

**Walnut Grove Schoolyard**  
**A Reader's Theater Script**  
**Written by Daniel DeSmith and Shalayna Knapper**

**Characters:**

**Laura Ingalls**  
**Mary Ingalls**  
**Nellie Olson**  
**Willie Olson**  
**Anna Nelson**  
**Johnny Johnson**  
**Sandy Kennedy**  
**Christy Kennedy**  
**Cassie Kennedy**  
**Miss Beadle**  
**Narrator 1**  
**Narrator 2**

**Narrator 1:** After the Ingalls family was settled into their home near Plum Creek by Walnut Grove, Minnesota, daughters Laura and Mary began attending school in town.

**Narrator 2:** The girls walked nearly 2 miles to school each day. They would carry with them a small lunch pail, slates (like small chalkboards) to write on, and other books that were used to learn to read.

**Narrator 1:** This story takes place in the spring of 1875 at the school in Walnut Grove.

**Miss Beadle:** (Speaking to her class of students that are arranged from the youngest in the front to the oldest in the back) Attention students. It is almost recess time, but before you go outside to play, I want to remind you that next week is our school picnic. Please plan to bring something to share with the other pupils.

**Johnny:** (raising his hand)

**Miss Beadle:** Yes, Johnny?

**Johnny:** Miss Beadle, I won't be able to go to the picnic. My pa said that this will be my last week of school for a while. The grass is getting mighty green. I am going to have to go back to watching the livestock in the fields again.

**Sandy:** (Raising his hand, waiting until Miss Beadle nods to speak) Same for me Miss Beadle. My pa told me that soon I'll be needed to help him plant the root vegetables in the garden.

**Anna:** Raises her hand

**Miss Beadle:** Yes, Anna.

**Anna:** My ma said that if Plum Creek gets much higher, I won't be able to walk to town for school until the water is back down. All the spring rains have made the creek almost to the top of its banks.

**Nellie:** Ugh! Country folks!

**Miss Beadle:** Nellie, that's enough. Spring is a busy time for everyone here in Walnut Grove and I understand that you farm kids must help out at home, but your education is still very important. I will put together some materials that I will want you to continue to work on at home in the evenings. I don't want you to fall too far behind.

**Nellie:** (Raising her hand)

**Miss Beadle:** Nellie?

**Nellie:** Miss Beadle, my mother and father believe that there's nothing more important than going to school. I have had perfect attendance for the past two years, so has Willie. Isn't that right, Willie?

**Willie:** Yep! Our Mother and Father make us go to school, even if we throw a fit and don't want to go. That's what Nellie did just yesterday. She was throwing a screaming tantrum that she didn't want to go to school, but Ma made her go.

**Nellie:** Willie!!!

(Class giggles)

**Miss Beadle:** Alright pupils, it is now time for recess. Don't be late back to class when you hear me ring the bell. You are dismissed.

**Narrator 1:** One room school houses did not have cafeterias so students must bring their lunch with them. If they lived close enough to the school, they might walk home for lunch.

**Narrator 2:** Schools also didn't have playgrounds, so kids would play tag, clapping games, string games, marbles, dolls, or other games that didn't require a lot of equipment.

**Narrator 1:** Recess and lunch break was usually an hour long. Sometimes it was called "nooning".

**Laura:** (Speaking to a small group of friends consisting of Mary, Christy, Cassie, and Anna outside) I really had to hold my temper, hearing Nellie going on and on about how she and Willie have perfect attendance. I doubt that they've even worked a day in their lives!

**Mary:** Laura, it's good that you held your temper in the classroom, perhaps you should practice again out here.

**Anna:** Laura does make sense though, It's not our fault that we live in the country. The work has to be done, and sometimes we have to be the ones to do it... or at least help with it. Still, it must be nice to live in town.

**Christy:** Well, sometimes it can be nice, although there are times when I would rather be working on the farm than be stuck in school with Nellie!

**Cassie:** Yeah! When you all are working on the farm, the school house feels awfully empty. That doesn't stop Nellie from showing off. I don't understand why she does it.

**Nellie:** (interrupting the conversation) Did I hear someone say my name? I certainly hope that you weren't talking about me behind my back.

**All Girls:** No never!

**Nellie:** Well good. What are you all planning to bring to the school picnic? My mother is going to make her lovely rhubarb pie. It always tastes so wonderful. Though, you've probably never heard of rhubarb.

**Laura:** (Mocking Nellie) You've probably never heard of rhubarb.

**Anna:** Oh please Nellie, of course we have heard of rhubarb. We grow it out on our farm. Where did you think the rhubarb came from?

**Mary:** (interrupting to bring peace back to the group) We haven't decided what to bring, but your rhubarb pie sounds delicious.

**Cassie:** I might ask my mother to make soda bread! All my sisters, brothers, and I love it. The recipe has been passed down in our family. I suppose you could say that it came with our family from Ireland!

**Christy:** Oh! I'm excited just thinking about it! I don't remember the last time I've had Ma's Irish soda bread! This picnic by Plum Creek is going to be perfect!

**Anna:** I certainly hope that I can go! Hopefully the creek won't be too high for me to come to school and the picnic.

**Narrator 1:** Schools at this time went well into the summer months. Students came when they could and tried to keep up the best that they could during the times when they were unable to attend.

**Narrator 2:** Supplies were not readily available like they are today either. It was not uncommon for siblings to share materials (like the slate) and to reuse materials from one student to another. We certainly have a different experience going to school now than they did back then.

**Cassie:** Finish your cornbread, Christy. Noon break is almost over.

**Laura:** (Groans) I wish that I could stay outside forever. I can hardly stand being cooped up in that schoolhouse all day. Especially when I can see the green grass right outside the window.

**Cassie:** I certainly understand what you mean, but we'd better not be late.

**Mary:** Laura, when we get back to class, you can use our reader since I have sums to work on the slate.

**Anna:** Look, it's Miss Beadle! It's time to go back to the schoolhouse.

**Narrator 1:** In Laura's time, schools typically only went through the eighth grade. Students had to pass a very difficult exam to graduate from school.

**Narrator 2:** Laura Ingalls became a teacher herself at only sixteen years old.