

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

O Pioneers!

by Willa Cather

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Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the students will be able to:

1. recognize and supply examples of the following use of language:
 - metaphor
 - simile
2. make inferences about the thoughts, ideas, and actions of the characters when they are not expressly stated.
3. recognize the author's use of irony.
4. find an example of a myth to explain Marie's love of trees.
5. recognize and supply examples of foreshadowing that add interest and suspense.
6. define third-person narrative and discuss how it is useful in this novel.
7. review the definition of a literary symbol and discuss the extent to which the ducks may be used as symbols in this story.
8. provide specific incidents from the text to support or refute that the following themes are present in this novel:
 - *Role of women* - Even intelligent, successful women must struggle for acceptance from their male counterparts.
 - *Materialism* - Material possessions of modern life are often unnecessary to a person's life.
 - *Love of the Land* - Land properly belongs to people who love and understand it.
 - *Cycle of life* - Nature's cycle of life constantly renews itself with the tired or old being replaced by the fresh or young.
9. discuss the following additional observations about life or "life lessons":
 - A pioneer needs imagination and dreams to succeed.
 - Poor people can learn to prosper by watching rich people.
 - The right thing to do is often what everyone else is not doing.
 - People who grow up too soon often have a lot of the child in them.
 - The only way one person can help another person is through understanding.
 - In nature and human affairs cooperation can achieve both individual and group goals.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Compare the characters Emil and Amedee. Refute or support the following statement: Both characters are unprepared for death but die happy.
2. Define a literary symbol. Cite events in the novel that suggest that ducks may be used as symbols in a number of incidents.
3. How are Alexandra and her father alike? Why does he trust her with the leadership of the family after his death?
4. Identify and discuss the qualities that make a good pioneer.
5. How does the author use irony to demonstrate the unfair attitudes of men toward women?
6. What general “rule of nature” is explained by Ivar’s story about the ducks flying in a V formation?
7. Cite three instances where Alexandra must force her brothers to accept her decisions about the farm.
8. Support or refute the following statement: Marie tries to do the right thing and remain a faithful wife.
9. Discuss the importance of metaphors to help the author add to the reader’s understanding of the characters. For example the following is a metaphor describing Marie’s relationship with Emil: “And yet, down under the frozen crusts, at the roots of the trees, the secret of life was still safe, warm as the blood in one’s heart; and the spring would come again! Oh, it would come again!”
10. Find two examples of similes in the story.
11. Why does Mrs. Lee enjoy her visits to Alexandra’s house?
12. Cite an incident in the story to support the overall theme that it is natural for the old to become tired and for the young to take their turn in life.
13. Discuss the definition of third-person narration.
14. By referring to events in the novel, support the argument that love of the land is a major theme in this book.

All references come from the Prestwick House Literary Touchstone Classics edition of *O Pioneers!*, copyright 2007.

O Pioneers!

PART 1 - The Wild Land

Chapter I

VOCABULARY

comforter – a long winter scarf
drummer – a salesman
dubiously – doubtfully
eddying – swirling
gaunt – bare, stark
pallor – paleness
perplexing – confusing
resolutely – determinedly, confidently
skepticism – cynicism
tippet – lengthy pieces trailing from a hood or collar
ulster – a full-length, heavy overcoat
volubility – talkativeness

1. Briefly describe Emil and Alexandra. What can you conclude about Alexandra's character by the description of her coat?

2. What is Carl Linstrum purchasing in the store when Alexandra asks him to help rescue Emil's kitten? How does he climb the pole?

PART 2 - Neighboring Fields**Chapter 1**

VOCABULARY

droll – funny, comical
gauntlets – gloves
gilded – gold-covered
laconically – curtly, briefly
moorings – anchoring places
proficiency – ability, knack
puissant – powerful
supple – flexible, adaptable
symmetrical – equal, even
tilth – land
tonic – energizing
whetstone – a sharpening stone
windbreaks – barriers that block the wind

1. Briefly list the changes on the Divide in the previous sixteen years.

2. What is Emil's life like now that he is a young adult?

3. What is implied but never stated about the relationship between Emil and Marie Shabata?

4. How is the interior of Alexandra's farm house a metaphor for the way she lives her life and runs her farm?

Chapter 6

VOCABULARY

blandly – unemotionally
rash – brash, unpredictable
recumbent – resting, reclining
ruefully – sheepishly
stile – a two-sided ladder often used to go over a fence
strapping – brawny, muscular

1. What do Alexandra and Carl confess to each other about their feelings on their walk to visit Marie?

2. After listening to Frank’s complaints about the neighbor’s hogs trespassing in his wheat, what is Alexandra’s suggestion?

3. Why does Marie look “thoughtfully” at her husband after Alexandra and Carl leave? Does she seem to love him?

4. What do we learn about Frank’s personality that may foreshadow future actions?

Chapter 12

VOCABULARY

feverishly – enthusiastically, quickly, excitedly
tidings – news

1. What observation about life is stated in Alexandra’s reaction to the news that Carl is leaving?

2. Why does Alexandra wish her dead father is not watching over her now?

Chapter 8

VOCABULARY

ineffable – indefinable, deep
jaded – exhausted, weary
scuttled – dashed

1. How does the white mulberry tree tell the story of Marie and Emil’s final moments before death?

2. What evidence is there that Emil does not understand what has happened to him?

3. How does Ivar discover their bodies?
