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Composition 101

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Nonsense Poems in the Big Woods of My Childhood

"The Owl and the Pussy-cat went to sea [in] a beautiful pea-green boat" (Lear). My grandmother's voice intones through the haze of one of my earliest childhood memories. I was four years old, lying on the earth-tone coverlet of my grandparent's bed in the loft bedroom of their asymmetrical 1970s hippy house. It was naptime. The sun streamed through the floor-to-ceiling windows in the kitchen and made its way up the hallway. I was drifting off, but the familiar words penetrated the early stages of slumber. My grandmother has a beautiful voice, and every word of Edward Lear's nineteenth-century nonsense poem was spoken in just the right pitch and rhythm. "They took some honey, and plenty of money, [wrapped] up in a five-pound note," her voice continued soothingly. I was losing the battle with sleep, but I knew how the narrative ended. The next week on my day at Gram's house, the book was *Teddy Bear Picnic*, which she would sometimes sing, or *Leaves from a Child's Garden of Verses*. I was not particular; I loved them all. Many of the peaceful moments of my early childhood had the same features: my mom or my grandma, a book, and a warm, safe place. In the present, I return to books, not only for mental expansion, but also for the familiarity and stability of summer naptimes and homeschool afternoons.

"Once upon a time, sixty years ago, a little girl lived in the Big Woods of Wisconsin, in a little gray house made of logs" (Wilder). The voice in this memory is different, younger for one thing. My mother was only twenty-five, but she had two youngsters and a toddler around her on

Commented [A1]: Description is an important part of a strong narrative. Here, the author describes details to help capture her audience's attention and make her narrative interesting.

Commented [A2]: Not all narrative essays require a thesis statement, but many narrative assignments will. Here, the author presents a clear thesis about what books mean to her.

the couch. I was five, and these were the early days of my education, which I spent at home with my two brothers. Every day after lunch, Mum read to us from a chapter book. A favorite of ours was the *Little House on the Prairie* series, and our copy of the first book, *Little House in the Big Woods*, sported a missing cover, cracked spine, and bent pages. I can recall with distinct clarity the motion of my mother turning down the page to mark our place in the familiar tale. My later school years do not have this idyllic quality. I have become an exacting perfectionist who agonizes over every word read and written, but the habits from my childhood of listening—focus, attention to detail, enthusiasm, and organization—continue to bring me peace.

"How do you spell *frog*," my seven-year-old self demanded of my mother, who was kneading a loaf of bread at the kitchen counter. For a child who loved books, I struggled to read independently, and it affected my early ability to write. Yet, I clearly wanted to write and followed my indefatigable mother around asking for her help.

"Sound it out," she encouraged. "F-raw-g." I looked at her skeptically, not feeling the sound-it-out game. I was more interested in my story about a boy and his pet frog. "Or look it up."

"I don't know how," I insisted impatiently.

"Then make your best guess."

Eventually, the book was finished and illustrated, despite a few unconventionally-spelled words. Within a year or two, I learned to read and jumped from a first-grade reading level to a high-school reading level in the course of a few months. Being conventional is overrated. At seven, I never suspected I was behind, and because my parents did not pressure me, I caught back up without ever knowing. Learning to read was another quiet, happy experience. Now, other things do not come easily, and the outside environment is not as kind. I suffer more on these occasions, but in time, I catch up when I am ready.

Commented [A3]: Dialog is often used in narrative to help convey characters. Effective dialog helps this writer "show" how her mother behaved as her teacher, instead of just "telling" her audience about this.

"And hand in hand [on] the edge of the sand, [they] danced by the light of the moon, the moon, the moon. They danced by the light of the moon" (Lear). I was gone from the present as my grandmother closed the shiny hardcover copy of *The Owl and the Pussy-Cat* and placed it back on the low bookshelf beside the bed. The present is not always as sunny as that day in 1996, but my grandmother's voice and the words it repeated always keep me steady.

Commented [A4]: The conclusion makes a strong reference back to the main idea the author presents in her thesis statement.

Works Cited

- Lear, Edward. "The Owl and the Pussy-Cat." *Poetry Foundation*. Poetry Foundation, n.d. Web. 16 Apr. 2014.
- Wilder, Laura Ingalls. *Little House in the Big Woods*. New York: Harper, 1953. Web.

Once upon a time, sixty years ago, a little girl lived in the Big Woods of Wisconsin, in a little gray house made of logs. Thus begins the first of nine books based on the frontier existence of the Ingalls family, fixing the time at 1873 and introducing the main character of the series. The simplicity of presentation fixes Laura's perspective as the lens for the story, and all facets of the tale remain true to a child's point of view. Wilder's use of capital letters heightens Laura's wonder at her surroundings. It is fall, and the snug Ingalls home bursts with harvest foods, colorfully cataloged. Once upon a time, sixty years ago, a little girl lived in the Big Woods of Wisconsin, in a little gray house made of logs. The great, dark trees of the Big Woods stood all around the house, and beyond them were other trees and beyond them were more trees. As far as a man could go to the north in a day, or a week, or a whole month, there was nothing but woods. There were no houses. There were no roads. A wagon track ran before the house, turning and twisting out of sight in the woods where the wild animals lived, but the little girl did not know where it went, nor what might be at the end of it. The little girl was named Laura and she called her father, Pa, and her mother, Ma. In those days and in that place, children did not say Father and Mother, nor Mamma and Papa, as they do now. Once upon a time Little Red Riding Hood forest cake keep to the path at the edge of the forest cottage pick flowers meanwhile roof swallow hunter snore big belly whisper well. Es war einmal Rotkäppchen Wald Kuchen bleib auf dem Weg am Rande des Waldes kleines Landhäuschen Blumen pflücken in der Zwischenzeit Dach verschlingen, herunterschlucken Jäger schnarchen dicker Bauch flüstern Brunnen. Listen to and download Little House in the Big Woods Audiobook written by Laura Ingalls Wilder without annoying advertising. The story plots a little cabin house in Wisconsin where a family lives. Laura, her mum, and her father with their dog lived happily in their little house but lived a pioneer life which seems a bit hard or troublesome for some reasons. Due to the fact the family had to catch up the possible food items or grow them before the winter approaches, it is sometimes hard to manage all the necessities as a pioneer family. They are ready to make their own treats at home when Christmas comes and when spring approaches. But despite all the hardships and needs, the family lives happily and have no fears

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