

Study Questions for *My Antonia*

By Willa Cather

Instructions for using these study questions:

- A. Students may prepare for the in-class essay by answering these questions.
- B. Any such prep work, including quotations or key phrases, that you write on this paper will be allowed on your desk during the writing of the in-class essay.
- C. Only handwritten notes are acceptable. Only the study questions paper may be used. Students can use anything that they are able to write in the margins, back, and spaces of the study question pages.
- D. Make notes about these as we read the book and discuss it in class.
- E. Students will not know which study question the teacher has selected as the topic of the in-class essay. On the writing day, the teacher will provide three choices and the student will select one of those choices.

The Questions:

1. Jim Burden begins his study of Virgil during his sophomore year of college. What is the significance of the novel's epigraph, and what is the connection between it and his view of *Antonia*? Is it important that Lena reenters his life while he reflects on his lesson from Gaston Cleric? Explain.
2. Why does Mr. Shimerda commit suicide? Take into account as many different factors as possible. How does his death change his family's fate, especially *Antonia*? Why does it affect Jim so deeply?
3. What double standard do the immigrant women in Black Hawk face? What unexpected results occur because of this standard? How does Jim Burden feel about the "hired girls"?
4. Lena and *Antonia* take different paths as adults. How do their personalities and choices in Black Hawk foreshadow their future destinies? By the end of the novel, are they both content? Have they both succeeded? Explain.
5. When Jim finally tries to kiss *Antonia*, she pushes him away and tells him never to succumb to Lena's temptations. Why do Jim and *Antonia* never have a romantic relationship? Why does Jim pursue one with Lena?
6. How important is figurative language to Willa Cather's writing style? How does Cather's use of imagery communicate the themes of her novel? Focus your essay on one chosen theme.
7. As an adult, Jim tells *Antonia*, "I'd have liked to have you for a sweetheart, or a wife, or my mother or my sister—anything that a woman can be to a man," and he tells her sons, "I was very much in love with your mother once." Do you believe him? Why does Jim never try to marry her?