

Honors LA 11

My Antonia, by Willa Cather

DIRECTIONS: Read these analysis questions about the novel before you begin reading Willa Cather's novel. Annotate as you read to help you answer these questions. I will not be collecting your annotations, but I will be collecting your answers to these 10 questions.

- You will be asked plot, character, and theme questions on each of the calendared reading quizzes. Be ready by keeping good notes of these elements while you read and reviewing your notes before each quiz. (And don't think that Spark Notes will suffice—please read the book yourself.)
- On the final quiz, you will be asked to write a short essay response to a question related to one of these questions.

***My Antonia* Questions:**

1. The novel explores the social, linguistic, and economic barriers these immigrants face as they try to settle in a new place. How are they treated? How would you describe Cather's attitude toward the various immigrants in the story? What would you say is Cather's attitude toward America's immigrant past? Give evidence from the novel to support your answer.
2. Note the descriptions of the land and the natural environment in the narration of the story. What role does the land play in the novel? How does it relate to the characters and themes of the story?
3. Whose voice is telling the story? What attitudes, feelings, and "messages" are conveyed through the descriptions, symbols, and narration of the story—and how?
4. *My Antonia* explores social issues in a small town in Nebraska around 1900. It can be considered a novel of historical fiction in that it paints a portrait of the culture of a specific time and place: the American West around the turn of the 19th century. Social issues like racism, immigration, gender roles, and classism, are explored through a fictionalized story that is based on the author's own real experiences. How does this relate to other novels we have read?
5. What basic viewpoint or attitude does Cather convey about the American West? Romanticized? Nostalgic? Sacrifice and struggle? Pride? Victory? And what role do immigrants play in her portrait? Think of Mr. and Mrs. Shimerda as well as Pavel and Peter and others we meet in the story.

6. It's never exactly clear just what the novel's narrator (Jim) feels for his childhood friend, *Ántonia*. Analyze the relationship between Jim and Antonia: How would you characterize Jim's feelings for *Ántonia*? *Ántonia*'s feelings for Jim? How do Jim's feelings for *Ántonia* change over the course of the novel? Why don't Jim and Antonia become romantically involved—or do they? Why don't they end up together?
7. Lena has an important role in the novel. What is her relationship with Jim? How do they feel about each other? How does Lena compare to Antonia?
8. *My Ántonia* is as much a coming-of-age story as any other genre. Protagonist Jim Burden begins the novel as a ten-year-old boy and the story follows his character through adolescence, college, and into adulthood. What are some of the values or traits Jim acquires from his experiences? How might Jim's coming-of-age be compared to our country's own coming-of-age with regard to the American West?
9. Analyze the significance of the introduction to the novel: In the introduction, the narrator says that she and Jim and *Ántonia* were children together. Why doesn't the narrator appear in Jim's narrative? What is the point of the frame story – the first few pages where the unnamed narrator gets a manuscript from Jim? Why not just start with Jim telling the story?
10. Is *My Ántonia* more important as a historical novel (giving us a slice-of-American-life portrait of a very specific time and place), a coming-of-age novel, or a love story? What do you think is the real heart of this novel?