

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

My Ántonia

by Willa Cather

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My Ántonia

Book I

1. Jim Burden is on his way to Nebraska from Virginia to live with his grandparents after the loss of his parents. Imagine how you would feel starting over in a new place. Write about how would you feel? What would be your concerns?
2. Coming to Nebraska, Jim awakens to a whole new experience in a completely new environment. Think about a time when you were placed in new surroundings. How did you feel? Were you more fearful or excited?
3. Otto states that Bohemians have a natural distrust of Austrians. Can you think of other racial or ethnic groups that may experience a similar problem? What may have caused this problem?
4. Write a short letter as if you were from a group that has racial, gender, ethnic, or economic prejudices against it. The letter should be to someone who exhibits the prejudice. Explain how you feel as the target, what prejudices cause, how to stop them, etc.
5. Jim and Ántonia become fast friends. What are the qualities of a good friend? Make a list of the ten most important ones.
6. Jim and Ántonia are both strangers in a strange land. How might they both experience alienation in this new situation? Write a diary entry for Jim in which he expresses his feelings.
7. Jim and Ántonia's adventure with the rattlesnake changes the dynamics of their relationship. Have you ever been in a similar situation of danger? Explain what happened.

Response Journal

8. Mr. Shimerda has a huge influence on *Ántonia's* life, even after his death. Who has had a large influence on your life? Imagine you are that person. Write a diary entry detailing the thoughts that person might have when he or she thinks about you and how you have turned out.
9. The Shimerdas mistakenly believe that Jake has to sell a pig in order to pay the fine for knocking Ambrosch down. Explain to someone who cannot follow the story how the misunderstanding arose.
10. After Mr. Shimerda's death, Jim and *Ántonia* grow apart for a time. Write an (at least two paragraphs) on separation, either from a friend, a relative, or a love.
11. After *Ántonia's* father dies, and she is forced to work the fields, Jim notices a change in her. Describe someone that you knew who changed because of a death in his or her life. The change could be positive or negative.
12. After *Ántonia* begins working in the fields, Jim accuses her of acting like Ambrosch. People frequently pick up traits from others. Write about someone that you know that you know who tries to imitate someone else but in a negative way.
13. At Mr. Shimerda's burial, Grandfather gives a prayer that seems to be more for the benefit of the neighbors than for the family. What do you think the effect of the prayer may be? Do you pray? Has prayer helped you? In what ways?
14. Mr. Shimerda appears to have died of homesickness. Write a condolence note from *Ántonia* that explains her feelings about him when he was alive.

My Ántonia

15. The two Shimerda girls like to forget their problems by playing with Jim on the prairie. What activity helps you to escape from life's cares? Why is that the case, and how is it different from how you behaved when you were younger?
16. During Jim's first winter in Nebraska, he and his family are able to enjoy a simple Christmas together with homemade gifts. Write two paragraphs about your favorite holiday memory.
17. Jim says that their environment shapes Otto's and Jake's characters. Describe another character in this story or a character in another story that you have read who is shaped by his or her surroundings. If you are unable to think of one, use a character on television or from a movie.
18. Mrs. Shimerda has difficulty adjusting to life in a new country. What are some of the difficulties that you might encounter if you were moving to a foreign country? Make a list of at least twelve.

Book II

19. Jim feels all alone in the city, though he has interaction with more people. Write a paragraph about a time when you felt all alone even though there were people around. Include your emotions.
20. What does Willa Cather's depiction of Blind D'Arnuault say about her perception of African-Americans? Write a short essay about some prejudices that still exist among the races. What can you personally do to help overcome prejudice?
21. When Jim leaves home for college, he talks about the figures of his old life waiting for him in the new. Has someone or something from your past caught up with you? Was it pleasant or not? Why?

Response Journal

22. *Ántonia* displays her jealousy when Lena playfully runs her fingers through Jim's hair to rid it of sand. Remember a time when you, someone that you know, or someone from the movies acted out of jealousy. Write a letter of apology from the person who caused the jealousy to occur.
23. Mr. and Mrs. Cutter find great joy in arguing. Write about someone that you know who likes to argue. Why do you think that some people find joy in this type of behavior?

Book III

24. In the novel, dancing is seen as improper and a frivolity, but it is ultimately a way for the children of Black Hawk and the surrounding counties to express themselves. What are some ways that teenagers express themselves today that are seen as frivolous and improper by adults?
25. Jim feels that the hug that *Ántonia* gives him after his commencement as one of the most poignant moments of his life. Write about the most poignant memory of your life; first, though, you need to look up a definition of "poignant."
26. Compare Jim's life in the city to his life in the country. Which would you prefer and why? Write a letter to him explaining your choice.
27. In Book 3, Chapter 1, Jim describes his living area in great detail. Describe a favorite area of your house using words that indicate spatial order. You could describe one of your favorite places instead.

Book IV

28. Mrs. Harling acts as a surrogate mother to both Jim and Ántonia. Write a thank you note to someone, other than a parent, who has had a large influence on your life.

29. Wick Cutter kills his wife and himself out of pure spite. In a two-paragraph letter to the editor of your local paper, explain your thoughts on either suicide or murder.

30. Jim and Ántonia have a falling out over a dispute between Jake and Ambrosch. Think about a time when you and a friend were not on speaking terms. How did you reconcile? Write a letter to the friend explaining how you now understand his or her point of view.