

My antonia summary



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Summary: Introduction The novel opens with an unnamed narrator recounting a train trip through Iowa the previous summer with an old friend named Jim Burden, with whom the narrator grew up in a small Nebraska town. The narrator recalls talking with Jim about childhood on the prairie, and then notes that while they both live in New York, they don't see each other much, since Jim is frequently away on business and since the narrator doesn't really like Jim's wife.

The narrator resumes talking about the train trip with Jim through Iowa, adding that their discussion kept returning to a girl named Antonia, with whom the narrator had lost touch but with whom Jim had renewed his friendship. The narrator recounts that Jim mentioned writing down his memories of Antonia; the narrator expressed to Jim an interest in reading these writings. A few months later in New York, according to the narrator, Jim brought a portfolio of writings about Antonia to show to the narrator.

The narrator adds that Jim, wanting to title the work, wrote "Antonia" across the front of the portfolio before frowning and scribbling "My" before "Antonia." Summary: Chapter I As the narrative begins, Jim is ten years old, newly orphaned and making the trip west from Virginia to stay with his grandparents in Black Hawk, Nebraska. He is traveling in the company of a farmhand named Jake Marpole, who is slightly older but who, like Jim, has limited experience of the wider world. Beyond Chicago, a friendly conductor informs Jim that an immigrant family, the Shimerdas, are also bound for Black Hawk.

Among this Bohemian family, the only one who speaks any English is Antonia, a young girl about Jim's age. Once the train reaches Black Hawk, Jim and Jake disembark, and one of the Burdens' hired men, Otto Fuchs, meets them. Before departing for the Burden farm, Jim observes the Shimerdas preparing to set off as well. The emptiness of the Nebraska landscape at night overwhelms Jim as he travels in the jolting wagon. Eventually, he falls asleep on a bed of straw as the wagon travels into the night. Summary:

Chapter II The next afternoon, at the farm, Jim's grandmother, Mrs.

Burden, awakens him and draws a bath for him. Afterward, Jim explores his new surroundings while Mrs. Burden prepares the evening meal. At supper, Jake discusses Virginia with the Burdens. Later, Otto tells stories of ponies and cattle to Jim, and the evening concludes with some family prayers. In the morning, Jim begins to take in the landscape around the farm. When he accompanies Mrs. Burden to the garden to pick potatoes for supper, he stays behind after her and sits quietly among the pumpkins. Summary: Chapter III On Sunday, the Burdens head out in the wagon to greet their new Bohemian neighbors.

Mrs. Burden explains that someone took advantage of the Shimerdas when they decided to move to Black Hawk by overcharging for a farmhouse not suited to the harsh Nebraska winters. Mrs. Shimerda greets the Burdens upon arrival, and Mrs. Burden presents her with some loaves of bread. They exchange greetings, and, as the adults begin talking, Jim and Antonia run off to play with her youngest sister, Yulka, trailing behind. As they wander through the grass, Jim teaches Antonia a few English words. When the Burdens prepare to depart, Mr. Shimerda entreats Mrs.

Burden to teach English to Antonia. Summary: Chapter IV Later that same day, Jim takes his first of many long pony rides. As he rides, he reflects on Otto's story that the sunflowers that fill the prairies sprang from seeds scattered by Mormons on their way to Utah. Jim rides twice a week to the post office, and he describes many other rides that he takes simply to wander or explore the local wildlife, with Antonia accompanying him at times. Jim begins giving Antonia regular English lessons, and she loves to help Mrs. Burden around the house. Summary: Chapter V

One afternoon in late autumn, Antonia takes Jim to visit a pair of Russian immigrants whom her family has befriended. Only Peter is at home, but he shows Antonia and Jim his milking cow and feeds them a snack of melons. He then entertains them by playing a number of tunes on his harmonica. As Antonia and Jim leave, Peter presents Antonia with a sack of cucumbers for her mother, along with a pail of milk to cook them in. Summary: Chapter VI On another fall day, near sunset, Antonia and Jim encounter Mr. Shimerda, who has recently caught three rabbits. This bounty will provide food for the family and a winter hat for Antonia.

Mr. Shimerda promises to give his gun to Jim when Jim is older. Jim notes that Mr. Shimerda seems sad, which leaves a deep impression on Jim. As daylight wanes, the Shimerdas return to their farm, and Jim races his shadow home. Analysis: Introduction-Book I, Chapter VI Several sections of My Antonia preface the novel's actual narrative: in addition to the introduction, Cather includes an epigraph and a dedication. The epigraph, from Virgil's Georgics (a long poem about farming life), reads: "Optima dies . . . prima fugit," a Latin phrase meaning "The best days are the first to flee. Cather's - <https://assignbuster.com/my-antonia-summary/>

dedication—" To Carrie and Irene Miner" above the words " In memory of affections old and true"—further emphasizes the nostalgic intent of the novel. From the very beginning, *My Antonia* presents itself- unmistakably as a novel imbued with strong yearnings for a -vanished past. Yet certain elements of the novel temper this nostalgic intensity. First and foremost, Cather provides a frame for the narrative by way of a narrated introduction, which gives the reader some psychological distance from the intensely personal voice of the memoir that forms the core of the novel.

Although the introduction's content is fairly straightforward, it remains a curious document nonetheless—indeed, we are not sure whether we are supposed to consider the introduction as fact or fiction. The only concrete biographical information revealed about the narrator of the introduction concerns a childhood spent in rural Nebraska and a present existence in New York. While it may be plausible to assume that this narrator is Cather herself, given that Cather has these locales in common with the narrator, the text offers no proof of this hypothesis.

Several critics have noted *My Antonia* as a bold departure from American literature of its time, one of the first novels written by a woman to feature a male narrator and deserving of special attention because of the autobiographical elements in the text. Jim begins the novel as a ten-year-old orphan, moving cross-country from Virginia to Nebraska to live with his grandparents. Although Cather was not orphaned at age ten, she too made the move from Virginia to Nebraska to live with her grandparents, and the change of scenery had a profound effect upon her experience and her memory.

It is always difficult to assess the importance of biography and invention in fiction, but it seems reasonable to assume that Cather employs a liberal amount of each. Cather was a rather tomboyish child, a trait that would certainly enhance her own capacity to get inside the head of a male narrator. In addition, her many intense childhood and adult friendships with women would allow her to paint a nostalgic picture of an immigrant frontier girl. To say that Cather herself is Jim Burden, however, may be to overstep the mark.

Rather, it is Cather's willingness to combine biographical recollection with fictional experimentation (the use of a male narrator, for example) that merits note. Jim's remark, upon presenting his portfolio to the narrator in the introduction—" I didn't take time to arrange it; I simply wrote down pretty much all that her name recalls to me. I suppose it hasn't any form"— prefigures the novel's extremely episodic nature. The memoir, the core of the novel, features little snippets of memory pasted loosely together.

In place of a focused plot, Cather gives her attention to lengthy descriptions of the characters who populate the novel and, perhaps even more important, of the austere landscape that they inhabit. The close relationship between humans and their environment is a major theme in *My Antonia* and one of the ideas that Cather explored throughout her literary career. In *My Antonia*, the focus is on landscape—the natural, physical settings in which the characters live and move. Among Cather's characters, Jim is especially sensitive to his environment, to the point that he invests human qualities in the landscape around him. Because of the scarcity of trees in the area, for instance, Jim remarks, " we used to feel anxious about them, and visit them as if they were persons. " His ability to treat trees as people reflects his

compassion for nature. At other times, aspects of the landscape come to represent emotions or ideas for Jim. Although Jim realizes that botanists have demonstrated the sunflower to be native to the Nebraska region, he prefers to believe Otto Fuchs's story that the Mormons scattered the seeds from which the local sunflowers grew on their flight westward.

For Jim, this romantic legend supersedes scientific explanation, and he prefers keeps the landscape as something to dream about, not necessarily as something to understand rationally. Summary: Chapter VII One day, Antonia and Jim ride Jim's pony to Peter's house to borrow a spade for Ambrosch, her older brother. On the way home, they stop to examine a group of prairie-dog holes. Suddenly, Antonia spots an enormous snake and lets out a scream, which causes the snake to coil in their direction. She points at the snake and shouts at Jim in her native Bohemian.

Jim turns around and sees the huge snake. He swiftly gathers his wits and uses the spade to bludgeon the snake several times to kill it. Jim gets angry at Antonia for not warning him in English about the presence of the snake, but her admiration for his bravery quickly wins him over. They resolve to bring the dead snake home to show off Jim's victory. The size of the snake impresses Jim's elders, and Antonia derives great pleasure from relating the story to all interested listeners. Summary: Chapter VIII Meanwhile, the Russians, Peter and Pavel, have fallen upon hard times.

Peter finds himself deeply in debt to a Black Hawk moneylender named Wick Cutter, and Pavel seriously injures himself in a fall. When Peter arrives at the Burdens' to ask the Shimerdas, who are visiting, for help, Jim decides to

accompany Antonia and her father to the Russians' farm. They arrive after nightfall and find Pavel lying incapacitated. Frantic preoccupation with wolves punctuates his illness—a fascination whose origins Antonia explains to Jim on the ride home: when Pavel and Peter were living in Russia, they attended a winter wedding party between a mutual friend and a girl from a neighboring town.

On the ride home from the wedding, a pack of wolves attacked the wedding party in their sledges. Everyone perished, with the exception of Pavel and Peter, who were driving the sledge that carried the newly married couple; in a frantic effort to lighten that sledge's load to increase its speed, Pavel had thrown the couple to the wolves. The shame of this incident drove Pavel and Peter from their hometown and later from Russia. The memory of the horror of that evening plagues both Pavel and Peter. Pavel dies mere days after Antonia and Jim's visit, and, with Pavel gone, Peter sells off everything and leaves America. Mr.

Shimerda thus quickly loses two of the only friends he had made in the country, and Pavel's story continues to fascinate Antonia and Jim long after Pavel's death. Summary: Chapter IX At the first snowfall, Otto Fuchs builds a sleigh for Jim to drive. After a test run, Jim sets out to give Antonia and Yulka a ride. The girls are unprepared for the cold weather, and Jim gives them some of his clothing to help them keep warm. As a result, he himself is vulnerable to the cold, and ends up bedridden for two weeks with quinsy, a severe tonsil disease. Summary: Chapter X Jim's next encounter with Antonia occurs when Mrs.

Burden resolves to bring a gift of a rooster and foodstuffs to the Shimerdas. As they approach the Shimerda farm, Jim spots Antonia working at the water pump, but she quickly flees back to the house. When Mrs. Shimerda answers the Burdens' call, she is in tears. The Shimerdas have very little food stored up for the winter, and much of what they do have is rotting. When Jake brings in the gift basket of food, Mrs. Shimerda only cries harder. Mr. Shimerda explains that they were not beggars in Bohemia, but that several unexpected turns in -America have left them with very little money.

While Mrs. Burden reassures the Shimerdas, Jim plays with Yulka's kitten. As the Burdens rise to leave, Mrs. Shimerda presents a small gift package of food to Mrs. Burden. On the ride home, Jake and Mrs. Burden -discuss the Shimerdas' plight. Later, while preparing supper, Mrs. Burden discards the gift package of food. Though he is unsure of what the food is, Jim breaks off a small piece and eats it anyway. Summary: Chapter XI During the week before Christmas, with Jake preparing to go into town to do the Burdens' Christmas shopping, a heavy snow begins to fall. Mr.

Burden decides that the roads are unfit for travel, and the family sets about to create homemade Christmas presents. Jim makes a pair of picture books for Antonia and Yulka, and Mrs. Burden bakes gingerbread cookies. After delivering an offering to the Shimerdas, Jake brings back a small cedar tree, which the Burdens decorate on Christmas Eve. Summary: Chapter XII On Christmas morning, Mr. Burden leads the family in prayer, and afterward they sit down to a meal of waffles and sausage. Jake mentions that the Shimerdas were very happy to receive gifts from the Burdens. In the afternoon, Mr.

Shimerda arrives to thank the Burdens for all of their kindnesses. They persuade him to stay for supper, and he stays until well after dark.

Summary: Chapter XIII By New Year's Day, a thaw has reduced the snow to slush. Soon after, when Mrs. Shimerda and Antonia visit the Burdens, Antonia and Jim have a fierce argument about the Shimerdas' situation and attitude. The mild weather continues until late January, when, on Jim's eleventh birthday, a violent snowstorm blankets the countryside and brings work on the farm to a grinding halt. Analysis: Book I, Chapters VII-XIII

My Antonia proposes much bolder theories about gender than most other novels of its time. Not only does Cather, a female author, write in the first-person voice of a male narrator, Jim, but Jim himself chooses to spend very little time with the Shimerda boys. Instead, he focuses his attention almost exclusively on Antonia and Yulka. Even in the face of a language barrier, a young frontier boy would be more likely to spend more time with his male peers than with his female peers. But Jim's sensitive nature and Antonia's tomboyish eagerness for adventure make the two natural companions.

If the characters of a novel can be thought of as aspects of their creator's persona, Antonia and Jim are certainly complementary components of Cather. While growing up, Cather did not fit within traditional gender boundaries; she cut her hair short and called herself William. Throughout her life, furthermore, she shunned heterosexual relationships and socially accepted gender norms. Likewise, the relationship between Antonia and Jim breaks—or rather, ignores—the conventions of gender relations. Jim reveals an especially strong desire to identify with his fellow human beings across all kinds of boundaries and differences.

This urge to connect is tied closely to Jim's mystical belief that a divine presence is controlling his fate. As he rides in the back of a horse-drawn wagon, staring up at the stars, he speaks on behalf of Antonia when he asserts that " though we had come from such different parts of the world, in both of us there was some dusky superstition that those shining groups have their influence on what is and what is not to be. " Although Jim feels increasingly alienated from the world, he is comforted by the discovery that Antonia, despite coming from a culture entirely different from his own, shares his belief about the stars and fate.

Although Jim is not as displaced as the Bohemians or the Russians, he too is an immigrant of sorts, and his desire to identify with others leads him to adapt the immigrant experience to his own life. After he hears Pavel's story of the wolves, for instance, Jim repeatedly imagines himself as a sledge driver in flight, " dashing through a country that looked something like Nebraska and something like Virginia. " When he makes homemade picture books for Antonia and Yulka at Christmas, he uses resources that he brought from Virginia, which he refers to as " my ' old country. " This desire for shared experience also manifests itself in Jim's efforts to bring the legends and stories of the Bible closer to his own experience. As Mr. Burden reads from the Book of Matthew on Christmas morning, the story of Jesus' birth strikes Jim as seeming like " something that had happened lately, and near at hand. " Mr. Shimerda's visit to the Burdens on Christmas Day puts a slight ripple in the harmony that Jim feels. Jim's sense of universality cannot override the practical gap in observance existing between different religions.

While the Shimerdas are from Bohemia (a western region of the Czech Republic, a country with a substantial Catholic population) and of Catholic heritage, the Burdens are Protestant. Mr. Shimerda emphasizes this difference by kneeling in front of the Burdens' Christmas tree, transforming it from a symbolic decoration into an explicitly religious icon. While the Burdens may not identify, or even agree, with this type of religious observance, Mr. Burden decides to tolerate it quietly. "The prayers of all good people are good," he remarks as Mr. Shimerda vanishes into the Christmas night.

It is a noble sentiment, but Cather is ambiguous about whether Mr. Burden speaks sincerely. Jim himself reveals an uncharacteristic lack of sympathy in the argument he has with Antonia shortly after New Year's Day, which may be attributed to his immaturity as a ten-year-old boy. While he retells the story in an adult voice, his words and actions in the story are those of his ten-year-old self. His inability to appreciate the complexity of the Shimerdas' situation in a new country is not a matter of insensitivity to their plight or scorn of foreigners, but rather a lack of adult perspective.

While he tells Antonia that "people who don't like this country ought to stay at home," it is clear from the attention and energy he pours into his relationship with Antonia that her departure from Nebraska is the last thing he would want. Antonia and Jim's argument, as an unexpected turn in an otherwise pleasant narrative, suggests greater tensions to come.

Additionally, Cather employs a change in the weather to foreshadow trouble.

An unusually mild beginning to the year gives way to a violent blizzard. At

this point, Cather uses an elegant metaphor of snowbound animals to represent the struggling immigrant family.

The high drifts leave the guinea hens “ resentful of their captivity,” leading them to screech and attempt to poke their way out of the snow walls that have been built up around them. The Shimerdas, in their economic hardship, face a similar challenge in the unfamiliar land that they now inhabit.

Summary: Chapter XIV On the second morning of the blizzard, Jim wakes to a great commotion. When he arrives in the kitchen, his grandfather informs him that Mr. Shimerda is dead. With Ambrosch Shimerda curled up on a nearby bench, the Burdens quietly discuss the apparent suicide as they eat breakfast.

Jake describes Krajiiek’s strange behavior around the body and notes that Krajiiek’s axe fits the gash in Mr. Shimerda’s face. Otto Fuchs and Mrs. Burden talk him out of his suspicions. After the meal, Otto sets out to summon the priest and the coroner from Black Hawk, and the others clear the road for the trip to the Shimerdas. Jim stays behind and finds himself alone. After completing a few chores, he settles down to contemplate Mr. Shimerda’s death. At dusk, the wagon returns, and Jake describes the scene at the Shimerdas’ to Jim. Summary: Chapter XV

The next day, Otto returns from Black Hawk with a young Bohemian named Anton Jelinek. At dinner, Jelinek bemoans the fact that no priest could be found to put Mr. Shimerda to rest. Afterward, Jelinek goes out to clear a road to the Shimerdas’ wide enough for a wagon, and Otto begins to construct a coffin. Later in the afternoon, a number of other locals stop at the Burdens’

to ask after the Shimerdas and discuss the tragedy. The coroner refrains from issuing a warrant for Krajiek at Mr. Burden's urging. The postmaster alerts the Burdens that none of the graveyards in the area will accept Mr.

Shimerda because he killed himself, and Mrs. Burden lashes out in bitterness at this unfairness. With no graveyard to turn to, the Shimerdas decide that they will bury Mr. Shimerda on the corner of their homestead. Summary:

Chapter XVI After lying dead in the barn for four days, Mr. Shimerda is finally buried on his own land. Despite the beginnings of another ominous snowfall, rural neighbors come from miles around to attend the burial. At Mrs. Shimerda's request, Mr. Burden says a prayer in English for Mr. Shimerda, and afterward Otto leads the assembled group in a hymn.

Summary: Chapter XVII With the coming of spring, the neighbors help the Shimerdas to build a new log house on their property, and they eventually acquire a new windmill and some livestock. One day, after giving an English lesson to Yulka, Jim asks Antonia if she would like to attend the upcoming term at the schoolhouse. Antonia proudly refuses, saying that she is kept too busy by farm work, but her tears of sorrow reveal her true feelings on the matter. Jim stays at the Shimerdas' for supper, but he is offended by their ingratitude over neighborly charity and by Antonia's coarse manners.

Summary: Chapter XVIII Once school starts, Jim sees less and less of Antonia, and soon tension erupts between them. When Jake and Jim ride over to the Shimerdas' to collect a loaned horse collar, Ambrosch first denies borrowing it, then returns with a badly damaged collar he rudely gives over to them. After a heated exchange, Jake grabs Ambrosch, who kicks him in the

stomach. Jake then pounds Ambrosch on the head. Jake and Jim quickly pull away from the Shimerdas', as Mrs. Shimerda yells after them about sending for the authorities. When Mr.

Burden learns of the incident, he sends Jake into town with a ten-dollar bill to pay the assault fine. For the next few weeks, the Shimerdas are proud and aloof when meeting the Burdens in passing, although they maintain their respect for Mr. Burden. Finally Mr. Burden arranges a reconciliation by hiring Ambrosch to help with his wheat threshing and offering Antonia a job to help Mrs. Burden in the kitchen. In addition, he forgives Mrs. Shimerda her debt on the milk cow she bought from him. In an effort to show her own forgiveness, Mrs.

Shimerda knits Jake a pair of socks. Summary: Chapter XIX In high summer, Antonia and Jim spend more time together, walking to the garden each morning to collect vegetables for dinner. One night, during an electric storm in a light rain, Antonia and Jim climb onto the roof of the chicken house to stare at the sky until they are called down for supper. Antonia tells Jim that things will be easy for him but hard for her family. Analysis: Book I, Chapters XIV-XIX Throughout the novel, Jim shows an extraordinary capacity to identify with others, and, upon hearing of Mr.

Shimerda's apparent suicide, he immediately senses that " it was homesickness that had killed Mr. Shimerda. " As Jim imagines the homeward route of Mr. Shimerda's released spirit through Chicago and Virginia, two way stations on his own journey to Nebraska, he identifies with the sense of loss that he believes caused Mr. Shimerda such disenchantment. In

meditating on Mr. Shimerda's life, Jim comes to feel as though his memories almost " might have been Mr. Shimerda's memories. " Jim's most concentrated struggle with cultural difference occurs over the matter of religion.

As Jake describes Ambrosch's view that his father has been sent to purgatory as a result of his suicide, Jim rails against what is to him an incomprehensible stance, saying, " I almost know it isn't true. " But the " almost" indicates Jim's hesitation. Because he himself holds a belief that is mystical (his belief in the presence of Mr. Shimerda's soul), Jim is unable to rule out the seemingly unsupportable beliefs of others. As he attempts to sleep that night, Jim is crushingly preoccupied with this unfamiliar idea of purgatory, suggesting that his confrontation with other ways of thinking has left him uncomfortable.

Although Jim listens carefully to Anton Jelinek's story of religious conviction and finds it " impossible not to admire his frank, manly faith," there is clearly a divide between the Bohemians' more instinctual faith and Jim's more philosophical spirituality. The Nebraska prairie, as an amalgam of various immigrant groups, is a testing ground for collisions between such differing religious viewpoints. Mr. Shimerda's suicide proves to be a test case for the solidarity of the farming community. When the old-guard religions universally refuse to have a suicide buried in their graveyards, the Shimerdas are forced to come up with an alternative.

In dismissing the conservative standards of the foreign churches, Mrs. Burden proposes " an American graveyard that will be more liberal minded. "

This American graveyard is a burial plot on the family land, accompanied by a makeshift funeral and an improvised service conducted by the farming community. For all of its unorthodoxy, the beauty of this service captures Jim's imagination, as he remarks on his affection for "the dim superstition" of the event and the "propitiatory intent" of the grave that remains behind it. With Mr.

Shimerda departed, the different paths that await Antonia and Jim begin to emerge. Structurally, this chapter concludes Book I, the main phase of Jim and Antonia's relationship in the rural countryside. The directions that they will take in life are already becoming visible, and they begin to grow apart. Thrown into a more laborious role on the farm, Antonia quickly loses her feminine softness, and Jim's entry into school sets him off on an altogether separate road. Interestingly, in spite of, or perhaps because of, his more formal education, Jim fails to recognize the reality of this difference.

When he says to Antonia that he wishes she could always be "nice" rather than rough and tumble, she explains that "things will be easy for you. But they will be hard for us." Here, for the first time, Cather clearly presents the dichotomy between Antonia's role as a rural worker and Jim's role as a leisured thinker—a dichotomy that she explores throughout the remainder of the novel. Summary: Chapter I Almost three years after his move to Black Hawk, Jim and his grandparents decide to leave their farm in the countryside for a house on the outskirts of town.

Finding himself out of work, Otto decides to head out west in search of adventure, and Jake decides to go with him. Before leaving, they help the

Burdens move their household. One Sunday morning, they set off on a train, never to see Jim again. Mr. Burden takes a post as a deacon at the Baptist church in Black Hawk, and Mrs. Burden helps out with the church's social calendar. Jim begins attending the school in town and quickly adjusts to the company of his new classmates. Jim questions Ambrosch for any news about Antonia whenever Ambrosch comes to town, but Ambrosch is taciturn and says little.

Summary: Chapter II The Burdens' nearest neighbors are the Harlings, a Norwegian family who also used to live on a farm. Three of the Harlings' children are around Jim's age, and their older sister, Frances, works in Mr. Harling's office. In August, the Harlings' cook leaves them, and Mrs. Burden convinces them to hire Antonia. Summary: Chapter III With her warm personality and easy way, Antonia is right at home among the Harlings, and she soon settles into a regular routine. Summary: Chapter IV One evening, a visitor calls for Antonia at the Harlings'.

Lena Lingard, a local farm girl, has come to announce that she has also found work in town, as a dressmaker. The Harlings welcome Lena, but Antonia treats her coolly, unsure how she is meant to receive her visitor. Jim, thinking back to the stories he has heard of Lena, relates her entanglement with a neighboring farmer, Ole Benson, who became so smitten with Lena that his jealous wife attacked her. Summary: Chapter V During the autumn, Jim sees Lena often in town. He helps her to shop for fabric and they trade gossip and stories about life in Black Hawk.

Shortly before Christmas, Jim sees Lena and her brother shopping for Christmas presents for their mother. Lena advises her brother to get her monogrammed handkerchiefs, and then, teary-eyed, tells Jim that she misses her family very much. Summary: Chapter VI As winter descends, Jim turns to various indoor amusements, playing at charades and dress-up and dancing with Antonia and the Harlings in the evenings. Antonia tells the Harlings a story about a man who, for no apparent reason, dove into a threshing machine and killed himself. The story upsets Nina Harling, but the memories of threshing time make Mrs. Harling homesick for the country.

Summary: Chapter VII In March, with snow still covering the landscape, excitement fills Black Hawk when Samson d'Arnault, a blind, black pianist, comes to town. Jim makes his way to the Boys' Home, where d'Arnault and his manager are staying. He enters the parlor to find a raucous scene, a full house listening to music and gossiping away. Eventually, d'Arnault plays a concert of old plantation standards to an enthusiastic audience. During one of his numbers, d'Arnault senses the patter of women dancing in a neighboring room. A door opens to reveal Antonia, Lena, and two of their friends dancing among themselves.

After a bit of hesitation and plenty of encouragement from the men, the girls come into the parlor and join the party, dancing until d'Arnault's manager shuts the piano. After the party breaks up, Jim and Antonia walk home together, excited and restless. Analysis: Book II, Chapters I-VII Once Cather settles the Burdens comfortably in Black Hawk, her focused treatment of the landscape gives way to a scrutiny of the townspeople. She introduces

several new characters in a very short time span, and, in turn, Jim's narrative becomes less purposefully sequential and more episodic and anecdotal.

Whereas Cather earlier presents an idyllic portrait of a group of people overwhelmed by a place, the shift to Black Hawk is mirrored by a reduction of emphasis on the power and importance of the land and an increased emphasis on the individuals in the town. In a world of finance and industry, people have a more businesslike and economic relationship to each other, as epitomized by Frances Harling's utilitarian approach to her townspeople.

Another major contrast between the farm and the town is the emphasis that each environment places on gender roles.

In the countryside, Jim is free to be domestic and sensitive in the company of women. But Jim's arrival in town forces him to recognize his social identity as a male. In adjusting to school and his classmates, he seems to become "quite another boy," learning to fight, swear, and tease the girls. The pressure to assume gendered behavior is equally acute on Antonia, who gradually begins to make the shift from tomboyish farmhand to polished town girl. Lena Lingard also changes her costume, trading in her tattered farm rags for the smarter costumes of a dressmaker.

Cather's title for Book II is "The Hired Girls," which serves as a reminder of the important connection among occupation, place, and sexuality, for both the young women and young men. This new pressure denotes another shift in the main characters' lives: just as Book I describes life in the country and Book II describes life in town, Book I describes the characters as children, while Book II describes them as young adults. The move to town comes with

a new shift to more urban, grown-up interests, such as the dancing that takes place in Chapter VII.

Because the farm is associated with the past and the town with the present, Jim and Antonia become nostalgic for their former existence in the country. Even Lena, who is most keen on the lures of the town life, confesses her nostalgia for her rural family life. While telling Jim one of her wild tales of adventure, she admits to him of her rustic family, “ I get awful homesick for them, all the same. ” Although the shift from farm to town marginalizes the landscape, the harsh climate of the Nebraska prairie continues to dominate the flow of the narrative.

Jim finds the winter a nearly unendurable penalty for the pleasantness of summer. When Antonia relates the story of a tramp who committed suicide by leaping into a thresher, the mystery for the Harlings is not in the tramp’s choice to kill himself but that he did so in such a lovely season as late summer. It is as if the Harlings conceive of pleasant weather as a boon from their often unforgiving environment not to be taken for granted. One of the few breaks in the monotony of Jim’s first long winter in town is the visit paid to Black Hawk by Samson d’Arnault, the itinerant black pianist.

While some may take offense at the coarse picture Cather paints of d’Arnault, it is difficult to imagine that the insensitive nature of her characterization was intentionally meant to wound. Although her descriptions of him at his piano—“ enjoying himself as only a Negro can” and later, playing with a gusto “ full of strong, savage blood”—may have been aimed to charm the audiences of 1918, they are more likely to provoke outrage in a

modern reader. Nevertheless, her nostalgic and accurate portrait of part of America's past is of great value as a cultural document.

Summary: Chapter VIII Finally, the long winter gives way to spring, and Antonia, Jim, and the Harling children spend their days in the garden and at play among the trees. In June, the Vannis, an Italian family, arrive with a dancing pavilion and begin giving lessons. The pavilion quickly becomes a center of town life, especially on Saturday nights, when the dancing carries on until midnight. Summary: Chapter IX Jim claims that all the socially respectable boys are secretly attracted to the country girls who came to Black Hawk as hired girls.

But because of the town's extremely rigid social hierarchy, none of the town boys feels comfortable dating a hired girl. For his part, Jim finds the hired girls more interesting and worthwhile than the townsfolk, and he begins to spend time with them, to the general disapproval of the community.

Summary: Chapter X Over time, Antonia begins to draw notice at the pavilion, and thoughts of dancing soon preoccupy her waking hours. Trouble arises when an engaged boy attempts to kiss Antonia on the Harlings' back porch. Although Antonia manages to fight him off, Mr.

Harling presents her with an ultimatum: she must quit dancing or look for work elsewhere. Indignant, Antonia decides to take her chances on her own and announces her plan to find work with Wick Cutter, the local moneylender. Distraught, Mrs. Harling tells Antonia that she cannot speak to her if she works for the Cutters. Antonia insists on keeping her independence and leaving the Harlings. Summary: Chapter XI Jim describes the Cutters as a

detestable Black Hawk couple, generally loathed by the populace: Wick Cutter is a devious moneylender who makes his money by manipulating farmers into accepting unwise loans, and Mrs.

Cutter is a hideous shrew. The Cutters do not even get along with each other, and their epic arguments are legendary throughout the town.

Summary: Chapter XII Once set up at the Cutters, Antonia spends even more time and energy on her new social life. She sews her own outfits and parades around town with Lena and a number of the other hired girls. Now a senior in high school, Jim sometimes travels about with them. After the Vannis leave town, a group called the Owl Club begins to stage dances in the Masonic Hall each Tuesday, but Jim refuses to join.

Envious of the older girls, Jim begins to grow restless at the thought of being cooped up in school, and so he visits a local saloon. When Jim's reputation is brought into question, he is forced to look elsewhere for diversion, but he quickly finds that very few diversions are to be found in Black Hawk. Eager to find an alternative, Jim resolves to attend the Saturday night dances at the Firemen's Hall, sneaking out of the house after his grandparents have fallen asleep. One evening, after a night of dancing, Jim walks Antonia back to the Cutters.

When he asks for a kiss and goes a little farther than Antonia expects, she scolds him for his brazenness. Jim, pleased at her show of virtue, walks home with his heart full of her. Summary: Chapter XIII A short time later, Jim notices that his grandmother has been crying. She has learned of his secret journeys to the Firemen's Hall dances, and she is ashamed of his

deceitfulness. In an attempt to atone for his actions, Jim swears off the dances, but he finds himself lonely again as a result. At his high school commencement, Jim gives an oration that the crowd receives wonderfully.

Afterward, Antonia breathlessly congratulates him and is moved to tears when he declares that he dedicated the oration to her father. Jim is thrilled with his success. Summary: Chapter XIV During the summer, Jim commits himself to a rigorous study schedule in preparation for his upcoming university studies. His one -holiday comes in July, when he arranges to meet a party of girls, including Antonia and Lena, at the river. As he approaches, he spots Antonia sitting alone by a stream and notices she has been crying. When Jim asks her why she is sad, she confesses to him her pangs of homesickness for the old country and for her father.

Later in the day, Antonia and Jim rejoin the rest of the girls, and they spend the afternoon playing games and talking together until sunset. Summary: Chapter XV Left alone to housesit for the Cutters in late August, Antonia has an uneasy feeling about spending the night by herself. Jim agrees to sleep there in her stead and comes back to the Burdens each morning for breakfast. On his third night in the house, he is roused by a noise, but quickly falls back asleep. A short while later, he wakes to the noise of someone in the same room and comes face to face with Cutter, who was expecting to find Antonia in the room.

Cutter has used the trip as an elaborate scheme to abandon his wife and either seduce or rape Antonia. He had told Antonia that he left his valuables under her bed and that she must not leave them unattended at night. A

scuffle ensues, and Jim manages to escape Cutter by leaping out of the window and running through the dark town in his nightshirt. He eventually makes his way home, only to find that he has suffered several severe bruises and cuts. Jim holes up in his room to recover, and Mrs. Burden accompanies Antonia to the Cutters to pack her trunk.

They find the house in utter disarray, and, as they are gathering up the torn garments, Mrs. Cutter arrives at the front door. After doing her best to calm Mrs. Cutter down, Mrs. Burden listens in amazement as Mrs. Cutter relates the elaborate ruse that her husband concocted: he put her on the wrong train while he slipped back to Black Hawk in his failed scheme to have his way with Antonia. Analysis: Book II, Chapters VIII–XV Frances Harling, the no-nonsense businesswoman of the novel, perfectly describes the core of Jim's affliction.

Criticizing Jim over his affections for the hired girls, Frances says, " The problem with you, Jim, is that you're romantic. " Frances's objection to Jim's social persona lies both in his withdrawal from society and in the glorified sense of glamour that he bestows upon Antonia, Lena, and the rest of their kind. Frances, who speaks for the more respectable realms of Black Hawk society, represents a class of people whom Jim despises. Jim contrasts the staid propriety of a house full of " hand-painted china that must not be used" with the carefree charms of the free spirits he deems " my country girls. The dancing pavilion brings the difference between the sheltered American daughters and the immigrant working girls into relief. As Jim observes, the presence of the dance hall upsets the established social order. With little to lose, the displaced immigrant girls from Bohemia, Denmark, and Norway

take advantage of their working-class freedom to gain a foothold among the young men of Black Hawk, while the more respectable girls of established families are left to hang back in the shadows.

From the distanced perspective of a man writing a memoir, Jim can look back on this curious social order and analyze it as the natural evolution of the American immigrant experience. The same girls who were initially held back by barriers of language and wealth applied the strength of character acquired through hardship in order to better their lot in life. As a result, the servant girls of Jim's youth become the property-owning mistresses of his adulthood. That such radical changes are afoot is clear from the pressing march of time.

Jim himself is very conscious of the fleetingness of existence, soliloquizing that "when boys and girls are growing up, life can't stand still, not even in the quietest of country towns; and they have to grow up, whether they will or no." Although Jim clearly understands the inevitability of growing up, we get the sense that his romantic side is loath to do so. Jim grows to dislike the stillness of Black Hawk, however, shuffling aimlessly as he does in his senior year among the "malcontent" in their "flimsy shelters. But at the same time, he longs to recapture the innocence and purity of his childhood affection for the domestic and the mundane, as shown when he hangs a May basket for young Nina Harling, taking a "melancholy pleasure" in the action. As Book II comes to an end, the feeling that the characters are moving out of childhood and into the world of adulthood is nearly complete. The story's increasing emphasis on sexuality—including Cutter's bizarre attempt to sleep with Antonia—reflects this transition. Jim's reluctance to grow up manifests

itself most strongly in his inability to reconcile his emotional and sexual urges.

When he attempts to kiss Antonia in the same way that he has kissed Lena, she curtly but politely rebuffs him; he does not protest, but is pleased by her modesty. Although he is “not half as fond” of Lena as he is of Antonia, it is Lena that he dreams of passionately embracing, and though he wishes it were Antonia in her stead, he is never able to dream about her in the same way. Antonia, too, harbors nostalgia for a purer, more childlike past. She arranges for Jim to meet her and her friends at the river, in a last attempt to re-create old times.

While her tears are ostensibly shed in longing for a lost Bohemia, she perhaps feels another grief—equally strong but subconscious—for the loss of her and Jim’s shared childhood in the Nebraska countryside. Once again, Cather reverts to the majesty of the landscape to provide a visual analogue for the nostalgia and sense of loss that her characters feel. As Jim and the girls continue to reminisce late into the afternoon, a plow emerges against the red disk of the setting sun, heroic in its loneliness, a symbol for the romantic imagination. But, inevitably, like the romantic imagination itself, this heroic image can enjoy only a fleeting moment of distorted importance. As the sun slowly sinks, the plow is returned “back to its own littleness” beneath the darkening sky, symbolizing how helpless humankind is in the face of indomitable forces of the universe such as time. Summary: Chapter I

At the university, Jim comes under the influence of a young scholar named Gaston Cleric. He takes rooms with an elderly couple on the edge of Lincoln

and quickly becomes engrossed in his studies. During the summer, he remains in Lincoln to study Greek under the terms of his enrollment.

Summary: Chapter II One evening, during the spring of his sophomore year, Jim is deep in thought when someone knocks at his door. He is slow to recognize his visitor, but soon realizes that it is Lena Lingard, dressed in her city finery. She explains to him that she has set up in Lincoln as a dressmaker, and she describes the details of her business affairs. When Jim asks after Antonia, Lena explains that Antonia has taken up work with Mrs. Gardener at the hotel and is engaged to Larry Donovan. Jim greets this news with a mixture of pleasure and dismay, and he mentions an urge to go home and take care of her.

Lena changes the subject to the theater, and Jim asks if she would like to get together for a theater outing in the near future. Lena agrees to this proposal and departs as quickly as she has come, leaving Jim among his books in the solitude of his study. Summary: Chapter III Throughout the spring, Jim and Lena attend a series of plays together. One play in particular, *Camille*, the story of a man's love for a woman dying of tuberculosis, affects them both very strongly. Summary: Chapter IV In addition to spending time with Lena at the theater, Jim visits her regularly at her dressmaking shop and takes Sunday breakfasts with her at her apartment. As the weeks wear on, Jim becomes less interested in his classes and spends more and more time hanging about with Lena and her circle. Near the end of the academic term, Cleric informs Jim that he has accepted an instructorship at Harvard College and wants Jim to accompany him east. After receiving the blessing of his grandfather, Jim resolves to leave Lincoln, and he visits Lena to tell her his

<https://assignbuster.com/my-antonia-summary/>

decision. While sad to hear the news, she makes no attempt to hold him back. When the term ends, Jim returns home to be with his grandparents for a few weeks.

He then makes a visit to his relatives in Virginia before joining Cleric in Boston. Analysis: Book III, Chapters I-IV Book III reflects another major narrative shift in the novel: Jim's transition to college. Although Jim's move from the farm to Black Hawk—the break separating Books I and II—makes for a change of scenery, his sense of place is still firmly rooted in the nearby countryside that he roamed as a boy. But with his entry into the university at Lincoln in Book III, a more permanent rift between his past and his present begins to establish itself.

Jim's initial impulse is to reject the lure of "impersonal" scholarship in favor of his "own naked land and the figures scattered upon it." He finds himself torn between study and memory, excited by the lure of learning new forms, but at the same time plunged back into thoughts of his past. In the face of the new, Jim finds the old people and ways "strengthened and simplified," though it is unclear whether such an improvement is more a virtue of the past itself or a result of thinking about the past in a new way.

In either event, the nostalgia that Jim begins to feel at the university is extremely intense, and it begins to hamper his ability to live in the present. The people that he carries with him in his mind are so alive to him that he "scarcely stopped to wonder whether they were alive anywhere else, or how." Antonia soon comes to display a similar tendency to live in the past at the expense of her present. The idea that takes hold of Jim most strongly in the

course of his study is the concept of patria, or loyalty to one's specific place of origin, a concept prominent in the works of the renowned Latin poet Virgil. The heart of My Antonia lies not in its existence as an American novel, or even as a novel of the American Midwest, but rather as a fictionalized document of childhood in a town like Cather's own Red Cloud, Nebraska. The devotion that Cather, and by extension Jim, feels is not for the cosmopolitan present in which they are immersed but rather for the provincial countryside of their youth, which they carry in their hearts always.

Jim's complete separation of his Lincoln world from his Black Hawk world is undermined by the visit he receives from Lena Lingard. She acts as a link between his past and his present and continues to stand in Antonia's place as an object of his desire. Jim's relationship with Lena is curiously sterile; although he spends a great deal of time with her, their interaction is rarely charged with the same quality of emotional intensity as his earlier interactions with Antonia are. With the security of his childhood and his early family life slipping away from him, Jim finds himself in an aimless and unhappy state.

Cather makes use of a play (Camille) within the novel to illustrate Jim's mood, presenting his wistful perspective in the middle of a particularly wrenching theatergoing experience. As he watches the tragic story told in Camille unfold, Jim feels "helpless to prevent the closing of that chapter of idyllic love" in which the protagonist's "ineffable happiness was only to be the measure of his fall." The unhappy fate of the drama's male character is Jim's fate as well, and Cather suggests that art itself is of value as a reflection of our own emotions and experiences.

Jim marvels at the power of art to get at such universal truths “ across long years and several languages,” but at the same time he reveals his own subjective bias about art’s meaning, asserting that “ whenever and wherever that piece is put on, it is April. ” The play has crystallized for him a certain emotion that he associates with April, but in linking the play automatically to this emotion, he potentially limits the breadth of his actual experience.

Summary: Chapter I Jim completes his academic program at Harvard in two years and returns to Black Hawk for summer vacation before entering law school.

On the evening of his arrival, he is greeted at home by the Harlings. After Jim catches up with his family and friends, Frances brings up the subject of Antonia. He knows that Larry Donovan never married Antonia and that he left her with a child. Jim thinks bitterly of Antonia’s lot, lamenting her misfortunes. Summary: Chapter II On a trip to the town photographer to arrange a portrait of his grandparents, Jim notices a prominently placed picture of a baby on the wall. The photographer informs Jim that it is a likeness of Antonia’s baby, and that Ambrosch will be coming in to the studio to collect it over the weekend.

On his way home from the photographer’s, Jim stops at Mrs. Harling’s and mentions to her his wish to learn more about Antonia’s plight. She suggests that he go to visit Widow Steavens, the tenant on the Burdens’ old farmland. Summary: Chapter III At the beginning of August, Jim takes a horse and cart out to the countryside to visit Widow Steavens. She welcomes him warmly and invites him to stay the night, promising to speak to him of Antonia after

supper. That evening, Jim and the widow repair to the old sitting room upstairs, and she begins her story.

In the weeks leading up to her wedding, Antonia had been hard at work, sewing various things for her new household and -anxiously awaiting the approaching date. When Donovan had -written to her soon after to inform her that his route as a train conductor had changed and that they would have to live in Denver, Antonia was initially discouraged, but she quickly placed her doubts behind her. When the time to depart came, Ambrosch helped Antonia pack up and drove her into Black Hawk to board the night train for Denver.

After receiving a couple of initial communications from Denver confirming Antonia's safe arrival, the Shimerdas heard nothing from her for several weeks. Then, suddenly, she reappeared at home one day, unmarried and devastated by Donovan's desertion of her and subsequent running off to Mexico. Throughout the spring and summer, Antonia worked in the fields, shutting herself in among her family. In the winter, she bore a child, to the surprise of her family, who had not observed her pregnancy because of the loose and bulky clothing that she had taken to wearing.

Widow Steavens concludes her story by telling Jim that Antonia's baby is nearly two years old now, healthy and strong. Jim retires for the evening into the room he slept in as a boy, and he lays awake watching the moonlight and the windmill. Summary: Chapter IV The next afternoon, Jim walks over to the Shimerdas'. After Yulka shows him Antonia's baby, he walks out to the

fields to speak to Antonia. They meet, clasp hands, and walk together to the site of Mr. Shimerda's grave.

Jim tells her his plans for law school and of his life in the East. Antonia tells him of her resolution to bring her daughter up into the world. As they walk across the fields together at sunset, Jim feels a strong nostalgia for the Nebraska landscape. At the edge of the field, Antonia and Jim part ways. Jim gives his promise to return, and Antonia gives her promise to remember him always. As Jim walks back to his old farmhouse alone at dark, he has the sense of two young children running along beside him. Analysis: Book IV, Chapters I-IV

With Jim at Harvard, away from the constancy of his Nebraska childhood, the narrative becomes even more piecemeal, and Jim's memory begins to skip around from story to story. Jim contrasts Antonia's lot as a mother on the Nebraska prairie with that of her girlhood friends, Lena Lingard and Tiny Soderball, who in time come to establish themselves as women of fortune and position in San Francisco. The upward mobility that Lena and Tiny enjoy is somewhat undermined by Jim's lukewarm description of it: he remarks of Lena that she "had got on in the world" and of Tiny that "she was satisfied with her success, but not elated. For all of their victories, Lena and Tiny's lack of earnestness and enthusiasm does much to tarnish their achievements in Jim's eyes. In contrast to these successful women in urban America stands Antonia, who has returned to the country after a thwarted attempt to make a new life for herself in the big city. Like Jim, Antonia has a powerful sense of place that supersedes all other considerations. But, unlike Jim, without the

prospect of a career in front of her, she is quickly sucked back into her natural, if not native, environment.

Saddled with a child, deserted on the brink of marriage, Antonia retreats to the idylls of her past in the face of an unacceptable present. Her labor is slow and intermittent, for, as she says to the Widow Steavens, “[I]f I start to work, I look around and forget to go on. It seems such a little while ago when Jim Burden and I was playing all over this country. ” To the romantic individual, a specific place becomes invested with the quality of an emotion felt at a specific time, and such a mind is slow to disassociate such remembrances in a changing situation.

Antonia prefers to live in the past and is fully aware of her denial of the reality of the present; despite the fact that her father is long since dead, for instance, Antonia tells Jim that her father “ is more real to me than almost anybody else. ” What brings both Antonia and Jim to an acceptance of change is their ability to come to terms with their own nostalgia. Rather than denying or feeling guilt about their yearnings to recapture and relive the old times, they indulge themselves by reminiscing. Thus, while their exteriors may shift radically, their interiors are constant and unchanging.

This interior steadfastness gives them repose in the face of an unstable environment. Upon returning home for the summer before he enters law school, Jim sees the world changing, but he doesn't mind because what is truly important to him—the memories—remain the same. Summary: Chapter I Some twenty years later, Jim returns to Nebraska on his way home to New York from a business trip out west. His intention is to see Antonia, of whom

he has heard almost nothing in the intervening period except that she has married a fellow Bohemian named Cuzak and is raising a large family.

When his buggy arrives at the Cuzak farm, Jim is led up to the house by two young boys and welcomed into the kitchen by two older girls. As he prepares to sit down, Antonia enters the room, but she fails to recognize him initially. Once she does, she is thrown into a rush of emotion and calls out to gather her children around her. Introductions are made, and Antonia and Jim sit down in the kitchen to discuss old times and new times. During their conversation, one of Antonia's boys comes into the house to mourn the death of his dog.

Antonia consoles him, and the Cuzaks take Jim on a tour of their new fruit cave. Afterward, Jim is taken through the farmhouse and then on to the orchard. Another long talk of times gone by ensues, and Antonia invites Jim to stay the night with them. Jim expresses his wish to sleep in the haymow with her sons, and Antonia goes off to prepare supper while Jim heads out to milk cows with the boys. At supper the group crowds into the kitchen, and afterward everyone settles in the parlor for some musical entertainment by the Cuzak children.

After the concert, Antonia brings out a box of photographs, and the children gather around as their mother leads Jim through the pictures. Antonia tells stories until eleven, when Jim and the boys retire to the barn. The boys' giggles quickly give way to slumber, but Jim lays awake late into the night, thinking of Antonia. Summary: Chapter II The next morning, Jim dresses in the barn and washes up by the windmill, entering the kitchen to find

breakfast ready. In the afternoon, Cuzak returns with his oldest son and introduces him to Jim.

Cuzak begins to describe the details of their trip into town, including a dance at which they encountered many of Antonia's Bohemian acquaintances. Back at the house, as Antonia serves a supper of geese and apples, the talk turns to Black Hawk, and the story of the violent murder-suicide involving Wick Cutter and his wife. After the meal, Cuzak and Jim take a walk into the orchard, and Cuzak recounts for Jim the details of his early life. Confessing a loneliness for his old haunts in Bohemia and Vienna, Cuzak explains that the warmth of Antonia's love and the energy of his large family has kept him free from despair.

Summary: Chapter III The following day, after dinner, Jim leaves the Cuzaks. The whole family gathers to see him off as he departs, and Jim pulls away in the buggy as Antonia waves her apron in farewell by the windmill. In Black Hawk the next day, Jim is disappointed by the unfamiliar town, and is hard-pressed to occupy himself until the night express train arrives. Toward evening, Jim walks out beyond the outskirts of town and finds himself at home again. In his wanderings, he comes upon the first bit of the old road that leads out to the country farms.

Although the track has largely been plowed under, Jim easily recognizes the way. He sits down by the overgrowth and watches the haystacks glowing in the sunlight. Analysis: Book v, Chapters I-III With twenty years gone by since their last encounter, it is no surprise that Antonia fails to recognize Jim immediately when he arrives at her farm. Because of the interval in their

acquaintance, it also follows that Jim's description of Antonia should be an odd mixture of the familiar and the strange.

He refers to her in one breath as "this woman" and in the next insists that her eyes could be none other than her own. As the two warm up to each other, the awkwardness of lost time fades into the background, and Antonia and Jim begin to enjoy each other's company in their old easy way. As Jim remembers, with the face-to-face encounter "the changes grew less apparent to me, her identity stronger." Still, Antonia does not expect to find Jim childless, and this fact throws him into stark contrast with Antonia, a mother to a large family. The difference in their domestic status owes perhaps to the difference in their environments: Jim, as an urban white-collar worker, has less need to rear children than the poor, farm-bound Cuzaks, who need all the labor they can get. Antonia is as invested in her relationship with the landscape as ever, as demonstrated by her carefully cultivated orchard. She endows the trees around her with human qualities, declaring much as Jim does earlier in his childhood that she loves them "as if they were people" and explaining that as she cared for them in their first growth "they were on my mind like children. Jim quickly reintegrates himself into such a landscape-oriented life in the countryside, and feels as he milks the cows with Antonia's sons that "everything was as it should be." In bringing out a box of photographs to display, Antonia returns to a tangible resource that provokes a flood of memories. By educating her children in the tales of her past, she has made her past a part of her present, and the photographs help the memory of those old stories to live on.

Memory lives largely on the strength of images, photographic or otherwise, and in recalling his feelings for Antonia, Jim runs through a series of pictures from the past in his own head. At the same time, he finds that Antonia “ still had that something which fires the imagination,” and is every bit as moved by the images of his return visit as he has been all these years by the pictures from his childhood. Ultimately, more than the photographs or the mental images, it is the surrounding prairie landscape that comes to serve as an icon of the childhood idyll that Antonia and Jim earlier share.

After parting once again from Antonia, Jim finds resolution and strength in a walk among the familiar, silent places of his youth, illustrating how the past still has a tremendous power to comfort him. Although the road leading out to the old farms is largely grown over, it still serves as a useful landmark to those aware of its presence. Likewise, the map of memory is a key to the present for those who have lived through the past. In returning to his roots, Jim is taken by “ what a little circle man’s experience is” and resolves to renew his relationship with Antonia and develop a bond with her family.

Regardless of the missing years between them, Jim finds the key to a future with his childhood friend in the richness of what they hold in common—“ the precious, the incommunicable past. ” Jim meditates on this shared past once again as the landscape closest to his heart lies quietly beneath the darkness that surrounds him. Key Facts full title · My Antonia author · Willa Cather type of work · Novel genre · Frontier fiction, autobiographical fiction language · English time and place written · 1917, New Hampshire date of first publication · 1918 narrator · The main part of the story is Jim Burden’s memoir narrated in his first-person voice, from the perspective of an older

man looking back on his childhood. The introduction to the novel is narrated by an unnamed individual, one of Jim's childhood acquaintances. Like Jim, this narrator uses a friendly, first-person voice. point of view · Except for the introduction, written from the perspective of the unnamed narrator, the entire novel is written from Jim's perspective. tone · Jim's attitude toward his story is somewhat sad, extremely nostalgic, and full of yearning for a lost past.

Throughou