



# a little house CHRISTMAS

Main  
Street  
Theater

ALL  
THEATER FOR YOUTH  
STUDY GUIDE

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## Who was Laura Ingalls Wilder?

Laura Elizabeth Ingalls Wilder was born in the Big Woods on February 7, 1867. Her Pa's name was Charles Ingalls. He had grown up in New York State and then moved to Wisconsin with his family. Laura's Ma, Caroline Quiner, was born in the Milwaukee, Wisconsin area, in a little town called Brookfield. She met Charles when his family bought a farm near her family's farm. They married and in 1863, Pa and Ma moved to the Big Woods. Their first daughter, Mary, was born there in 1865, and Laura was born two years later. When Laura was a baby, Pa and Ma decided to leave the Big Woods. They moved to a farm near Keytesville, Missouri and lived there about a year. Then they moved to land on the prairie thirteen miles south of Independence, Kansas where Carrie was born. After two years in their little house on the prairie, the Ingalls learned that they could not stay because their land belonged to the Osage Indians so they moved back to the same house in the Big Woods that they lived in before. They lived there for three years. This was the time that Laura wrote about in her first book, *Little House in the Big Woods*.

Laura based her second book, *Little House on the Prairie*, on the two years

they lived on the Kansas prairie. In the winter of 1874, they moved to Walnut Grove in southwestern Minnesota. The stories in *On the Banks of Plum Creek* were based on this time. During the next several years, Ma and Pa moved away from Walnut Grove and had a son named Charles Frederic, who later died on their trip to Iowa. Grace was born in Burr Oak, Iowa in May 1877. After returning to Walnut Grove, Mary became sick and went blind and Laura's family moved to DeSmet in Dakota Territory. This journey was documented in her book *By the Shores of Silver Lake*. Ma and Pa never moved again and Laura lived here for



Laura Ingalls Wilder as a child, 1879.

thirteen years. She described the blizzards that they endured there in her book *The Long Winter*. Laura went to school, taught, worked as a seamstress and helped raise money to send Mary to the blind school. Laura met Almanzo Wilder and married him in 1885. She described his boyhood in *Farmer Boy* and in *Little Town on the Prairie* and in *These Happy Golden Years*; Laura describes her happy years in DeSmet. In December 1886, Laura and Almanzo had their daughter, Rose. In 1889, Laura gave birth to a son but he died before he was a month old. During these years, Laura and Almanzo suffered many hardships including their house burning down and their crops being

destroyed year after year. Almanzo's health suffered and Laura wrote about this sad time in *The First Four Years*. They moved to Florida for a time to help Almanzo get better but Laura hated it there so they returned to DeSmet.



Laura Ingalls Wilder as a young woman, 1910.

In August of 1894, Laura, Almanzo and Rose settled in Mansfield, Missouri on a piece of land they named Rocky Ridge. They never moved again. When Laura was in her fifties, she began to write down her memories of her pioneer childhood. She realized that life had changed radically since her childhood. Cars and trains had replaced the horse and wagon. Indoor plumbing and electricity were common. Laura wanted to preserve her father's stories of life on the frontier. It wasn't until 1931 when Laura was 64 years old that her first book was published. In April of 1932, *Little House in the Big Woods* was published and was so successful that she was asked to write more books about her life on the frontier.

Laura died on February 10, 1957 three days after her ninetieth birthday and eight years after Almanzo died in 1949.



Laura Ingalls Wilder signing copies of *Little House on the Prairie* titles, 1960s.

## Who wrote the play *A Little House Christmas*?



James DeVita is an author and actor who was born in Long Island, New York. He has written three novels and many plays for children. Some of his plays for

children include: *Trials: the Story of Joan of Arc*, *Pollyanna*, *Swiss Family Robinson* and *Huckleberry Finn*. He has won many awards for his playwriting. He is a core company member at American Players Theater, a repertory theater in Spring Green, Wisconsin. He was the recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowship for Fiction.



## Summary

*A Little House Christmas* is based on *Little House in the Big Woods* and *Little House on the Prairie* with Nellie Oleson and Mrs. Oleson borrowed from *On the Banks of Plum Creek*.

The Ingalls are hosting some of their friends and relatives for a pre-Christmas dinner when a sudden storm threatens to cut off access to the town from which most of the guests have come. It ends on Christmas Day, when Mr. Edwards arrives after going to town to find Santa Claus who was unable to visit because of the storm.

## Characters from the Books

### The Ingalls Family

**Charles Phillip Ingalls** – This is Laura Ingalls Wilder's father, better known as "Pa" in the *Little House* books.

**Caroline Lake Quiner** – This is Laura Ingalls Wilder's mother, better known as "Ma" in the *Little House* books.

**Mary Amelia Ingalls** – This is Laura's older sister, whom became blind. Laura was her "eyes" to the world.

**Laura Elizabeth Ingalls** – This is Laura of the *Little House* books, and the writer of the wonderful children's series.

**Caroline Celestia Ingalls** – This is Laura's younger sister Carrie.

**Charles Frederick Ingalls Jr.** – Although never a character in the *Little House* books, he was Laura's younger brother, also known as Freddie.

**Grace Pearl Ingalls** – This is Baby Grace, Laura's youngest sister.

### The Wilders

**Almanzo James Wilder** – Husband to Laura Ingalls Wilder.

**Rose Wilder Lane** – Rose is Laura and Almanzo's only daughter.

**Royal Wilder** – Royal is Almanzo's brother. The two lived together in De Smet, and appeared in several of the *Little House* books.

**Eliza Jane Wilder** – This is Almanzo's sister, and was also Laura's school-teacher in *Little Town on the Prairie*.

### Friends

**Nellie Oleson** – Nellie is Laura's arch-rival in the *Little House* books.

**Mr. Edwards** – The wildcat from Tennessee, this is the man who met Santa Claus to get the presents for the Ingalls girls on Christmas.

## Themes

**HOME AND FAMILY:** Though the Ingalls lived in many different places, Pa often sings, "Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam, be it ever so humble, there's no place like home." In times of hardship everyone pitches in to help.

**Activity:** Have your students write about what the difference is between a house and a home. Describe what makes the Ingalls feel at home, even when they are traveling across the country in a wagon. Have them think about a time that they helped out in their own family during a time of hardship. Did it make them feel more a part of their family?



**COURAGE:** Pa is courageous when he attempts to cross the creek to get the girls presents. Mr. Edwards is courageous when he swims across the creek to make it for Christmas.

**Activity:** Have your students define courage. What other ways were the people in the *Little House* books courageous?

**MEMORIES:** Laura wrote about her life from her very early childhood. These stories help people living today understand what life was like for pioneers in the 1800s.

**Activity:** Have your students interview a friend or family member who lived in a time period before they were born. Discuss his or her life. Have them list the similarities and differences they notice compared to their own lives.

**NATURE:** Nature is very important in pioneer life. If the road is washed out then the covered wagon cannot continue on or friends cannot come for a meal.

**Activity:** Have your students make a list of the ways that nature helped Laura's family and the ways that it hurt them.



## Books by Laura Ingalls Wilder

Stories from *Little House in the Big Woods*, *Little House on the Prairie*, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, *Farmer Boy*, *The Long Winter*, and *These Happy Golden Years* all make up the collection of stories named *Little House on the Prairie Christmas*. The covers of the classic novels have stayed the same in American editions since the 1970s. A collection of stories from different sources is called an anthology.

The original books had the same illustrations that are used in most versions of the books today. They were created by a woman named Helen Sewell, who illustrated the books from 1932-1943. She also wrote and illustrated her own books, but none have had the fame or lasting power of the *Little House* series. Upon her passing, author and illustrator Garth Williams became the official artist. In 1971 he illustrated *The First Four Years* which is thought of as the last in the nine book *Little House on the Prairie* series.



While you are reading one of the Little House books, choose a scene or chapter and fill in these sections:

Who is the main character?

\_\_\_\_\_

Who is the secondary character?

\_\_\_\_\_

What is the something that the characters may be thinking but not saying?



Explain what happens (the Plot) in the pages you read in two sentences.

What is the setting of the story? Inside? Outside? In a building?

Can you draw the setting?



## Covered Wagons

***“Everything from the little house was in the wagon, except the beds and tables and chairs. They did not need to take these, because Pa could always make new ones.”***

In 1869 when the Ingallses moved to Indian Territory, the most common way for a family to travel long distances was by covered wagon.

The wagons had to be strong enough to carry everything from mattresses to pots and pans and still be lightweight enough for the horses or oxen to pull. It also needed to be watertight so that the contents of the wagon would stay dry when it rained or when the travelers were crossing rivers. A typical wagon was about four feet wide by ten feet long. The wagon was covered with a large piece of canvas or sailcloth that was laid over “bows” of green hickory wood. Drawstrings at the front and back open and closed the cover. Some people oiled the canvas to make it water-repellent.



Traveling was very slow. Twenty miles a day was about all a covered wagon could go before the animals had to rest. The roads were very rough. They were dirt roads with deep ruts from the many wagons traveling the same road. When it rained, the dirt would turn to sticky, heavy mud. The travelers would often have to stop and wait for the roads to dry out. This could take a day or two or several weeks.

Have your students use the attached journal activity page to write what they think daily life would have been like for Laura and her family on their covered wagon journey. What were the conditions in the wagon like? Where did they sleep? Who rode where? What did they eat? What did the children do all day as they traveled?

## Christmas Traditions

By the mid-1800s, the pioneers of America were using many of the traditions that families still use today. Can you think of a way that pioneers would have done these activities differently than people do now?

### Stockings:

Then: \_\_\_\_\_

Now: \_\_\_\_\_

### Christmas Trees:

Then: \_\_\_\_\_

Now: \_\_\_\_\_

### Christmas Decorations:

Then: \_\_\_\_\_

Now: \_\_\_\_\_

### Greeting Cards:

Then: \_\_\_\_\_

Now: \_\_\_\_\_

### Holiday Dinner:

Then: \_\_\_\_\_

Now: \_\_\_\_\_

### Holiday Travel:

Then: \_\_\_\_\_

Now: \_\_\_\_\_



## A "Little" Geography

Laura's family traveled often through several states. See if you can find these locations on a map.

1867 - Pepin, Wisconsin

1869 - Independence, Kansas (in Montgomery County)

1871 - Pepin, Wisconsin

1874 - Walnut Grove, Minnesota

1876 - Burr Oak, Iowa

1877 - Walnut Grove, Minnesota

1879 - De Smet, South Dakota

1881 - Vinton, Iowa

1890 - Spring Valley, Minnesota (not on map)

1891 - De Smet, South Dakota

1894 - Mansfield, Missouri

Answer these questions:

- Which two cities are the closest to one another?
- Which two cities are the farthest from each other?
- How many times did Laura live in Minnesota?
- How many times did Laura live in South Dakota?
- Where did Laura live for the longest amount of time?
- Which two states did Laura move to only once?
- Where was Laura's final home?



DRAW A LINE FROM THE ITEM TO THE WORD IT MATCHES WITH.



**Water Pail** – Many settlers and pioneers had to walk long distances for water to cook and clean with, or to drink. Water from wells was collected in a wooden bucket attached to a rope and pulley.

**Blacksmith** – All metal products, tools, horseshoes, and cookware were created by metalsmiths, or blacksmiths. They use heat to melt the metal and a mallet hitting an anvil to shape it.

**Bonnet** – Bonnets had many uses in the pioneer times. They were worn to shade women and girls' eyes from the sun, to keep their hair from getting tangled or in the way while they worked, and to sleep in to help keep warm.

**Horse Plow** – If pioneers were lucky enough to find themselves with some land to farm on, they often needed the help of horses to pull the plows through the fields.

**Butter Churn** – Butter was used to cook with, to sweeten things, and was even believed to help heal burns. Women made the butter by pouring whole milk into a churn and rapidly stirring it with a stick.

**Quill Pen** – Before there were pens and pencils with ink and lead, pioneers used feathers to write with. They would simply dip the tip into an ink well and run it across a page to form their letters.

**Wool Spinning Wheel** – Pioneers made their own clothes and sheep were a cheap and easy source of acquiring wool. After a farmer sheared a sheep, the wool would come out in big, cloud-like clumps. A spinning wheel was used to turn that thick puff of wool into thin, weavable thread.

**Candle Lantern** – There was no electricity in the American frontier, so candles and fire provided the light at night.



## Churning Butter

Housekeeping on the frontier was hard work. There were no modern appliances so everything had to be done by hand. It took all week to keep up with the cleaning, washing, ironing, mending and cooking. In the Ingalls's' house, every day of the week had its own "proper work." Thursday was churning day. When Mary and Laura turned 6 they were allowed to help churn the butter.

After the cow was milked on Wednesday, the milk was set aside and allowed to rest, undisturbed, overnight. The cream rose to the top and Ma poured it into the churn. In the lid of the churn was a long handle with a flat piece of wood on the bottom. This was called a dasher, and it had to be moved up and down constantly through the cream until the butter formed a lump. Then the butter was scraped from the dasher and washed in clean water. It was salted so that it would not spoil too quickly and was packed into a crock to keep it cool.



Try using this recipe to make your own "churned butter". Have each student make their own container and see how the cream turns into butter.

You will need...

Whipped cream; a baby food or mayonnaise jar

1. Choose a day when it is not very hot outside, or do this activity indoors.
2. Working alone or with a friend so your arms do not get tired, put cream into the jar (approx one tablespoon of cream for a small baby food jar).
3. Start shaking! After fifteen to twenty minutes of vigorous shaking, you should have a lump of butter in your jar.
4. Enjoy it on a slice of bread like Laura did.

## Laura's Gingerbread

Laura's gingerbread was a favorite in the Mansfield community and she was often asked to share the recipe. Here is the recipe updated for a modern kitchen. Have your students help measure all the ingredients. What quantities would they need if they were duplicating the recipe? Tripling it?

You will need...

Measuring spoons; 9"x9" baking pan; small bowl; mixing spoon; 2-cup measuring cup; large bowl; cake tester (or fork); 1 cup brown sugar; ½ cup shortening; 1 cup molasses; 2 teaspoons baking soda; 1 cup boiling water; 3 cups all purpose flour; 1 teaspoon each ginger, cinnamon, allspice, nutmeg, and cloves; ½ teaspoon salt; shortening to grease baking pan

1. Preheat oven to 350. Grease a 9"x9" baking pan.
2. Blend the sugar and shortening in the small bowl. Mix in the molasses.
3. Measure out a cup of boiling water in the 2-cup measuring cup. Add the baking soda and mix well.
4. In the large bowl, sift together the flour and the spices. Add all other ingredients, mix well, and pour into prepared pan.
5. Bake for 45 minutes or until cake tester or fork comes out clean.
6. Serve this warm or at room temperature. It is delicious with applesauce or whipped cream that has been whipped to soft peaks and sweetened just a little.

Laura liked to add chocolate frosting! She wrote in her recipe, "Chocolate frosting adds to the goodness."





## Packing Your Covered Wagon

Pioneers traveling by covered wagon had to be very careful of their wagon's weight. Even a few pounds heavier could mean the trip would be much more difficult for the oxen or horses. This is why the men and women would walk beside the wagon instead of inside it. The typical journey by covered wagon was five months long, and they would need to pack enough supplies and equipment for the entire five months. Below are the supplies that a typical Pioneer family traveling west across the United States might take on their covered wagon journey.



Have your students pretend they are pioneers planning a long journey to the frontier. Ask them to make a list of what they would take in their covered wagon, keeping in mind that the wagon will carry only 2,000 pounds before the weight becomes too much. When you are done, compare your list with friends. Be sure to pack enough food for each person in your family. Use the list of recommendations of food for each person below, and then see how much weight you have left for everything else!

## Recommended Food per Person for a Covered Wagon Journey West

This is the amount of food that was recommended for each person traveling West in a covered wagon.

- 200 pounds of flour
- 30 pounds of pilot bread (hardtack)
- 75 pounds of bacon
- 10 pounds of rice
- 5 pounds of coffee
- 2 pounds of tea
- 25 pounds of sugar
- ½ bushel of dried beans
- 1 bushel of dried fruit
- 2 pounds of saleratus (baking soda)
- 10 pounds of salt
- ½ bushel of corn meal
- ½ bushel of corn, parched and ground
- 1 small keg of vinegar



Food	Weight in Pounds
Flour	150
Tea	10
Salt	50
Sugar	50
Coffee	100
Bacon	40
Dried Fruit	100
Dried Beans	100
Cornmeal	10
Spit Peas	100
Oatmeal	8
Vinegar	25
Pickles	50
Dried Beef	25
Salt Pork	5
Assorted Spices	5
Barrel of Water	350
Vegetables	5

Personal Items	Weight in Pounds
Doll	2
Jump Rope	1
Marbles	1
Family Bible	2
Books	2
Hunting Knife	1
Bag of Clothes	40
Fiddle	2
Snowshoes	8
Rifle	10
Pistol	7
First Aid Kit	3

Tools	Weight in Pounds
Ax	15
Shovel	12
Hatchet	9
Hammer	7
Hoe	3
Anvil	150
Grinding Stone	75
Animal Trap	15
Rope	4

Households Goods	Weight in Pounds
Coffee Grinder	5
Rug	40
Bedding	20
Mirror	40
Dutch Oven	70
Butter Churn	40
Table & 4 Chairs	200
Piano	900
Organ	2000
Baby Cradle	75
Wooden Bucket	10
Bedpan	2
Butter Mold	1
Rocking Chair	50
Pitcher & Bowl	5
Cooking Stove	700
Cooking Utensils	2
Stool	10
Spinning Wheel	80
Lantern	4
Clock	1
10 Candles	1
Set of Dishes	40



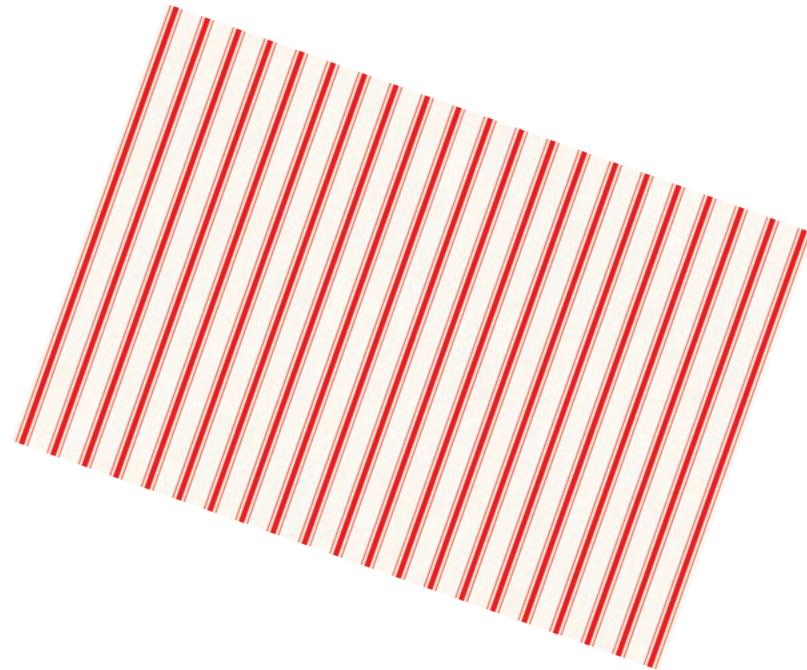
## Red-and-White Striped Paper

Life on the frontier was hard and the Ingalls did not have much money. At Christmas time, Ma would make her own wrapping paper to make the gifts look special. Have your students make their own wrapping paper.

You will need...

Newspapers; small disposable dish; 1 jar of red acrylic paint; water; piece of cotton string, 36" long; large sheets of plain white paper.

1. Spread newspapers on a flat work surface to protect it.
2. Pour some red paint in the disposable dish; add water to thin it down.
3. Dip the piece of string into the paint to coat it thoroughly.
4. Carefully remove the string from the paint, letting any drips fall back into the dish.
5. Hold each end of the string and lay the string down on the paper. For a wider stripe, roll the string back and forth slightly.
6. Make another stripe about an inch from the first one and continue across the whole width of the paper.
7. Dip the string in the paint again as needed. You can make straight stripes or wavy ones or both.
8. Let the paper dry before wrapping gifts. You can use the paint-soaked string to tie up your package if you like.



## How to Make a Braided Rug

Pioneers often found themselves with scraps of fabric left over, either scraps from cutting out fabric for clothes, or from old clothes that were no longer serviceable for wearing. They never let anything go to waste. Often times they would use the scraps to make rugs.



You will need...

Fabric scraps, cut into strips 3 inches wide (for a thicker rug, you can cut them into 4, 5 or 6 inches wide, but make sure all strips are the same width); heavy weight thread, matching the most dominant color in your fabric scraps, or in gray; heavy needle for sewing (ask an adult for help).

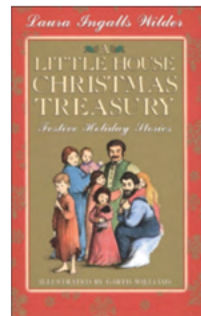
1. To begin, sew three separate strips together at one end. You can also tie a secure knot instead.
2. Begin braiding tightly. You can tie the end to something secure such as a chair or table leg, which will make it easier for you to quickly braid while keeping the braid tight.
3. As you get to the end of a strip, you sew or knot a new strip on, and then keep braiding.
4. When you have used all your scraps, you then begin at one end and coil it. You or an adult can then braid the edges together, until you reach the end of the braid.



If you enjoyed our play, you might want to read:



**A Little House Christmas: Holiday Stories from the Little House Books.** Wilder, Laura Ingalls, and Garth Williams. HarperCollins, 1997.



**A Little House Christmas Treasury: Festive Holiday Stories.** Wilder, Laura Ingalls, and Garth Williams. HarperCollins, 2005.



**Prairie Lotus.** Park, L. S. Clarion Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 2020.



**May B.: A Novel.** Rose, C. S., A Yearling Book. 2014.



**Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy.** Schmidt, G. D. Sandpiper. 2013.



**Magic Treehouse #23: Twister on Tuesday.** Osbourne, Mary Pope. 2001.



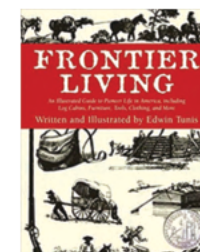
**The Quilt Walk.** Dallas, Sandra. Sleeping Bear Press, 2013.



**Heading West: Life with the Pioneers: 21 Activities.** McCarthy, P. Chicago Review Press. 2009.



**A Pioneer Sampler: The Daily Life of a Pioneer Family in 1840.** Greenwood, B., Collins, H., & Greenwood, B. Houghton Mifflin. 1998.



**Frontier Living.** Tunis, E. Lyons Press. 2000



**Your Life as a Pioneer on the Oregon Trail.** Gunderson, J., and Dougherty, R. Picture Window Books. 2012.



# a little house CHRISTMAS

## How Should I Prepare My Students for a Trip to the Theater?

Being in a live performance is very different than seeing a movie in a movie theater or at home. The setting is much quieter and noises created by viewers can interrupt the show and distract the performers. Remember that real people are on stage and they deserve your respect while they perform.

Here are some basic guidelines and rules to attending live theater:

No talking. Even whispers can be quite loud in a quiet room.

If you have a cell phone, it must be turned off AND put away during the show.

The light can distract performers.

Keep bags, feet and bodies out of the aisles.  
Sometimes actors walk through them during shows.

Do not put your feet on the chairs in front of you or sit on your feet in the seats.

No food or drinks are allowed in the theater.

Cover your mouth for yawns, coughs or other noises.

If you think something is funny, feel free to laugh.  
The actors are energized by interaction from the audience.

Don't stand up or switch seats during the performance.

Use the restroom and get comfortable before the show starts.

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