



STUDENT STUDY GUIDE

Farmer's Son by N.E. Lasater

*Thank you for reading *Farmer's Son* and making it come alive with your analysis. The following questions track the book, so they can be taken in order as the class reads each section. More general questions are at the end. Teachers should also feel free to include questions from the Book Club Discussion, as well as adding their own.*

BEFORE YOU BEGIN:

Looking at the cover, what do you think the book will be about? Why do you think the class is reading it?

Have you ever been to a farm? Do you know any farmers? What kinds of farming happen in your state? How far away is your school from that farming?

Do you know anyone with dyslexia? How would it feel to be dyslexic, do you think?

Have you yourself ever had trouble learning at school? If yes, how did it feel? Who did you talk to about it?

As you page through the book, you see that it's organized into four main parts (plus "Cora"), each set in a different year and a different season, with each told from the point of view of a different central character. Before you start reading, why do you think the author did that? What challenges can you see in organizing a novel in this way?

If you have a paper copy of the book, look at how the pages are laid out. Why do you think there are unusually wide margins and unusually wide white spacing (called kerning) between the lines of type? Also, the words used are simple, and the story is told in short sentences. Why do you think that is?



THE “BOBBY” SECTION:

After reading the first chapter, where we meet Bobby, Garrett and Will at the farm, how do you guess the story will end? (When you finish the book, compare your guess with what really happened.)

What did the conflict about how deep to plant the seed tell us about the character of each of the people in Bobby’s life and about his relationship with each of those people? What does it tell us about what Bobby thinks of himself? (When you finish the book, describe how each of these relationships changes by the story’s end.)

During Bobby’s school years, what were his sources of emotional support? Think about things and places as well as people. What gives you emotional support? Have you ever found support from an unexpected source? Does wishing help provide support too?

Bobby feels incompetent compared to his siblings. Have you ever felt like that?

What do we learn from the tornado chapter about each member of the McAllister family?

Has your parent ever been called to your school, like Cora was with Miss Nunley? How did that make you feel? Did it make you feel closer to or more distant from your parent?

As you finish “Bobby”, what do you think Sarah’s role in the story will be? (Compare this with what actually happens, after you finish reading.)

How does the season of spring advance this section’s plot and describe its characters?

Story questions are the “what will happen about [x]?” questions that propel a reader through a novel. What story questions does the reader have at the end of “Bobby”?

Do you agree with Bobby’s choice to stay on the farm?

THE “SARAH” SECTION:

A story usually begins with a character’s ordinary world before it changes. Describe Sarah’s ordinary world at the start of this section, then summarize the things that change for her by the end.

Why do you think “Sarah” takes place in winter, and not in summer, which is the next season on the calendar after spring in “Bobby”? How does winter fit the plot and characters in this section?

Bobby witches with his sons. Have you ever done it? Would you like to try?

What do you think of Sarah’s mother? How does her relationship with Sarah differ from Bobby’s relationship with Cora?

What do we learn about Bobby from his speech at the end of “Sarah” that we didn’t know before?

Sarah gathers the courage to confront Bobby at the end of “Sarah”. Have you ever had to muster bravery to speak your truth to someone you love, knowing that it might forever change your relationship? If yes, how did it work out? Would you do it again?

Did you ever have a big choice to make that was only yours, that would change the course of your life whichever way you chose? Describe what you decided and why.

THE “GARRETT” SECTION:

What does the first chapter of “Garrett” tell us about the family’s dynamics as of fall 1991?

In the scene at the house, where Garrett strikes Bobby, why is Garrett so angry? What does this moment change?

Why does Garrett meet with Mickey Shaw to change the farm bank accounts?

What do you think of Spencer the lawyer? How was Spencer able to size up Garrett’s character and motives so quickly?

How does “fall” advance the plot and describe Garrett’s internal journey in this section?

At the courthouse, Cora meets the raw truth about her conniving husband. What do you think of her at the end of this chapter?

As you finish this section, what do you expect will happen between Garrett and Bobby in the big climax you know is coming? What climax would you write?

THE “DANIEL” SECTION:

Before you read this section: have you ever said or done something on purpose that ended up seriously harming someone else, that you could never take back?

Garrett corners Daniel with his offer to have Daniel come work for him. Have you ever felt similar pressure to do something an older relative demanded?

Do you have siblings? If yes, are you younger or older? How does your experience compare with Daniel’s (if you’re older) or Kevin’s (if you’re younger)?

Have you ever conspired with a sibling against your parents? How did that work out?

Have you ever manipulated your parent to get something you wanted? What levers (love, guilt, lies, carrot, etc.) did you use? How did it feel to do that? How do you feel about it now?

What role do the ducks play?

Why do you think Kevin did as Daniel instructed with the lasso, rather than take it down as Bobby directed?

Daniel is infatuated with Lisa. Why do you think the author included this subplot? What does it accomplish in the story?

Have you ever lost a loved one? How does the book compare with your own experience?

What role does Sarah's father play? Compare Sarah's relationship with him with Bobby's relationship with Garrett.

Bobby blames himself for the death. Do you agree that Bobby is at fault?

In the aftermath, Sarah is overwhelmed, Bobby is stoic, and Daniel flees outdoors, then pleads with Garrett. Which of these responses do you relate to the most? How do you think you would respond under similar circumstances?

Cora loves Garrett, but what finally is more important to her?

At the funeral, when they exchange that look, Bobby and Sarah agree to forgive Garrett. Why?

Do you think Bobby and Sarah will ever truly forgive Daniel fully for what he has done? Do you think Daniel will ever forgive himself?

THE "CORA" SECTION:

We never learn what's in the note that Cora keeps inside her Bible. What do you think it is?

Why does the book end with this one scene, with Cora alone in Bobby's guestroom?

OVERALL QUESTIONS:

The author had never visited a farm before tackling *Farmer's Son*. If you wrote a novel, how would you go about educating yourself on a central subject you knew nothing about? Or do you agree with the old adage "Only write what you know"?

A good story has sensory details about what is seen, heard, smelled, felt and tasted. Give one example for each of the five senses about how that detail made a scene more realistic for you.

Good stories usually have these major plot points: 1) an inciting incident that ignites the hero's journey; 2) the hero's commitment to a new path that will change the hero's life; 3) rising stakes making it harder and harder for the hero to succeed; 4) a midpoint pivot that changes how the hero proceeds; 5) a worsening situation that culminates in the hero's All Is Lost moment, when everything is at its worst; 6) a climax that resolves the story's central conflict; and 7) a new "normal" for the hero in a changed world. Identify each of these elements in *Farmer's Son*.

This story is about family secrets. Do you think secrets should all eventually come to light? Are there any secrets that morally can be kept?

Which of the four lead characters do you identify with the most? The least?

A good story has both an external plot and an internal journey for the hero. How does Bobby change on the inside from start to finish of this story?

Identify each of the story's subplots and say how each is resolved by the end of the book. About each subplot, also explain how it sheds light on something about Bobby's central journey. (An example of this is narcissistic Gaston in *Beauty and the Beast*, who shows Beast what an extreme version of himself looks like, so that Beast can choose instead his fundamentally good inner self at the climax.)

Describe in one sentence what this book is about (and send it to the author, who would love to see it).

If you could ask the author one question (other than "what's in Cora's note?"), what would it be?

What would be on your playlist if you made one for *Farmer's Son*?

Who would you cast in the *Farmer's Son* movie?

Are you glad you read this book? Why or why not?