



Little House in the Big Woods Sample 3-Hour Agenda

To see how this played out for us and get ALL the details,
view the FREE [LitWits Kit for this book](#).

Takeaway Topics:

Nature as Friend and Foe | Making the Most of Little | Preservation

15 minutes Introductions

Introduce the person next to you, and “meet the author” via audiovisual.
(Since the book is autobiographical, there’s a natural segue to the setting handout.)

15 minutes Setting handout

Takeaway Topic: Nature as Friend and Foe

This story is barely under way when we’re brought up against the reality of settlers’ lives: most had to kill to survive. Laura’s tone makes it clear that nature is not just to admire, but to use — she gives us matter-of-fact descriptions of the deer Pa has hung from the trees, the pig Ma turns into food for the winter, and the skins Pa takes to town for things they need.

15 minutes Narrative arc handout

Questions to ask about each point on the arc:

Exposition: Why doesn’t the author tell us the name of the town? (Because there wasn’t one!)

Conflict: Why don’t the Ingalls just order some preserved food online?

Rising Action: Why does Ma see a cow instead of a bear? Why does Pa see a bear instead of a stump? (Talk about expectations)

Climax: If dark cold scary dangerous winter was the conflict, how can that be resolved?

Resolution: Spring! The focus is off of MEAT and on what? Flowers, fun times, friends, frolicking, fertility!

Falling Action: It’s time to be thinking about meat again . . . but Pa just can’t pull the trigger. The story ends with COMPASSION and LOVE.

(The handout and book end with winter, a natural segue to the art project.)

30 minutes “Jack Frosting” folder art project

Takeaway Topic: Nature and Friend and Foe

This simple project lets us “do what Laura and Mary did,” and gives us a great opportunity to talk about frost and the conditions that create it. (Show clips of frost formation during the

project intro.) Do a slow-reveal – don't show the kids a sample or tell them what they're working on until the prep work is finished.

(This activity is about making the most of Nature's gifts, a natural segue to the vocabulary handout.)

15 minutes Vocabulary handout

Takeaway Topics = Preservation, Making the Most of Little

From food to memories to human life, this story is steeped in the concept of preservation. Ask the kids if they understand why the Ingalls must preserve fresh food, and what it is about salting, pickling, smoking, and canning that keeps food safe to eat without refrigeration.

(This handout is about preserved foods, a natural segue to BookBites.)

30 minutes BookBites snack

Takeaway Topics = Preservation, Making the Most of Little, Nature as Friend and Foe.

Tease the kids that they're getting headcheese, then give them maple sugar and/or vinegar pie, or sugar cookies if doing the math handout. Venison is another taste of all three themes—note that the story opens with two deer being slaughtered, and closes with three being spared. That ending presents a chance to talk about narrative license, and the plot point of falling action—leaving readers with a happy ending, never mind what we know must happen afterward, as another winter arrives.

15 minutes History handout

Takeaway Topic = Nature as Friend and Foe

Point to the props, and ask which ones are natural. Talk about the meaning of the phrase *natural resources*, and, as a class, list several from the story. Many, like logs and maple sugar, come from trees. Ask the kids if they noticed the frequent mention of stumps. Settlers like the Ingalls cut down what they needed to use or to clear land for crops, but by the late 1800s, loggers had cut down far more. As the Wisconsin Historical Society puts it, by 1905 the "amount of pine harvested from the Black River Valley alone [just southeast of the Ingalls' home] could have built a boardwalk nine feet wide and four inches thick around the entire world." Use our Pinterest board and Learning Links to learn about the animals of the Wisconsin forests and the nineteenth century logging industry, which greatly impacted other resources as well.

(This handout is about the lumber industry, a natural pun-segue to the "Chopped" activity.)

15 minutes "Big Woods Chopped" sensory activity

Takeaway Topic = Making the Most of Little

Ma does a great job making the most of little — she literally uses that pig from head to tail! She's also got a knack for making ordinary things quite special. What better way to get in her shoes than with a Big Woods "cooking" competition, making the most of strange (to us) ingredients? Get kids using their imaginations, working as a team, and looking for potential in the ordinary.

15 minutes Creative writing handout

Takeaway Topic: = Nature as Friend and Foe

Talk about tales as both entertainment and warning. The author lets us know, through events and tales, that Nature is to be feared. How did the “big woods” both provide and threaten? What did they have to fear in the forest?

15 minutes “Cloven Apples” sensory project

Takeaway Topic = Making the Most of Little, Preservation

Ask the kids what happy-homemaking need Ma might have been addressing with her clove-studded apple. If they need some help getting the picture, brainstorm together about what the inside of the “Little House” might have smelled like at the end of the week in the middle of winter. Have them think through the things that filled the Ingalls’ lives – the foods, habits and activities that created their daily rituals and environment, from the sausages and cheeses in the larder to the wood smoke, log walls, animal-care duties, Jack the (sometimes wet) dog, kerosene lamps and just-once-a-week baths. Kids will love coming up with reasons why the cabin might have been stinky. A sweet smelling “settlers’ air freshener” would have been pretty and efficient, just like Ma.

Filler/swap/add-on ideas

Math handout

“Grandma’s Jig” activity

Pinterest board exploration

Learning Links exploration