension Questions: Read through these questions with students to encourage purposeful reading.

READING:

I. Mark Your Book

A. Appreciation: Have students mark something that is True, Good, or Beautiful with a double line in the margin (this could be different for each student).

B. While reading, have students mark each vocabulary word as they come across it. This shouldn't interrupt the flow of reading once students get used to marking the words. (In a classroom, students can be taught to raise their hands when they come across a word so that everyone sees it, and then students can mark it without disrupting the reading.) Students can also mark answers to comprehension questions, but this should not interrupt the flow of their reading either.

C. Don't put undue pressure on students to find vocabulary words and comprehension answers if it is interfering with their enjoyment of the story, but this is an important skill to teach. It is worth helping students to go back and mark their books as they work through their comprehension questions in the guide if they struggle to complete this task as they read.

II. Reading

A. Have younger students read the chapter aloud. You can alternate between teacher-read and student-read passages. Older students can read silently, but ideally they would also read sections aloud as you discuss. Reading aloud is a skill that continues to be important as the content students are reading elevates in difficulty. Reading aloud even after students are good independent readers prepares them for the difficulty of reading Shakespeare, Homer, Dante, etc. Reading aloud trains students to become good orators. Model good reading skills. Encourage students to read expressively and smoothly. You may occasionally take oral reading grades.

AFTER READING:

I. Vocabulary

A. Look at each word within the context that it is used and help students come up with the best synonym or short phrase that defines the word. Refer to the book to see the words within a larger context as needed and use students' knowledge of Latin and other vocabulary to decipher meanings. Make sure you choose synonyms students know the meaning of.

B. Have students record the word's meaning in the study guide.

II. Comprehension Questions

A. Older students can answer these questions independently, but younger students (3rd-4th) need to answer the questions orally, form a good sentence, and then write it down using correct punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. Write the sentence on a board after students form it orally, and then students should copy it perfectly. Toward the end of 4th grade, or when you feel students have mastered forming a good sentence, after you have discussed the answer to each question, transition to only putting key words on the board and let students form their own full-sentence answers.

B. The goal is to write an answer for every comprehension question, but if time does not permit this, be sure to answer the questions on the test (denoted with an asterisk) and answer the rest orally.

C. Thorough answers are supplied for the teacher in the teacher guide, but student answers will probably be shorter and simpler, which is fine as long as the answers are complete.

D. Consider comprehension questions to be composition exercises. Require students to answer in complete sentences with proper spelling, punctuation, and grammar. It is important that students practice forming their own unique sentences as answers to the questions so that they will acquire the skill necessary to do this work independently.

III. Quotations and Discussion Questions

A. Use the Quotations and Discussion Questions section of each lesson as a guide to your oral discussion of the key concepts in the chapter that may not be covered in the comprehension questions.

B. These talking points can take your oral discussion to a more elevated level than covered in the students' written work. Use this time as an opportunity to introduce higher-level thinking. You can introduce concepts the students may not be mature enough to fully understand yet but that would be beneficial for them to begin thinking about.

C. A key to the Discussion Questions is in the back of the *Teacher Guide*.

IV. Enrichment

A. The Enrichment activities include poetry work, literary terms, theme development, cross-subject connections, and more.

B. We highly recommend that you take the time to complete the Enrichment activities that teach literary terms and theme development, especially the Evidence Lists in the Appendix. These activities will serve students well as they move into more complicated literature.

V. Essential Questions & Evidence Lists

A. The major themes of the work—the Essential Questions that the text is contemplating—are explored in both the Discussion Questions and the Enrichment activities. The Discussion Questions will lead students to notice and think deeply about the Essential Questions, while the Enrichment activities will prompt students to gather Evidence Lists as they read that pertain to the Essential Questions. In the grammar school years students are not required to write analytical literary essays, but completing these sections of the grammar school guides will prepare them for doing so in high school. Ideally the Essential Questions would be posted in your classroom and referred to repeatedly while students read.

VI. Unit Tests

A. There is a unit review and a quiz or test following every few lessons (varies by individual guide).

B. On the weeks that have these reviews and tests, you may want to do the review early in the week, and then drill it orally a couple of times before giving the test at the end of the week.

C. A final comprehensive test is also included.

Introductory Essay

It would be easy to overlook *The Moffats* on a crowded bookstore shelf. The Moffats are unassuming: a regular family with regular problems and regular hopes. There is Mama, kindhearted and pragmatic, a widow and a steadfast presence in her children's wild and whimsical world but with a mischievous streak of her own; there's fifteen-year-old Sylvie, resourceful and responsible and exploring teenaged independence; there's twelve-year-old Joey, a trustworthy, confident, capable young man very uninterested in dancing lessons; there's nine-year-old Jane, wielding a boundless imagination and a very loud conscience she tries very hard to listen to; and there's little Rufus, just five-and-a-half, bursting with curiosity and yearning to be a part of everything. They are an average family in common circumstances. And yet, we find that they are humbly extraordinary. Loyalty and love (and a tendency toward delight) animate their interactions with each other and with their community. Tough situations are approached with a willingness to consider things in the best light instead of the worst, a trait that leavens all aspects of their lives. Change—that most unwanted of human inevitabilities—comes for them unexpectedly and they wrestle with it like anyone would, but they lean on each other in the face of the uncertainty. Confronted with the prospect of leaving their beloved yellow house, the Moffats grapple with understanding what their home truly means to them, and whether they might ever feel the same sense of familiarity and peace in a new house.

The story is told by an omniscient narrator who weaves in and out of the minds of all the characters. The reader spends the most time with Jane and the other young Moffats, and experiences most of the events through the children's voices and perspectives. Part of the beauty of this novel is that the author has captured what it feels like to experience real and difficult problems through the relatively carefree lens of childhood. The reader lives some life-changing moments with Sylvie and Joey and Jane and Rufus—and some compelling small and quiet moments, too—through the innocent insulation that a nine-year-old point of view provides (though the reader knows more than the characters do, a gift from the all-seeing narrator). The author expertly captures that period of childhood when you are still focused on childhood concerns—where to keep your collection of special things, the pitfalls of forgetting your doll can't actually fly, whether you'll be made to dance in front of the whole town at the recital, if you'll make friends on the first day of school—but have a growing awareness of adult responsibilities. Mama is honest with the children about the reality of facing financial difficulties, severe illness, and unwanted change, but she also fortifies them all with her matter-of-fact optimism, lending courage and a sense of stability and safety to her anxious children.

All of the Moffats have a remarkable tendency toward hopefulness and joy, even in objectively dire or distressing circumstances, which gives the novel a playful, sometimes ironic tone, even when dealing with heartache and worry. It is easy to respond to disappointment or an obstacle with cynicism or frustration; it is much harder to accept an unpleasant or scary reality and *still* try to find a positive perspective, but this is what the Moffats do again and again. They don't see a run-down house or an eyesore of a brick lot, or feel jealousy for richer neighbors; they love their house for the safety and comfort it provides, they appreciate the brick lot for its open space in which to play and be imaginative, they find joy in shared adventures, they appreciate the common miracles of trolley rides and ice cream cones and spirited kittens. They aren't in denial about reality, but in a world that encourages noticing and commenting on everything that annoys, distresses, worries, or bothers us, the Moffats show that even disappointing realities can be improved simply by reaching first for appreciation, wonder, joy, and hope (or in Jane's case, by literally looking at the world "upside-down" to get a new perspective). Intentionally cultivating a posture of gratitude and a willingness to consider things in the best light instead of the worst breeds contentment, and it is a simple but revolutionary example for the reader. How much more aware of the grace and blessings in our lives would we be if we followed their example?

Their unique voices—Jane's especially—beckon from the page, inviting the reader to become part of the warm, tight-knit community of Cranbury, Connecticut. Times are hard in Cranbury, but the members of the community are involved in each others' lives, supporting each other through struggles and reveling in shared triumphs. Being part of a community is both a responsibility and a blessing, where each person has a responsibility to support, uplift, and help where able, and where each person is blessed with the same in return. The Moffats, young and old, are active participants in their little community, demonstrating in concrete ways the means by which a healthy community operates. When one member struggles the others step in, as when Miss Chichester the dance instructor cannot afford to pay for the sewing she's commissioned from Mama so they strike up a deal that benefits both parties. When little Hughie Pudge needs encouragement (and supervision) on his first day of school, his classmate Rufus fulfills his duty with five-year-old gravitas. Actively participating in community provides a support system and an outlet for service, as well as simply being enjoyable. It creates opportunities for relationships that might not otherwise be sought (you'll be enchanted by Jane befriending the Chief of Police) and broadens experience and empathy. The Moffats seem to do this by instinct: There is no discussion of being part of the community, they just *are*.

The center of the Moffats' community is their own little family: the five Moffats who live in the beloved yellow house at the center of New Dollar Street. The yellow house is, according to Jane, "the best house to be living in in the whole block." Next door is the brick lot (where the Moffats play Druids), on the other side is Mrs. Squire (who never wants the children to sit on her fence), and if you look at the house "the upside-down way" preferred by Jane, it is clean and bright. They love it almost as a tall yellow member of the family. The central tension of the book has to do with the house and is introduced in the very beginning, hovering over the Moffats like a distant rain cloud throughout, threatening a bad day to come. One morning a man walks up and nails a For Sale sign to the house, signaling an unexpected and very unwanted change on the horizon. The Moffat children are devastated at the thought of leaving their home for another unknown and unloved house. This is partly because the yellow house is warm and welcoming, but they (and hopefully readers) eventually realize it is mostly because the yellow house is where all the Moffats are, where they have made countless memories together. The most basic definition of "home" is "where a person lives," but this is a changeable metric, a definition dependent on circumstance. A house can be a home, and it might be very special, but ultimately home is simply where your loved ones are, a place of familiarity, safety, comfort, joy, acceptance, and support. The Moffats feel this, and eventually, they know it. When one of the Moffats is not at home, the house feels empty—because the Moffats themselves, their love for each other and their belonging to one another, make the yellow house feel like *home*. Thoughts of moving—the uncertainty and the inevitability of it—shade Jane's thoughts throughout the novel as she grapples with the reality of such a momentous change in her young life. Heartache and excitement loom larger in the scope of time when you've only got nine years of memories—or five or twelve. Mama, having already faced a move, the death of a husband, raising four children, and all the other changes inherent in making it to middle age, has a broader, more balanced perspective on moving from the yellow house, but even she struggles with it. Any kind of change—a new school, new friendship, new home, new baby—necessarily means that comfort and familiarity must be traded, at least temporarily, for discomfort and the unknown. Not many people revel in this transitional discomfort, and the Moffats are no exception. Change is difficult, even when it ultimately leads to growth, good experiences, and new relationships and opportunities, as we glimpse the Moffats beginning to discover at the end of the novel.

This unassuming book about an unassuming family is, first, an amusing reminder of the pure joy and confusing complexity of childhood, but is also a sincere exploration of the very human struggle with the inevitability of change, the gift of having a place and people to call home, and an argument for approaching the world with an eye for silver linings. It is whimsy and profundity mixed perfectly together in one enchanting story, as they so often are in life.

Essential Questions

1. How is home defined? How do you know when you're there?
2. How does perspective contribute to contentment or dissatisfaction?
3. What does it mean to be part of a community?
4. Are there good things that can come from change, even when it is not necessarily wanted?

Literary Devices

- **Personification:** Giving human characteristics to an inanimate object or idea. (Chapter 2 Discussion Question #1 and Chapter 8 Enrichment #1)
- **Onomatopoeia:** When a word imitates a sound or sounds like what it describes. (Chapter 2 Enrichment #2, Chapter 3 Discussion Question #4, and Chapter 4 Enrichment #2)
- **Sensory Imagery:** Sensory descriptions that make scenes feel more real by using adjectives that appeal to the five senses and help us imagine what something smells, tastes, sounds, looks, and feels like. (Chapter 5 Discussion Question #1)
- **Omniscient Narrator**: When a story is told by a narrator who knows more than the characters in the story and more than the reader. (Chapter 6 Discussion Question #3)
- **Allusion:** A reference to a well-known character, event, literary work, etc., often used to add greater significance or depth of meaning. (Chapter 7 Enrichment #1)
- **Simile**: An expression that compares two different things using "like" or "as." (Chapter 9 Enrichment #2)

Chapter 1: The Yellow House on New Dollar Street

READING NOTES

hitching post a short post to which reins of horses, mules, etc. are tied

trolley a vehicle for public transportation that runs on tracks in the street

Druids members of an ancient religious group in Britain, Ireland, and Gaul

bust a dressmaker's dummy that serves as a model in place of a person

VOCABULARY: Write the meaning of each bold word or phrase.

1. She sprinkled sugar and cinnamon on the apples with the same **deft** fingers. skillful
2. When Mama went to town for **provisions** *food; supplies
3. she got off the trolley, arms **laden** with bundles loaded down
4. count the cars … as they **galumphed** along. moved clumsily
5. She answered … with an **impertinent** grimace. rude; disrespectful
6. She could **impersonate** anyone. *mimic

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: Answer the following in complete sentences.

1. List each member of the Moffat family and give the age of each child.

   The Moffat family consists of Mama, Sylvie (15), Joey (12), Jane (9), and Rufus (5 ½).

2. Why is the yellow house the best place to live in New Dollar Street?

   *The yellow house sits in the middle of the curved street and is the only house from which you can see both ends of the street. On one end of the street is the trolley, and on the other is the train tracks. (Note: See map of New Dollar Street in the Appendix.)

3. What happened to the Moffats' Papa? How long have the Moffats lived in the yellow house?

   The Moffats' Papa died before they moved to the yellow house approximately five years ago, when Rufus was a tiny baby. We are not told how Papa died.

4. How does Mr. Baxter, the odd-jobs man, surprise Jane when he comes to the yellow house?

   *Mr. Baxter puts a sign on the house that says "For Sale."

*Answers denoted with an asterisk will appear on the quiz or test.

5. Who is Madame? How does she help Mama in her profession?

*Madame is not a person but a bust. Mama is a dressmaker, and Madame is her model (or mannequin). Madame helps Mama maintain her position as the finest dressmaker in Cranbury, Connecticut. (Note: See illustration of a dressmaker's dummy in the Appendix.)

QUOTATIONS

Jane clanked her feet against the hollow hitching post. For the hundredth time she was thinking that the yellow house was the best house to be living in in the whole block because it was the only house from which you could see all the way to both corners.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to look at things "the upside-down way"? Why does Jane do this?
2. Why does Jane tell Hildegarde that "these are hard times"? Is she trying to comfort Hildegarde or discourage her?
3. We are just getting to know the Moffats, but they seem to have an optimistic outlook on life so far. Give examples from the chapter.
4. "The yellow house was still the yellow house even with a sign on it. The sign didn't change it." Consider this quote. *Has* the house changed? Does it mean a future change for the Moffats? How do they feel about this?

ENRICHMENT

1. In the Appendix, begin filling in the lists of Community, Change, The Idea of Home, and Perspective.
2. Describe Mama. List what you know about her, including her appearance, talents, and attitudes. Discuss the ways in which she influences the children.

Answers may include: Mama is the finest dressmaker in Cranbury, is from New York City, wears a blue-checked apron, has eyes the same color as the blue violets on her hat, and is the only housewife on New Dollar Street to wear a hat and gloves when going only to Elm Street. Mama is hardworking and honest with the children, but always encourages them to hope for the best. She is hopeful and positive but not unrealistic. She teaches the children not to worry about problems they don't have yet. For example, when the Moffats learn the yellow house will be sold, Mama says she wishes she could buy the house but cannot afford to, so they'll forget about it until it's actually sold.

3. Read the poem "Our House." If you have *Poetry for the Grammar Stage*, complete the poem study. If not, do the following:
    - **a.** Find the poem "Our House" in the Appendix.
    - **b.** Read it through several times.
    - **c.** Discuss the meaning of the words, the aspects of poetry, and its message.
    - **d.** Copy it carefully and precisely.
    - **e.** Memorize it and recite it for your family or class.

Chapter 9: Share and Share Alike

READING NOTES

wooden horse of Troy	a reference to the Trojan horse in Virgil's epic poem the *Aeneid*
game of beast, bird, or fish	a word categorization game
Dresden shepherd	a collectible china figurine imported from Dresden, Germany
"with bated breath"	in great suspense

VOCABULARY: Write the meaning of each bold word or phrase.

1. the graceful way … he **cantered** up the street. moved at a pace between trot and gallop
2. He stood there **immobile**. not able to move
3. The shingles **protruded** over each window *extended
4. like **languorous**, drooping eyelids. still; sleepy
5. this kitten was the most **enterprising** of the four. *adventurous
6. You must call as **fervently** for this one as that one. *passionately; zealously

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: Answer the following in complete sentences.

1. In what three interesting ways does Jane imagine Mr. Brooney's horse?

   Jane imagines Mr. Brooney's horse as a winged horse that could carry her away (such as Pegasus), as the wooden horse of Troy, and as a bridge she could walk under.

2. After watching Jane from inside, why does Mama send her on an errand? What is the errand?

   *Mama is afraid that Jane will walk under the horse again, which is dangerous. She doesn't know Jane has no desire to do it again. Jane's errand is to take a sleeve to Tilly Cadwalader for measuring.

3. What is the Moffats' code about sharing and how does Jane break it? How does Jane feel about breaking it?

   *The Moffats' code is "share and share alike." Jane breaks this code by spending her entire nickel on an ice cream cone for herself. She feels so ashamed and angry with herself afterward that she doesn't even enjoy the cone. She regrets her choice.

4. Why is Jane not entirely happy with the results of the "choosing game"?

Jane wins Boots, the kitten everyone wanted, but she feels she doesn't deserve the best cat because she's broken the family's "share and share alike" rule.

QUOTATIONS

She had no desire to keep on walking under horses. It was just something she felt she had to do at that moment, just that once. And she knew that horse.

This day she had walked under a horse, been a pig about an ice-cream cone, and won Boots, the sweetest of all kittens, though she didn't deserve it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss how Mama's attitude about moving away from the yellow house is different from her children's attitude. Why might this be?

2. Jane feels she does not deserve any of the good things that happen to her in this chapter because she behaves selfishly with the nickel. What do you think? Do people "deserve" every bad or good thing that happens to them?

ENRICHMENT

1. Jane references the game of beast, bird, or fish on p. 159. Play beast, bird, or fish with your family or class. Here are the rules:
   - Everyone sits in a circle facing in, except one person, the leader, who sits in the middle of the circle.
   - The leader points at someone in the circle and calls out one of the categories (beast, bird, or fish).
   - Whichever player is pointed at must name an animal that fits under the given category within ten seconds. The player is eliminated from the round if unable to name a valid animal. If the player is able to name a valid animal, then the leader points at someone else and calls out a different category.
   - Animals may not be repeated, even after the player who gave the answer has been eliminated.
   - Continue until all but one person has been eliminated. This person becomes the leader for the next round.

2. Similes are expressions that compare two different things using "like" or "as." In each sentence, circle "like" or "as," and underline the things being compared.

   a. The shingles protruded over each window like languorous, drooping eyelids.
   b. And the red steed sent sparks from his nostrils that disappeared like shooting stars into the still night air.
   c. The thunder cracked like a giant whip.
   d. He tore around the attic room, roaring like a bull.
   e. Now she would have the center of the floor at dancing school, spinning lightly as a leaf.
   f. Otherwise, very few people were on the street this cold day, and they were muffled up like mummies.
   g. The man stood there like a rock and said nothing.

3. In the Appendix, add to the lists of Change, The Idea of Home, and Perspective.