*The Memory Coat*

Story by Elvira Woodruff

Illustrations by Michael Dooling

**Map** Grade 3

**Unit** The People, The Preamble, and the Presidents

**Type** Literature

Essential Question: Why is it important

to choose words carefully?

**RATIONALE**

*The Memory Coat* tells of a Russian family who immigrate to America to escape the Cossack invasion. Illustrations play a large part in understanding this story. The illustrator uses a combination of colorful and gray-tone illustrations to establish the changing mood in various sections of the text. Studying the illustrations along with text descriptions gives the reader a thorough glimpse into the character traits and feelings of the story’s two main characters, Rachel and Grisha.

**SUGGESTIONS FOR USE**

Reading and discussing this text could be spread over three or four days with each day having a different focus for scoring to standards. Teachers could pair this text with informational texts, such as *Ellis Island* by Elaine Landau or *Coming to America: The Story of Immigration* by Betsy Maestro and Susannah Ryan. This text could also be used to compare the immigration experiences of Rachel and Grisha to the experience of Kimeli in *13 Cows for America*. Teachers can use the questions as is for a thorough understanding of the story, or specific questions could be chose to highlight specific skills, such as understanding how illustrations contribute to a story, story elements, inferring, etc.

**COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS ALIGNMENT**

**(a) Focus Standards**

* RL.3.3 Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events
* RL.3.7 Explain how specific aspects of a text’s illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g., create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting).
* L.3.4 Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning word and phrases based on grade 3 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.
* Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
* Determine the meaning of the new word formed when a known affix is added to a known word (e.g., agreeable/disagreeable, comfortable/uncomfortable, care/careless, heat/preheat).
* Use a known root word as a clue to the meaning of an unknown word with the same root (e.g., company, companion).

**(b) Additional Standards**

RL.3.1 Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers

RL.3.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, distinguishing literal from non-literal language.

**Terminology**

* characters
* character traits
* motivation
* infer
* mood

**VOCABULARY**

The following list of words is not intended to be a comprehensive list of words that must be explicitly taught in order to fully comprehend the story. Rather, the list is simply to highlight possible barriers for student comprehension. These words are a combination of Tier II and Tier III words found in the text.

* cobblers
* cobblestone
* Jewish
* commotion
* cradle
* pleading
* chattering
* midst
* shushing
* orphaned
* epidemic
* alley
* synagogue
* grieve
* threadbare
* offered
* refused
* sharply
* comfort
* wagon
* Tsar
* palace
* shivery
* enchanted
* mittened
* twig
* dazzling
* turret
* miniature
* chanted
* lullaby
* bittersweet
* Cossacks
* chaos
* clattered
* cellars
* attics
* trembled
* journey
* frightened
* immigrants
* inspection
* impression
* allowed
* separated
* shuddered
* tattered
* fierce
* ashamed
* mend
* belongings
* voyage
* harbor
* din
* echoed
* plaster
* pillar
* tumbled
* examined
* irritated

**Text-Dependent Questions**

Page 1-5

1. What words tell us about the setting of the story?
* “long ago”
* “small town, far away in Russia”
1. What evidence does Michael Dooling provide in the illustrations to support Elvira Woodruff’s description?
* The characters are carrying buckets, walking in a field (not a busy city), wagons pulled by horses (not cars and trucks), very few buildings, colors are dull (shades of brown and gray instead of bright, cheerful colors)
1. In working together, how do the text and illustrations create the mood in *The Memory Coat*?
* In just reading and studying the first page, the reader gets a sense that this is not going to be a happy-go-lucky story. The mood is much more subdued, gloomy, and maybe even sad.
1. What does “commotion” mean as it is used on page 4? What words and/or phrases from the text support your definition?
* A commotion is a very loud noise. After the author says that there was a commotion in the house, she goes on to list several activities going on by various members of the family. Student responses could include:
* A baby crying
* A cousin tapping at the door
* An older sister humming at the stove
* A younger sister pleading for something sweet to eat
* Rachel chattering away
* The author also tells us that in the midst of all of the noise, Bubba was “covering her ears and shushing them”.
1. How does the illustration on page 5 support the text on page 4?
* The illustration shows the family gathered in the kitchen. The family members are gathered into small groups. The expressions on their faces tell us that they are all talking or laughing with each other. On the far left, we see Bubba with her hands on her ears. Even though she is holding her ears, she is smiling.
1. How often do Rachel and Grisha tell stories?
* Rachel and Grisha tell stories all day long. The text tells us that their stories continued “…from the first morning light to the setting of the sun.”
1. What kind of relationship do Rachel and Grisha have?
* Rachel and Grisha are cousins, but they are also best friends. They tell each other all of their “deepest secrets.”
1. At the end of the first paragraph on page 4, why are Bubba’s words written in italics?
* Bubba’s words are in italics because they are not English words. The author wants the reader to notice that they are in a different language. Because the author has already told the reader that the family is Jewish, we can infer that the language is probably Hebrew or Yiddish.

Page 6-9

1. Why does Grisha live with Rachel and her family?
* Grisha’s parents died from an epidemic. Students may need some help understanding what this means. Consider asking questions in order to lead them to understanding that his parents died from illness. These questions could include:
* What do we already know about the setting of this story? (long time ago, small town)
* What might have caused both of his parents to die at the same time? (Try to keep students focused on “long ago.” Guide them to thinking about medicines from long ago.)
* If there people didn’t have the medicines that we have now, what might happen if a lot of people are all sick at the same time? (Diseases spread and could infect or even kill many people.)
1. Why does Grisha run to the alley behind the synagogue?
* Grisha runs behind the synagogue because he wants to be alone.
1. How does Grisha feel when he runs behind the synagogue? What word does the author use to let the reader know how Grisha is feeling? How does the illustration support the reader’s understanding of Grisha’s feelings?
* Grisha misses his parents. He sits alone behind the synagogue. The author tells the reader that Grisha grieves for his parents. The illustration shows Grisha sitting alone. He has a “far away” look in his eyes, his mouth is turned down, and he is resting his head on his hand.
1. On page 7, what adjective does the author use to describe Grisha’s coat? What does this word mean? What other words could the author have chosen to describe Grisha’s coat?
* The author says that Grisha’s coat is “threadbare”.
* “Threadbare” is a compound word. We can break the word apart into its two smaller words to help us determine the meaning of the compound word. What is thread? (The small pieces of thread or string that clothes are made of.) What does “bare” mean? (Empty or blank…Like in the nursery rhyme, “Old Mother Hubbard.”) When we put those two words back together, we get something that has no threads; the threads are missing.
* The author could have described Grisha’s coat as tattered, worn out, shabby, ragged, frayed, etc.

*Teacher Note: Students may need scaffolding for the words “thread” and “bare,” but the concept of breaking the words should not be new. Students should have experience breaking compound words into individual words to determine meaning. This is a second grade expectation under L.2.4d.*

1. What can the reader learn about Grisha’s coat when he replies to his family offering to make him a new coat?
* The text says that Grisha responds “sharply” that he likes his coat “…the way it is.” This lets the reader know that the coat is special to him. He does not want it changed.
1. On page 7, which character does the text say would “fly out of the house” after Grisha? Why does she do this? What does the phrase “fly out of the house” really mean?
* The text says that Rachel would “fly out of the house” when Grisha raced out into the icy wind. She raced after him because he is her cousin and best friend. She cares for him.
* We know that Rachel cannot literally fly out of the house. To “fly out of the house” means to rush out quickly.
1. When Grisha runs out of the house, how does Rachel’s reaction support what the reader already knows about the relationship between Rachel and Grisha?
* Rachel races after Grisha. She chases after him to comfort him; she wants to help him to feel better. The reader already knows that Rachel and Grisha are not only cousins, but they are best friends. The way Rachel chases him when he is upset supports our understanding that she cares for him very much.
1. On page 9, who inspired the story that Rachel and Grisha wrote together?
* Rachel saw a mouse run under a wagon. The mouse inspired their story.
1. Who is Rachel talking about when she says, “He’s very fine”? What does she mean by “fine”?
* Rachel is talking about the mouse when she uses the pronoun “he.”
* When Rachel says that he is “fine,” she means that he is a handsome mouse. She is imagining him dressed in his palace clothes.

*Teacher Note: A natural break in the story happens at the end of page 9. Reading and discussing the text could be stopped for the first day’s lesson after reading this page.*

* *If students have previously studied immigration and Ellis Island either with other texts in this unit or in social studies, consider asking students why this text was placed in this unit.*
* *Knowing what we know about the setting and characters in the story, predict/infer what will happen next in the story.*
* *How does the last line on page 9 foreshadow changes that are on the horizon for Rachel and Grisha?*

Page 10-15

1. According to the text, why did the Cossacks come to Russia? How does their coming effect Rachel and her family?
* They came to kill anyone who was Jewish.
* Rachel and her family are Jewish. They are in danger of being killed by the Cossacks.
1. How did Rachel and Grisha feel as they watched from the attic window? What evidence does the author provide to let the reader know how they felt?
* Looking out the attic window makes Rachel and Grisha feel afraid and scared.
* The text says they “…trembled as the Cossacks swept through town.” People tremble when they are afraid.
1. What does “swept” mean as it is used on page 10?
* The Cossacks came through the town fast. They cleared a path through the town using force.

*Teacher Note: Students may or may not come up with an exact answer to the definition of “swept” as it is used in the text, but they should know that it does not mean they came through the town to clean it with brooms.*

1. What does “chaos” mean as it is used on page 10? What clues does the author provide to let the reader know what it means?
* “Chaos” means disorderly, loud, messy, unorganized, many things happening at once
* The author provides the following statements in the text to clue the reader into the meaning of “chaos”:
* “babies cried”
* “dogs barked”
* “wagons clattered over cobblestones”
* “people screamed and shouted”
* “(people) ran to hide in their cellars and attics and barns”
1. Why does the family whisper when they are discussing their plan to move to America?
* They are in danger. The Cossacks were threatening all Jewish people in the town, and Rachel’s family is Jewish. They need to come up with a plan that will keep them all safe.
1. What does Rachel’s father mean when he says, “We must not wait for our children’s blood to color the snow”?
* If the family stays in Russia much longer, the Cossacks will come for them and kill them. He wants the family to leave quickly before they are killed.
1. What does the phrase “set about” mean as it is used on page 10?
* The family started making their plans. They got to work on all of the things they had to do in order to leave.
1. What frightened Rachel and her family most when they thought about their trip to America?
* They were most afraid of being turned away once they got to America.
1. Why would immigrants be turned away when they arrived in America?
* Once they arrived at Ellis Island, the immigrants were looked over to make sure they were healthy, had enough money to support themselves, and that they could take care of themselves.
1. Characters, setting, major events…which of these are most important based on the illustration on pages 12-13? Which story element does the author most want the reader to notice?
* The illustration on pages 10-11 shows people packing and loading boxes onto wagons pulled by donkeys. This event seems to be the most important feature of the illustration. The scene is done in shades of black, white, and gray. While there are several characters in the scene, the characters do not have many details. Their faces are not clear. Students may say that the setting is most important in this illustration. There are many boxes and crates scattered on the ground or already loaded onto the wagons. The illustration shows how hard it would have been for the family to pack up and leave.
1. Who will the family need to impress when they get to America? Why is it so important that they make a good impression?
* When they reach America, the family must pass an inspection at Ellis Island. They will be checked to make sure they are healthy, have enough money to support themselves, and can take care of themselves.
* Anyone who does not pass inspection could be sent back to their home country. If this happens, they could be separated forever.
1. What is wrong with Grisha’s coat? Why does Bubba want to make him a new coat?
* Grisha’s coat is old, tattered, and torn. The family is afraid that the inspectors in America may think he can’t afford anything better, and Grisha could be forced to go back to Russia; they may not let him into America if his clothes don’t look neat and clean.
1. Why does Grisha refuse to let Bubba make him a new coat?
* The inside of Grisha’s coat is lined with wool from his mother’s coat. When he wears the coat, he feels close to his mother even though she has died.
1. On page 15, why does the family feel ashamed?
* The family feels ashamed because they forgot why Grisha’s coat was so important to him. They forgot that his mother made the coat from him, and he misses her very much.
1. Why does Rachel whisper when she tells her family that Grisha’s coat is special because his mother made it?
* Rachel and Grisha are best friends. She knows how important the coat is to him, and she understands why he is upset at the offer to make him a new coat. Grisha never talks about his coat, so when Rachel tells the family that the coat reminds him of his mother, she is telling one of his secrets.

Page 16-21

1. What modes of transportation were used to travel from Russia to America?
* The family traveled by wagon, train, and ship.
1. How did Rachel and Grisha pass the time on their journey across the ocean?
* Rachel and Grisha played their story game to pass the time on the ship. Rachel told stories and Grisha illustrated them.

*Teacher note: The text says that Rachel and Grisha “played their story game.” Students should be able to explain that the game involves Rachel making up a story and Grisha illustrating while she tells the tale.*

1. What does the author mean when she says that Rachel and Grisha “…left a trail of their stories and drawings stretching all the way back to Russia”? What kind of language is this?
* The author is using figurative language when she says that Rachel and Grisha left a trail of stories. This does not literally mean a trail as in Hansel and Gretel or a trail through the woods. The author is telling the reader that Rachel and Grisha told many stories as the ship made its way across the ocean.
1. How does the illustration on page 17 support the author’s description of the journey from Russia to America? On this page, how do the illustration and text work together to create mood?
* The text says the trip was difficult. The journey across the ocean was “rough.”
* The illustration on page 17 shows very dark water. Thick, black smoke pours out of the ship. While the horizon is orange and yellow, the majority of the sky shows dark gray clouds.
* The text and illustrations work together to set a dark, scary, and dangerous mood across pages 16-17.
1. Why do Grisha and Rachel hold onto their grandmother’s skirt?
* Rachel and Grisha hold onto their grandmother’s skirt so they don’t get lost in the crowd of people making their way towards the Ellis Island inspectors.
1. Why are the last three sentences on page 19 written in italics?
* The last three lines on page 19 are written in italics because they are thoughts. These three sentences are the questions that the family members are asking themselves. They are worrying and wondering what will happen to them.
1. How does the illustration on pages 18-19 support the text on these two pages?
* The illustration supports the description in the text that the people were “wondering and worrying.” The people in the illustration are crowded together. They are all facing the same direction to show that they are in a line heading in the same direction. The people are very close together, and many have their heads down. The colors are shades of black, white, gray, and very dark brown. A few of the people are looking out at the reader. No one is smiling.
1. What do Rachel and Grisha do as they wait in line to see the inspectors?
* As they wait in line to see the inspectors, Rachel tells stories and Grisha illustrates them.
1. What does the phrase “to still their fears” mean as it is used on page 20?
* As they wait in line for the inspectors, Rachel and Grisha play their story telling game so that they won’t be scared or continue to worry. The phrase “to still their fears” means to keep them calm, to keep from worrying.
1. Who is Bubba?
* “Bubba” is what Rachel and Grisha call their grandmother.
1. What happens to Grisha at the end of page 21? What effect could this event have on what happens next to Grisha and his family?
* At the end of page 21, Grisha falls on a basket and scratches his eye.
* Grisha and his family are waiting in line to see the inspectors at Ellis Island. One thing the inspectors check for is whether or not someone is healthy. Now that Grisha’s eye is scratched, the inspectors may think that he is not healthy enough to enter America. They could send him back to Russia.
1. Why didn’t Grisha pass the inspection? What happened to him after he did not pass?
* Grisha did not pass inspection because his eye was scratched.
* The doctor wrote on Grisha’s coat with chalk. He wrote an “E” on Grisha’s coat.

Page 22-26

1. How does the illustration in the top left-hand corner of page 22 support the reader’s understanding of the text?
* The illustration in the top left-hand corner of page 22 shows a close-up view of Grisha’s eye inspection. The text says that the doctor “…lifted Grisha’s eyelid with a buttonhook”. The illustration shows what this looked like. Studying the illustration and text together helps the reader understand why Grisha “…cried out in pain.”
1. Why didn’t the inspector listen to Rachel’s father when he told the inspector that Grisha scratched his eye?
* Rachel’s father did not speak English, and the doctor could not understand Russian or Yiddish. The interpreter stepped away, and no one was there to translate what Rachel’s father was saying to the doctor.
1. As the children sit on the bench, what reason does Rachel’s sister give for why Grisha might be sent back to Russia?
* Rachel’s sister says that Grisha could be sent back to Russia because of his coat. She says that the coat is raggedy and old. The inspectors might think that, because his coat is old and tattered, Grisha cannot take care of himself.
1. What does Rachel tell Grisha at the bottom of page 23? Why does she whisper this to him?
* Rachel tells Grisha that she will not let the inspectors send him back to Russia. The author does not tell the reader why she whispers, but because the reader knows that Rachel and Grisha are best friends, we can infer that Rachel is worried about Grisha being sent back alone. He does not have any family left in Russia, and Russia is a dangerous place at the time of the story. She could also be whispering so that the inspectors do not hear her.
1. What did Rachel do to Grisha’s coat? Why did she do this?
* Rachel turned Grisha’s coat inside out. The inside of the coat was lined with wool from Grisha’s mother’s coat. Turning the coat inside out hid the “E” marked in chalk.
1. Why did Rachel’s father take Grisha to another inspector?
* The inspector that Grisha first saw did not speak Russian or Yiddish. Rachel’s father could not tell him that Grisha’s eye was just scratched from hitting the basket. When Rachel turned Grisha’s coat inside out, she made it seem as though Grisha had not been through the inspection at all. The second inspector knew that Grisha’s eye was only scratched, and he let Grisha go through with his family.
1. Why was the family crying at the top of page 25?
* At the top of page 25, the family cried tears of joy because the entire family passed the inspection and would be allowed to go into America.
1. What does Bubba mean when she says, “Your mama’s touch will be with you for a very long time”?
* Bubba does not mean that Grisha’s mother can literally touch him. When Bubba tells Grisha that his mother’s touch will be with him for a very long time, she means that he will feel her love for him in his heart. His coat will always remind him of her, and he will feel close to her when he feels the warmth of his coat.
1. On page 26, what is the “bigger story” that the coat tells? Write your answer in your interactive notebook.
* Students already know that the coat is a reflection of the love Grisha’s mother had for her son. In addition, the coat is the story of how the family left Russia and came to America.

**Author’s Craft**

Throughout the story, what words are used to describe Grisha’s coat? Why does the author continue to describe the coat each time the coat is mentioned? How do these descriptions help us to answer our essential question, *Why is it important to choose words carefully?*

**PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT**

1. In *The Memory Coat*, Elvira Woodruff provides her readers with details telling about Grisha’s coat and why the coat is so special to him. Write a journal entry from Grisha’s point of view in which he tells about his coat. Add dialog to your entry telling what his family members had to say about his coat. What made Grisha’s coat special in the beginning of the story? What made it special at the end of the story? Edit your entry for correct spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.
2. After reading and discussing Ellis Island by Elaine Landau, compare the inspection at that Rachel, Grisha, and their family faced to the inspections in the informational text. How are they similar? How are they different?

**FLUENCY**

(167 words, 7.9 readability)

 Grisha always found great comfort in their storytelling game. And once they began, the game could last for hours.

 One day, Rachel pointed out a mouse that had run under a wagon.

 “Such a long tail,” Grisha sighed.

 “Yes, he’s very fine,” Rachel agreed. “And look, he’s come from the Tsar’s palace with a message.” Rachel’s voice grew low and shivery with excitement as she went on to tell the story of this enchanted mouse. “Go ahead, Grisha, draw it just as I say.”

 With his mittened fingers curled around a frosted twig, Grisha scratched a dazzling castle in the snow. In its turret, he drew a mouse with a miniature sword in his paw and a tiny smile on his whiskered face.

 And so the two spent many a frosty afternoon for Grisha’s swirling figures in the snow.

 Meanwhile, from within the temple, their grandfather’s chanted prayers were as comforting as a lullaby. Life was simple and bittersweet, and it seemed these times would never end.

(Woodruff, 9)