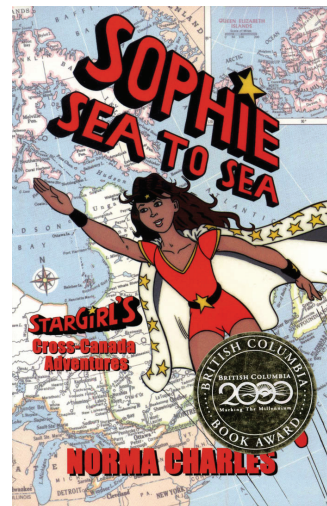


NOVEL STUDY AND TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR **SOPHIE SEA TO SEA**

BY NORMA CHARLES



CLASSROOM USES

Sophie Sea to Sea is the story of 10-year-old Sophie LaGrange, the only girl in a large French-Canadian family about to make a cross-Canada move from Montreal, Quebec to Maillardville, British Columbia. During the month-long journey Sophie—obsessed with a comic book heroine named Star Girl—gradually *becomes* her own heroine, racing to the rescue of friends and strangers alike who find themselves in need of a helping hand. The novel takes place in 1949, the year Newfoundland joined Confederation, and makes its way through Ste. Anne des Chênes, Manitoba, Laflèche, Saskatchewan, and Carbon, Alberta, soaring over flooded prairies, oil fields, dinosaur badlands and the whitecaps of the Rockies. Each chapter/border is a snapshot of the province's history and offers a challenge to language and gender stereotypes while painting a picture of the country mid-century which many students will find both engaging and informative.

SOCIAL STUDIES

The novel provides a glimpse of social and historical events in the late 1940s as well as a first hand look at Canada's provinces both in terms of life and culture in the cities and in more rural regions of the country. As the LaGrange family travels across Canada, each province is introduced with a page of 'Quick Facts' which gives readers up-to-date statistics and information about its motto, population, size, capital, main industries and provincial flower, bird and tree as well as offering a brief historical sketch. This format and detail

provides an opportunity for students to gain map reading and charting skills, to do further research into each of these categories for classroom presentation, to discuss various social, technological and cultural changes in the intervening 50 years and to evaluate those changes with respect to their own experience and knowledge.

The novel gives occasion to introduce Canada's formative cultures and languages, French and English, and to examine the conflict and complement those cultures share to this day. Sophie's father leaves Montreal because he can't find well-paying work as a Francophone in Quebec; this moment and others equally significant are springboards for more involved discussions about language, culture and racism/prejudices in this country including those *in addition* to Canada's two official languages.

Finally, the book is ideal for further exploration of the events leading to Confederation, and of various historical circumstances related to Newfoundland's decision to join Canada in 1949. Similar or dissimilar events within the other provinces allow for greater contrast and a national view. Furthermore, the novel allows for a fuller examination of the various industries that played a role in the development and founding of the provinces: from oil and coal mining to the lumber industry, from fisheries to the fur trade. Teachers may also wish to pursue a longer archaeological view, taking into account the Badlands and various geographical forces which have *literally* formed the country.



DUNDURN
www.dundurn.com

ISBN 9781459709034

LANGUAGE ARTS

Sophie is an avid reader and writer, collecting her comic books, but also recounting her own experiences of the trip in postcards and letters to her cousin Danielle in Nfld. These two interests provide an opportunity to engage students in discussions of their own favourite reads, the act of writing (whether letters, diaries or stories) and of various ways of expressing through language a life story or an imagined life altogether. The separate chapters roughly coincide with one episode in Sophie's adventures and one provincial border en route to the west. Teachers might use this structure to investigate the device of a "story within a story" or the short story format.

Charles has provided a glossary of words which may not be familiar to students because of their specificity in the context of the 1940s. This may lead to discussions about how language changes with time and cultural shifts while simultaneously expanding student vocabularies.

GLOSSARY

Albertosaurus—a dinosaur similar to Tyrannosaurus, whose fossil remains were found on the banks of the Red Deer River in the Badlands of Alberta near Drumheller by Joseph Burr Tyrrell in 1884

alcove—a recessed section of a room, a nook

aphids—tiny insects with tube-shaped mouths adapted for piercing stems and leaves of plants and sucking juices

boardwalk—a walkway usually over a wet muddy area, made of long planks of wood

chicken coop—a small building or pen to confine or house chickens

fedora—a man's felt hat with a curved brim and a crown creased lengthwise

go-cart derby—a contest or race with homemade carts made from crates or soap boxes big enough for 1 driver

gumbo mud—soil that contains much silt and becomes very sticky and heavy when wet

gunny sack—a sack made of a coarse, strong fabric

Hail Mary—a short prayer honoring Mary, the mother of Jesus in the Christian faith

hooligan—one of a gang of street ruffians or bullies

jalopy—an old automobile in poor state of repair

jawbreakers—small, round, hard candy usually black, licorice flavoured, popular in the 1940s and 50s

Jughead hat—a hat made by turning a man's felt hat

inside out and cutting the brim into jagged triangles, worn by boys in the 1940s and 50s and decorated with plastic or metal badges and pins.

Kick the Can—a game played by children similar to hide-and-go-seek where a tin can is kicked and must be retrieved and returned to the goal

marooned—to be left in a helpless place or position

metis—a person of mixed French and First Nations ancestry

nightcap—a cap worn to keep the head warm in bed

packing case—a large box usually made from thin wood, used for packing goods

phonograph player—an old style record player

pump house—a small building housing a water pump

saddle shoes—white leather oxfords with black or blue patches over the instep popular with girls in the late 40s and 50s

scrubbing board—a rectangular apparatus usually made of ridged wood and metal to scrub clothes against using soap and water

sonata—a musical composition

spitfire—a popular airplane used extensively in WWII

summit—the highest point, top or peak of a mountain

toque—a knitted hat with no brim

vacant lot—a plot of land which is unoccupied

verandah—a large covered porch along the side of a house

VISUAL ARTS, MUSIC AND WRITING

As noted above, students may choose to follow Sophie's lead and devise their own ways to share an experience of adventure, travel, family or coming to a new city and school. Students may also explore various other forms of narration, including animation and illustrated stories as in the case of comic books. This combines both visual arts and writing while tapping into a creative talent which may not yet have found expression in the classroom. Sophie's Maman is as obsessed with music and her piano as Sophie is with Star Girl, both of them arriving at the house in Maillardville with suitcases empty of clothes but packed with comics or sheet music. Their first night in the house the LaGranges sing and play instruments as a way of bringing their culture with them to their new surroundings. The book can be used to explore the role of music/art/imagination in culture and the lives of children.

SCIENCE

While the book lends itself more obviously to social studies and writing exercises there are opportunities to delve further into a number of science-related components of the novel including: Sophie's fascination with bugs of all description (unit on insect biology etc.); her cousins experience in the mines (the science and physics of that job); their experience at the Drumheller museum (introduction to dinosaurs and the Badlands); the building of the TransCanada highway (construction, physics of engineering etc.); and finally the theory and history of flight, from Sophie's kite to actual planes. While these units may be peripheral to the focus of the story they do provide an entry into related areas of study and might invite further discussion in complementary units.

LIFE SKILLS

Sophie is the only girl in a large family, enduring not only the isolation of her gender but many of her mother's traditional notions of what it means to be a proper young lady. Her mother appears to be constantly disappointed and frustrated with Sophie's tomboyish ways (see the contrast to and incident with her cousin Isabella), scolding her for wanting the experience and risk associated with her brother's freedom and rougher existence. The novel is an opportunity to explore gender stereotypes and parental expectations while discussing how they have or have not changed since the 1950s.

Sophie also encounters anti-French sentiment from the boys in the park in Kitchener and is forced to defend both her language and identity on foreign turf. This scenario allows students to share their own experiences with racism and stereotypes and begin to dismantle their power.

Sophie visits many members of her extended family—aunts, uncles, cousins, her grandmother—and briefly shares their homes. Discuss what living with these family members might be like, dealing with unfamiliar people one is obliged to be friendly with, and what might be learned and shared from such an experience. This introduces inter-generational activities and discussions about the changing notion of "family" in our culture and in others.

Sophie also is forced to leave her best friend Marcie in Montreal, as she did with Danielle who moved to Nfld and to make friends at a new school where she is

considered an outsider initially. Explore the difficulties of entering new social spheres and the skills needed to be confident, independent and self-assured.

SETTING THE SCENE

In 1949, Canada was recovering from its involvement in the WWII war effort, with troops home and men crowding cities and towns in search of a better life for themselves and their young families. In Montreal, many professional French Canadians were not faring well. After a disastrous strike in the town of Asbestos, Quebec, where police troops were called in by the premier of the province, Maurice Duplessis, to quell the French Canadian strikers, the situation seemed even worse. Many French Canadian men in Quebec packed up their families and left to seek a better life in other parts of Canada. In this novel, Antoine LaGrange, Sophie's father, has decided to do this in the hopes of getting better-paid work in the town of Maillardville.

Newfoundland

In 1948, the people of Newfoundland voted by a narrow margin to join Confederation. On March 31, 1949, this island was declared Canada's tenth province with Joey Smallwood as its premier.

Displaced Persons

After the war, over 165,000 'D.P.s' were admitted entry to Canada. The United Nations called these refugees from war-torn Europe, 'Displaced Persons', but the man on the street called them 'D.P.s', and often looked down on them as unwanted members of the population who threatened to overtax Canadian social services and threaten the job security of "real Canadians". Many other European immigrants who were not refugees were often lumped in with 'D.P.s' by those ignorant of the difference who responded only to outward racial traits and family names. French Canadians were sometimes called 'D.P.s' outside of Quebec.

Trans-Canada Highway

Crossing Canada by car was a rare feat in the 1940s. In 1912, a highway enthusiast in Victoria, B.C., A.F. Todd, offered a gold medal for the first person to drive a motor

vehicle along an all-Canadian highway route from the Atlantic to the Pacific. No one claimed the medal until 1946, when R.A. Macfarlane and Kenneth MacGillivray drove 4,743 miles from Louisberg, Nova Scotia to Victoria, B.C. in a 1946 Chevrolet in nine days.

The highway across northern Ontario from Nipigon to Geraldton did not exist until 1945, so to travel the 150 miles between the two towns one had to take a 2000-mile detour through the USA. In B.C., there was no road through the mountains from Golden to Revelstoke until 1940 when the Big Bend Highway cut a 190 mile gravel loop along the Columbia River to join the two towns and allow travel to the west coast. Only intrepid drivers braved the steep narrow mountain road. In 1949, the TransCanada Highway Act provided funds for a cross-country highway, but it took thirteen years to complete. Stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific, it is now the world's longest continuous paved highway, nearly 8,000 kilometres long.

Barbara Ann Scott

Barbara Ann Scott was the darling of the media, after winning the European Ladies' Figure Skating Championship in Switzerland and the world championships in Stockholm in 1947. Scott also won the Gold medal for figure skating at the 1948 Winter Olympics. Girls all over Canada tried to emulate her by taking up figure skating and longed for Barbara Ann Scott dolls and cutouts as Sophie's cousin Isabella did.

Oil Discoveries

On February 13, 1947, near the small town of Leduc, Alberta just south of Edmonton, a young engineer named Vern Dry-Hole Hunter discovered oil. Within a year, there were over 150 new oil rigs pumping oil in the vicinity and the men working on the drills and their families enjoyed new-found prosperity. Sophie sees these drills from the window of her car en route to Carbon.

Badlands

The Badlands of Alberta were so named because the land in this area in the valley of the Red Deer River is not arable. Vegetation is sparse and desert-like. The strange looking Hoodoos and gulleys of the area were formed as a result of erosion. The region contains layers of

sandstone and mudstone deposited by rivers 75 million years ago. The sediments were carried by the prehistoric rivers to the Mowry Sea which covered the Great Plains region of North America. Each layer of sediment contains fossil plant and animal species characteristic of the epoch. The fossilized remains of dinosaurs and other primitive animals are abundant, allowing scientists a detailed glimpse into a chapter of the earth's history. No other land area of comparable size has produced such a diverse record of these early animals. It is the home of Dinosaur Provincial Park, and of the town of Drumheller where the famous Tyrrell Museum of Paleontology was established in 1985. The museum exhibits include 50 complete dinosaur skeletons, many of which were found locally.

Comic Books

Comic books have grown in popularity since the 1930s when many comics flooded to Canada from the USA. However, in 1940, due to the war effort, the Canadian government banned their importation along with other 'non-essentials' so comic book fans had to live without Superman, Flash Gordon and Captain Marvel. But not for long. Within months, Canadian artists and writers created a whole raft of Canadian superheroes: Johnny Canuck, The Invisible Commando, The Penguin, Dixon of the Mounted, Thunderfist, The Brain and Captain Wonder. Girl superheroes were Nelvena of the Northern Lights, Elaine Kenyan, the Polka Dot Pirate, and Trixie Rogers, the famous two-fisted Wing. All these comic book heroes were endowed with supernatural strength or some secret weapon. Star Girl, the object of Sophie's obsession is based on a imaginary model with a combination of these traits.

Maillardville

In 1909, the first group of 110 French Canadian settlers arrived from Quebec and Eastern Ontario by train to the area now known as Maillardville. They were skilled workers coming to work at Fraser Mills owned by the Canadian Western Lumber Co. which was the biggest lumber mill in the British Empire at the time. When the families first arrived, there weren't enough houses to accommodate all of them so some had to live in boxcars parked on a side track until a few shacks could be built for them. At first living was tough, but there was plenty of work for the men at the mill, and good lumber as well,

so soon family homes were built around what became Laval Square. Our Lady of Lourdes (*Notre Dame de Lourdes*) church was also built and became the focus of Laval Square and of the parish's activities with Fathers Maillard and Tec as pastors. A school was opened where children were taught by French-speaking nuns. Many other French Canadians from Quebec and Ontario, and later, from the prairie provinces moved west to Maillardville as well, until the parish became too large. So in 1946, a new parish with a new church was established. All the people who lived east of Lebleu Ave. would remain in the parish of Our Lady of Lourdes while people who lived west of Lebleu would belong to Our Lady of Fatima parish (*Notre Dame de Fatima*). The school at Our Lady of Fatima was established soon after and remains an active bilingual school today.

MAIN CHARACTERS

• SOPHIE LAGRANGE

Sophie is a spirited and impulsive ten-year-old whose current ambition is to collect every Star Girl comic book ever made so she can study them and learn how to become that heroine herself. She is the only girl in a family of five children and is often frustrated by the changes her father's decision to move have made in her own world.

• MARIE LAGRANGE

Marie Lagrange is Sophie's mother. She is a pianist who, in addition to raising her family of four sons and one daughter, works part-time in a shoe store. She is often frustrated in her attempts to quell Sophie's adventurous spirit and make her behave more like a lady.

• ANTOINE LAGRANGE

Antoine LaGrange is Sophie's father and a civil engineer. He is frustrated with his current job situation, able to get only truck-driving jobs while in Montreal due to an anti-French hiring policy. When he's offered an excellent job as a road engineer in B.C., he decides to take it although it means relocating his family.

• JOSEPH LAGRANGE

Joseph is Sophie's sixteen-year-old brother. He is tall and has shiny black hair which he keeps slicked back with Brylcreme. He and Henri tease Sophie and are seen by their younger sister as lucky participants in adventures reserved for boys and men.

• HENRI LAGRANGE

Henri LaGrange is Sophie's fifteen-year-old brother. He and Joseph are as close in friendship as they are in age and like to do everything together.

• ARTHUR LAGRANGE

Arthur is Sophie's twelve-year-old brother. He and Sophie are sometimes rivals but secretly become co-conspirators given that though they try to keep up with their older brothers, they often end up playing with each other instead. Arthur looks like Sophie except that he wears glasses and his prized Jughead hat.

• ZEPHRAM LAGRANGE

Zephram is Sophie's two-year-old brother and is doted upon by everyone in the family. Sophie is often called upon to look after him which is difficult for her because of his tendency to wander away and into trouble.

• GRAND'MAMAN

Grand'maman is the mother of Sophie's father. She lives independently on a farm in Manitoba, but joins the family on their way west when her farm is threatened by a flood. She knits Sophie nightcaps and insists she say her prayers, but despite her brisk manner is very affectionate toward her granddaughter.

• MARCIE

Marcie is Sophie's best friend in Montreal and equally obsessed with collecting Star Girl comics. She and Sophie are classmates and spend much of their time discussing how they will afford the comics, where they will buy them and what they have read in the latest issue. Sophie writes postcards to Marcie telling of her cross-Canada adventures and longing for their reunion.

• DANIELLE

Danielle is Sophie's cousin, a year older and recently moved to St. John's, Newfoundland as a result of her mother's transfer to a job teaching French in that city. Sophie and Danielle correspond by letter and postcard and Danielle's tales of life on the east coast provide the full cross-Canada link to Sophie on the west coast.

• JAKE

Jake is Sophie's next door neighbour and classmate and though he initially teases Sophie and stomps on her feet in dance class they become friends in the final chapter

when he assists her in achieving her life-long dream to fly like Star Girl.

• GWENDOLYN

Gwendolyn and Sophie are initially rivals when they compete for the best writing using an ink pen in Miss Wiggins' class. After a messy fight which results in strict punishment for them both they become good friends and turn their competition into an alliance.

• ISABELLA

Isabella is Sophie's cousin in Kitchener and fascinated with dolls, pretty frilly dresses and Barbara Ann Scott. She is reluctant to follow Sophie to the park to play Kick the Can, but once committed she throws herself, literally, into the game, falling into the creek and forcing Sophie Star Girl to rescue her in time to return to her mother's tea party and embarrass everyone.

PLOT OUTLINES

Chapter 1

Sophie and her best friend, Marcie, spot a new giant Star Girl comic in the local grocery store. They hide it so no one else will be able to buy it before they get their allowance the following Saturday. When Sophie gets home, her mother urges her to pack for their move to B.C. the following Monday. While Maman is working at the shoe store below their apartment, Sophie tries to find a safe place to store her collection of bugs, finally letting them roam free.

Chapter 2

When Saturday comes, Sophie rushes to the store and buys the Star Girl comic, but feels guilty because there was only one copy and Marcie had also wanted it. While packing her suitcase, she leaves behind 'unimportant' items of clothing so she will have room for her collection of comic books.

On Monday, just before the family leaves in their new Mercury pulling a trailer, Sophie gives Marcie a going-away present, the wrapped Star Girl comic, and Marcie gives Sophie a present as well. When Sophie unwraps the gift later in the car, she discovers that Marcie has given her a copy of the very same comic.

When they arrive in Kitchener, Ontario, the car has a flat tire so Papa stops at a garage to have it repaired. Sophie wanders into the shop and becomes engrossed in reading comics. Meanwhile, Papa and the others drive away, unwittingly leaving her behind. Later, her uncle picks her up and drives her to his fancy house across the street from Victoria Park.

Chapter 3

The next day, while Papa and her big brothers go off to buy a new tire, Sophie has to stay behind and play with her younger cousin, Isabella. She is soon bored playing with paper dolls and convinces Isabella to go across the street to the park where they join a group of boys playing Kick the Can. Isabella falls into a muddy stream and Sophie has to rescue her. Isabella's mother is very upset when the girls return home with their fancy dresses all muddy and they are forced to endure the tea party despite wishing they were elsewhere.

Chapter 4

The family continues on their journey through Ontario and across the border until they reach Ste. Anne des Chênes in Manitoba where Grand'maman greets the tired family with hugs and kisses, bowls of 'soupe aux pois' and a warm fire. The next morning, the sun's shining so washday is declared and everyone must help by pumping water and chopping wood. Sophie's job is to look after her little brother, Zephram. While she is trying to capture one of Grand'maman's chickens, Zephram wanders off to the local bridge where he is in danger of falling into the flooded river. She calls upon all her Star Girl powers to save him from the fall.

Chapter 5

The next morning the river is even higher and the family rushes to leave the farm before the bridge is closed and the water too high to drive in. Grand'maman joins them, forcing Sophie to ride in the back seat of the car, squashed in with her three older brothers. The car is almost swept away by the flood, but the whole family manages to push it to safety thanks in part to Star Girl's amazing strength and agility.

Chapter 6

The LaGranges drive across Manitoba until they reach Laflèche, Saskatchewan where they stay at Uncle Leo's farm. Sophie is unsure of Uncle Leo's two large, fierce-looking dogs. The next day, while she, Arthur and Zephram try to take a shortcut across a field, an angry bull chases them. The two fierce-looking dogs come to their rescue and they manage to escape unharmed.

Chapter 7

The family travels on and stops in Carbon, Alberta where the two older boys are taken on a tour of the local coal mines and Sophie helps Arthur with his go-cart. The next day she rides in the go-cart derby disguised as her brother Arthur, using goggles and his Jughead hat. She calls upon all her Star Girl powers to help her beat the 'Red Flash', an especially obnoxious opponent. When she crosses the finish line and claims her ten dollar prize her identity is revealed and Maman is once again dismayed by her unladylike behaviour.

Chapter 8

As the family continues on their journey, now travelling through the Rockies, Sophie must watch the steep and narrow road every second to be sure their brakes won't fail forcing them over the cliff. When the anxiety becomes too much for Maman, she insists that the whole family leave the car and walk to the foot of the mountain.

Chapter 9

When they finally arrive in Maillardville, Sophie is not impressed with their new home. She rushes in dragging her suitcase, which has become so heavy during the journey she can hardly lift it. Her plan to hide it is thwarted when Maman opens it and discovers that Sophie has given away all her clothes during the trip and now has a suitcase full of Star Girl comics! On Sophie's first day at her new school, she is introduced to writing with pen and ink, with disastrous results, though it also introduces her to her new friend Gwendolyn.

Chapter 10

A few days later, while the class has a lesson in creative dance, the boys spend a lot of time stomping on girls'

toes until Sophie comes up with a brilliant solution involving boots and interpretative acting. On the evening of the school play, she saves the day when her friend Jake forgets his lines. Then one Saturday, she climbs to the top of the chicken coop in the back yard and when Jake challenges her to jump, she does and discovers that it feels almost like flying, almost like Star Girl. After many attempts, she finally finds a way that she CAN fly, and she becomes who she's always wanted to be.

ACTIVITIES

The following suggestions for classroom activities illustrate some of the major areas explored in the book: Canadian geography and provincial attractions, comic book heroines and the French-Canadian experience mid-century. Classroom discussions, research in the library, at home, hands-on creative activities, and use of outside resources through field trips and visiting specialists can be addressed separately or as part of an integrated approach. Reference resources are listed in the bibliography at the end of this guide.

SOCIAL STUDIES

- Imagine the streets of Montreal in 1949. What would they look like in terms of architecture, the kinds of storefronts, cars on the street and clothing styles of the inhabitants? How different is this scene from that of your own home town? Go to the library to find pictures of the city and people as they looked around the time of this novel. Make a Then and Now chart noting what has changed in the intervening 50 years.
- On wash day at Grand'maman's Sophie, her mother and grandmother wash the clothes in a vat of hot water inside using a washboard while the boys chop wood and haul buckets of water in from the pump. How does this demonstrate traditional roles in the household and affect what technological advancements we take for granted in the late 20th century?
- The LaGrange family is caught in a flood, a disaster all too common on the prairies. Have any students in the class ever been involved in a natural disaster (hurricane, earth quake, ice storm etc.)? How did they know what to do? Use this as an opportunity to review school emergency plans in such an eventuality.

- Divide the class into ten groups, one for each province. Each group should prepare a report about its province with maps, diagrams, and facts to present to the class. Write questions to go with these answers. Put the info on small file cards and make a game board using the map of Canada following a route from St. John's to Victoria. The route is broken into smaller 'steps' on which playing pieces can be advanced one step for each correct response. The first team to Victoria wins.

- As an alternative to this approach have the students answer questions in a quiz show format, with teams facing off and a MC reading the questions in rounds.

- Divide the class in half, one group representative of English Canadians, the other of French Canadians. Stage a debate about issues like hiring policy, language on signs, cultural independence and ties to France and England. Midway through the debate have the teams switch cultures and finish the argument with a list of possible solutions or compromises. Discuss the Meech Lake Accord, in simple terms, and have a referendum. Relate this debate to concerns at the time of Confederation, in 1949, and today.

- Danielle has moved to Newfoundland and writes to Sophie of the dramatically different landscape and lifestyle on the east coast. Discuss the history of Acadia and Francophones in the Maritimes. Open the discussion to include Newfoundland and the circumstances which led to its decision to join Canada in 1949. Has anyone been to Newfoundland? Ask them to bring in pictures of their trip or of the landscape that may feature *their* friends or relatives.

- Assign students maps of the towns of Maillardville, St. Anne des Chênes, Carbon, Laflèche, Kitchener, St. John's and Montreal as well as the respective provincial maps of B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and Newfoundland. Plot the routes Sophie and her family take in each chapter, both locally from school, to home, to the epicerie, to the vacant lot, to the neighbourhood where she flies the kite, and provincially from town to town. Ask students to pay particular attention to the map's legend, geographical variations and unique sites. Finally, have them design a small map of their own neighbourhood using the symbols on the legend.

- Sophie and her family drive through the flat Badlands of southern Alberta. Ask students to research the geology of this area, with particular attention to the deposits found there. Pretend they are on an archaeological dig. What might they have found? How would they document their discoveries? Investigate tourist material which discusses the terrain, routes through the Badlands and historical points of interest. Share this with the class.

LANGUAGE ARTS

- While reading the novel, have students keep a reading log in which they record their thoughts, observations, and predictions and perhaps even notes about how they would have changed the plot and characters if they were writing the story. Completing these entries after each reading session (oral, by the teacher, or silent by the students) will help students reflect on the story so far, and predict what may happen next. It will also help clarify their own feelings and opinions as the novel progresses.

- Add a chapter to this book detailing the adventures Sophie has in your town. What unique characteristics of your town would Sophie be witness to? What danger might threaten you or your neighbours that Sophie might have to call upon her superpowers to prevent?

- Ask students to use ten of the words in the glossary in a short writing exercise demonstrating their understanding of the word in context. Do the same for the French words explained in the glossary at the end of the book. If students are currently enrolled in French have them translate this exercise into that language with the help of their instructor.

- Sophie and her mother do not often understand each other, though they speak the same language. Discuss how communication is not always a function of shared language. What else does it depend on? Ask the students to write a short scene between Sophie and her mother discussing Sophie's wish to keep the bug collection and to play in the park rather than attend the tea party. If the scene ends in argument, write another which would resolve the tension and allow for differing points of view and mutual respect. Have students act each part and explain why they wrote the dialogue as they did.

- Isabella is in many ways the opposite of Sophie in terms of disposition, yet the two are friends by the end of their encounter. Write the “near drowning” scene in the park from her point of view. Do the same for the go-cart scene, imagining Isabella in the driver’s seat. What would *her* mother have said?

VISUAL ARTS, MUSIC & WRITING

- Have students create with paint, markers, crayons, or other media, the different settings and events that occur through the book. Create a storyboard using these plot illustrations by organizing them chronologically to show the progress of Sophie’s journey and mount them on the wall using a map of Canada as the background. This technique is often used in planning a movie. Have students write the scenes as a movie script which will accompany the illustrations and then break into groups to act them out.
- Have students invent a superhero, complete with costume, a list of superpowers and his/her origin. Students could practise their cartooning skills by designing the cover of the first issue of their comic featuring the hero him/herself. Recall the description of Star Girl’s comic cover in chapter one.
- Have students begin a correspondence with a real or invented pen pal in another province, describing their own adventures and life in their town.

- Have students imagine that they are newspaper or radio reporters. Have them write a short article or newscast about one of the adventures that Sophie had on her long journey west. Some headlines they might use:

- “FAMILY LEAVES MONTREAL FOR A BETTER LIFE IN THE WEST”
- “GIRL DESERTED BY FAMILY IN KITCHENER GARAGE”
- “YOUNG MONTREALER RESCUES COUSIN FROM DROWNING”
- “SISTER RESCUES TODDLER FROM SURE DEATH”
- “FAMILY ESCAPES PRAIRIE FLOOD”
- “DOGS SAVE TRIO FROM BULL’S STAMPEDE”
- “TEN-YEAR-OLD GIRL WINS CARBON GO-CART RACE”

- “NEWCOMER FROM MONTREAL SAVES PLAY AT LOCAL SCHOOL”
- “TEN-YEAR-OLD GIRL FLIES!”

- Sophie’s mother is obsessed with her sheet music and piano. En route the whole family sings in the car to pass the time. When they finally arrive they celebrate with a night of song and instrumental music. Write the lyrics of a song describing Sophie’s long journey west. Write another song exclaiming the attributes of Star Girl. Write the jingle for a commercial announcing a Star Girl action figure. What role does music play in the students’ lives and in those of their family members? Does anyone play an instrument? If so, invite demonstrations.

SCIENCE

- Sophie finds her wings at the end of the novel. Have the students invent their own flying machines after researching those proposed by the Wright Brothers and others both historical and contemporary.
- Imagine you are in the car in the Rockies with the LaGrange family. What would it look like in 1949? How did engineers decide where roads and bridges and tunnels should be placed for both safety and economy? Invite the students to research the building of the TransCanada highway, including the treatment of the road workers and the obstacles they encountered in the west and other parts of the country.
- Sophie and her family visit the museum in Drumheller and see the bones of the Albertosaurus and other dinosaurs. Survey the class about their knowledge of dinosaurs and assign species to each group for presentation, including pictures of the animals and information about what they ate and when they became extinct. Invite an palaeontologist to speak to the class about the above.
- Early in the novel Sophie has to part with her bug collection. Learn the characteristics of each of her pets—what they look like, what they eat, where they are formed and if they are helps or hazards in the garden.
- Sophie’s uncle in Alberta takes her brothers on a tour of the mine and later has a dinner conversation about the hazards of being under the earth. Discuss Black

Lung and other illness attributed to the job and research advancements in the field which have improved on the dark, damp conditions or the threat of collapse. Where else does mining happen in Canada? What, other than oil and coal, are mined? What are these resources used for? Has anyone ever been down in a mine? If so describe the experience.

LIFE SKILLS

- Sophie is forced to move from Montreal and leave her best friend. Have students discuss their own moving experience and write two short dramatic scenes which stage both a positive and a negative encounter on their first day in a new school. Discuss responses to both predicaments.
- Imagine a conversation between Sophie's mother and father about moving. What might be some of the reasons for conflict? For compromise? What are the reasons for students' moves—parental transfers, divorce, better housing, family circumstances. Discuss.
- Marcie is left behind in Montreal. Sophie is left behind at the garage. Have any students had this experience? How did they feel? How did they resolve the problem?
- When Sophie is called a Frenchie D.P., what were the boys in the park reacting to? Did they really know what that meant? Have students ever been called names as a result of their language, appearance or culture? Have students role play both the bully and Sophie's position, rewriting dialogue which expands on their argument and allows both parties to leave the park as friends.
- Many students will have younger siblings they will likely have had to "watch" at one time or another. With a toddler like Zephram what are some of the real hazards to avoid when faced with such a responsibility? Have students volunteer their own experiences including those in babysitting courses or with camp counsellors etc.
- When Sophie wins the go-cart race disguised as her brother, Arthur, she keeps the ten-dollar prize and gives him the silver pin. On the other hand, when she buys the special Star Girl comic in Montreal she feels so guilty she generously gives it to Marcie rather than keep it for herself. When she is in Kitchener she trades

her Grand'maman's nightcap for a Star Girl comic and a Little Lulu. Have students discuss what they would have done in each circumstance, including concerns about fairness and value.

- Sophie is frequently embarrassed: when her aunt in Kitchener discovers her in a ruined dress in the kitchen prior to the tea party; when she reveals to her mother what was hidden in her suitcase; when her new class is learning to write with pen and ink; when she is forced to dance with Jake; when she has to improvise lines in the school play. Often these situations turn from embarrassment to sources of pride. Discuss how our uniqueness can ignite both these emotions.
- Sophie idealizes Star Girl as her hero. What characteristics make a hero in 1949? Now? What kinds of people might be heroes for students and adults alike—athletes, musicians, actors, politicians, activists, religious figures? Have students research or interview their personal hero and present their stories to the class. Have these heroes been teachers, mentors, examples to the students? How?
- Grand'maman joins the LaGrange family in Manitoba after her farm is threatened by a flood. Not only is the car and home now more crowded, but Sophie feels as if she has three parents. Have students ever had a member of the extended family live with them? What was it like? What can students learn from their elders? How do different cultures show their reverence or respect (or the opposite) for their elders? Invite students to imagine themselves fifty years in the future—what will they be doing? How will they feel about their grandchildren and what the world might be like then? How will it have changed?
- While Canada's two founding cultures are French and English, many other cultures now coexist within its borders. How many are represented in your classroom? Present one culture each day for the next few weeks, discussing assimilation, identity, racism and multiculturalism.

FIELD TRIPS/OUTSIDE RESOURCES

Make plans to visit one of the following near your school:

- your town hall or local museum

- an archaeological dig
- a comic book store
- an aviation museum
- a transport museum
- an oil field
- a mine
- a francophone community centre
- a farm
- a house of Canadian parliament

ILLUSTRATIONS

- “Sophie” and her family before the move
- Grand’maman’s farm in Manitoba and the chicken coop
- Maman feeding the chickens
- class of grades 4-6 students in 1949
- “Sophie” with her family, car and trailer in the Rockies
- The dark “unfriendly” house on Quadling St. in Maillardville, BC.
- Comic book characters from 1949.

RESOURCES

BOOKS

Many excellent books have been written about the history and geography of Canada and its provinces. Some that would be particularly useful are as follows:

- District of Coquitlam. *Coquitlam, 100 years. Reflections on the past*. Coquitlam, B.C., 1990.
- Franklin, Stephen. *A Time of Heroes*, (Canada’s Illustrated Heritage Series) Toronto: N.S.L. Natural Science of Canada Limited, 1977.
- Greenwood, Barbara. *The Kids’ Book of Canada*. Toronto: Kids Can Press, 1997.
- Jobe, Ronald. *Cultural Connections: Using Literature to explore world cultures with children*. Markam: Pembroke Publishers Ltd., 1993.
- Lunn, Janet and Moore, Christopher. *The Story of Canada*. Toronto: Lester Publishing, 1992.
- Mitchell, W.O. *Who has seen the Wind*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1947.
- Norris, John. *Strangers Entertained: A History of the Ethnic Groups of British Columbia*. British Columbia Centennial ’71 Committee, 1971.
- Steffoff, Rebecca. (ed) *Let’s Discover Canada Series*. New York: Ciedsea House, 1991.
- Sylvester, John. *Canada, Country Fact Files*. Austin,

Texas: Raintree Steck-Vaughn, 1996.

- Tames, Richard. *Journey Through Canada*. London, England: Eagle Books, 1991.
- *Discover Canada Series*. Toronto: Grolier Limited, 1992.
- *Journey Across Canada Series*. Vero Beach, Florida: Rourke Book Co. 1997.

WEB SITES

- Documents on Confederation: www.geocities.com/Yosemite/Rapids/3330/constitution/conf.htm
- Territorial Evolution of Canada: www.nais.ccm.emr.ca/schoolnet.ca/vavrr/time-I~1.htm
- Canada’s Symbols: nelson.com/nelson/school/discovery/images/symbimag/ncddsymb.htm
- Canadian Aviation: www.trinculo.educ.sfu.ca/ipost_e/ipost2/4-7/default.htm
- National Atlas of Canada Online: www.sts.gsc.gc.ca/lanf.htm
- Nelvana of the North/Johnny Canuck: www.skypoint.com/members.schutz19
- Entomology: www.wuky.edu/Agriculture/Entomology/ythfacts/entyouth.htm or www.ent.iastate.edu/imagegallery
- Royal Tyrrell Dinosaur Museum: www.tyrrellmuseum.com
- About the author and the novel: <http://www.beachholme.bc.ca>. The Beach Holme page. Includes information on Norma Charles, *Sophie Sea to Sea* and other titles.

CONSTRUCTING THE NOVEL

Norma Charles, on writing *Sophie Sea to Sea*:

“Sophie LaGrange kept intruding on my thoughts with all her adventures until I was forced to write them down. Some of her stories came to me full-blown, so I just had to pick up my pen and write them as fast as I could. One Sophie adventure led to another until I had six or seven ‘mini’ stories. That’s when I decided that what Sophie really needed was a whole novel to herself so I invented the long journey which takes her family from Montreal to Maillardville in B.C. in 1949, the year Newfoundland became Canada’s tenth province. What an auspicious year for us!

In many ways, her family’s journey parallels a journey my own family took when I was a girl. My parents, who

were French Canadians, were feeling ostracized by the post-war community we were living in, so we packed up our possessions into my father's new Mercury and a little trailer (that was already almost full with my mother's precious piano that she couldn't bear to leave behind). Off we went, my three brothers, and I, and my mother and father, all squashed into the car. We drove across the country to Maillardville, British Columbia to begin a new life."

The idea for the comic book super hero, Star Girl, came from Sophie herself. When I asked myself what Sophie's main interests were, I knew she'd be keen about comic books because most children were crazy about them in the 40s and 50s, before the advent of TV heroes and wide access to public libraries. Although my own favourite comic book hero was Little Lulu, I thought Sohie would have a hero who was more adventurous and spectacular, so I invented Star Girl who has all the kinds of powers ten-year-olds aspire to. Star Girl is enormously brave and strong. She has x-ray vision and her main purpose is to rescue people in need. Best of all, she can fly, which is the one thing Sophie longs to do more than anything, and she feels that she could do it, if only she knew Star Girl's secret.

I've been asked if there will be more Sophie/Star Girl books. I must admit that although Sophie got her heart's desire at the end of this novel, *Sophie Sea to Sea*, she is still very much alive in my mind and there are a lot more stories about her brewing away.

ABOUT NORMA CHARLES

Norma Charles lives in Vancouver, B.C. in a house that she shares with her partner of many years, Brian Wood. She has two sons, two daughters, two stepsons, two grandsons and two granddaughters. She was a teacher, then a teacher/librarian in Vancouver since 1980. When it became too difficult to juggle both writing and teaching, she gave up teaching so she could write full time.

She has written two picture books, *See You Later, Alligator* and *Amanda Grows Up*, and five other novels besides *Sophie Sea to Sea*. They are *No Place For a Horse*, *April Fool Heroes*, *Darlene's Shadow*, *Dolphin Alert!* and

Runaway. She has also written many short stories for children that have been published in various anthologies including 'Lum King' for which she received first prize from the Coquitlam Pioneers.

CONTACTING THE AUTHOR

Norma Charles visits many schools and libraries and may be contacted through Beach Holme Publishing or CWILL BC (Children's Writers and Illustrators of BC).

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BUYING THE NOVEL

Copies of this novel may be ordered from bookstores and the Teacher's Guide may be ordered from Beach Holme Publishing. A free Teacher's Guide is provided with each class set of novels (20).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank her writing friends, Sonia Craddock, James Heneghan, and Linda Bailey who read the *Sophie Stories* in their many forms and offered constructive feedback. She wishes also, to thank Joy Gugeler, who had the vision to see the whole project as a novel, edited the manuscript meticulously and produced the book with such enthusiasm.