

A Time I Remember

Pat Lowe, Wasatch Range Writing Project

Summary:

Wilder wrote *The Long Winter* about the blizzards of 1880-1881 when her family moved from their claim into the town of De Smet, South Dakota. Students are encouraged to make comparisons with their own life in the 21st century.

Objectives:

- Students will become familiar with *The Long Winter* by Laura Ingalls Wilder.
- Students will identify themes in her writing which have a personal connection to their own life.
- Students will write in the format of their choice about an incident or situation they remember.

Context:

This lesson could be used during the study of narrative writing. It would be appropriate for middle elementary students, and could be used for different content areas such as the American westward expansion, or a health unit on self-reliance, or a discussion of the effects of isolation.

Materials:

- Copies of books (optional).
- Large sheets of poster paper for display in the classroom.
- Individual student notebooks/journals.
- “The Life and Legacy of Laura Ingalls Wilder” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1g14K8sz10o>
- “Little Houses” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bUXIY0T8CMU>

Time Span:

The material can be presented in multiple sessions of 45 minutes each, with periods of several days between for student reflection and writing.

Procedures:

1. Present background information about Laura Ingalls Wilder. As a mature woman she wrote an autobiography entitled *Pioneer Girl*. It was not appealing for publication as an adult book, but she later used stories from it for a children’s audience. The *Little House* series of books is a fictionalized account of her life, particularly on the prairies of the United States in the 19th century.
2. In reading groups, or as a read-aloud by the teacher, read the book, *The Long Winter*.
3. During the reading, ask students to make personal journal entries of memories sparked by the book.
4. Identify themes in the selections, and post them on chart paper.
5. Watch portions of the YouTube video, entitled: “The Life and Legacy of Laura Ingalls Wilder.” The story of the blizzards is told about 36:25 minutes into the video. The story of the wheat which saved the town from starvation is related beginning about 39:00. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1g14K8sz10o>

6. Allow students time to reflect and brainstorm ideas about which they want to write.
7. Discuss different types of writing forms.
8. Let students consider which format would fit the memory they want to capture.
9. Work through the writing process to help students complete a narrative memory. It need not be an essay, but could be a poem, monologue, rap, letter, or diary entry.
10. Have students reflect in their journals about why they selected a particular incident and format. How is theirs similar to or different from the Wilder experience or writing?
11. As a class, orally share responses.

Extensions:

- Students could write several memory pieces and publish them as a collection. The format might vary from one selection to another.
- Investigate the geographic location and history of De Smet, South Dakota.
- How did events affect Laura's family? How do we know? What activities do students see as being similar to their own lives?
- The blizzards closed railroad lines and prevented delivery of essential goods. Have students list the effect of shortages on the Ingalls family. They could write about similarities and differences they have experienced in their own lives.
- Have students write a persuasive or argumentative piece to convince others of the importance of schooling. How did the Ingalls family demonstrate their attitude about education?
- Wilder wrote about her experience living on the prairie in the 1800s. Compare and contrast her activities with student life in today's world.

Rationale:

Laura Ingalls Wilder grew up in a time very different from the 21st century life of current students. By exposure to her life and work, students can be encouraged to explore diverse ideas about the world in which they live, and effective ways in which to communicate personal thoughts, feelings, and ideas.

Resources:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1g14K8sz10o> *The Life & Legacy of Laura Ingalls Wilder*. Accessed 6/22/2020. Media.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bUXIY0T8CMU> A visit to various "little houses" related to Laura Ingalls Wilder, her travels and the time period in which she lived.

Wilder, Laura Ingalls. *The Long Winter*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Incorporated, 1940. Print.

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