## The Long Winter

The sixth book in the series, The Long Winter (working title: The Hard Winter) tells of the Ingalls family and De Smet surviving one of the hardest, longest winters recorded—the winter of 1880–1881. Great areas throughout the midwest lay frozen under relentless blizzards throughout a six-month period of time. Homesteaders and citizens of new towns like De Smet lived without support from the outside world, and some did not survive. However, the Ingalls family and the citizens of De Smet did, and they went on to prosper.

No novel in the series shows quite so clearly the diligence and survival instincts of the Ingalls family. They utilize every resource possible in surviving the harsh winter. Nearly frozen and starved, they come through intact, typically looking for and finding their blessings. The novel closes with a celebration of their victory over the winter and their hopes for future times.

This novel also shows the character of Almanzo Wilder in depth. Only briefly mentioned in By the Shores of Silver Lake, the one-time farmer boy is one of this novel's heros. He and his friend Cap Garland save the entire town from starvation by an act of bravery that brings 60 bushels of wheat to the hungry people. Almanzo, like Charles Ingalls, is willing to do whatever needs to be done in order to survive and prosper. It is no wonder that one day he and Laura find their way together.

Below and on the pages that follow, you will find individual chapter topics and activities. See page 14 for further explanation.

#### Chapter Discussions and Activities

#### Chapter 1: Make Hay While the Sun Shines

- 1. What is a mowing machine? How does it work?
- 2. Why does Pa cover the jug with grass?
- 3. Research garter snakes. If possible, study a live one.
- 4. What are the family's objections to Laura working in the fields? What do you think of their ideas?
- 5. What is a windrow? What is a haycock? What is a whiffletnee?
- 6. Make ginger water. (See page 82.)
- 7. Research muskrats. Find a diagram of a muskrat home.
- 8. Pa names one major difference between animals and people. What others can you name?

#### Chapter 2: An Errand to Town

- 1. What is a false front? Find an illustration or photograph of one. Why were they made?
- In a book entitled Laura Ingalls Wilder Country (see bibliography, page 111) you can find a map of De Smet circa 1883. Share it with the class, enlarging it to hang on the wall while you read the story. Point out pertinent areas on the map as you read.

Alternative: Construct a map of the town based on Laura's descriptions. This would be a good small-group project.

- The replacement part for Pa's mowing machine costs five cents. Do some research to find out what else five cents would buy in 1880. Compare that to what five cents might buy today.
- 4. Carrie feels safe with Laura. With whom do you feel safe?
- 5. What does Laura mean when she writes that Carrie is old enough "to be really a sister"?
- Fabricate tall grasses to demonstrate how Laura and Carrie feel wandering through them, unable to see where they are going.

# **Long Winter**

**Newton G. Thomas** 

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