



“A Ring of Endless Light”
A Disney Channel Original Movie for Cable in the Classroom
Ages 10-13

Program Summary:

A Ring of Endless Light exemplifies the combination of reality and fantasy that has made Madeleine L'Engle one of the most widely read children's authors. The story revolves around the three Austin children—16-year-old Vicky, genius younger sister Suzy, and precocious little brother Rob. All three are spending the summer at 81-year-old Grandfather Eaton's home on a remote island.

Beautiful and smart Vicky is the story's protagonist. While Grandfather Eaton dotes on all three children, it is clear that he and Vicky share a special relationship. Sadly, Grandfather Eaton is suffering from leukemia, and he tries in vain to conceal his constant pain and fatigue from the grandchildren.

The main story begins with the appearance of marine biologist Adam Eddington, who has come to return some books he's borrowed from Grandfather Eaton's library. Adam is about to enter Harvard on early admission. He and Vicky set off to visit the marine biology center where Adam is studying the behavior of dolphins.

Enter the confused teenage antagonist, Zach Gray. He's the handsome, reckless son of one of the island's wealthiest residents. Speeding along in his sports car, Zach nearly collides with Adam and Vicky on their bikes. We soon learn that he, too, is interested in Vicky. Also, it turns out that Zach's father owns a fishing fleet that illegally uses huge drift nets that trap and kill dolphins.

The fantasy element of the story intensifies when Vicky senses she can understand what Adam's dolphins are thinking and feeling. One of the dolphins has a long scar on his body from an encounter with a drift net. The head of the research center says there's nothing anyone can do about the drift net problem-- short of catching fishermen in the illegal act.

While at the beach one afternoon, brother Rob starts to drown in the heavy surf. Without realizing exactly what is happening, Vicky "hears" the warning cries of a nearby dolphin. Ultimately the dolphin saves the boy's life by pushing him to shore and safety. Grandfather Eaton isn't at all surprised when Vicky confides that she thinks she can communicate with the remarkable marine mammals.

Finally Adam and Vicky enlist Zach's help in exposing his father's illegal drift net activities. The story builds to a climax as the three young people chase one of the large fishing boats, catch the fisherman as they cast their nets, report them to the harbor patrol, and rescue a struggling mother and baby dolphin.

**Objectives:**

The student will:

- Describe and analyze differences between “scientific” and “non-scientific” approaches to life;
- Describe ways in which characters in a story develop and change;
- Identify important turning points in a story;
- Identify and discuss inner conflict in fictional characters; and
- Identify elements of persuasive arguments in favor of a specific position or idea.

Previewing Questions:

What do you know about the special qualities of dolphins?

- Why do you think dolphins are categorized as mammals instead of fish?
- In what kinds of ways do you think human beings can communicate with animals?
- Why do you think adolescence can be a time of difficult choices?
- What books by Madeleine L’Engle have you read?

Post-Viewing Questions

- What were some of the conflicts you observed in the story?
- What do you think are some of Vicky’s inner conflicts?
- How does Vicky resolve her inner conflicts?
- Who was your favorite character in the story—and why?
- How much of the story do you think was fantasy? How much of it could have been fact?
- Several of the characters changed during the story. Who do you think changed most?
Be specific in describing the changes you observed.

Vocabulary:

Character development, plot, conflict, scientific method, fantasy

Language Arts:**Activity #1: Vocabulary**

Find definitions for the words in the vocabulary list and discuss how these words are relevant to the movie. Aspects of the various words to emphasize include:

- Ways in which the various characters in the story develop and change.
- Adam’s dependence on scientific observations and his suspicion of Vicky’s “non-scientific” claim that she can communicate with the dolphins (he thinks it’s a fantasy).
- Points in the story where the plot takes unexpected and surprising turns.
- Conflicts among the main characters—both inner conflicts and actual conflicts of ideas, personal preferences, and likes or dislikes.



Activity #2: Character Development and Change

Divide students into groups of three or four. Each group's task is to describe how one of the following characters in the video changes during the course of the story, referring to specific behaviors or statements they observed.

- Adam
- Vicky
- Zach

Advanced activity: Have students write a letter from one of these characters to another character describing his/her thoughts and feelings after the summer's adventures are over. The letters should describe ways in which the writer has learned something important about himself/herself and how he/she has changed as a result. Have the students share their letters with the class for comment and feedback.

Activity #3: The Skill of Persuasion

In the story Vicky has to deal with Adam's scientific skepticism when she says she can communicate with dolphins. This activity will help to improve students' speaking skills and abilities to fashion strong, persuasive arguments to defend a position or point of view.

Explain that people often make decisions based on what they see and hear others say. People who are good communicators develop and use a variety of skills to convince others about their positions. During this activity students will take turns arguing for or against the idea that people can communicate with animals.

Begin by having the students recall and list experiences in which others have convinced them about an idea or point of view. Have them discuss what it was about the other person's ability to persuade them that was most effective. Emphasize the following qualities of a persuasive public speaker:

- Clarity of speech and strength of voice;
- Effective choice of words to convey understanding and conviction;
- Command of the topic;
- Timing, pauses, and rhythm of language (not too fast, not too slow, use of pauses for effect);
- Effective use of "body language."

Encourage students to take turns arguing for or against the following topic:

"Humans can communicate with animals in a variety of ways that lead to a real understanding almost like spoken language."



Make and distribute copies of the rating scale below. Each member of the student “audience” assesses the speaker’s skills in order to reach agreement about which speakers were most persuasive and why. Emphasize that whether or not you agree with the speaker’s point of view is less important than how persuasive the speaker was. The main point is to assess the speaker’s persuasion skills. Lead a brief discussion of each speaker’s presentation after he/she has completed it.

Instructions:

- Write the name of each speaker in the left-hand column.
- Listen carefully to the speaker’s presentation. Pay attention to the various qualities of speech in the rating scale.
- For each quality, give the speaker a score from 1 to 5—1 being “poor” and 5 being “excellent.”

Speaker's name	Clarity of expression	Strength of arguments	Body language	Organization of ideas	Overall score

Activity #4: Madeleine L’Engle Read-a-Thon

Have each student choose one of the following books by Madeleine L’Engle to read individually. Then have the students group themselves in class according to which book they read. If too many students have read the same book, divide these large groups into smaller groups. Each small group’s task is to discuss and then share with the class:

- Favorite characters in the book I read and why I liked them;
- My favorite things about Madeleine L’Engle’s books;
- Surprises and plot twists in the story I didn’t expect;
- Other important topics I want to share with the class about this book.



Books to choose from (taken from a listing of perennial favorites of children and young adults):

The Time Quartet: *A Wrinkle in Time*, *A Wind in the Door*, *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, *Many Waters*

The Austin family books (in addition to *A Ring of Endless Light*): *Meet the Austins*, *The Moon by Night*, *The Young Unicorns*, *Troubling a Star*

Polly O’Keefe books: *The Arm of the Starfish*, *Dragons in the Waters*, *A House Like a Lotus*, *An Acceptable Time*

Activity #5: I Saw the Book and Read the Movie

Have students, working individually or in pairs, choose a popular book to read that has been made into a movie. The other part of their homework is to see the movie, but only after reading the book. Lead a class discussion on the following topics:

- Which I liked better—the book or the movie;
- Ways in which the book and the movie were different from each other;
- Things I imagined while reading the book that looked different in the movie;
- Surprises in the movie I didn’t expect;
- Things about the book that I would have liked to see in the movie and missed.

Examples of books/movies: *Mary Poppins*, *The Secret Garden*, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Never-Ending Story*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Willa Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, *White Fang*.

Science:

Activity 1: A World of Mammals

Dolphins belong to the mammal family, but they are unlike most other mammals in a variety of ways. Have the students, working in small groups or pairs, choose any mammal to learn about for a class report and wall display. The students’ task is to:

- Choose a mammal;
- Identify qualities that all mammals have in common;
- Compare and contrast the mammal they have chosen with dolphins and other mammals;
- Contribute to a collage showing the various types of mammals and including their habitat, the food they eat, and important aspects of their life cycle.

Have the students present their findings about their chosen mammal to the class, discussing at least the bullet points above and sharing illustrations and photographs they have found that help to describe their mammal. These can then become part of a classroom display on mammals. Key points to include in the display:



- All mammals are warm-blooded, nourish their young with milk, are covered with varying amounts of hair, and possess a muscular diaphragm.
- Some qualities all mammals have in common can be seen by observing the mammal; others are internal (for example, the blood circulatory system).
- Mammals have the most highly developed nervous systems of all animals.
- All mammals reproduce sexually and almost all produce live offspring.
- Most mammals live on land, but some, like the dolphin, are marine-bound.
- All mammals have two eyes and ears or the equivalent.

Categories of mammals to include:

- Primates
- Canines
- Equines
- Felines
- Marsupials
- Rodents and burrowing mammals
- Marine mammals

Activity 2: Amazing Dolphins

Background: More than 32 species of dolphin can be found throughout the world, including some varieties that live in fresh water. Among the best-known are the bottle-nosed dolphin and the common dolphin. Both the killer whale and the pilot whale are types of dolphins. The remarkable intelligence of dolphins is widely recognized. Not so well-known is their ability to discriminate objects by *echolocation*, the process of sending out high-frequency clicks that bounce off prey and other objects, enabling the dolphin to identify the object. Dolphins are also able to communicate with each other through high-pitched noises.

Have the students create a display about dolphins that documents a variety of characteristics of the dolphin family such as:

- Different dolphin species and their habitats (students can use a map of the Earth to show where the various species are commonly found);
- Special characteristics of the different species;
- The anatomy of dolphins;
- What dolphins eat;
- How dolphins reproduce;
- Man-made threats to dolphins, e.g., drift nets in which they can get trapped and die.

Particularly helpful for this activity is the web site of the Dolphin Research Center:
www.dolphins.org.



Resources

Books

Bottlenose Dolphins (The Untamed World), by Patricia Miller-Schroeder; Raintree/Steck Vaughn (2002).

A Dolphin Named Bob, by Twig C. George, Christine Herman Merrill (Photographer), Christine Herman (Illustrator), Harpercollins Juvenile Books (1996).

Web Sites

The Official Madeleine L'Engle Website

<http://www.madeleinelengle.com/>

The Madeleine L'Engle Workshop

<http://www.madeleinelengle.org/>.

Bonastra—The Madeleine L'Engle WWW Resource

<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/8838>

The Tesseract: A Madeline L'Engle Bibliography in 5 Dimensions

<http://hometown.aol.com/kfbopfql/LEngl.html>

Madeleine L'Engle Teaching Resources

<http://www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/lengle/lengletg.html>

Dolphin Research Center

<http://www.dolphins.org/>

Basic Public Speaking

<http://capital.net/~bps2/>

Curriculum Standards:

This guide addresses the following standards based on a compilation of K-12 standards nationwide from Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL). The complete review of standards is available online at www.mcrel.org.

**Language Arts**

- Demonstrates competencies in speaking and listening as tools for learning.
- Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.
- Understands the characteristics and components of the media.

Life Skills—Thinking and Reasoning

- Understands and applies basic principles of logic and reasoning.
- Effectively uses mental processes that are based on identifying similarities and differences (compares, contrasts, classifies).

Life Skills—Working with others

- Contributes to the overall effort of a group.
- Works well with diverse individuals and in diverse situations.
- Displays effective interpersonal communication skills.

Science—Understands biological evolution and the diversity of life

- Knows different ways in which living things can be grouped (e.g., plants/animals, bones/no bones, insects/spiders, live on land/live in water) and purposes of different groupings.