

Lesson in Literature ...

SARAH'S ROOM


WHAT IS A STORY?

- A story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Something in the story must change before the story is over.
- *What happens* in the story is called the **plot**.
- The *people* or animals in the story are called the **characters**.

- The *time* and *place* in which the events happen are called the **setting**.

THINK ABOUT IT!

1. In the middle of the story, something changes in Sarah's life. What is it?
2. Who are the six characters in the story?
3. Describe the setting of the second half of the story.



Sarah didn't like being the youngest in the family. With an older brother and two older sisters, Sarah always had to wait for them to do things first. On the playground or in the backyard, she had to wait. "Wait your turn!" her sister Emily said when Sarah wanted to go first. When her parents gave her brother permission to ride his bicycle to the park, Sarah asked, "Can I go too?"

"Sarah," her mother said, "you're too young. You have to wait until you're old enough."

"But when will I be old enough?" Sarah asked.

"Soon," her mother said.

Sarah thought about it. When she was younger, she had to wait to go to school. She had to wait to learn to read. She had to wait to ride a bicycle. She had to wait to swim in the pool. Now at twelve she still had to wait. She had to wait to sit at the adults' table for dinner. She had to wait for her older sisters to grow out of their clothes, and she was still waiting for her own room. Sarah didn't want to share a bedroom with her sister Emily anymore. When she asked her father about a room of her own, all he said was, "Sarah, you just have to wait."

So when her family moved into a new house, her father surprised them all when he said, "Sarah has waited long enough. In this house she gets her own room." He smiled at her. "Sarah, you get first choice. What room do you want?"

Her whole face smiled back at her father, but she didn't feel happy. She felt the eyes of

her brother and her sisters staring at her. She didn't have to wait anymore, but now they had to wait.

"I like the downstairs room," she said. It was the best room in the house. It had a big window that opened to a field of tall grass behind the house. It had a big closet, too. It was also the only bedroom on the first floor.

Once the movers left, everyone in the family helped with the unpacking, carrying boxes upstairs to the other bedrooms or to the rear of the house to Sarah's bedroom. After a while Sarah noticed that her sister Anne took a long time climbing the stairs with her boxes. Ever since her hip surgery Anne used a cane. She walked slowly and couldn't carry very much, and Sarah's heart jumped when she saw Anne almost fall coming down the stairs.

Sarah liked the downstairs room. She liked the sunlight from the window and the view of the field. She even liked the big closet. But she especially liked first choice. So when her father walked past with a box, she stopped him. "I can't wait to tell you," she said. "I changed my mind. My first choice is to share a bedroom upstairs with Emily. I want Anne to have the downstairs room."

When he heard her new choice, Sarah's father immediately held out his arms to hug his youngest daughter. "You didn't wait to do the right thing," he said. Sarah didn't wait to be hugged, either. She ran into her father's outstretched arms, happy she didn't have to wait for a hug.

Blueprint for Reading

INTO . . . *Leah's Pony*

After many years of comfortable farm life, Leah's family falls upon hard times. People react in different ways when faced with a challenge. One person may react with anger. Another person may react with determination. As you read, think about the way Leah, her family, and her neighbors deal with the difficulties that come their way. Leah has no concern for herself, as she inspires others to behave with kindness and generosity.



Narrative Elements

Why do we tell stories? There are many reasons. A story can have important messages, help us remember something, or create an imaginary world. In order for a story to work properly, a number of **elements**, or parts, must be present. You will learn about these elements, such as plot and setting, in the coming pages. As you read *Leah's Pony*, think about what makes the story interesting. Does anything in the story surprise you?

LEAH'S PONY

Elizabeth Friedrich



The year the corn grew tall and straight, Leah's papa bought her a pony. The pony was strong and swift and sturdy, with just a snip of white at the end of his soft black nose. Papa taught Leah to place her new saddle right in the middle of his back and tighten the girth¹ around his belly, just so.

1. A *girth* is a band that passes underneath a horse or other animal to hold a saddle in place.



That whole summer, Leah and her pony crossed through cloud-capped cornfields and chased cattle through the pasture.

Leah scratched that special spot under her pony's mane and brushed him till his coat glistened like satin.

Each day Leah loved to ride her pony into town just to hear Mr. B. shout from the door of his grocery store, "That's the finest pony in the whole county."

The year the corn grew no taller than a man's thumb, Leah's house became very quiet.

Sometimes on those hot, dry nights, Leah heard Papa and Mama's hushed voices whispering in the kitchen. She couldn't understand the words but knew their sad sound.

Some days the wind blew so hard it turned the sky black with dust. It was hard for Leah to keep her pony's coat shining. It was hard for Mama to keep the house clean. It was hard for Papa to carry buckets of water for the sow and her piglets.

Soon Papa sold the pigs and even some of the cattle. "These are hard times," he told Leah with a puzzled look. "That's what these days are, all right, hard times."

Mama used flour sacks to make underwear for Leah. Mama threw dishwater on her drooping petunias to keep them growing. And, no matter what else happened, Mama always woke Leah on Saturday with the smell of fresh, hot coffee cake baking.

One hot, dry, dusty day grasshoppers turned the day to night. They ate the trees bare and left only twigs behind.

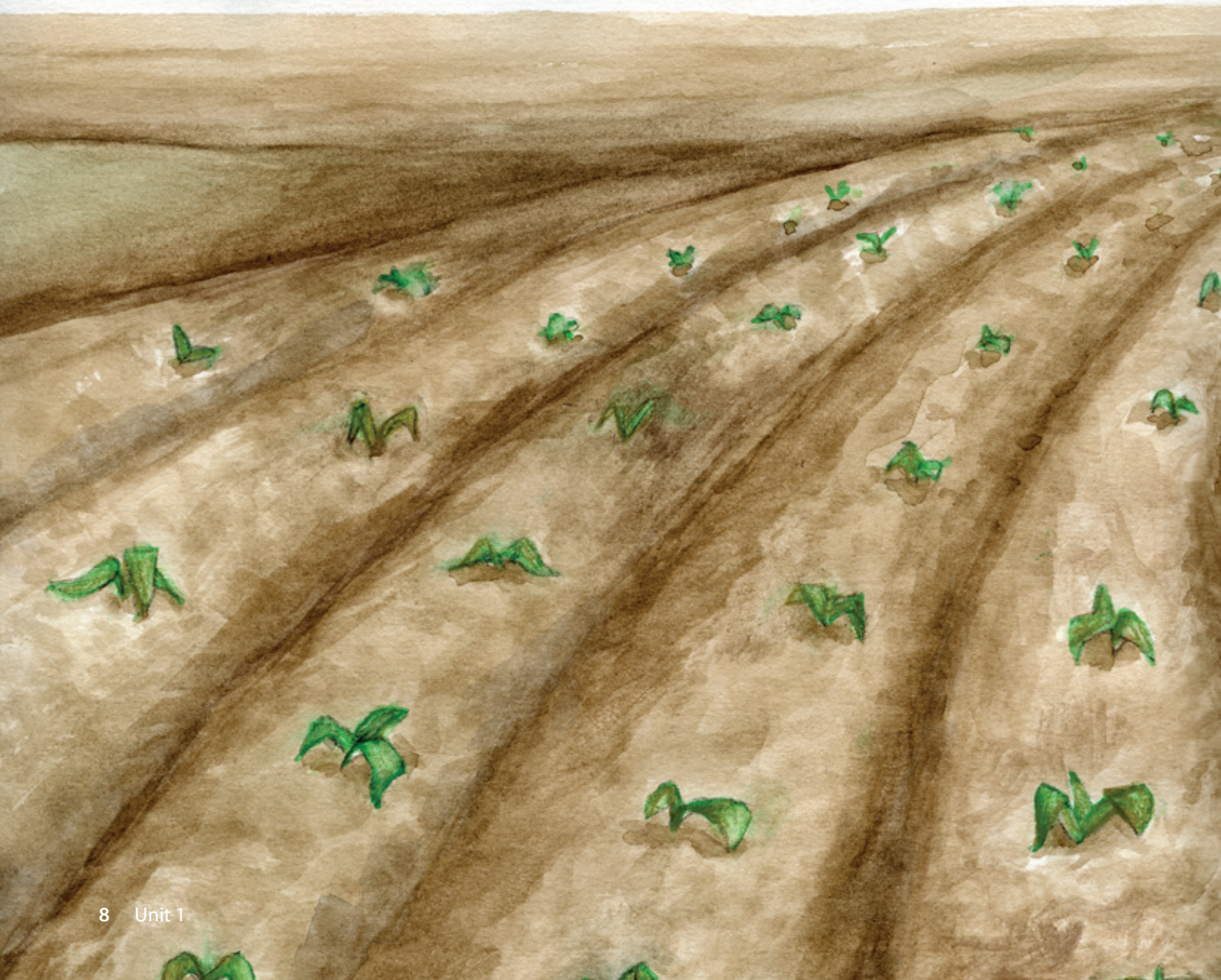
The next day the neighbors filled their truck with all they owned and stopped to say good-bye. "We're off to Oregon," they said. "It must be better there." Papa, Mama, and Leah waved as their neighbors wobbled down the road in an old truck overflowing with chairs and bedsprings and wire.

WORD BANK

sow (rhymes with now)
n.: an adult, female pig

The hot, dry, dusty days kept coming. On a day you could almost taste the earth in the air, Papa said, “I have something to tell you, Leah, and I want you to be brave. I borrowed money from the bank. I bought seeds, but the seeds dried up and blew away. Nothing grew. I don’t have any corn to sell. Now I can’t pay back the bank,” Papa paused. “They’re going to have an auction, Leah. They’re going to sell the cattle and the chickens and the pickup truck.”

Leah stared at Papa. His voice grew husky and soft. “Worst of all, they’re going to sell my tractor. I’ll never be able to



plant corn when she's gone. Without my tractor, we might even have to leave the farm. I told you, Leah, these are hard times."

Leah knew what an auction meant. She knew eager faces with strange voices would come to their farm. They would stand outside and offer money for Papa's best bull and Mama's prize rooster and Leah's favorite calf.

All week long Leah worried and waited and wondered what to do. One morning she watched as a man in a big hat hammered a sign into the ground in front of her house.



Leah wanted to run away. She raced her pony past empty fields lined with dry gullies. She galloped past a house with rags stuffed in broken windowpanes. She sped right past Mr. B. sweeping the steps outside his store.

At last Leah knew what she had to do. She turned her pony around and rode back into town. She stopped in front of Mr. B.'s store. "You can buy my pony," she said.

Mr. B. stopped sweeping and stared at her. "Why would you want to sell him?" he asked. "That's the finest pony in the county."

Leah swallowed hard. "I've grown a lot this summer," she said. "I'm getting too big for him."

Sunburned soil crunched under Leah's feet as she walked home alone. The auction had begun. Neighbors, friends, strangers—everyone clustered around the man in the big hat. "How much for this wagon?" boomed the man. "Five dollars. Ten dollars. Sold for fifteen dollars to the man in the green shirt."

Papa's best bull.

Sold.

Mama's prize rooster.

Sold.

Leah's favorite calf.

Sold.

WORD BANK

gullies (GULL eez) *n.*: small valleys or ravines made by running water



AUCTION
FARM EQUIPMENT FOR SALE
BARK BRADSHAW'S FARM

Leah clutched her money in her hand. “It has to be enough,” she whispered to herself. “It just has to be.”

“Here’s one of the best items in this entire auction,” yelled the man in the big hat. “Who’ll start the bidding at five hundred dollars for this practically new, all-purpose Farmall tractor? It’ll plow, plant, fertilize, and even cultivate for you.”

It was time. Leah’s voice shook. “One dollar.”

The man in the big hat laughed. “That’s a low starting bid if I ever heard one,” he said. “Now let’s hear some serious bids.”

No one moved. No one said a word. No one even seemed to breathe.

“Ladies and gentlemen, this tractor is a beauty! I have a bid of only one dollar for it. One dollar for this practically new Farmall tractor! Do I hear any other bids?”

Again no one moved. No one said a word. No one even seemed to breathe.

“This is ridiculous!” the man’s voice boomed out from under his hat into the silence. “Sold to the young lady for one dollar.”

The crowd cheered. Papa’s mouth hung open. Mama cried. Leah proudly walked up and handed one dollar to the auctioneer in the big hat.

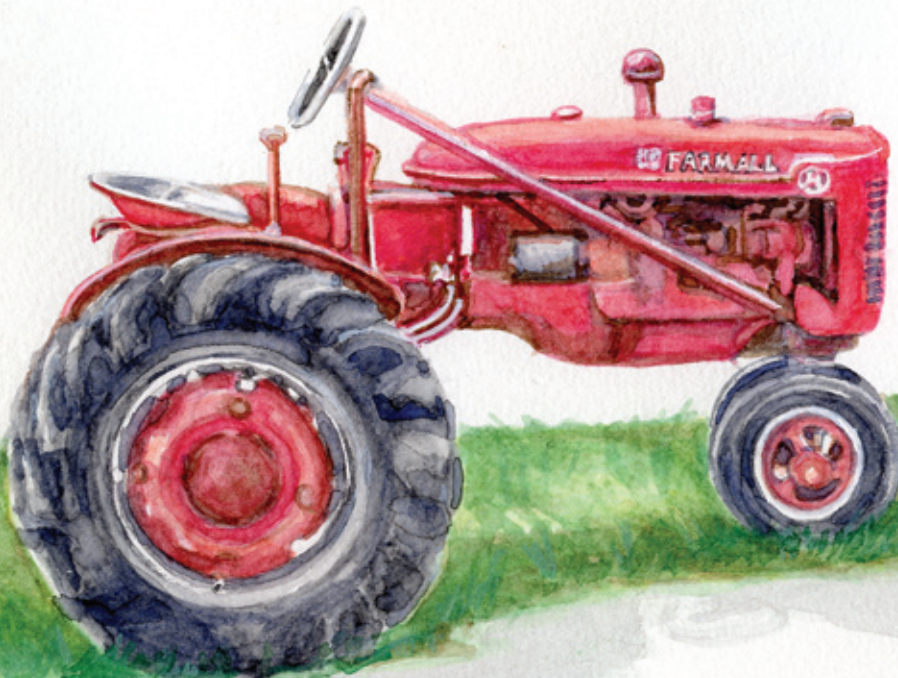
WORD BANK

clutched (KLUCHD)

v.: held onto tightly

cultivate (KUL tih vayt)

v.: to help the plants grow by tending to the soil around them





“That young lady bought one fine tractor for one very low price,” the man continued. “Now how much am I bid for this flock of healthy young chickens?”

“I’ll give you ten cents,” offered a farmer who lived down the road.

“Ten cents! Ten cents is mighty cheap for a whole flock of chickens,” the man said. His face looked angry.

Again no one moved. No one said a word. No one even seemed to breathe.

“Sold for ten cents!”

The farmer picked up the cage filled with chickens and walked over to Mama. “These chickens are yours,” he said.

The man pushed his big hat back on his head. “How much for this good Ford pickup truck?” he asked.

“Twenty-five cents,” yelled a neighbor from town.

Again no one moved. No one said a word. No one even seemed to breathe.

“Sold for twenty-five cents!” The man in the big hat shook his head. “This isn’t supposed to be a penny auction!” he shouted.

The neighbor paid his twenty-five cents and took the keys to the pickup truck. “I think these will start your truck,” he whispered as he dropped the keys into Papa’s shirt pocket.

Leah watched as friends and neighbors bid a penny for a chicken or a nickel for a cow or a quarter for a plow. One by one, they gave everything back to Mama and Papa.

The crowds left. The sign disappeared. Chickens scratched in their coop, and cattle called for their corn. The farm was quiet. Too quiet. No familiar whinny greeted Leah when she entered the barn. Leah swallowed hard and straightened her back.

That night in Leah’s hushed house, no sad voices whispered in the kitchen. Only Leah lay awake, listening to the clock chime nine and even ten times. Leah’s heart seemed to copy its slow, sad beat.

The next morning Leah forced open the heavy barn doors to start her chores. A loud whinny greeted her. Leah ran and hugged the familiar furry neck and kissed the white snip of a nose. “You’re back!” she cried. “How did you get here?”

Then Leah saw the note with her name written in big letters:

Dear Leah,

This is the finest pony in the county. But he’s a little bit small for me and a little bit big for my grandson.

He fits you much better.

Your friend,

Mr. B.

P.S. I heard how you saved your family’s farm. These hard times won’t last forever.

And they didn’t.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As a child, **Elizabeth Friedrich** loved to visit her aunt and uncle's farm. There, she was allowed to ride horses and help care for some of the farm animals. Young Elizabeth thought of the farm as "a magical place." As an adult, Ms. Friedrich was able to fulfill her dream of living on a farm. She, her husband, and their two children live on a New Hampshire farm, where they are raising a small flock of sheep. In addition to writing, Ms. Friedrich enjoys traveling and collecting antiques.



The Way

Nancy Springer

The way you sway
rocked in a cradle
as the horse walks

5 The way the sun
rides warm on your shoulders
as they sway

10 The way the sound
of hooves on clay
sets you dreaming

15 People say, "You're back.
So what did you see
on the trail today?"

You say, "Nothing much."
It's not what you see
it's the way. It's the way.



Poetry shows us
the way

Studying the Selection

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Do you think you would have the strength to do what Leah did?

QUICK REVIEW

1. Describe Papa's precious gift to Leah.
2. What type of weather conditions brought on the 'hard times' experienced by Leah's family?
3. How did Mama recycle things to save money?
4. Who changed the direction of the auction with a very low bid?

FOCUS

5. Leah's father told her to be brave, and Leah obeyed. What are two examples of Leah's bravery?
6. We know that a good story has a beginning, middle, and an end. Reread the story and write down one important event from the beginning of the story, the middle of the story, and the end of the story.

CREATING AND WRITING

7. Leah acted unselfishly to help her family. Do you think the townspeople would have reacted differently if an adult, rather than a child, had done what Leah did?
8. Leah was selfless during very difficult times. Think of someone you know who gave up something important to help another person. Write a paragraph describing the situation and selfless deed.
9. Create a poster for a "One Kindness a Day" campaign. Encourage people, young and old alike, to do something for others with the understanding that small acts can make a big difference. Be sure that your poster is attractive and explains the purpose of the project.



Jill's Journal:

On Assignment from the Dirty Thirties

You will never guess where I am, or what it is like here.

What if it were daytime, but when you looked out your window you couldn't see anything? Wouldn't you think it was scary, if you couldn't see anything but dust so thick you just saw blackness? Well, that is what it is like here.

It is Sunday, April 14, 1935. I am in Dodge City, Kansas. I wanted to go to a town somewhere in the Great Plains. Then I would be able to see for myself what happened on Black Sunday. That's what people called it later on. On Black Sunday, some people thought the world was coming to an end.

I am staying with the Kaufmans, a farm family. They are pretty sure that the black blizzards have come because people have plowed too much. The grass is gone. The roots of the grass used to grip the soil and keep it moist. Also, cattle



Courtesy of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Collection.

have been grazing the land for years. They've eaten what was left of the grass.

Mr. Kaufman also told me that the farmers on the prairie have been planting the same crop—wheat—year after year after year, on millions of acres of earth. He says that planting just one crop takes all of the good nutrients out of the soil.

Then the long and terrible drought started in 1930. There has been almost no rain for five years, so the land has turned to dust.

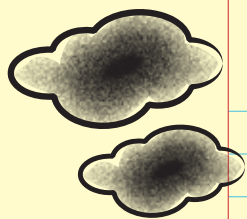
Mr. and Mrs. Kaufman work so hard. They have been farming this land for eleven years. In fact, five of their six children were born right in this cabin! Each of the children helps (of course, not the baby). Meg is 12, Tim is 10, Robert is 8, Zack is 6, Elizabeth is 4, and little Ruthie is 18 months. I will tell you now that the baby is sick. Her mom is holding a wet cloth over her face so she won't breathe in so much dust. Meg says they are worried that Ruthie has dust pneumonia.

Well, no wonder. The cabin is always filled with grit and dust, no matter how hard everyone works to keep it clean. Tim and Zack are taking wet gunnysacks and waving them through the air. They call that sweeping the air. The gunnysacks turn black with dirt.

Any little holes or cracks in the walls or doors or windows are plugged up with newspapers and rags. But the house is not sealed tight the way our houses are. Dust still gets inside. Meg and Robert are nailing sheets over the windows now and putting blankets over the doors. But it



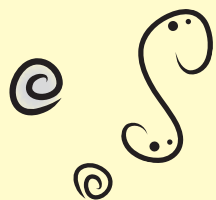
Courtesy of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Collection.



hardly seems to help. I have only been here a few days, but sometimes it feels like I could choke. The cabin is hot and very stuffy.



You should see the lot of us. Have you ever seen cowboys with kerchiefs tied over their noses and mouths? The cowboy robbers did that so no one could identify them. That's how the Kaufmans and I look. And when we go outside, if we dare, we put on these funny old goggles to protect our eyes. It is dangerous to go out, because you cannot see your hands in front of your eyes. You can get lost only a few feet from the house.



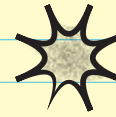
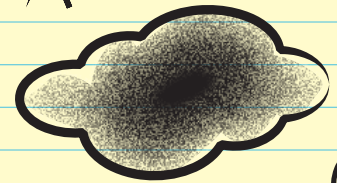
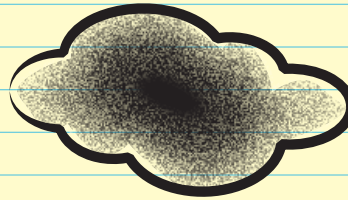
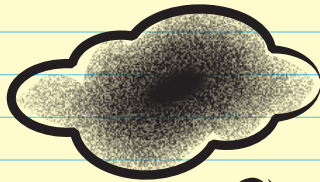
I am helping Mrs. Kaufman do laundry. We wash everything by hand in a large metal tub. Of course, the clothes are gray when we pull them from the soapy



Courtesy of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Collection.

water. Mr. and Mrs. Kaufman carry the heavy tub outdoors together to empty it. Someone has to go to the well to bring in more water. Then it's heated in the big black iron kettle. This takes so long. I can hear grit rattling in the bottom of the kettle as it heats. Even the food we eat has grit in it.

What will happen to the Kaufmans?



POWER SKILL:

Don't Get Lost! Learn to Read a Map.

It is important to be able to read a map. Maps tell us where we are. They tell us what is around us. A map adds to the information you may have about a place. Maps make it much easier for us to understand events in history.

If you live in the United States, do you know where your state is on the map?

If you live outside the U.S., do you know where your country is on the globe?

Many maps show directions with a compass rose, a circular figure that shows the directions north, south, east, and west. Some maps also have a scale bar to show the true size of the area on the map. These days, we go by airplane to travel long distances. Travel by plane doesn't give us the sense of distance we have when we go by car, train, bus, or on foot. So we *do* need maps.

Exercises

1. Your teacher will give you an outlined, blank map of the United States.
2. Now you are going to put in the Dust Bowl states on your map. Use a large labeled U.S. map to help you. Start at the bottom with Texas. Then add New Mexico and Oklahoma. Now add Kansas and Colorado.
3. Now write in the names of the following states: Nebraska, South Dakota, and North Dakota.
4. Finally, using a U.S. map for reference again, write in the names of other states that were affected by the Dust Bowl: Wyoming, Montana, New Mexico, Iowa, and Minnesota.
5. Now, on your maps, color in the Dust Bowl area. That was the region most badly affected during the Dust Bowl years.