

A GIRL OF THE LIMBERLOST

by
Gene Stratton-Porter

Beginning in 1904 with the publication of *Freckles*, Gene Stratton-Porter quickly became one of the best-loved American authors of this century. Her books have been described as "wholesome, with strong themes of love of nature, love of God, and love of one's fellow man."

Gene Stratton-Porter was the youngest of 12 children born to an Indiana farmer. Her father taught her to love the land and gave her first nature lessons. Largely self-taught, she became not only a naturalist, but a photographer and writer. At one time she even organized her own movie company to protect the moralistic tone of her work. More than twenty films were based on her novels.

Perhaps the most widely read female author of her day, *Freckles* sold more than two million copies. Her best known work today, *A Girl of the Limberlost*, is the story of Elnora Comstock, a lovely, kindhearted girl with a burning desire to learn. Elnora's mother, nursing a deep grief from losing her husband early in their marriage, has neglected Elnora and has always treated her coldly.

Elnora bravely faces a high school full of well-dressed city children and is ridiculed as a "country" girl. In order to pay for her clothes, books and tuition she begins collecting the moths in the Limberlost and selling them to the famous Bird Woman. Eventually, Elnora wins everyone's respect and love by her unselfishness, diligence, and hard work.

In a deeply moving moment Elnora's mother learns the truth about the past and her heart turns back to her daughter. The relationship is restored and mother and daughter become partners in the moth work.

As a further development of the plot, Elnora and her mother meet a young lawyer recovering from typhoid fever. They befriend him and he shares their interest in moth collecting. As their respect for one another grows, he tells Elnora of his love and long-standing engagement to the beautiful and sophisticated Edith Carr back home in Chicago.

You can find out what happens to Elnora and Edith by reading *A Girl of the Limberlost*. As you read and enjoy, expand your knowledge by choosing from these unity study activities:

1. Making a list of the moths mentioned in the book. Check out a book from the library with pictures of these moths.
2. Making a list of the birds mentioned in the book. Check out a book from the library with pictures of these birds.
3. Find out if the Limberlost is a real place. Where is it?
4. Read other books by Gene Stratton-Porter. An especially good story is *Laddie: A True Blue Story*.
5. Elnora has a natural gift for playing the violin. Listen to recordings of violin music.
6. Learn about the violin. If possible, handle one and try to play it. A music store would be a good place to start.

7. If you already play the violin or another musical instrument purpose to be more diligent in your practice time.
8. Do you think Gene Stratton-Porter had a Christian world view? Use passages from the book to support your position.
9. Just as Mrs. Porter was a self-taught naturalist, you can develop skills in this area also. Beginning in your own backyard, neighborhood park or nearby natural habitat...
10. Identify the plants and trees. You can check out books from the library. If you run into difficulties making identifications, try collecting some samples and taking them to your local county extension office for help.
11. Build a bird feeder.
12. Identify any birds that come to your bird feeder. You can check out a *Field Guide to Birds* from the library if you don't already have one.
13. Start your own field notebook by quietly sitting outside and recording information and observations. For example, the date, time, weather conditions, position of sun, habitat, any sounds heard or insect or animal behavior observed. You can include sketches of what you see.
14. Go for a nature walk. Collect leaves, insects, feathers, rocks, etc.
15. Contact your local extension office and find out what plants to plant in your area that will attract butterflies. Plant your own butterfly garden.
16. If possible collect or buy a cocoon and observe the metamorphosis process first hand.
17. Research and write a nature lesson. Present it to your family or another homeschooling family.
18. Make gifts for loved ones using things you find outside. The library will have craft books that can help you.
19. Write a devotion making an analogy between a developing and emerging butterfly and a Christian. Read it during your family devotion time.
20. If you like to draw, try making a special coloring book for a little brother, sister or friend. Draw the shape of a moth or butterfly. At the bottom of the page print the name and a description to help them correctly color it.