

From the Author's Desk:

Hello Parents and Teachers! Thank you for sharing "A Journey of Faith" with your readers. It's the first in the Prairie River series. I hope this discussion guide will help them reflect on the story and enjoy it on a deeper level. I've added a recipe, a few random activities, and personal tidbits that might be fun for them.

*My very best,
Kristi*

Prairie River #1: A Journey of Faith:

About this book:

Nessa can't remember a home other than the orphanage, and now she has no choice but to leave. Her plan is to escape on the next stagecoach west -- one headed toward Prairie River, Kansas, a town in the middle of nowhere. When she arrives at the small settlement, she has no money and nowhere to go. Worst of all, she is alone. The townspeople are suspicious of her. They see her as a newcomer with no family and no past.

Nessa is about to learn that life on the prairie is hard -- it's a trial of her strength and her faith as a Christian.

For ages 10 up.
ISBN 9781507553954

Discussion ideas:

<> Part I: [Chapter 1-20]

1. How did some Americans respond to President Lincoln's assassination?
2. Name five things you would quickly pack in a bag if you suddenly had to move from your home.
3. What does Mr. Button mean when he says buffalo were "like gold" to the Indian tribes?
4. Why is the job of sail-maker important on the Santa Fe Trail?

<> Part II: [Chapter 21-40]

1. Describe two wise things Mrs. Lockett tells Nessa about faith.
2. Explain if you've ever felt good about someone then moments later felt mad at them.
3. Mrs. Lockett and Mr. Button have symbolic names. What do they mean to you?
4. What are some good things about living in sod dugout? Iffy things?

Activity suggestions:

<> Write - These can be a brief paragraph or several pages:

1. "If I needed to find a safe place to live I would ..."
2. Tell about a time you felt alone
3. Describe a new place you have visited and how it made you feel

<> **Draw**

1. A map of the Santa Fe Trail from Independence, Missouri to Fort Larned, Kansas
2. A view looking out a stagecoach window
3. An animal or insect you might find on the prairie

<> **Make**

1. Diorama of the town of Prairie River
2. An American flag with thirty-six stars

<> **Cook**

Nessa's Stagecoach Snack -- Nessa planned ahead for her long journey by taking dried apricots, hardtack, and beef jerky for protein. The same idea carries over to modern times: When I travel or go on a day trip, I always bring a baggie of almonds and dried fruit to help between meals. Here's a mix you can try:

Ingredients:

- Almonds, peanuts, or macadamia nuts
- Raisins
- Dried cranberries
- Pretzel sticks or little round ones
- Rice Chex or Corn Chex
- Cheerios
- Chocolate chips (to add a little pizzazz!)

<> **Read** - Prairie River # 2: A Grateful Harvest
ISBN 9781507562635

Behind the scenes of this story:

For research my mother and I explored the Fort Larned National Historic Site in Kansas, which operated from 1859-1878. It felt as though we had stepped out of a time machine, to walk the wooden floors of the officers' quarters and barracks, to see the blacksmith's and carpenter's shops. The prairie was beautiful and reminded me of the ocean, vast and rippling. Down the road we had lunch in a coffee shop with paper placemats that said, "Welcome to Dodge City, where the wind always blows." And does it ever! I learn best when I can see, hear, touch, feel an environment, which then helps me write about it. The tiny town of Prairie River is fiction, but is based on this lovely part of Kansas.

A secret about the author:

Nessa's loneliness and desire to make friends is drawn from my own youth. As a kid I attended three elementary schools, two junior highs, and three high schools. I always felt like an outsider wanting to fit in.

Contact: I would love to hear about your discussion. Just click the Contact button on my website, kristianagregory.com, and I'll answer you!