

Background about the Book – Anne of Green Gables

When Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert of Green Gables, Prince Edward Island, send for a boy orphan to help them out at the farm, they are in no way prepared for the error that will change their lives. The mistake takes the shape of Anne Shirley, a redheaded 11-year-old girl who can talk anyone under the table. Fortunately, her sunny nature and quirky imagination quickly win over her reluctant foster parents. Anne's feisty spirit soon draws many friends--and much trouble--her way. Not a day goes by without some melodramatic new episode in the tragicomedy of her life. Lucy Maud Montgomery's series of books about Anne have remained classics since the early 20th century. Her portrayal of this feminine yet independent spirit has given generations of girls a strong female role model, while offering a taste of another, milder time in history.

From: http://www.online-literature.com/lucy_montgomery/anne_green_gables/

About the Author



Biography

Lucy Maud Montgomery was born on November 30, 1874 to Clara Woolner Macneill and Hugh John Montgomery in Clifton, Prince Edward Island.

Maud's mother died before Maud was two years old. She was sent to live with her mother's parents, Alexander and Lucy Macneill, whose farm was in the small settlement of Cavendish on the northern coast of the Island. Many of her relatives lived nearby, but she did not have any companions of her own age to play with until she went to school. However, Maud had many imaginary playmates to keep her company. As well, the Macneill household was full of books, and Maud could not remember a time when she could not read. Although Maud spent a great deal of time alone as a child, she did not have an unhappy childhood.

Meanwhile, Maud's father was living in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, had married again and was working as a government official and a real estate agent. In 1890 Maud moved "out west" to live with him for the first time in many years. Maud enjoyed spending time with her father and seeing this part of the country. She also saw the first publication of her writing while living in Prince Albert, a poem, published, ironically, on the first page of the Charlottetown Patriot. In June of the next year, she had an article published in the Prince Albert Times.

Although Maud had many successes in Prince Albert, in 1891 she became homesick for her beloved Prince Edward Island. Her western experience had given Maud a great deal to be thankful for and to remember for years to come. Back in Cavendish, Maud returned to school to become a teacher. However, she never gave up hope of becoming a writer.

Over the next few years of her life, Maud continued to teach and to write. Her stories, articles and poems were often published, and she made some extra money from her writing. In 1898 her grandfather Macneill passed away and she left her teaching job to return to Cavendish to care for her grandmother. Maud stayed with and cared for her grandmother for the next thirteen years, until her grandmother's death in 1911.

Her grandparents were strict Presbyterians who had not shown Maud a great deal of warmth during her childhood, something that she later began to resent. For the most part, the years from 1902 to 1911 were hard on Maud, despite the success she was starting to have as a writer. However, one piece of work that she wrote during this time would bring her much success and brightened this time in Maud's life.

Anne of Green Gables started as a short serial for a girl's magazine. However, Maud fell in love with the character and thought that the story could be extended to book length. She sent the manuscript to five publishers, all of whom had no interest in it. She became very discouraged and put it away, only to come across it some months later. She made some changes to it and sent it away again. It was accepted and the publisher suggested she start on a sequel immediately. It was published in June of 1908.

Maud had no idea that the book would become as successful as it did. She thought the book would appeal to young girls, and was excited and surprised when she began to receive letters from people of all ages, including many other successful writers. Altogether, Maud wrote eight books about Anne, the last one written in 1939.

Maud's grandmother passed away in 1911, and Maud married the Reverend Ewan Macdonald later on in that year. They took a three month honeymoon abroad before moving to the small community of Leaskdale, Ontario, where Reverend Macdonald was to become the new pastor. Maud liked Leaskdale and found it charming, but admitted she did not "love" it. It was not Prince Edward Island or her beloved Cavendish.

Maud took her role as a minister's wife very seriously. She was very busy trying to provide the leadership in the community that she felt she should as the pastor's wife. Her responsibilities soon increased with the birth of her two sons, Chester in 1912 and Stuart in 1915. In spite of her busy life, she managed to set aside time in her day to write.

Although the Macdonalds seemed to be happy and were fitting in very well in Leaskdale, there was a secret that plagued the household. Ewan became ill with depression, which became a great burden for Maud. She kept up a cheerful front, but found it hard to cope with how miserable her husband was feeling. She, too, was feeling weary from her church duties and somewhat bored with her life. As long as she lived, she needed the Island to renew her spirit and make her feel like herself.

The last years of the 1930's were not good for Maud. In the winter of 1937/38, following an attack of influenza, Maud suffered a nervous breakdown. She felt much better by the spring of 1939, but continued to feel burdened by her responsibilities. On April 24, 1942 Maud passed

away. She was buried in the little Cavendish cemetery in Prince Edward Island, where she would be joined by Ewan two years later.

In 1936, the Canadian government proposed that a national park be developed in Cavendish to celebrate the author and all of the places precious to her, including Lover's Lane, the Lake of Shining Waters, the Dryad's Bubble, as well as a house furnished to represent Green Gables. This action prevented the land from being broken up and sold to separate individuals, and preserved the area exactly as it was. Maud visited the site in 1939 and was quite pleased with the project. Today a musical, *Anne of Green Gables*, draws thousands of tourists to the Charlottetown Confederation Centre of the Arts. As well, the National Park in Cavendish remains a popular destination for tourists and Islanders alike. L. M. Montgomery is loved across the world, with tourists from as far away as Japan coming to Prince Edward Island to see Green Gables house in Cavendish and the musical in Charlottetown. L. M. Montgomery lives on in the place she loved the most - Prince Edward Island

From: <http://www.edu.pe.ca/lmmontgomery/lmmbiography/lmmbio.htm>

Reviews – Anne of Green Gables

The nostalgic charm of Avonlea comes alive in Lucy Maud Montgomery's heart-warming tale set on the quaint island of Prince William about an aging brother and sister, Mathew and Marilla Cuthbert, and their decision to adopt a young boy to help with chores around their farm. However, as the result of a misunderstanding the boy turns out to be a feisty, independent, and wildly imaginative redheaded girl named Anne. Marilla's first reaction to this news is, "What use is she to us?" Wherein Mathew replies, "We might be of some use to her." Throughout this moving story these two statements mix and meld together so richly and completely that they become one truth. Three lives are changed so dramatically that none can imagine life without the others. Each new day brings a new set of adventures, often hilarious and always uplifting. Anne's vivid and overactive imagination is the cause of many mishaps, but her saving grace is her heart of gold. Her best friend and "kindred spirit," Diana, and her handsome admirer, Gilbert Blythe, often find themselves unintentional victims of Anne's escapades.

From: School Library Journal

Review Excerpts from original year of publication, 1908

Montgomery reported to Ephraim Weber the receipt of copies of 60 reviews, all but five laudatory. (quoted by Wiggins, 1992) She was particularly pleased by the complimentary review of the *London Spectator* and was thrilled by Mark Twain's comment.

On *The Publishers Weekly* of 1908, the advertisements by L. C. Page quoted quite some recommendations, laudatory comments from readers, and excerpts of positive reviews from *The Boston Herald*, *Chicago Record-Herald*, and *Boston Transcript*. For example:

- "I take it as a great test of the worth of the book that while the young people are rummaging all over the house looking for ANNE, the head of the family has carried her off to read on his way to town."—Bliss Carman
- "In *Anne of Green Gables* you will find the dearest and most moving and delightful child since the immortal Alice."—Mark Twain in a letter to Francis Wilson.
- "She talks her way into the affections of her readers for she is positively irresistible," says the *Boston Transcript*.

A review in *The Outlook* proclaimed: " 'Anne of Green Gables' is one of the best books for girls we have seen for a long time....the book is by no means an imitation: it has plenty of originality and character. Moreover, it will please grown-up people quite or nearly as well as the school-girls for whom it is primarily designed. It ought to have a wide reading." (The Outlook, Vol. 89, No. 17, Aug. 22, 1908. pp. 956-57.)

From *The New York Times Book Review* the book received negative review. It criticized that Anne was "altogether too queer." "...she talked to the farmer and his sister as though she had borrowed Bernard Shaw's vocabulary, Alfred Austin's sentimentality, and the reasoning powers of a Justice of the Supreme Court. She knew so much that she spoiled the author's plan at the very outset and greatly marred a story that had in it quaint and charming possibilities." (*A Heroine from an Asylum*, in The New York Times Book Review, July 18, 1908.)

Later in 1924, MacMechan said: "[*Anne of Green Gables*] just misses the kind of success which convinces the critic while it captivates the unreflecting general reader. ... the 'little more' in truth of representation, or deftness of touch, is lacking; and that makes the difference between a clever book and a masterpiece. ... Miss Montgomery has created her public and she supplies it with what it wants. The conclusion to be drawn from Miss Montgomery's achievement is that the great reading public on this continent and in the British Isles has a great tenderness for children, for decent, and amusing stories, and a great indifference towards the rulings of the critics." (quoted in *Children's Literature Review*, 1985)

As to Montgomery's entire body of work, many feel that the quality of her books after *Green Gables* steadily declines. However, most agree that her abiding popularity stems from her storytelling ability and her sensitive understanding of children. Montgomery "remembered exactly how it was to be a child," explained Jean Little in *L. M. Montgomery: An Assessment*. "More than that, she was able to record the experience of being a child so faithfully and vividly that reading children, years later, find themselves in her stories." (quoted in *Contemporary Authors Online*, 2004)

From: <https://netfiles.uiuc.edu/mchen6/www/collection/514A/rev.htm>

Read Alikes – Anne of Green Gables

Gentle's Holler by Kerry Madden

Becoming Naomi Leon by Pam Munoz Ryan

Way Down Deep by Ruth White

A Corner of the Universe by Ann M. Martin

Journey to the River Sea by Eva Ibbotson

Billy Creekmore by Tracey Porter

Discussion Questions: Anne of Green Gables

1. When Matthew arrives at the train station to pick up Anne, he is surprised to find the orphanage has sent a girl when he and Marilla wanted a boy. Why do you think Matthew is so quick to express his wish to keep Anne? Could Anne have been just as happy at Green Gables without someone like Matthew?
2. How does Marilla's character change as a result of Anne's arrival at Green Gables?
3. What evidence is there that Matthew and Marilla have never raised any children before? Would you like to have either or both of them as parents? Why or why not?
4. *Anne of Green Gables* was first published in 1908 and has been widely read over the last century. What do you think makes Anne such an enduring character of world fiction?
5. In what ways does Anne conform? In what ways does she remain fiercely independent?
6. One criticism of *Anne of Green Gables* is that, although Montgomery claims that Anne has a number of flaws, her faults are minor ones, such as daydreaming and talking too much. Is Anne a believable character, or does she possess more talents, virtues, and knowledge than could be reasonably expected in a girl her age?
7. In what ways do Anne and her friends seem to be like eleven-year-olds today? In what ways are they very different?
8. Suppose you are Anne, looking back over the diary you kept between ages 11 and 17. You laugh aloud as you read one particular page. You cry as you read another. What does each say?
9. Suppose you were responsible for illustrating the cover of this book. Which incident in the book do you think would be appropriate to include on the cover? Why do you think it is an important incident?
10. Good behavior is a subject that troubles Anne. How do Anne and Marilla differ in the way each one approaches the problem of being good?

From: www.sparknotes.com, www.bookrags.com, www.hintonlibrary.org

GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following questions can be applied to any book. You can tweak the questions for your specific book. They can be cut into strips and passed around in a basket to help facilitate discussion.

My favorite part of the book was...

A better title for this book would be...because...

(Name of character) reminds me of myself because...

My least favorite character was...because...

If I were (name of character, -----) I would (wouldn't) have...

(Name of character) reminds me of someone I know because...

I changed my mind about...because...

I would (wouldn't) like to read another book by this author because...

This book made me think...When I finished this book, I still wondered...

This book reminded me of...

I'd like to tell the author...

What happened in this book was very realistic (unrealistic) because...

This book was better (worse) than the movie version because...

When I started reading his book, I thought...

I didn't like...because...

This book made me realize...

If I could talk to (name of character), I would say...

One thing I have noticed about the author's style is...

If I could be any character in the book I would be...because...

I was surprised when...

I think the main thing the writer was trying to say was...

The most important thing about this book is...

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I predicted that...

I think the writer must be ...because...

I would change the ending...