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Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Across Five Aprils

by Irene Hunt

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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Across Five Aprils

Note to the Teacher

Across Five Aprils is a novel written by Irene Hunt and published in 1964. The story follows the Creighton family, specifically their youngest son Jethro, during the American Civil War. The book presents a tumultuous period of American history through the eyes of nine-year-old Jethro and focuses on his changing views of the war, as well as on family and society, as he gets older. This coming-of-age story highlights Jethro's struggles with growing up too fast and his loss of innocence; in the course of the novel, he comes to understand the sometimes-conflicting choice between loyalty and duty, the dangers of stereotyping, and the importance of family.

Irene Hunt was born in Pontiac, Illinois, in 1907. She had a strong relationship with her grandfather, who grew up during the Civil War. Hunt earned her B.A. from the University of Illinois, in 1939, and an M.A. from the University of Minnesota, in 1946. While earning her degrees, Hunt also was an English and French teacher in Illinois; teaching in the public schools lasted until 1945, when she went to the University of South Dakota to teach psychology. *Across Five Aprils* was Hunt's first book, published when she was 57, and in 1965, she received the Newbery Honor for her work. Two years later, in 1967, she received the Newbery Medal for her second book, *Up the Road Slowly*. In 1969, she retired and began to focus more on writing. Other works by Hunt include *No Promises in the Wind* (1970), *The Lottery Rose* (1976), and *The Everlasting Hills* (1985).

Hunt has been praised for her contribution to children's literature and has been the recipient of many awards, including a 1965 Lewis Carroll Shelf Award, and in 1974, Hunt was a nominee for the Hans Christian Andersen Award, the highest international recognition available for authors of children's books.

All references come from the Berkley edition of *Across Five Aprils*, copyright 1964.

Across Five Aprils

Objectives

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

1. write an essay that explains and supports the coming-of-age theme in *Across Five Aprils*.
2. identify and discuss the following themes in this novel and cite comments and incidents from the novel for support:
 - the unjust and corrosive effects of stereotyping people and/or groups
 - the importance of family and friends in one's life
 - the conflict that may have to be faced when loyalty to a friend or relative collides with a sense of duty
 - the consequences of what may happen when unchecked emotions overwhelm rational thoughts
 - the difficulty of following one's personal conscience
 - the loss of innocence
3. write a one-half page character description of selected characters.
4. infer meanings about plot and characters when the meanings are not explicitly stated.
5. list the major incidents in this plot and identify:
 - exposition
 - rising action
 - climax
 - falling action
 - resolution
6. define the term "dialect," explain why an author may choose to use it, and explain how it is used in this story.
7. define the term "stereotype" and discuss the extent to which the following characters are, or are not, stereotypes:

Across Five Aprils

Terms and Definitions

Allusion – a reference to a person, place, poem, book, event, etc., which is not part of the story, that the author expects the reader will recognize; **Example:** In *The Glass Menagerie*, Tom speaks of “Chamberlain’s umbrella,” a reference to British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain.

Antagonist – the person or force that is in conflict with, or opposes, the protagonist; **Example:** Nurse Ratched opposes McMurphy throughout *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*.

Climax – the point of greatest dramatic tension or excitement in a story; **Examples:** Othello’s murder of Desdemona; in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the person chasing Scout is killed.

Dialect – a particular kind of speech used by members of one specific group because of its geographical location or class; **Example:** Jim, in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* says, “Shet de do.” [“Shut the door.”]

Exposition – the background information that the reader has to know and/or understand before reading the play or novel; the information is usually dealt with at the beginning of the book. Sometimes, exposition reveals things that occurred before the actual plot begins. **Example:** The chorus in *Romeo and Juliet* explains the setting, the feud between the families, and the future deaths of the main characters in fourteen lines of poetry.

Falling Action – additional action that follows the climax; **Example:** After the deaths near the end of *Hamlet*, the Prince of Norway enters, and Horatio explains what happened.

Foil – a character whose qualities or actions usually serve to emphasize the actions or qualities of the main character, the protagonist, by providing a strong contrast; on occasion, the foil is used as a contrast to a character other than the main one. **Examples:** Hotspur contrasts Prince Hal in Shakespeare’s *Henry IV, Part I*; the Roadrunner of cartoon fame uses Wile E. Coyote as his foil.

Foreshadowing – the use of hints or clues in a story to suggest what action is to come; foreshadowing is frequently used to create interest and build suspense. **Example:** Two small and seemingly inconsequential car accidents predict and hint at the upcoming, important wreck in *The Great Gatsby*.

Across Five Aprils

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Explain why this novel is a good example of the coming-of-age genre. Support your answer by citing comments and incidents from *Across Five Aprils*.
2. Write a short essay in which you explain how foreshadowing is used in this novel to build interest and suspense.
3. Write a one-half page description of each of the major characters in the novel.
4. List the major incidents in the plot of this novel and identify the incidents that are part of the **Exposition**, those that constitute **Rising Action**, the **Climax**, those that are part of the **Falling Action**, and those that are part of the **Resolution**.
5. When a novel ends, sometimes we are sorry because we wish to spend more time with the characters we have come to know well. This is probably why sequels are popular. In a two-page sequel to this novel, write what you think happens to Jethro in the next portion of his life.
6. Prove that the following are themes in this novel by citing specific portions of the book:
 - the loss of innocence
 - the unjust and corrosive effects of stereotyping people and/or groups
 - the importance of family and friends in one's life
 - the conflict one may have to face when loyalty to a friend or relative collides with a sense of duty
 - the consequences of what may happen when unchecked emotions overwhelm rational thoughts
 - the difficulty of following one's individual conscience
7. After defining the term "dialect," cite examples of it in this novel and discuss reasons why an author chooses to use dialect.
8. Discuss characters on television shows or in movies that you feel are good examples of stereotypical characters. Then, identify each of the major characters in this novel and discuss to what extent these characters are or are not stereotypes.
9. Discuss first-person and third-person narration and explain the advantages and disadvantages of both types of narration.

Across Five Aprils

Chapter One

VOCABULARY

fencerow – an uncultivated strip of land on either side of a fence
folly – a foolish act or idea
furor – a situation in which many people are angry or upset
shiftless – lacking in incentive or ambition; lazy
team – two or more horses, oxen, or other animals harnessed together to pull a vehicle or plow

1. The setting for this novel is established quickly. In what time period and in what place does it occur? How important do you think setting will be in this story?

2. What two moods are contrasted in this first chapter?

3. What makes Jethro special to his mother? What literary term is implied in the sentence, “Destiny had marked him [Jethro]”?

4. Identify and explain the allusion and simile in the following passage:

Jethro was her youngest child, born in the year of '52, a year in which three of her children died within one week of the dreaded disease they called child's paralysis, a disease which struck the country that year, people said, like the soldiers of Herod.

Chapter Four

VOCABULARY

admonitions – warnings; advice; counsel
dispel – to drive off
ironclads – 19th-century warships with iron or steel armor plating
mimicry – a performance or act of imitating
rebuke – a stern disapproval; a reprimand
soberly – marked by seriousness

1. This is a chapter of contrasts. What contrast is made between General McClellan and General Grant?

2. What problem does President Lincoln have with his commanding generals early in the war?

3. In response to Matt's comment about General Buckner and General Grant, why does Ellen say, "Yes...and my Bill and John was even closer than that—"?

4. What is Ellen's reaction after reading Tom's letter?
