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Main Street

Sinclair Lewis · *1920 · original English text*

This is America, a town of a few thousand in a region of wheat and corn, here called Gopher Prairie, Minnesota. Carol Kennicott comes as a doctor's bride with plans to beautify and awaken the town, and the town, with a smile, begins to wear her down. Lewis's 1920 novel is satire with a real woman in it.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Can one person change Main Street, and what happens to her when Main Street will not be changed?

"This is America--a town of a few thousand, in a region of wheat and corn and dairies and little groves."
The opening

Carol's culture, her clubs, her plays, and her restlessness meet a town that already knows what it is. Dr. Will Kennicott is kind, limited, and at home. The book is long, exact, and often funny; it is also a study of a marriage and of a country at the level of one street. This is Lewis's original English, PG #543. The dashes in the opening are printed as --. The close returns to storm-windows and a screwdriver, not to a triumph. For older students.

KEY CHARACTERS

Carol Kennicott
The bride who means to awaken Gopher Prairie, and who must also live there.

Dr. Will Kennicott
The country doctor, kind, able, and at home on Main Street.

the town of Gopher Prairie
Clubs, comments, and a polite resistance that is the book's other protagonist.

the friends and provokers
The few who share Carol's restlessness, and the many who do not.

THIS IS AMERICA

> *"This is America--a town of a few thousand, in a region of wheat and corn and dairies and little groves."*
> The opening

Grades 10–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

A Town of a Few Thousand

THE OPENING

Lewis names the place as America first, then as Gopher Prairie. Main Street, he says, is the continuation of Main Streets everywhere.

- The opening is exact, including the double dash after America.
- The claim is national, not only Minnesotan.
- Carol has not yet arrived; the town is already the subject.

> *"This is America--a town of a few thousand, in a region of wheat and corn and dairies and little groves."*
> The opening

02

A Bride in Gopher Prairie

THE EARLY CHAPTERS

Carol arrives with taste, training, and hope. The houses, the parties, and the conversation are not what she had pictured. Will is proud of her and of the town both.

- The satire of clubs and comments is also Carol's loneliness.
- Do not make the town only stupid; Lewis is sharper than that.
- The marriage begins in genuine affection.

03

Plans, and a Wearing Down

THE MIDDLE

Beautification, a play, friendships that almost help, and the slow discovery that reform here looks like meddling. The town has a polite way of winning.

- Carol is not always wise; her taste can be a pride.
- The 'village virus' is a social force, not a joke only.
- A long middle is the point: change fails by inches.

04

Leaving, and a Child

THE LATER TURN

Restlessness becomes a departure, work elsewhere, and a different measure of herself. Motherhood and a career both enter the account.

- The book is a marriage novel as well as a town novel.
- Will's limits are real; so is his constancy.
- Lewis will not award a simple victory to either spouse.

05

Storm-Windows

THE CLOSE

The end is domestic and unfinished: talk of snow, storm-windows, a screwdriver put back. Main Street remains. Carol remains, with a clearer and less triumphant knowledge.

- Do not tidy this into a defeat only, or a conversion only.
- The last small talk is the book's hard comedy.
- A long American satire for older students, still in the original 1920 English.

Main Street | Reform and Pride | A Marriage | America in Little | A Comic Wearing-Down

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 10–12

1. The hosted text is Sinclair Lewis's original English (Project Gutenberg #543). The opening is exact, with a double dash: "This is America--a town of a few thousand, in a region of wheat and corn and dairies and little groves." The town is called "Gopher Prairie, Minnesota."
2. The novel is a long 1920 satire of a marriage and a town, not a simple attack on "small minds." The close is domestic (storm-windows, a screwdriver), not a triumph.
3. For older students. Quote this page, not a later corrected text.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #543, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/lewis-main-street/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.