



 Prestwick House

Activity Pack

MY ÁNTONIA

BY WILLA CATHER



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Written by Katie Mitchell

Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading

Making Predictions

Objectives: Analyzing the cover, epigraph, and dedication
Predicting themes, motifs, and events in the novel

Activity

While an old adage declares, “Never judge a book by its cover,” the design and illustrations on a cover not only help market a book, but they often reflect themes and events that appear in the story. Many editions of *My Ántonia* have a picture of a girl on the cover. People say a picture is worth a thousand words. We treasure photographs of our family, friends, and events because they remind us of our experiences, good and bad. Sometimes a photograph can capture an emotion, and looking at the photo causes that emotion to resurface. Study the cover of *My Ántonia*. Take in the visual details—the images, colors, and light.

In the first few pages of the novel, you’ll notice the dedication page. The dedication reads, “To Carrie and Irene Miner: In memory of affections old and true.” Some editions of the novel also include an epigraph, “Optima dies...prima fugit,” a line from Virgil, which means, “the best days are the first to flee.”

Based on the cover, dedication, and epigraph, make at least five predictions about the novel. Write them down, and be prepared to share them in a class discussion.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Introduction

Inferences and Purpose

Objectives: Using details and prior knowledge to make inferences
Identifying the purpose of a passage

Activity

An unnamed, first-person narrator introduces the novel, recounting his or her friendship with Jim Burden—what it was like growing up in Nebraska—and recalling another person from their shared past: a girl named *Ántonia*. Once you begin reading the novel, however, you will notice that the narration shifts to Jim Burden.

Analyze the Introduction on the following three key points. Answer each as completely as you can, citing specific words, phrases, or sentences from the text. Be prepared to share your ideas in a class discussion.

1. Based on the details in the passage, what kind of person do you think Jim Burden seems to be? What is the narrator's attitude toward him?

2. Based on the details in the passage, who do you think is the unnamed narrator? Is it a character in the novel? What kind of person is the narrator, and what is his or her relationship to Jim?

3. Why do you think Willa Cather includes this Introduction? What purpose could it serve?

Name: _____

Date: _____

During Reading**Chapter Titles**

Objectives: Identifying main ideas and themes
Summarizing chapters

Activity

Authors use chapter titles for a variety of reasons: to give an overview of what a chapter or story will be about; to highlight a significant event, theme, or motif; or to pique a reader's interest by using unique words and phrases. Sometimes, the title is taken directly from the dialogue or descriptions in the text. A title can also focus on an individual character.

My Ántonia has numbered chapters instead of titled ones. As you read Book I, assign each chapter a title. Create each title based on what you want to convey to readers about the chapter. Your titles can be from quotes, characters, plot, events, symbols, motifs, or anything else you find relevant. In addition, write a brief summary of that section and an explanation of why you chose that title. We've provided a sample for you.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Book I: Chapters I – III**Figurative Language Chart****Objective:** Understanding and identifying figurative language**Activity**

Writers use figurative language to evoke a particular emotion, to convey a deeper meaning, or to emphasize an action or event in the text. There are many literary devices that writers employ to achieve this goal. Several of these devices are used in *My Antonia*, including metaphor, simile, and personification.

The first three chapters of the novel contain a great deal of descriptive language to establish the setting and introduce the characters. In the chart provided, write at least ten examples of figurative language that you find in Chapters I – III. Then, write the literal meaning of each example in the third column. We have provided an example for you.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Book II: Chapter I**Thank You Note**

Objectives: Recalling key events
Adopting a persona

Activity

At the start of Book I, Jim's grandfather decides to move back to Black Hawk. Otto feels it's time for him to move on, as well, and Jake chooses to accompany Otto and head out west. Otto has worked for the Burdens for quite some time and is like family to Jim's grandparents; Jim has also grown close to Otto in the time he has known him.

Write a thank you note to Otto from the Burden family. Write personalized messages from Jim, Mr. Burden, and Mrs. Burden thanking him for his service to the family. Each personalized message should refer to at least two specific events from the novel, for a minimum of six examples from the book.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Book III: Chapter I**Travel Brochure****Objective:** Creating a travel brochure for Lincoln, Nebraska**Activity**

In the first chapter of Book III, Jim heads off to college in Lincoln, Nebraska. Larger than Black Hawk, Lincoln is a true city. Create a travel brochure that would entice people to take a trip to Lincoln, Nebraska. Use the Internet or other available resources to gather information about Lincoln. If you were trying to persuade someone to visit Lincoln, what information would you include? Most travelers would be interested in the town's physical features and average temperatures, local attractions such as museums, universities, and historic sites; they might also appreciate information about festivals and other happenings in the city.

The brochure can be in any format (bi-fold, tri-fold, booklet, etc.). Use pictures and an interesting design to make Lincoln appealing to potential visitors. To get started, you may want to list the type of information you want to include. If you need ideas, you can visit online travel sites or obtain travel brochures from local business such as travel agencies and hotels.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Book IV: Chapter I**Yukon Gold Rush****Objective:** Plotting locations on a map**Activity**

In Chapter I of Book IV, Jim visits Black Hawk and learns from Frances Harling what has happened to *Á*ntonia, Lena, and Tiny. Tiny had been running a sailor's lodge in Seattle when the Yukon Gold Rush occurred. She sold her business and headed to Alaska, hoping to become rich. She ran a hotel for the gold miners and then inherited the fortune of a gold miner whom she had befriended.

The Yukon Gold Rush began in 1897. At its height, nearly 100,000 gold miners attempted to reach the Klondike region, but only about 30% made it. The three-week trip was treacherous; the terrain was challenging, and sub-zero temperatures made it even worse.

The following are important locations associated with the Yukon Gold Rush. Use the Internet and/or other available resources to plot each location on the map provided.

- Skagway
- Chilkoot Trail
- Yukon Territory
- Circle City
- Dawson City
- Yukon River
- Carcross
- Dyea

Name: _____

Date: _____

Book V: Chapters I – II**Photo Album**

Objectives: Using images to convey information
Creating a photo album

Activity

As he promised in the last chapter of Book IV, Jim does return to visit **Á**ntonia, but not until twenty years later. As he puts it, “life intervened.” During this chapter, Jim’s visit with **Á**ntonia consists of small talk, a tour of the property, meeting her many children, and memories of living in Black Hawk. **Á**ntonia brings out a box of photographs of the people in her life and Jim’s. However, no one asks, nor does he volunteer, what Jim has done in the last twenty years.

If you were to show pictures of your life to someone you haven’t seen in years, what images would you want to share to give him or her an idea of who you are and what is important to you? Create a photo album of pictures that are meaningful to you. The pictures can be of your family, friends, events, or even places and objects.

You can display the photographs in a photo album, or you can create the album out of construction paper, cardboard, or any other appropriate materials. Include at least ten photographs from your life. Your photographs can be real or copies. If photographs are not available to you, you can print out pictures from the Internet or clip pictures from any print media that represent your life. Each picture must be accompanied by a brief caption that explains its meaning.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Wrap-Up

Casting Call

Objectives: Analyzing characters and inferring character traits
Casting a film version of *My Ántonia*

Activity

Hollywood has not produced a major motion picture version of *My Ántonia*; the only film version in existence was made for television. Given its beautiful setting and large cast, this novel would adapt nicely to a larger format.

Imagine that a major production company has written a screenplay for *My Ántonia*, and you have been hired as the casting director. Consider what you know about the personality and physical traits of each character. Then, decide which actors you would cast for the major roles.

Characters to cast include:

- *Ántonia* Shimerda
- Jim Burden
- Mr. Shimerda
- Mrs. Shimerda
- Yulka Shimerda
- Ambrosch Shimerda
- Lena Lingard
- Otto Fuchs
- Tiny Soderball
- Mrs. Harling
- Mr. Harling
- Frances Harling
- Mrs. Gardener
- Samson D'Arnault
- Wick Cutter

Create a "cast book" for the film by completing the following steps:

1. Write the character's name on the top of the page. Then, write a brief description of the character, including his or her personality traits.
2. Write the name of the actor you have chosen to play the part of that character.
3. Include a picture of the actor cut from a newspaper or magazine, or print it from the Internet.
4. Under each actor's picture, write a short explanation of your choice: Why would this actor be a good fit for this role? Provide a detailed explanation.

You may have up to two characters on each page, if there is enough space.