

**Willa Cather. O Pioneers! From Part 1, Chapter 1, "The Wild Land"**

One January day, thirty years ago, the little town of Hanover, anchored on a windy Nebraska tableland, was trying not to be blown away. A mist of fine snowflakes was curling and eddying about the cluster of low drab buildings huddled on the gray prairie, under a gray sky. The dwelling-houses were set about haphazard on the tough prairie sod; some of them looked as if they had been moved in overnight, and others as if they were straying off by themselves, headed straight for the open plain. None of them had any appearance of permanence, and the howling wind blew under them as well as over them. The main street was a deeply rutted road, now frozen hard, which ran from the squat red railway station and the grain "elevator" at the north end of the town to the lumber yard and the horse pond at the south end. On either side of this road straggled two uneven rows of wooden buildings; the general merchandise stores, the two banks, the drug store, the feed store, the saloon, the post-office. The board sidewalks were gray with trampled snow, but at two o'clock in the afternoon the shopkeepers, having come back from dinner, were keeping well behind their frosty windows. The children were all in school, and there was nobody abroad in the streets but a few rough-looking countrymen in coarse overcoats, with their long caps pulled down to their noses. Some of them had brought their wives to town, and now and then a red or a plaid shawl flashed out of one store into the shelter of another. At the hitch-bars along the street a few heavy work-horses, harnessed to farm wagons, shivered under their blankets. About the station everything was quiet, for there would not be another train in until night.

On the sidewalk in front of one of the stores sat a little Swede boy, crying bitterly. He was about five years old. His black cloth coat was much too big for him and made him look like a little old man. His shrunken brown flannel dress had been washed many times and left a long stretch of stocking between the hem of his skirt and the tops of his clumsy, copper-toed shoes. His cap was pulled down over his ears; his nose and his chubby cheeks were chapped and red with cold. He cried quietly, and the few people who hurried by did not notice him. He was afraid to stop any one, afraid to go into the store and ask for help, so he sat wringing his long sleeves and looking up a telegraph pole beside him, whimpering, "My kitten, oh, my kitten! Her will fweeze!" At the top of the pole crouched a shivering gray kitten, mewling faintly and clinging desperately to the wood with her claws.

**Define Each Word**

eddy: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

drab: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

straggle: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

wring: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

whimper: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Write the Correct Word from the Vocabulary**

1. Every morning, the villagers walk to the river's edge to soak and to \_\_\_\_\_ out their clothing in the clear water.
2. Although the tiny apartment appeared \_\_\_\_\_ and somewhat dreary to others, the young couple felt happy and alive in their first home together.
3. Large, swirling \_\_\_\_\_ form where the river and the bay converge, making swimming in the area dangerous.
4. The pit bull with the broken paw lay \_\_\_\_\_ in the corner of the building, but no one dared to help it.
5. Fifteen minutes after the main group of runners completed the race, \_\_\_\_\_ still crossed the finish line sporadically.

**Comprehension and Discussion: Answer Each Question in Complete Sentences**

1. How is the "little Swede boy" described?

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2. From the narrator's description, what sort of town is Hanover? What words help create this mood?

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