

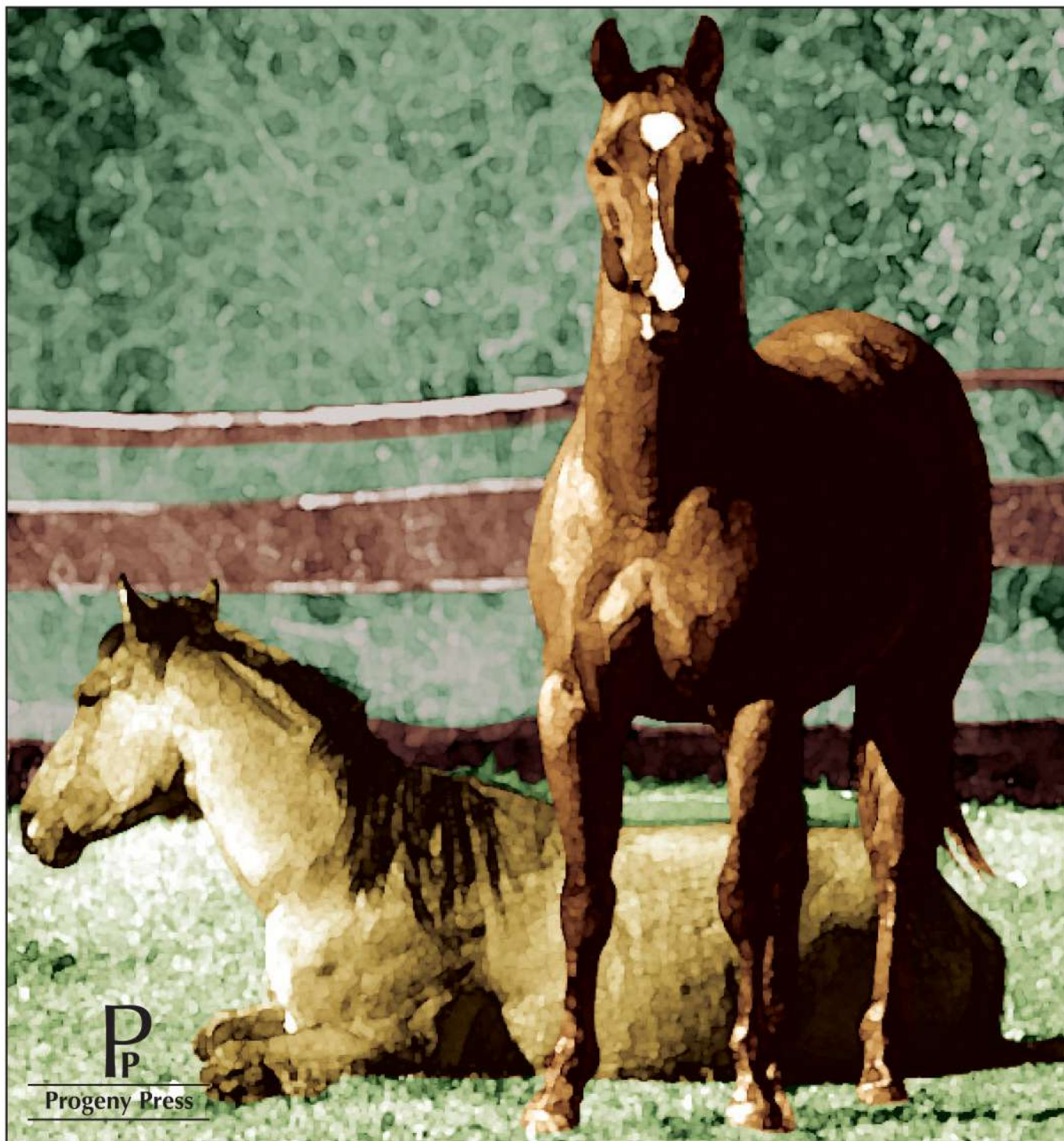
Farmer Boy

Study Guide

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For the novel by
Laura Ingalls Wilder



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Synopsis

Almanzo Wilder, almost nine years old, is the youngest of the four Wilder children. He's a farmer boy, living and working on his family's large farm in northern New York state. He attends a one-room schoolhouse when school is in session, but when there is work to be done—and there almost always is on the Wilder farm—Almanzo does his part to help his family make a living.

Each season has its own special chores on the farm. In the winter the Wilder family hauls wood and cuts ice from the river. Spring is the time for planting and tending to the crops. Summer is time for picking berries, but it also means time for fishing or a trip to town on Independence Day. Harvest time brings lots of hard work, but it also means a trip to the County Fair. And then it's time to prepare for Winter all over again.

Almanzo is old enough to feed and milk the cows and to help with the planting and harvesting. He even has a pair of young oxen he teaches to obey his commands. But he isn't yet old enough to care for the young horses. Although the temptation to handle them is great, Almanzo obeys his father and leaves the young horses alone.

Throughout the year the Wilder family works hard, and Almanzo seems to eat as much as he works. As the older children leave for school and begin to think about their futures, Almanzo knows what kind of future he wants. He wants to be a farmer for the rest of his life, and he dreams of the day he will have a colt of his own to train.

Projects & Activities

1. Find a recipe and try to make some home-made ice cream. Your family may have an ice cream maker that you can use along with the recipe. How is the process you follow similar to the process the Wilder children followed to make ice cream?
2. Share a large cold watermelon. Save some of the seeds and plant them outdoors in the spring. See if you can grow your own watermelon.
3. *Art Project:* Buy a candle-making kit or get a book from the library about candle making. Buy some wicking and paraffin, and any other supplies needed for making candles (such as scent, coloring, molds). A crayon melted in the wax colors it nicely. *Be sure to use an old pan in which to melt the paraffin.* This project should only be done with adult supervision.

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6. Royal plans to become a storekeeper. Almanzo thinks he would rather break colts and drive his own horses himself than let a coachman in the city drive him around.

7. Almanzo and Father make a bobsled so that Almanzo can hitch Star and Bright to it and help haul wood.

Dig Deeper:

8. Synonyms will vary. Some examples: cheerful, serene, snug, comfortable, acceptable, peaceful, happy, at ease, easygoing.

9. These verses encourage us to find satisfaction in our work, because working is our lot in life. Verse 19 tells us that finding satisfaction in work is a gift from God. Father and Almanzo seem to find satisfaction in their work. Father says that if they didn't have work to do, they'd just sit around twiddling their thumbs. Almanzo heads off to do chores whistling. He tells the cows, sheep, pigs, and horses that they can depend on him to take care of them. Answers will vary.

"Christmas" through "Farmer Boy"

Vocabulary:

1. shook; 2. necktie; 3. rolled; 4. made into a 4' x 4' x 8' stack; 5. a machine that winds cable; 6. flexible bands; 7. miserly; 8. person who makes wheels

Questions:

1. While all the children are enjoying their gifts, suddenly they hear Father's voice call out, "Look at the clock." It is half past three.

2. One log slips and lands on Almanzo. It pins Almanzo down in the snow. When he gets up "his head hurt and his stomach hurt and his right foot hurt dreadfully." Answers will vary. He might have wanted to prove that he could do the job, and he didn't want injury to slow him down.

3. "See-sawing" a sled is what happens when it gets stuck. Successive back and forth pulling by each oxen does nothing to move it. Should this happen, the oxen will quit trying after awhile when nothing happens.

4. Almanzo finds a wallet with \$1,500 in it. Almanzo and his father deduce that the money belongs to Mr. Thompson, and they decide to return it to him.

5. Almanzo finds Mr. Thompson at Mr. Paddock's wagon-shop. Mr. Thompson expresses a sigh of relief that "this darn boy" didn't steal any of his money. He gives Almanzo a nickel. Almanzo is so angry that he returns the nickel, saying he can't make change for Mr. Thompson (implying that Mr. Thompson was expecting change back from the nickel). Mr. Paddock comes to Almanzo's defense, bullying Mr. Thompson into rewarding Almanzo with \$200.

6. An apprentice is someone who agrees to work for an employer for an extended period of time. Usually an apprentice is provided with a room and meals, and in return learns a valuable trade. Almanzo is offered an opportunity to be apprenticed to Mr. Paddock and learn to become a wheelwright.

7. Mother says that being a storekeeper means having to live in town and always answering to every whim of the customer. "He'll never be able to call his soul his own."

8. Almanzo's father gives him Starlight to train. He is allowed to break the colt, and drive him, and either keep or sell him when the colt is older.

Thinking About the Story:

9. Cousin Frank tries to climb into Starlight's stall. Almanzo tries to hold him back, but Frank kicks back. Starlight begins to jump and run around the stall. Almanzo succeeds in pulling Frank away from the stall, but Frank is angry and ready to fight. Before they start fighting, Royal appears and reprimands them both. Answers will vary. Almanzo might have avoided the whole situation by not showing Frank the colt, but Almanzo did try to stop Frank from scaring Starlight.

10. Almanzo grabs Frank and the two of them begin fighting in the snow. Almanzo pushes Frank's face deep into the snow until Frank yells that he's had enough. Almanzo fights with Frank because he is still upset about being reprimanded when he tried to stop Frank from scaring the colts.

11. These verses tell us to not seek revenge, but to leave justice up to God. Instead we should treat our enemies with kindness and overcome evil with good. Answers will vary. No. According to these verses, Almanzo should have not sought to get back at Frank for the incident with the colts.

12. Father says that if you are a farmer you can work as you please with no one to tell you what to do. You can be free and independent. The drawbacks are that you can depend only on yourself, the land, and the weather. You must raise what you eat and you must raise what you wear. You use your own timber to keep warm. It is hard work.