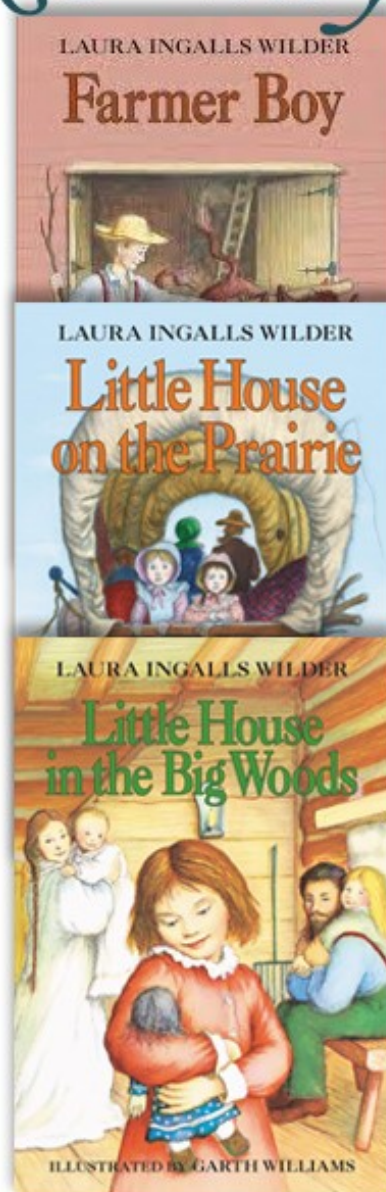


# A Little Christmas on the Prairie

*Book Study*



Common Sense Press  
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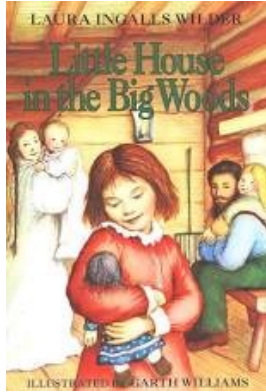
*From Common Sense Press*

Christmas and its traditions brighten our lives. Each year families enjoy activities like making gingerbread houses and caroling, eating favorite foods, watching special movies, and visiting with family and friends. One of our family's traditions included rereading aloud Christmas stories like *A Christmas Carol* and *The Gift of the Magi*, and every year we would read all the Christmas chapters in Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* series.

Although written as fiction, the Little House books are based on the childhood experiences of Laura Ingalls and her family. Each of the books tells of her life as she and her family established new homesteads in the wilderness and plains of the American West during the late 1800's. Thankfully, most of the books include a chapter or two about their Christmas celebrations in each new home.

Read the Christmas chapters in each of these books and enjoy the suggested activities. As you read, you may think of other things that you'd like to learn more about!

## *Little House in the Big Woods*



The first Christmas we share with the Ingalls family is in *Little House in the Big Woods*.

*Once upon a time, sixty years ago, a little girl lived in the Big Woods of Wisconsin, in a little gray house made of logs.*

Four-year-old Laura lived in the little house with her father and mother, her big sister Mary, her little sister Carrie, and her faithful dog Jack.

Read Chapter Four “Christmas.”

### **Activities:**

1. *Pa’s breath hung in the air like smoke, when he came along the path from the barn. He breathed it out in clouds, and it rose in white frost on his mustache and beard.*

Make a cloud in a jar. You’ll need a glass jar with a lid, 50ml of boiling water, a can of hairspray, and some ice. Pour 2cm of the boiled water into the jar. Swirl the water around to heat the inside of the jar. Put some ice in the upside-down lid of the jar and rest it on top of the jar for a couple of minutes. Quickly remove the lid and squirt some hairspray into the jar. Put the lid with the ice in it back on the top of the jar and watch as a cloud appears.

2. *All night he was busy, working on a large piece of board and two small pieces. He whittled them with his knife, he rubbed them with sandpaper and with his hand, until when Laura touched them, they felt soft and smooth as silk.*

Whittling is a great hobby. You don’t need any special tools, just a knife and a stick! There are many sites online to help you get started. Just search for How to Whittle. You might want to practice with a butter knife and a bar of soap.

3. *Pa and Uncle Peter had each a pair of new, warm mittens, knit in little squares of red and white. Ma and Aunt Eliza had made them.*

Homemade gifts are thoughtful and represent a sacrifice of time. Start now looking for ways you can make gifts for your family.

4. *She baked vinegar pies and dried-apple pies, and filled a big jar with cookies, and she let Laura and Mary lick the cake spoon.*

In Laura’s day, you could not just run to the grocery store to pick up what you needed. Pioneers had to rely on common staples that were easy to come by. Bake your own vinegar pie using this recipe from <https://www.lifeloveandsugar.com/vinegar-pie>.

## Vinegar Pie

### Ingredients

1 large pie crust	1 ½ tbsp white vinegar
4 large eggs	1 tsp vanilla extract
1 ½ cups sugar	whipped cream, optional
1/3 cup butter, melted	nutmeg, optional

### Instructions

1. Pre-bake pie crust according to directions. Use pie weights to keep the crust from puffing up too much when baking.
2. Adjust oven temperature to 350
3. In large bowl, combine the eggs, sugar, butter, vinegar, and vanilla extract. Whisk well to combine. Pour into pre-baked pie shell.
4. Bake pie for 30-40 minutes or until pie is set but a little jiggly.
5. Allow pie to cool to room temperature, then refrigerate until cold and firm.
6. Serve pie with whipped cream and a sprinkle of nutmeg.

*5. Alice and Ella and Laura in their red flannel nightgowns and Peter in his red flannel nightshirt, all ran shouting to see what he had brought.*

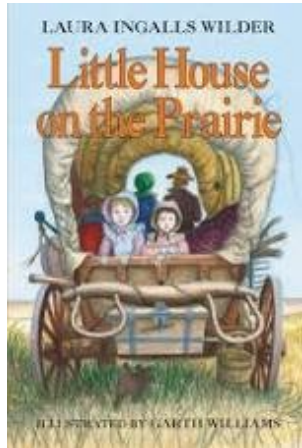
Make a list of the Christmas gifts the Ingalls' children received this Christmas. How does this compare with your Christmas wish list?

*6. For breakfast there were pancakes, and Ma made a pancake man for each one of the children.*

Enjoy a pancake breakfast. Let each person make their own pancake people or animals by carefully dropping the batter onto a skillet.

*7. Ma said, "Laura, aren't you going to let the other girls hold your doll?"*

Discuss why it is important for children to learn to share. If you have younger brothers and sisters, how can you encourage them to share? Besides our possessions, what other things can we learn to share?



## *Little House on the Prairie*

Laura and her family are heading to Independence, Kansas to homestead on the Osage Diminished Reserve, Indian Territory.

*A long time ago, when all the grandfathers and grandmothers of today were little boys and little girls or very small babies, or perhaps not even born yet, Pa and Ma and Mary and Laura and Baby Carrie left their little house in the Big Woods of Wisconsin. They drove away and left it lonely and empty in the clearing among the big trees, and never saw that little house again.*

Find out when *Little House on the Prairie* was published. If the Ingalls moved to Kansas in 1869, how would the first sentence be written today?

Read Chapter 19 “Mr. Edwards Meets Santa Claus”

### **Activities:**

1. *Laura was anxious because Christmas was near, and Santa Claus and his reindeer could not travel without snow.*

Research some Santa traditions from around the world.

2. *“I’m going to hang up your stockings, girls,” she said. “Maybe something will happen.”*

Why do we hang stockings on Christmas?

3. *“Your little ones had to have a Christmas,” Mr. Edwards replied.*

Mr. Edwards risked his life so that the Ingalls children could have a happy Christmas. Discuss with your family ways that you can help another family have a happy Christmas.

4. *Something was shining bright in the top of Laura’s stocking. She squealed and jumped out of bed.*

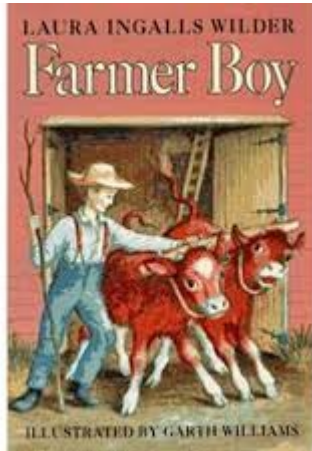
Make a list of the Christmas gifts the girls received this year. Compare it to the list you made before.

5. *It had been made of pure white flour and sweetened with white sugar.*

Having white flour and white sugar was a luxury for the pioneers. Using the same cake or cookie recipe, bake half using white flour and half using brown flour. Compare the results. Do they look different? Taste different? Which do you like best? Find out the differences between white and brown sugar. Are they interchangeable in a recipe? How is brown sugar made?

6. *Then Pa and Ma and Mr. Edwards sat by the fire and talked about Christmas times back in Tennessee and up north in the Big Woods.*

At your next family gathering, ask the adults in the family to tell some stories about their past Christmases.



## *Farmer Boy*

We leave the Ingalls family to spend some time with Almanzo Wilder, who Laura would one day marry. The Wilder's lived on a farm in northern New York State.

*They all settled down cozily by the big stove in the dining-room wall. The back of the stove was in the parlor, where nobody went except when company came. It was a fine stove; it warmed the dining-room and the parlor, its chimney warmed the bedrooms upstairs, and its whole top was an oven.*

Read Chapter 26 "Christmas."

### **Activities:**

*Almanzo tried to be good for so long that he could hardly stand the strain.*

1. Enjoy reading aloud the poem "Jest 'Fore Christmas" by Eugene Field

Father calls me William, sister calls me Will,  
Mother calls me Willie, but the fellers call me Bill!  
Mighty glad I ain't a girl - ruther be a boy,  
Without them sashes, curls, an' things that's worn by Fauntleroy!  
Love to chawnk green apples an' go swimmin' in the lake -  
Hate to take the castor-ile they give for bellyache!  
'Most all the time, the whole year round, there ain't no flies on me,  
But jest 'fore Christmas I'm as good as I kin be!

Got a yeller dog named Sport, sick him on the cat;  
First thing she knows she doesn't know where she is at!  
Got a clipper sled, an' when us kids goes out to slide,  
'Long comes the grocery cart, an' we all hook a ride!  
But sometimes when the grocery man is worrited an' cross,  
He reaches at us with his whip, an' larrups up his hoss,  
An' then I laff an' holler, "Oh, ye never teched me!"  
But jest 'fore Christmas I'm as good as I kin be!

Gran'ma says she hopes that when I git to be a man,  
I'll be a missionarer like her oldest brother, Dan,  
As was et up by the cannibuls that lives in Ceylon's Isle,  
Where every prospeck pleases, an' only man is vile!  
But gran'ma she has never been to see a Wild West show,

Nor read the Life of Daniel Boone, or else I guess she'd know  
That Buff'lo Bill an' cow-boys is good enough for me!  
Excep' jest 'fore Christmas, when I'm good as I kin be!

And then old Sport he hangs around, so solemn-like an' still,  
His eyes they seem a-sayin': "What's the matter, little Bill?"  
The old cat sneaks down off her perch an' wonders what's become  
Of them two enemies of hern that used to make things hum!  
But I am so perlite an' 'tend so earnestly to biz,  
That mother says to father: "How improved our Willie is!"  
But father, havin' been a boy hisself, suspicions me  
When, jest 'fore Christmas, I'm as good as I kin be!

For Christmas, with its lots an' lots of candies, cakes, an' toys,  
Was made, they say, for proper kids an' not for naughty boys;  
So wash yer face an' bresh yer hair, an' mind yer p's and q's,  
An' don't bust out yer pantaloons, and don't wear out yer shoes;  
Say "Yessum" to the ladies, an' "Yessur" to the men,  
An' when they's company, don't pass yer plate for pie again;  
But, thinkin' of the things yer'd like to see upon that tree,  
Jest 'fore Christmas be as good as yer kin be!

*2. That night everyone was tired, and the house was so clean and neat that nobody dared touch anything.*

Make a chore list to help prepare your family home for Christmas

*3. It was still dark when Almanzo woke up. He felt excited, and then he remembered that this was Christmas morning.*

Interview some friends and find out what their Christmas mornings are like.

*4. He saw his sock hanging all lumpy; he set down the candle and grabbed his sock. The first thing he pulled out was a cap, a boughten cap!*

Make a list of what the Wilder children received for Christmas. Compare it to the Ingalls' children's gifts. What does this tell you?

*5 "I bet you don't dast go in there and get on his back," said Frank."*

Have you ever been dared to do something? How did it turn out?

*6. "Don't be a tattle-tale. Now you behave yourselves or you'll wish you had."*

What is a tattle-tale? How does your family handle tattling? Discuss times that "tattling" on someone would be appropriate.



7. *He squeezed his hands together between his knees. He had to sit silent and wait, but he felt aching and hollow inside.*

Read the section about how children were treated at the table. How are things different today?

8. *How the snowballs flew! Almanzo ducked and dodged and yelled and threw snowballs as fast as he could.*

Enjoy an indoor “snowball” fight. Make paper snowballs by crumpling up sheets of paper, newspaper, or tissue paper. Divide the room with a piece of painter’s tape and place a pile of snowballs on each side. Set a timer for one minute. Each team throws their snowballs across the line, throwing back any that land on their side. When the timer goes off, count the snowballs on each side of the room. The side with fewer snowballs wins!

9. Continue reading the following Christmas chapters from the Little House books. Come up with your own activities as you read each chapter.

*On the Banks of Plum Creek:* Chapter 40 “The Fourth Day” and chapter 41 “Christmas Eve.”

*On the Shores of Silver Lake:* Chapter 19 “Christmas Eve,” chapter 20 “The Night Before Christmas,” and chapter 21 “Merry Christmas.”

*The Long Winter:* Chapter 18 “Merry Christmas,” chapter 32 “The Christmas Barrel,” and chapter 33 “Christmas in May.”

