“Mrs. Flowers” by Maya Angelou

Prereading

Background

Know the Setting and Characters  Black Stamps was the black neighborhood in Stamps, Arkansas. At the time of this story, segregation was in force, which meant that only blacks lived in that neighborhood. Also, Momma calls Mrs. Flowers “Sister,” but they are not related. The term is one of respect and affection.

Vocabulary Practice

Preview Selection Vocabulary  To help students understand “Mrs. Flowers,” preview this additional vocabulary. Write the words on the board and go over the definitions. Then, have students use each word in a sentence.

- aristocrat (p. 186): member of the upper class
- boggled (p. 188): confused by something that is surprising, vast, or very hard to understand
- scent (p. 188): smell; aroma
- icebox (p. 188): cabinet with ice in it for keeping food cold
- ignorance (p. 189): lack of knowledge or education
- aura (p. 189): feeling or mood that seems to surround something

Alternative Activity

Read the Adaptation  Distribute copies of the adapted reading of “Mrs. Flowers” (available in this book and, with marginal questions, in Holt Adapted Reader). To prepare for reading the original version and to practice fluency, students should read the adaptation silently. Encourage students to write notes, questions, predictions, reactions, and comments on the worksheets as they read.

Reading

Alternative Activity

Especially for ELL  Play the Audio Recording  Struggling readers may benefit from listening to the audio recording of the selection as they follow along in their books. Spanish-speaking English-language learners can also listen to the recording of the selection in Spanish.

Literary Skill

Understand character.

Reading Skill

Identify the main idea.

Other Resources:
- Holt Adapted Reader
- Audio CD Library
- Audio CD Library, Selections and Summaries in Spanish
- Supporting Instruction in Spanish
- Videocassette, Segment 3

Teacher Tip

Maya Angelou, born in 1928, grew up living with her grandmother in rural Arkansas. Her writing stresses the themes of courage, perseverance, self-acceptance, and self-actualization. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, the book from which the selection is taken, is the first volume of her autobiography.
Alternative Teaching Strategy

**Core Skill** Compare and Contrast Help students compare and contrast the motivations and reactions of literary characters from different eras. On the chalkboard, draw a chart like the one below and help students to complete it as they read.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Historical Era</th>
<th>Conflict</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harriet Tubman</td>
<td>1850s</td>
<td>human rights versus slavery</td>
<td>gain freedom for her people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Old West</td>
<td>to stay or go</td>
<td>caring for the children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marguerite</td>
<td>around 1940</td>
<td>whether to trust someone and begin speaking again</td>
<td>Mrs. Flowers and her kindness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Postreading

**Reteach the Key Idea**

**Core Skill** Identify the Main Idea Help students identify the main idea in a passage by explaining that many writers state their main idea in a sentence at the beginning of a piece. Read the opening paragraph of “Mrs. Flowers,” and help students identify the line that serves this function: “Then I met, or rather got to know, the lady who threw me my first lifeline.” Discuss the statement with students. Ask what throwing a lifeline means, and then ask them to talk about the way Mrs. Flowers saved Marguerite.

Listening and Speaking Opportunities

**Especially for ELL** Choose a Paragraph Help students with their pronunciation of English by having them read aloud. When Mrs. Flowers read, Marguerite “heard poetry for the very first time in my life.” (p. 189) Point out that though it was prose that Mrs. Flowers read, she pronounced the words so well that it seemed like poetry. “Her voice slid in and curved down through and over the words. She was nearly singing.” Tell students that they are going to practice reading passages from “Mrs. Flowers.” Mark three or four passages, and review them with students to be sure they understand the meanings. Assign each student a few lines to read aloud, either to you in private or to the class. Before they read, help students with the content, pronunciation, and inflection of their passage.

**Give Examples** Ask students what lessons in living Marguerite learned from Mrs. Flowers. Ask if they have specific examples of adult helpers or mentors who have taught them lessons in living.
Vocabulary Development

Reteach the Key Idea

Look for Context Clues  Remind students that, even if they don’t actually know the definition of a word, they may be able to understand its meaning from its context. We may not know what Mrs. Flowers means when she talks about *mother wit* (p. 189), but Maya Angelou follows it by referring to “homely sayings” and “collective wisdom of generations,” which provide a definition. Later the story mentions *wormwood* (p. 189). It is linked to the word “bitter” and Marguerite says she would exchange it for “a hot cup of tea and milk” so we know it is something unpleasant.

Have students read through the selections of this chapter, noting when they are able to understand the meaning of new words by their context.

Alternative Teaching Strategy

(Especially for ELL) Understand Idioms  Explain to students than an idiom is an expression with a meaning that is not immediately apparent from the individual words that make it up. Maya Angelou uses some idioms in “Mrs. Flowers.” For example:

- *let alone* (p. 186): not to mention
- *picking her way* (p. 186): walking cautiously
- *tried her hand* (p. 188): attempted

Have students look for idioms. Invite them to share their findings with classmates. (for example, *back to the drawing board, once in a blue moon, with flying colors*) Have English-language learners discuss idioms from their native languages, first giving a literal translation of the phrase, then providing the idiomatic meaning.

Reading Skills Development

(Mixed Ability Group) Identify the Main Idea  Students will benefit from additional practice in identifying main idea. Arrange students in small, mixed ability groups to read together a selection you choose from the “Determining Main Idea” section of the list that begins on page 341 of this book. Encourage students to look for features such as section or paragraph breaks to use to divide the selection into parts. Group members can work to identify the main idea and supporting details of each part and then use their notes to determine the main idea of the selection as a whole. Discuss each group’s results with the class.
Lesson Plans

Prereading

Background

Connect Motivation and Behavior  To help students compare and contrast the motivations and behavior of the characters in “Mrs. Flowers,” explain that someone has been cruel to Marguerite and that’s why she stopped talking. Tell them she had withdrawn from the world like a turtle into its shell. Then, explain that when Mrs. Flowers was kind to the girl and paid attention to her, Marguerite came out of her shell again.

Reading

Reteach the Key Idea

Draw Conclusions  Help students compare and contrast the motivations and reactions of the characters in “Mrs. Flowers” by asking them to describe the characters. Have them begin with Mrs. Flowers. Most students will talk about her appearance or her clothes. Point out that she is also educated, well-read, and patient, and that she speaks with clarity. Mention that she is very kind. Ask students why they think Mrs. Flowers is helping Marguerite. Then, ask what they think is the most important thing Mrs. Flowers does for the girl. Help students identify the lessons of life that Mrs. Flowers teaches Marguerite:

- to be intolerant of ignorance
- to be understanding of illiteracy
- that it is important to be respected by someone

Have students discuss the lessons as a class. Help them see that Mrs. Flowers helped Marguerite become the famous author Maya Angelou.

Postreading

Alternative Activity

Compare Characters  Review with students Mrs. Flowers’s traits: graceful, black, aristocratic, thin, and neat; wears dresses, hats, and gloves; educated, well-read, patient, well-spoken, and kind. Write the traits on the chalkboard. Then, draw a Venn diagram on the board, and compare those traits with the traits of one of the other characters in the chapter: Harriet Tubman, Barbara Frietchie, or Mary. Then, ask students to look at the list of traits and to think about which traits the two characters had in common. Write the shared traits in the overlap area of the diagram.
“Mrs. Flowers”

A. Match words and definitions. Write the letter of the correct definition next to each word.

1. taut  
2. benign  
3. infuse  
4. intolerant  
5. illiteracy

a. fill; inspire  
b. inability to read or write  
c. unwilling to put up with something  
d. tightly stretched  
e. kind; harmless

B. Choose three words from above. Use each word in a sentence.

1. _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________

2. _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________

3. _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________

C. Answer each question below.

1. What do Mrs. Flowers and Marguerite do during their first visit together?
   _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________

2. How does Mrs. Flowers help Marguerite?
   _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________

3. How does knowing that she is liked by Mrs. Flowers make Marguerite feel good about herself?
   _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________
“Mrs. Flowers”; Mrs. Flowers’s Recipes

A. Match words and definitions. Write the letter of the correct definition next to each word.

   1. flavor  a. eat quickly
   2. cup  b. drink made with lemon juice, sugar, and water
   3. scent  c. unit of measure equal to 8 liquid ounces or 250 ml.
   4. lemonade  d. smell; aroma
   5. gobble  e. taste of a particular food

B. Complete each sentence with a word from the Word Bank.

   1. A person who is not tolerant of other people is _________________.

   2. Her ________________ smile let me know that she was good-natured and kind.

   3. Getting students to enjoy reading is the best way to solve the problem of _________________.

   4. Mr. Luna likes to ________________ his lessons with humor to make them interesting.

   5. The ________________ fishing line did not break when I struggled with the fish.

C. Choose the word that best completes each sentence. Write the letter of the correct word on the blank.

   1. To flatten dough, you use a ______.
      a. rolling pin  b. measuring cup  c. teaspoon  d. cookie cutter

   2. ______ is a cold, refreshing drink on a hot summer day.
      a. Hot chocolate  b. Lemonade  c. Cream  d. Hot tea

   3. Mix, or ______, butter and sugar together until light and fluffy.
      a. measure  b. flour  c. roll  d. cream
Collection 2: Do the Right Thing

Vocabulary and Comprehension
from Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad, p. 65
A. 1. d  3. e  5. b
    2. c  4. a
B. Sample answers given.
1. She is strong-willed and willing to take risks to free people from slavery.
2. Her appearance: She was short.
   Her actions: She knows how to avoid the slave catchers as she leads people on the Underground Railroad.
   Her speech: She is firm with the group, always urging them on.
   Her thoughts and feelings: She knows she must instill courage in her group, even though she is often afraid herself.
   The effect she had on other people: She inspired confidence because she was so determined and committed to her task.

Vocabulary and Comprehension
The Fugitive Slave Acts of 1793 and 1850, p. 67
A. 1. c  3. a  5. e
    2. d  4. b
B. Sentences will vary.
    2. T  5. T
    3. F  6. T

Additional Vocabulary Practice
from Harriet Tubman;
The Fugitive Slave Acts of 1793 and 1850, p. 68
A. 1. e  3. d  5. f
    2. b  4. a  6. c
B. Sentences will vary.
C. 1. had no teeth
    2. cradle of liberty
    3. taken to their heels
    4. goodly number

Vocabulary and Comprehension
Barbara Frietchie, p. 73
A. 1. a  3. a  5. b
    2. d  4. d
B. Sample answers given.
1. She speaks her mind and has great courage.
2. She means that they should not destroy the flag, which is still the flag of their country.
3. The Southern army marches quietly through the town, passing by the Union flag as it waves above them.

Additional Vocabulary Practice
Barbara Frietchie, p. 74
A. 1. staff  4. tread
    2. stirred  5. host
    3. rent
B. Sentences will vary.

Vocabulary and Comprehension
Too Soon a Woman, p. 79
A. 1. d  3. b  5. c
    2. a  4. e
B. Sentences will vary.
    2. T  5. T
    3. F  6. T

Vocabulary and Comprehension
Union Pacific Railroad Poster, p. 81
A. 1. F  3. F  5. F
    2. T  4. T  6. T
B. Sample answers given.
Accept all reasonable responses.
1. The picture presented by the poster is very biased. Winters were harsh and summers very hot and dry, although the poster claims that the climate is mild.
2. Answers will vary.

Vocabulary and Comprehension
Home, Sweet Soddie, p. 83
A. pioneers
    2. as scarce as hen’s teeth
    3. the crack of dawn
    4. drawbacks
    5. prairie
B. Sentences will vary.
C. 1. T  3. F  5. T
    2. F  4. T

Additional Vocabulary Practice
Too Soon a Woman; Union Pacific Railroad Poster;
Home, Sweet Soddie, p. 84
A. 1. grub  4. butcher
    2. waterproof  5. well
    3. homesteaders
B. 1. i  5. d  9. c
    2. a  6. f  10. b
    3. j  7. h
    4. e  8. g

Vocabulary and Comprehension
Mrs. Flowers, p. 89
A. 1. d  3. a  5. b
    2. e  4. c
B. Sentences will vary.
C. Sample answers given.
1. Mrs. Flowers and Marguerite have lemonade and cookies. Then, Mrs. Flowers begins to read aloud from *A Tale of Two Cities*.
2. Mrs. Flowers gives Marguerite a feeling that she is important and likeable just for being herself.
3. Marguerite feels that she must be a good enough person if someone as wonderful as Mrs. Flowers can like her.

Vocabulary and Comprehension
*Mrs. Flowers's Recipes*, p. 91
A. 1. d 3. e 5. b 7. c 2. a 4. h 6. f 8. g
B. Sentences will vary.
C. 1. cream, creamy 2. beat, beating 3. sticky, stick

Additional Vocabulary Practice
*Mrs. Flowers; Mrs. Flowers's Recipes*, p. 92
A. 1. e 3. d 5. a 2. c 4. b
B. 1. intolerant 4. infuse 2. benign 5. taut 3. illiteracy
C. 1. a 2. b 3. d

Vocabulary and Comprehension
Comparing Literature: Fact and Fiction, p. 95
A. 1. e 3. d 5. a 2. b 4. c
B. Sentences will vary.

Additional Vocabulary Practice
Comparing Literature: Fact and Fiction, p. 96
A. 1. c 3. e 5. d 2. a 4. b
B. Sentences will vary.
C. 1. askew 2. chastise 3. resolute 4. tremor 5. groggy

Collection 3: Being There

Vocabulary and Comprehension
*In Trouble*, p. 103
A. 1. a 3. d 5. c 2. e 4. b
B. Sentences will vary.

C. Sample answers given.
1. Columbia played a joke on Olaf by placing a bone just beyond Olaf's reach.
2. Paulsen has not been using the sled brake to slow the dogs, and when they come to a gully by a stream, Paulsen goes flying off the trail.
3. Obeah drags the team and the sled down to where Paulsen is lying. Then the dogs pull him home.

Vocabulary and Comprehension
*Fast, Strong, and Friendly Too*, p. 105
A. Sentences will vary.
B. Sentences will vary.
Accept all reasonable responses.

Additional Vocabulary Practice
*In Trouble; Fast, Strong, and Friendly Too*, p. 106
A. 1. steeped 4. contention 2. exaltation 5. chagrin 3. alleviate
C. Sentences will vary.

Vocabulary and Comprehension
*There Will Come Soft Rains*, p. 111
A. 1. paranoia 4. oblivious 2. cavorting 5. sublime 3. tremulous
B. 1. tremulous 4. oblivious 2. cavorting 5. paranoia 3. sublime
C. Sample answers given.
1. The house is angry at the dog because it tracks in mud.
2. At first the house tries to save itself, but there are no more reserves of water.

Vocabulary and Comprehension
*Destination: Mars*, p. 113
A. 1. caption 4. sidebars 2. title 5. contents page 3. subtitle
B. Sample answers given.
1. The sidebar is about the mission to send people to Mars.
2. The eventual goal of a mission to Mars is to live off the land.
3. The article uses large letters so people quickly can pick out what the eventual goal of the mission is.