

Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

My Antonia by Willa Cather

- Who is the central character in this novel?
- The book's epigraph is a quotation from Virgil: "Optima dies ... prima fugit" (The best days are the first to flee). What is the significance of this quotation?
- Why did Jim marry the woman he did? Did he "break faith" with his ideals of what constituted a "real woman" by doing so? Why didn't he marry Antonia after her fiancé had abandoned her?
- Why do you think Cather included the stories of Pavel and Peter, the bum who threw himself into the thresher, and the blind piano player?
- Was Antonia's mother a sympathetic character?
- What does the plow represent in the story?
- Why were the town boys and girls drawn so unfavorably?
- Why do we lose sight of Antonia halfway through the book? Do you think this is a weakness of the novel, as some critics claim?
- Why was Jim so angry with Antonia after the attack by Cutter?
- What was it about Lena that attracted men?
- How did Lena and Antonia differ?
- Which of the hired girls was a success in the eyes of Jim?
- If Jim had moved directly into Red Cloud when he arrived in Nebraska, do you think he would have viewed "country folk" differently?
- Why is the book arranged by seasons?
- What is the significance of the play *Camille*?
- One critic has suggested that in the novel Willa Cather is saying that sex is dangerous. Do you agree?
- When we become young adults, we often want to leave our childhood home. How does this novel explore this idea of "place"?
- If the narrator had been a woman, do you think the novel would have worked as well?
- How does the immigrant experience depicted in this novel differ from the current immigrant experience in America? In what ways is it similar?
- Read the last paragraph of the book. Is the precious incommunicable past the most important thing?
- What will you remember most about this novel?



Skokie Public Library

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