

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Sable

by
Karen Hesse

Book Information

Karen Hesse, Sable
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Tate is determined to keep a stray dog despite her mother's protests.

Award: State Award

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Main Characters

Aunt Aurelia Tate's aunt, who lives in Hartford, New Hampshire

Doc Winston a customer of Pap's who agrees to keep Sable

Eden Mam's crimp-tailed cat

Elton Cobb a neighbor who brings Sable back home

Mam Tate's mother, who is afraid of dogs

Pap Tate's father, who builds things from wood and knows a lot about dogs

Sable a mostly dark brown, shaggy stray dog

Tate Marshall a ten-year-old girl who is delighted with the stray dog that wanders into her yard

Tom owner of Tom's General Store; Tate's after-school employer

Vocabulary

brambles prickly shrubs or vines

kindling small pieces of wood used to start a fire

planer a machine that makes a piece of wood smooth

sable a mammal related to the weasel, usually having dark-brown fur

Synopsis

Tate Marshall is a ten-year-old girl who lives with her parents in the country. Tate has always wanted a dog for a pet, but knows this is unlikely since her mother doesn't like dogs. One day, a thin, weak dog wanders down off the mountain near Tate's house and enters Tate's yard. Eden, the cat, is not thrilled to see this intruder, but Tate thinks it's wonderful. At first, Tate's mother won't even let Tate open the door and go outside, but she then decides to let Tate give the dog a bowl of water. When Tate's father comes in from his shop, he decides the dog is "near starved" and is unlikely to bite, so he gives Tate a biscuit soaked in milk gravy to give to the dog. Although the dog's dusty coat is covered with brambles, and she looks like bones held together by a dark-brown coat, Tate falls in love with the dog. Tate names the dog Sable, because the soft fur on her ears reminds Tate of the sable fur trim on one of Mam's sweaters.

Tate shows Sable her secret spot, braids her a collar, and makes her a bed from an old box, sawdust, and an old quilt. She arranges to work at Tom's General Store in exchange for dog food and has many fun times playing with Sable.

When Sable begins to run off and return with items snatched from the neighbors, trouble begins. Tate tries to teach Sable to stay, but without much success. Pap chains Sable to the side of the shop, but by the end of the week, Sable has learned to get free, and the neighbors continue to complain. Two weeks later, Pap brings Tate and Sable with him when he makes a delivery of cabinets to Doc Winston in Concord. Doc's property has a tall stone fence surrounding it, and there is lots of room to run and play. Doc agrees to keep Sable, and Pap and Tate go home without her. When Tate goes to visit Sable several weeks later, Doc tells her Sable has run away and has not returned. Tate is heartbroken and returns home.

One day in early summer, a neighbor, Mr. Cobb, arrives at the Marshalls' in his car with a surprise.

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He has found Sable limping down the center of the road and has given her a ride home. Mam, who has lost some of her fear of the dog, pets Sable and cooks her some "hamburg." Tate is able to keep her dog, and Sable becomes one of the family.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Although Tate had wanted a dog for a long time, and Pap had said if it was up to him, they would have had a dog a long time before, both Tate and Pap expected that Tate would not be able to keep the dog. Why?

Mam had been "torn up by a dog" as a child, and because of this did not like dogs and was afraid of them.

Literary Analysis

When Sable first arrives at Tate's house, she is rather timid. List two examples from the book that demonstrate this.

Sable would not look directly at Tate or Mam. She also put her tail between her legs and backed away when the planer was turned on. Sable inched up slowly to the bowl of water, even though she was very thirsty. Sable ran off when the screen door banged shut.

Inferential Comprehension

Why did Tate name the dog Sable?

Sable is a type of fur that is dark brown and soft. The dog was dark brown and furry, and her ears were very soft. These things reminded Tate of the sable fur trim on one of Mam's sweaters, so Tate named the dog Sable.

Constructing Meaning

How do we know that Tate got to keep Sable?

After finding her way back from Doc Winston's place, Sable stopped running off and taking things from the neighbors. Mam began to pet Sable, sweep up after her and let her sleep in the kitchen. By the end of the story, all the problems Sable caused were thus solved.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Tate built a fence using stickers from Pap's workshop. Stickers were thin strips of wood that were placed between planks when drying wood. Using craft sticks and glue instead of stickers and nails, build a fence similar to the one Tate built. Try to make your gate resemble Tate's gate as much as possible.

Comparing and Contrasting Although we don't know what type of dog Sable was, we have a fairly good description of her appearance. Write down a description of Sable, being as detailed as possible. Now research Elkhounds (the breed of dog Tate's great-grandmam raised) and write a description of an Elkhound's appearance. List the similarities and differences between the two descriptions. Sable: "good-sized," skinny, furry, dark brown with white blaze on chest and white on the tip of the tail, hair long enough to get matted, floppy ears. Elkhounds: short-bodied, "medium sized," very heavy coat, gray hairs with black tips, ears that stand erect, tail that curls over the back.

Understanding Sequence Some books have sequels, in which the story is continued in another book. At the end of *Sable*, Tate is learning her father's trade and helping Mam with chores, Mam has gotten over her fear of Sable, and Sable is allowed to sleep in the house. What do you think happens next? What title would you give the sequel to *Sable*? Write a short outline for a sequel to *Sable*.

Differentiating Fact and Opinion Many books have statements that may, at first, appear to be

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facts when they are really opinions. For example, in *Sable*, Tate says, "It's not really a bed unless it's soft." At first, this may appear to be a fact. But beds don't have to be soft. It is Tate's opinion that beds must be soft. Look through some ads from magazines or newspapers. Some of the claims will be fact; some of the claims will be opinions. Make a list of which statements are facts and which are opinions.