



American Stories

A White Heron by Sarah Orne Jewett

Lesson Plan

by Jill Robbins, Ph.D.

Level: Intermediate

Introduction

This lesson plan is to accompany the VOA Learning English **American Stories** episode, '*A White Heron*' by Sarah Orne Jewett.

A transcript of the story is included at the end of this lesson.

Depending on the length of the class period, this lesson may cover more than one session. The approach used in this lesson is based on the CALLA approach. See the end of the lesson for more information and resources on teaching with the CALLA approach.

Lesson Elements

Prepare

Present

Practice

Self-Evaluate

Expand

Prepare

Introduce the background of the story: “Today’s story is about someone who protects the natural environment. It’s also about a young girl from the city. She is living in the countryside and learning about nature there. What do you know about people who are protecting the environment or wild animals?”

Allow students time to share what they know about protecting the environment. Then explain the new vocabulary.

Vocabulary

whistle - *n.* a high and loud sound made by forcing air through your lips or teeth

preserve - *v.* to keep (something) in its original state or in good condition

heron - *n.* a large bird that has long legs and a long neck and bill

nest - *n.* the place where a bird lays its eggs and takes care of its young

handsome - having a pleasing appearance that causes romantic feelings in someone

Learning Strategy name - inference – *n.* a conclusion or opinion that is formed because of known facts or evidence

Present

Explain “When we read a story, we don’t always know *everything* about the characters in it. The writer tells us gradually by *showing* us the actions of the characters. We learn little by little by ***making inferences*** based on what the writer shows us about the characters. This strategy helps us to understand the stories we read.”

Explain the characters in the story.

- **Sylvie** is a young girl, the main character.
- **Sylvie’s grandmother** lives in the country.
- **The young man** is a stranger Sylvie meets one day.

“Let’s read the first part of the story. Then we can try to make some **inferences**.”

Play to ‘Sylvie felt as if she were a part of the gray shadows and the silver leaves that moved in the evening breeze.’

“When I read this sentence, I learned about Sylvie’s personality. She was sitting by a stream and cooling her feet in the water. When the writer, Sarah Jewett, tells us that Sylvie felt a part of the shadows and leaves, I made an **inference** that Sylvie is very comfortable in the countryside. Let me show you how we can keep a record of our inferences.”

Make a table on the board or display on the screen:

Character	Actions in the Story	My Inference
Sylvie	Sits by stream with her feet in the water	She feels comfortable there.
Sylvie's Grandmother		
Young man		

Practice

Say, “Now it’s your turn. Let’s read some more of the story. When we stop, I will ask you to make an **inference** about one of the characters.”

Play or instruct students to read up to ‘Now Sylvie, get a plate for the gentleman!’ Ask students to work in pairs to write their inferences about Sylvie and the other characters they read about.

Based on student feedback, write more inferences:

Character	Actions in the Story	My Inference
Sylvie	Sits by stream with her feet in the water She hid in the bushes when the man came near her.	She feels comfortable there. She is shy.
Sylvie's Grandmother	Welcomes the stranger to eat dinner with them	She is friendly.
Young man	He carries a gun He whistles He hunts birds He is lost	He doesn't live in the countryside.

Say, “Good job in making inferences. Let’s read some more of the story. When we stop, I will ask you to make more **inferences**.”

Play or instruct students to read to the end of the story. Ask students to work in pairs to write their inferences about Sylvie and the other characters they read about.

Continue to add inferences about the characters:

Character	Actions in the Story	My Inference
Sylvie	Sits by stream with her feet in the water She hid in the bushes when the man came near her. Didn't talk about the heron	She feels comfortable there. She is shy. She wants the heron to live.
Sylvie's Grandmother	Welcomes the stranger to eat dinner with them. Speaks about Sylvie with pride.	She is friendly. She likes the way Sylvie is getting used to the countryside.
Young man	He carries a gun He whistles He hunts birds He is lost	He doesn't live in the countryside.

Self-Evaluation

When students have completed the story, ask, “How did you feel about **making inferences**? Do you think that helped you understand and remember this story?”

Allow time for some discussion.

“On a sheet of paper, write a few sentences about the characters in this story. Be sure you include the inferences you made about them.”

Give students time to write, then collect all the student sheets.

Expand

Wrap up the lesson by asking students to think of other times they can **make inferences**. Possible answers are 'reading a textbook, listening to a lecture, or watching a movie.'

Encourage students to go home and **make an inference** using their homework for another class.

The forest was full of shadows as a little girl hurried through it one summer evening in June. It was already eight o'clock and Sylvie wondered if her grandmother would be angry with her for being so late.

Every evening Sylvie left her grandmother's house at five-thirty to bring their cow home. The old animal spent her days out in the open country eating sweet grass. It was Sylvie's job to bring her home to be milked. When the cow heard Sylvie's voice calling her, she would hide among the bushes.

This evening it had taken Sylvie longer than usual to find her cow. The child hurried the cow through the dark forest, following a narrow path that led to her grandmother's home. The cow stopped at a small stream to drink. As Sylvie waited, she put her bare feet in the cold, fresh water of the stream.

She had never before been alone in the forest as late as this. The air was soft and sweet. Sylvie felt as if she were a part of the gray shadows and the silver leaves that moved in the evening breeze.

She began thinking how it was only a year ago that she came to her grandmother's farm. Before that, she had lived with her mother and father in a dirty, crowded factory town. One day, Sylvie's grandmother had visited them and had chosen Sylvie from all her brothers and sisters to be the one to help her on her farm in Vermont.

The cow finished drinking, and as the nine-year-old child hurried through the forest to the home she loved, she thought again about the noisy town where her parents still lived.

Suddenly the air was cut by a sharp **whistle** not far away. Sylvie knew it wasn't a friendly bird's whistle. It was the determined whistle of a person. She forgot the cow and hid in some bushes. But she was too late.

"Hello, little girl," a young man called out cheerfully. "How far is it to the main road?" Sylvie was trembling as she whispered "two miles." She came out of the bushes and looked up into the face of a tall young man carrying a gun.

The stranger began walking with Sylvie as she followed her cow through the forest. "I've been hunting for birds," he explained, "but I've lost my way. Do you think I can spend the night at your house?" Sylvie didn't answer. She was glad they were almost home. She could see her grandmother standing near the door of the farm house.

When they reached her, the stranger put down his gun and explained his problem to Sylvie's smiling grandmother.

"Of course you can stay with us," she said. "We don't have much, but you're welcome to share what we have. Now Sylvie, get a plate for the gentleman!"

After eating, they all sat outside. The young man explained he was a scientist, who collected birds. "Do you put them in a cage?" Sylvie asked. "No," he answered slowly, "I shoot them and stuff them with special chemicals to **preserve** them. I have over one hundred different kinds of birds from all over the United States in my study at home."

"Sylvie knows a lot about birds, too," her grandmother said proudly. "She knows the forest so well, the wild animals come and eat bread right out of her hands."

"So Sylvie knows all about birds. Maybe she can help me then," the young man said. "I saw a white **heron** not far from here two days ago. I've been looking for it ever since. It's a very rare bird, the little white heron. Have you seen it, too?" He asked Sylvie. But Sylvie was silent. "You would know it if you saw it," he added. "It's a tall, strange bird with soft white feathers and long thin legs. It probably has its **nest** at the top of a tall tree."

Sylvie's heart began to beat fast. She knew that strange white bird! She had seen it on the other side of the forest. The young man was staring at Sylvie. "I would give ten dollars to the person who showed me where the white heron is."

That night Sylvie's dreams were full of all the wonderful things she and her grandmother could buy for ten dollars.

Sylvie spent the next day in the forest with the young man. He told her a lot about the birds they saw. Sylvie would have had a much better time if the young man had left his gun at home. She could not understand why he killed the birds he seemed to like so much. She felt her heart tremble every time he shot an unsuspecting bird as it was singing in the trees.

But Sylvie watched the young man with eyes full of admiration. She had never seen anyone so **handsome** and charming. A strange excitement filled her heart, a new feeling the little girl did not recognize...love.

At last evening came. They drove the cow home together. Long after the moon came out and the young man had fallen asleep Sylvie was still awake. She had a plan that would get the ten dollars for her grandmother and make the young man happy. When it was almost time for the sun to rise, she quietly left her house and hurried through the forest. She finally reached a huge pine tree, so tall it could be seen for many miles around. Her plan was to climb to the top of the pine tree. She could see the whole forest from there. She was sure she would be able to see where the white heron had hidden its nest.

Sylvie's bare feet and tiny fingers grabbed the tree's rough trunk. Sharp dry branches scratched at her like cat's claws. The pine tree's sticky sap made her fingers feel stiff and clumsy as she climbed higher and higher.

The pine tree seemed to grow taller, the higher that Sylvie climbed. The sky began to brighten in the east. Sylvie's face was like a pale star when, at last, she reached the tree's highest branch. The golden sun's rays hit the green forest. Two hawks flew together in slow-moving circles far below Sylvie. Sylvie felt as if she could go flying among the clouds, too. To the west she could see other farms and forests.

Suddenly Sylvie's dark gray eyes caught a flash of white that grew larger and larger. A bird with broad white wings and a long slender neck flew past Sylvie and landed on a pine branch below her. The white heron smoothed its feathers and called to its mate, sitting on their nest in a nearby tree. Then it lifted its wings and flew away.

Sylvie gave a long sigh. She knew the wild bird's secret now. Slowly she began her dangerous trip down the ancient pine tree. She did not dare to look down and tried to forget that her fingers hurt and her feet were bleeding. All she wanted to think about was what the stranger would say to her when she told him where to find the heron's nest.

As Sylvie climbed slowly down the pine tree, the stranger was waking up back at the farm. He was smiling because he was sure from the way the shy little girl had looked at him that she had seen the white heron.

About an hour later Sylvie appeared. Both her grandmother and the young man stood up as she came into the kitchen. The splendid moment to speak about her secret had come. But Sylvie was silent. Her grandmother was angry with her. Where had she been?. The young man's kind eyes looked deeply into Sylvie's own dark gray ones. He could give Sylvie and her grandmother ten dollars. He had promised to do this, and they needed the money. Besides, Sylvie wanted to make him happy.

But Sylvie was silent. She remembered how the white heron came flying through the golden air and how they watched the sun rise together from the top of the world. Sylvie could not speak. She could not tell the heron's secret and give its life away.

The young man went away disappointed later that day. Sylvie was sad. She wanted to be his friend. He never returned. But many nights Sylvie heard the sound of his whistle as she came home with her grandmother's cow.

Were the birds better friends than their hunter might have been? Who can know?

Vocabulary:

whistle - *n.* a high and loud sound made by forcing air through your lips or teeth

preserve - *v.* to keep (something) in its original state or in good condition

heron - *n.* a large bird that has long legs and a long neck and bill

nest - *n.* the place where a bird lays its eggs and takes care of its young

handsome - having a pleasing appearance that causes romantic feelings in someone

Inferences chart:

Character	Actions in the Story	My Inference
Sylvie		
Sylvie's Grandmother		
Young man		

About the CALLA Approach

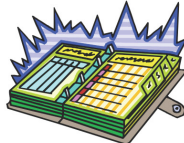



The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) is an instructional model for second and foreign language learners based on cognitive theory and research.

CALLA integrates instruction in priority topics from the content curriculum, development of the language skills needed for learning in school, and explicit instruction in using learning strategies for academic tasks.







The goals of CALLA are for students to learn essential academic content and language and to become independent and self-regulated learners through their increasing command over a variety of strategies for learning in school. CALLA can be used in ESL, EFL, bilingual, foreign language, and general education classrooms.

CALLA was developed by Anna Uhl Chamot and J. Michael O'Malley, and is being implemented in approximately 30 school districts in the United States as well as in several other countries.







Metacognitive Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES		
Plan / Organize	 Planner	Before beginning a task: <ul style="list-style-type: none">–Set goals.–Plan the task or content sequence.–Plan how to accomplish the task (choose strategies).–Preview a text.
Monitor / Identify Problems	 Check	While working on a task: <ul style="list-style-type: none">–Check your progress on the task.–Check your comprehension as you use the language. Do you understand? If not, what is the problem?–Check your production as you use the language. Are you making sense? If not, what is the problem?
Evaluate	 I did it!	After completing a task: <ul style="list-style-type: none">–Assess how well you have accomplished the learning task.–Assess how well you have used learning strategies.–Decide how effective the strategies were.–Identify changes you will make the next time you have a similar task to do.
Manage Your Own Learning	 Pace Yourself	<ul style="list-style-type: none">–Determine how you learn best.–Arrange conditions that help you learn.–Seek opportunities for practice.–Focus your attention on the task.


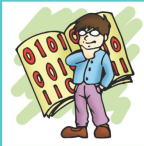
Task-Based Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
TASK-BASED STRATEGIES		
<div></div> <p>USE WHAT YOU KNOW</p>		
Use Background Knowledge	 <p>I know.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Think about and use what you already know to help you do the task.- Make associations between new information and your prior knowledge.-Use new information to clarify or modify your prior knowledge.
Make Inferences	 <p>Use Clues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Use context and what you know to figure out meaning.-Read and listen between the lines.-Go beyond the text to understand its meaning.
Make Predictions	 <p>Crystal Ball</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Anticipate information to come.-Make logical guesses about what will happen in a written or oral text.-Make an estimate (math).-Make a hypothesis (science).
Personalize	 <p>Me</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Relate new concepts to your own life, to your experiences, knowledge, beliefs and feelings.


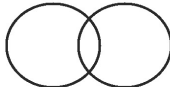


Task-Based Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
TASK-BASED STRATEGIES		
Transfer / Use Cognates	 Coffee/Café	-Apply your linguistic knowledge of other languages (including your native language) to the target language. -Recognize cognates.
Substitute / Paraphrase	 Make it work	-Use a synonym or descriptive phrase for unknown words or expressions.
<div></div> USE YOUR SENSES		
Use Images	 See it in your mind	-Use or create an actual or mental image to understand and/or represent information. -Use or draw a picture or diagram.
Use Sounds	 Sound Out	-Say or read aloud a word, sentence, or paragraph to help your understanding. -Sound out/vocalize. - Use your “mental tape recorder” to remember sounds, words, phrases, and/or conversations.

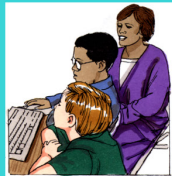

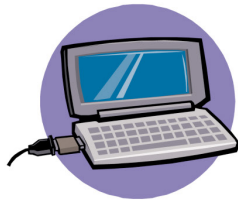


Task-Based Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
TASK-BASED STRATEGIES		
Use Your Kinesthetic Sense		<ul style="list-style-type: none">--Act out a role, for example, in Readers' Theater, or imagine yourself in different roles in the target language.--Use real objects to help you remember words, sentences, or content information.
<div></div> USE YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS		
Find/Apply Patterns	 <p>abacus</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Apply a rule.-Make a rule.-Recognize and apply letter/sound, grammar, discourse, or register rules.-Identify patterns in literature (genre).-Identify patterns in math, science, and social studies.
Classify/Sequence	 <p>Life cycle</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Categorize words or ideas according to attributes.-Classify living things; identify natural cycles.-Identify order and sequences in math, science, and social studies.-Sequence events in history.

Task-Based Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
TASK-BASED STRATEGIES		
Take Notes	 PDA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Write down important words and ideas while listening or reading.-List ideas or words to include in speaking or writing..
Use Graphic Organizers	 A Venn diagram	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Use or create visual representations (such as Venn diagrams, time lines, webs, and charts) of important relationships between concepts.
Summarize	 Main Idea	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Create a mental, oral, or written summary of information.
Use Selective Attention	 Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Focus on specific information, structures, key words, phrases, or ideas.

Task-Based Strategies

CALLA CONTENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		
STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	
TASK-BASED STRATEGIES		
<div></div> <p>USE A VARIETY OF RESOURCES</p>		
Access Information Sources	 <p>Look it up!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Use the dictionary, the internet, and other reference materials.-Seek out and use sources of information.-Follow a model-Ask questions
Cooperate	 <p>Together</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Work with others to complete tasks, build confidence, and give and receive feedback.
Talk Yourself Through It (Self-Talk)	 <p>I can do it!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Use your inner resources. Reduce your anxiety by reminding yourself of your progress, the resources you have available, and your goals.