



# WHEN THE SERGEANT CAME MARCHING HOME

DON LEMNA

GRADES  
4-7

## About the Book

Donald can't believe it when his father returns after serving in World War II and decides to move the family to a middle-of-nowhere farm, where they work hard trying to make ends meet. Full of wry, affectionate humor, this novel shows how one family becomes whole again.

## SUGGESTED CLASSROOM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

### Language Arts

**Questions for Discussion**—The following questions can be used for classroom discussion, for discussion in small groups, or as prompts for writing.

- ❖ Donald and his brother, Pat, lived without their father while he was away at war. How was their life different while he was away? How did it change after he returned? Have you had a similar experience with a parent being away at war and then returning? How did you deal with it?
- ❖ Donald has to move from Wistola to a ramshackle farm in a rural area, leaving his friends and “normal” activities behind. Describe a time when you had to move and how you coped with the changes in your life.
- ❖ At a couple of points in the story, Donald’s mother suggested that Donald not tell his father the truth. Do you think she was correct in suggesting this? Is it ever okay to lie? Why or why not?
- ❖ Donald and Pat attend a one-room school that serves grades kindergarten through 8. Compare this school with your own school. How are they alike? How are they different? Which do you prefer and why?
- ❖ Donald was saving his money so he could run away to California. Do you think running away was a good idea? Why or why not? Have you ever saved for something special? If so, describe what it was and if you ever actually obtained it. At the end of the story Donald changed his mind. Why do you think he did that? Do you agree with him? Why or why not?
- ❖ Donald’s feelings about “the Sergeant” changed between the time his dad first returned home and the end of the book. Why do you think Donald’s feelings changed? How did the Sergeant change?
- ❖ Compare Donald’s and Pat’s lives in Wistola and on the farm with your life in your town or city. How are they the same? How are they different? Which do you prefer? Why?

## Literature

Donald and Pat read children's books that were popular in the 1940s. Students may be interested in reading them also, and can probably find them in their school or local public library. The books they read were: the Oz books by L. Frank Baum, *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame, and *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson.

## Music

Donald and his brother learned the song "Pirate King" from the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta *The Pirates of Penzance* and they performed in *H.M.S. Pinafore* at the end of the school year. Students may like to hear these famous operettas. CDs are probably available at your local public library.

## Online Resources

[www.loc.gov/vets/sights.html](http://www.loc.gov/vets/sights.html) The Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress has collected **interviews and documentary materials related to veterans' experiences**. Many can give insight into the Sergeant's behavior when he first came home.

[www.loc.gov/vets/stories/onthebeach.html](http://www.loc.gov/vets/stories/onthebeach.html) Relates stories of World War II veterans who had **experiences at Omaha Beach** like Donald's dad.

[www.old-time.com/weekly/](http://www.old-time.com/weekly/) Presents a list of a number of **old-time radio programs**. Some entries provide a short history of the show or a short sound clip. Some of these programs may have been ones Donald listened to.

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American\\_films\\_of\\_1946](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_films_of_1946) A relatively extensive list of **movies that were released in 1946**. One, which might be appealing to young people, is *The Yearling*, which Donald could have watched with his friends. He also liked the Frankenstein movies and *Tarzan and the Amazons*.

[www.montanabookaward.org/](http://www.montanabookaward.org/) Students may be interested in reading some of the books that have won the Montana Book Award to get a better idea of what **life in Montana has been like at various times in history**.

[geography.about.com/library/maps/blusmt.htm](http://geography.about.com/library/maps/blusmt.htm) Presents various **maps of Montana** showing landforms, elevations, weather, etc.

## About the Author

**Don Lemna** was raised on the prairies, the child of an American father and a Canadian mother. After a career in the Canadian armed forces, he retired from the military with the rank of lieutenant colonel and took up writing. *When the Sergeant Came Marching Home* is his U.S. debut.

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Classroom activities prepared by Sandy Schuckett, school library consultant.

## Geography

Wistola, Montana, is a fictional town, but it is described as being north of Great Falls, which is a real city. Students may use an atlas or encyclopedia to locate Great Falls and then estimate where Wistola and the family farm were located.

The land played a very important part in the story. Students may look at maps of Montana to see what the land was like, what the weather was like in different seasons, etc. (See Online Resources below for details.)