

Letter from Chicago

Teacher's Guide

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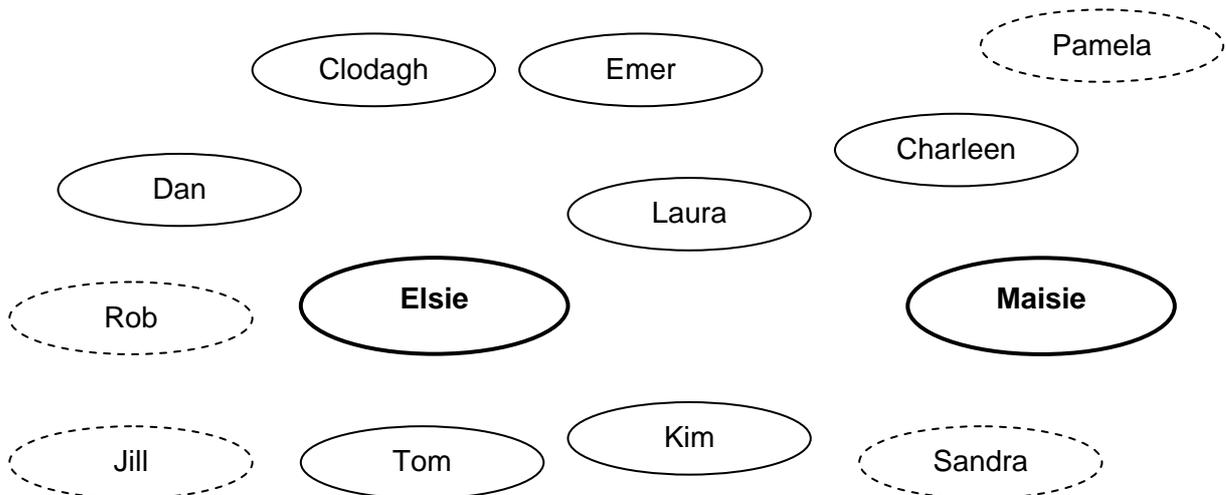
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Preliminary remarks

- The following assignments offer tasks and activities, which the teacher or students can choose from.
- Many tasks are suitable for talks or presentations to the class.
- Some tasks overlap with others.
- Since the material can be edited, the teacher may enlarge the tables, diagrams, and charts, or the students may copy them into their exercise books.

Pre-reading activities

- 1 The picture on the **cover** shows a mailbox, so the story probably has something to do with receiving letters. Talk to the class about one letter that would make you happy and one letter that would make you sad.
- 2 Imagine you have a pen pal who would like to visit you. What would you do to prepare for this visit?
- 3 Sometimes people exaggerate to show off. Imagine a situation in which you might stretch the truth. Tell your story.

While-reading activities**1 Constellation of figures**

How are the characters connected?

Use lines, arrows, symbols, and/or keywords to indicate the relationships.

2 Titles

Create titles for each chapter.

3 Summaries

Write a very short summary of each chapter (2 or 3 sentences each).

4 Structure

In what way does Chapter 1 serve as an introduction for the characters, action, and conflict?

5 Characterization and relationships

- 1 While you are reading, create a list of differences between Emer and Laura.

Emer	Laura

- 2 What makes Clodagh the most important figure in the story to jumpstart the plot?
- 3 Characterize Tom McDonnell.
- 4 What is Kim's place in the story?
- 5 Why is Jill, Rob's wife, not accepted by the family clan?
- 6 What is paradoxical about Elsie's attitude toward Rob and Jill?

6 Setting

- 1 Explain where the story is set.
- 2 What is the importance of the setting in this story?

7 Narrator and point of view

Who is the narrator of the story?

(You can find a definition of narrator and point of view in a library or on the Internet, or your teacher may have one ready for you.)

8 Themes

While reading the book, make notes about the following themes:

- 1 What is the **influence of TV** on the characters?
- 2 To what extent are Emer, Laura, and Charleen **typical teenagers** of our time?
- 3 What role does **family** play in this story?
- 4 What **image or idea** of her life in Ireland has Elsie created over the years?
What **image or idea** of her life in America has Maisie created over the years?
- 5 How has Elsie's and Maisie's practice of "**stretching the truth**" developed over the years?

9 Interpretation by acting

- 1 Chapter 1: Write and act a typical breakfast scene in the McDonnell's house:
... before Maisie's letter about her granddaughter's planned visit to Ireland.
... after Maisie's letter about her granddaughter's planned visit to Ireland.
- 2 Chapter 3, p. 35, line 9 through p. 42: Write the dialogue (you can make it more colorful) and act out the family's meeting.

(These are just two examples. There are more opportunities for acting in other passages.)

10 Freeze frame

Make a freeze frame of this scene: Chapter 6, p. 67, lines 13–14. A freeze frame is like a snapshot of a situation.

1st step: Imagine your character's body position in this situation and decide what your character's face looks like. Then find and freeze your pose. Don't talk.

2nd step: Hold your pose while the rest of the class interprets the freeze frame.

3rd step: Rejoin the class and participate as students discuss this interpretation.

(This is just one example. More freeze frames are possible in other passages.)

11 Language and Style

- 1 As you read Chapter 3, p. 36, line 8 through p. 38, line 2, compare Kim's and Clodagh's speeches.
How does the choice of words and phrases make Kim's speech pessimistic and Clodagh's speech optimistic?
- 2 While you are reading, collect examples of humor and explain its principle.
- 3 Name and explain the following figures of speech:
 - Chapter 4, p. 50, line 10: *You're like a cat on a hot tin roof.*
 - Chapter 4, p. 51, line 14: *I could kill for a drink.*
 - Chapter 5, p. 55, lines 3–4: *Think of it as a type of skin treatment.*
 - Chapter 5, p. 56, line 9: *I'm as white as a milk bottle.*

Post-reading activities**1 Book review**

Write a critical book review and state your personal opinion.

(If you liked the book, you may encourage other students to read it.)

2 Summary

Write a summary of the story in 90–100 words or 180–200 words or 270–300 words.

(It is more difficult to summarize a story like this in 100 words than in 300 words.)

3 Ending

Add another chapter to the book. Write or act the dialogue between Elsie and Maisie when they meet again after so many years. (Decide whether you want them to stick to the truth this time.)

4 Letter writing

- 1 Reread Chapter 4, p. 48, line 12 through p. 49, line 2. Continue writing the letter in Elsie's style of "stretching the truth."
- 2 Write Charleen's first letter home to her mother and grandmother in the United States.

5 Comment

- 1 Reread Chapter 5, p. 59, l. 14 and l. 20: "I'm exhausted. . . . But I enjoyed it, you know."
Would you say that this quotation stands for one of Clodagh's important principles of life? Explain your answer.
- 2 Comment on the following question: How can a loving grandmother "stretch the truth" so much?

6 Book cover

Design your own book cover.

(Your teacher may hold a contest for the best entry.)

7 Title

Think of other titles for the story.

(Your teacher may hold a contest for the best suggestion.)