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 **Prestwick House**
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Literature Made Fun!



My Antonia
BY WILLA CATHER



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ISBN 978-0-9823095-4-4
Item No. 308870

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Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading**Author Background****Objective:** Researching the author**Activity**

Willa Cather was an intelligent and talented writer whose work many have come to appreciate. She wrote primarily from her life experiences; for this reason, readers feel a connection to her stories. It has even been suggested that *My Ántonia* is autobiographical. Using the Internet or other resources, research Cather's life. Make a list of the facts that you find; include biographical details, as well as information about her published works.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Introduction

Inferences and Purpose

Objectives: Using details and prior knowledge to make inferences
Identifying the purpose of a passage

Activity

An unnamed, first-person narrator introduces the novel, recounting his or her friendship with Jim Burden—what it was like growing up in Nebraska—and recalling another person from their shared past: a girl named *Á*ntonia. Once you begin reading the novel, however, you will notice that the narration shifts to Jim Burden.

Analyze the Introduction on the following three key points. Answer each as completely as you can, citing specific words, phrases, or sentences from the text. Be prepared to share your ideas in a class discussion.

1. Based on the details in the passage, what kind of person do you think Jim Burden seems to be? What is the narrator's attitude toward him?

2. Based on the details in the passage, who do you think is the unnamed narrator? Is it a character in the novel? What kind of person is the narrator, and what is his or her relationship to Jim?

3. Why do you think Willa Cather includes this Introduction? What purpose could it serve?

Name: _____

Date: _____

Book I: Chapters II – V**Drawing Character or Setting****Objective:** Synthesizing character or setting details through images**Activity**

As with most novels, the first few chapters of *My Ántonia* introduce several characters and provide the reader with information about the setting. Cather does so with intricate detail—she describes each character's physical appearance, and recreates for the reader Jim's first impressions. Her graceful and striking words illuminate the setting, evoking the color, texture, and features of the land.

Choose something from Chapters II – V to draw. Whatever you choose, you must first collect as many details about that character or place as you can in the space provided. Then, you may begin your drawing. Your details may be directly quoted from the novel or paraphrased.

Before you begin your drawing, complete this short form:

Character's Name: _____

Details I want to include in my drawing: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Book I: Chapters I – IX**Resumé**

Objectives: Writing a resumé
Recognizing distinctive traits through a character's experiences

Activity

Jim Burden first meets Otto Fuchs on the platform of the train station after his long journey from Virginia to Nebraska. Otto greets the ten-year-old Jim by saying, "Hello, are you Mr. Burden's folks? If you are, it's me you're looking for. I'm Otto Fuchs. I'm Mr. Burden's hired man, and I'm to drive you out."

As Mr. Burden's hired man, Otto has many responsibilities, and his duties change frequently. Over the course of the first nine chapters of *My Ántonia*, the reader sees Otto perform a variety of tasks. He has accumulated a great deal of marketable experience working for the Burdens.

Imagine that Otto has decided to look for a new job as a hired man. Write a resumé for him to include with his job application. Try to be creative and persuasive, and keep in mind the following guidelines:

- Include what you think Otto's job objective would be. What experiences make Otto qualified for this job?
- Be concise—keep the resumé to one page. Most employers will be more concerned with the significance of the experiences than the length of the resumé. What is most important for his future employer to know about Otto, and how will you convey that?
- It is critical that your grammar and spelling are correct, so be sure to proofread your work. In addition, have someone else proofread your work; it will help catch errors that you might have missed. Employers pay attention to errors on resúés and cover letters.
- As with all resúés, you will need to keep Otto's and update it each time he gains more work experience. Use the following as a guide to write Otto's resumé. Remember to save it.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Book I: Chapters IX – XIII**Winter Collage**

Objectives: Understanding how language creates mood
Making a collage

Activity

In Chapters IX – XIII, Jim's and *Ántonia*'s families experience the harsh Nebraska winter. The season is especially hard on the Shimerdas because of their modest house and large family. In these chapters, Cather presents scenes of the best and worst aspects of winter, creating often-contrasting moods. For example, she describes the excitement of a sleigh-ride and then the depressing living conditions in the Shimerda home.

As you read these chapters, note passages and events that convey a particular mood. Then, choose one, and create a collage that depicts the mood of that passage or event. The images you use can be drawn or painted by hand, computer generated, cut from magazines or other print media, or made from found materials. The images do not need to accurately illustrate the scene, although they may; they must only represent the mood that Cather has created.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Book II: Chapters II – III**The Harling Family**

Objectives: Identifying characters by their traits
Learning about the Harling family members

Activity

The Harling family is introduced in Book II, and Cather describes Mr. and Mrs. Harling and each of their children in detail throughout Chapters II and III. Each family member has distinctive physical and personality traits, and Cather's descriptions of them provide the reader with great insight into their characters. Identifying each Harling and his or her characteristics will help you gain a better understanding of the Burdens' neighbors.

Review Chapters II – III to find descriptions of each of the Harlings, and list them in the following chart. List at least four characteristics for each. You do not need to use Cather's exact words, although you may, but you must write descriptions that accurately represent the characters. We have done one for you as an example:

Name: _____

Date: _____

Book II: Chapters VII – X**Researching Ragtime**

Objective: Learning about ragtime music and dancing

Activity

During these chapters, Jim's and *Ántonia*'s lives open up to the world of popular music. Jim sees Blind D'Arnault perform one night at the hotel and is very impressed; the Vannis' tent was built in Black Hawk, and Jim, *Ántonia*, Lena, and Tiny attend dances there every Saturday night. *Ántonia* gains a reputation as "the best dancer of them all" and attracts the attention of young men in the area.

This was a very exciting time in the music world. A new form of music—ragtime—was gaining in popularity and would become the precursor to the American jazz movement.

Use the Internet or other resources to research the answers to the following questions: