SOFTWARE & TECH

When Is Anne Of Green Gables Set

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Unlocking the Past: When Is Anne of Green Gables Set?

For over a century, readers have fallen in love with the fiery-haired, imaginative orphan, Anne Shirley. L. M. Montgomery's classic novel, *Anne of Green Gables*, has charmed generations, inviting them into a world of rustic beauty, heartfelt friendships, and the simple joys of childhood. Yet, for many enthusiasts and literary scholars alike, a single question often lingers: **When is Anne of Green Gables set?**

Understanding the historical backdrop of Avonlea is more than just a matter of trivia. It enriches the reading experience, providing context for Anne's struggles, the social norms she challenges, and the quiet rhythm of life on Prince Edward Island. While the novel was published in 1908, the story itself unfolds in a slightly earlier era, a fact that Montgomery wove subtly into the fabric of her narrative. This article explores the definitive time period of the novel, the historical clues that pinpoint it, and why this era is so crucial to the story's enduring magic.

The Definitive Time Period: A Story of the 1870s and 1880s

The most accurate answer to the question, **when is Anne of Green Gables set**, is the late 19th century, specifically around the years **1878 to 1880**. While the book never states the precise year, literary historians and Montgomery scholars have pieced together the timeline using internal evidence from the text. The novel was published in 1908, but Montgomery deliberately set her story roughly thirty years prior, during her own childhood in the 1870s and 1880s. This decision allowed her to capture a world that was already beginning to fade as the 20th century dawned.

Montgomery herself was born in 1874, and the fictional world of Avonlea is heavily inspired by her memories of growing up in Cavendish, Prince Edward Island. The technology, fashion, transportation, and social customs depicted in the book are all firmly rooted in the Victorian era—a time of horse-drawn carriages, oil lamps, and tightly knit rural communities. By setting the story in this specific window, Montgomery created a timeless yet historically grounded sanctuary.

Decoding the Clues: How We Know the Era

Montgomery left several breadcrumbs for readers to determine **when is Anne of Green Gables set**. One of the most compelling pieces of evidence comes from a remark made by Matthew Cuthbert about biscuits. In Chapter 2, Matthew buys Anne a box of "Royal Canadian" biscuits. The Royal Canadian Biscuit Company was established in 1878. Since the biscuits are a well-known commodity in the story, the narrative must take place after this date. This clue firmly anchors the story's beginning in or after 1878.

Further textual evidence relates to the political and economic context of the era. The characters often discuss the price of wheat and the challenges of farming, which aligns with the agricultural depression that affected Canada in the late 1870s and early 1880s. Additionally, the story's educational system—with its one-room schoolhouses, formal examinations for the Queen's Academy, and the pursuit of the "Avery Scholarship"—

reflects the academic aspirations common in late Victorian Canada. The lack of modern inventions like the automobile, telephone, or radio also firmly places the story in a pre-industrial, simpler time.

The Geographical Setting: The Heart of Avonlea

While determining **when is Anne of Green Gables set** is crucial, the **where** is equally important. The story takes place in the fictional village of Avonlea, which is based on the real-life community of Cavendish on Prince Edward Island, Canada. Prince Edward Island was one of the founding provinces of the Canadian Confederation in 1873, just five years before Anne arrives at Green Gables. This means that the story is set in a very young, developing nation, which adds a layer of pioneering spirit to the narrative.

The island's natural beauty—its "Snow Queen" apple trees, the "Lake of Shining Waters," and the "White Way of Delight"—is not just a backdrop but a character in itself. Setting the story in the late 19th century allowed Montgomery to celebrate the unspoiled, pastoral landscape of her homeland. This setting is integral to Anne's character; her connection to nature is a primary source of her joy and imagination. The specific flora, fauna, and seasonal changes described in the book are authentic to Prince Edward Island's maritime climate, further grounding the story in a real and tangible place.

Life in the Late 19th Century: Social Context

Understanding **when is Anne of Green Gables set** helps modern readers appreciate the social expectations that Anne constantly wrestles with. The late 19th century was a time of rigid social etiquette, particularly for young girls. Anne's fiery temper, tendency to daydream, and constant chatter were often seen as character flaws that needed to be corrected. The Avonlea community values propriety, hard work, and religious piety—values that Anne must learn to navigate without losing her unique spirit.

Gender roles were strictly defined. Men like Matthew were expected to provide for the family through farming, while women like Marilla were responsible for the household, cooking, and moral education of the children. Anne's ambition to become a teacher was a progressive goal for a girl of her time, reflecting the growing opportunities for women in education during the late 1800s. The story's setting in this transitional period allows Montgomery to subtly critique these social norms while still celebrating the strength of community bonds.

Fashion and Technology: Markers of the Era

Another way to answer **when is Anne of Green Gables set** is to examine the material culture of the story. The characters' clothing is distinctly Victorian. Marilla wears plain, dark dresses with high collars and a bun, while Anne longs for the puffed sleeves that were fashionable in the 1880s. The famous "brown serge dress" that Anne is forced to wear is a perfect example of the practical, unadorned clothing typical of the era.

Technology in Avonlea is minimal. Light comes from candles and oil lamps. Transportation is by horse-drawn buggy or on foot. Communication is slow, relying on letters and word-of-mouth. The absence of electricity and modern machinery emphasizes the self-reliant, agrarian lifestyle of the community. This technological simplicity is a major reason why the story feels so peaceful and timeless, offering a stark contrast to the fast-paced world of the 20th and 21st centuries.

The Passage of Time: Seasonality in the Novel

L. M. Montgomery masterfully uses the seasons to mark the passage of time in the story. The question of **when is Anne of Green Gables set** can also be answered by looking at the seasonal timeline. The story begins in the spring of what we believe to be 1878, with the arrival of the cherry blossoms and the blooming of the apple trees. Anne's first summer at Green Gables is filled with exploration and wonder. Autumn brings the drama of the "Broken Rice Pudding" and the start of school.

The novel spans several years, roughly from Anne's arrival at age 11 to the end of her first teaching year at age 16. This means the story covers numerous seasonal cycles, each one richly described with vivid imagery. The

winter scenes, particularly the “Christmas concert” and the sleigh rides, are some of the most memorable in literature. This seasonal structure reinforces the cyclical nature of rural life and reflects Anne’s own growth and maturation from a wild child into a thoughtful young woman.

Why the Setting Matters: The Novel’s Enduring Appeal

The question, **when is Anne of Green Gables set**, is not just a matter of historical accuracy; it is central to the novel’s magic. The late 19th-century setting provides a safe, nostalgic space for readers to escape into. In a world that was rapidly industrializing at the turn of the century, Montgomery offered a portrait of a simpler, more innocent time. This nostalgic quality is one of the key reasons the book has remained a classic for over a hundred years.

Furthermore, the setting allows Anne’s character to shine. In a modern context, her extraordinary imagination might be medicated or pathologized. In the late 19th century, it is seen as a quirk to be managed, but ultimately, it is her defining gift. The slower pace of life in Avonlea gives Anne the time and space to dream, to make mistakes, and to learn from them. The setting acts as a crucible for her character development, shaping her from a talkative orphan into a beloved member of the community.

Comparison to Other Classic Time Periods in Literature

To fully grasp **when is Anne of Green Gables set**, it is helpful to place it alongside other classic works. While *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott is set during the American Civil War (1860s), Montgomery’s novel is set a generation later, in a time of relative peace and reconstruction. Unlike the urban, industrial landscape of Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (1830s London), Avonlea is a pristine, rural sanctuary. The setting of Anne’s story is closer to the pastoral world of Laura Ingalls Wilder’s *Little House* books, which also depict the late 19th century, though on the American frontier rather than the Canadian shoreline.

Understanding these comparisons highlights how Montgomery’s choice of time and place creates a unique literary space. It is a world that is both realistic and idyllic, grounded in the economic and social realities of the 1870s and 1880s but filtered through a lens of beauty and optimism. This delicate balance is what makes the story so universally appealing.

Bringing It All Together: The Lasting Legacy of Avonlea

When we finally answer the question, **when is Anne of Green Gables set**, we unlock a deeper appreciation for L. M. Montgomery’s masterpiece. The story is set in the late 19th century, specifically around 1878 to 1880, on the enchanting Prince Edward Island. This was a time of horse-drawn carriages, oil lamps, and puffed sleeves—a world on the cusp of modernity but still deeply rooted in tradition.

The historical setting is not merely a static backdrop; it is an active force in the narrative. It shapes the characters’ ambitions, defines their social boundaries, and provides the canvas for Anne’s vibrant imagination. The timeless appeal of *Anne of Green Gables* lies in this perfect harmony between character and context.

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