

Suzy Q. Student

Ms. Carter

Accelerated English 3

April 29, 2014

MLA  
format  
heading –  
no title page

[Yellow box] = paper author's original writing – does not need cited

Intro ¶ – no  
citations or  
evidence –  
introduces  
the topic

There are many periods of American history that are exciting. One of the most interesting was the period of the westward movement of the pioneers. It took a special kind of person to be willing to brave the hardships of moving into unsettled, uncivilized territory. Although that difficult period ended over 100 years ago, many people have an understanding of what some pioneers endured because of the writings of one woman: Laura Ingalls Wilder.

Original  
topic sent.

Laura Ingalls was a pioneer almost from birth. She was born near Pepin, Wisconsin, in February of 1867. Her parents, Charles and Caroline Ingalls, left their Wisconsin home with Laura and her older sister Mary and headed for the Kansas frontier little more than a year later (Wommack and White). This may sound like an unappealing decision for a young family, but it did have its benefits. The Homestead Act of 1862 promised free western land to Americans, and the Ingalls family began a ten year succession of journeys to take advantage of that land. They left the land in Kansas when they found out that it still actually belonged to the Osage Indians (Wommack and White). They could not achieve their dream of owning the land. The family, including the newest daughter, Carrie, returned to their Wisconsin farm. They sold the farm and headed west again only two years later (Wommack and White). Laura Ingalls travelled many miles in her young life.

Original  
writing  
connects  
pieces of  
evidence

Original concluding sentence

While the pioneer life suited the family, they did also live in towns. They moved to Walnut Grove, Minnesota in 1874. Once they settled there, the girls were able to go to school

(Wommack and White). **Town life was not any easier than pioneer life.** Between 1874 and 1876, the Ingalls family experienced blizzards, grasshoppers destroying their crops two years in a row, and the death of the fourth child, Freddie (Wommack and White). “In Walnut Grove, Mary suffered ‘brain fever’, possibly a form of meningitis, which slowly caused her vision to fail” (Harmon 90). **Although this was difficult, it may have been the beginning of Wilder’s career as an author.** She began to describe what she saw to her sister, Mary. “As her [Wilder’s] perception sharpened, so did her vocabulary and ability to relate the sights in vivid prose... This self-taught ability would be used years later when she would write her books” (Wommack and White). **Surely she did not realize a family tragedy would lead to later success.**

**The family was not done moving yet.** In 1879 they moved to Silver Creek in the Dakota territory (Wommack and White). **Times were hard for the family, and even the children had to do their part.** In 1883, Laura Ingalls began teaching, although she was not yet 16 years old. This job required her to stay with another family during the week, but a local man, Almanzo Wilder, came to the rescue, taking her on the twelve mile journey so she could come home on the weekends (Wommack and White). This job was worthwhile, however, because Laura Ingalls “earned forty dollars to help pay Mary’s expenses at the College for the Blind” (Anderson 20). **The job was worthwhile for another reason as well.**

**Almanzo Wilder played a larger role than just providing transportation.** Laura Ingalls married Almanzo Wilder in 1885. They lived on a farm near De Smet in the Dakota territory. Their daughter Rose was born there in 1886 (Wommack and White). **All seemed to be going well at first, but the situation changed.** “A succession of horrors followed.” There was a bad crop and a barn fire. Both adults caught diphtheria, and Almanzo was left partially disabled (Harmon 91). A son born in 1889 lived only 10 days (Wommack and White). Finally, the two

year old Rose “accidentally burned the house to the ground” (Harmon 91). It was devastating for the family.

Not surprisingly, the Wilders left the area and began moving again. In 1890, they headed east to New York and then moved to Florida (Wommack and White). They made a brief return to De Smet where Mrs. Wilder took a job sewing twelve hours a day for only one dollar a day (Wilder and Lane 61). Finally, Laura Ingalls Wilder found a place to call home for more than just a brief time. The Wilders made their last move in 1894 when they bought 40 acres and a log cabin in Mansfield, Missouri. At that farm, which they named Rocky Ridge, their travels ended. Both remained there until their deaths, Almanzo Wilder in 1949 and Laura Ingalls Wilder in 1957 (Wommack and White). Both enjoyed long lives and a long marriage.

Laura Ingalls Wilder first became an author while living at Rocky Ridge farm. She began writing articles for *The Missouri Ruralist* in 1911 (Wommack and White). She did not limit her activities only to writing, however. During this time, she worked to improve the situation for those living in her area. “Laura personally organized farm women’s clubs throughout southwestern Missouri, working to establish meeting rooms and restrooms for women. Though she scoffed at extreme feminism, she strongly protested any situation that treated women unfairly” (Wilder and Lane 97). She felt strongly about her way of life. In *The Missouri Ruralist*, Wilder wrote, “Keep up with the march of progress for the time is coming when the cities will be the workshops of the world and abandoned to the workers, while the real cultured, social, and intellectual life will be in the country” (Wilder and Lane 103). She was still a pioneer at heart.

Perhaps it was this love of the country life that prompted her to start writing about her own life. “Laura wrote her autobiography in story form, in pencil, on both sides of school paper

tablets. Little did she know this first manuscript would lead to an eight-volume set of children's books cherished by readers and fans all over the world" (Wommack and White). The semi-autobiographical series tells the story of the family's journeys in novel form (Spaeth). **Such a humble beginning led to a very impressive end.** The first of the series, *Little House in the Big Woods*, was published when she was 64 years old (Wommack and White). "*Little House in the Big Woods* became an instant bestseller when it came out in 1932..." (Harmon 102). **The author loved the book as much as her fans.** Of *Little House in the Big Woods*, Wilder said, "That book was a labor of love and is really a memorial to my father" (Wilder and Lane 177). She continued writing about the life of the Ingalls family through 1943 when she was 76 years old (Wommack and White). **Although she became an author late in life, her career was still impressive.**

**These books played an important role in helping readers understand a period of American history.** Wilder was called, "...the woman who would come to define the American pioneer experience all over the world..." (Harmon 89). **She was the best person to do this because of her experiences.** Wilder said, "I realized that I had seen and lived it all – all the successive phases of the frontier, first the frontiersmen, then the pioneer, then the farmers, and the towns. ...I wanted the children now to understand more about the beginning of things, to know what is behind the things they see – what it is that made America as they know it" (Wilder and Lane 217). **Her writing provided a very personal look at a crucial time in American history.**

**The impact of Ingalls' writing went far beyond a simple children's series.** The books in the Little House series are still bestsellers in children's literature (Wommack and White). While Wilder was living, "She received fifty letters a day from her readers, and she answered each one" (Wilder and Lane 237). **The popularity of and fascination with her series lasted far beyond Wilder's life span.** Long after her death, television programs based on her books ran on NBC

from 1974 to 1983. By 1994, there were 35 million copies of her books in print (Spaeth).

Generations after a young Laura Ingalls lived, stories of her life remained popular.

Along with the popularity of her books, Wilder also received critical acclaim. Five books from the Little House series were selected as Newbery Honor books. *By the Shores of Silver Lake* won the Pacific Northwest Library Young Reader's Choice Award (Spaeth). It was not only her specific books that were honored. Her biggest honor was the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award, which was established in 1954 by the American Library Association. She was the first author to receive that award (Wilder and Lane 238). "The award, a bronze medal, honors an author or illustrator whose books, published in the United States, have made, over a period of years, a substantial and lasting contribution to literature for children." ("Wilder"). The continuation of such an award is a fitting tribute to an author who had so much impact on children's literature.

Laura Ingalls Wilder lived a full, rich life. She experienced life as a pioneer, a journalist, and as an award-winning author. She lived from the era of the horse and buggy into the era of air travel. By setting down her experiences in the Little House series, she has helped her readers to enrich their lives as well.

Works Cited

Anderson, William. Pioneer Girl: The Story of Laura Ingalls Wilder. HarperCollins Publishers, 1988.

Harmon, Melissa Burdick. "Laura Ingalls Wilder: Her Real Life on the Prairie." Biography Aug. 2001: 89-91, 102-103.

Spaeth, Janet. "Wilder, Laura Ingalls." *American National Biography*. 2000. *Infohio*. Web. 30 Sept. 2009.

Wilder, Laura Ingalls and Rose Wilder Lane. A Little House Sampler. New York: Harper and Row, 1988.

"Wilder Medal" *American Library Association*. 30 Nov. 1999. Web. 30 Sep. 2005.

Wommack, Linda, and Stephen Wommack White. "Wagon Roads to the Little House on the Prairie." *Old West Spring* 1999: 24-31. *SIRS Discoverer*. Web. 03 Sept. 2009.