

My antonia

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

27 July Mrs. Shimerda vs Emmaline Burden: Comparison and Contrast Mrs. Shimerda, Antonia's mother and Emmaline Burden, Jim's grandmother are two of the most important characters of the play *The Antonia*. The two are neighbors and Mrs. Shimerda often seeks help from Emmaline Burden in domestic matters. Mrs. Shimerda is new in America and has minimal knowledge of English while Emmaline Burden is American and is fully competent in English. Thus, Emmaline Burden is in a position to help Mrs. Shimerda financially and otherwise, and she does full justice to her position, though her efforts are least appreciated by Mrs. Shimerda. There is a great deal of difference between the ways the two of them behave. Mrs. Shimerda and Emmaline Burden are on the two opposite ends of the scale of personality.

Mrs. Shimerda is an envious woman. No amount of money, resources, or blessings can satisfy her extremely demanding nature. She looks accusingly at people richer than her. The fundamental cause of her immigration to America was her greed for money and better lifestyle. Mrs. Shimerda is too unthankful towards the Burdens despite all their favors. Her words and actions that she makes in front of the Burdens overtly speak of her character. She maintains a disagreeable attitude in every matter and is a terrible cook and housekeeper. Her unhygienic cooking habits are narrated in the novel in these words:

I remember how horrified we were at the sour, ashy-grey bread she gave her family to eat. She mixed her dough, we discovered, in an old tin peck-measure that Krajiek had used about the barn. When she took the paste out to bake it, she left smears of dough sticking to the sides of the measure, put the measure on the shelf behind the stove, and let this residue ferment. The

next time she made bread, she scraped this sour stuff down into the fresh dough to serve as yeast. (Cather 21, 22).

Mrs. Shimerda disagrees upon the cow loaned by the Burdens and complains about the bad quality of Antonia's English lessons. Despite all help of the Burdens, she thinks that they do not give their share.

In comparison to Mrs. Shimerda, Emmaline Burden is a very generous and considerate woman whose keeps her house very decent. She lets go of Mrs. Shimerda's attitude considering that she is poor and requires help. Contrary to Mrs. Shimerda, Emmaline Burden's cooking and housekeeping skills are talked about nicely in the play, " Grandmother took me into the ice-cold storeroom, where she had some bolts of gingham and sheeting. She cut squares of cotton cloth and we sewed them together into a book" (Cather 52). Appreciating her cooking, the author writes, " Grandmother hunted up her fancy cake-cutters and baked ginger bread men and roosters, which we decorated with burnt sugar and red cinnamon drops" (Cather 52).

The Burdens, and particularly Jim's grandmother tend to overlook Mrs. Shimerda's incompetence in the management of domestic matters. " We were willing to believe that Mrs. Shimerda was a good housewife in her own country, but she managed poorly under new conditions: the conditions were bad enough, certainly!" (Cather 21). Thus, Mrs. Shimerda is an incompetent housewife with an envious nature in contrast with Emmaline Burden, who is a highly competent housewife with a generous nature.

Works Cited:

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