

Approved for use in English II

Summary of the Work:

For this Bison Books edition, James Welch, the acclaimed author of *Winter in the Blood* (1986) and other novels, introduces Mildred Walker's vivid heroine, Ellen Webb, who lives in the dryland wheat country of central Montana during the early 1940s. He writes, "It is a story about growing up, becoming a woman, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, within the space of a year and a half. But what a year and a half it is!" Welch offers a brief biography of Walker, who wrote nine of her thirteen novels while living in Montana.

Rationale:

This book has been board approved for use at the grade level because Sophomore Honors English is an enriched and challenging version of the required English II course. This course for the college-bound emphasizes the analysis of non-fiction and novels. Students should have an appreciation for and love of reading. Additionally, the course focuses on the study of other genres of literature, emphasis on class discussion, grammar, and vocabulary development. Expository and research writing is emphasized.

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

-From [500 Great Books by Women](#); review by Jesse Larsen

With an arid "dry-land" wheat farm as both its geographic and metaphoric center, *Winter Wheat* tells the story of eighteen-year-old Ellen Webb. Her Vermont-born father and Russian-born mother, married during the first World War, have come as homesteaders to Barton, Montana, a grain-elevator and general store. It is 1940, the year Ellen will start college if the wheat harvest is good; it is September, "like a quiet day after a whole week of wind. I mean that wind that blows dirt into your eyes and hair and between your teeth and roars in your ears after you've gone inside." The harvest pays and Ellen goes off to college, where she immediately falls in love: "I hadn't meant to fall in love so soon, but there's nothing you can do about it. It's like planning to seed in April and then having it come off so warm in March that the earth is ready." Ellen and Gil plan their marriage for after the summer harvest. But Gil arrives and doesn't find Montana or the life of dry-land wheat farmers beautiful. Ellen begins to see everything, including her parents, with new and critical eyes in this unsparing and poignant examination of love and life. -- *For great reviews of books for girls, check out [Let's Hear It for the Girls: 375 Great Books for Readers 2-14](#).*

* Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.

* Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

Noted Distinction:

- Montana Center for the Book, One Book Montana Choice.

Readability:

- Lexile Score: 680
- Readability Level: 5.9

Learning Resources Guidelines:

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

Standard Alignment: ([link](#))

Approval:

Submitted to Committee:

Approved for Adoption: 2002

Notes on the Text:

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

Montana Fiction.
Young women Fiction.

Connection to the Curriculum:

Literary example of use of imagery, point of view, and sense of place.

Additional Connections:

(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)