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Lesson Eight

FOCUS: The Plot Unfolds

The author artfully builds a plot structure to create expectations, increase suspense, and inform character development. The timing of events, from beginning, to middle, to end, can make a novel predictable or riveting. A plot, propelled by a crisis, will reach a climax, and close with a resolution (sometimes called *dénouement*). Foreshadowing and flashbacks allow the author to defy time while telling the story. A successful author will keep a reader entranced by clever pacing built within the tale, sometimes confounding a simple plot by telling stories within stories.

According to Betty Kort, there are three levels to *My Ántonia*: first, the obvious plot line of Jim's and Ántonia's friendship; second, the development of the Nebraskan land; third, the "story-scape," which includes the retelling of myths and stories Cather integrates throughout her novel.

Discussion Questions

Which key events lead to the novel's crisis, climax, and resolution? Discuss the significance of Mr. Shimerda's suicide, Ántonia's desire to leave the Harlings' home, Jim's move to Boston, Lena's move to Lincoln, and Ántonia's return to Black Hawk.

Writing Exercise

Some of Cather's contemporary readers criticized *My Ántonia* for its lack of plot and structure. Do you agree with this opinion? Why or why not?

Homework

Finish *My Ántonia*, Book Five, Chapters 1-3 (pp. 241-272). Ask students to consider the parallels between the Nebraska Divide and Ántonia Shimerda.