

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## Meet Samantha, an American Girl

by  
Susan S. Adler

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### Book Information

Susan S. Adler, Meet Samantha, an American Girl  
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Pleasant Company, 1986  
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61 Pages  
Book Level: 3.8  
Interest Level: MG

In 1904, Samantha and her servant friend try to learn what happened to the seamstress who suddenly left her job.

**Topics:** Interpersonal Relationships, Friendship; Series, American Girl

### Main Characters

Cornelia Uncle Gard's girlfriend; she has new-fangled ideas

Eddie Samantha's next-door neighbor who teases her a lot

Grandmary Samantha's grandmother and caretaker; she is wealthy and is trying to raise Samantha as a proper young lady

Hawkins Grandmary's butler; he is kind to Samantha

Jessie the woman who does the sewing for Grandmary and her family

Mrs. Hawkins the cook for Grandmary and her family

Nellie the nine-year-old girl who works for Eddie's family; she becomes Samantha's friend

Samantha Parkington the nine-year-old main character of the story; an orphan cared for by her grandmother

Uncle Gard Samantha's uncle; he has an automobile and a girlfriend with modern ideas

### Vocabulary

**fret** to worry

**parlor** a fancy room used for sitting and special occasions

**porter** a person who carries luggage for passengers on a train

**sampler** a piece of cloth embroidered with sayings and designs made with a variety of stitches

**taffeta** a stiff shiny material used to make fancy dresses

**treadle** the foot-bar that is pushed to run a sewing machine

### Synopsis

Nine-year-old Samantha Parkington is an orphan who lives with her prim and proper grandmother, Grandmary. Grandmary is raising Samantha to become a proper young lady. All of the housework is done by servants. Samantha spends an hour with Grandmary every day to learn how to stitch properly. Grandmary does not believe children should ask questions of adults; they should be seen and not heard.

When Samantha falls from a tree and tears her stocking, Jessie, the family seamstress, repairs it without telling Grandmary, who would frown upon Samantha's carelessness. Samantha knows that Jessie will help her, and she loves to listen to Jessie tell marvelous stories.

One day, Samantha meets Nellie, a nine-year-old girl who has come to live and work for the next-door neighbors. When the two girls meet, Samantha does not realize their difference in class and is surprised when Nellie calls her "miss." Nellie is small, thin, and pale. She had been working in a factory to earn money to help her family, but when she began to cough, her family thought it would be better to send her away to do housework. The girls quickly become friends and make a special meeting place in the lilac bushes.

One day Jessie abruptly leaves Grandmary's employment. Samantha is horrified that she is leaving without giving a reason. She wants to know why Jessie is leaving, but none of the adults will give her an explanation. When Samantha tells Nellie, the two girls plot to sneak to Jessie's house at night. They discover that Jessie is not returning to work because she has a new baby. Two days later, Samantha is shocked to learn that Nellie, too, is

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leaving to return to her family. Samantha is angry with grownups for taking away her friends and never telling her why. She blurts out that Grandmary was wrong not to tell Samantha that Jessie left because she has a baby. Grandmary realizes that Samantha is right and agrees to let Jessie come back to work with her baby. Grandmary also discovers that Samantha gave her beautiful doll to Nellie. At first Grandmary is angry, but she later realizes the sacrifice that Samantha has made and agrees to help Nellie's family. She praises Samantha by telling her that she is a fine young lady.

### Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

#### Initial Understanding

What leads Samantha to say that Grandmary was wrong in not telling Samantha about Jessie's baby? Why does Grandmary admit that Samantha is right?

*Samantha is feeling very angry with adults who, in her opinion, are responsible for taking away her two friends. She is angry that all the adults know why Jessie is leaving, but no one will tell her. When Samantha tells Grandmary that she and Nellie had gone to Jessie's house during the night, Grandmary evidently realizes how important it is to Samantha to know the truth.*

#### Literary Analysis

Explain why it is important to Grandmary for Samantha to behave like a proper young lady. What are some things that proper young ladies are expected to do and not to do?

*Grandmary's way of life is to follow the protocol of her class. Good behavior and appearance are important to her because that is the way she has lived her own life. As Samantha's guardian, she feels responsible to raise Samantha to look and act like someone of similar social status. Samantha is expected to be polite, use proper manners, wear fine clothing, and learn fancy stitches. Samantha is expected to not be loud or boisterous, not get herself dirty or messy, not ask adults questions, and especially not treat her elders disrespectfully.*

#### Inferential Comprehension

How might Samantha's life have been different if her parents had not died? What elements of her lifestyle might have remained the same?

*Since Samantha's grandmother is from a well-to-do family, it is likely that her parents were raised in the same fashion. Her parents most likely were quite similar to Uncle Gard and Cornelia. They maintain respect toward Grandmary, yet are carefree and more open-minded. Samantha's parents may not have been as strict as Grandmary, but they would most likely have wanted Samantha to be a proper young lady. She would probably still live in a large house, if not the same house, and still have servants do much of the work. It is very likely that Grandmary would still be very influential and play a big part in Samantha's life. Her life may have been different in that her parents may have tolerated some of her behavior and been more sympathetic in answering some of her questions.*

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### Constructing Meaning

What does Eddie mean when he tells Samantha that Nellie is leaving and that "Mother says next time we'll get an immigrant woman who can last longer"?

*Nellie was weak and sickly when she arrived to work at Eddie's house. She is being sent back to her family because she is not strong enough to do the work they want done. By hiring a woman who has just arrived in this country, Eddie's mother is hoping to have an older, stronger worker who can get the heavy work done more quickly.*

### Teachable Skills

**Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors** The story emphasizes exhibiting proper behavior and having work done by servants rather than by family members. Divide the class into groups of three or four and have them develop a skit with characters behaving primly and properly like the Parkington family. For example, Cornelia and Grandmary could be having tea together. The students would act out how they would sit straight at the table and eat with proper manners. If servants are selected as characters, the scene should focus on proper behavior and polite manners rather than commands and haughtiness.

**Responding to Literature** Divide the class into four groups. Two groups are to develop a list of behaviors and actions that they believe are acceptable but that adults do not allow. Conversely, they may also identify things they do not like doing that the adults insist they do. The other two groups are to develop a list of things Samantha did that adults did not like, and things that the adults wanted her to do, but she did not like to do. Class discussion should compare the two types of lists and focus on similarities in all lists.

**Comparing and Contrasting** All of the characters in the story have very different personalities and points of view. Have the class develop a list of significant characters. Then divide the class into the same number of groups as characters.

Assign one of the characters to each group. Using a large sheet of paper and a lamp, each group is to draw a silhouette and write the name of the character above or below the silhouette. The group is then to think of word descriptions of the character. The descriptions may be taken directly from the book, or they can be thought up by the group. Each description should then be written with marker inside the silhouette. The writing should be large enough to be seen from a distance and small enough so that all of the words can fit. Have each group present its character and description to the class. Group discussion should follow focusing on what similarities and differences the characters have to one another. The completed silhouettes may be displayed in the classroom.

**Identifying Persuasive Language** Because the story takes place many years ago, some students may not be as interested as they would be in a story with a more current setting. Divide the class into groups of three or four. Have each group develop either a book cover or a magazine advertisement for the book. The announcement should be different from the cover that is on the book, and it should be attractive enough to catch a reader's attention and interest them in reading a story that happened many years ago. Each group should then present the cover or advertisement to the class with its reasons for developing it the way it did. Class discussion should follow focusing on how historical aspects can add interest to stories.