PRAIRIE SONGS

BY

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Synopsis

Prairie Songs takes a different approach to pioneer life. Louisa and her family live in a Nebraska prairie sod house. It isn't until their new neighbors from New York move in that Louisa begins to understand that somewhere else people live differently. Emmeline Beryman is not emotionally equipped to live in a sod house. She has been used to servants and fancy dresses, houses with running water, and wooden floors. Her adjustment is difficult. Her life quickly changes and each new event seems to take something away from her until there is just a shell of a person left. Her death is all the sadder because she was a stranger to their way of life. She had been uprooted and put down in a place she didn't understand. Louisa gains a better understanding about herself and her family as she watches the tragedy of Mrs. Berryman. This is a haunting look at prairie life.
1. Louisa and her family are waiting for someone to arrive. Who is it?
   A. Mr. and Mrs. Whitefield
   B. Mr. and Mrs. Downing
   C. Dr. and Mrs. Berryman

2. Is this story told in first person (a character is telling you the story), or third person (a narrator is telling the story) view?

3. The author uses numerous similes (comparisons using like or as). For example: "She laughed, like a wind chime." Find another example of a simile the author uses, write it down and the page you found it on.

4. Of what were the Nebraskan prairie houses built?

5. What does "frivolous" mean?
   ("Probably all kinds of frivolous things in there."

6. When Louisa compares her mother and Mrs. Berryman, what does she see?

7. How do you think Louisa’s mother felt when Louisa kept talking about how pretty Mrs. Berryman was?

8. Louisa’s mother thinks other things are more important than the way you look. What do you think is more important than the way a person looks?
1. For what reason would Mrs. Berryman need to know how to use a gun?
   A. To hunt for food
   B. To scare off wild animals
   C. In case of an Indian attack

2. Louisa’s mother wants to make a trade with Mrs. Berryman. What does she want to trade?
   A. She’ll wash clothes in exchange for Mrs. Berryman teaching the children to read.
   B. Louisa’s mother will help collect cow chips in exchange for the use of Emmeline’s books.
   C. Mrs. Berryman will share her dresses with Louisa’s mother in exchange for fresh vegetables.

3. Louisa likes the lonely Nebraska land. How does Mrs. Berryman feel about the prairie?

4. What does “browse” mean?
   ("...something better than just asking for you to browse through her books.")

5. Number the following events in the correct order.
   ____ The Berrymans came for dinner.
   ____ Mrs. Berryman tries to shoot a gun.
   ____ Lester and Louisa attended school at Mrs. Berryman.
   ____ Dr. Berryman buys a new wagon.
   ____ The photographer takes a family picture.

6. Compare Dr. Berryman and his wife. How are they different and/or the same?
7. How does Louisa feel about Dr. Berryman? What does Louisa say that helped you to know how she felt?

8. Which do you like the best, the quiet of the country or the busy sights and sounds of the city?
1. After Dr. Berryman arrived with the canary what caused Mrs. Berryman to scream?
   A. She saw some Indians riding over the hill
   B. The cradle she was expecting had broken on its train trip
   C. Her husband had brought a stuffed owl

2. Describe what Paulie did that upset Lester, Louisa, and Mrs. Berryman so much.

3. The authors uses words that appeal to the readers sense of hearing. Such as “Lester’s delicate snorts, all made a kind of music.” Find another sentence that uses sounds that appeal to your sense of hearing.

4. What does “awry” mean?
   (“The doc’s all right, but that woman is going to put it all awry.”)

5. In Chapter Eight at whom do you think Mrs. Whitefield was yelling, Paulie, doc, or the horse? Why?

6. Why didn’t Mrs. Berryman go to a hospital to have her baby?

7. What is making Louisa’s mother feel so sad?
1. Mrs. Berryman has been changing since she arrived on the prairie. List two of the changes.

2. What keeps Louisa from starting her reading lessons again at Mrs. Berryman?
   A. the rain
   B. Mrs. Berryman
   C. her father

3. When Louisa’s father and the doctor are leaving to help at the train wreck why does Louisa’s mother feel that Mrs. Berryman shouldn’t stay alone?

4. What does "skittered " mean?
   ("... that must have skittered for miles over the prairie."

5. Circle the following event that happened last?
   _____ Louisa working on her first quilt
   _____ the rain causing the roof to leak
   _____ Poppa mending his boots

6. Lester doesn’t want to return to the Berryman house for reading lessons any more. Why not?

7. Mrs. Berryman is adamant that Lester should not be pushed into anything he’s not ready for. What reason might she have for feeling that way?
1. This story starts out sometime in late summer. What time of the year is it now?
   A. fall
   B. winter
   C. spring

2. Lester was scared and hiding under the bed. What scared him?

3. Why was the family gun missing from over the door?
   A. it was at the shop being fixed
   B. they left it at Mrs. Berryman’s house
   C. their father took it when he left

4. "The wind picked up that night, howling and tearing..." To which of your senses does the author appeal to in this sentence?

5. The Indians were laughing when they found Lester hiding under the bed? Why?

6. When the Indians took the family horse, why didn’t Louisa’s mother try to stop them?

7. Earlier in the story Louisa compares her mother to a walnut. How does she see her mother at the end of the story?

8. Compare this story to ideas you had about prairie or pioneer life. How was it different from what you imagined?
LESSON 1

1. C
2. This story is told in the first person.
3. Answers will vary as to which simile they find and write down.
4. The Nebraskan prairie houses were built of sod.
5. Frivolous means foolish or not serious.
6. At first Louisa thinks her mother looks like a walnut and Mrs. Berryman seems to be so beautiful.
7. Answers will vary.
8. Answers will vary.

DISCUSSION: Cow chips were very important in prairie life. Help the students to understand the necessity for collecting them in an area where there were no other materials to burn for fuel.

Mrs. Berryman and her "eastern" ways found prairie life difficult. Discuss with the students things she was used to having that she no longer had such as: servants, fancy houses, fresh fruits and vegetables to buy etc.

LESSON 2

1. C
2. A
3. Mrs. Berryman is not used to the loneliness of the prairie and she does not like it. The strangeness of it seems to scare her.
4. Browse means to glance here and there in books.
5. The correct order is 2, 3, 5, 1, and 4.
6. Answers will vary. They might include the idea that Dr. Berryman seemed at home on the prairie while she was afraid, or he seemed harsh on occasion and she seemed delicate.
7. Louisa doesn’t seem to like Dr. Berryman. She mentions that he scolds his wife too easily and he "acted to proud."
8. Answers will vary.

DISCUSSION: What is a hothouse flower? Dr. Berryman seems to call his
wife that in disappointment. He seemed to want her to be something else more rugged.

LESSON 3
1. B
2. What Paulie did to upset everyone was to take Mrs. Berryman's gun and point it at his mother and forcing her to do as he commanded. He even went so far as to shoot at her skirt.
3. There are several sentences that appeal to the readers sense of hearing. Possible sentences are: Lester sobbed; Lester was sniffing; The basket kept smacking against my leg; The quiet lapping of the soup in the jar.
4. Awry means to go wrong.
5. Answers will vary.
6. Mrs. Berryman didn't go to a hospital to have her baby because there were none in there area.
7. Louisa's mother was feeling sad because Mrs. Berryman's baby had died even though she had tried to save it.

LESSON 4
1. Mrs. Berryman had changed in many ways. Some were: She had a blank stare; her hands moved aimlessly; her face looked like a skeleton; she forgot lots of things; she was no longer afraid to be alone; she didn't take care of her appearance; and her mind seemed to have stepped out of the room.
2. B
3. Mrs. Berryman is no longer able to take care of herself and Louisa's mother is concerned about leaving her alone while the men go to help out at the train wreck.
4. Skittered means to move quickly.
5. Louisa working on her first quilt happened last.
6. Lester most likely didn't want to return to Mrs. Berryman for reading lessons because he was afraid of her and the strange things she did.
7. Mrs. Berryman may feel strongly about people being pushed into things they may not be ready for because possibly that is what happened to her, she had been pushed into prairie life although she wasn't ready for it. Any answers that are reasonable are acceptable.
LESSON 5
1. B
2. Lester hid under the bed when he realized the Indians were coming.
3. C
4. The words howling and tearing in the sentence appeal to the reader's sense of hearing.
5. The Indians laughed at finding Lester under the bed because the strange noises he had made startled them into thinking maybe it was a wolf.
6. Louisa’s mother didn’t try to stop the Indians from taking the family horse because she didn’t want trouble, she was just glad her family was safe.
7. At one time Louisa compared her mother to a walnut, but by the end of the story she recognizes her natural beauty.
8. Answers will vary.