

# Dear Cousin

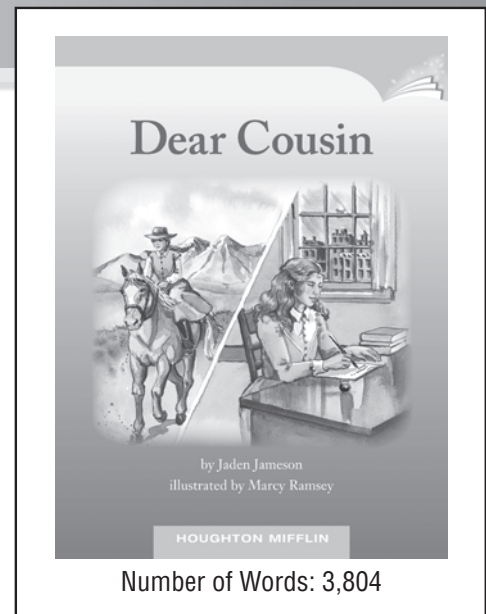
by Jaden Jameson

Fountas-Pinnell Level W

Historical Fiction

## Selection Summary

Cousins Sarah and Anna correspond about their respective lives in 19th-century Chicago and New Mexico. The young girls' families face different challenges: Anna's, the hardships of homesteading; Sarah's, rebuilding after the Chicago Fire. Both girls look to their futures, bright with promise in a rapidly changing United States.



## Characteristics of the Text

<b>Genre</b>	• Historical fiction
<b>Text Structure</b>	• First-person narrative told in letters from girl cousins • Letter components—date, salutation, closing, signature
<b>Content</b>	• 1870s Chicago urban life and New Mexico frontier life • The Great Chicago Fire of 1871; Sojourner Truth
<b>Themes and Ideas</b>	• Families can work together to achieve common goals. • No one group or culture has the right to interfere with or disadvantage another. • All people experience hardships in one form or another.
<b>Language and Literary Features</b>	• Realistic narrative with 19th-century language that resembles conversation between the writers
<b>Sentence Complexity</b>	• A mixture of simple, compound, and complex sentences of all types • Exclamations, dashes, italics
<b>Vocabulary</b>	• Most Spanish terms and expressions ( <i>con cariño</i> , <i>señor</i> ) are explained or can be inferred from text. • Historic/cultural references may be unfamiliar: <i>gaslights</i> , <i>trolleys</i> , <i>reservation</i> , <i>land claim</i> • Many terms and expressions that can be defined in context: <i>newsies</i> , <i>elocution</i> , <i>cholera</i>
<b>Words</b>	• Present participles and -ing words derived from verbs: <i>quaking</i> , <i>rustling</i> , <i>practicing</i>
<b>Illustrations</b>	• Drawings contrast the mid-19th-century urban and rural environments
<b>Book and Print Features</b>	• Seventeen pages of text, with illustrations on most two-page spreads
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Printed in the U.S.A.

978-0-547-30688-9 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 0940 15 14 13 12 11 10 09

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# Dear Cousin

by Jaden Jameson

## Build Background

Help students use their knowledge of American history to visualize the story. Build interest by asking a question such as: *What do you know about the pioneer families that settled the American West? What influenced them to move west?* Read the title, author, and illustrator, and talk about the contrast in the color illustrations. Tell students that this story is historical fiction, told through a series of letters between two cousins, Anna and Sarah; one girl’s family moves west and the other’s family remains in Chicago.

## Introduce the Text

Guide students through the text, noting important ideas and helping with unfamiliar language and vocabulary so they can read the text successfully. Here are some suggestions:

**Pages 2–3:** Explain that Anna is writing from the end of the Santa Fe Trail. She and her family are going to a **homestead**. **Ask:** *What do you think a homestead on the New Mexico frontier would look like?* Anna tells Sarah that there was a problem with the **deed**, but a Mr. Nuñez (“NEW-knee-ez”) says he will fix everything. **Ask:** *What kinds of problems can relate to a deed?*

**Pages 4–5:** Remind students that this historical fiction includes many 19th-century details. Call attention to *penmanship* and *proper position* on page 4. Explain that *elocution lessons* (p. 5) were recitations of memorized material, usually poetry.

**Page 14:** Point out the picture on page 14. **Suggested language:** *Anna seems really interested in the Navajo blanket the woman is holding. Notice also the necklace the señora is wearing. Both are handmade. What do you think the woman might be able to teach Anna?*

*Now turn back to the beginning of the story to read about the different kinds of hardships the two cousins will face.*

### Expand Your Vocabulary

**deed** – a document relating to property, p. 3

**gaslights** – gas street lamps, p. 4

**homestead** – a house with adjoining buildings and land, p. 2

**land claim** – a title or right to land, p. 2


**lantern** – a portable lamp, p. 12

**livestock** – domestic animals, such as cattle or horses, p. 7

**sorghum** – a plant from which syrup is made, p. 2

# Read

Have students read silently while you listen to individual students read aloud. Support their problem solving and fluency as needed.

Remind students to use the Analyze/Evaluate Strategy  **TARGET STRATEGY** as they read and to look for important details about the setting, characters, and plot. Have them share details that let them see Anna’s family’s problem more clearly.

## Discuss and Revisit the Text

### Personal Response

Invite students to share their personal responses to the story.

**Suggested language:** *Do you have a friend or close relative who lives far away?*

*In what way is your situation similar to Sarah and Anna’s situation?*

### Ways of Thinking

As you discuss the text, help students understand these points:

Thinking Within the Text	Thinking Beyond the Text	Thinking About the Text
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Anna and her family move to New Mexico to a homestead.</li><li>• Anna’s cousin, Sarah, and her family remain in Chicago.</li><li>• Anna’s mother gets sick, and her family has a problem with their land claim.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Expressing interest and concern in others helps people stay connected.</li><li>• People from different backgrounds can learn from each other.</li><li>• People should respect the rights and feelings of others.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Letters between the cousins show how two places in 19th-century America could be completely different.</li><li>• Vivid details of the Chicago Fire make it seem very real.</li><li>• Friendship with Apache Indians shows Indian crafts and customs.</li></ul>

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### Choices for Further Support

- **Fluency** Invite students to choose a passage from the text to demonstrate phrased fluent reading. First, pronounce all Spanish words or phrases in the story, such as “*Buenas tardes, Señora*” and “*Tan hermosa.*” Explain how specific consonant and vowel sounds are different in Spanish than they are in English. Then, have students choose a passage that includes at least one word or phrase in Spanish.
- **Comprehension** Based on your observations of the students’ reading and discussion, revisit parts of the text to clarify or extend comprehension. Remind students to go back to the text to support their ideas.
- **Phonics/Word Work** Provide practice as needed with words and word parts, using examples from the text. Remind students that many English words have Latin roots. For example, the words *lectured* on page 2 and *elocution* on page 5 come from the Latin words *lectus* (reading) and *eloqui* (speaking).

# Writing about Reading

## Critical Thinking

Have students complete the Critical Thinking questions on BLM 24.9.

## Responding

Have students complete the activities at the back of the book, using their Reader's Notebook. Use the instruction below as needed to reinforce or extend understanding of the comprehension skill.

## Target Comprehension Skill

**Cause and Effect** ✓ **TARGET SKILL** Remind students that events in a story's plot are often connected by cause and effect. Most stories show cause and effect through what happens to characters as a result of events. Model how to add details to the Graphic Organizer, using a "Think Aloud" like the one below:

### Think Aloud

*In her letter, Sarah tells Anna that the great fire in Chicago was a catastrophe. The fire caused destruction and left thousands homeless. The destruction and homelessness were effects of the fire.*

## Practice the Skill

Encourage students to share an example of another story that clearly shows how one action or decision caused something else to happen.

## Writing Prompt: Thinking Beyond the Text

Have students write a response to the writing prompt on page 6. Remind them that when they think beyond the text, they use their personal knowledge to reach new understandings.

## Assessment Prompts

- What is the meaning of **livestock** on page 7?
- Sarah writes that she wants to stay in Chicago to show that

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- Why does the author write this story in the form of letters exchanged between two girls?

# English Language Development

**Reading Support** Make sure the text matches the students' reading level. Language and content should be accessible with regular teaching support.

**Idioms** Explain any idioms from modern and nineteenth-century English, such as *out of sorts*, *live off the land*, and *smoothed the way* (page 2). Explain that some idioms create mental pictures: *fill Mama's shoes*.

## Oral Language Development

Check student comprehension, using a dialogue that best matches your students' English proficiency level. **Speaker 1** is the teacher, **Speaker 2** is the student.

Beginning/Early Intermediate	Intermediate	Early Advanced/ Advanced
<p><b>Speaker 1:</b> Who tell the story with their letters?</p> <p><b>Speaker 2:</b> Anna and Sarah</p> <p><b>Speaker 1:</b> How are Anna and Sarah related?</p> <p><b>Speaker 2:</b> They are cousins.</p> <p><b>Speaker 1:</b> Where do the cousins live?</p> <p><b>Speaker 2:</b> New Mexico and Chicago</p>	<p><b>Speaker 1:</b> Why does Anna's family move to New Mexico?</p> <p><b>Speaker 2:</b> Anna's family moves to homestead in New Mexico.</p> <p><b>Speaker 1:</b> What must Anna do when her mother gets sick?</p> <p><b>Speaker 2:</b> Anna must take care of the baby and the house.</p> <p><b>Speaker 1:</b> What happens after Sarah's home burns in the fire?</p> <p><b>Speaker 2:</b> Sarah's family lives with her aunt and uncle.</p>	<p><b>Speaker 1:</b> How do the cousins' feelings about living apart change in the story?</p> <p><b>Speaker 2:</b> At first, Anna misses Chicago and Sarah wishes she were in New Mexico. At the end, Anna is enjoying Pedro's friendship and Sarah is looking forward to helping rebuild Chicago after the fire.</p>

### Responding

**TARGET SKILL Cause and Effect** What are the effects of the huge fire in Chicago that Sarah describes in her November 1 letter? Copy and complete the chart below.

<p><b>Cause</b> A huge fire burns in Chicago in early October of 1871.</p>	<p><b>Cause</b> ?</p>	<p><b>Cause</b> ?</p>
<p><b>Effect</b> ?</p>		

**Write About It**

**Text To World** Think of an event you have read or heard about recently that has had an effect on many people. Write a few paragraphs in which you describe the event and explain its multiple effects.

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Lesson 24  
BLACKLINE MASTER 24-3

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Critical Thinking

Read and answer the questions. Possible responses shown.

- Think within the text** Who is Sojourner Truth? a former slave who spoke about equal rights
- Think within the text** What caused Sarah and her family to move in with her aunt? Their home was burnt down during the Great Chicago Fire.
- Think beyond the text** What do you predict may happen to Sarah in the future? She may fight for women's rights.
- Think about the text** Why do think the author chose to tell the story of these cousins through letters? You can learn about how America was changing in two different places in the country through the point of view of people who are experiencing the changes.

**Making Connections** Do you think Anna or Sarah has the more interesting life? Why?

Write your answer in your Reader's Notebook.

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Critical Thinking

**Dear Cousin**  
**Critical Thinking**

Read and answer the questions.

1. **Think within the text** Who is Sojourner Truth?

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2. **Think within the text** What caused Sarah and her family to move in with her aunt?

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3. **Think beyond the text** What do you predict may happen to Sarah in the future?

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4. **Think about the text** Why do think the author chose to tell the story of these cousins through letters?

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**Making Connections** Do you think Anna or Sarah has the more interesting life? Why?

**Write your answer in your Reader's Notebook.**

# Dear Cousin • LEVEL W

**Dear Cousin**  
Running Record Form

page	Selection Text	Errors	Self-Corrections
8	<p>Since I am 12 now, Father says I'm old enough to step in and fill Mama's shoes. So in the mornings, I get up before dawn. I bake bread, make coffee, and care for the baby. I tend to Mama, too. Rudy has been milking Jezebel—our milk cow—for me. After the men leave to work on the ranch, I sweep, wash dishes, prepare the noontime meal, take care of the chickens, and work the tiny garden we are trying to grow. We have very little water, and I must carry bucketloads from the pump to the yard.</p>		
	Comments:	<b>Accuracy Rate</b> (# words read correctly/99 × 100) _____ %	<b>Total Self-Corrections</b> _____

Behavior	Code	Error
Read word correctly	✓ cat	0
Repeated word, sentence, or phrase	Ⓜ cat	0
Omission	̄ cat	1

Behavior	Code	Error
Substitution	cut cat	1
Self-corrects	cut <sup>sc</sup> cat	0
Insertion	the ^ cat	1
Word told	Ⓢ cat	1

ISBN-13: 978-0-547-30688-9  
 ISBN-10: 0-547-30688-1  
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