

Biography

# Laura Ingalls Wilder



by Justine Fontes

# Read to Find Out

Why does this author want you to know about the life of Laura Ingalls Wilder?

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## STRATEGIES & SKILLS AT A GLANCE Comprehension

- Strategy: Summarize
- Skill: Evaluate Author's Purpose

## Vocabulary

- acceptance, excitement, proper, single, talented, useful

## CONTENT-AREA VOCABULARY

Words related to frontier life  
(see *glossary*)

## NATIONAL CONTENT STANDARDS

### Social Studies

- Individual Development and Identity

### Vocabulary Strategy

Context Clues: Word Clues

Word count: 685\*\*

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\*\*The total word count is based on words in the running text and headings only. Numerals and words in captions, labels, diagrams, charts, and sidebars are not included.

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# Introduction

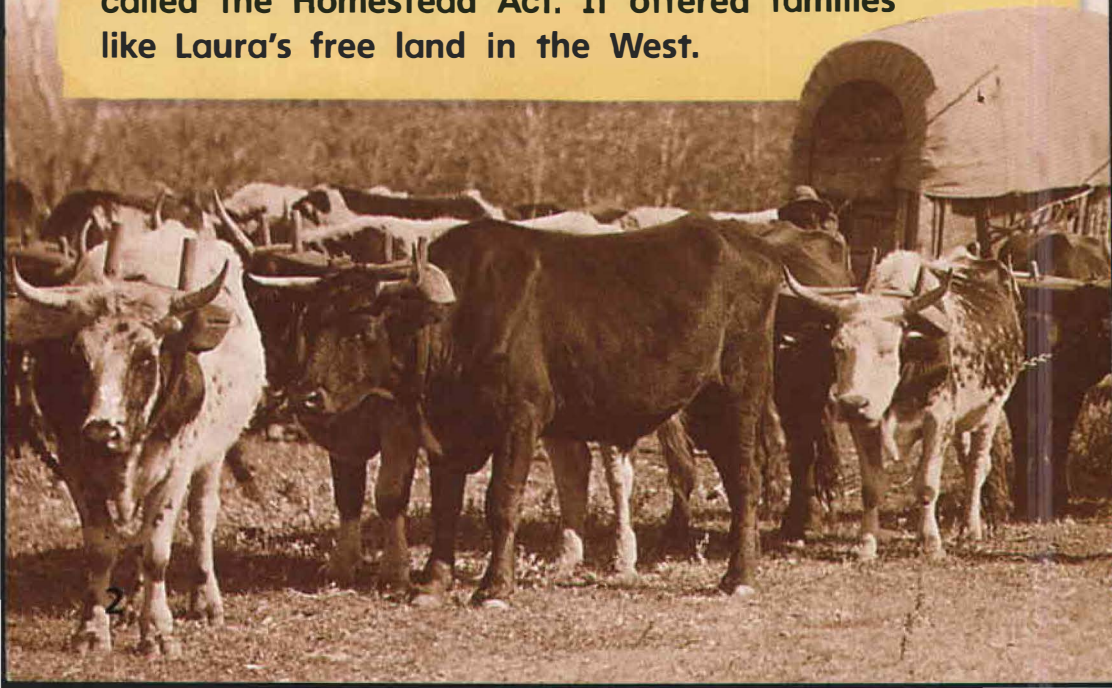
When Laura Ingalls Wilder was a child, she lived in a log **cabin** in the woods. Laura's family ate food they found, grew, or hunted.



Laura and her family were **pioneers**. They traveled west in a covered wagon to settle new land. Laura's dog ran beside the wagon.

## The Homestead Act

In 1862 President Abraham Lincoln signed a law called the Homestead Act. It offered families like Laura's free land in the West.



Years later Laura told her daughter Rose about her early life. Rose liked to hear her mother's stories. She thought other children would like them. So Laura began to write.

When Laura was ↻ born, there were only 37 states in the United States. This map shows some of the places where Laura lived.



↻ Many families traveled by covered wagon to start new lives in the West.



# The Trip West

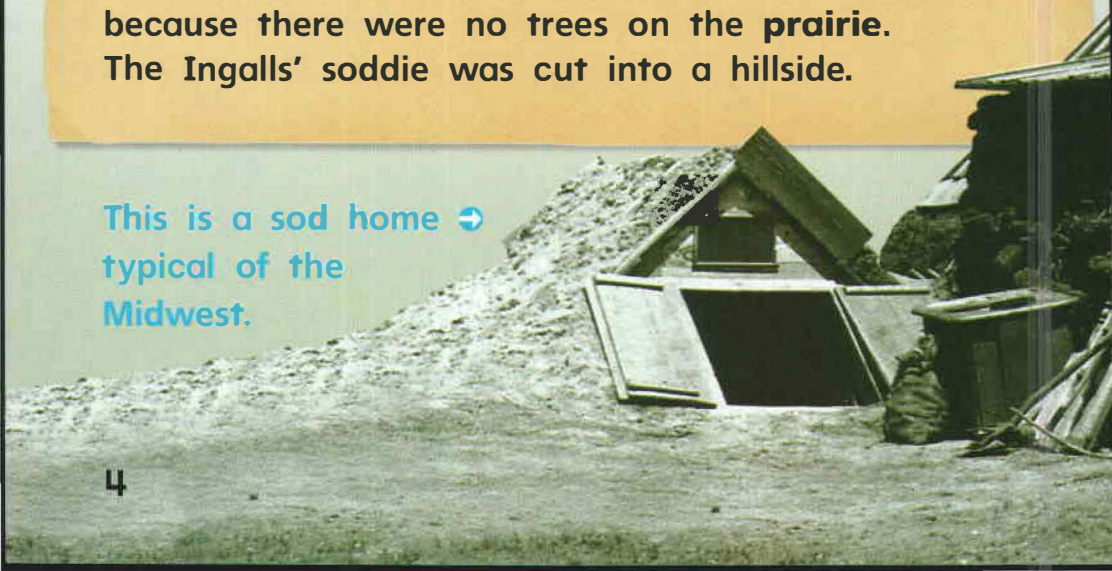
Laura was born in the Big Woods near Pepin, Wisconsin, in 1867. She lived with her parents and two sisters, Mary and Carrie. The girls called their parents Ma and Pa.

Laura was two years old when the Ingalls moved to Kansas. The trip took months. The family camped in a new place each night.

## A Soddie

The Ingalls lived in a soddie. A soddie is a small house made of blocks of dirt with grass growing in it. Many pioneer families built homes out of sod because there were no trees on the prairie. The Ingalls' soddie was cut into a hillside.

This is a sod home →  
typical of the  
Midwest.



Before she married Pa, Ma had been a teacher. She loved to read and write poems. Laura loved to listen to her Ma read aloud.

Both of Laura's parents were smart and talented. Pa loved to tell stories and play the **fiddle**. Laura would go to sleep to the sweet sound of Pa's fiddle.

Pa's fiddle can now be seen at the [Laura Ingalls Wilder Historic Home and Museum in Mansfield, Missouri.](#)





☺ Pioneer children played with dolls made out of corn husks.

Laura and her sisters Mary and Carrie played some of the games children still play today. They played catch and tag, and spent lots of time exploring nature. Their toys were handmade. Laura had a rag doll with buttons for eyes.



When Laura was seven, her family moved to Minnesota. The girls walked to a proper school, which was not too far away. Before then Ma had taught them at home.

At school Laura and her sisters learned to read and write. The Ingalls girls and other children all studied in a single room. It was a one-room schoolhouse.

🕒 This photograph shows a one-room schoolhouse. Many new towns did not have enough students for separate classrooms.



## Chapter 2

# Frontier Life

There were many chores to do on the farm. The girls brought water from the stream to the house. They fetched wood for the fire and helped Ma milk the cow. On Sundays they rested.

There was great excitement in the Ingalls' home on holidays. They sang, danced, and ate lots of good food.

👉 The whole family worked on the farm.





👉 Laura learned to use words to describe the sunset to Mary.

When Laura was not quite 13, Ma, Mary, Carrie, and the baby, Grace, caught scarlet fever. Mary was left blind. Pa said Laura must act as Mary's eyes. From then on, Laura described the world to Mary.

## **Scarlet Fever**

Scarlet fever causes a sore throat, a fever, and a rash. Today there are drugs to treat the disease. But in Laura's day, doctors could not cure it.

Laura studied hard. She wanted to earn money so Mary could go to a school for the blind. At 15, Laura became a teacher at a school far from home. Laura lived near school during the week. On weekends her friend Almanzo Wilder drove her home. Later he asked Laura to marry him. When she was 18, she did.

For two years ↻ before they married, Almanzo Wilder drove Laura home in his sleigh.



# Two Writers

Laura and Almanzo built their own little house on the prairie. In 1886 Laura gave birth to Rose. Later the family moved to Missouri.

Laura and Almanzo raised crops and animals. Laura also wrote articles for a magazine for farmers. She included useful tips about farming.

The years went by. Rose grew up. She became a writer, and went to live in San Francisco.



Laura and Almanzo's daughter Rose.

In 1915 Rose asked her mother to come for a visit. Laura's acceptance of her invitation pleased Rose. Laura left home and traveled west again, just as she had when she was a child. But so much had changed since her early days on the **frontier**. Laura did not want people to forget the way life used to be.

🕒 **Laura wrote wonderful letters to Almanzo from the 1915 San Francisco World's Fair.**



## **Rose Wilder**

Rose Wilder Lane became a newspaper reporter. She traveled all over. Rose met and wrote about many famous people. She also wrote books.

Rose urged Laura to write stories about life on the frontier. Laura did. Rose offered her mother's work to a publisher. It was accepted. Laura was 65 when *Little House in the Big Woods* was printed. People loved the book. So Laura wrote many more. She was glad to share the stories of her frontier childhood.

### **Laura Ingalls Wilder's Books**

Little House in the Big Woods

Farmer Boy

Little House on the Prairie

On the Banks of Plum Creek

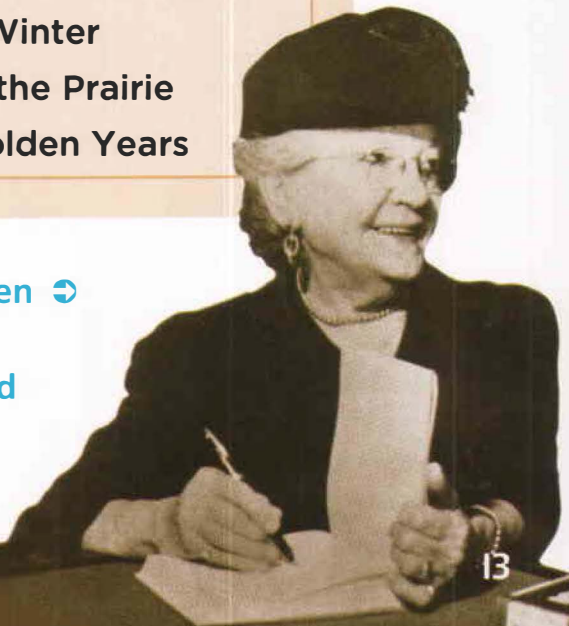
By the Shores of Silver Lake

The Long Winter

Little Town on the Prairie

These Happy Golden Years

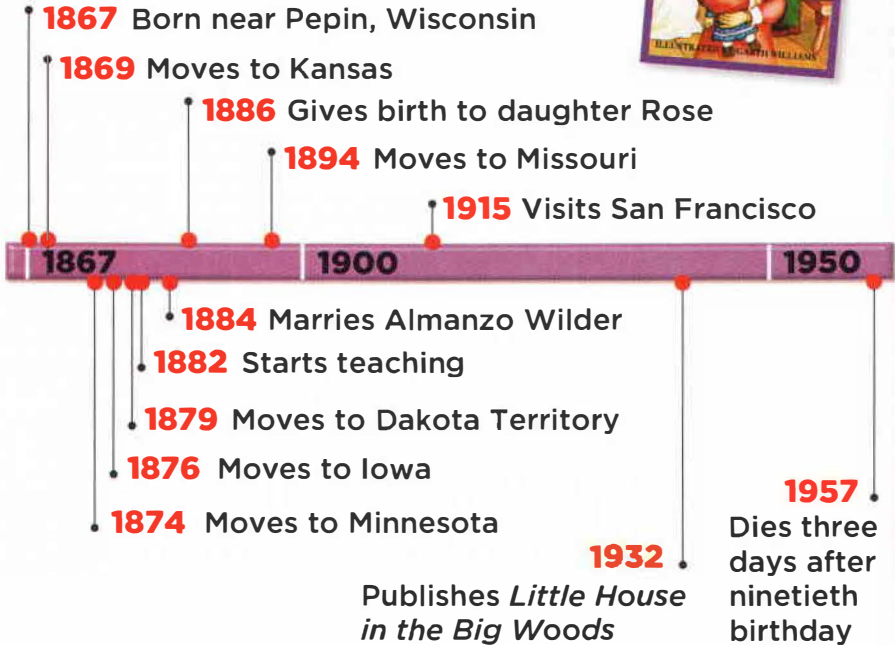
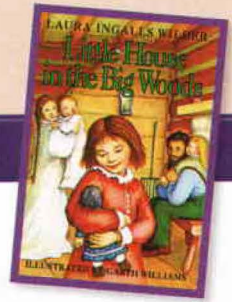
Laura was 85 when ↻  
this picture was  
taken. She enjoyed  
meeting her fans.



# Conclusion

Laura was 90 when she died. But she still had the heart of a child. She loved family, fun, animals, stories, snow, and the sound of a fiddle. Laura wrote about these things so people would love them too. Thanks to her books, we know what it was like to grow up on the frontier.

## Laura Ingalls Wilder





# Glossary

**cabin** (*KAB-in*) a small, simple house  
(page 2)

**fiddle** (*FID-uhl*) a violin (page 5)

**frontier** (*frun-TEER*) the far edge of  
a country where people are just  
beginning to settle (page 12)

**pioneer** (*pigh-uh-NEER*) a person who is  
among the first to explore and settle  
a region (page 2)

**prairie** (*PRAYR-ee*) large, flat region  
covered with grass (page 4)

**sod** (*SOD*) the top layer of soil that  
has grass growing in it (page 4)

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covered wagon, 2

Kansas, 4

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parents, 4–5

Rose, 3, 11

Wilder, Almanzo, 10

Wisconsin, 4

# Comprehension Check

## Summarize

Use an Author's Purpose Chart to tell why the author wrote about Laura Ingalls Wilder. Then use the chart to summarize the book.

Clues

↓

Author's Purpose

## Think and Compare

1. Look back at page 12. Why did Laura Ingalls Wilder decide to write books about her childhood?  
***(Evaluate Author's Purpose)***
2. Would you have liked to have grown up on the frontier?  
Why or why not? ***(Apply)***
3. Compare travel today with travel when Laura was young. How have things changed? ***(Evaluate)***

# Literacy Activities



## Write an Interview

Pretend you are interviewing Laura Ingalls Wilder. Write several questions that you would like to ask her about her life.



## Invent a Pioneer Game

Pioneer children did not have televisions, video games, or radios. They had to create their own games and songs. Pretend you are a pioneer. Invent a game that you would play with your friends. Include things from nature in your game, and remember that you can't use electricity.

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3.2 Week 5

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