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Response Journal

Reflections: A Student Response Journal



O Pioneers!
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.

Part I The Wild Land

I

1. The title of the book you are reading is taken from the poem “Pioneers, O Pioneers!” in Walt Whitman’s famous book, *Leaves of Grass*, which was published in 1900. The first stanza of the poem is as follows:

Come my tan-faced children
Follow well in order, get your weapons ready
Have you your pistols? have you your sharp-edged axes?
Pioneers, O Pioneers!

Imagine that you are a young pioneer in Nebraska in the late 1800’s. Write a four line poem in which you would tell Walt Whitman how you are living on the prairie.

2. In the opening section of this chapter, we meet the four children who will be the central characters in this novel. Write down each of their full names and a two sentence description of each. You may use the exact words which describe them that you find in the chapter as part of your answer, but be sure to put these exact words in quotation marks.

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V

9. As the first part of the novel, "The Wild Land," concludes, you can see how precious the idea of owning, caring for, and "taming" the unforgiving plains of America's early frontier is to Alexandra. She has realistically faced all the work and problems and has not romanticized the land. However, we read that she thinks, "She had never known before how much the country meant to her...She felt as if her heart were hiding down there, somewhere, with the quail and the plover and all the little wild things that crooned or buzzed in the sun." Suppose your best friend does not understand why Alexandra has nothing but the land and making it a success on her mind. Nor can your friend understand why Alexandra does not seem interested in being married and having children. Explain to your friend why you think Alexandra is like this.
10. There are some interesting words in this novel. From the following list, write the eight words you like best. Look up and write one meaning for each. Then, use each one in a sentence which is connected in some way with land. The following is an example:

plank: a stout length of cut timber. I was in the forest the day they sawed down the tree for wood to make their plank floor.

The list of words:

- | | |
|--------------|------------|
| 1. tableland | 6. timber |
| 2. mineral | 7. hillock |
| 3. prairie | 8. snipe |
| 4. homestead | 9. sage |
| 5. gully | 10. corral |

O Pioneers!

III

15. In this chapter, Carl Linstrum has returned to the Divide after being away for thirteen years and is to stay with Alexandra for a few days on his way to Alaska. Alexandra is tearful at seeing him again, but her brothers, Oscar and Lou, are not very happy about the arrival of their childhood friend. Suppose you are with the brothers as they ride to their homes after their visit with Alexandra. Complete the following conversation they might have about Carl and their sister:

Oscar: What's he really come here for anyway, Lou? Maybe he's lying about going to Alaska.

Lou: What'd you think, that he's after the farm? Maybe he thinks he can get it by...

IV

16. In this chapter, we read about Alexandra's impressions of the changes, or lack of them, that she has found in Carl since last seeing him thirteen years ago. Suppose you are Carl. Finish the monologue below. In it, explain what he might be thinking about how little Alexandra has changed in the last thirteen years.

I may not be showing it, but I am really, really glad to be with Alexandra again. I'd forgotten how...

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23. Upon learning of Marie's impetuous romantic involvement with Frank when they first met, is not hard to see that difficulties might present themselves in their marriage. On the other hand, we see Alexandra's history of avoiding romantic entanglements and the unexciting life she has led because of that. Suppose you were having a discussion with a friend about which character you would rather be, Marie or Alexandra. Even if you are not female, you can make your choice based on how much happiness you think each of these women can experience based on their life stories. Complete the following dialogue in which you discuss your choice and the reasons why you feel that way:

I look at the situation of Marie and Alexandra this way...

VIII

24. Frank Shabata is said to have come to Nebraska from "Bohemia." The Czech language was spoken in that area of Eastern Europe. You will notice that Frank speaks in a rather heavy dialect. An example of this can be found in this chapter. Copy down one of Frank's sentence exactly and write it in modern-day standard English. Imagine that Marie also speaks with a Czech dialect. Copy down exactly the paragraph which begins: "Don't let me disturb you, Emil." Re-write that entire paragraph which ends with, "Will you have to cut them, too?" as you think Marie would have spoken it in Czech dialect.
25. Suppose you were Emil's best friend and knew of his growing feelings for Marie, a married woman. What advice would you give him about whether to continue with his involvement with her? Keep in mind that Marie is a Catholic, and because her church forbids divorce, there would seem no way that Marie could leave her husband and marry Emil. Complete the following dialogue about what you would say to Emil:

I know how you feel, Emil. It's not easy to love someone when it seems as if the situation is hopeless. Do you think...