***Anne of Green Gables***

***Chapter 5***

### ***Anne’s Story***

***Summary:***

* Anne tells Marilla she's made up her mind to enjoy the drive and immediately starts talking about names again. They're driving down The Shore Road, a name Anne's okay with. She likes White Sands (their destination) too, but the name she's really into is Avonlea. She thinks it sounds like music.
* Marilla tells Anne that since she's determined to talk, she might as well tell Marilla about her life. Anne's not so into that idea—she'd rather tell Marilla what she imagines about herself—but Marilla insists, so she begins.
* Anne was born to schoolteachers who were poor, from out of town, and didn't have any family. They both died of fever shortly after Anne was born. Mrs. Thomas, the woman who scrubbed her parents' house, took her in.
* Mrs. Thomas raised Anne to watch her four younger children (skip over to [**"In a Nutshell"**](https://www.shmoop.com/anne-of-green-gables/) for a refresher on how orphans were treated in this time period).
* When Anne was eight, Mrs. Thomas's husband died, and Anne was passed off to Mrs. Hammond, to help watch her three sets of twins. Another family, another underage, unpaid job.
* She was there for two years, until Mr. Hammond died. The kids were divided among relatives, and Anne was put in the orphan asylum, where she stayed for four months until meeting Matthew.
* Anne had some schooling, enough to learn how to read. She loves memorizing poetry.
* Marilla asks Anne if the Mrs. Hammond and Thomas were good to her. Anne gets really flushed and says she thinks they meant to be.

***Synopsis:***

Anne announces that she is determined to enjoy the ride back to Mrs. Spencer’s orphanage. Marilla, realizing that Anne must talk about something, decides to pick the topic herself, and asks Anne about her past. Anne says she would prefer to tell what she imagines about herself, as her imagination is so much richer than her history, but she agrees to tell her story. Her parents, Walter and Bertha Shirley, were teachers, and both died of fever when Anne was a baby. She was adopted by Mrs. Thomas, a poor woman with a drunken husband, who wanted Anne only so she would have help with her children. Eight years later, after the death of Mr. Thomas, Mrs. Thomas gave Anne to another poor woman, Mrs. Hammond, and Anne cared for Mrs. Hammond’s three sets of twins. After two years, Mr. Hammond died, and Anne was sent to the orphanage, where she lived for four months. She received little schooling but compensated for her lack of formal education by reading voraciously.

After hearing Anne’s sad history, Marilla pities her for the first time. Anne, however, refuses to feel sorry for herself, crediting her various foster mothers with good intentions, even if the women were not always kind. Marilla begins to consider keeping Anne. She thinks Anne ladylike and supposes Anne could easily be trained out of her bad habits.

***Critical Study:***

On the way to Mrs. Spencer’s house, Marilla asks Anne to tell her about her childhood. Anne tells Marilla that she is eleven years old and originally from Bolingbroke, Nova Scotia. Her mother and father were both teachers. When they had Anne, they were “a pair of babies and as poor as church mice” (p. 51). Anne’s mother and father died of fever when Anne was 3 months old. Anne did not have any relatives nearby, so a poor woman named Mrs. Thomas took her in. Mrs. Thomas had a husband who was a drunk and four children younger than Anne who Anne looked after until she was eight years old. At that time, Mrs. Thomas’s husband died and his mother said that Mrs. Thomas and her biological children could move in with her, but not Anne.

Anne moved to the home of a woman named [Mrs. Hammond](https://www.gradesaver.com/anne-of-green-gables/study-guide/character-list#mrs-hammond), who took in Anne because she had heard Anne could care for young children well. Life was very difficult for Anne during this time because Mrs. Hammond had eight children including three sets of twins. After two years, Mrs. Hammond’s husband died and Mrs. Hammond moved to the United States. Anne had to go to the orphan asylum, where she lived for four months until Mrs. Spencer came and took her away.

Marilla asks if Anne ever went to school. Anne responds that she went to school a very small amount when she was at Mrs. Thomas and Mrs. Hammond’s houses, and she attended school while at the orphan asylum for four months. However, she says that she can read well and loves poetry. Marilla asks whether Mrs. Thomas and Mrs. Hammond were good to Anne, and Anne gives a mature and empathetic response about how each woman tried to be good but had their hands full. It is clear that Anne had a very difficult childhood bereft of love, education, and fun. Marilla begins to think that perhaps she and Matthew should take in Anne, who seems to be respectful and teachable.

***Critical Analysis:***

Marilla and Anne set out on the five miles it will take to reach White Sands and Mrs. Spencer, who will arrange Anne's return to the orphanage. Anne announces she has decided to enjoy the drive despite its sad destination. Anne talks romantically about herself and Avonlea and convinces herself "you can nearly always enjoy things if you make up your mind firmly that you will."

Marilla asks Anne for a brief autobiography: "I don't want any of your imaginings. Just you stick to bald facts." Though Anne would rather tell a fictionalized, romantic tale about herself, she tells her story cheerfully enough, though it's clear her life has been hard. She was born to Walter and Bertha Shirley, poor, young schoolteachers in Bolingbroke, Nova Scotia. Her parents died when she was three months old, and no one knew what to do with her. At last Bertha Shirley's "scrub woman," Mrs. Thomas, offered to give the baby a home "though she was poor and had a drunken husband." Anne helped look after the Thomas children until Mr. Thomas died and the household was broken up. At that point Mrs. Hammond took her in. There were eight children in the Hammond family, including three sets of twins. "I used to get so dreadfully tired carrying them about," Anne confesses.

When Mr. Hammond died, Mrs. Hammond divided the children among her relatives and sent Anne to a nearby orphan asylum. "They didn't want me at the asylum, either ... but they had to take me," she says. She has had only rudimentary schooling, though it's clear she is a precocious and voracious reader, deeply influenced by what she reads.

Marilla abruptly asks whether Mrs. Thomas and Mrs. Hammond were good to Anne. Anne falters at the question. She says loyally, "They MEANT to be ... They had a good deal to worry them, you know." Marilla is touched by what Anne has gone through and thinks it's easy to see why the girl was so thrilled at the idea of having a real home and people to care for her. Perhaps they should take her in after all: "She's ladylike," she reassures herself. "It's likely her people were nice folks."

Anne is in raptures over the sea view, but her courage begins to fail as they approach White Sands.

Novels of the 19th and early 20th century often rely on the convention "breeding will out"; children born to privileged people will be well-bred and well-spoken no matter who raises them. Marilla reveals this prejudice when she reflects Anne's relatives were likely "nice folks." It's more likely Anne would speak like a child from either the Thomas or Hammond families, especially since she hasn't had much schooling, but "lower-class" dialogue would make her less appealing to turn-of-the-century readers. [Montgomery](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Anne-of-Green-Gables/author/), therefore, has her speak like a member of the educated middle class. Indeed, in this chapter Anne appears to have read more than Marilla herself, in accordance with what readers of the period would expect.

It's clear Anne is naturally kind despite her harsh upbringing. No one she has lived with is likely to have taught her not to criticize people; her loyalty to the Thomas and Hammond families is part of her character and makes a strong impression on Marilla. Modern readers, too, may feel more sympathy when Anne gushes about this or that. She has schooled herself to think about the positive and to appreciate what beauty she finds. In this chapter Montgomery reveals Anne as a brave and gallant soul who makes the best of whatever life hands her.

Anne's description of the Hammond household leaps out of her story, as she says, "I went up the river to live with [them] in a little clearing among the stumps." The sentence conjures up an image of serious rural isolation. Mr. Hammond works in a sawmill, meaning the family must live "up river" in a forest. *Anne of Green Gables* was published in 1908, a period when the Canadian lumber industry was struggling and finding good logging sites was becoming more and more difficult. It's painful to think of a girl like [Anne Shirley](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Anne-of-Green-Gables/character-analysis/#Anne_Shirley) living in such a place.

***Significance:***

Anne intently tries to enjoy the drive to White Sands despite it all. Marilla suggests the talkative Anne tell her about herself, since she is "bent on talking" anyway. We learn that Anne, lately turned 11, was the daughter of two high school teachers in Bolingbroke, Novia Scotia, both of whom died from fever when she was just three months old. The orphaned Anne lived with Mrs. Thomas and her drunken husband until she was eight-years-old, looking after the four younger Thomas children. When Mr. Thomas was killed by "falling under a train" the family was taken in by Mr. Thomas's mother  save for Anne. Anne went up the river to live with Mrs. Hammond to care for her eight children, twins three times over. After two years, Mr. Hammond died and Anne was sent to the Hopeton asylum, where Mrs. Spencer found her four months later.

Despite little formal education and her hard-luck life, Anne thrills over the books and poetry she has read. Marilla cautiously asks the girl if the women whose service she had been in were good to her. Anne, as is her nature, struggles to find the good in everyone. Marilla pities the girl and wonders if she ought not keep the curious little red-headed girl as Matthew wishes.

Having at her young age already endured a life of hardship and disappointment, we see Anne's unfailing optimism and good manners; her striving to be a "model child" despite all odds. Showing an uncommon enthusiasm for learning and respectful of people who treated her shamefully, Anne shows an inner strength even in her eagerness to please and desire for goodness. The remote Marilla, genuinely affected by the girl's life's history, relents a little.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

As they travel to White Sands, [Anne](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) tells [Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) that she’s determined to enjoy the trip by admiring her surroundings. A wild rose prompts a digression about the color pink and how people with [red hair](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/symbols/red-hair) can never wear it. When Marilla says she doubts that Anne’s hair will ever be less red, Anne quotes a line from a book, that her “life is a perfect graveyard of buried hopes.” She says that romantic lines like that cheer her up.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Many passages in the book are long digressions like this one, giving Anne’s ideas and perspectives on events without describing them directly. Especially early in the book, this is meant to endear Anne to readers (and to other characters) by instilling a sense of her imagination and quirks. Here, Anne’s quote suggests that she often uses melodramatic language to help her cope with sadness, so her extreme declarations shouldn’t always be taken at face value.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) says that if [Anne](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) is going to talk for the entire five-mile journey, then she might as well tell Marilla about herself. Reluctantly, Anne begins to talk about her birth in Nova Scotia. She was the daughter of two high school teachers, [Walter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters) and [Bertha Shirley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters). When they were young and poor, the Shirleys lived in a tiny yellow house, which Anne has always pictured being surrounded by flowers. Anne was born in the house, but her parents both died of fever within a few months.

***Analysis Part 2:***

The journey to White Sands gives Anne an opportunity to acquaint Marilla and readers with her backstory. It’s a very sad one; Anne lost the only home and family she has ever known when she was still too young to remember them. Thus she fills in the unknown details with her imagination, and her life since has been spent longing for a permanent home.

***Summary Part 3:***

After that, nobody knew what to do with [Anne](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley); neither of her parents had any living relatives. Finally, [Mrs. Thomas](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters), the woman whom the Shirleys had hired to clean, took Anne to live with her. Mrs. Thomas was even poorer than the Shirleys, and her husband was often drunk. Anne lived with the Thomases until she was eight years old and spent her time looking after the four younger Thomas children. After Mr. Thomas died, his relatives didn’t want Anne, so a local woman named [Mrs. Hammond](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters) took Anne in to help raise her eight children, including three sets of twins.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Anne doesn’t remember a time in her life when she was genuinely wanted for her own sake; she’s always been expected to earn her keep by working hard and helping raise other people’s children. As a consequence, she’s never had much of a childhood of her own. Anne’s history explains some of her oddness; her articulate use of words and ideas is mature for her age, yet her exuberance and imagination remain childlike.

***Summary Part 4:***

After Mr. Hammond died, the children were divided among relatives, and there wasn’t anywhere for [Anne](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/anne-shirley) to go, so she wound up at the overcrowded Hopeton orphan asylum, spending four months there until [Mrs. Spencer](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters) showed up. At this, Anne sighs with relief. She evidently doesn’t enjoy talking about her past. To [Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert)’s further questioning, she says that though her schooling has been spotty, she can read well and recite lots of poems from memory.

***Analysis Part 4:***

While Anne could talk all day about her imaginings, she apparently doesn’t enjoy talking about her own history, suggesting that her imagination provides a way of avoiding the sorrowful parts of her life. Reading and poetry serve a similar function.

***Summary Part 5:***

[Marilla](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/marilla-cuthbert) asks if [Mrs. Thomas](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters) and [Mrs. Hammond](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters) were good to Anne. Anne isn’t sure what to say. She’s sure that the women intended to be kind, but they both had a lot to deal with. Anne slips back into daydreams, and Marilla pities her. She realizes Anne’s life has been filled with neglect and that she’s been starved of love. What if [Matthew](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters/matthew-cuthbert) were right? After all, Anne isn’t rude or disrespectful, and she could be trained to talk less. Anne breaks her silence to admire the beach at the base of the cliffs they’re driving along. She dreads arriving at [Mrs. Spencer](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/anne-of-green-gables/characters)’s—it feels like it will be “the end of everything.”

***Analysis Part 5:***

Anne tries to speak well of the women who gave her shelter in the past, but it’s clear to Marilla that those women never really loved or cared for Anne. After hearing the story of Anne’s childhood, she is beginning to soften toward Anne and to reconsider her attitude about adoption altogether. She begins to picture what providing a home and family environment for Anne might actually look like.