

## A Choose to Read Ohio Toolkit

Use this toolkit to plan book discussions, library programs, or classroom activities.

Meet Ohio author Michelle Houts and learn about her magical adventure novel set in Denmark.

Select from a range of discussion questions and extension activities to deepen the experience of reading *Winterfrost*.

Discover informational websites, crafts, and read-alikes to explore topics and themes in depth.

# Winterfrost

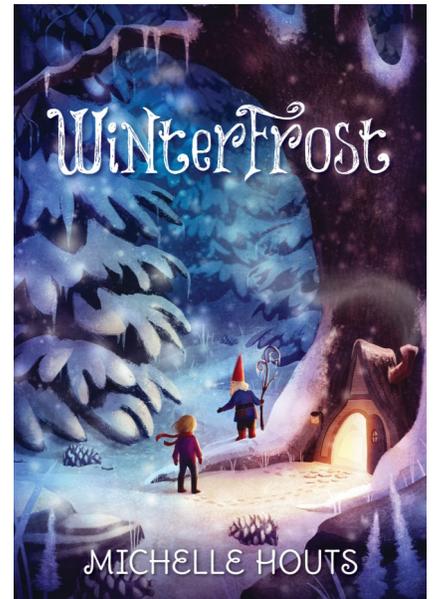
By Michelle Houts



## About the Book

What should have been an ordinary Danish Christmas for twelve-year-old Bettina Larsen and her baby sister, Pia, quickly turns extraordinary when unexpected events take their parents away for a few days, leaving Bettina in charge of the house, the barn, and baby Pia. In all the confusion, Bettina's family neglects to set out the traditional bowl of Christmas rice pudding for the tiny nisse, a gnome-like creature who's rumored to look after the family and their livestock. But no one besides her grandfather Farfar ever believed the nisse were real, so what harm could there be in forgetting this silly custom?

But for one young and impetuous nisse, the lack of rice pudding is a very big deal. And when baby Pia disappears during an afternoon nap, Bettina finds herself trying to appease a nisse she's not even sure she believes exists. With her parents' return looming, Bettina must do everything she can to get her sister back and set things right – even if it means entering the magical world of the nisse.



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## Book Details

**Winterfrost** by Michelle Houts.

Candlewick Press, 2014. ISBN 9780763665654. Ages 8-12. 259 pages.

Leveled Reading: AR Points 6.0. ATOS Book Level 5.3. 810 Lexile.

[candlewick.com/cat.asp?browse=Title&mode=book&isbn=0763665657](http://candlewick.com/cat.asp?browse=Title&mode=book&isbn=0763665657)

Available as an ebook through the Ohio Digital Library: [ohiodigitallibrary.com](http://ohiodigitallibrary.com)

## Say and learn the Danish words in *Winterfrost*

- ◆ Nisse: *nee-suh* (plural: *nisser*)
- ◆ Pia: *pee - uh*
- ◆ Klakke: *clack-uh*
- ◆ Gammel: *gam - mul*
- ◆ Hagen: *hay - gun*
- ◆ Pedersen: like we say *Peterson*

Danish is more precise than English about family relations. Farfar was Bettina's paternal grandfather (father's father), and Mormor is her maternal grandmother (mother's mother).



Author photo and biographical information courtesy Candlewick Press; used with permission.  
Photo by Richard Nordstrom.

## About the Author

Michelle Houts is the author of several middle-grade novels including *The Beef Princess of Practical County* and its sequel, *The Practical County Drama Queen*. She fell in love with the nisse folk more than twenty years ago while living in Denmark, where she became fascinated with tales of their mischief and fun. Her Danish friends continue to share nisse stories and an occasional nisse sighting. She dreams of returning to Denmark at Christmastime so she can show her gratitude to the nisse with a warm bowl of rice pudding. Michelle Houts lives on a grain and livestock farm in west central Ohio with her husband and three children.

Michelle lives her life by the "Mark Boney Promise." *Always treat others with respect, and speak up when others do not.* See her website for the full story.

Michelle will write back to any fan letter sent to:  
Michelle Houts, P.O. Box 434, Rockford, OH 45882

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## Author Resources

### Michelle Houts's official website

[michellehouts.com](http://michellehouts.com)

### Michelle Houts's blog

[michellehouts.com/category/a-country-mile](http://michellehouts.com/category/a-country-mile)

### Brittney Breakey interviews Michelle Houts

[authorturf.com/interview-with-award-winning-author-michelle-houts/authorinterviews](http://authorturf.com/interview-with-award-winning-author-michelle-houts/authorinterviews)

### Mindy McGinnis interviews Michelle Houts

[writerwriterpantsonfire.blogspot.com/2011/05/interview-with-michelle-houts-sat-wow.html](http://writerwriterpantsonfire.blogspot.com/2011/05/interview-with-michelle-houts-sat-wow.html)

### For publicity and speaking engagement inquiries:

[michellehouts.com/author-appearances](http://michellehouts.com/author-appearances)

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## Talk About It!

Topics to share when discussing *Winterfrost* with young readers.

**Spoiler warning! Some discussion questions refer to key elements in the book. Do not read if you do not want to find out what happens.**

- What do you think about Bettina, 12 years old, and Pia, nearly a year old, being left home alone, for about a week, by their parents? What are some other options their parents had, besides leaving their children home alone?
- What do you think would have happened if Bettina remembered to feed Klakke his rice pudding? What if the rice pudding were a day late?
- What do you think would be the best part about becoming tiny like the nisse? What would you do if a goose picked you up?

**“But remember, whether or not you see me is not up to me. It is the seer who must do the looking, the seer who must slow down enough to take note of the world around her.”**

## Go Further!

Ideas for extending the experience of reading **Winterfrost**.

**Educators:** Every CTRO book may be used to support Ohio's English Language Arts reading, writing, and speaking and listening standards. Other Learning Standards, such as Social Studies: Geography: Human Systems (Grade 5) also apply. Discussion questions and educational activities for **Winterfrost** align with Learning Standards for Grades 3-6.

**Librarians, parents, and others:** These activities are also for library programs, family activities, and other projects. Learning Standards define what students should know and be able to do at each grade. For more information, see the Ohio Department of Education website, [education.ohio.gov](http://education.ohio.gov). From the Topics dropdown menu, click on "Ohio's Learning Standards."

- Bettina lied to her neighbors, the Pedersens, about baby Pia being stolen. Rewrite the scene from Mr. Pedersen's perspective as he searched for Bettina in the woods after finding their house empty.
- Use your library to learn about mythical creatures, including the Danish or Norwegian nisse (plural nisser), Swedish tomte (plural tomtar), and Celtic brownie. How are they similar? What do they look like? How do they behave? Are there similar mythical creatures in other countries?
- Summarize **Winterfrost** in a 12-panel illustration. Pick the 12 most important parts of the book that drive the plot line and keep the book interesting. Remember, somebody who has never read the book should be able to understand the plot by looking at your 12-panel summary. To make the 12-panel sheet, take an 11x17" sheet of paper and fold in half (creates a 8.5x11" paper), fold that paper in thirds the long way, then in half the short way. Open the paper up to reveal 12 panels.
- Create a biography for each of the members of Gammel's family (wife, daughter, son-in-law, twin sister, etc.). Using clues found in **Winterfrost**, include where they were born, their birthdates, jobs, and how they are related to Gammel. Describe their childhood. Were they ever disciplined for mistreating their human family? Present your biographies, including a picture of how you imagine the nisse to look.
- Watch a book trailer for **Winterfrost** ([animoto.com/play/J2k0KHcMvLoqJd1H18fMAw](http://animoto.com/play/J2k0KHcMvLoqJd1H18fMAw)) created by education students at Wright State University. Create your own 2-minute book trailer. You want people to become interested in the book, without giving away spoilers. Teacher Librarian Michelle Harclerode gives good tips and examples for creating book trailers: [www.booktrailersforreaders.com/How+to+make+a+book+trailer](http://www.booktrailersforreaders.com/How+to+make+a+book+trailer)
- Using online resources available to students through INFOhio ([infohio.org](http://infohio.org)) and to all Ohio residents through Ohio Web Library ([ohioweblibrary.org](http://ohioweblibrary.org)), research the history and culture of Denmark. Create a travel guide for Denmark highlighting important towns and people. Also discuss language, currency, climate, and how to get around as a tourist.

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## Talk About It! (continued)

- What do you think would happen if Ulf went straight to his parents' house to apologize, instead of going to the Larsens to check on Klakke? Would Klakke still have stolen Pia? Would Ulf have been able to convince Klakke that the Larsens were good people that took care of the nisse?
- What are some of your family's winter traditions? Do you celebrate a special holiday? Do you eat particular foods, or take a trip every year to the same place?
- Do you think creatures such as nisser, brownies, and tomtar exist? How would you feel if one were assigned to assist your family in household chores?
- Do you believe the winterfrost that covered Lolland was magical? Why do you think the winterfrost disappeared when Pia had been safely returned?

## Explore More!

Additional ideas and resources to use with *Winterfrost*.

### History of the Danish Christmas Nisse

[scandinavianchristmas traditions.com/norwayculture.html](http://scandinavianchristmas traditions.com/norwayculture.html)

The Danish nisse, who is very similar to the Swedish tomte, is thought to be short and stocky with a long grey or white beard and a knitted red cap. The role of nisser in the Scandinavian Christmas has changed over the years, yet they have always played an important part.

### Recipe for Rice Pudding (Risengrød)

[mydanishkitchen.com/2010/12/06/12-days-of-christmas-risengr%C3%B8d/](http://mydanishkitchen.com/2010/12/06/12-days-of-christmas-risengr%C3%B8d/)

The Larsens forgot to feed Klakke his rice pudding on Christmas Eve, which caused all of the chaos to ensue. On Christmas Eve, many Danish families – believers and unbelievers alike – acknowledge the possibility of a nisse by placing a bowl of rice pudding in the barn or attic for him to enjoy, and to bring good luck to the family during the next year.

### Scandinavian Christmas Crafts

Nisse Craft: Intermediate Skill Level

[tikkido.com/blog/swedish-tomte-Christmas-elf-ornament-tutorial](http://tikkido.com/blog/swedish-tomte-Christmas-elf-ornament-tutorial)

Nisse Craft: Easy Skill Level

[quirkyartistloft.blogspot.com/2011/12/free-paper-craft-mr-gnome-ornament.html](http://quirkyartistloft.blogspot.com/2011/12/free-paper-craft-mr-gnome-ornament.html)

Danish Christmas Hearts

[craftster.org/forum/index.php?topic=363100.0](http://craftster.org/forum/index.php?topic=363100.0)

### Author Pinterest Page for *Winterfrost*

[pinterest.com/mehouts/winterfrost/](http://pinterest.com/mehouts/winterfrost/)

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**“Take care of your nisse, and your nisse will take care of you.”**

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## Check It Out!

Companion texts for *Winterfrost*.

### Picture books about Scandinavian Christmas

- ◆ *Christmas Trolls* (series) by Jan Brett. Puffin Books.
- ◆ *The Christmas Wish* (series) by Lori Evert. Illustrated by Per Breiehagen. Random House Books for Young Readers.
- ◆ *The Tomten* (series) by Astrid Lindgren. Puffin Books.
- ◆ *The Tomtes' Christmas Porridge* by Sven Nordqvist. Floris Books, 2011.
- ◆ *Lucia Morning in Sweden* by Ewa Rydaker. Illustrated by Carina Stahlberg. Nodin Press, 2014.

### Middle Grade Adventure Books

- ◆ *Chronicles of Narnia* (series) by C.S. Lewis. HarperCollins.
- ◆ *Wildwood Chronicles* (series) by Colin Meloy. Illustrated by Carson Ellis. Balzer+Bray.
- ◆ *The Familiars* (series) by Adam Jay Epstein and Andrew Jacobson. HarperCollins.
- ◆ *Edge Chronicles* (series) by Paul Stewart and Chris Riddell. David Fickling Books.
- ◆ *The Hidden Folk* by Lise Lunge-Larsen. Illustrated by Beth Krommes. Houghton Mifflin, 2004.

Choose to Read Ohio, a project of the State Library of Ohio, the Ohioana Library Association, and the Ohio Center for the Book, encourages public libraries, schools, families, and others to build a community of readers and an appreciation of Ohio authors, illustrators, and literature. CTRO is adaptable for use in classrooms, libraries, bookstores, by book discussion groups, families, and other community groups.

Explore Choose to Read Ohio resources & toolkits:  
[library.ohio.gov/ctro](http://library.ohio.gov/ctro)

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