

A Guide for Using

Little House

in the

Big Woods

in the Classroom

*Based on the novel written by
Laura Ingalls Wilder*

This guide written by Laurie Swinwood



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Introduction

A good book can touch our lives like a good friend. Within its pages are words and characters that can inspire us to achieve our highest ideals. We can turn to it for companionship, recreation, comfort, and guidance. It can also give us a cherished story to hold in our hearts forever.

In *Literature Units*, great care has been taken to select books that are sure to become good friends!

Teachers who use this literature unit will find the following features to supplement their own valuable ideas.

- Sample Lesson Plans
- Pre-reading Activities
- Biographical Sketch and Picture of the Author
- Book Summary
- Vocabulary Lists and Suggested Vocabulary Activity Ideas
- Chapters grouped for study with the sections including:
 - *quizzes*
 - *hands-on projects*
 - *cooperative learning activities*
 - *cross-curriculum connections*
 - *extensions into the reader's life*
- Post-reading Activities
- Book Report Ideas
- Research Ideas
- Culminating Activities
- Three Different Options for Unit Tests
- Bibliography
- Answer Key

We are confident that this unit will be a valuable addition to your planning, and we hope that as you use our ideas, your students will increase the circle of “friends” they have in books!

Sample Lesson Plan

Each of the lessons below can take from one to several days to complete.

Lesson 1

- Introduce and complete some or all of the pre-reading activities. (page 5)
- Read “About the Author” with your students. (page 6)
- Introduce the vocabulary list for Section 1. (page 8)

Lesson 2

- Read chapters 1 and 2. As you read, place the vocabulary words in the context of the story and discuss their meanings.
- Choose a vocabulary activity. (page 9)
- Make paper dolls. (page 11)
- Research panthers. (page 12)
- Label a map of Wisconsin. (page 13)
- Describe Laura’s home and your home. (page 14)
- Administer the Section 1 quiz. (page 10)
- Introduce the vocabulary list for Section 2. (page 8)

Lesson 3

- Read chapters 3–5. Place the vocabulary words in context and discuss their meanings.
- Choose a vocabulary activity. (page 9)
- Make an apple pomander ball. (page 16)
- Create a book in the shape of a house. (page 17)
- Tell a story from an owl’s point of view. (page 18)
- Compare special holidays. (page 19)
- Administer the Section 2 quiz. (page 15)
- Introduce the vocabulary list for Section 3. (page 8)

Lesson 4

- Read chapters 6–8. Place the vocabulary words in context and discuss their meanings.
- Choose a vocabulary activity. (page 9)
- Make a lantern. (page 21)
- Make maple sugar candy. (page 22)
- Learn how to square dance. (page 23)

- Complete a family tree. (page 24)
- Administer the Section 3 quiz. (page 20)
- Introduce the vocabulary list for Section 4. (page 8)

Lesson 5

- Read chapters 9–10. Place the vocabulary words in context and discuss their meanings.
- Choose a vocabulary activity. (page 9)
- Make a patchwork quilt from construction paper. (page 26)
- Build your own town. (page 27)
- Learn about honey bees. (page 28)
- Write a journal entry. (page 29)
- Administer the Section 4 quiz. (page 25)
- Introduce the vocabulary list for Section 5. (page 8)

Lesson 6

- Read chapters 11–13. Place the vocabulary words in context and discuss their meanings.
- Choose a vocabulary activity. (page 9)
- Make stewed pumpkin. (page 31)
- Write a pioneer cookbook. (page 32)
- Compare and contrast “The Boy Who Cried Wolf” with a boy’s experience in the story. (page 33)
- Make an autograph book. (page 34)
- Administer the Section 5 quiz. (page 30)

Lesson 7

- Discuss any questions your students may have about the story. (page 35)
- Assign book reports and research projects. (pages 36 and 37)
- Begin work on culminating activities. (pages 38, 39, and 40)

Lesson 8

- Administer unit tests 1, 2, and/or 3. (pages 41, 42, and 43)
- Discuss the test answers and possibilities.
- Discuss the students’ enjoyment of the book.
- Provide a list of related reading for your students. (page 44)

Before the Book

Literature is always more meaningful when the reader is given a solid background before reading. Children need to have a feel for the time period, the characters, and the author of the book. The following activities may work well with your class.

1. Discuss with students any other books they have read by Laura Ingalls Wilder.
2. Set up a cozy reading corner in your classroom. Display Laura Ingalls Wilder's books in that corner.
3. Predict what the story might be about by hearing the title and looking at the cover illustration or by previewing the illustrations in the book.

4. Answer these questions.

- Are you interested in . . .
 - stories about the hardships of pioneer life?
 - stories about family life?
 - stories that involve danger from wild animals?
- Would you ever . . .
 - want to live where there were no houses, people, or roads?
 - be afraid of a screech owl?
 - slap a wild bear on the shoulder?



5. Create an Ingalls Bulletin Board. Have students draw pictures of Laura and her family. They may want to draw pictures of the setting as well to create a "Little House in the Big Woods" scene.
6. Using the *Laura Ingalls Wilder Songbook* by Eugenia Garson, learn a few of the songs Laura heard her father sing, such as "Old Dan Tucker," "Oh! Susanna," and "Old Grimes."
7. Use an atlas to locate a map that shows Wisconsin, the setting of the story.
8. Do research to learn about the post-Civil War years.
9. Borrow trunks of artifacts from that time period from your local museum. Share with your students. (If this is not possible, make your own trunk and have students make models of artifacts.)
10. Make time each day to read aloud to your class from one of the books by Laura Ingalls Wilder.

About the Author

Laura Elizabeth Ingalls was born on February 7, 1867, in the Big Woods of Pepin, Wisconsin. Her parents were Charles and Caroline Ingalls. Laura was their second child.

In 1870 Laura's father packed up the family and their belongings in a covered wagon. They settled in Montgomery County, Kansas, which was called Indian Territory at that time. After living on the Kansas prairie, the Ingalls family moved back to Wisconsin in 1871, and then to Plum Creek in Minnesota in 1874. They lived there for several years, although one year was spent as caretakers for a hotel in Burr Oak, Iowa. In 1879, they moved to the new town of DeSmet near Silver Lake in the Dakota Territory. This area is now in the state of South Dakota.



In 1882, when Laura was 15, she became a teacher. The school in which she taught was an abandoned claim shanty. It was located twelve miles from De Smet. When Laura was 18, she married Almanzo Wilder, who was 28. In 1886, they had a daughter, Rose. Two years later, they had a son who died in infancy. When Rose was a young child, Laura and Almanzo moved to Spring Valley, Minnesota, for one year to stay with Almanzo's parents, and they moved to the piney woods of Florida. After a short while, they returned to De Smet. Finally, in 1894, they moved for the last time to Rocky Ridge Farm in Mansfield, Missouri.

In 1911 Laura started writing articles about farming. She was 44 when she became a household editor and her first article was published in the *Missouri Ruralist*. Her daughter, Rose, was a successful journalist. She encouraged her mother to write an autobiography.

Laura wrote about her childhood in a story entitled "Pioneer Girl." The story began when she was a little girl living in the Big Woods of Pepin, Wisconsin, and ended when she got married. However, Laura was not able to find anyone who would publish it. As a result, she decided to rewrite it as a series of children's books telling about her experiences as a pioneer child. She called the first book *Little House in the Big Woods*. In 1932, when Laura was sixty-five years old, the book was published by Harper and Brothers.

To Laura's surprise, *Little House in the Big Woods* was an enormous success, not only with children but with literary critics as well. Over the next eleven years, she wrote an entire series of books which includes *Farmer Boy* (1933), *Little House on the Prairie* (1935), *On the Banks of Plum Creek* (1937), *By the Shores of Silver Lake* (1939), *The Long Winter* (1940), *Little Town on the Prairie* (1941), and *These Happy Golden Years* (1943). Laura won a variety of honors and awards for these books. She was the first person to receive an award from the Children's Library Association for her lasting contribution to children's literature, and the Laura Ingalls Wilder award was named in her honor.

Laura died on February 10, 1957, at the age of 90. Her memories have provided readers with an insight into the sacrifices and hardships of pioneer life. Laura's books have remained popular with readers of all ages. They have been translated into many foreign languages. Her books were also the basis for a popular television series called "Little House on the Prairie."

Little House in the Big Woods

by Laura Ingalls Wilder

(Harper & Row, 1932)

(Also available in Canada, UK & AUS from HarperChild Bks.)

The story begins when Laura Ingalls was a little girl living in a log cabin in the Big Woods of Wisconsin. She lived with her mother and father, whom she called Ma and Pa, an older sister named Mary, and a baby sister named Carrie. Mary was always a very good girl and did exactly what she was told. She loved to cook, sew, and help around the house. In contrast, Laura was extremely bored by sewing. She would rather have been outside climbing trees than inside working.

The Ingalls cabin was surrounded by woods. They did not have any neighbors except for the wild animals that shared the woods with them. Life in the cabin was comfortable but not without its dangers from the wild animals. For example, one night Ma and Laura went to milk their cow. When they got to the pen, the gate was being blocked by an animal they thought was their cow. Ma slapped the animal on the shoulder to move it out of the way. Suddenly, Ma and Laura realized that it was a bear in the pen and not their cow.

The story describes in detail what life was like for the Ingalls family. Everyone worked hard doing chores during the day. They had to work together to provide for all of their needs. They got milk from their cow, churned their own butter, and made their own cheese. They grew their own crops and raised animals for meat. Pa also got meat for the family by hunting wild animals such as deer and bear. Then in the evening, the family was entertained by Pa's fiddle playing and storytelling. One tale Pa related to the family was about an experience he had as a young boy when he had not listened to his father. He explained that he was rounding up the cows from the woods when he began to play. As it grew dark, he frantically called out the names of the cows but could not find them. Suddenly, he heard a voice asking, "Who?" It scared him so badly he ran all the way home. When he arrived, he found that the cows were already there and that the voice he had heard was nothing more than a screech owl.

