

*Prairie Songs* (on poetry of Carl Sandburg and Willa Cather)  
Carl Sandburg selections from **Prairie** in Cornhuskers — 1918 (displayed in regular font)  
Willa Cather selections from April Twilight — 1923 (displayed in italic font)  
[adapted by Gwyneth Walker]

Carl Sandburg: **Prairie**

I WAS born on the prairie and the milk of its wheat, the red of its clover, the eyes of its women, gave me a song and a knowledge..

Here between the sheds of the Rocky Mountains and the Appalachians, here now a morning star fixes a fire sign over the timber claims and cow pastures, the corn belt, the cotton belt, the cattle ranches.

Here I know I will thirst for nothing so much as one more sunrise or a sky moon of fire or a river moon of water.

**The prairie sings to me in the forenoon and I know in the night I rest easy in the prairie arms, on the prairie heart.**

In the city among the walls the overland passenger train is choked and the pistons hiss and the wheels curse.

On the prairie the overland flits on phantom wheels and the sky and the soil between them muffle the pistons and cheer the wheels.

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Willa Cather: *Going Home*

*(Burlington Route)*

*How smoothly the trains run beyond the Missouri;  
Even in my sleep I know when I have crossed the river.*

*The wheels turn as if they were glad to go;  
The sharp curves and windings left behind,  
The roadway wide open,*

*(The crooked straight  
And the rough places plain.)*

*They run smoothly, they run softly, too.  
There is not noise enough to trouble the lightest sleeper.*

*Nor jolting to wake the weary-hearted.  
I open my window and let the air blow in,*

*The air of morning,  
That smells of grass and earth—  
Earth, the grain-giver.*

*How smoothly the trains run beyond the Missouri;  
Even in my sleep I know when I have crossed the river.*

*The wheels turn as if they were glad to go;  
They run like running water,*

*Like Youth, running away . . .  
They spin bright along the bright rails,  
Singing and humming,  
Singing and humming.  
They run remembering,  
They run rejoicing,  
As if they, too, were going home*

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Carl Sandburg: **Prairie**

I am here when the cities are gone.  
I am here before the cities come.  
I nourished the lonely men on horses.  
I will keep the laughing men who ride iron.  
I am dust of men.

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Willa Cather: **Prairie Dawn**

*A crimson fire that vanquishes the stars;  
A pungent odor from the dusty sage;  
A sudden stirring of the huddled herds;  
A breaking of the distant table-lands  
Through purple mists ascending, and the flare  
Of water ditches silver in the light;  
A swift, bright lance hurled low across the world;  
A sudden sickness for the hills of home.*

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Carl Sandburg: **Prairie**

I am the prairie, mother of men, waiting.  
They are mine, the threshing crews eating beefsteak, the farmboys driving steers to the railroad cattle pens.  
They are mine, the crowds of people at a Fourth of July basket picnic, listening to a lawyer read the Declaration of Independence, watching the pinwheels and Roman candles at night, the young men and women two by two hunting the bypaths and kissing bridges.  
They are mine, the horses looking over a fence in the frost of late October saying good-morning to the horses hauling wagons of rutabaga to market.  
They are mine.

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Will Cather: **Prairie Spring**

*Evening and the flat land,  
Rich and sombre and always silent;  
The miles of fresh-plowed soil,  
Heavy and black, full of strength and harshness;  
The growing wheat, the growing weeds,  
The toiling horses, the tired men;  
The long empty roads,  
Sullen fires of sunset, fading,  
The eternal, unresponsive sky.  
Against all this, Youth,  
Flaming like the wild roses,  
Singing like the larks over the plowed fields,  
Flashing like a star out of the twilight;  
Youth with its unsupportable sweetness,  
Its fierce necessity,  
Its sharp desire,  
Singing and singing,  
Out of the lips of silence,  
Out of the earthy dusk.*

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Carl Sandburg: **Prairie**

O prairie mother, I am your daughter.  
I have loved the prairie as a woman with a heart shot full of pain over love.

Here I know I will thirst for nothing so much as one more sunrise or a sky moon of  
fire or a river moon of water.

**The prairie sings to me in the forenoon and I know in the night I rest easy in the prairie  
arms, on the prairie heart.**