

A look into antonias struggle throughout her childhood and adolescence

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Antonia in the book *My Antonia* is both a character and a symbol of many things. Cather has conveyed this to the audience in the introduction in these words, "[Antonia was] a Bohemian girl whom we had known long ago and whom both of us admired. More than any other person we remembered, this girl seemed to mean to us the country, the conditions, the whole adventure of our childhood" (Cather 2). Throughout the play, Antonia is shown struggling at different points in time both in her childhood and adulthood. Cather reveals to her readers how the struggles faced by Antonia throughout her childhood lead her to achieve independence while accepting responsibilities. The struggle that Antonia experiences throughout her early life brings forth a mature woman.

In her childhood, Antonia has to go through a lot of hard times. First, she along with her whole family encounters the challenge of gaining competence in speaking English because lack of knowledge of English was causing the Shimerdas many troubles. They face problems of food and accommodation. Tony's statement, " We get what Mr. Bushy...throw out. We got no potatoes" (Cather 48) shows that the family has little food to eat. Antonia and her sisters would sleep in " a round hole, not much bigger than an oil barrel" (Cather 48). This indicates that the Shimerdas live in poverty and are forced to sleep on the ground in a small cave, therefore making use of what little housing arrangements they are offered. Secondly, Antonia has to cope with harsh winters in the state of extreme poverty. Then, she has to bear the unfortunate incident of her father's suicide after which, she has to work like men in the fields in order to earn her living and support the family. Marriage

does not make things any easier for Antonia. Antonia herself discusses how tough it was for her to manage everything with Jim in these words, " We'd never have got through if I hadn't been so strong. I've always had good health, thank God, and I was able to help him in the fields until right up to the time before my babies came" (Cather 209).

During Antonia's adolescence years, Cather shows Antonia's struggle for independence while leading a hard life to provide for her family and herself. She struggles for her independence because she is not in control of the money she earns. For example, Ambrosch is confronted about how he rewards Antonia with an allowance and how he discriminates on the things he felt are necessary for Antonia. Cather tells that the lifelong struggle took away all delicacy from Antonia's looks in these words, " She was a battered woman now, not a lovely girl" (Cather 214). Antonia had invested years of effort in making her family and taking care of both her husband and her sons. " It was no wonder that her sons stood tall and straight. She was a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races" (Cather 214).

Antonia represents the immigrants that played an important role in the development of American West. The determination and fearlessness of the group of immigrants that have shaped the American history reflects in Antonia's will power and strength throughout her life.

Works Cited:

Cather, Willa. *My Antonia*. Forgotten Books, 2008. Print.