

7th Grade Passages

Beginning of Year (BOY) Student Packet

Passage 1 *Laura*

Passage 2 *A Wonderful Friendship*

Passage 3 *Spreading Wildflowers*

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Laura

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Laura Ingalls Wilder is a famous author. She wrote children’s books about pioneer life in the late 19th Century. Laura was born in 1867 in a log house in Wisconsin. She was the second daughter of Charles and Caroline Ingalls. Laura had an older sister named Mary. They were very close. The Ingalls family moved frequently. They went wherever their father could find a job. Shortly after Laura’s birth, the family moved to Missouri. A few years later, they moved to Kansas to start their own farm. A third daughter, Carrie, was born there. When Laura was 13, they left Kansas and returned to Wisconsin to be near family.

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The girls were happy to be there, but their father longed to farm again. So, four years later, in 1874, the family moved to Walnut Grove, Minnesota. They built a house and farmed the land. The three girls had many adventures there. But the family suffered many tragedies as well. During their first year there, Charles had grown a good wheat crop. It was destroyed by grasshoppers. This was repeated the next year as well. The family was blessed by a baby boy in 1875, but he died of an illness at only 9 months. The family suffered yet another tragedy when Mary lost her eyesight as a result of a stroke. That same year, Charles took a job with the railroad. They moved to De Smet in the Dakota Territories. When the railroad job was finished, they acquired some land. He began to farm again. A harsh winter made farming difficult that first year. But they persevered and were able to save enough money to send Mary to a school for the blind.

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When Laura was 15, she earned her teaching certificate. She began teaching at a small school several miles from her home. It was at this time that she met a farmer named Almanzo Wilder. They married three years later. They had a healthy baby girl named Rose. They had many misfortunes as well, however. Severe storms ruined their crops. This forced them into debt. Almanzo worked hard in the fields, but he got sick and became crippled. During this time, Laura was pregnant with their second child. He died shortly after birth, unnamed. Soon after, their house burned down when something in the kitchen caught fire.

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The family then moved to Florida, where the warm conditions improved Almanzo’s health. They eventually returned to De Smet. But, in 1894, they relocated to Missouri. Here they would spend the rest of their lives. They bought a farm there and prospered.

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Laura was a great storyteller. Her daughter Rose convinced her to write her stories so that other children could enjoy them too. Laura did so. In all, she wrote seven children’s books. These comprised her Little House series. They have been widely read and admired. She and Almanzo

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spent the rest of their lives at their Missouri farm. Laura died in 1957, at the age of 90. Their farm is now open for people to visit.

A Wonderful Friendship

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Helen Keller was a young girl who couldn't see or hear. Alexander Graham Bell was the famous scientist who invented the telephone. These two famous people not only knew each other, but together they also opened up new worlds of conversation.

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Helen Keller was born in 1880. When she was a baby, she lost her sight and hearing. Because of her inability to hear, she did not learn how to speak. Even so, it was clear that she was an intelligent child and was eager to learn. Keller's family did everything they could to find a way to educate her.

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When Helen Keller was six years old, her parents took her to see Alexander Graham Bell. He was well known for his inventions. He was also a teacher of deaf people. He considered teaching to be his most important work.

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Bell recognized Keller's intelligence. At his suggestion her parents hired a private teacher named Anne Sullivan. She worked with Keller every day. Through her persistence Sullivan was able to teach Keller words and their meanings. With a great deal of constant work, Sullivan taught Keller how to read and write. One of the first letters Keller wrote was to Bell.

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Bell encouraged Keller to learn as much as she could. Sometimes they would go on rides or visit the zoo. They also shared a love of books. Bell would tell her stories by using his fingers to spell the letters of words in her hand.

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One day Bell told Keller about his invention called the telephone. He explained how it was enriching lives. People all over the world benefited by being able to talk to each other when they were in separate places. Although Keller could not use the phone without help, she understood that it was important.

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Bell opened a school for deaf students and formed an information center to help people understand the needs and abilities of deaf people. Keller was very interested in Bell's work with deaf children.

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Keller had worked hard and set goals for herself. Because she wanted to help Bell by telling other people about his work, she decided to take lessons to learn to speak. When she felt comfortable speaking in public, she gave a speech at Bell's information center. She told the audience how happy she was to be able to speak to them about Bell's work with deaf people.

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Bell's invention of the telephone helped hearing people talk to each other. His teaching helped deaf people talk to each other and to the hearing world. His support and instruction helped Keller express herself by writing and even speaking. Helen Keller went on to finish college and became a well-known writer.

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When she wrote a book about her life, Helen Keller dedicated it to Alexander Graham Bell. This was a symbol of their lasting friendship.

Spreading Wildflowers

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Claudia Taylor was born in Karnack, Texas, in 1912. As a young child she was given the nickname Lady Bird. She grew up in the country, and it was there that her lifelong love of nature began. Throughout her childhood and adult years, she has enjoyed being outdoors, looking for the beautiful flowers that grow naturally in open fields.

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In 1929 the state of Texas started a wildflower program. The highway department waited for the flowers to go to seed before they were mowed. Then the seeds would spread and grow into plants the next year. Lady Bird enjoyed exploring the countryside in search of different wildflowers. She continued to do so after moving to Austin in 1930 to attend the University of Texas. Four years later Lady Bird married Lyndon B. Johnson.

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In 1964 Lyndon Johnson was running for President of the United States. As he and his wife traveled around the country, Lady Bird saw beauty as well as blight. Some areas suffered from neglect and ugliness. When Lady Bird's husband won the election, she wanted to do something to make the nation's capital look more beautiful. The following year she found a way to do that.

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Lady Bird helped set up the Committee for a More Beautiful Capital. She was chosen to head the group of volunteers. They met once a month at the White House to discuss ideas and make plans. They decided their program could be successful only if people in the community were willing to get involved. To attract attention, volunteers planted flowers around the city in hundreds of places that many people passed each day. They encouraged businesses to plant grass, shrubs, and flowers. They organized cleanups and fix-up projects in neighborhoods. They also tried to improve school yards and playgrounds. The committee gave awards each year to neighborhoods, businesses, and public spaces.

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The ideas of the committee quickly spread across the country. Some states began setting up their own programs to preserve flowers and to plant new ones. Thanks to Lady Bird, many of these programs included wildflowers. In the state of Texas, people continued to strengthen the program that had been adopted almost 40 years before the committee began its work.

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The Johnsons returned to Texas in 1969. Lady Bird wanted to do something to encourage more people to plant wildflowers. She knew that little was known about growing these flowers in gardens and that more research needed to be done.

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In 1970 Lady Bird began a project to make the city of Austin more lovely. A variety of colorful flowers and trees were planted along the banks of a major river. Trails for hiking and biking were also added. This project helped inspire the idea for building a center for studying native plants. In 1982 Lady Bird gave a large sum of money and 60 acres of land near Austin to build the National Wildflower Research Center. The purpose of the center was to learn about wildflowers and share new information with interested people everywhere. In 1998 Lady Bird was honored for her tireless efforts to make our nation more beautiful. The name of the center was changed to the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center.