



My Antonia: Willa Cather's First Masterpiece (Timeless Classic Books)

Willa Cather

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My *Antonia* was enthusiastically received in 1918 when it was first published. It was considered a masterpiece and placed Willa Cather in the forefront of women novelists. Today, it is considered as her first masterpiece. Cather was praised for bringing the American West to life and making it personally interesting. It brought place forward almost as if it were one of the characters, while at the same time playing upon the universality of the emotions, which in turn promoted regional American literature as a valid part of mainstream literature. While interpretations vary, *My Antonia* is clearly an elegy to those families who built new lives west of the Mississippi River and highlights the role of women pioneers in particular. The book's narrator, Jim Burden, arrives in the fictional town of Black Hawk, Nebraska, on the same train as the Shimerdas, when he goes to live with his grandparents after his parents have died. Jim develops strong feelings for *Antonia*, something between a crush and a filial bond, and the reader views *Antonia*'s life, including its attendant struggles and triumphs, through that lens. The novel is divided into five books, some of which incorporate short stories Cather had previously written, based on her own life growing up on the Nebraska prairies. The volumes correspond roughly to the stages of *Antonia*'s life up through her marriage and motherhood, although the third volume, "Lena Lingard," focuses more on Jim's time in college and his affair with Lena, another childhood friend of his, who is also *Antonia*'s friend.

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