

A Swiftly Tilting Planet



By

Madeleine L'Engle

A Novel Study
by Nat and Joel Reed

A Swiftly Tilting Planet

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Table of Contents

| | |
|------------------------------|----|
| Suggestions and Expectations | 3 |
| List of Skills | 4 |
| Synopsis / Author Biography | 5 |
| Student Checklist | 6 |
| Reproducible Student Booklet | 7 |
| Answer Key | 85 |

About the author: Nat Reed was a member of the teaching profession for more than 35 years. He was a full-time instructor at Trent University in the Teacher Education Program for nine years. For more information on his work and literature, visit novelstudies.org.

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Suggestions and Expectations

Each chapter of the novel study focuses on one chapter of *A Swiftly Tilting Planet* and is comprised of four distinct sections:

1. Before You Read
2. Vocabulary Building
3. Comprehension Questions
4. Language and Extension Activities

A **portfolio cover** (page 7) as well as a **Checklist** (page 6) are included so that students may track of their completed work.

Every activity need not be completed by all students.

Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 5*, makes reference to:

- a) determining the meaning of words and phrases... including figurative language;
- b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
- c) compare and contrast two characters;
- d) determine how characters ... respond to challenges;
- e) drawing inferences from the text;
- f) determining a theme of a story ... and many others.

Themes which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include science fiction, time travel, the American Civil War, North and South American pioneers, nuclear war, courage and persistence, personal growth, reason and faith.

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List of Skills

Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homophones
3. Identifying/creating *alliteration*
4. Identification of root words
5. Identifying syllables
6. Identify *anagrams*
7. Listing compound words
8. Identifying parts of speech
9. Identify *personification*.
10. Identify *similes*.

Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

Plot Activities

1. Complete a *time line* of events
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Complete Five W's Chart
4. Complete a Plot Outline for a Sequel
5. Identify the climax of the novel.

Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Identify the protagonist/antagonist
3. Relating personal experiences
4. Compare characters

Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Participate in a talk show
4. Conduct an interview
5. Create a poem
6. Write a description of personal feelings
7. Write a book review
8. Complete an Observation Chart
9. Complete a KWS Chart
10. Create a friendly letter.

Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a collage
3. Design a cover for the novel
4. Create a comic strip

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Synopsis

In *A Swiftly Tilting Planet* by Madeleine L'Engle, a companion to the Newbery Award winner *A Wrinkle in Time* and *A Wind in the Door*, fifteen-year-old Charles Wallace and the unicorn Gaudior undertake a perilous journey through time in a desperate attempt to stop the destruction of the world by the mad dictator Madog Branzillo.

They are not alone in their quest. Charles Wallace's sister, Meg--grown and expecting her first child, but still able to enter her brother's thoughts and emotions by "kything"--goes with him in spirit.

Charles Wallace must face the ultimate test of his faith and his will as he is sent within four people from another time, there to search for a way to avert the tragedy threatening them all. [Summary Courtesy of the Publisher]

Author Biography Madeleine L'Engle

Madeleine L'Engle was born November 29th, 1918 in New York City. Even as a young girl she preferred writing stories and poems to doing her school work. At the age of 12 she and her family moved to the French Alps where she attended an English boarding school. A few years later she attended Smith College, continuing her passion for writing by studying English. After graduation she moved to Greenwich Village to work in the theater. During this time she saw her first two novels published. Here she also met her future husband, Hugh Franklin. Madeleine and Hugh had three children. Madeleine wrote more than 60 books during her illustrious writing career, the most famous being the award-winning, *A Wrinkle in Time*. Sadly, she passed away in 2007.



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Student Checklist

Student Name

A Swiftly Tilting Planet



By Madeleine L'Engle

Name: _____

The Novel's Title

The title of this novel is taken from the 64-line poem, *Morning Song of Senlin* by Conrad Aiken. Here is a sampling of the poem. You can read the poem in its entirety online at <https://allpoetry.com/Morning-Song-Of-Senlin>

Morning Song of Senlin By Conrad Aiken

It is morning, Senlin says, and in the morning
When the light drips through the shutters like the dew,
 I arise, I face the sunrise,
 And do the things my fathers learned to do.
 Stars in the purple dusk above the rooftops
 Pale in a saffron mist and seem to die,
 And I myself on a **swiftly tilting planet**
 Stand before a glass and tie my tie.

 Vine leaves tap my window,
 Dew-drops sing to the garden stones,
 The robin chips in the chinaberry tree
 Repeating three clear tones.
 It is morning. I stand by the mirror
 And tie my tie once more.

 While waves far off in a pale rose twilight
 Crash on a white sand shore.
 I stand by a mirror and comb my hair:
 How small and white my face!—
 The green earth tilts through a sphere of air
 And bathes in a flame of space.
 There are houses hanging above the stars
 And stars hung under a sea...
 And a sun far off in a shell of silence
 Dapples my walls for me...

It is morning, Senlin says, and in the morning
Should I not pause in the light to remember God?
 Upright and firm I stand on a star unstable,
 He is immense and lonely as a cloud.
 I will dedicate this moment before my mirror
 To him alone, and for him I will comb my hair.
Accept these humble offerings, cloud of silence!
 I will think of you as I descend the stair.

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Chapter 1 – In This Fateful Hour



Before you read this section:

A protagonist of *A Swiftly Tilting Planet* is Meg O'Keefe (whom you might remember as Meg Murry in the first two books of this series). A few years have passed since the events described in *A Wind in the Door*. Meg is now married and expecting her first child. Think of one advantage and one disadvantage to have been able to get to know Meg from reading one (or both) of the previous two novels in this series.

| | |
|---|--|
|  | |
| | |
|  | |
| | |



Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

| | | | | |
|--------------|------------|-------------|-----------|----------|
| habitual | constitute | wistful | intuitive | morose |
| supplication | ferocious | retribution | pessimist | reprieve |

1. After losing to the Black Hawks so badly, the team was looking for _____.
2. Johnny has the _____ tenancy of being late for everything.
3. The governor gave the prisoner a last-minute _____.
4. "Stay clear of the Jenkin's yard," she ordered. "They have a _____ dog."
5. Katherine always looks _____ just before a math test.
6. No one seems to know what will _____ a good Sunday dinner.
7. "Don't be such a _____," Mary said. "I'm sure you did well on the assignment."
8. She stretched out her hands to her husband in _____.
9. Charles Wallace had an _____ sense of Meg's needs.
10. From the _____ look on her face, it seems she longs for home.

Questions



1. What is the **setting** of this first chapter?

| |
|--|
| |
| |

2. How would you describe _____'s personality from Chapter One? Give two possible characteristics supported by proof from the story.

| | Characteristic | Proof |
|---|----------------|-------|
| 1 | | |
| 2 | | |

3. Why wasn't Calvin with the family on Thanksgiving?

| |
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| |
| |

4. How would you describe the atmosphere of the Murry household as the novel begins?

| |
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| |

5. How had Meg's physical appearance changed since she was a teenager?

| |
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| |
| |

6. What made the bond that Meg shared with her younger brother, Charles Wallace, special?

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| |
| |
| |

7. Why hadn't the family replaced Fortinbras with another dog?

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| |

8. Summarize what the president told Mr. Murry.

| |
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| |
| |
| |

9. Why did the president call Mr. Murry in particular?

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| |

10. Mrs. O'Keefe seems like a very unusual character. What was your impression of her? How do you think what she said to the others will play into the novel's plot?

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| |

11. What is a *rune poem*?

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| |

12. How did Mrs. O'Keefe draw Charles Wallace into her message to the others. What did she say in particular that might have made the others think that she knew more about Charles Wallace than they might have thought?

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Language Activities



A. Personification is giving human qualities to something that is not human. Here is an example from this chapter: *The lightning with its rapid wrath*. Why is this an example of personification?

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| |

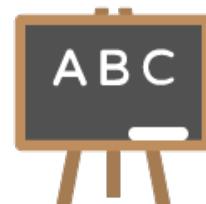
Give another example of personification from this section.

| |
|--|
| |
| |

As you continue to read through the novel be on the lookout for other examples of this literary device. If you should find one, come back to this question and enter it below.

| |
|--|
| |
| |

B. Alliteration Many authors enjoy using **alliteration** – a literary device where the author repeats the same sound at the beginning of several words. The following from this chapter serves as an example of this literary device: ... stirring the giblet gravy.

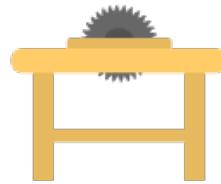


Using your imagination, create your own examples of **alliteration** from the following topics. Each example must contain a minimum of three words.

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| The howl of a lonely wolf. | |
| The Northern Lights. | |
| Your choice. | |

C. Anagrams

An **anagram** is a word that is formed by changing the order of the letters of another word. For example, the letters in the word **WAS** can also form the word **SAW**. Follow these directions to form the anagrams:



a) read the clue in the right-hand column.

b) Using the word in the left-hand column move the letters around in any order, but you must use all the letters. All of the words in the left-hand column can be found in this section of **A Swiftly Tilting Planet**.

| Word | Anagram | Clue |
|---------|---------|-----------------------------|
| table | | The sound made by a sheep. |
| smiles | | Fruits. |
| shingle | | A language. |
| respond | | Ruminates. |
| earned | | Drew closer. |
| plates | | A fastener. |
| silence | | A permit from an authority. |

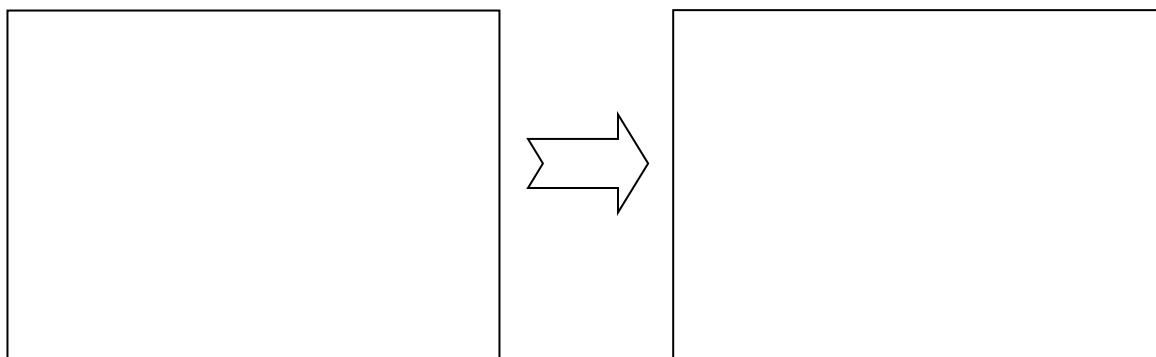
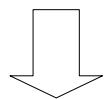
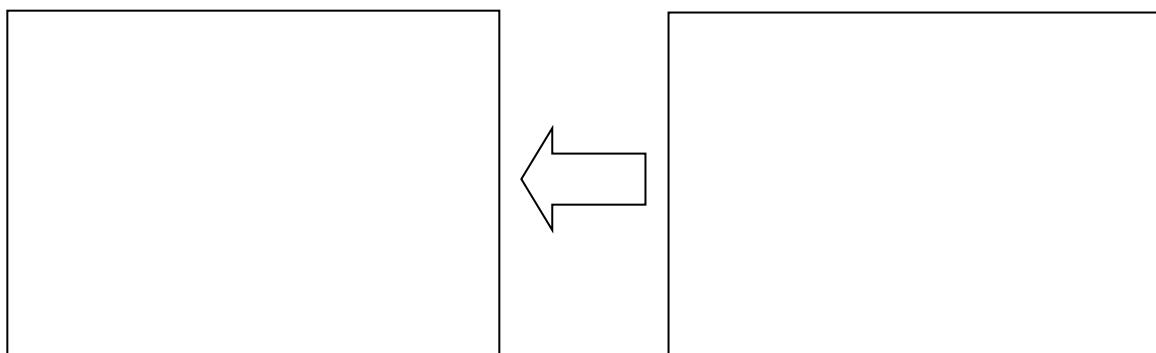
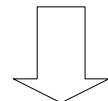
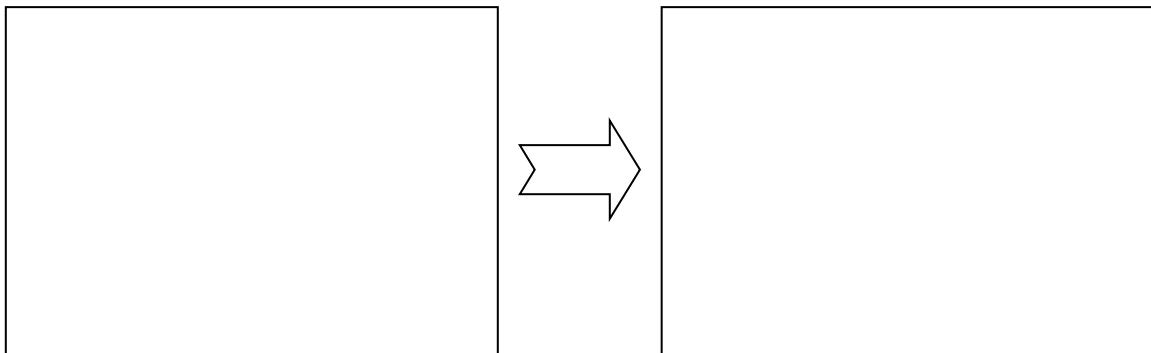
D. Three-Syllable Words

Find twelve three-syllable words from this section and list them below.

| | | | |
|---|--|----|--|
| 1 | | 7 | |
| 2 | | 8 | |
| 3 | | 9 | |
| 4 | | 10 | |
| 5 | | 11 | |
| 6 | | 12 | |

E. Sequence Chart

Choose what you consider to be the six most important events in this chapter. In each of the six boxes below list the six events that you have chosen, describing what happened and telling why you consider this to be an essential part of the story.



Extension Activity



A Picture's Worth a Thousand Words

Use the three boxes to describe and illustrate the beginning, middle and end of this section.



| | |
|---------------------|-------------|
| Beginning Picture: | Beginning: |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| Middle Picture: | Middle: |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| Concluding Picture: | Concluding: |
| | |
| | |
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