***Anne of Green Gables***

***Chapter 11***

### ***Anne’s Impression of Sunday School***

***Summary:***

* Marilla has made some clothes for Anne. But unfortunately for Anne, they're very plain. The best thing Anne can think to say about them is that she will imagine that she likes them.
* Anne tells Marilla she was hoping for a dress with puffed sleeves. Puffed sleeves = trendy in the mid- to late-1800's (not to mention [**the1980's**](http://www.liketotally80s.com/2011/06/puffed-sleeves/)). Marilla thinks Anne's desire is vain. She thinks clothes should be functional and nothing else.
* Marilla isn't feeling well, so she sends Anne to church by herself. She tells Anne to stop by Mrs. Lynde's and ask her where the family pew is.
* Anne leaves the house embarrassed of her plainness, but soon comes up with a crafty solution. She picks a bunch of flowers and puts them in her hat, so it looks like a flower wreath.
* Even though Anne might've looked boho chic by today's standards, the Avonlea girls in her Sunday school class think she looks ridiculous.
* When Anne returns home, she tells Marilla she didn't like Sunday school. Marilla is shocked. Then Anne goes into one of her speeches, telling Marilla all her thoughts about church and Sunday school.
* Some of Anne's thoughts: Mr. Bell's opening prayer was too long, the minister's sermon was uninteresting because he doesn't have enough imagination.
* Marilla secretly agrees with Anne but would never let her know.

***Synopsis:***

Marilla shows Anne the three new dresses she has made for her, all of which are ugly and none of which has the puffed sleeves that Anne wants. To make up for the ugliness of the dresses, Anne imagines they are as beautiful and ornate as the dresses she has seen other girls wearing. The next day, Anne goes to church and Sunday school alone, wearing one of her new dresses. On the way, she picks a bunch of flowers and decorates her otherwise plain hat with them, an eccentric adornment that causes other Avonlea churchgoers to scoff.

After church, Anne reports to Marilla that the service did not impress her. She says that the minister’s sermon, the prayer, and the Sunday school teacher’s prim questions were all unimaginative. Anne was able to survive the boring morning only by looking out the window and daydreaming. Marilla scolds Anne for her inattention at church but inwardly agrees with her. Although she never articulates her own criticisms of the minister, Mr. Bentley, and the Sunday school teacher, Mr. Bell, she, like Anne, has always felt that the church service is boring and uninspiring.***Critical Study:***

Marilla has sewn Anne three new dresses, which Anne does not like because they are so plain. Anne particularly wishes that they had puffed sleeves, which are fashionable. Anne decides she will imagine that the dresses look the way she wants them to.

The next morning, it is time for Anne to go to Sunday school for the first time, but Marilla cannot take her due to a headache. She sends Anne to ask Mrs. Rachel to walk with her to the church and show her how to behave. On her walk, Anne stops to make a garland of flowers and puts it on her hat. When Anne reaches Mrs. Rachel’s house, the woman is not there, so Anne walks to the church alone.

At Sunday School, Anne meets many other little girls, mostly attired in cute dresses with puffed sleeves. The Sunday School teacher uses the class time to drill the students with questions, which Anne is able to answer since Marilla had made her study ahead of time.

Anne goes home after Sunday School and tells Marilla that she didn’t like it. Anne says that the sermon was long and boring so she looked outside at a lake and used her imagination. She also says she didn’t like that all the other girls had puffed sleeves and that she had to answer the teacher’s questions without asking any herself. When Anne finishes her criticisms, Marilla thinks to herself that she actually agrees with Anne but has never let herself express those thoughts before.

***Critical Analysis:***

Marilla presents Anne with three dresses she has sewn for her by hand. All three are plain and drab, and the best Anne can say is she can imagine she likes them: they're not pretty and don't have puffy sleeves, as is the fashion. Marilla scoffs at the idea of Anne needing pretty clothes. The three dresses are sensible and serviceable, which is all that matters.

One of the dresses is for Sunday school, which Anne will begin the following day. Marilla is sick on Sunday morning, so Anne walks there by herself. On the way she picks a mass of flowers with which she decorates her plain, serviceable hat. At church all the girls her age, wearing dresses with puffy sleeves, stare at her; no one tries to befriend her. The uninspired Sunday school teacher is also a disappointment to Anne, though Anne correctly answers every question she is asked but is disappointed about not being able to ask questions when she had so many.

Home again Anne reports she didn't like Sunday school a bit. "It was horrid," she says. Both the service and the class were dull and lifeless. Anne is especially critical of the minister's sermon, accusing him of having no imagination. Instead of listening to him, she tells Marilla, "I just let my thoughts run." Marilla is helpless to protest. Deep down she agrees with Anne. Opinions she has held for years and never examined are suddenly voiced by "this outspoken morsel of neglected humanity."

Three religious chapters in a row! [Montgomery](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Anne-of-Green-Gables/author/) really cares about the points she is making. Marilla's faith is like the dresses she makes for Anne: serviceable, without flourishes, and easy to ignore. When she argues with Marilla about the importance of puffed sleeves, she is making a plea for bringing beauty into one's life, but Marilla can see only the waste of fabric.

Anne instinctively rejects that version of faith along with that style of clothing. Adorning her hat with wildflowers is a sign of her own fresh and naturalistic view of what religion should be. Why shouldn't she appreciate the beauties God has bestowed on the world? There's no doubt which side Montgomery was on. In her teenage diary she excoriated boring sermons. "I actually fell sound asleep while the Rev. John M. was praying," she confessed in 1893.

During the years she was writing *Anne of Green Gables*, Montgomery was an organist, choir director, and Sunday school teacher at her village church. This work gave her plenty of material for her books, many of which treat church services flippantly. During this period Montgomery also wrote stories for Sunday school magazines. As an avid magazine reader, perhaps she saw *The Delineator*'s 1905 article on public speaking, which noted, "Ministers and preachers today are striving for brief, bright, local effects." Clearly she agreed with the article.

A small detail: This chapter seeds the plot with another of Marilla's "sick headaches."

***Significance:***

With material purchased from a peddler, bought at a bargain store and an ugly blue print from a store in Carmody, Anne's new dresses were serviceable though achingly plain and out of fashion. Responding to Anne's protests about the handmade clothes, Marilla sniffs: "I don't believe in pampering vanity, Anne." It is Anne's fondest wish to have just one dress with puffed sleeves. The next morning Anne, in her black and white stiff sateen dress, having adorned her plain sailor hat with buttercups and wild roses, sets out to Sunday school. Marilla quizzes Anne on her first day of Sunday school, which Anne found to be a rather dull experience: Mr. Bell's prayers were long and absent of feeling, Anne felt, Miss Rogerson asked far too many questions while not answering any of her own, and the minister just plum lacked imagination. Marilla felt very much that she should disapprove of Anne's observations, but she secretly was much in agreement with the little orphan girl.

A little girl's vanity should not be coddled, thus Anne, feeling frightfully out of fashion, sits among the girls and their puffed sleeves in her tight sateen dress. Concern over fashion and curbing a young girl's vanity are given sympathetic treatment by the author. Marilla may find Anne's concerns over fashion to be frivolous, but she finds herself quite in agreement in some of her observations. Outwardly rigid and unbending, Marilla's real sympathies are once again revealed to the reader, showing that she is indeed bending to, or has a growing sympathy towards, Anne's way of thinking.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) has made [Anne](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) three new dresses for Sunday school: a “serviceable” gingham, a black-and-white checked sateen, and an ugly, stiff blue. The dresses are very plain in all details. Marilla asks Anne how she likes the dresses, and Anne replies that she’ll imagine she likes them, but they aren’t pretty. Marilla is offended—dresses should be sensible, and Anne should be grateful. Anne says she is grateful—but fashionable puffed sleeves would make her more grateful.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Anne finds beauty inspiring, and though she hasn’t owned much clothing in her life, she doesn’t hesitate to admit that she’d be happier to own prettier clothing, no matter how this affronts Marilla. The ornate, puffy sleeves, popular in the late 1800s, will have to be left to her imagination.

***Summary Part 2:***

The next day [Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) is too sick with a headache to go to church, so [Anne](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) heads off alone in her plain dress and hat. On her way, she picks some buttercups and roses to decorate her hat. Avonlea has already heard interesting rumors about Anne, so when she arrives at church in her festooned hat, she draws much curiosity from the other girls, but nobody approaches her. Anne is placed in Miss Rogerson’s Sunday school class. Miss Rogerson’s teaching method consists mostly of question-and-answer drills. Anne knows the answers, thanks to Marilla, but she doesn’t understand much—and she is the only girl who lacks puffed sleeves. She feels dreadful.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Especially in the Victorian period of the late 1800s, Sunday school was a major part of church life for young Protestant Christians—not just as an educational program, but as the center of social life for church youth. Anne stands out and doesn’t fit in with the other girls, an awkward introduction to Avonlea beyond Green Gables. Her lack of puffed sleeves (not to mention her flowered hat) symbolizes her different past and inability to fit in.

***Summary Part 3:***

When [Anne](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) gets home, she tells [Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) that she hated Sunday school. Marilla is appalled. Anne explains that she behaved herself well during the opening part of the service, but she was bored—partly because [Mr. Bell](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters), the Sunday school superintendent, didn’t seem very interested in his own prayer. Then, in Sunday school, she was the only one of the 10 girls who didn’t have puffed sleeves. She also thought it was unfair that Miss Rogerson got to ask all the questions. Finally, church was difficult because the minister’s sermon was too long and lacked imagination. Marilla finds it hard to scold Anne, because she’s secretly had the same thoughts about both the minister and Mr. Bell.

***Analysis Part 3:***

From Marilla’s point of view, a good girl would enjoy and benefit from Sunday school. Anne, however, feels that some of the formalities of Sunday school don’t match the heartfelt sincerity she associates with real prayer. She stood out from the other girls, and there just wasn’t enough room for imagination. In a way, though, Anne’s “outsider” observations just bring out what others have always thought, but—being more accustomed to social expectations—are afraid to say aloud.