**Journeys (Response #8)**

*My Ántonia* is in many ways a book about journeys—journeys both in space and in time (through memory). Each of the novel’s five sections begins with some sort of physical journey. Characters’ fortunes and futures are defined by the journeys they make or the journeys they don’t take.

**Pick two of the journeys below and explore their significance.** You might consider whether the outward journeys result in internal character changes. How do journeys change people? Do some things stay constant despite a journey?

**1. Jim’s journey back East.** The prairie orphan boy leaves Black Hawk to attend the University of Nebraska, and later Harvard Law School. What does he learn there, especially from his tutor, Gaston Cleric? How does Jim’s journey impact his view of Ántonia and his past?

**2. Ántonia’s journey to get married.** Ántonia leaves Nebraska to get married, only to find herself a deserted woman carrying an illegitimate child. What is Ántonia’s response to the idea of raising her child by herself? Why does she return to Black Hawk? Does she act in the way you would expect? What does her response reveal about her character?

**3. Lena’s & Tiny’s journeys.** Lena becomes a well-respected dressmaker in Lincoln and has a brief romantic relationship with Jim, but she tells him she doesn’t intend to marry. She prefers to be an independent, self-made woman. Eventually, she moves west to join Tiny, who has made a fortune connected with the great Western gold rushes. Why do you think these characters’ life histories are included in the novel? What do they contribute to its message or themes?

**4. Taking separate roads.** In their youth, Jim and Ántonia embark on separate paths that lead them to very different and outwardly unconnected futures. Many students find this disappointing. What do you think? In your opinion, why did Jim and Ántonia never marry? Do you believe that would have been a logical path for their relationship? Why or why not?

**5. Jim’s return visit.** As an adult, Jim Burden “is legal counsel for one of the great Western railways” (p. 1). He is very prosperous and regularly travels all over the country and around the world. Why then does he take so long to return to visit Ántonia? What eventually compels him to visit her?

**6. Ántonia’s rootedness.** Eventually, Jim’s makes a return trip to Nebraska to visit Ántonia.  In contrast with Jim, Ántonia has had a life of very little travel. She has stayed in place and worked long hard years on a prairie homestead. When Jim sees Ántonia for the first time after so many years, he describes her as “battered but not diminished” (p. 214). What does he mean? In what ways does Antonia seem like the young girl Jim had known? Has she changed much since the days of their childhood? How does her appearance reflect her character and her life?

**7. A road from the past.** At the end of the novel, Jim finds an old wagon road and talks about “what a little circle man’s experience is” (p. 238). Consider how Cather brings the novel full circle to demonstrate this idea. How does the final page bring closure to the work? What is meant by the “road of Destiny”? Compare the details of the landscape and the characters of the last book with details and characters of the first book.