

# 3–7 Grade ELA Lesson Plan

## *Creaky Acres* by Calista Brill

### Grade Levels

3–7

### Time

45–60 minutes

### Common Core State Standards (CCSS ELA)

- **RL.3–7.1:** Ask and answer questions using evidence from the text.
  - **RL.3–7.2:** Determine the theme or central message.
  - **RL.3–7.3:** Describe how characters respond to challenges and change over time.
  - **RL.3–7.6:** Explain how a character's point of view influences events.
  - **RL.3–7.7:** Analyze how illustrations contribute to the meaning, mood, and characterization in a graphic novel.
  - **W.3–7.3:** Write narratives using descriptive details and clear event sequences.
  - **W.3–7.1:** Write opinion pieces supported with reasons and evidence.
  - **SL.3–7.1:** Participate effectively in collaborative discussions.
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## Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Analyze Nora's character development as she adjusts to a new home, school, and riding community.
  - Explore themes of belonging, friendship, leadership, resilience, and accepting change.
  - Use evidence from the text and illustrations to support ideas about characters and theme.
  - Examine how graphic novels use visuals to communicate emotions and relationships.
  - Write a personal or imaginative narrative about facing change with courage.
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## Essential Questions

- How do we find where we belong?
- What qualities make a good leader?
- How can friendships help us through change?

- How do illustrations deepen our understanding of a character's emotions?
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## Materials

- *Creaky Acres* by Calista Brill
  - Character Growth Graphic Organizer
  - Sticky Notes
  - Chart Paper
  - Writing Journals or Notebook Paper
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## Vocabulary

- Resilience
  - Leadership
  - Belonging
  - Community
  - Perspective
  - Conflict
  - Resolution
  - Empathy
  - Inference
  - Graphic Novel
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## Before Reading (10 minutes)

### Activate Prior Knowledge

Ask students:

- Have you ever had to start somewhere new?
- What makes you feel like you belong?
- What qualities do you admire in a leader?
- How can hobbies or sports help people make friends?

Students complete a **Think-Pair-Share**, followed by a whole-class discussion.

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## During Reading (25 minutes)

# Character Growth Tracker

Students record Nora's journey.

| Story Event | Nora's Feelings | Evidence (Words & Pictures) | What Nora Learns |
|-------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|------------------|
|-------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|------------------|

Encourage students to notice:

- Facial expressions
- Dialogue
- Body language
- Relationships with Laura, Wilson, and Dizzy
- Interactions with Hay Fever
- Changes in Nora's confidence
- Background details that reveal setting and mood

## Class Discussion

Discuss:

1. What challenges does Nora face after moving?
2. How do her new friends help her adjust?
3. What does Nora learn about leadership?
4. How do the illustrations show Nora's changing emotions?
5. What message does the story share about friendship and belonging?

## Mini-Lesson

### Character Growth Through Challenges

Explain that strong characters often grow because they face obstacles.

Readers can track character growth by asking:

- What problem does the character face?
- How do they respond?
- Who helps them?
- What changes by the end?
- What lesson do they learn?

Discuss how Nora's experiences help shape her confidence and leadership.

## Collaborative Activity (10–15 minutes)

### Teamwork at the Barn

Divide students into small groups.

Present a scenario:

*A riding team must prepare for an important event, but everyone has different ideas about how to solve a problem.*

Groups discuss:

- How should teammates communicate?
- How can everyone contribute?
- What makes a strong leader?
- How can disagreements be resolved respectfully?

Groups share one strategy for successful teamwork.

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## Writing Activity (20–25 minutes)

### Writing Prompt

Starting over can be exciting and challenging. Write about a time when you had to adjust to something new, such as moving, joining a team, making new friends, or trying a new activity. If you prefer, imagine you are Nora arriving at Creaky Acres for the first time. Describe the challenges you face, the people who help you, and what you learn about friendship, leadership, and believing in yourself. Include descriptive details, dialogue, and sensory language.

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## Extension Activities

### Grades 3–4

#### Meet My Horse

Design your own horse or favorite animal companion.

Include:

- Name
- Personality

- Strengths
  - Favorite activity
  - Illustration
  - A paragraph explaining why you make a great team.
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## Grades 5–7

### Character Analysis Essay

Write an essay explaining how Nora changes throughout the story.

Support your ideas with evidence from both the text and illustrations.

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### Graphic Novel Project

Create a six-panel comic showing:

- Arriving somewhere new
  - Facing a challenge
  - Meeting new friends
  - Working together
  - Solving a problem
  - Feeling like you belong
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## Assessment

### Formative

- Class discussions
  - Character Growth Organizer
  - Group collaboration
  - Reading observations
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### Summative Writing Rubric

| Criteria | 4                       | 3     | 2          | 1       |
|----------|-------------------------|-------|------------|---------|
| Ideas    | Detailed and thoughtful | Clear | Developing | Limited |

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| Criteria      | 4              | 3                | 2                 | 1                   |
|---------------|----------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Organization  | Well organized | Mostly organized | Some organization | Difficult to follow |
| Text Evidence | Strong support | Some support     | Minimal support   | No evidence         |
| Conventions   | Few errors     | Some errors      | Frequent errors   | Many errors         |

## Exit Ticket

Students answer one question:

- What helped Nora feel like she belonged?
- Which character showed strong leadership? Explain.
- How did the illustrations help you understand Nora's emotions?
- What advice would you give someone starting at a new school or joining a new team?

## Differentiation

### Support

- Partner reading
- Graphic organizers
- Sentence starters
- Visual vocabulary cards
- Teacher-guided discussion
- Read-aloud support, if available

### Extension

- Compare *Creaky Acres* with another story about moving, making friends, or finding a new community.
- Rewrite an important scene from Laura's, Wilson's, or Dizzy's point of view.
- Research different horseback riding disciplines or horse care practices and create an informational poster connecting your research to the story.

## Cross-Curricular Connections

**Science:** Explore basic horse biology, behavior, and care, including how humans responsibly care for animals and why trust is important between riders and horses.

**Art:** Design a stable, riding arena, or comic panel that uses expressions, movement, and background details to show characters' emotions.

**Health/SEL:** Discuss strategies for making new friends, handling change, practicing empathy, and becoming a positive leader in school and community settings.

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## Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Connection

Students reflect on:

- Resilience
  - Friendship
  - Leadership
  - Empathy
  - Confidence
  - Accepting change
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## Big Idea

*Creaky Acres* shows that while change can be difficult, it can also lead to unexpected friendships, new opportunities, and personal growth. Nora's journey reminds readers that true leadership comes from kindness, perseverance, and the willingness to embrace others' differences while staying true to yourself.