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Prestwick House **Response** Journal



My Ántonia Willa Cather



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Response Journal

To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

My Ántonia

Book I

- 1. Jim Burden is on his way to Nebraska from Virginia to live with his grandparents after the loss of his parents. Imagine how you would feel starting over in a new place. Write about how would you feel? What would be your concerns?
- 2. Coming to Nebraska, Jim awakens to a whole new experience in a completely new environment. Think about a time when you were placed in new surroundings. How did you feel? Were you more fearful or excited?
- 3. Otto states that Bohemians have a natural distrust of Austrians. Can you think of other racial or ethnic groups that may experience a similar problem? What may have caused this problem?
- 4. Write a short letter as if you were from a group that has racial, gender, ethnic, or economic prejudices against it. The letter should be to someone who exhibits the prejudice. Explain how you feel as the target, what prejudices cause, how to stop them, etc.
- 5. Jim and Ántonia become fast friends. What are the qualities of a good friend? Make a list of the ten most important ones.
- 6. Jim and Ántonia are both strangers in a strange land. How might they both experience alienation in this new situation? Write a diary entry for Jim in which he expresses his feelings.
- 7. Jim and Ántonia's adventure with the rattlesnake changes the dynamics of their relationship. Have you ever been in a similar situation of danger? Explain what happened.

My Ántonia

- 15. The two Shimerda girls like to forget their problems by playing with Jim on the prairie. What activity helps you to escape from life's cares? Why is that the case, and how is it different from how you behaved when you were younger?
- 16. During Jim's first winter in Nebraska, he and his family are able to enjoy a simple Christmas together with homemade gifts. Write two paragraphs about your favorite holiday memory.
- 17. Jim says that their environment shapes Otto's and Jake's characters. Describe another character in this story or a character in another story that you have read who is shaped by his or her surroundings. If you are unable to think of one, use a character on television or from a movie.
- 18. Mrs. Shimerda has difficulty adjusting to life in a new country. What are some of the difficulties that you might encounter if you were moving to a foreign country? Make a list of at least twelve.

Book II

- 19. Jim feels all alone in the city, though he has interaction with more people. Write a paragraph about a time when you felt all alone even though there were people around. Include your emotions.
- 20. What does Willa Cather's depiction of Blind D'Arnualt say about her perception of African-Americans? Write a short essay about some prejudices that still exist among the races. What can you personally do to help overcome prejudice?
- 21. When Jim leaves home for college, he talks about the figures of his old life waiting for him in the new. Has someone or something from your past caught up with you? Was it pleasant or not? Why?

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Book V

- 31. Anton is a frank, confident young Bohemian. Explain how his character shows another side of the Bohemian culture. Write about someone that you know who breaks a stereotype you might have had about that person or culture.
- 32. Jim's visit with Ántonia and the boys is bittersweet. Is this how you expected the story to end? Write an alternative ending that places Ántonia and Jim in a different situation.
- 33. Pretend that you are one of the Cuzak children. Write a diary entry describing Jim Burden and your interaction with him during his visit.
- 34. The story ends with Jim contemplating his burgeoning relationship with the Cuzak boys. Write a short chapter describing Jim's hunting trip with Rudolph and Ambrosch. Why do you think Jim has not had a family of his own?

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- 56. Compare Jim and Ántonia's ordeal in the prairie with the snake to Adam and Eve's encounter with the snake in the Garden of Eden. Explain how the snake symbolizes the "end of innocence" in both cases.
- 57. Write a letter to Willa Cather expressing your feelings about *My Ántonia*. Talk about your favorite and least favorite parts and about sections of the book that are surprising or confusing. What might you have done differently?
- 58. Write a will for Ántonia.