

THEATRE
RESOURCE GUIDE

A Laura Ingalls Wilder Christmas

By Laurie Brooks

Directed by Carl Lindberg

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Danette Olsen, Executive Director

Jaelyn Johnson, Associate Artistic Director

Pam Koch, Patron Services

Peter Weber, Stage Manager/

Technical Director

Using this theatre resource guide

This theatre resource guide for *A Laura Ingalls Wilder Christmas* is designed to be used with students before and after attending the Festival Theatre production. The guide includes information and activities that will increase student understanding of this and other theatrical performances. You may reproduce any and all of the following pages to distribute to students or parents.

Who, What, Where and When?

Page 3

This page familiarizes students with background information on the pioneer prairie setting of 1876.

What Happens in *A Laura Ingalls Wilder Christmas*

Page 4

This synopsis of the play familiarizes students with the main characters and events of the play.

An Ingalls Christmas:

Staging the Story

Page 5

This page contains information about theatre in *A Laura Ingalls Wilder Christmas* and encourages students to engage in creative problem-solving in relation to staging the play.

From Life to Novel to Play

Page 6

The information on this page explains the relationship of the play to Laura Ingalls Wilder as the author of the autobiographical Little House Books.

Lines of Dialogue

Page 7

This activity page provides dialogue from the script and involves students in experimenting with different ways to speak or "deliver" character's lines.

The Part That YOU Play

Page 8

This page reminds students of their role as audience members, stressing the importance of listening carefully and responding appropriately. Post-performance discussion questions and resources are also included on page 8.

WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN ON THE PRAIRIE?



Use the dates and times to trace the places the Ingalls moved.

1867 Laura Ingalls is born near Pepin, Wisconsin.

1869 Ma, Pa, Mary and Laura move to Indian Territory near Independence in Montgomery County in Kansas Territory.

1871 Ingalls family returns to the Big Woods near Pepin, Wisconsin.

1874 Family moves to the banks of PlumCreek, near Walnut Grove, Minnesota.

1876 Ingalls family lives in Burr Oak, Iowa. This is not recorded in Laura's books.

1877 Pa, Ma, and girls return to Walnut Grove, Minnesota.

1879 Ingalls family moves to Dakota Territory near the town of De Smet.

1881 Mary Ingalls leaves De Smet to attend the Iowa College for the Blind in Vinton, Iowa .

1894 Laura, Almanzo and Rose leave De Smet for Mansfield, Missouri.

During the late 1800's, Laura

and her family were part of a great movement to the west. Pa, like many men of the time, wanted to take his family west to his own land. Stories of rich soil, abundant game, sparkling rivers and wide open prairies inspired a pioneer spirit. Although it was exciting to build a new life, it was also very difficult. Out on the prairie, blizzards, hail storms, and insects often destroyed entire crops. Diseases and the disputes with the American Indians were dangerous challenges for new pioneers and Indians alike, resulting in many deaths.

Characters

Charles Phillip Ingalls or Pa: *adventurous*
Caroline Lake Quiner Ingalls or Ma: *hard-working*
Mrs. Starr: *a lonely neighbor*
Samantha Steadman: *a mischievous 9 year old*

Mary Amelia Ingalls: *the eldest*
Laura Elizabeth Ingalls: *spunky*
Caroline Celestia Ingalls or
"Carrie": *the youngest*

WHAT HAPPENS



Times were hard for the Ingalls.

The wheat crop has been destroyed by grasshoppers. The family is left very poor and now has lost Baby Freddie to a terrible sickness. The Ingalls are forced to move again, this time into town to help manage the Masters Hotel in Burr Oak, Iowa.



Charles and Caroline Ingalls

Nothing is the same at the hotel. Pa is too busy to play his fiddle. Ma is too sad and tired to put out the special Christmas decorations. And Laura is told she must be nice to Samantha Steadman, "the worst girl in Iowa."

When wealthy Mrs. Starr asks for Laura as a companion to read to her in the afternoons, Laura is overjoyed to be invited into such a fine house, but when she hears Mrs. Starr offer to adopt Laura as her own daughter to ease the burden of so many children, Laura is certain Ma and Pa will give her up.



Carrie, Mary, and Laura

***As Christmas approaches,
Laura must make a decision.***

Will Laura choose what she believes is best for her family?

Will she find a way to stay with Ma, Pa, Mary and Carrie?



Laura Ingalls Wilder was a pioneer girl who grew up to be one of the most popular writers of this century. She gave young readers an idea of what American life was like in the late 1800s.

She was a talented woman who did well at anything she attempted. When she was 16, she became a school teacher and earned enough money to send her blind sister Mary to a special school. As a seamstress, Wilder sewed buttonholes so well and so fast that she was rewarded with a huge salary--one dollar a day!

Later on she became a journalist, and age 63, when most people think of retiring, she wrote "Little House in the Big Woods." With the help of her daughter, Rose Wilder Lane, it was published and soon became a great success.

Based on means the playwright used the original story as a starting point. Parts of the real history of Laura's time are included to make the story correct. In the play *A Laura Ingalls Wilder Christmas*, we find some of the same characters from the Little House books and many of the same details. Playwright Laurie Brooks took the two years that Laura Ingalls Wilder did not write about in her stories and used what she could find out from history to write this play.



Masters Hotel, Burr Oak, Iowa

FACT AND FICTION

- The Masters Hotel is a real place.
- The Ingalls family had a baby named Freddie that died.
- There was actually a boy, Tommy Steadman, who lived at the hotel.
- We don't know if Laura really read to a Mrs. Starr who lived next door.
- We don't know how Laura felt about Tommy, the boy, called Samantha in this production.

What parts of the play did playwright, Laurie Brooks have to use her imagination?

What parts of the play came from facts that the playwright researched?

If you have read any of the Little House series, watch for other changes in what you know of the story and characters compared to what you see when you attend the performance.



STAGING THE STORY

Theatre Conventions

When you attend a play, you agree to pretend. You agree to “suspend disbelief,” to pretend that the stage action and characters are real. To present a story on stage, actors and other theatre artists often rely on theatre customs. These customs, or conventions, are accepted ways of acting or doing something on stage. In *A Laura Ingalls Wilder Christmas*, watch for the following theatre conventions:



- Characters freeze in positions on stage. Even though you can still see them, “frozen” characters are not part of the action on stage.
- Split stage effect: Two sides of the stage are used for scenes that occur simultaneously in different locations.
- Even though other actors really *can* hear them, characters speak their inner thoughts aloud.
- Pantomime is used to show action using gestures and movements without the use of actual props or words.

Solving Stage Problems

To present a story on stage, actors and other theatre artists often have problems to solve. Here are some problems that had to be solved for *A Laura Ingalls Wilder Christmas*. How might you solve them? You may use lights, sound effects, music, actors, costumes, and props (objects) in your solutions. (Hint: You may want to use some of the theatre conventions listed above.)

Problem 2

How can you create a barn with horses on a bare stage?

Problem 1

How can you show all the play action with just a large wooden box?

Problem 3

How can you show action that happens in a character's imagination?

When you attend the play, watch for Festival Theatre's solutions to these stage problems.



LINES OF DIALOGUE

Playwrights are people who write plays. They write lines of dialogue for the actors to speak. The dialogue gives information about the story and the characters.

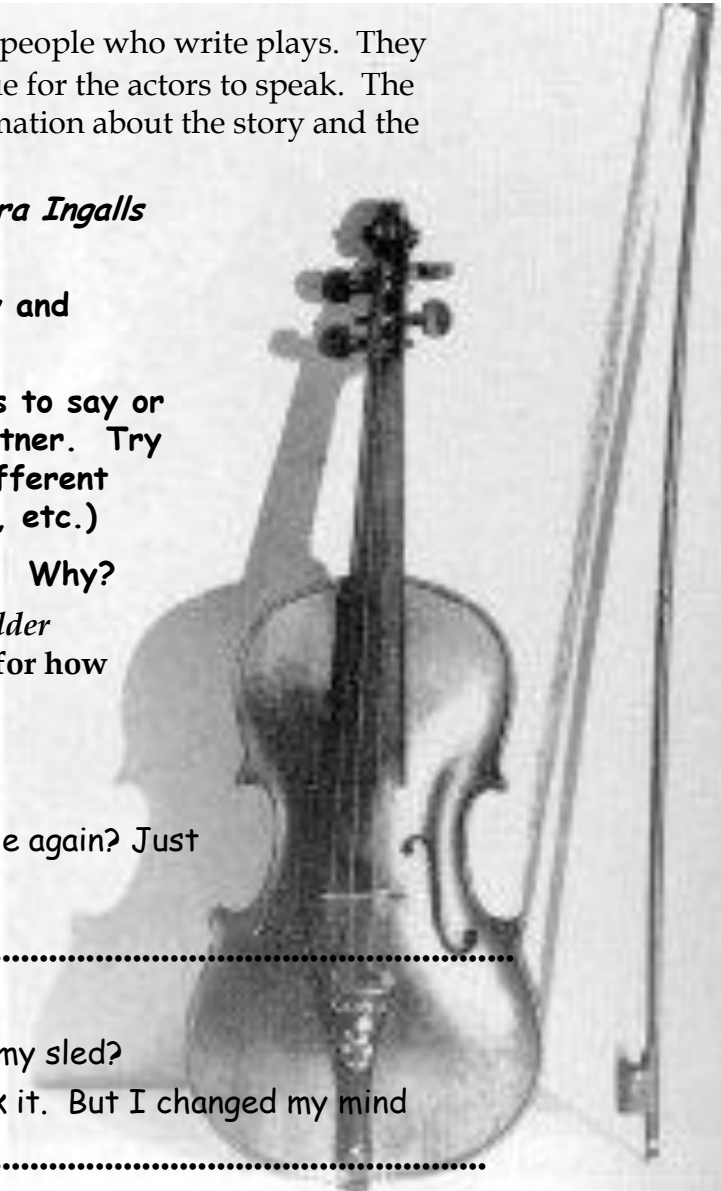
Read the lines of dialogue from *A Laura Ingalls Wilder Christmas* printed here.

What do they tell you about the story and characters?

Actors experiment with different ways to say or "deliver" their lines. Work with a partner. Try delivering these characters' lines in different ways (boldly, fearfully, proudly, sadly, etc.)

Which line deliveries do you like best? Why?

When you attend *A Laura Ingalls Wilder Christmas*, listen for these lines and for how the actors deliver them.



Group One

1 Laura: (to Pa) Will you play the fiddle again? Just one song.

Pa: Got chores to do, Half-Pint.

Group Two

2 Samantha: What are you doing with my sled?

Laura: You wouldn't share, so I took it. But I changed my mind so you can have it back.

Group Three

3 Ma: Would you care for coffee? I'm afraid we haven't any tea.

Mrs. Starr: Oh, coffee would be fine, Mrs. Ingalls.

Group Four

4 Laura: Shhh. I can't hear what they're saying.

Mary: Good. You're eavesdropping, Laura Ingalls, and that's a sin.

Group Five

5 Laura: Will you keep this for me, Ma? You can put it alongside the china shepherdess so you'll never forget me.

Ma: Forget you? I don't understand.

Character reminders:
Samantha is 9 years old; Mrs. Starr is a wealthy woman who lives next door.

THE PART THAT YOU PLAY



To prepare for presenting *A Laura Ingalls Wilder Christmas*, three adult actors and two complete “families” of child actors memorized their lines, practiced their movements and learned the show’s songs. They worked with director Carl Lindberg who helped them move about the stage and play their parts well. The costume and set designers planned with the director and created a look that was historically correct. The stage manager is ready to make sure everyone on stage and backstage does the right thing at the right time. All Festival Theatre needs now is

YOU.

YOU have a part to play in *A Laura Ingalls Wilder Christmas*. You are the audience. Your part requires you to listen carefully and watch closely.

It’s okay to laugh or applaud if you enjoy the play, but remember that you and the actors are in the same room. Talking or whispering to friends during the performance will distract the actors.

Help them play their parts well by playing YOUR part well.

Reacting to the Performance

After the performance, share your experience of *A Laura Ingalls Wilder Christmas* with your class, family and friends:

Who was the most memorable character and why?

What did you learn about pioneer life in 1876? In what ways was this time different than now? How was it the same?

What were the lessons or “themes” of the play?

How did the Ingalls family handle their hardships?

What was your favorite part of the play and why?

RESOURCES

To learn more about the Ingalls family and the Little House series, visit...

www.littlehousebooks.com

www.hoover.nara.gov/LIW/

www.lauraingallswilder.us

For information about Arts Education opportunities at Festival Theatre, visit www.festivaltheatre.org or call 888.887.6002