

# Adventure on the Banks of Plum Creek: A 3-Day Journey

## Lesson Overview

This unit is designed for a 10-year-old student (Ann) to explore the world of Laura Ingalls Wilder's *On the Banks of Plum Creek*. Over three days, the student will transition from a reader to a geographer, a historian, and an artist, gaining a deeper understanding of pioneer life in the 1870s.

## Learning Objectives

- **Geography:** Identify the route of the Ingalls family and describe the physical characteristics of the Minnesota prairie.
- **Social Studies:** Analyze the challenges of pioneer survival and the unique structure of a dugout home.
- **Art:** Use descriptive imagery from the text to create a multi-media landscape representation.

## Success Criteria

- Ann can locate Walnut Grove, MN on a map and explain why the landscape looked different from the "Big Woods."
- Ann can list three pros and cons of living in a dugout.
- Ann can create an artwork that accurately reflects the "Tableland" and "Plum Creek" as described in the book.

---

## Day 1: Geography - The Great Migration to Minnesota

**Materials:** A map of the United States (print or digital), a blue highlighter or marker, a brown crayon, and a notebook.

### 1. The Hook (5 Minutes)

Ask Ann: "If you had to move 500 miles today, we'd pack a car or a plane. But Pa, Ma, Mary, and Laura did it in a wagon pulled by oxen! Today, we are going to track their path to see exactly where 'Plum Creek' actually is."

### 2. I Do: Mapping the Path (5 Minutes)

Show Ann a map of the US. Point out where they started (Pepin, Wisconsin) and where they went (Walnut Grove, Minnesota). Explain that they moved from a place with thick forests (The Big Woods) to a place with rolling hills and few trees (The Prairie).

### 3. We Do: Landscape Comparison (10 Minutes)

Discuss the term "**Tableland**." In the book, Laura describes the high, flat land above the creek.

*Activity:* Look at photos of the Minnesota prairie online or in a book. Ask Ann to identify the differences between a forest and a prairie. How would a lack of trees change how you build a house?

#### **4. You Do: Mapping the Journey (10 Minutes)**

Ann will mark Wisconsin and Minnesota on her map. She will draw a dotted line showing the wagon's path. Around the Minnesota mark, she will draw small tufts of grass to represent the prairie and a winding blue line for Plum Creek.

#### **5. Formative Assessment**

Ask: "Why was it called 'Plum Creek'?" (Answer: Because of the wild plum trees growing along the water, which were rare on the flat prairie.)

---

### **Day 2: Social Studies - Living Underground**

**Materials:** Pencil, paper, and a small container of dirt or a handful of grass (for sensory connection).

#### **1. The Hook (5 Minutes)**

Ask: "How would you feel if a cow walked on top of our roof while you were eating dinner?" Read the passage where the ox, Pete, falls through the roof of the dugout.

#### **2. I Do: The Why of the Dugout (5 Minutes)**

Explain that pioneers often lived in "dugouts" because lumber (wood) was expensive and scarce on the prairie. A dugout used the earth as walls, which kept it cool in the summer and warm in the winter. It was the ultimate "green" home!

#### **3. We Do: Pros and Cons (10 Minutes)**

Create a T-chart with Ann.

**Pros:** Free building materials, stays warm, hidden from wind.

**Cons:** Dirt falls from the ceiling, bugs/snakes might visit, very dark, damp during rain.

#### **4. You Do: The Floor Plan (10 Minutes)**

Ann will draw a "top-down" bird's-eye view of the dugout. She must include the door facing the creek, the window Ma cleaned so carefully, the stove, and the beds. Label the items Laura mentions in the first few chapters.

#### **5. Formative Assessment**

Ask: "If you were Ma, what is one thing you would miss most about a house made of wood?"

---

### **Day 3: Art - The Golden Prairie and the Deep Creek**

**Materials:** Heavy paper or cardstock, watercolors or crayons, real grass or twigs from outside, glue, and salt (for texture).

---

## 1. The Hook (5 Minutes)

Laura Ingalls Wilder was known for "word painting." Read the description of the "shimmering heat" and the "willow trees" by the water. Tell Ann: "Today, you aren't just drawing; you are building a piece of Laura's world."

## 2. I Do: Defining the Layers (5 Minutes)

Explain the concept of **Foreground, Middle ground, and Background**.

- Background: The big blue sky.
- Middle ground: The flat tableland with the dugout door.
- Foreground: The rushes and plums by the creek bank.

## 3. We Do: Sketching the Scene (5 Minutes)

Guide Ann in lightly sketching a horizontal line for the tableland and a curved line for the creek bank. Help her decide where the "footpath" to the water should go.

## 4. You Do: Mixed Media Creation (15 Minutes)

Ann will paint or color her scene.

**Creative Twist:** Glue real blades of grass to the "tableland" area. Sprinkle a little salt on the wet blue paint of the creek to make it look like it's sparkling in the sun. If she can find a small twig, she can glue it down as one of the willow trees Laura loved to climb.

## 5. Summative Assessment (The Gallery Walk)

Ann will present her artwork and explain three specific details she included based on the book (e.g., the door in the hill, the plum thicket, the sparkling water).

---

## Differentiation & Adaptations

- **For More Challenge:** On Day 2, have Ann research the "Grasshopper Plague" mentioned later in the book and write a short newspaper headline about how it affected the social studies/economy of the time.
- **For More Support:** On Day 1, use a pre-labeled map where Ann only has to color the states and the route.
- **Multi-Sensory Option:** For Day 2, bake "Journey Cakes" or simple cornbread to eat while discussing the dugout.