

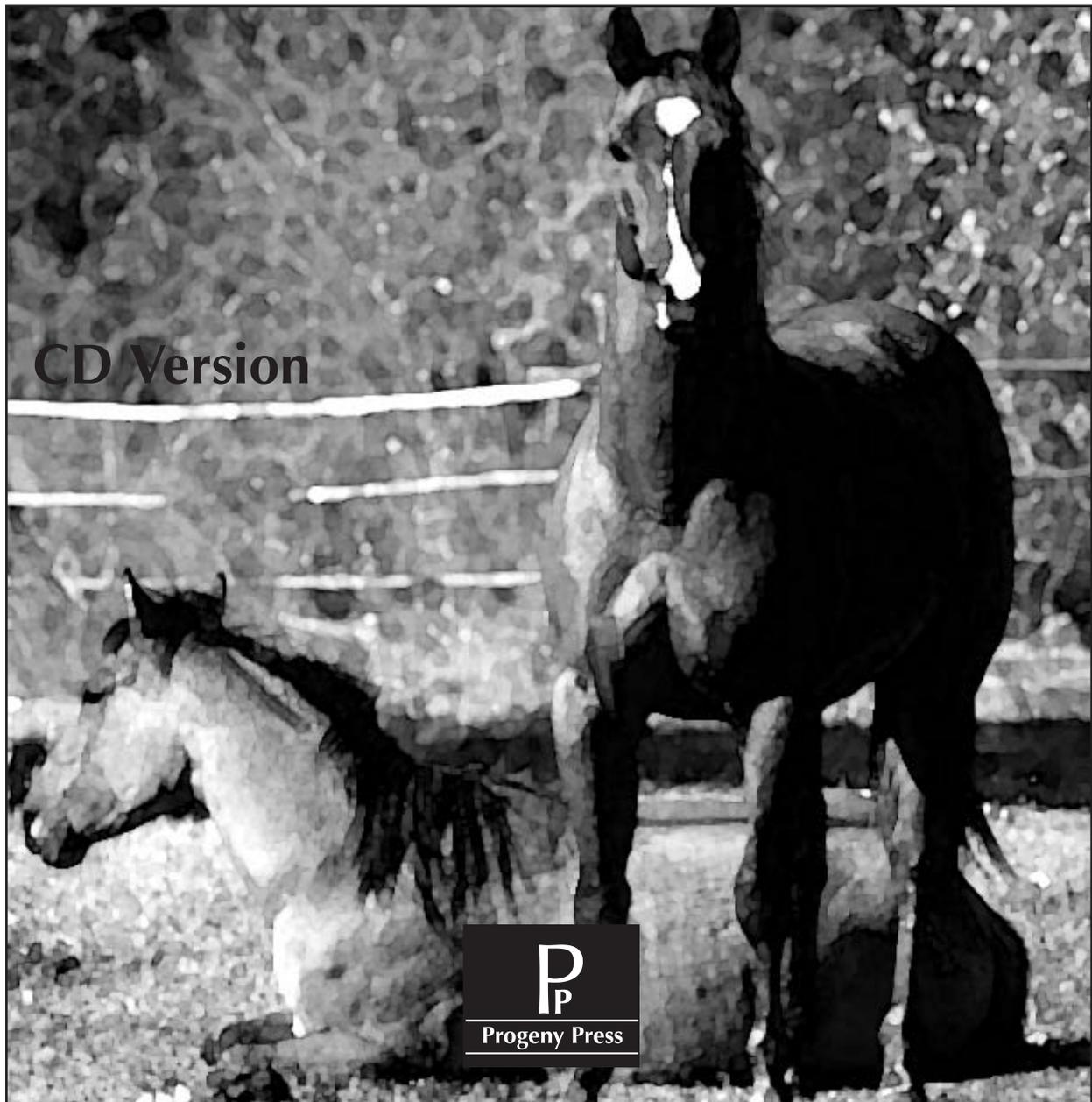
Farmer Boy

Study Guide

by Rebecca Gilleland



For the novel by
Laura Ingalls Wilder



CD Version



Progeny Press

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Farmer Boy Study Guide
A Progeny Press Study Guide
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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.

“Keeping House” through “County Fair”

Vocabulary:

A word is *in context* if we read it in the sentence in which it was written. It is *out of context* when it is by itself. The following underlined words are shown in the context of the sentence from the book where they appear. Read the sentence and try to define the underlined word. Then look up the dictionary definition and compare.

1. The air shimmered and wavered with heat, and little insects made a shrill sound.

Your definition:

Dictionary definition:

2. “Goodness! don’t dawdle so!”

Your definition:

Dictionary definition:

3. Alice whispered to him: “Don’t feel bad. Maybe they won’t care.” But she looked anxious too.

Your definition:

Dictionary definition:

4. “I guess I was aggravating,” she said. “But I didn’t mean to be.”

Your definition:

Dictionary definition:

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5. They walked side by side, swinging their scythes into the tall grass, and the plumed timothy fell in great swathes.

plumed

Your definition:

Dictionary definition:

swathes

Your definition:

Dictionary definition:

6. Almanzo's face was blistered and his eye was swelled shut. But Mother put a poultice on it at noon, and another at night, and the next day it did not hurt so much.

Your definition:

Dictionary definition:

7. They looked at Merino sheep, like Father's with their wrinkled skins and short, fine wool, and they looked at the larger Cotswold sheep, whose wool is longer, but coarse.

Your definition:

Dictionary definition:

8. They watched the trotting-horses flashing by, warming up for the races. Little puffs of dust rose in the sunshine behind the fast sulkies.

Your definition:

Dictionary definition:

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9. “You get a run for your money,” he said. “But I would rather get something more substantial for mine.”

Your definition:

Dictionary definition:

Questions:

1. Where do Almanzo’s parents go on vacation? How long will they be gone?
What rules does Mother give as they pull away?
2. What does Almanzo do while his parents are away that Father specifically told him *not* to do?
3. What happens to Almanzo’s pig?
4. The day before their parents arrive home, what do all the children suddenly realize? What do they do?

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5. Why does Almanzo lose his temper with Eliza Jane? What happens in the parlor?

6. Using a dictionary, define the word *consequences*. Is Almanzo afraid of the consequences? Why or why not?

7. The days after his parents come home are difficult for Almanzo. He is sure they will discover the stain on the parlor wall. What *does* happen? What does he discover about Eliza Jane?

8. During harvest, what do the men put in their hats to keep cool? (Try it sometime. Does it work?) What does Mother send to the fields for the workers?

9. What accident happens to Almanzo during potato picking? What does his mother do for it later?

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10. How would you be cared for today if such an accident happened to you? Would you continue working in the fields all day? Explain.

11. Father gives Almanzo advice about betting at the fair. Finish the statement Father makes. He tells Almanzo, "Never bet your money _____
_____."

Explain what Father means by this statement.

12. Father says a mule is a half-breed horse. What does he mean? What do livestock breeders combine to get a mule?

Thinking About the Story:

13. Almanzo's mother and father go only ten miles away on their vacation. Does that seem like a long distance? Why do you think it seemed farther away in those days?

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14. Do you think the children behaved properly while their parents were away? Explain your answer with examples from the story.

15. Have your parents ever left you on your own for a long period of time? Were you given instructions to follow? What did you do?

Dig Deeper:

16. Read Ephesians 6:1–3. What do these verses command? What is the promise found with this command?

How do you try to follow this command? Give an example.

17. How does Almanzo respond when the judge at the fair asks him how he raised such a big pumpkin?

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18. Why is Almanzo afraid to tell the truth? How does he feel after the truth is told?

19. Read Proverbs 12:22 and Colossians 3:9. What do these verses encourage us to do? Do you think Almanzo should have told the truth if it would have disqualified his pumpkin from winning? Why or why not?

Optional Activity:

Almanzo sees many different breeds of horses, cows, pigs, and sheep at the fair. Listed below are all the different breeds mentioned in the chapter "County Fair." Place an "H" in the blank next to the name of the breed if it is a kind of horse, a "C" if it is a breed of cow, a "P" if it is a breed of pig, or an "S" if it is a breed of sheep. Look back through this chapter of the story for help with this exercise.

- | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| 1. ____ Cotswold | 5. ____ Morgan | 9. ____ Chester White |
| 2. ____ Guernsey | 6. ____ Merino | 10. ____ Jersey |
| 3. ____ Devon | 7. ____ Durham | |
| 4. ____ Berkshire | 8. ____ Belgian | |

Choose one of the above breeds and present a short report about it. Where did it originate? What is unique about the breed? Illustrate your report with a picture of the animal.

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.