



Kirsten

Learning Guide

Learn about pioneer life through the stories of Kirsten, a Swedish immigrant whose family settles on the prairie in 1854.



 American Girl®



Kirsten

About the Kirsten Books

Kirsten Larson is a pioneer girl of strength and spirit who emigrates from Sweden to the frontier of the Minnesota Territory in 1854. Kirsten's story is central to United States history, since most Americans today have ancestors or family members who came from somewhere else.

Home is the overarching theme of the Kirsten books. We meet Kirsten on her journey from Sweden to America. Once she reaches her new home, she feels homesick in a land where the language, customs, people, and habits are all unfamiliar. Kirsten longs to feel at home—to feel rooted physically and psychologically. In the last book, the Larsons finally move into a home of their own, a hard-won result of their longing and their extraordinary efforts.

The six books of the core series are:

Book 1: *Meet Kirsten*

Book 2: *Kirsten Learns a Lesson*

Book 3: *Kirsten's Surprise*

Book 4: *Happy Birthday, Kirsten!*

Book 5: *Kirsten Saves the Day*

Book 6: *Changes for Kirsten*

Instructions for Teachers

Assign or read aloud to your students some or all of the books in numerical order. As needed, print copies of each work sheet you would like to use in class. Before assigning the work sheets to your students, consider the talking points and discussion questions for each work sheet provided below. Note: It's not essential to read all six books in order to complete the work sheets.

Talking Points and Discussion

Cultural Differences

When Kirsten moves to the United States, she is fluent only in Swedish. At times, she meets people, such as Singing Bird, who do not share a common language with her. In those situations, she draws pictures to communicate. *Discussion questions:* Have you ever been around people speaking a language that you could not understand? Did you try to communicate? How?

Just for Fun: Play a game to show students what it is like to try to communicate without words. On slips of paper, write words or phrases, such as "radio," "See you tomorrow," or "That's my favorite book." Have students take turns drawing a slip of paper and trying to communicate the word or phrase on it. Players may draw pictures or use gestures to communicate, but they may not speak or write words. Once the class has guessed the word or phrase, another student takes a turn.

Helping One Another

Life on the frontier was a struggle. Family members depended on one another, and everyone—including children—had to work hard so that the family could survive. *Discussion questions:* What chores were pioneer children expected to do? Which tasks do you think you might enjoy? Which chores do you think would be difficult?



Kirsten

Having a Positive Attitude

In Kirsten's stories, Kirsten and her family face hardship and loss, but they always try to "have heart" and stay hopeful. *Discussion questions:* What are some of the losses that Kirsten and her family experience? Do you think that a person's attitude about a situation can affect the outcome? If so, how?

Answers to the first question may include: leaving their home in Sweden; the long, hard journey to America; Marta's death; leaving their belongings behind; struggling through a blizzard; losing their home and belongings in the fire

Answer Key

Cultural Differences

1. Answers will vary.
2. Answers will vary.
- 3.

Tradition	Kirsten	Singing Bird	Me
People own land.	Yes	No	Yes
People move from place to place with the seasons.	No	Yes	No
Children must work so that the family can survive.	Yes	Yes	No
Children go to school.	Yes	No	Yes
People make most things by hand.	Yes	Yes	No

Helping One Another

1. Answers will vary.
2. Answers will vary.
3. Answers will vary.
4. Answers will vary.



Kirsten

Having a Positive Attitude

1. To “have heart” means to have courage and not give up.
2. Answers will vary.
3. Answers will vary.
4. Answers will vary.

Puzzle

- | | |
|----------------|------------------------------|
| 1. plant seeds | 5. churn butter |
| 2. cook dinner | 6. pick berries |
| 3. gather eggs | 7. feed the chickens |
| 4. milk cows | 8. make clothes for the baby |

Illustrations by Renée Graef and Paul Lackner



Kirsten

Cultural Differences

1. Except for the descendants of Native Americans, Americans today have all immigrated from somewhere else or are the descendants of immigrants. What countries or cultures did your family come from?

2. Describe a special tradition, such as a food or custom, of one of those countries or cultures. Is this tradition part of your life today?

3. Fill in the rest of the chart below to see some of the cultural differences between Kirsten, Singing Bird, and you.

Tradition	Kirsten	Singing Bird	Me
People own land.		No	
People move from place to place with the seasons.		Yes	
Children must work so that the family can survive.		Yes	
Children go to school.		No	
People make most things by hand.		Yes	



Kirsten

Helping One Another

1. Kirsten's family would not have been able to survive in America without the help of their relatives. Describe a goal you've accomplished. Did others help you achieve your goal? If so, how?

2. In *Happy Birthday, Kirsten!*, Kirsten and her friends work together to sew a quilt during recess at school. Doing the project together made their work faster and more fun. Would you like to work on a project with others during your recess? Why or why not?

3. In *Happy Birthday, Kirsten!*, Kirsten's family needs a barn, but building a barn is too big a job for one family to do alone, so neighbors come to help the Larsons raise their barn. Write about a time you helped someone do a big job. Describe how you felt when you helped.

Building a Pioneer Barn

It took weeks for a farmer—and a local carpenter, if one was available—to cut timbers for a barn. Neighbors then came to put up, or "raise," the frame of the barn. The barn raising ended with a party, which was not only a reward but also a welcome chance to visit with neighbors.

4. At times, pioneer children stayed home from school to help with farm work. Would you rather go to school or stay home to do work for your family? Explain your answer.



Kirsten

Having a Positive Attitude

1. When Kirsten gets discouraged, her mother tells her to “have heart.” What does that mean?

Symbolism of the Heart

Kirsten wears a heart necklace that her grandmother gave her. The necklace reminds Kirsten of her loved ones in Sweden and helps her to “have heart” or not to “lose heart” when times are tough.



2. Describe a situation in your own life when “having heart” was important, and explain how it made a difference.

3. In *Changes for Kirsten*, Kirsten’s family loses their home in a fire, but Aunt Inger tries to point out the bright side of the situation. Describe a time in your life when things didn’t go well. What was the bright side of that situation?

4. After the fire, Lisbeth and Peter complain about sharing beds to make room for Kirsten’s family. Then Aunt Inger says, “Don’t fuss about what can’t be helped.” Do you think it helps to complain about something that can’t be changed? Explain your answer.



Kirsten

Farm Chores

Pioneer families needed lots of help on the farm. Kirsten, Lars, and Peter sometimes stayed home from school to get all the chores done! Use the code to discover what they did.



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|-------------------|--------------------|---------------|---------------------|------------|
| 1. 7-22-9-5-18 | 21-6-6-2-21 | 2. 24-14-14-3 | 2-25-5-5-6-11 | |
| — — — — — | — — — — — | — — — — — | — — — — — | |
| 3. 10-9-18-1-6-11 | 6-10-10-21 | 4. 17-25-22-3 | 24-14-16-21 | |
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| 5. 24-1-4-11-5 | 13-4-18-18-6-11 | 6. 7-25-24-3 | 13-6-11-11-25-6-21 | |
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| 7. 15-6-6-2 | | 18-1-6 | 24-1-25-24-3-6-5-21 | |
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| 8. 17-9-3-6 | 24-22-14-18-1-6-21 | 15-14-11 | 18-1-6 | 13-9-13-20 |
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| 1-H | 2-D | 3-K | 4-U | 5-N | 6-E |
| 7-P | 8-X | 9-A | 10-G | 11-R | 12-J |
| 13-B | 14-O | 15-F | 16-W | 17-M | 18-T |
| 19-Z | 20-Y | 21-S | 22-L | 23-Q | 24-C |
| | | 25-I | 26-V | | |