

From the Author's Desk:

Hello Parents and Teachers! Thank you for sharing "A Grateful Harvest" 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 #2: A Grateful Harvest:

About this book:

It hasn't been easy for Nessa to find her place in Prairie River. She is having difficulty making friends, and her position as the local teacher is on shaky ground. Many townspeople still question whether she, a runaway orphan, can be trusted. She struggles to keep a positive outlook despite the scrutiny. But when an unexpected threat endangers Nessa and her students, she must find a way to keep the children safe. With so much at risk she must dispel all the doubts that have been plaguing her -- most of the time.

For ages 10 up.

ISBN 9781507562635

Discussion ideas:

<> Part I: [Chapter 1-20]

1. Why do you think many of the laundresses for the soldiers didn't know how to read? What are two reasons why it might have been important for them?
2. Tell about a time when you had trouble keeping a secret.
3. Mrs. Lockett says that forgiveness isn't always followed by happiness. What does she mean?
4. Why do Fannie Jo and Mrs. Sullivan react differently to Nessa?

<> Part II: [Chapter 21-40]

1. Talk about some of the animals and birds that come to Pawnee Creek for water.
2. Describe a place where you find solace.
3. What do you think about Nessa as a schoolteacher? Would you like to be in her class? Why or why not?
4. How would you help your friends and teacher if a fire broke out?

Activity suggestions:

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

1. "If I could plant a garden I would grow ..."
2. A letter to a friend telling about an interesting experience
3. About a time when you got in trouble

<> **Draw**

1. A map of Fort Larned and its parade ground
2. A sky full of clouds
3. A buffalo, turtle or raccoon

<> **Make**

1. Diorama of a sutler's store
2. Stick people or soldiers from peg clothespins

<> **Read** - Prairie River # 3: Winter Tidings
ISBN 9781507562697

<> **Cook**

Rolly's Favorite Pumpkin Bars -- After Nessa's students harvested their garden, pumpkins were in great supply, which they shared with the townspeople. From my own garden I have baked them whole with delicious results: Wash the skin, poke 6-10 times with sharp knife, set them on a foil-lined cookie sheet and bake at 350 degrees for about 90 minutes until soft. Allow them to cool. Now cut in half, scrape out the seeds and stringy stuff (save the seeds if you want to roast them later). Scoop the soft pumpkin into a bowl to mash or purée for cookies or something scrumptious.

Ingredients:

- 1 15-ounce can pumpkin or make your own (see above)
- 4 eggs
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 1 2/3 cups white sugar
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon or pumpkin pie spice (my favorite!)

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1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. In a medium bowl, mix the pumpkin, eggs, oil & sugar with an electric mixer until light and fluffy. In a separate bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, & cinnamon. Stir into the pumpkin mixture until nicely blended.
3. Spread the batter evenly into an ungreased 10x15-inch "jelly roll" pan. Bake for 25 to 30 min. If you want to add frosting make sure the bars are completely cooled first.

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Frosting:

- 2 cups sifted confectioners' sugar
 - 1 3-ounce package cream cheese, softened
 - 1/2 cup butter, softened
 - 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1. Cream together the cream cheese & butter. Stir in vanilla.
 2. Add sugar bit by bit, beating until smooth.
 3. Spread evenly on top of the cooled bars. Cut into squares then share with friends.

Behind the scenes of this story:

Nessa's joy and appreciation for the natural world reflect my own. Her middle name, Ann, is for my beloved editor, Ann Reit, who advised me through most my books.

A secret about the author:

I love to swim, so any time my characters are near water if the weather is hot, I have them jump in a creek or lake to cool off. I also love dogs. Nessa's puppy is inspired by the golden retrievers my family have cherished over the years. Like Green, they often were naughty and stole things: socks, shoes, puzzle pieces, and unattended sandwiches.

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