

KATHLEEN ERNST WAS BORN in 1982 into the 1870s
Kathleen Ernst
Her research emerged from
the trees, the prairie, and the past
WRITING AT THE INTERSECTION OF PEOPLE, PLACES, AND THE PAST
cloud-studded blue sky.



Discussion Guide for *Death on the Prairie*

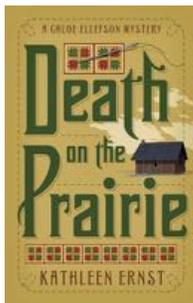
Chloe Ellefson Historic Sites Mystery #6

Written by Kathleen Ernst

Published by Midnight Ink Books

"This quilt belonged to *who*?" Chloe Ellefson's voice squeaked on the last word. "Did you say ...Laura Ingalls Wilder?"

Thus begins the sixth book in the popular, multiple award-winning, Chloe Ellefson Historic Sites mystery series. These stories combine history and mystery with a little romance, and are written for adults and mature teens who enjoy books *without* explicit sex, gratuitous violence, or gore.



Chloe and her sister grew up treasuring the books by Laura Ingalls Wilder, and have long dreamed of visiting each of the home sites where she lived.

When Chloe gets custody of a beautiful quilt once owned by Laura, the sisters set out on the road trip of a lifetime, hoping to prove that Wilder stitched it herself.

But death strikes just as their journey begins. As the sisters drive deeper into Wilder territory, Chloe races to discover the truth about the precious quilt—and her own heart—before the killer can strike again.

Bestselling author Kathleen Ernst writes mysteries, historical fiction, and non-fiction books for adults and young readers. Her work has earned numerous honors, including an Emmy, a LOVEY, and nominations for an Edgar Allen Poe and multiple Agatha Christie mystery awards.

SPOILER ALERT! The following pages reveal key plot points.



1. Millions of people have read Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House series. Have you read the Little House books? If so, did you discover the series as a child, or as an adult? What was your experience?
2. Have you watched the television series *Little House on the Prairie*? If you've also read the books, which did you prefer? Why? By the end of the television series, the storyline had diverged quite a bit from the books. How do you feel about that?
3. The Little House books have a strong fan following. Why do you think the books remain so popular, and continue to touch so many readers?
4. Have you read *Pioneer Girl*, the annotated biography of Laura Ingalls Wilder compiled and edited by Pamela Smith Hill (South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2014)? How does it compare to the original series? What did you learn about periods or episodes that Laura did not include or fictionalize?
5. At the beginning of *Death on the Prairie* Chloe asserts that as a curator, she of course wants to learn the truth about Laura Ingalls Wilder's life. By the end of her road trip she has decided to hang on to the Laura she met as a fictionalized character in the books. How do you feel about learning that Laura's books are not completely autobiographical?
6. Kari has a meltdown at the Ingalls' home in De Smet when she discovers that in real life, Cap Garland died an early and tragic death. Have you ever cared that strongly about a fictional/fictionalized character? What does this scene reveal about Kari?
7. Kari's need to periodically escape her home life has gotten her into serious trouble. Were her feelings about being trapped on her family's farm realistic? Did you sympathize with her, or have only negative feelings for a woman who secretly went to taverns?



8. Roelke handled Kari's problem by threatening the bartender. Do you agree with Roelke's approach?
9. A main theme running through all of the Little House Books is the search for a home. How does the Ingalls family's search provide a mirror for the questions facing Chloe and Roelke at this point in their relationship?
10. Roelke makes a big gamble when he decides to purchase his family farm. Was it a wise decision? Do you think Chloe and Roelke will be happy there? What challenges do they face? What would you like the future to hold for them?

Hosting a book group discussion? Treat participants to snacks made from *The Little House Cookbook: Frontier Foods from Laura Ingalls Wilder's Classic Stories* by Barbara M. Walker, or *The Laura Ingalls Wilder Country Cookbook*, by Laura Ingalls Wilder. Laura was particularly known for her gingerbread; an online search will quickly lead you to her original recipe.

Kathleen did extensive research when writing this book. Some of her discoveries ended up influencing the story; others appear in the book. A rich mix of these 'behind the scene' details about the people, places, and the past that went into the creating this book are available online.

In addition to this guide, Kathleen's website includes an interactive custom Google map showing where key scenes are set, a slide show of story-related artifacts and descriptions, an author's note, book reviews, author interviews, and many book-related blog posts.

You can discover all this and more at www.kathleenernst.com/prairie.