GENERAL

when is anne of green gables set

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When Is Anne of Green Gables Set? A Deep Dive into the Time and Place of a Classic

Anne Shirley's adventures in the idyllic village of Avonlea have enchanted readers for generations. Yet, many fans wonder: **when is Anne of Green Gables set?**Understanding the time period of this beloved novel not only enriches the reading experience but also reveals how Lucy Maud Montgomery's own era shaped the story's themes, characters, and settings. In this article we explore the historical backdrop of the novel, the timeline of Anne's life, the cultural details of late 19th century Prince Edward Island, and how the story's setting is portrayed across books, films, and television adaptations.

1. The Historical Snapshot: Late 19th Century Canada

Anne of Green Gables is firmly rooted in the 1870s and 1880s, a period of significant social and technological change in Canada. The novel's opening chapter places Anne at the age of 11, in the year 1870, when she arrives at Green Gables to replace the missing twins. The narrative unfolds over the next few decades, culminating in Anne's adulthood in the early 1900s.

During this time, Canada was still a young confederation, having joined the Commonwealth in 1867. The country was experiencing rapid industrialization, the expansion of the railway network, and a wave of immigration from Europe. Prince Edward Island, where Anne's story unfolds, was transitioning from a largely agrarian society to one that began embracing new technologies such as telegraphy and steam-powered ships.

Key historical markers that intersect with the novel include:

- 1870s: The year Anne first arrives at Green Gables.
- 1880s: Anne's teenage years, the development of the local school, and the rise of the railway.
- 1890s: Anne's early adulthood, marriage to Gilbert Blythe, and the expansion of her family.
- Early 1900s: Anne's return to the island as a mother and her reflections on the changing world.

These dates give the reader a clear sense of the era in which Anne's story takes place, and they highlight the novel's connection to significant Canadian historical milestones.

2. Lucy Maud Montgomery's Inspiration and the Setting of Avonlea

Lucy Maud Montgomery (1874–1942) grew up on Prince Edward Island, and her intimate knowledge of the island's geography, culture, and social norms informed the creation of Anne's world. The fictional village of Avonlea is loosely based on the real towns of Charlottetown, Cornwall, and other communities on the island.

Montgomery's own life intersected with the novel's timeline: she was born in 1874, just a few years after Anne's first arrival at Green Gables. The author's experiences as a teacher, writer, and resident of the island provided authentic details about:

- Local architecture: clapboard houses, stone foundations, and the iconic green roof of Green Gables.
- Seasonal rhythms: the harsh winter snows, the vibrant summer harvest, and the bustling spring festivals.

- Community life: the importance of the school, the church, and the local post office as social hubs.
- Technology: the introduction of the telegraph, the arrival of the first steamship, and the early use of electric lighting in the later books.

Montgomery's deep affection for the island and her keen eye for detail make the setting feel vivid and real, allowing readers to step into a world that feels both timeless and historically grounded.

3. A Timeline of Anne's Life: From 1870 to 1913

Below is a concise timeline that outlines the key events in Anne Shirley's life, matched to the years in which they occur. This timeline helps readers understand the passage of time in the series and the historical context surrounding each major moment.

1. 1870–1871 – Anne arrives at Green Gables as an orphan, mistakenly sent to Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert.
2. 1872–1874 – Anne's early school years, the development of her friendship with Diana Barry, and her first love interest, Gilbert Blythe.
3. 1875 – The birth of Anne's first child, a baby girl named "Molly." (In the books, this is a fictional event; the real Anne had no child until later.)
4. 1876–1877 – Anne's growing reputation as a writer, her first published poem, and the construction of the new schoolhouse.
5. 1878–1879 – The arrival of the railway to Charlottetown and the expansion of commerce in Avonlea.
6. 1880–1884 – Anne's teenage years, her continued friendship with Gilbert, and the development of her literary career.
7. 1885 – Anne's first major publication, "The Green Gables Letters."
8. 1886–1887 – Anne's engagement to Gilbert, and the planning of their wedding.
9. 1888 – Anne and Gilbert marry and move to the farm in the village of Avonlea.
10. 1889–1892 – Anne's early motherhood, the birth of her son Matthew, and the first publication of her novel "Anne of Avonlea."
11. 1893–1899 – Anne's continued literary success, the arrival of her daughter Diana, and her involvement in the community's cultural life.
12. 1900–1902 – Anne's return to the island after a brief period in New York, her reflections on modernity, and the birth of her second son, Charles.
13. 1903–1910 – Anne's family life, her involvement in the local school board, and her travels to England and Europe.
14. 1911–1913 – The final chapters of the series, featuring Anne's reflections on her life, her legacy, and her enduring love for Avonlea.

While the dates above are approximate and sometimes fictionalized for narrative purposes, they provide a framework for understanding the novel's progression and the historical backdrop that shapes Anne's journey.

4. The World of Avonlea: Geography, Climate, and Society

Avonlea is a fictional community located on the fictional island of Prince Edward Island. However, its setting is unmistakably grounded in the real geography of PEI, with its rolling green hills, sandy beaches, and small coastal towns.

4.1 Geography and Landscape

The novel describes Avonlea's landscape as a blend of farmland, forests, and a scenic shoreline. Key locations include:

- Green Gables – The Cuthberts' home, a modest clapboard house with a green roof that becomes the story's centerpiece.
- Avonlea School – The village school where Anne teaches, featuring a simple wooden building with a bell tower.
- Charlottetown – The provincial capital, visited by Anne during her travels to the mainland.
- The Harbour – A bustling fishing port where the community gathers for news and gossip.

4.2 Climate and Seasons

Montgomery uses the four seasons as a narrative device, each reflecting Anne's emotional growth. The novel's vivid descriptions of:

- Harsh winter snows and the excitement of building snowmen.
- Spring blossoms and the renewal of life.
- Summer festivals and the warmth of the sun.
- Autumn harvests and the changing colors of leaves.

These seasonal cues help anchor the story in a specific time of year and highlight the natural beauty of Prince Edward Island.

4.3 Social Structure and Culture

During the late 19th century, Avonlea's society was largely agrarian, with a strong emphasis on community, family, and faith. The novel portrays:

- The role of the church in daily life, with sermons and Sunday school.
- School as a center for learning and socialization.
- The importance of local markets, where farmers sell their produce.
- Community gatherings, such as the annual "Harvest Festival" and the "Christmas Eve Candlelight."

5. Technological Advancements in the 19th Century

Anne's world is on the cusp of modernity. The late 1800s brought significant technological innovations that are subtly woven into the narrative:

- Telegraphy – The arrival of the telegraph line allowed Anne to send letters quickly to distant relatives.
- Railways – The extension of the railway to Charlottetown enabled easier travel and trade.
- Electricity – The introduction of electric lighting in the later books, symbolizing progress.
- Printing Press – Anne's early publications were made possible by the local printing press, which also served the community's newspapers.

These technological milestones are used by Montgomery to illustrate the tension between tradition and progress, a theme that runs throughout the series.

6. Film and Television Adaptations: How the Setting Is Portrayed

The enduring popularity of Anne of Green Gables has led to numerous adaptations, each interpreting the novel's setting in distinct ways. Here's a look at how the time period is represented across different media:

6.1 1985 Canadian Television Series

The landmark 1985 adaptation, starring Megan Follows as Anne, is widely celebrated for its faithful recreation of 19th century Prince Edward Island. The production used period-accurate costumes, props, and sets to capture the era's look and feel. The series also highlighted the island's natural beauty, with sweeping shots of the coastline and

countryside.

6.2 2009 Film “Anne of Green Gables: The Legacy”

Directed by Bruce Pittman, this film aimed to bring a modern cinematic perspective to the classic story. While it maintained the historical setting, the filmmakers used contemporary filming techniques to emphasize the emotional depth of Anne’s journey.

6.3 2019 Television Series “Anne with an E”

Netflix’s modern adaptation, while set in the same historical period, introduced contemporary storytelling techniques and a more diverse cast. The series explored the social issues of the era, such as gender roles and class differences, and used the setting to comment on contemporary themes.

Across all adaptations, the core historical elements—clothing, architecture, technology—remain consistent, ensuring that viewers can still sense the time period in which Anne’s story takes place.

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