

LITTLE HOUSE • BIG ADVENTURE



CLASSROOM ACTIVITY GUIDE
FOR THE NOVELS OF LAURA INGALLS WILDER

Little House in the Big Woods

Farmer Boy

Little House on the Prairie

On the Banks of Plum Creek

By the Shores of Silver Lake

The Long Winter

Little Town on the Prairie

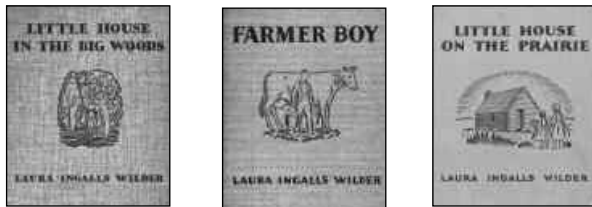
These Happy Golden Years

The First Four Years

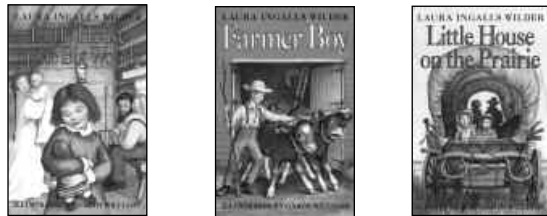
LITTLE HOUSE – A LOOK FOR EVERY GENERATION.

The 1932 publication of Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House in the Big Woods* first introduced the world to Laura Ingalls, a spirited and courageous pioneer girl. Readers young and old fell in love with Wilder's stories about Laura and her life on the American frontier, and the books quickly became classics.

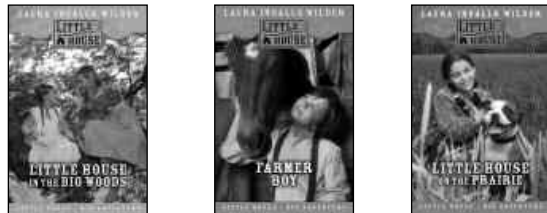
The Little House books have remained timeless adventures, but their look has changed over time, reflecting the changing world around them. Below is a glimpse of the beloved series and its evolution, from its first publication to a new look for today's young readers.



Original art for the series by Helen Sewell, a prominent illustrator of the 1930s.

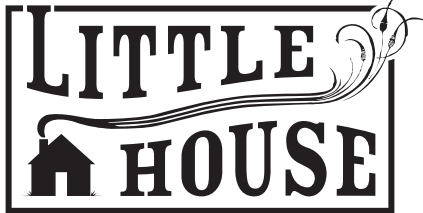


Garth Williams, best known for his art for *Charlotte's Web*, illustrated new editions of the series in 1953.



Today, a fresh, adventure-filled new look for the series, appealing to today's young readers, who can find real-life role models in Laura Ingalls and her friends.

LITTLE HOUSE • BIG ADVENTURE



Laura Ingalls Wilder’s classic Little House books, five of which received the distinguished Newbery Honor, have been cherished by millions of readers around the world for their endearing portrayal of Laura Ingalls, her family, and her remarkable pioneer childhood. Although her books are historical fiction, Wilder brought to life her family’s real adventures, challenges, and triumphs on the American frontier.

With their detailed and historically accurate portrayal of life in the 1800s, these novels are ideal for integrating into a classroom curriculum. In addition to providing thematic and interdisciplinary connections appropriate for use with a single novel or the entire series, this teacher’s guide also provides specific discussion questions and activities for each of the novels.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY GUIDE FOR THE LITTLE HOUSE BOOKS

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About
Laura Ingalls Wilder
(1867–1957)

Laura Ingalls Wilder was born in 1867 in the log cabin described in *Little House in the Big Woods*. As her classic Little House books tell us, she and her family traveled by covered wagon across the Midwest—from the deep forests of Wisconsin to the vast Kansas prairie and the rich plains of Minnesota. The Ingalls family finally settled at the end of a railroad line in the brand-new town of De Smet in the Dakota territory. During their journeys they faced many hardships, including a plague of grasshoppers, extreme drought, severe blizzards, and malaria. Through it all the Ingallses stuck together and persevered as a family. After a particularly severe winter Laura observed, “There is something about living close to the great elemental forces of nature that allows people to rise above small annoyances and discomforts” (from *Laura Ingalls Wilder: A Biography*, p. 107).

Besides helping her family with chores such as churning butter and rounding up cattle, Laura was an excellent student. She was especially gifted at history and writing. In the dim light of her kitchen at age fourteen, she started writing poetry. Laura also helped her sister Mary prepare for the Iowa College for the Blind. “I wanted an education so much myself



that I was very happy in thinking that Mary was getting one” (from *Laura Ingalls Wilder: A Biography*, p. 110).

Laura’s first teaching job came in 1882, when a school board member from a little settlement twelve miles south of De Smet asked her to teach a two-month winter term. Each weekend Almanzo Wilder drove her back and forth in his sleigh between her family’s house and the settlement. When she turned seventeen, they were engaged, and in 1885 they were married.

When Laura was in her fifties, she began to document her childhood memories. Laura chronicled her extraordinary life as a pioneer girl, her early adulthood as a teacher, and her marriage to the quiet farm boy Almanzo Wilder. Laura said, “For years I had thought that the stories my father once told me should be passed on to other children. I felt they were much too good to be lost. . . . Also, to my surprise, I have discovered that I have led a very interesting life. Perhaps none of us realizes how interesting life is until we begin to look at it from that point of view” (from *A Little House Sampler*, pp. 179–80).

Laura’s books prove to be both a realistic and gripping account of nineteenth-century frontier life and a timeless tale of a strong and loving family working together in the face of hardship.

READING SKILLS AND STRATEGIES	THEMES
Compare and Contrast	Home and Family
Identify Problems and Solutions	Courage
Make Decisions	Pioneers and Life on the Frontier
Show, Don't Tell	Memories
Writing About the Past	Nature

READING SKILLS AND STRATEGIES

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

The Ingalls family lives in many different places. With each new location come fresh challenges, joys, and difficulties, but there are also many things that stay the same. Make a comparison chart to help students explore the differences and similarities between the places where the Ingallses settle. Each row of the chart can be represented by a different home. Label the columns by categories, such as “Food,” “Landscape,” “Neighbors,” “Weather,” “Hardships in Nature,” “Fun,” etc.

IDENTIFY PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

As students read the books, ask them to look for problems and solutions relating to survival on the frontier. Have them make a list of such problems and solutions, then ask them to think about how they would solve similar problems in the present day. Additionally, have students come up with problems that the Ingallses encounter in the towns of De Smet, Walnut Grove, and other places they live. Discuss with the class whether the town problems are different from the frontier problems. Are there times when the Ingallses’ solutions seem to make more sense than the more advanced solutions we use today?

MAKE DECISIONS

There are many times when Laura is forced to make difficult choices. For example, Laura must decide whether or not to go against her parents’ orders to stay in the house when a blizzard is coming and there is no firewood (from *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, p. 286). Ask students to think of examples of Laura’s difficult decisions. How does she handle them? What do Laura’s choices show you about her values? Do students notice any changes in how Laura handled these difficult judgments and decisions as she got older?

SHOW, DON’T TELL

The Little House books use descriptive language to show the actions and emotions of the characters. For example, when Mary leaves for college, and she and Laura take one last walk together through the prairie, “Laura’s throat choked up. She winked her eyelids hard and took a deep breath but her voice quivered” (from *Little Town on the Prairie*, p. 111). In *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, Wilder remarked that “her whole skin felt thirsty” (p. 29). Discuss with your class how Wilder showed how Laura felt, rather than simply telling us. Ask students to think of a time when they were feeling strong emotions, then to write about it using this “show, don’t tell” method.

WRITING ABOUT THE PAST

Wilder has commented that as she wrote the Little House books, she was surprised by how interesting her life had been. What may seem ordinary to us can be fascinating to a person of another time or another culture. Have students pick out Laura’s detailed descriptions of daily activities, such as making cheese or maple syrup. Ask students to choose an activity that they do daily and describe it in detail.

THEMES

HOME AND FAMILY

Though the Ingallses live in many different places throughout the books, Pa often sings, “Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam, Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home.” Ask students to write about what the difference is between a house and a home. Ask them to describe what makes the Ingallses feel at home, even when they are traveling across the country in a wagon.

In times of hardship or disaster, all the Ingallses pitch in to help. Ask students to think of each member of the Ingalls family and describe a time when he or she helps out the family. What can they tell about the characters’ personalities by the ways that they handle difficult situations? How do these different personalities work together?

COURAGE

Different types of courage are addressed in the books. What is the difference between Mary’s courage as she leaves to attend college for the blind (*Little Town on the Prairie*, p. 111) and the courage Pa shows when he goes into the well to save Mr. Scott (*Little House on the Prairie*, pp.153–56)? Ask students how they would define courage. Discuss with students other kinds of courage that the Ingallses exhibit in the Little House books.

PIONEERS AND LIFE ON THE FRONTIER

What does it mean to be a pioneer? Ask students to write about someone living today whom they would call a pioneer and why. Have students make lists of ways in which they themselves are pioneers.

MEMORIES

As an adult, Wilder thought back to her very early childhood in the Big Woods and wrote detailed accounts of her life. These accounts have helped people today to truly understand what life was like for pioneers in the 1800s. Ask students to find a friend or family member who lived in a time period before they were born, and talk about his or her life. Ask students to list the similarities and differences they notice compared to their own lives.

NATURE

Nature plays an enormous role in pioneer life. Make a list with students of the ways that nature helps the Ingallses. Next to it make a list of the ways that nature has proven to be a danger to the Ingallses. Have students keep the list and add to it as they read the books. What patterns do they notice?

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ADDITIONAL CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Whether or not you are able to read all of Laura Ingalls Wilder's books with your class, you might wish to encourage students to continue reading the books on their own. Following are suggestions for independent projects that could go with any, or all, of the books.

HOT SEAT

Ask volunteers from the class to sit in the "hot seat" and answer questions as if they were one of the characters from the book. Then have the rest of the class come up with questions to discuss with the character. The volunteers must answer the questions based on what they've learned in the books, even if it means making up an answer that would fit with the time period and the personality of the character.

MAKE A TIME LINE

As the books progress, have students make a time line of Laura's life, marking important events as they occur. They may wish to supplement the time line by researching important events and discoveries that occurred in those years, and marking them on the time line as well.

HELP WANTED!

Ask your students what they would do to earn money if they were part of the Ingalls family. Have students imagine that they are residents of one of the places where the Ingallses settled, such as Walnut Grove or De Smet. Pretend there is a bulletin board in town, and ask students to post an ad offering to do work. Have students think about what kinds of jobs would have been available at that time, and which jobs would suit them, based on their skills and interests and the specific town they picked. What traits do they have that would make them ideal for that job?

INVENTIONS AND PROGRESS

As time passes, the Ingallses come across more and more innovations that help make their lives a little simpler. Ask students to pick one of these inventions, such as a sewing machine or a wheat thresher, to research. Have students find out what need this invention filled, who invented it, and how. Discuss with students what people did before this invention. Do people still use this invention today, or has it been replaced by something more advanced?

MAPS

Wilder's books are filled with detailed descriptions of the scenes around her. Have students compare a map of the United States today with a map that would have been used when Laura was growing up. Have students map Laura's journeys.



Little House in the Big Woods

SETTING THE SCENE

It is the mid-1800s, and young Laura Ingalls is growing up in a log house in the Big Woods of Wisconsin with her family. Laura's days are busy with chores, such as making cheese and planting a garden, as well as playing games with her sister Mary. However, at the end of the day she is never too tired to enjoy a cozy night by the fire with Ma, Pa, Mary, and baby Carrie, listening to Pa tell stories and play his fiddle.

PROMPTS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

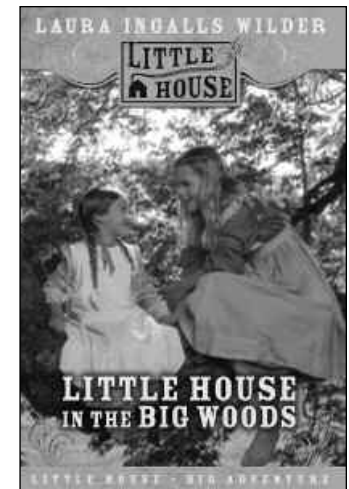
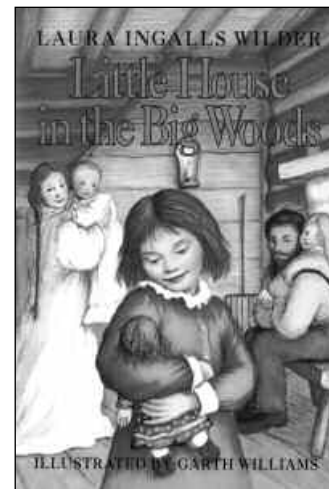
- Laura loves to hear her father play his fiddle and tell stories. Pa's stories always include a moral for the girls. Pick one of Pa's stories and explain what you learned from it.
- In the chapter "The Sugar Snow" (p. 128) we learn that Ma was very fashionable when she lived back East before moving to the Big Woods with Pa. Why do you think Ma was willing to leave? Would you want your family to start a new life in the wilderness?
- The Ingalls family must often work together to face the difficulties of pioneer life. Give an example of a hardship that the Ingallses faced, then describe how they all worked together to overcome it.
- From the beginning of the book, it is clear that Mary and Laura are quite different. How would you describe the two sisters? How does Wilder use dialogue and action to show us those differences?
- The Ingalls family relied heavily upon the animals and plants that lived in the woods. Name both an animal and a plant that was helpful to the Ingallses, and explain how.
- The Big Woods could be very dangerous. Name a hazard that the Ingallses faced in the woods, and describe how they handled it.
- In the chapter "The Deer in the Wood" (p. 232), Pa encounters several deer but does not shoot them even though the Ingallses could have used the meat. Why do you think Pa decides to spare their lives? What does this tell you about Pa?
- When Charley jumps on the yellow jackets' nest and calls for help, nobody comes to help him (pp. 205–8). Why not? What lesson does Charley learn that day?

JOURNAL WRITING

Imagine that your family lived in a log cabin in the woods and had to rely on wits and skills to make a living. Would you have liked the life that the Ingalls family had? Describe why or why not.

THEN AND NOW

Almost everything that the Ingallses eat is prepared by hand by the family. Make a list of everything you eat on a given day and how you get it, and compare it to what the Ingallses ate and how their food was obtained. How are the two lists different? How are they similar? Which would you prefer?



Farmer Boy

SETTING THE SCENE

While the Ingallses travel by covered wagon through the prairies of the Midwest, the prominent Wilder family is quite busy running its farm in New York State. Though he wants nothing more than to work with horses and be a farmer like his father, Almanzo must still go to school as well as help with long hours of farm chores each day. Almanzo's tasks as a farmer boy range from filling the ice-house to breaking calves to shearing sheep, and he does it all willingly to prove to his father that he is indeed mature enough to handle the beautiful colt in the barn, and ready to follow in his father's footsteps.

PROMPTS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

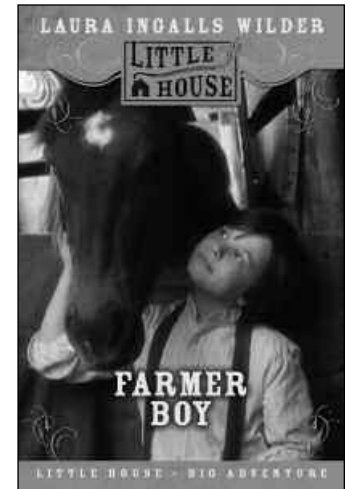
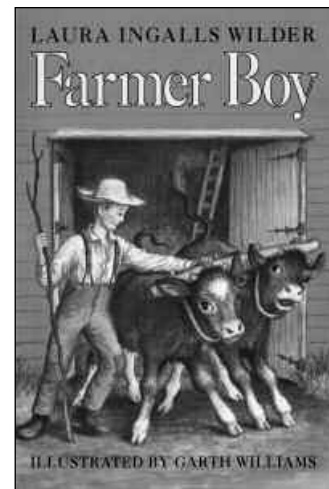
- How does Mr. Corse outsmart the big boys in the schoolhouse (pp. 43–46)? What about this surprises Almanzo?
- Throughout the book, Almanzo gradually proves to his father that he is reliable enough for a horse. What are some of the things he does that show his father that he is responsible? What does he do to make his father doubt his maturity and trustworthiness? Why do you think his father is willing to overlook these actions?
- Almanzo's life is vastly different from Laura's, even though they are both growing up on farms in the same time period. Describe how their childhoods are different. What similarities do you notice?
- What does Father say to Almanzo on Independence Day when Almanzo asks him for a nickel (pp. 181–85)? Why does he give him a half dollar? What do you think Almanzo learned that day?
- What happens in the Wilder house when Mother and Father go away for a week? Why do you think Eliza Jane patches the wallpaper for Almanzo (pp. 224–26)?
- Describe the relationship between Almanzo and Frank. Do you think Almanzo handles conflicts with Frank well? Why or why not?
- When Almanzo's bobsled of logs goes off the road, why does Father pass by without stopping to help? How does Almanzo feel about this?
- Why does Father give Starlight to Almanzo (p. 371)?

JOURNAL WRITING

On p. 130, Almanzo and Alice have a discussion of the different responsibilities of boys and of girls in their household. Which of their tasks would you find interesting to do and why? Which of your own household chores do you find interesting? Which are dull? Are there chores that someone else in your household does that you might want to try someday? How do you feel when you know you've done a good job completing all the jobs your family asks you to do?

THEN AND NOW

Read the description of the schoolhouse the Wilder children attend, and compare it to your own classroom. What are some reasons why the Wilders would stay home from school, compared to the present day? Which would you prefer? Explain your answer.



Little House on the Prairie

SETTING THE SCENE

The Big Woods are getting crowded, and Pa decides it's time to head to the Kansas prairie. Once there the Ingallses start a fresh life building a house from the ground up and learning to adjust to their new home. The Ingallses no longer have the comfort of family nearby, but they have friendly neighbors. Although pioneer life is hard, Laura and her family settle into their new home.

PROMPTS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

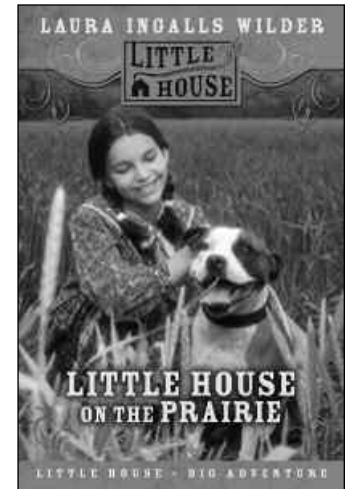
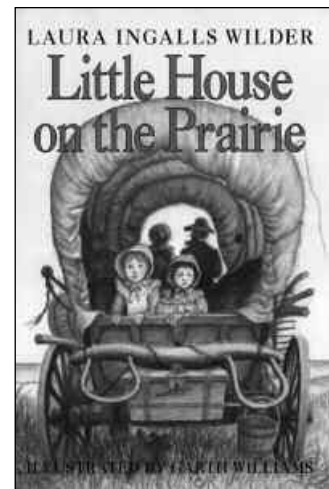
- Now that the Ingallses have moved to the Indian Territory, the land surrounding them is quite different from the Big Woods. Name a new difficulty that the Ingallses must face. What is something enjoyable and exciting about the vast prairie?
- Whenever Laura is close to tears, such as when Jack is missing (p. 33) or when the chimney catches fire (p. 204), she tries as hard as she can not to cry. Why does Laura hate to cry? What does this show you about her personality?
- Throughout the book, Pa likes to say, "All's well that ends well." What does this mean? What does this philosophy tell you about Pa?
- What makes Pa disagree with Mr. Scott's opinion that "the only good Indian is a dead Indian" (p. 301)? How do you feel about this?
- How does Laura help her family when they all have fever 'n' ague (p. 188)? When they are better, why do you think Pa eats a watermelon (p. 197), even though the Scotts think that's what caused their sickness?
- How does Pa communicate with the Indian about the panther? Why does the Indian want the panther dead? How does the conversation illustrate how two mistrustful strangers can work together in a time of need?
- There are many times where the Ingallses receive crucial help from their neighbors. Describe an incident in the book when a neighbor helps the family. How do the Ingallses respond? What would have happened to them if the neighbor had not come to their aid?
- Why do the Ingallses leave the Indian Territory?

JOURNAL WRITING

Pa tells Laura, "The government is going to move these Indians farther west, any time now. That's why we're here, Laura. White people are going to settle all this country, and we get the best land because we get here first and take our pick" (pp. 236–37). Do you agree that the pioneers should get the best land, or do you think that the Native Americans should have been allowed to hold on to their homeland? If you could write a letter to Pa to discuss this, what would you say? You may want to do research to back up your opinion.

THEN AND NOW

The Indians are described as "dirty and scowling and mean" (p. 232). What happens between the Ingallses and the Indians in this book? If you were a child living in Indian Territory at that time, how would you feel about the Indians? What about now, when you know that it was actually the pioneers who were invading the Native Americans' land?



On the Banks of Plum Creek

SETTING THE SCENE

The Ingallses are on the move again, this time to a one-room dugout on the banks of Plum Creek in Minnesota. As they settle into the beautiful little house that Pa builds, it seems as if things can't get any better. Then one day a mysterious cloud covers the sky, and suddenly their land is covered with millions of grasshoppers, who make quick work of their valuable wheat crop. No sooner do the grasshoppers leave than a drought sets in, complete with dangerous fiery tumbleweeds. When winter begins, the Ingallses find themselves facing yet another dangerous obstacle—prairie blizzards. The Ingalls family works together to overcome these obstacles.

PROMPTS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

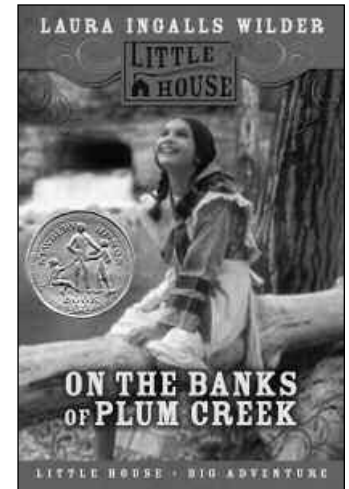
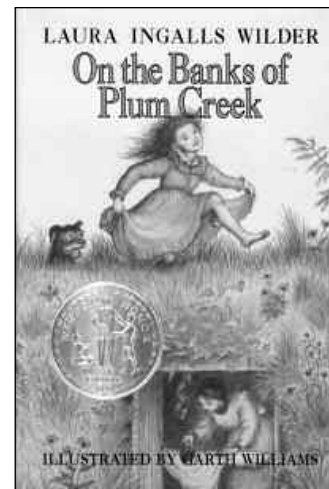
- What does Laura learn on the day that she encounters the badger (pp. 30–31)? Why do you think she confesses to her parents that she was going to the creek?
- One of Pa's favorite nicknames for Laura is flutterbudget. What do you think Pa means by this? Can you think of other times when Laura acts like a flutter-budget?
- How does Nellie Oleson treat Laura, and how does Laura get back at her? Do you think Laura was justified to trick Nellie? Why or why not?
- Discuss the chapter title "The Darkest Hour Is Just Before the Dawn" (p. 228). What do you think this phrase means? Why would Wilder choose that title for that chapter?
- Ma and Pa disagree about whether or not to move west. Pa thinks of the west as a land of opportunity, but Ma is concerned by the lack of communities and schools. Which choice would you make?
- Pa says that he "did not know how he could manage without Laura" (p. 14). In what ways can you tell that Laura is her father's daughter?
- When the grasshoppers cover the field, Ma remarks that "we won't have to buy feed for the hens. There's no great loss without some gain" (p. 199). What does this tell you about Ma's outlook?

JOURNAL WRITING

All the Ingallses know that stealing is wrong, but Ma agrees with Laura that it was all right that she took Charlotte back from Anna (p. 236). Why? Can you think of some examples when doing something "wrong" might actually be okay? Explain your answer.

THEN AND NOW

Throughout the book, natural disasters, such as a swarm of grasshoppers and a terrifying blizzard, have devastating effects on the Ingallses. Imagine that your home was surrounded by grasshoppers or so covered in snow that you couldn't leave. In what ways would your experience be different from that of the Ingallses? In what ways would it be the same?



By the Shores of Silver Lake

SETTING THE SCENE

This book picks up the story of the Ingalls family two years after the ending of *On the Banks of Plum Creek*. Now Laura is thirteen years old, Mary is blind, and the family is still struggling to get out of debt. Pa receives an unexpected offer to earn money for the family by moving farther west and working on the new railroad. For the last time, the family travels across the prairie to a new home, this time in the wilds of the unsettled Dakota Territory.

PROMPTS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

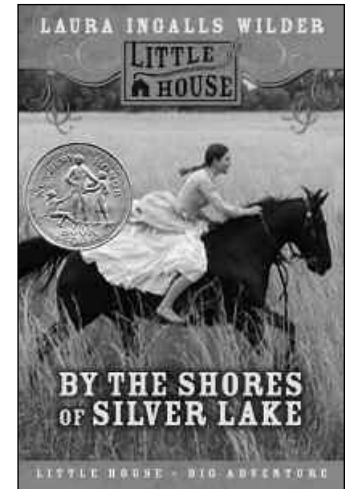
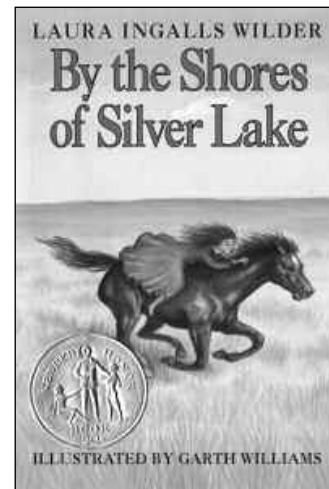
- Why is Pa always eager to continue moving west? Why is Ma so reluctant? If you were in their shoes, whom would you agree with? Explain your answer.
- How does Laura help Mary now that Mary is blind? What adjustments has the family made to accommodate Mary?
- Describe the events of the chapter called “Payday” (p. 109). How do you feel about Pa’s behavior and decisions in this chapter? What about Big Jerry?
- Why do you think the building of the railroad is so fascinating to Laura?
- In the chapter “Wolves on Silver Lake” (p. 163), the night was so lovely, Laura wanted to take Carrie to slide on the ice. “It was so beautiful that they hardly breathed” (p. 164). However, they had to run home because they spotted a wolf. Explain why Laura doesn’t want Pa to kill the wolf that she and Carrie encounter.
- How does Laura feel about the prospect of becoming a teacher? What makes her want to do it in spite of her reluctance?
- Why do so many strangers begin to show up at the Ingallses’ house? What makes the Ingallses agree to take them in? How does this affect Pa’s getting a claim on a homestead?
- On p. 245 Pa remarks that “hunting’s going to be slim around here from now on.” Why does he say this? What are some other ways in which the Ingallses’ life will be different now that they live in a town?

JOURNAL WRITING

Laura strongly prefers living on the prairie to living in town. What are the differences between the two? Where would you have preferred to live in the late 1800s? How about today? Why?

THEN AND NOW

When Pa takes Laura to watch the men build the railroad, “Laura could not imagine a country with so many railroads, nor one so rich that nearly everybody could ride on trains” (p. 101). What progress do you foresee in the near future? Are there things you know will come soon but have difficulty imagining? What do you think of as some of the most important inventions of the last 100 years?



The Long Winter

SETTING THE SCENE

The Ingallses are settling into their new life in De Smet when an early-October blizzard begins the harshest winter of their lives. The snow continues tirelessly through April, and the trains won't run again until the tracks are cleared of snow. Without new deliveries of supplies from the trains, the Ingallses must make do with their own dwindling food and supplies. Soon the family is out of everything from coal to kerosene to flour. As the blizzard howls outside, the Ingallses find their own survival solutions, which include building a tunnel of snow to lead to the barn and binding hay into sticks to burn in the fireplace. As the town's supplies grow ever shorter, Almanzo Wilder risks his life to travel forty miles in hopes of getting a supply of wheat for the starving town.

PROMPTS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

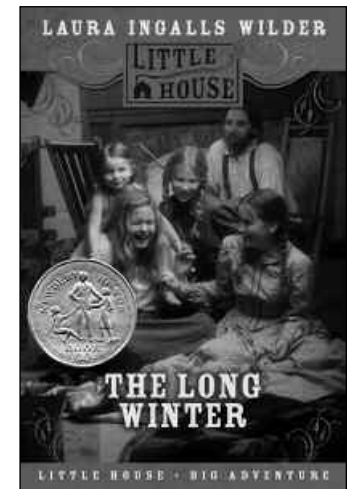
- Laura and Pa have always had a special bond, and in this book she finds many ways to help him support the family. What are some of the ways that she assists Pa? How does her aid make a big difference in the family's survival?
- Why is Pa so alarmed by the muskrat house (pp. 10–12)?
- On p. 13, Pa and Laura have a discussion on what separates humans from animals. Do you agree with Pa?
- Think about when Laura goes into town to buy the mowing-machine section (pp. 17–18), or when she goes to school in De Smet for the first time (pp. 75–77). How does she feel about being around lots of people? How does her behavior change when Carrie is with her? Why?
- Why did Almanzo think it was okay to lie about his age to get a homestead claim? Do you agree with him? Why or why not?
- Laura complains that even though they are in a town, they are just as alone as if they were still by themselves on the prairie. By the end of the book, how has living in a town helped the Ingallses survive?
- What are the ways that the railroad has changed life for the settlers?
- Why does Almanzo risk his life to find the wheat when he has a stash of wheat himself?
- Explain the chapter title “Where There's a Will” (p. 188).

JOURNAL WRITING

One of the main characters in *The Long Winter* is the winter itself. Revisit all the descriptions of the winter throughout the book. How does Laura give a natural occurrence human characteristics? Think of something other than a person that plays a large part in your life, and bring it to life using descriptive language like Laura's.

THEN AND NOW

On p. 192, Pa remarks that “times are too progressive . . . Railroads and telegraph and kerosene and coal stoves—they're good things to have but the trouble is, folks get to depend on 'em.” How do the Ingallses get by without the newer things they have come to depend on? What are some of the inventions that you depend on? How would you make do without them?



Little Town on the Prairie

SETTING THE SCENE

Now that the harsh winter of 1880–81 has finally ended, things have returned to normal in the growing town of De Smet, but life is changing fast for Laura and her family. In between taking a job in town, helping Ma and Pa at home, attending school, and seeing Mary off to a college for the blind, Laura still finds time to enjoy herself. She attends her first sociable and birthday party, joins a town literary society, receives her school teaching certificate earlier than expected, and even begins walking home from church with Almanzo Wilder.

PROMPTS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

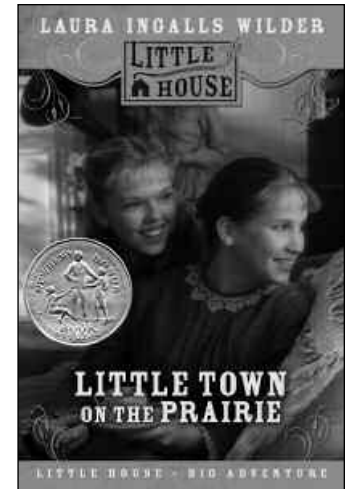
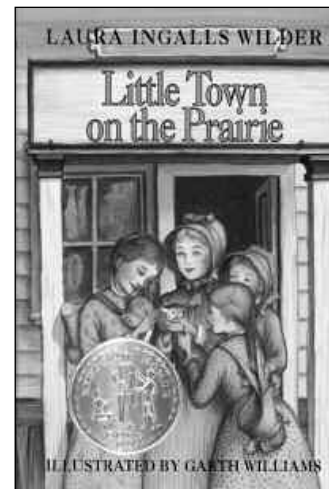
- Describe how Laura feels toward the town at the beginning of the book versus the end. What leads to her change of heart?
- In what ways is it evident that Laura is growing up? In what ways does she still behave the way she always has?
- Describe the scene when Mary leaves for college (pp. 112–14). How do you think each of the characters feels that day?
- Describe Laura's relationship with Miss Wilder. Why does Miss Wilder dislike Laura so much? How does Laura handle her conflict with Miss Wilder? Would you act in the same way? Why or why not?
- Ma, Ida, Mary, and Minnie each write a verse in Laura's autograph book (pp. 184, 188–89). What do the verses tell you about each of these characters? Why do you think Ma wrote what she did?
- What compromises has Mary had to make, now that she is blind? In what ways does she manage to help her family in spite of this disability?
- How has Laura and Mary's relationship changed? What would you attribute this to?
- Why do you think Wilder calls the chapter about the kitten "The Necessary Cat" (p. 19)? Discuss the role of pets and animals in the Little House books.
- Reread Laura's thoughts on America (p. 76). Do you agree with her? Why or why not?
- On p. 89 Laura remarks that "the prairie looks so beautiful and gentle. But I wonder what it will do next. Seems like we have to fight it all the time." What does she mean by this observation? Give examples from the book.

JOURNAL WRITING

Mary often asks Laura to see for her, and compliments the pictures she makes when she talks. Think of the rich, colorful language that Laura uses to describe sights that she sees every day. Now think of something you see often and describe it as Laura would describe it to Mary. Think of the details that would be most interesting, and which words would best describe them.

THEN AND NOW

In the chapters "Literaries," and "The Whirl of Gaiety," Pa and some of the other men decide to form a town literary society. At the first meeting, the whole town finishes the evening with an impromptu spelling match. How is the spelling match different from spelling bees today? What are some of the other events that take place at later meetings of the literary society? What do you think are some of the reasons that the "literaries" are so successful? What needs do they fill in the community? Are there similar organizations and groups in your community today? What are they and where might you find them taking place? How are they both similar to, and different than, the "literaries" of Laura's day?



These Happy Golden Years

SETTING THE SCENE

Laura, now fifteen, is leaving home for the first time to earn money as a teacher in the nearby settlement of Brewster. She dislikes Brewster and is quite homesick for her family in De Smet, but earning money for Mary's college tuition is too important to Laura to give up. Fortunately, Almanzo Wilder begins to show up each weekend to take Laura home in his sleigh, and soon the two friends fall in love. They are married by the end of the story.

PROMPTS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

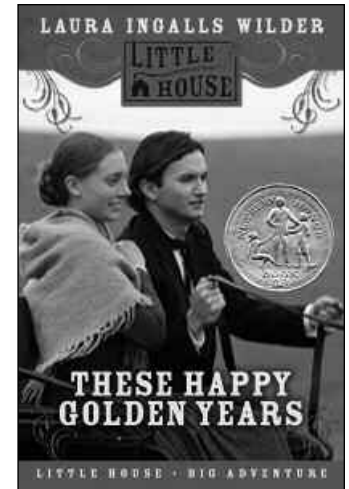
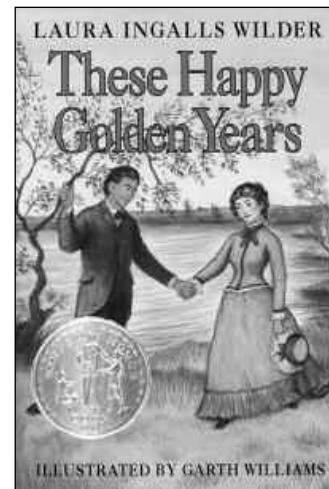
- Laura does not dare tell her family and friends in De Smet about the troubles at the Brewster house. Why not? Do you think this is wise of her? Explain your answer.
- How does Laura manage to earn respect and kindness from her class in the Brewster settlement?
- Why does Laura tell Almanzo that she does not wish to ride with him once she is back in De Smet (p. 62)? Why does he come back for her the following week? How does she feel when he says good-bye after her last trip from Brewster (p. 88)?
- In what ways has Mary changed since going to college? How do you think her home has changed around her since she has been gone?
- How does Laura feel about promising to obey Almanzo (p. 269)? How does Almanzo feel about it? What does her response say about Laura?
- When Laura seeks Pa's advice, he recommends she think before she speaks. Do you think this is good advice for Laura? Why or why not? Do you think she follows it?
- Chapters 5 and 6 are titled "A Stiff Upper Lip" (p. 46) and "Managing" (p. 53), respectively. Discuss why Wilder chose these titles.

JOURNAL WRITING

Reread Laura's composition "Ambition," on p. 98. Do you think Laura is ambitious? Why or why not? What about yourself? Describe a time when you were ambitious.

THEN AND NOW

Do some research on the developing women's movement in the late 1800s with regard to the right to vote. Although Laura can be opinionated and outspoken, she says she does not want to vote (p. 269). Why would Laura prefer not to have a voice in an election? How do you think Laura would feel about women's rights if she were living today?



The First Four Years

SETTING THE SCENE

Laura and Almanzo have just married and are starting their new life together on a farm. Laura is hesitant to make a living through farming, but she agrees to give Almanzo three years to try to succeed. However, the Wilders encounter many hardships—the crops are destroyed again and again, Laura and Almanzo lose a son, and their house is burned to the ground. However, through it all, Laura and Almanzo maintain their characteristic optimism, firmly believing that “it all evens up in the end” (p. 132).

PROMPTS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

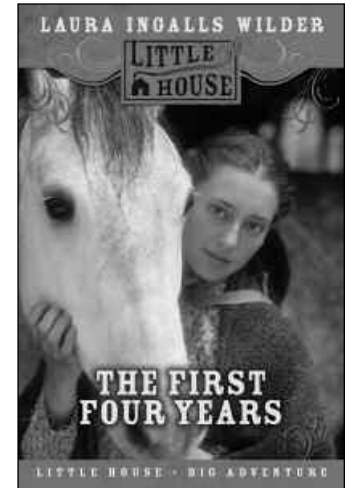
- In Roger Lea MacBride’s introduction, he describes *The First Four Years* as being different from the books that preceded it. How is it different from the other books in the series? How is it similar?
- Why does Laura not want to marry a farmer? How do she and Almanzo resolve this disagreement? Compare how she feels about being a farmer’s wife in different parts of the book.
- Laura and Almanzo differ in their opinions of how to treat their neighbor Ole Larsen. Which of them do you tend to agree with? Why?
- What happens when the Native Americans show up at Laura and Almanzo’s house (p. 31–33)?
- Describe young Rose Wilder. In what ways does she remind you of Laura from *Little House in the Big Woods*? In what ways is she different from Laura as a child?
- What is meant by the chapter title “A Year of Grace” (p. 98)? Why do you think that title was chosen?
- Wilder speaks of “the incurable optimism of the farmer” (p. 133). How does Almanzo fit this description? Does Laura fit this description as well? Do you think Laura will agree to let Almanzo continue farming even though their three years are up? Why or why not?
- Throughout the book, the Wilders frequently comment that “everything evens up” (p. 49). What do they mean by this? Apply this quote to the events that take place throughout the book. For example, discuss the different seasons, and how they affect the Wilders. What are the good and bad aspects and repercussions of each season?

JOURNAL WRITING

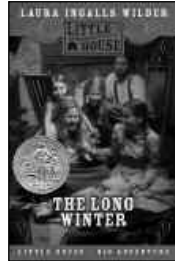
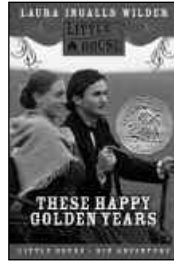
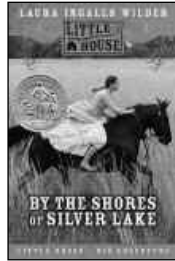
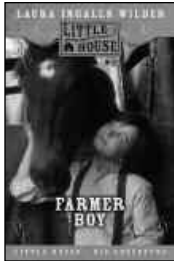
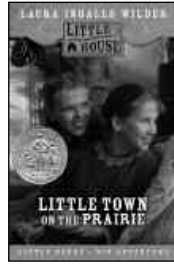
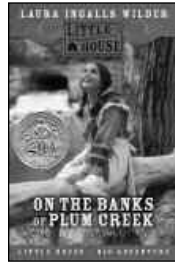
During the first four years of Laura and Almanzo’s marriage, they endure many devastating hardships and setbacks. Pick one of the hardships that the Wilders endured and describe it in detail as Laura would.

THEN AND NOW

Almanzo’s parents and sister live in Minnesota, a long way from the Dakota Territory and Laura and Almanzo’s homestead. How do you think they might have learned the news about the birth of Rose? How do families usually share the news today? What ways do distant friends and families have to keep in touch and relay news about important events that were not even imagined in Laura’s time?



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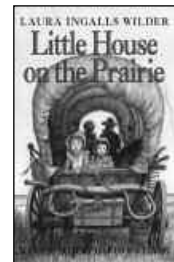
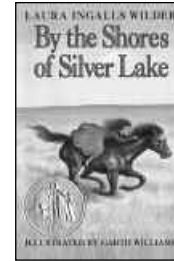
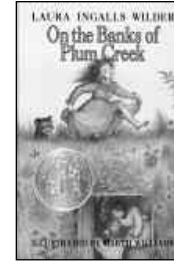
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