***Anne of Green Gables***

***Chapter 1***

***Summary:***

* The first scene of the story opens on Mrs. Rachel Lynde, a housewife in the town of Avonlea who everyone knows…and who knows *everyone.*
* We're told that Mrs. Rachel Lynde is kind of the ultimate gossip. Her kitchen window looks out onto the only main road in the town of Avonlea, so she sees everyone who enters or leaves the town.
* Quick geography note: Avonlea is a made-up farming town on Prince Edward Island, which is off the coast of Nova Scotia, Canada (for you American Shmoopers, that's north of Maine).
* Suddenly, Rachel sees Matthew Cuthbert travelling town the road.
* Rachel Lynde analyzes every detail, Sherlock Holmes-style. Matthew's wearing a suit, which means he's leaving town, and he's travelling via buggy and sorrel mare (a horse and carriage), which means he'll be travelling far.
* She knew Matthew should be sowing his turnip seed because she heard him tell a store clerk that yesterday. Scandal-a-lous.
* (We can already tell that not too much happens in Avonlea and people really like their routines.)
* Rachel decides to visit Matthew's sister Marilla at her house, Green Gables, to investigate.
* Marilla and Matthew live in an orchard house that's set far back from the road, near the woods. As she walks there, Rachel Lynde thinks that it's no wonder Matthew and Marilla are both a little odd—they see way more trees than they do people.
* Marilla Cuthbert takes Rachel into the kitchen, and Rachel keeps on sleuthing. She notices that there are three plates on the table but "every-day dishes" (1.11) and only one kind of cake, so the company they're expecting can't be too fancy.
* Marilla tells Rachel Lynde that Matthew went to pick up a little boy from an orphan asylum in Nova Scotia (the mainland).
* Cue the chapter title: Mrs. Rachel Lynde is surprised.
* Like, really surprised. Shocked.
* Marilla calmly explains that they've been thinking about this all winter, and that Matthew's getting older and needs help with the farm. A woman named Mrs. Alexander Spencer is picking up a girl from the orphanage and they asked her to bring back a boy for them, who Matthew will meet at the train station.
* Rachel Lynde goes all worst-case scenario and cites stories from the news about adopted orphans killing their new families. She reminds Marilla that they're bringing a strange boy into their house they know nothing about.
* Marilla points out that there are always risks with having a child, naturally or adopted.
* Rachel leaves to spread the gossip all over town, thinking about how sorry she feels for the orphan, since Marilla and Matthew are old, set in their ways, and don't know a thing about children.

***Brief Summary:***

Mrs. Rachel Lynde, a small town busybody and self-appointed guardian of personal decorum, sits at her kitchen window, perfectly perched to take note of all of the peninsular Avonlea's comings and goings. And so, on this very sunny June afternoon when Matthew Cuthbert was not sowing his turnip seed as expected, but instead driving his buggy and sorrel mare up the hill away from Avonlea in his very best clothes, Mrs. Lynde took due notice. Perplexed and confounded by Matthew Cuthbert's actions (for he never goes out of town, and certainly not in his best suit), Mrs. Rachel Lynde *must* know the "wherefores and where-hows." Venturing over to Green Gables, Mrs. Lynde was set to inquire. On learning the astonishing news that the aging brother and sister, neither of whom had ever married or reared a child, were to adopt an orphan boy to help Matthew tend the farm, Mrs. Lynde was dumbfounded. Recovering her senses, Mrs. Lynde recounts sensational stories of orphans as bad seeds and counsels strongly against the plan. Marilla keeps quiet about her own reservations and remains firm.

***Brief Analysis:***

The novel's satirical but loving tone in depicting small town life is present from the onset. We are introduced to Mrs. Rachel Lynde, a bundle of small town propriety, intrusiveness and neighborly concern. The many flourishes in describing the natural surroundings of Avonlea, a small town on Canada's Prince Edward Island also prove to be a consistent presence in the book. The reader is also forewarned of heart troubles (Matthew), headaches (Marilla) and, aghast, the possibility of a girl orphan.

***Summary in Detail:***

Mrs. Rachel Lynde, the town busybody, lives with her meek husband on the main road of Avonlea, a small rural town in Prince Edward Island in Canada. Mrs. Rachel, as she is known, sits on her porch one afternoon in early June. She sees her neighbor, Matthew Cuthbert, leaving his home. This activity is surprising, since the painfully shy Matthew is known as a bit of a recluse. Even more surprising is that fact that he is wearing his best suit and driving his buggy, evidence that an important errand calls him away. Mrs. Rachel, her mind abuzz with questions, goes to the Cuthbert house to seek an explanation.

Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert live tucked away on a farm called Green Gables. Marilla, though more talkative than Matthew, is severe and private. Her house and her appearance reflect this severity: the immaculate house seems too sterile for comfort, and Marilla has an angular face and tightly knotted hair. Despite her stiffness, however, something about her mouth suggests a natural, if undeveloped, sense of humor.

When Mrs. Rachel asks about Matthew’s errand, Marilla informs her that he is on his way to pick up the Cuthberts’ new orphan from the train station. With Matthew getting older—he is sixty—they realized they needed help around the farm and decided to adopt a boy from the orphanage. This news shocks Mrs. Rachel, who launches into a monologue about the horror stories she has heard about orphans—a boy who set fire to his new home, another who used to suck eggs, and a girl who put strychnine in the well. Marilla acknowledges her concerns about bringing a stranger into the house, but she comforts herself with the knowledge that the boy will at least be Canadian and thus not too different from themselves. Marilla wonders why anyone would adopt a girl, since girls cannot work on farms.

***Analysis in Detail:***

The story begins by describing where [Mrs. Rachel Lynde](https://www.gradesaver.com/anne-of-green-gables/study-guide/character-list#mrs-rachel-lynde)’s home is located in a town called Avonlea. Mrs. Rachel likes to watch people going by outside her window so that she knows everything going on in Avonlea. Whenever she sees something that she finds odd, she always tries to figure out what is going on. One afternoon in early June, Mrs. Rachel sees a man who lives nearby, [Matthew Cuthbert](https://www.gradesaver.com/anne-of-green-gables/study-guide/character-list#matthew-cuthbert), driving a buggy out of town dressed in fancy clothes. This intrigues Mrs. Rachel Lynde because usually, at this time of year, Matthew Cuthbert would be sowing a field at his home, which is called Green Gables. She is also intrigued because Matthew Cuthbert is usually someone who stays home and keeps to himself.

Mrs. Rachel decides to go over to Green Gables to talk to a woman named Marilla about what Matthew is doing. Mrs. Rachel walks the quarter of a mile to Green Gables, criticizing how far the Cuthbert home is built from the main road. She believes this is because the family is shy and odd. As she approaches Green Gables, Mrs. Rachel notes that it is extremely clean. Mrs. Rachel sees Marilla in the kitchen, with three plates laid on the table. Mrs. Rachel surmises that Marilla and Matthew must be expecting company because only the two of them live at Green Gables. She thinks that they must not be expecting anyone very important because the food laid out is nothing fancy.

Mrs. Rachel knocks and Marilla lets her in politely. Marilla is described as tall and thin, with dark hair that has some streaks of gray. The narrator notes that she looks like she has a “rigid conscience” (p. 8) and yet something about her mouth indicates that she has a sense of humor. Mrs. Rachel says that she has come over because she saw Matthew driving to town and thought he might be going for a doctor. Marilla says that Matthew went to the train station in Bright River to pick up an orphan boy coming from Nova Scotia. Mrs. Rachel is shocked. Marilla says that she and Matthew are taking in an orphan boy to help Matthew with work around the farm since Matthew is now 60 years old and has heart trouble. Matthew and Marilla thought about hiring a young man from France or London, but Marilla speaks disparagingly about this prospect and says she would prefer to have a “native born” (p. 10) Canadian. Marilla and Matthew asked a woman named Mrs. Spencer to bring them an orphan boy who is 10 or 11 years old since there will still be time to train him.

Mrs. Rachel informs Marilla that she thinks this is a foolish and risky idea and tells Marilla a story of an orphan boy burning down a house. Marilla replies that even biological children have risks and that she thinks the orphan boy shouldn’t be too different from them since he will be from nearby. Mrs. Rachel tells Marilla another story of an orphan girl who poisoned a well. Marilla responds that she would never dream of taking in an orphan girl. Mrs. Rachel would like to stay until Matthew comes home with the orphan, but she decides instead to go start spreading the gossip she has learned.

***Critical Study:***

In a small Canadian town, Avonlea, on Prince Edward Island, [Mrs. Rachel Lynde](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Anne-of-Green-Gables/character-analysis/#Mrs._Rachel_Lynde) is sitting at her window keeping an eye on everyone who walks by. Mrs. Lynde, a well-known town leader, is also a well-known, though kindly, busybody. One June morning she's startled to see [Matthew Cuthbert](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Anne-of-Green-Gables/character-analysis/#Matthew_Cuthbert), in his best clothes, driving his horse and buggy out of town.

Matthew is a shy, retiring man, and Mrs. Lynde can't figure out where he's going. He never visits people, he wouldn't be traveling to town this time of year, and he's not driving fast enough to be on his way to the doctor. Matthew and his sister, Marilla, live in a nearby house, Green Gables; Mrs. Lynde decides to pay Marilla a call after tea and find out what's going on.

[Marilla Cuthbert](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Anne-of-Green-Gables/character-analysis/#Marilla_Cuthbert), Matthew's younger sister, is prim, severe, and withholding—"a tall, thin woman, with angles and without curves." Without preamble she tells Mrs. Lynde she and Matthew have decided to adopt a boy from the orphanage in Nova Scotia; Matthew is on his way to meet the child at the train station.

Mrs. Lynde is stunned. Marilla and Matthew are the least likely people she can imagine taking in a child. Marilla explains the pair hope to find a boy who can be "trained up proper." They'll give him a home and a good education; in return, he can help around the farm. Marilla adds she's been doubtful about this venture, but Matthew is "terrible set on it."

Mrs. Lynde issues dire warnings. Why, she's heard of an orphan girl who poisoned her entire adoptive family! Marilla replies, "I'd never dream of taking a girl to bring up." Mrs. Lynde reflects gloomily as she pities any orphan who comes Green Gables. It's no place for children.

If Mrs. Lynde had any idea who was actually waiting for Matthew, "her pity would have been still deeper."

This is an unusual opening chapter for a children's book. The reader begins the story knowing Anne is the protagonist of the story; What's this busybody doing here instead? Why is Mrs. Lynde paying so much attention to an anonymous and uninteresting-sounding man who drives past her window and isn't seen for the rest of the chapter? [Matthew Cuthbert](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Anne-of-Green-Gables/character-analysis/#Matthew_Cuthbert) doesn't seem very appealing! And hard-nosed, unaffectionate [Marilla Cuthbert](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Anne-of-Green-Gables/character-analysis/#Marilla_Cuthbert) is frankly unappealing.

One reason [Montgomery](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Anne-of-Green-Gables/author/) sets up the story in this way is to make it clear what an unwelcoming environment awaits Anne. Not only is Green Gables an uncomfortable place for a child, but the child the Cuthberts are expecting is not the child they are getting. Knowing these facts heightens suspense and creates sympathy for Anne from the beginning.

Because Marilla, Matthew, and to a degree Mrs. Lynde will be responsible for Anne's upbringing, Montgomery uses [Chapter 1](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Anne-of-Green-Gables/chapter-1-summary/)to establish their characters before Anne arrives on the scene. Although the three have their own quirks, they are all tolerant and kindly underneath rougher exteriors. Matthew may be pathologically shy, but he's "terrible set" on adopting a child. Marilla's grimness is softened by a "saving something about her mouth," hinting at a sense of humor. And Mrs. Lynde, for all her bossiness, is sincerely worried about the plight of any child who comes to live at Green Gables.

Finally, readers will see the town of Avonlea is treated almost like another character. Keeping characters to a minimum here allows Montgomery to focus on details about the town.

It's a bustling town whose activities are likely to involve more women than men (the Sewing Circle, Sunday school, Church Aid Society, and Foreign Missions Auxiliary). Three out of four of Mrs. Lynde's pursuits are religious, suggesting Avonlea's social life revolves around church—typical for a small North American town at the turn of the 20th century.

There's not much privacy in Avonlea. Mrs. Lynde knows Matthew is supposed to be sowing turnip seed; Marilla Cuthbert knows Mrs. Lynde has dropped in to find out where Matthew is going, though Mrs. Lynde feigns concern about Marilla's health; Mrs. Lynde knows the Cuthberts well enough to fear it's a bad idea for them to adopt an orphan.

Avonlea's natural setting is beautiful but remote: a peninsula on an island, and the main road passes Mrs. Lynde's house. The town is so rural even people from the neighboring province, Nova Scotia, are considered foreigners.

Finally the reference to Marilla's "bad headache" foreshadows plot developments toward the end of the novel.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

[Mrs. Rachel Lynde](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/mrs-rachel-lynde) lives just off Avonlea’s main road and keeps a careful eye on all the town’s comings and goings. One afternoon in early June, she is sitting by her window when she sees [Matthew Cuthbert](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/matthew-cuthbert) driving his buggy through the hollow, dressed in his best outfit. Matthew is such a shy man that he seldom goes anywhere without good reason. Mrs. Lynde decides she must visit Matthew’s sister [Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert), who lives with him, in order to satisfy her curiosity.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Montgomery begins her story through the eyes of the town gossip, allowing the reader to get an outside perspective on brother and sister Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert, who will occupy the center of the novel. Matthew’s unusual errand establishes an air of mystery and hints that the Cuthberts’ lives are about to change.

***Summary Part 2:***

After tea [Mrs. Rachel](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/mrs-rachel-lynde) heads up the road to Green Gables, the big house set back from Avonlea’s main road and surrounded by orchards where the Cuthberts live. Mrs. Rachel thinks it’s no wonder [Matthew](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/matthew-cuthbert) and [Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) are thought to be a bit strange, living in this isolated house among the trees. She walks across the tidy backyard of Green Gables and is soon welcomed into its spotless kitchen, where Marilla sits knitting. Immediately, Mrs. Rachel observes that the table is set for three, but the dishes and dessert indicate that only ordinary company is expected.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Matthew and Marilla live an isolated life even by rural Avonlea standards. In particular, Marilla’s life seems to revolve around impeccable housekeeping, even though people seldom come to Green Gables. Mrs. Lynde’s observations suggest that the Cuthberts’ life is rather lonely. Yet the mystery of Matthew’s errand deepens, because it seems that somebody is expected for dinner.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) and [Rachel](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/mrs-rachel-lynde) don’t have much in common—Marilla is tall, thin, and angular, with a stark knot in her hair and a rigid expression, yet a suggestion of humor around her mouth. Despite their differences (Mrs. Lynde is plump and laughs more readily), the two have always been friends. Mrs. Rachel sits down and gets straight to the point—where is [Matthew](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/matthew-cuthbert) off to? Marilla knew Rachel would show up with questions. Matthew, she explains, has gone to the train station; they’re adopting a little boy from an asylum in Nova Scotia.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Marilla and Rachel Lynde are the book’s first example of friendship. Their differences suggest that people don’t have to be very similar in order to form a genuine, enduring bond; being neighbors and learning each other’s habits, as Marilla and Mrs. Lynde have clearly done, is sometimes enough. “Asylum” is an archaic way of referring to an orphanage.

***Summary Part 4:***

[Mrs. Rachel](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/mrs-rachel-lynde) is briefly dumbstruck, but [Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) is serious. Rachel doesn’t approve of [Matthew](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/matthew-cuthbert) and Marilla adopting a boy—especially without asking her advice. Marilla explains that [Mrs. Alexander Spencer](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters) told them about the asylum, and they figured that Matthew, who’s now 60 and suffers from heart trouble, could use a little boy’s help. So they’ve asked Mrs. Spencer to pick out a boy of 10 or 11 for them.

***Analysis Part 4:***

In Canada in the late 1800s, it wasn’t uncommon to adopt a child from an orphanage in hopes of getting help around one’s house or farm. Situations varied, but in this case, the Cuthberts aren’t primarily interested in offering a child a home and family—they really need someone to help Matthew with daily chores.

***Summary Part 5:***

[Mrs. Rachel](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/mrs-rachel-lynde) tells [Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) she’s being foolish—they don’t know anything about this little boy or his background. What if he sets Green Gables on fire or poisons the well? She read in the newspaper about a little orphan girl doing that. Unfazed, Marilla points out that there are risks in everything, and anyway, she isn’t adopting a girl. Mrs. Rachel heads out to share the news with her other neighbors, feeling sorry for any orphan who’s going to be raised by the Cuthberts.

***Analysis Part 5:***

Mrs. Lynde is afraid the Cuthberts don’t know what they’re getting themselves into. Newspaper stories sensationalize orphans’ crimes, suggesting that these children were sometimes stigmatized. Marilla’s dry humor comes through in her response to Rachel, as well as her sensible nature. At the same time, Mrs. Lynde isn’t wrong—the Cuthberts don’t know what, or who, is waiting for them.