1. Jim traveled on a train from Virginia to Black Hawk, Nebraska around 1880. What are some of the feelings he might have had?

2. Willa Cather, the author of My Ántonia,moved from Virginia to Nebraska in 1883 when she was ten years old. How does knowing this impact your thoughts about the beginning of this story?

3. What is Jim's first impression of Nebraska, as described on pages 6-8? What expectations for the story do you get from this setting?

4. What is the difference between Jim's family's house and the houses of their neighbors? What does this suggest about their position in the community? What does it suggest about the level of civilization in Nebraska at this time?

5. In these first few chapters, the Nebraska landscape is described so frequently that it is almost a major character in the novel. Why do you think that is? What is the overall contribution provided by the landscape?

6. What is Jim's impression of his grandparents' hired man, Otto Fuchs? What differences might there be between a young boy's impression and the attitude of others in society?

7. Explain Jim’s concept of happiness: “to be dissolved into something complete and great” (p. 14).

8. In what ways does the Shimerdas family's situation represent the challenges that immigrants faced as they pioneered the American West?