



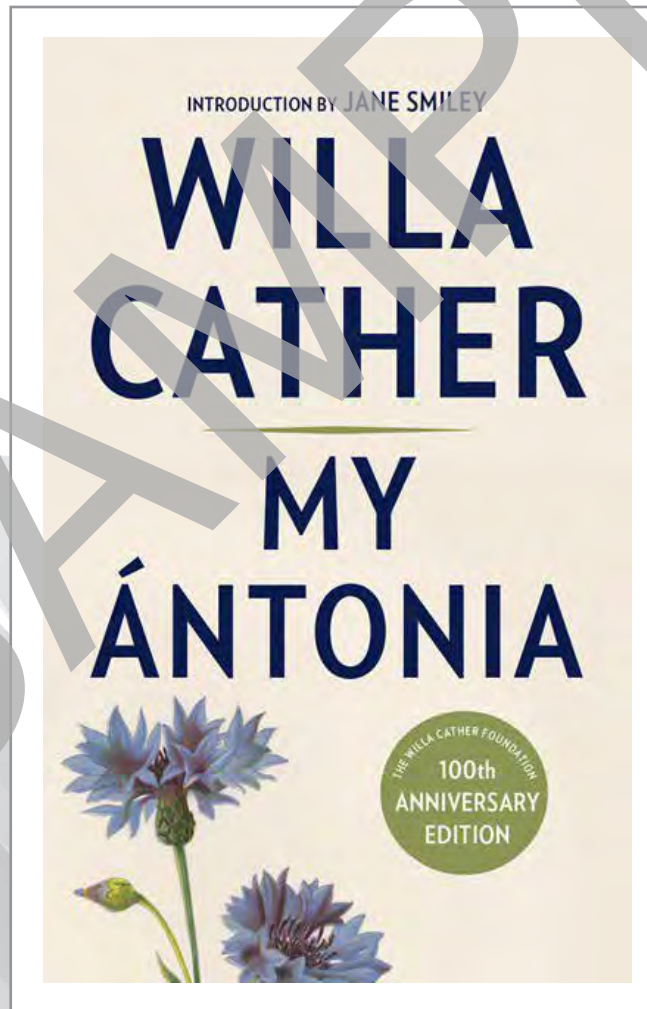
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

My Antonia

Willa Cather



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Discussion Questions • Vocabulary

Writing Ideas • Activities

Book I Pages 27-53

Vocabulary

freemasonry 27	jilted 28	bravado 28	picketing 28
patroness 28	ardent 28	solicitous 29	hieroglyphics 33
obelisk 33	encumbered 34	sombrero 36	desperado 36
jurisdiction 36	coverlid 38	inflection 39	decorum 39
strident 39	covert 40	oracular 41	granaries 41
draw 41	provisions 45	thatched 46	chased 49
earnestness 50	Mormons 51	catalpa 52	degraded 52

Vocabulary Activity

Assign one word to each student. Students should read the word in context to assure that they are working with the meaning used in the book. (For example, the words *draw*, *chased*, and *provisions* are used in ways students might not think of first.) Allow about five minutes for students to formulate several clues for their word. (e. g., “Mormons”—Their Zion was found in Utah; their leader was Brigham Young; their religion permits men to have more than one wife.) Students give their clues one at a time, while classmates try to guess the word after each clue.

Discussion Questions

1. Why was the author happy to run into Jim Burden on the train? (They grew up together and share many memories they enjoy discussing.) Who do they discuss, and what is the result? (They talk about Antonia, a central figure of their childhoods, and Jim later brings the author his story about her—the remainder of the book.)
2. Where are Jim and Jake going at the beginning of the story? (to Black Hawk, Nebraska) Why? (Jim’s parents both died. He is going to live with his grandparents. Jake will work for Jim’s grandfather.)

3. What is unusual about the people Jim sees at the train station in Black Hawk? (There is a family of immigrants, and Jim has never before heard a foreign language. Otto Fuchs, the hired man who comes to meet Jake and Jim, is intriguing with his scarred face, curled mustache, brown skin, and sombrero.)
4. How is Nebraska different from Virginia? (In Virginia, Jim saw hills, creeks, trees, fields, and fences. In Nebraska, there seems to be "...nothing but land; not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made.") How does Jim feel? (as if he has gone over the edge of the world; erased; blotted out)
5. What words could you use to describe Jim's grandmother? (kind, sentimental, wrinkled and brown, tall, energetic, capable) What about his grandfather? (He is dignified, quiet, has a snow-white beard and bright blue eyes, reads the Bible aloud each evening.)
6. What is unusual about the Burdens' house? (The kitchen is underground, in the basement. The house is the only wooden one west of Black Hawk.) At this time in history, how did many prairie pioneers live? (in dugouts or sod houses)
7. What does Jim see stretching for miles? (the red prairie grass) What phrases does Cather use to describe it? (p. 42—"...the whole country seemed, somehow, to be running;" "...as if the shaggy grass were a sort of loose hide, and underneath it herds of wild buffalo were galloping, galloping...")
8. Why do you think Grandmother chooses not to harm the bull-snakes and badger? (She "feels friendly to the animals," probably is a little lonely and enjoys their company when she works in the garden.)
9. Are you surprised that the Shimerdas were cheated by one of their own countrymen? How were they at a disadvantage when it came to financial dealings in their new country? (They couldn't speak English, had to rely on Krajiek for information, and he told them what suited his needs.)
10. What strikes Jim most about Antonia's appearance? (She has beautiful brown eyes, glowing brown skin, and wild-looking hair.) Do you think Jim finds her appealing? Describe the other children in the family. (Yulka is younger than Antonia, fair and obedient. Marek is apparently mentally retarded. Ambrosch, the older brother, is strong-looking.)

11. What does Jim notice about Mr. Shimerda? [He seems too refined for a man who lives in a miserable dugout house; he wears a silk scarf and pin under his shirt, has a dignified manner. His face looks "...like something from which all the warmth and light had died out." (p. 48)]
12. How does Antonia manage to communicate with Jim, even though she knows no English? (She grabs his hand, squeezes it and laughs, manages to learn Jim's name and the words "eyes," "blue," and "skies.") Why does Jim feel that Antonia is "reckless and extravagant"? (She wants to give him her little silver ring; he finds this far too impulsive an action for someone he barely knows.)
13. What jobs become Jim's? (He is given a pony and is sent for the mail twice a week as well as on other errands.) Why do you think he refers to the sunflower-bordered roads as "roads to freedom"?
14. **Prediction:** What part will the Burdens play in helping the Shimerdas to adjust to life on the prairie and to improve their living conditions?

Writing Idea

Writer James Joyce used the term **epiphany** to designate a sudden insight in which the essential nature of something is grasped. Jim Burden experienced epiphany in his grandmother's garden. Find and reread the passage. (page 44—"I was something that lay under the sun and felt it, like the pumpkins, and I did not want to be anything more.")

Write about an **epiphany** you have experienced. You may use either prose or poetry. Your description should be brief but to the point so that others who read it will understand exactly how you felt.

Research

Otto Fuchs, who is Austrian, tells Grandmother Burden that he would have tried to help Mr. Shimerda in his dealings with Krajiek, but "Bohemians has a natural distrust of Austrians." When asked to explain why, he tells her it would take too long, that it's "politics."

Find out why Bohemians distrusted Austrians. (Hint: look for information on the Hapsburg Empire.)