

From the Author's Desk:

Hello Parents and Teachers! Thank you for sharing "Hope Springs Eternal" 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.

*All the best,
Kristi*

Prairie River #4: Hope Springs Eternal:

About this book:

Nessa's winter was fraught with bitter trials. But now the promise of spring has come to Prairie River -- and so has Albert. Albert is Nessa's oldest friend from the orphanage. She had prayed that he would join her in Kansas ever since she journeyed to the small, remote town a year ago. But a year is a long time, and Nessa is discouraged when Albert's arrival is not what she had imagined. Things are different between them, and Nessa must reconcile the changes if she has any hope that their old friendship will bloom into something new.

For ages 10 up.

ISBN 9781507562857

Discussion ideas:

<> Part I: [Chapter 1-21]

1. What is something you wish you'd told a friend, but now it is too late?
2. Mr. Tomm is traveling to California on the Santa Fe Trail. What does he mean by saying he "didn't want to sail around the Horn."
3. Tell about an April Fool's joke that went badly, and one that went well.
4. Contrast the soldiers' use of slaughtered buffalo compared to the Indian tribes'.

<> Part II: [Chapter 22-42]

1. Tell about a time you had difficulty thinking the best of someone.
2. Why does Captain Lockett have trouble believing in a loving God?
3. Describe a time that was difficult to say good-bye to someone you cared about.
4. As Nessa matures she realizes that everyone "has a story." What does she mean?

Activity suggestions:

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

1. "If I could visit a foreign country it would be ..."
2. Tell about one of your pets, or one you'd like to have.
3. Describe an important journey you've experienced or dream about.

<> **Draw**

1. A map of Prairie River to Idaho Territory
2. Stormy skies over the prairie, or a tornado
3. A herd of buffalo

<> **Make**

1. Diorama of the Lockett family's corral and barn
2. Labels to identify vegetables or flowers in a garden, with Popsicle sticks

<> **Read** - Nugget: The Wildest, Most Heartbreakin'est Mining Camp in the West. This mystery is set in Idaho Territory in 1867, the same area where Nessa and Albert are headed. The Danish farmers planting orchards near the Boise River refer to the family Nessa hasn't met yet.
ISBN 9781505905793

<> **Cook**

Mrs. Lockett's Peach Cobbler --Much of the fruit Mrs. Lockett used for baking came to the fort by freight wagon, preserved in tins or jars. Canned peaches were a favorite and often used in pies and cobblers or stirred into hot porridge. Here's a simple recipe she taught Nessa and Rolly to make for their boarding house guests. Serves 10.

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup unsalted butter
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 cups sugar, divided into two
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- pinch of salt
- 1 cup milk
- 4 cups fresh peach slices (about six medium peaches or two 16-ounce cans)
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- Ground cinnamon or nutmeg

~~~~~

1. Melt butter in a 13x9-inch baking dish.
2. In a medium bowl combine flour, 1 cup sugar, baking powder & salt. Add milk, stirring just until the dry ingredients are moistened.
4. Pour this batter over the butter that you just melted (do not stir).
5. Now bring remaining 1 cup sugar, peach slices & lemon juice to a boil over high heat, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and pour over the batter (again, do not stir).
6. Sprinkle with cinnamon.
7. Bake at 375° for 40 to 45 minutes or until golden brown. Serve warm or cool.

**Behind the scenes of this story:**

In a used bookstore I found an old church hymnal that dated the year each hymn had been written. I culled my favorites from the Civil War era and added them to each Prairie River book. I felt they were beautiful and evocative, and most definitely would have been sung by Nessa and her friends.

**A secret about the author:**

I loved writing this series and was sad to say good-bye to the characters. So many readers have sent letters asking, "what happens next?" so I continue to ponder another story.

**Contact:** I would love to hear about your discussion, and if you have ideas for Prairie River #5. Just click the Contact button on my website, [kristianagregory.com](http://kristianagregory.com), and I'll answer you!