



Patricia MacLachlan's
All the Places to Love

Questions for Socratic Discussion
by Missy Andrews



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ALL THE PLACES TO LOVE



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QUICK CARD



<i>Reference</i>	<i>All the Places to Love</i> by Patricia MacLachlan ISBN-10: 0060210982 ISBN-13: 978-0060210984
<i>Plot</i>	The author traces the life of a boy who learns to love his home in the country by visiting the favorite places of his family members.
<i>Setting</i>	This book is all setting. It is fields, streams, hills, and valleys. It is sunlight and dappled forests, meadows and barns. It is a family homestead.
<i>Characters</i>	Eli, Mama, Papa, Grandfather, Grandmother, and Sylvie
<i>Conflict</i>	There is no obvious conflict. This is a contemplative, meditative slice of life. And yet, the theme of mortality runs throughout the story, creating a Man vs. Himself or Man vs. Nature conflict in the background.
<i>Theme</i>	An “homage to the American farm, re-creating all the glory and sweet simplicity of one family’s connection to the land.” (publisher) Eli learns that, no matter where his life may take him, he need look no farther than his home for all the places to love, and all the things that most matter. “Where else does an old turtle crossing the path make all the difference in the world?” The story praises the value and beauty of life’s simplicity.
<i>Literary Devices</i>	This story reads like poetry. It is full of imagery. Take time to look for similes: comparisons using the words “like” or “as.”

QUESTIONS FOR STRUCTURE: SETTING



Where does the story happen? (1)

The story is set in the countryside and encompasses a valley, a river, a hillside blueberry barren, a meadow, and the narrator's family farm, which nestles among these. Here, the narrator asserts, are "all the places to love." Because each place is a special haunt of one of the narrator's family members, each becomes by extension an important place to him as well.

The meadows and hay fields, which become marshes in springtime, are favorite romping grounds for the dogs. The farm's fields of rich, sweet dirt are his papa's realm. His grandmother shares with him her love of the river. His mother prefers the open skies of the blueberry barren. Eli's grandfather loves his silent barn best of all places. There he carves the names of his family members in the bulky rafters as permanent memorials.

Not only is the story's setting rich, but it also carries the conflict, becoming the vehicle for thematic content. These lovely and dear places represent more than mere scenic beauty. Associated with the persons who love them, they remain permanent landmarks of people who may not remain in those places forever. Not only may circumstances require that they move to other locales, but their humanity implies mortality; theirs are lives that will pass. These places, imbued by association with the personality of their lovers, will survive the passage of time. For this reason, they represent a permanent bridge or continuum between generations, concrete symbols that carry the resolution and theme of the story.

At what stage in the lives of the main characters do the events take place? (2e)

The story happens in the narrator's childhood. A young boy, he is learning from his family what is important in life. Not only is he learning how to be a man, but also how to be a contributing member of his family group. What does the group value? What makes them all tick? How can he absorb the best of each of his family members and make it a part of himself? Who will he be? Eli's growing identity is wrapped up in the people and places of the story.

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: CHARACTERS



Who is the story about? (3)

Eli is the young narrator and protagonist of the story. His first person remarks explain the significance of place, the land, to his readers. Since he is no more than eight or nine years old, these places and people constitute his entire world.

Who else is the story about? (4)

The other family members, all adults, feel the story's unspoken conflict in a way Eli hasn't yet. Eli is a child and hasn't lost any of the people who make the places special. The older characters are better acquainted with the temporal nature of life. They feel the conflict, the significance of life, more keenly. For example, Grandfather cries when Eli's sister, Sylvie, is born.

Mama- She carries Eli on romps through fields, sharing her family places with him. Her spot is the open blueberry barren where she can see both the sun's rising and setting.

Grandmother – Present at both Eli and Sylvie's births, she baptizes them with the valley breeze and initiates them in the ways of the glistening, gurgling river.

Grandfather – His love for family members is inscribed on the rafters of his favorite place, the silent, languid barn.

Father – One with the fields he works, he savors their "sweet dirt," carrying it home in his pockets.

Sylvie – When Eli's baby sister is born, Eli comes into his own. Now it's his turn to share the places to love. It is his turn participate in the transfer of family values to another generation.

NOTES:

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: CONFLICT AND PLOT



As mentioned in notes about setting, this haunting piece reads more like a series of still life pictures or a poem than a story. The setting is inherently peaceful. Nothing disturbs the tranquil scene. Life's simplest experiences are related: picking blueberries, walking in the fields, sailing bark boats down river, watching turtles, and listening to cows chew their cud through the lazy afternoon hours. Is there any conflict within the pages of this narrative?

All students of literature learn early that without conflict, there can be no story. Place and characters fail to live, move, and breathe without the motivation of conflict animating them.

While the conflict within this narrative is as quiet as the scenes described, it does exist. Driving the story forward and imbuing the places with significance is the underlying tension created by the inevitable passage of time. Parents are aging. Children are growing. All that is dear is being transferred from parent, to child, to child. The land is the wineskin that holds the wine of these lives together. It is the glue that binds each generation to the next. It will remain after these lives have passed and will continue to symbolize the ideas and values of the people with whom it was associated.

To arrive at a discussion of these themes with students, contemplate the following questions:

What does the protagonist want? (5)

Eli wants to enjoy the places he's been taught and given to love, and to share them with his baby sister, teaching her to love them as well. He wants to own his family membership and to preserve his family heritage.

Why can't he have it? Does his age, economic class, race, or sex stand in his way? (6d) Is he racing against time? (6e)

Eli is indeed racing against time, because time brings changes. Eli must remember, cherish, and share these places in order to preserve them. He must remember the places and the people associated with them regardless of where he may go. He must internalize the value of these places, and make them his own. He must choose to value his heritage and transfer it.

What sort of conflict is represented in this story? (6h)

Since time is a sort of silent antagonist in this story, reminding us of the impermanence of earthly life, this is a Man vs. Nature conflict. Time is meanly impersonal. Established as a part of God's created order, it "obeys no man," but only God, reminding us by its constant passage that we are but creatures.

What other problems are there in the story? What other conflicts and themes does the story articulate? (7)

In addition to the underlying threat of change and mortality, the story follows Eli's growth to early maturity. That is, Eli wants to discover his own "place." This place is both literal, a special haunt of his very own, and symbolic, a place only he can fill in the family order. This is a coming of age story. Eli becomes one of the givers in the story – one of the ones who know all the places to love.

Remember that a story's themes are directly related to its conflicts. Since the conflicts in this story are subtle, a discussion of them will develop students' understanding of conflict. Not all antagonists are human; not all are wicked. Yet they remain conflicts as they work against the protagonist's desires.

In this story, Eli probably isn't aware of just why the land is valuable. He isn't yet aware of his or his loved ones' mortality, nor is he as moved by the preciousness of life as his grandfather is. He just knows he wants to keep his childhood "snapshots" forever. They capture time. They substantiate and validate a changing reality. They embody all that has made him who he is, the admixture of the family and experiences that have shaped him. These places are to cherish and to share with his family. He'll start with his baby sister. "Sylvie," he'll say, "here's my favorite place. Let's find yours. This is how to live well. Listen. Look. Value. Remember. Share..." And he'll be right, of course.

What happens in the story? (8)

Eli visits all the special places his family loves. As he does so, he not only grows to appreciate the magical qualities of each locale, but also develops special relationships with the members who share them with him.

–Eli is born. His grandmother wraps him in a blanket made of wool from the sheep she raised. She raises him to the window to show him the family land.

–Grandfather carves Eli's name into his favorite place, the barn, making him a part of the family and its heritage.

–Mama shares the meadow.

–Father shares his wisdom and the sweet soil of his fields.

–Grandmother shares the river.

–Eli discovers the marsh.

–Mother shares the blueberry barren.

–Grandfather shares the barn where soon, he and Eli together await the arrival of a new family member.

How is the main problem solved? (9) Does the protagonist get what he’s after? (9a)

When Sylvie is born, Eli participates in the process of bringing another member into his family circle. He has come of age. Now it is his privilege to share with another the things that were given to him. He has been shown the places to love, and he has grown to love them himself. He has given himself to the family vision, and will share in their purpose – enjoying one another and creaturehood. “Someday I might live in the city. Someday I might live by the sea. But soon I will carry Sylvie on my shoulders through the fields; I will send her messages downriver in small boats; and I will watch her at the top of the hill, trying to touch the sky. I will show her my favorite place, the marsh, where ducklings follow their mother like tiny tumbles of leaves.” Eli has discovered his own place, both physically and metaphorically speaking.

Is the situation pleasantly resolved, or is it resolved in a terrible way? (9c)

In a greater sense, the underlying conflict of mortality is softened by this transferred vision. The awfulness of mortality is swallowed up in something larger than the individual, yet simultaneously a part of the individual: the family. The transfer of values and vision from generation to generation causes a man to live beyond his grave in the lives of his descendants. While man cannot live forever, he can become a part of something that extends beyond his lifetime and so influence those he may never meet.

NOTES:

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: THEME



What does the protagonist learn? (11) Is he changed in his mind or heart by the events of the story? (11a)

Eli learns that “all the places to love” are among his people. He is inducted into membership in his family circle.

Does he begin to act differently? In what way? (11b)

Eli's actions demonstrate that he has internalized all that his family has given him. He has become a part of something larger than himself and recognizes that, regardless of what he will do individually throughout the course of his life, something larger than himself exists there on the family land – something to which he belongs - something good and worthy.

Does the main character explain to the reader his perspective on the events that have transpired? (11e)

Eli vows to share what he's learned with his sister. “All the places to love are here, I'll tell her, no matter where you may live. Where else, I will say, does an old turtle crossing the path make all the difference in the world?”

Does the story deal with universal themes? (13a)

The story deals with universal themes like mortality, the fleeting passage of time, and coming of age. It speaks of family heritage and values, the significance of the land, and generational continuity.

Does the story offer an answer to a particular problem associated with one of those themes? (13b)

The author suggests that family offers the individual a way to transcend mortality by influencing the next generation. Family is the place where one can leave a permanent mark on the world. In like manner, the land is significant in the story. Outlasting the characters of the story, unmarked by mortality, it serves as a touchstone between the generations, a staying influence, an opportunity and invitation to build something larger than the individual.

What answer does the story seem to suggest for the question, “What is a good life?” (13d)

The story suggests that a good life is a life lived in relationship with others. A good life is a life that embraces creaturehood, enjoying its privileges and transcending its limitations. Not only is a good life gained by embracing the limitations of nature, but also by associating with nature. By connecting with nature – appreciating and living close to it – the individual etches himself into the permanence of place. He becomes attached to the land. Others know him by his land and remember him in connection with it. The land is a part of him. It will receive him, and he will leave it to his progeny. This adds importance to the generational transfer of vision. Should one of the members fail to grasp the importance of place, all that they have built may be lost.

NOTES:

QUESTIONS ABOUT STYLE



Does the author use the sounds of our language to create interest in the story? (14)

This story reads like poetry, and that's largely because of the proliferation of literary devices that embellish the text.

Sensory language makes the story live.

“What I heard first...” (hear)

“What I saw first...” (see)

”Raucous black grackles...” (hear)

“That sound like a whisper...” (hear)

“The bed was warm when I touched it.”(feel)

“Where else can I see the sun rise...?” (see)

“Grandma sailed little bark boats downriver with messages...” (see)

“Where else does an old turtle crossing the road...” (see)

“My grandfather's barn is sweet-smelling and dark and cool.” (smell, see, feels)

“Where else can the soft sound of cows chewing...” (hear)

Alliteration (14e)

“sly smiles” of the dogs

“Papa and I plowed”

“Where else is soil so sweet?”

“Papa put a handful of dirt in his pocket”

“”meadow turned to marsh...”

“Cattails stood...and killdeers called”

“marsh marigolds”

“footprints for us to find”

Consonance (14d)

“Raucous black grackles”

**Does the author use descriptions and comparisons to create pictures in the reader’s mind?
(15)**

Similes (15d)

“Crows in the dirt that swaggered like pirates”

“trout flashed like jewels”

“Cattails stood like guards...”

“Leather harnesses hang like paintings against old wood; and hay dust floats like gold in the air.”

“Where ducklings follow their mother like tiny tumbles of leaves.”

Repetition of Words

“Rock to rock to rock...”

“Someday I might...”

“Where else...?”

NOTES:

QUESTIONS ABOUT CONTEXT



Who is the author? (18)

Patricia MacLachlan began her writing career at 35-years-old. The mother of three, her interest in writing stems from her concern for families and children. A graduate of University of Connecticut, she has taught English, written journal articles, and served on a local family agency board researching and writing about adoption and foster mothers. Her interest in children's literature inevitably grew out of these experiences.

Although Ms. MacLachlan currently resides in Massachusetts, she confesses a strong connection to the Wyoming prairies of her childhood. As evidence of this heart connection, she reportedly carries with her a small bag of prairie dirt. This love of place is evident in her works, which are laced with scenes of prairie and sea.

When questioned concerning her writing methods, she states that character forms the backbone of her stories. Indeed, memorable characters have been born from her pen in acclaimed favorites *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, *Skylark*, *Baby*, *Journey*, *Arthur for the Very First Time*, *The Facts and Fictions of Minna Pratt*, and *Unclaimed Treasures*.

While she enjoys a busy career as a writer and speaker, Ms. MacLachlan finds time to teach a children's literature course at Smith College. She recently published a children's book with her daughter, Emily, entitled *Painting the Wind*. Her work has garnered recognition such as the Golden Kite Award and the Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction for Children. Additionally, several of her books have enjoyed a place on the ALA's Notable Children's Books list.

NOTES:

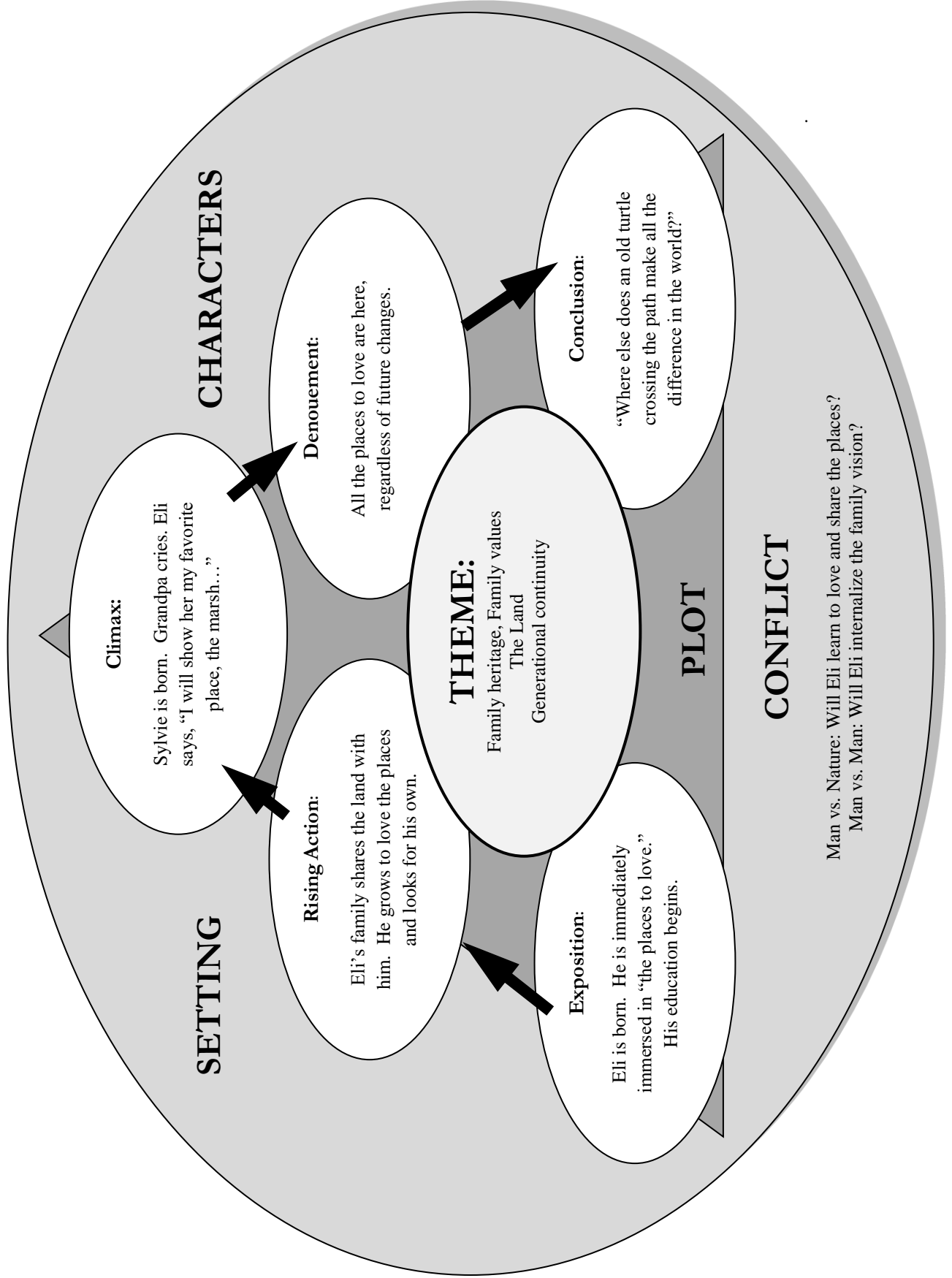
STORY CHARTS



The following pages contain story charts of the type presented in the live seminar *Teaching the Classics*. As is made clear in that seminar, a separate story chart may be constructed for each of the conflicts present in a work of fiction. In particular, the reader's decision as to the *climax* and central *themes* of the plot structure will depend upon his understanding of the story's central *conflict*. As a result, though the details of setting, characters, exposition, and conclusion may be identical from analysis to analysis, significant variation may be found in those components which appear down the center of the story chart: Conflict, Climax, and Theme. This of course results from the fact that literary interpretation is the work of active minds, and differences of opinion are to be expected – even encouraged!

For the teacher's information, one story chart has been filled in on the next page. In addition, a blank chart is included to allow the teacher to examine different conflicts in the same format.

All the Places to Love by Patricia MacLachlan: Story Chart



All the Places to Love by Patricia MacLachlan: Blank Story Chart

