

Challenging Classic Novels

Read these novels to provide alternative experiences and perspectives to the Eurocentric narratives that dominate U.S. history, such as those found in the Little House books. The following books by Louise Erdrich and Linda Sue Parks are strongly reminiscent of the Laura Ingalls Wilder books in their evocative, detailed depictions of daily life on the “frontier” in the late 1800s, while providing a different lens and set of stories from those typically told about this time period.

The Birchbark House cycle of novels by Louise Erdrich follows the life of a 19th century Ojibwe family

- *The Birchbark House*
 - Life of a young girl, Omakayas, and her Ojibwe community in 1847 near Lake Superior as white settlers impact their lives through smallpox. Provides many details of daily life.
- *The Game of Silence*
 - 9-year-old Omakayas and her family enjoy their summer life on an island on Lake Superior until news arrives that the U.S. government will force them to move.
- 1850. ● *The Porcupine Year*
 - 12-year-old Omakayas draws strength from the land and family as they endure hardships in their search for a new home in northern Minnesota in 1852.
- *Chickadee*
 - In 1866, Chickadee, the son of Omakayas, is kidnapped by two members of his own tribe and must make an exciting but dangerous journey to find his family in the Great Plains.
- *Makoons*
 - Twin brothers Makoons and Chickadee learn to become buffalo hunters in the Great Plains of Dakota Territory but Makoons has a vision of the disappearance of buffalo.

These books could be compared with Little House titles set in Wisconsin (*Little House in the Big Woods*), Minnesota (*On the Banks of Plum Creek*), and the Dakota territory (*By the Shores of Silver Lake*, *The Long Winter*, and *Little Town on the Prairie*).

See the Birchbark Bookstore, which includes a blog by Louise Erdrich - <https://birchbarkbooks.com/blog>

NPR Interview with Louise Erdrich on her personal connection to Native People’s fight for survival

<https://www.npr.org/2020/03/04/812085201/louise-erdrich-on-her-personal-connection-to-native-peoples-fight-for-survival>

Prairie Lotus by Linda Sue Park (2020)

- In 1880, a biracial Chinese/White girl and her white father seek a fresh start in Dakota

territory to open a dry goods store. The book depicts the details of everyday life along with making visible the prejudice of the town's white residents and Hanna's responses of empathy and dignity. Also depicts Hanna's encounters with women of the nearby Ihanktonwan community.

- The book ends with a personal author's note that details Park's love of the Little House books as a child and her realization of their shortcomings as an adult. Also describes her extensive research for this book.
- Note that this book is set in the same time period and territory as *Little Town on the Prairie* by Wilder and so one possibility is to read the two books together to compare perspectives. ● Check Linda Sue Park's website for additional resources and guides related to this book, including resources on Chinese immigration and Native Americans in the 1800s - <https://lindasuepark.com/books/books-novels/prairie-lotus/>
- Additional interviews and articles about this book include:
 - Podcast interview about Prairie Lotus
<https://www.wxnews.org/post/connections-author-linda-sue-park-her-new-book-prairie-lotus>
 - Interview of Park, Fan Fiction, 50 Years Later,
<https://www.shelf-awareness.com/readers-issue.html?issue=901#m15791>
 - Q & A with Park for Publishers Weekly,
<https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-authors/article/82538-q-a-with-linda-sue-park.html>
 - New York Times Book Review,
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/06/books/review/prairie-lotus-linda-sue-park.html>
 - KidsLive Author Talk with Linda Sue Park at the New York Public Library,
<https://www.nypl.org/blog/2021/03/24/kidslive-blogs-author-talk-linda-sue-park>
 - The Children's Book Podcast interview with Linda Sue Park
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_QTPyHQuldI
 - Keynote speech on Prairie Lotus by Linda Sue Park at Bank Street Book Festival
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17Gyy5aZ6Aq>
 - Book Talk by Colby Sharp of the book
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNSVDDQsf-Y>