

## Prairie Fires by Carolyn Fraser

### Discussion Questions for Reading Groups

1. Thanks to the little House books, Laura Ingalls Wilder's childhood is one of the most legendary in our literature. Discuss how the factual account of Laura Ingall's real childhood in *Prairie Fires* differs from the fiction. How does an understanding of Wilder's life affect our perception of her work?
2. Discuss the Dakota Boom of the late 1870s and 1880s. Why was it a bad idea for homesteaders to farm in Dakota Territory? Since the government knew about the arid nature of the Great Plains, why did it encourage settlement there?
3. Discuss Laura and Almanzo's courtship and early marriage. Why did they come together, and how were they compatible (or not)? How did the tensions that developed between them affect their later lives?
4. In 1894, after failing to make a go of it in Dakota Territory, the Wilders joined a mass exodus out of the region, journeying to the "Land of the Big Red Apples" in the Missouri Ozarks. How would Laura's exile from her family affect her, and why would she return to De Smet only once in the next couple of decades, for her father's death? Why do you think she did not return to see her mother or her sister Mary?
5. Women's clubs, farmers' clubs, and book groups were crucial to the development of Wilder's writing career. Does such networking still play a central role for urban and/or rural women?
6. Talk about how Rose Wilder Lane's return to Rocky Ridge Farm in the 1920s and 1930s affected her life. Why did she build another house for her parents, after their successful completion of their own farmhouse? What do you think the Wilders thought of the Rock House?
7. How have perceptions of the Little House books changed over the years, or even over the course of your own life? How has *Prairie Fires* changed your perception?