LESSON PLAN
From Little House to My House: Exploring History and Family Roles

Grades: K – 2
Lesson Plan Type: Standard Lesson
Estimated Time: Two 30- to 40-minute sessions
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Publisher: International Reading Association

PREVIEW

OVERVIEW
Read-aloud sessions with emergent readers encourage learning and are one of the best ways to ensure later reading success. Historical fiction helps students learn about the past and connect it to their own lives. This lesson for first- and second-grade students features two read-aloud sessions of a picture book adapted from Little House in the Big Woods by Laura Ingalls Wilder. A picture-walk preview invites students to make predictions about the characters and plot, and leads to a definition and discussion of historical fiction and memoir. Following the read-aloud, students hear some background information about the author, and compare these facts with situations and events in the story. In a second class session, discussion helps students compare the characters and events in the book with people and experiences in their own lives; students then create a T-chart to record their comparisons.

FEATURED RESOURCES

The Deer in the Wood by Laura Ingalls Wilder (HarperTrophy, 1995)

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE


Reading aloud to students motivates them to learn. It nurtures language development; teaches concepts about print; and helps develop comprehension, understanding of story structure, literacy, and real-world knowledge.

Following read-alouds with discussions helps students learn how to respond to literature and participate in literary discussions.

Memoirs or realistic fiction encourage students to make connections to their own lives; to make these connections they need to talk about the book.

STANDARDS
Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

**RESOURCES & PREPARATION**

**MATERIALS AND TECHNOLOGY**

- *The Deer in the Wood* by Laura Ingalls Wilder (HarperTrophy, 1995)

- Computer with Internet access and a projector

- Chart paper and markers

- Map of the United States

**PRINTOUTS**

- T-Chart

**WEBSITES**

- Laura Ingalls Wilder

- Frontier Girl Trail - Big Woods

**PREPARATION**

1. Obtain and familiarize yourself with *The Deer in the Wood* by Laura Ingalls Wilder. Practice reading the book aloud. Think about your own family stories that the book reminds you of; prepare to share some of these stories with your students.

2. Prepare for a discussion of the book using the following questions that you write on sticky notes and keep in the book pages to prompt you:

   [Note: The pages in *The Deer in the Wood* are not numbered. For the purposes of this lesson, the first few words from each page are used to indicate which page is referred to.]

   - (The page that begins, “Once upon a time…”) Why is the house made of logs? What is Laura doing in the picture? Why do you think she is doing it? Do any of you do a chore like this?

   - (The page that begins, “Laura lived in the little house…”) What is the family doing? Why do you think they are doing this for fun? Describe the inside of the house.
(The page that begins, “It was autumn...”) Look carefully at the picture. Why do you think Laura and Mary are working on a patchwork quilt? How do you keep warm when cold weather comes?

(The page that begins, “One night Pa said...”) Why are the pots and plates empty? What do you think the family will do with a deer? Where does your family get food to eat?

(The page that begins, “After supper Pa went...”) Why didn’t Pa play the fiddle that night? Who is sleeping with Laura? Does any one here share a bed with their brother or sister?

(The page that begins, “The next day...”) What is Pa doing? Why is he doing that? What do Laura and Mary want to know?

(The page that begins, “After supper Pa took Laura...”) Describe the feeling you get when you look at these pages. What are the objects hanging on the wall? What do you think they are used for? (Note: you may need to explain to students what a powder horn is and how it is used.)

(The page that begins, “Last night I went into the woods...”) What is Pa doing on these pages?

(The page that begins, “He looked so strong...”) Why couldn’t Pa shoot the deer?

(The page that begins, “Then I remembered that Ma...”) Pa had to get meat for the family. Look at his face on this page. Do you think he wants to shoot deer?

(The page that begins, “After a long while...”) Describe the scene on these pages. Think about the mother deer and her baby. Why do you think Pa is having a hard time getting meat?

(The page that begins, “I just sat there looking at them...”) Why is Pa going home?

(The page that begins, “Laura whispered in his ear...”) Why did Laura and Mary say what they did? How do you think that made Pa feel?

(The page that begins, “Soon Laura and Mary...”) Do you think Laura is lucky? Why or why not?

3. Use chart paper to prepare sample T-charts that compare the family in this story to your own family. Use several different characters. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pa</th>
<th>My Father</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hunts for meat</td>
<td>Shops at the supermarket for meat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chops wood</td>
<td>Works at Staples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plays the fiddle</td>
<td>Listens to the radio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tells stories</td>
<td>Watches TV and reads to me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laura</th>
<th>Me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carries wood</td>
<td>Set the table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dances with Mary</td>
<td>Play checkers with my brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shares a bed with Mary</td>
<td>Sleep by myself in my own room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sews a quilt</td>
<td>Play computer games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sits on Pa’s lap</td>
<td>Sit on my father’s lap</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Visit Laura Ingalls Wilder for background information on Wilder that you can share with your students (see Session 1, Step 4). Your students’ age should determine the level of detail you want to share; for younger
students you might pick only a couple of details, for older students, you might assemble a brief biography. You want students to understand the difference between Wilders' real life and the life depicted in this book to help them grasp the concepts of historical fiction and memoir.

5. Make a copy of the T-Chart for each student in the class.

INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

Students will

- Gain knowledge by learning about historical fiction, memoirs, pioneer life in the United States, Laura Ingalls Wilder, and family roles
- Demonstrate comprehension by answering questions about a text after listening to it
- Practice analysis by drawing connections between a text and their own experiences, by comparing and contrasting ways families are alike and different, and by categorizing information using a graphic organizer

SESSION 1

1. Use a picture-walk previewing strategy to introduce The Deer in the Wood. Show students the pictures, starting with the front cover. Ask them to talk about when and where they think the story takes place, using clues like the characters' clothing to help them answer. Ask them who is in the story and what they are doing. Write students' predictions on a piece of chart paper.

2. Ask students if they know what the term historical fiction means. Explain that it describes a certain type of story that takes place in the past. These stories may be based on the truth or have real people in them, but not everything that happens in the stories is true or happens in the order it did in real life. (You might choose to have several examples of historical fiction to share with students including the Little House books or Anne of Green Gables).

3. Ask if anyone keeps a diary or knows someone who does. Ask students if they know what a memoir is. Explain that memoirs are true stories written based on someone's memory. If they decide one day to turn their diaries into books for people to read, those books would be called memoirs, and people who read them would know that what happened in the book was true.

4. Tell the class that The Deer in the Wood is an example of historical fiction and takes place a long time ago. It is about a family who lives, works, and plays together. Ask them to listen to the story and think about what this family does and how it is the same and different from their families. Read the story without interruption for the first reading.

5. After you are done with the first read-aloud, return to the predictions students made earlier and talk about where they were correct and why. (If you choose, you can write students' comments about the predictions on the chart paper where you recorded the predictions). Talk to students about Laura Ingalls Wilder, explaining that this story is a fictional version of things that really happened and that it contains characters who really lived. Using the background information you identified (see Preparation, Step 4), tell students a little bit about Wilder's life. Use a map to show them where Pepin, Wisconsin is located. Use a computer and a projector to show the class the Frontier Girl Trail: Big Woods webpage. Explain that this is a model of the house in the book.

6. Reread the story aloud, pausing to ask the questions you have prepared (see Preparation, Step 2). Write
SESSION 2

1. Review *The Deer in the Wood* briefly by showing each page and talking about the characters.

2. Draw students' attentions to the responses to questions you recorded during Session 1. Talk about ways that Laura's family is the same or different as your family when you were growing up.

3. Talk about how families of long ago survived. Pa and Ma did not hold down regular jobs. Pa worked in the woods hunting for food and cutting trees for heat and their housing. Ma worked equally hard to prepare food and sew clothing. Ask students to point out ways that Mary and Laura helped out as well. Do they do things to help out at their houses? What kinds of things? Jot down students' responses on a sheet of chart paper that you display next to the responses from Session 1.


5. In the book, Pa told stories and played the fiddle to entertain the family. Ask students what their families do for fun. Write down students' responses.

6. Review the list of characteristics that students have shared from their own lives and explain that you have created a similar list, using it to compare your life with the characters in *The Deer in the Wood*. Share the T-chart you created with students (see Preparation, Step 3). Go over each of the characteristics you list, talking about the ways your life is different from and the ways it is the same as the characters in the book. Ask them to think of ways their lives are similar to Laura and Mary's and ways that their lives are different.

7. Distribute copies of the T-Chart to students. Ask them each to choose a character from the book they would like to write about and write that person's name at the top of the left-hand side of the T-chart. Tell students they should write three or four things about the character that they noticed from the book on the left-hand side of the chart. Draw their attention to the list you created during Session 1 and tell them they can use it to help them think of examples. Circulate while students are working to provide support and answer questions.

**Note:** You might choose to have emergent writers draw pictures of the people and activities or have them work in pairs or groups.

8. When students have finished, ask them to think about the person from their own family is most like the character they have described. They should write that person's name at the top of the right-hand side. Then for each characteristic that they have listed, they should write down what their family member does that is the same or different in the column underneath their family member's name. Draw their attention to the list you just created and tell them they can use it to help them think of examples. Circulate while students are working to provide support and answer questions.

9. When students have completed their T-charts, have them meet in pairs or small groups. Each student should share what he or she has written on the T-chart and then discuss it with his or her partner or group. Questions for discussion include: Did the student choose the right family member to compare to the character (for example, a brother compared to Mary)? Does he or she list things that happened in the story? Do the things listed about the character and the things listed about the family member compare (for example, does the student compare his or her chores with Laura's chores)?

10. Give students time to revise their charts based on the feedback from their partners or groups before they turn them in.
EXTENSIONS

- Ask students to turn their T-charts into Venn diagrams using the online Venn Diagram tool.

- Read other My First Little House Books aloud to students or place them in your classroom library for students to read. See Extension Lesson Ideas for a list of the other books in this series.

- Have a “Back to the 19th Century” day or week. Encourage students to dress up like Ma, Pa, Laura, and Mary. See Extension Lesson Ideas for specific activities you can use.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT/REFLECTIONS

- Informally observe students during class discussions to see if they are able to identify and describe roles of different family members in both the book and in their own families. Do students understand what was different about how families did things long ago? Do they grasp what is meant by the terms historical fiction and memoir?

- Check students’ T-Charts to determine if they can compare their family with Laura’s family. Did they select appropriate people to compare (e.g., Ma with their mother, Pa with their father, Laura with themselves, Mary with a sibling)? Do they list specific details from the story? Do they choose comparable activities (e.g., Laura’s chores with their chores, Pa’s job with their father’s job)?

- Observe during class discussions to see if students understand the text and share appropriately about their own experiences. Students can also write in journals or writing centers on these topics. Topics for writing assignments include:

  - Write about what you like to do with your family. How is it the same or different from what the family in A Deer in the Wood likes to do?

  - List the chores you have to do at home. Why are your chores different from Laura’s or Mary’s?

  - Write about why you think you are lucky to be in your family. Why did Laura and Mary feel lucky?

  - Draw a picture of the inside of a room in your house. Compare it to the pictures of the inside of the house in A Deer in the Wood. What are some of the differences? What are some of the similarities?

RELATED RESOURCES

LESSON PLANS

Grades 3 - 5 | Lesson Plan | Standard Lesson
Looking for the History in Historical Fiction: An Epidemic for Reading

This lesson pairs the reading of historical fiction with nonfiction to introduce students to the large themes of history.