The Winter Room
By: Gary Paulson

Grades: 7-8
Teaching Unit
By: Claire Abbas
Evaluation of The Winter Room

I personally enjoyed this book. I chose to use it in a classroom setting because of the different aspects of farm life that are described in the book. I might use this as a supplement for a section in a social studies class.

I would like to use this book in a classroom, but there is a reason I chose it for older grades. The story becomes graphic in the “Fall” section of the book. It speaks of the killing of the different animals for meat to survive the winter. In and of itself there is nothing wrong with it. That was a way of life in the 1930s and was for hundreds of years before that and it still is that way for some people. That is the way it was in Bible times. I would definitely send a letter home with the students before we start this book. I would leave it up to the parents whether we would read that part or not. The really graphic parts only last for 2 paragraphs and I would consider skipping over those parts.

Despite that part this book has real potential. It tells of farm life, some is said of what it is like in the “old country” (Norway), and shows a family unit working together.
What the students will be responsible for:

Vocabulary:

The student will be responsible for looking up each vocabulary word in the dictionary and should write a brief definition of the word as well as the page number that it is found on. They should also use at least three of the words in their own original sentences.

Comprehension questions:

Each comprehension question should be answered with complete sentences. These questions should be answered after each section is read. There will be periodic checks to make sure the students are doing them.

Discussion topics:

There will be at least one question at the end of each section that will be discussed in class. If we don’t have time to get to the discussion question it might be either taken up the next day or assigned as a short essay question for the student to answer.

Final project:

The students will complete one of three options

1. Research different types of farms and write a one to two page paper describing at least 3 different types of farms. One of these three should include a part of the farming that is mentioned in the book.
2. Research Norway and write a one to two page paper telling about it. There should be at least 3 different areas of research. They might include: landscape, climate, people, places of interest, famous people from Norway, etc.
3. Research different folk stories that come from Norway. Retell one in your own words.

This unit is split up by page number. We will spend 3 days on the first two sections, Tuning and Spring. One day will be spent on the Summer section. One day will also be spent on the Fall section and the first part of the Winter section. The next day will cover Alida and Orud the Terrible. The next section will cover Crazy Allen and the first part of The Woodcutter. The last day will be spent finishing the book.
Comprehension questions:

1. How old is Wayne? Explain how you know this.
2. How many residents live in the house on the farm? Name them.
3. Describe the different rooms in the house.

Discussion question:

1. How does Eldon describe “Spring”? Why do you think that he describes it that way?
Winter
Pages: 16-25

Vocabulary:
Granaries
Manger
Spigot
Bobsled

Comprehension questions:
1. Why does Wayne not want to train a few calves?
2. How did Wayne and Eldon keep up with whose turn it was to turn the Separator?
3. What does Eldon compare the backs of horses to?

Discussion questions:
Who do you think KARL is?
Winter
Pages: 25-32

Vocabulary:
Hayloft
Halter (for a horse)
Sore

Comprehension questions:
1. What do the boys decide to do with the book they are lended?
2. Describe what happens when Mother and Father went for coffee at Orrisons’.
3. Why did they choose Stacker?

Discussion question:
Have you ever gotten hurt when you were playing something with your brothers and sisters or friends?
Summer
Pages: 35-47

Vocabulary:
Plowshares
Blacksmith
Doubletree
Harrowing
Cultivated
Sweep rake
Thrash

Comprehension questions:
1. Describe what happens as Father plows the fields.
2. Explain why Eldon can’t “help out” with work on the farm.
3. Describe how Old Man Ransen eats.
4. Explain how Eldon knows it is “Fall”.

Discussion question:
Where is Hudson’s Bay? Discuss the area that they are farming in.
Fall and Winter
Pages: 51-53 and 61-69

Vocabulary:
Quilting bee
Singletree
Trace chains
Haresses

Comprehension questions:
1. Explain the myth of the lake Eldon mentions.
2. What part of Fall does Eldon dislike most? Why?
3. When is the time when Fall is gone and Winter hasn’t come yet, according to Eldon?
4. Why do Wayne and Eldon use grain shovels in this section?
5. Explain what Father does beside the stove. How long has he been doing this?
6. Why doesn’t Eldon stick his foot on the rail Wayne says is used to warm cold feet?

Discussion question:
Do you think Eldon or Wayne is right about the place between days? Why?
What is your favorite winter memory?
Alida and Orud the Terrible
Pages: 70-77

Vocabulary:
Bucksaw
Tallow
Viking
Burnished
Fjord
Vengeance

Comprehension questions:
1. Who is Alida? What happened to her?
2. What do the others do in the living room as Uncle David tells the story of Alida?
3. What does Uncle David do once he finishes his first story?
4. Eldon compares the three other stories to something, what?
5. What did Orud and his men do when they raided houses?
6. What happened to the man who “found” Melena? Why?
7. What did Melena do as Orud’s boat neared his home village? What did Orud do then?

Discussion question:
Do you think Orud’s story is based on true events? Why or why not?
Point out Norway on a map.

Crazy Allen and the Woodcutter
Pages: 78-91 top

Vocabulary:

Plume
Foreman
Undertaker
Kindling
Sawmills

Comprehension questions:

1. Describe Crazy Alen’s “best” joke. Who was it “played” on?
2. What was ironic about Alen and the foreman?
3. What happened each time the foreman came to visit Alen?
4. Describe Crazy Alen’s “last” joke.
5. What was different for Wayne about the stories Uncle David told?
6. What happened when cutters would stop and watch the Woodcutter?

Discussion question:

Who do you think the woodcutter is? Why?

Do you think it is possible for the Woodcutter to do everything Uncle David said?
Woodcutter
Pages: 91-103

Vocabulary:
Ragged
Braggart

Comprehension questions:
1. Who was the Woodcutter?
2. Describe in detail what happened in the granary in the back of the oats bin.
3. What happened in the hayloft that was unusual that day?
4. Who did Wayne and Eldon see in the back yard of the barn?
5. Describe what happened as the woodcutter looked up into the sky.
6. Describe what happened once the woodcutter split/cut the logs.
7. Describe what happened that night in the living room?

Discussion question:
Why do you think the boys felt betrayed?
Why do you think Uncle David looked young again?