



This PDF is the “easy to print” version of our online LitWits Kit for Little House in the Big Woods.

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WELCOME

Whew, no more surfing the Internet and patching together a plan! This all-original kit includes everything you need to help your kids soak up this book in experiential, academic ways.

We love sharing all the fun we've had in our experiential workshops, but please don't let our abundance of ideas bog you down. Just take what you need, and change it to suit your goals. (Here's [the agenda we followed](#) when we taught this book as a workshop. For preparation tips and specific ways to use this kit, pop over to our [Tips page](#).)

Relax—you can't go wrong! It's all about inspiring kids to read for fun—and learn for life.

Happy teaching!



Becky & Jenny

Sisters, best friends, founders & partners

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PROP IDEAS

When choosing props, we always try to focus on two important categories: props that are unique to the setting, because they help kids understand “what that was like,” and props that are symbolic of themes, because they make big ideas visual and tangible. Both kinds of props generate those wide-eyed, “aha!” moments.

Below are the “straight from the story” props we used for our experience of this book. Some props are easier to find or create than others – don’t feel your collection has to be this complete! Choose props that you think will have the most appeal to your kids and relevance to your goals.



The lantern Laura carried - the climax of the story and Laura's illuminating role (in and out of her book)



The “bright and shiny” kerosene lamp (decorated with red) that lights up the Ingalls' cabin and represents Ma's desire to make things pretty



The cowbell - Pa's teaching story about paying attention and Sukey's role in the climactic scene



Hickory chips soaked in water - used in the smoker and representing Nature as support for settlement



China doll - representing Ma's love of beauty and tradition



Pa's fiddle - his gifts of entertaining and memories



Stump - the many stumps in this story represent settlement and mark the beginning of the end of the Big Woods



Apple studded with cloves - Ma's desire to keep up standards of beauty and freshness



Red mittens - Christmas gift representing the theme ``making the most of little``



Stalk of wheat - cultivation of Pa's crops representing settlement and self-sustenance

HANDS-ON FUN

Cloven Apples – project –



Ma and Aunt Eliza exchanged these spicy-sweet gifts at Christmas, and Grandma had one beside her in her kitchen while she stirred the giant kettle of syrup during the sugaring-off dance. Just as the spicy-sweet aroma of cloves and apples reminds the author of home, Christmas, and sugar-making, so will

students be reminded of their experience of this book.

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. A sweet smelling “settlers’ air freshener” would have been pretty *and* efficient, just like Ma.

When you ask the kids if they’d like to make one their own, they’ll go nuts! They’ll especially enjoy coming up with reasons why the cabin might have been stinky.

DIRECTIONS

So simple! Give an apple and a pile of cloves to each child. Before starting, ask the kids to take a good look at the cloves, noticing that they're shaped like little nails. Show them how to push the stem of the clove all the way into the apple skin, and point out how good it will smell while they're doing it. That's all they need to know. If tiny fingers are having a hard time poking cloves into hard apples, show the kids how to use toothpicks to make holes for the cloves.



Some of them will figure out on their own that it's fun to make patterns – we're pretty sure Ma would have made pretty designs with her cloves. Play some of Pa's [fiddle music](#) ([you can purchase the official collection](#)) and revel in this shared multi-sensory experience!

Big Woods Chopped

– activity –



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?

This fast-thinking activity got kids using their imaginations, working as a team, and seeing potential in the ordinary.

SUPPLIES

- metal pan lid
- two baskets and cloths to cover them
- two jars or snack bags of cloves
- two apples
- two snack bags of cracklins
- two jars of maple syrup (add an antique label if you like)
- recipe/illustration form, 1 per team + pencils

SYRUP LABEL

RECIPE FORM

SETTING UP

Tell the kids that Ma’s use of everything (and making the most of it) reminds you of the cooking show Chopped. Explain the show’s concept to the kids: chefs compete to make a fabulous dish from four weird ingredients in just a few minutes, and the dish

that the judges like least gets “chopped” (that chef is eliminated). Tell them they get to compete in Ma Ingalls’ version!

1. Divide the kids into two teams (or more — it’s fine to all share one basket, since there won’t be any actual cooking; for that matter, each child could participate individually. Whatever works for you!) Place a covered basket in front of each. Tell them that at your signal



they’ll whisk off the cover and huddle to brainstorm a dish (we told our kids they could huddle anywhere in the room). They’ll write down the recipe and draw a picture of the completed dish, as imagined. They can add up to five new ingredients, but they must “use” all four in the basket.

2. Ask each team to choose a book-appropriate name (Wild Wolves? Stinging Wasps? Big Bears?), a recipe writer, and an illustrator.

DIRECTIONS

1. Say “Chefs, open your baskets!” and watch the fun begin! You can play some of Pa’s [fiddle music](#) ([you can purchase the official collection](#)) to keep the mood festive.
2. After 20 minutes (or however much time you allow), countdown from 10 and say



“Hands up! Step back, chefs!” Then ask each team to present their recipe and show their illustration. Give lots of serious judge-like responses to each dish.

Pretend to confer with other judges (you can just turn your head and mumble “confer confer confer”), then turn back to the kids and say “We have reached a decision!”

3. Collect the recipes and put them under a pan lid. Say “Whose dish has been chopped?” and lift the lid, which reveals — nothing, because you have yanked all the recipes away as you lifted the lid, and hidden them behind your back. No one is chopped! It’s a tie! Everyone’s a winner! Pass out maple sugar, one bite of which is easily worth \$10,000.

While the kids are nibbling, show them [how maple sugar is made](#), and [how nutritious it is](#)!

Jack Frosting – project –

This simple project let us “do what Laura and Mary did,” and gave us a great opportunity to talk about frost and the conditions that create it. We chose to do a slow-reveal, and not to show the kids a sample or tell them what they were working on until the prep work was finished. They were completely intrigued, and delighted when they realized what we were actually doing.



SUPPLIES

- white half-sheets of cardstock for window
- assorted very dark crayons for sky
- [white tempera paint](#) and brushes, jars of water for frost
- toothpicks and/or skewers, paper clips for designs
- light brown cardstock for cabin walls
- black and/or brown markers for logs, knotholes
- glue sticks for paper and wet glue for fabric
- folders (if you’re using them for storing handouts, as we do)
- dark brown cardstock cut into 1/2 x 8 1/2 strips (2 per) and 1/2 x 5 strips (2 per) for window frames
- dark brown cardstock cut into 1/4 x 8 1/2 strips (2 per) and 1/4 x 5 strips (2 per) for mullions
- calico cut into 8 1/2 x 5 1/2 sections and torn up the middle almost to the top for curtains (yes kids, they do look like pants)
- raffia in 6” strands for curtain tiebacks
- colored paper for title tags, about 1 x 5

DIRECTIONS

PHASE 1

1. Have the kids cover a piece of card stock edge to edge with solid crayon in deep sky colors. Don't tell them why — just ask them to imagine sunrise or night time outside their bedroom window.



2. Tell them to obliterate their art with a thin layer of white paint — again, don't explain why. Let the paint dry while you do another activity or a handout.
3. Once they're thoroughly distracted from this project, nonchalantly work in a conversation about frost, and its appearance in the book after "Jack Frost" visited. Talk about how it forms, what conditions are necessary for its formation, share some frost stories. Show them some frosty pictures from our [Pinterest collection](#) and be awed, all together, by

the unexpected beauty of these intricate patterns. Ask the kids what familiar items from nature Jack Frost seems to be copying – we saw feathers, palm branches, tiny brachia of algae, fern leaves, root systems, and fish



skeletons! Then tell them you hope they're feeling inspired because they get to be Jack Frosts themselves on their very own windowpanes ... which they've just created! (An excited gasp will fill the room).

PHASE 2 (after the paint is dry)

1. Have the kids get their now-dry “windows.”
Demonstrate scraping off thin lines of paint with a toothpick to reveal the dark blues and purples beneath. Show them how they can imitate the frost patterns you’ve been admiring, or do something fanciful of their own design, perhaps imagining the kind of pictures Laura and Mary might have drawn.
2. Once the etching is done, have them glue a piece of brown cardstock to a folder (if you’re using folders), glue the window in the middle of it, and use markers to draw logs and knotholes on the cabin wall.
3. Frame the “frosted window” with brown strips of paper to resemble window panes and trim. Tell the kids their window scene will include something to represent every member of the family (except Jack). The girls helped etch the window, but of course Pa built the log cabin wall and the window frame.
4. What’s missing? Ma’s curtains! Complete the scene by gluing curtains to the top of the window frame. Tie them back with raffia (representing the wheat harvest).
5. Add the book’s title at the top or bottom, wherever it best fits.



Grandma's Jig – activity –

It's hard to read this book without wanting to dance a jig, even before you hear the happy sound of fiddle music. The scene where Grandma and Uncle George face off and try to out-jig the other is priceless. Chin up, hands on hips, eyes sparkling, she did him in.

GO GRANDMA!



We told our kids we were pretty sure they couldn't jig like her, and they happily took us on. So we put on some extra fun fiddle music and let them wear themselves out — it didn't take long!

BOOKBITES

Farm Freshness

BookBites is the part of our literary experience when we get to “taste the story.” We choose a food right out of the book, and it has to meet at least one criterion:

- it’s important to a plot point
- it has thematic significance
- it’s unfamiliar for reasons of culture, era, or location

Though there were many, shall we say *interesting* foods in this story, vinegar pie hit on all three points. It’s definitely unfamiliar to most of us, and it’s important to the conflict in the plot (how will the Ingalls survive the winter? By eating things that don’t tend to rot!). It also exemplifies the themes of “preservation” and “making the most of little.”



Vinegar pie was made from inexpensive ingredients anyone might have on hand, and it tastes a lot better than you’d think — sort of like a bland custard. Our fearless kids were relieved — they’re used to us offering them interesting foods, but this one had sounded ickier than most.

You’re not likely to find vinegar pie in your local bakery, so [here’s the recipe, along with a little Laura love.](#)



We also offered a taste of [venison sausage](#), because it too was connected to the core conflict and those same two themes, as well as the theme of [“nature as friend and foe.”](#) The kids found it quite tasty, though some said they’d rather be friends with living deer — and indeed, though the story opens with two deer being slaughtered, it closes with three being spared.

That fact gave us 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.

TAKEAWAYS

Little House in the Big Woods is chock-full of wonderful topics to explore, from the [botany of the Wisconsin woods](#) to the [history of fiddle music](#) to [animal tracking](#) and more. You could easily spend a month or more flushing out all the learning opportunities this book introduces. But such abundance can also sound pretty overwhelming! We've narrowed the focus to three bite-sized (but rich) areas, and based most of our activities and prop choices around these "takeaway topics."



Nature as Friend and Foe

Hands-on connections in this kit: “Cloven Apples” project, “Jack Frosting” project, BookBites snack, natural resource props like the stump, wood chips, cowbell; lantern as

illuminating a foe vs. a friend in the dark; history and creative writing handouts

Things to talk about: 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. But she also lets us know, through events and tales, that Nature is to be feared. What role does weather play in their lives? How did the “big woods” both provide and threaten? What did they have to fear in the forest? Ask the kids why the Ingalls didn’t just drive to the local supermarket, or order their groceries and other needs online.

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 in the story. 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.



Making the Most of Little

Hands-on connections in this kit: “Cloven Apples” project; “Big Woods Chopped” activity; “Jack Frosting” project; BookBites snack; props that convey the joy in “just enough”: the peppermint sticks, mittens, fiddle, the kerosene lamp; vocabulary and math handouts

Things to talk about: The Ingalls family doesn’t seem to have much — and yet, as the story goes on, we see that they do. Yes, they have the riches of a loving family, but they also know how to stretch and embellish material things. Not just to increase volume or shelf life, either — sometimes just to increase attractiveness, which is especially important to Ma. Remember she “had been very fashionable, before she married Pa”!

Ask the kids for some examples from the story of ordinary things made special. What is it that makes something special, anyway? Why did Ma put red felt in the kerosene oil, and go to the trouble to color and mold the butter?

What turns a corncob into a doll, besides a handkerchief? What’s so fascinating about a frosted pane? How do the girls play with the pig’s bladder, and why do they look forward to Pa’s fiddle playing? Would *you* be excited about *just* getting mittens and peppermint sticks for Christmas?

Point out that *imagination* and *appreciation* can make almost anything wonderful. How else, after all, can one explain headcheese?



Preservation

Hands-on connections in this kit: “Cloven Apples” project; “Grandma’s Jig” activity; BookBites snack; props that convey the idea of making tangible and intangible things last: the peppermint sticks, fiddle, hickory chips, china doll; creative writing handout

Things to talk about: .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. Talk about Ma’s passion for preserving non-food items: her lovely delaine from her “fashionable” days, her china doll from her former life, and her standards of cleanliness and beauty no matter where she lived. What kind of preserving does Pa do by telling his stories and playing his songs?

Ask the kids why Laura remembered these kinds of details six decades later. What is it about those things that makes them memorable?

And what did *she* do to preserve those things forever — along with her life?

HANDOUTS

These are the LitWits® handouts included in this kit,
along with any necessary keys:

narrative arc

setting

history

creative writing

vocabulary

ACADEMIC HANDOUTS

Common Core State Standards Alignment:

CCSS GR 3 CCSS GR 4 CCSS GR 5 CCSS GR 6

LEARNING LINKS

Explore these links to supplement your reading experience, research points of interest, and prompt tangential learning opportunities.

About the Book & Author

[Brief bio – Wisconsin Historical Society](#)

[*Becoming Laura Ingalls Wilder: The Woman Behind the Legend* by John E. Miller – New York Times On the Web](#)

[Biography – Bio.com](#)

[Five Fun Facts” about Wilder – Bio.com](#)

[About Wilder’s memoir – The Guardian](#)

[Kid-friendly bio of Wilder – Historic Missourians](#)

[A modern look at the places Wilder lived in and wrote about – Legacy.com](#)

[Pepin County history and famous people – Pepin](#)

Story Supplements

[The Mississippi River \(including Lake Pepin\) – overview by the National Park Service](#)

[Old map of Wisconsin](#)

[Replica of the Wilder cabin in the big woods – Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum](#)

[Pepin, Wisconsin official site](#)

[Lake Pepin – NY Times](#)

[Pa’s book *The Wonders of the Animal World* \(actually *The Polar and Tropical Worlds* per LIW Frontier Girl\)](#)

[Wolves of Wisconsin – Wisconsin DNR](#)

[Bears of Wisconsin \(for kids\) – Wisconsin DNR](#)

[Cougars of Wisconsin – Wisconsin DNR](#)

[Minks of Wisconsin \(for kids\) – Wisconsin DNR](#)

[Muskrats of Wisconsin \(for kids\) – Wisconsin DNR](#)

[Foxes of Wisconsin \(for kids\) – Wisconsin DNR](#)

[Deer of Wisconsin \(for kids\) – Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources](#)

[River otters of Wisconsin \(for kids\) – Wisconsin DNR](#)

[Forest trees of Wisconsin – list and identification – Wisconsin DNR \(PDF\)](#)

[Lake sturgeon \(huge fish\) of Lake Pepin – Wisconsin DNR](#)

[Vintage calico – Niesz Vintage Calico Fabric](#)

Beyond the Book

[Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum](#)

[1877 maps of townships in Pepin County, WI – Historic Mapworks](#)

[“Where the Wilder Things Are” road trip – MPR News](#)

[“Beyond Little House” – LIW Legacy and Research](#)

[Laura’s books – LIW Frontier Girl](#)

[Pioneer Girl by Laura Ingalls Wilder, rejected when written – South Dakota Historical Society Press](#)

[Development of Wisconsin – Wisconsin Historical Society](#)

[Native American History of Wisconsin](#)

[Research about \(and photos of\) the people Wilder wrote about \(Google books\) – Daniel Peterson](#)

[About the real Charles Ingalls – Wikipedia](#)

[“American Forests” \(PDF\) – ForestHistory.org](#)

[Wisconsin logging history and the legend of Paul Bunyan – Paul Bunyan Camp](#)

[Explore Wisconsin museums and historic sites – Wisconsin Historical Society](#)

[The Great Lake Forest on the decline of wildlife in the Chippewa Valley, Wisconsin – Google books](#)

Audiovisual Collection

[*Little House in the Big Woods* on Pinterest](#)

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KIT AUTHORS



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Jenny Clendenen Walicek has a BA in English literature and an MFA in creative writing. She's been a K-6 teacher and K-12 tutor, and her essays, poetry, and scholarship have appeared in various journals. She has a son and a daughter, both English majors and excellent writers.

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