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Lesson Ten

FOCUS: What Makes a Great Book?

Novels illustrate the connections between individuals and questions of humanity. Great stories articulate and explore the mysteries of our daily lives, while painting those conflicts in the larger picture of human struggle. Readers forge bonds with the story as the writer's voice, style, and sense of poetry enchant the plot, characters, and themes. By creating opportunities for learning, imagining, and reflecting, a great novel is a work of art that affects many generations of readers, changing lives, challenging assumptions, and breaking new ground.

Discussion Activities

Ask students to make a list of the characteristics of a great book. Write these on the board. What elevates a novel to greatness? In small groups, ask students to discuss specific books that include some of these characteristics. Do any of these books remind them of *My Ántonia*? How is Cather's novel different?

A great writer can be the voice of a generation. What kind of voice does Cather create through *My Ántonia*? What does this novel tell us about the concerns and dreams of those who immigrate to America?

Divide students into groups and have each one choose the single most important theme of the novel. Have spokespersons from each group explain their decision. Write these themes on the board. Are all the groups in agreement?

Writing Exercise

Ask students to write a persuasive letter to a friend, perhaps one who does not like to read, explaining why *My Ántonia* is a good book. The student should make an argument that explains why the novel has meaning for many people, not just a particular group.

Have students work on their essays in class. Be available to assist with outlines, drafts, and arguments. Have students partner together to edit outlines and/or rough drafts. Provide students with characteristics of a well-written essay.

Homework

Students will turn in a rough draft of their essay at the next class.