

St. Mary's Catholic Academy

Year 10 – Anita and Me by Meera Syal

Background information/plot

'Anita and Me' is Meera Syal's debut novel, and was first published in 1996 and is semi-autobiographical. It is set in the fictional Midlands village of Tollington in the 1970s. The area is an ex-mining village. Now the pit has closed, there are few jobs and the area is generally poor. It's a traditional white working class area, but now only the women can get work, which leads to a change in social relationships.

The book follows the story of a girl named Meena and her family who have come to England from Punjab. In order to fit in, Meena finds herself trying to please a girl who lives in the village called Anita. Anita is interested in boys and make up - things that Meena hasn't really considered before their meeting. Meena is so keen to befriend Anita that she even adapts her accent in her company to mimic that of the Black Country.

Meena's parents tell her that they are expecting another baby which Meena is not happy about - she doesn't want to have to share her parents with another sibling.

Meena seems to grow up really quickly. Anita teaches her things that seem too old for them both. Meena desperately wants to be noticed by boys like Anita does and so starts acting differently and applying makeup to get attention. She also becomes deviant, showing no remorse for lying and stealing.

The story is about Meena's insecurities about her identity - she can't decide if she wants to be like her family members, or to try and fit in with the people in Tollington. Sadly, Meena finds Anita's influence so great that she chooses a path of deviant behaviour for a while in order to 'fit in' with some people in the village.

Character	Information
Meena	Meena struggles with her identity - on the one hand she wants to know about her family's past and their traditions, but she is also quick to try and fit in with the girls from Tollington. The book highlighted her troubles while growing up.
Anita	Anita is aggressive, rude and intimidating. Yet, people want to be friends with her. Meena is impressed by Anita and changes herself to impress her.
Meena's Parents	They are kind, caring and family orientated. They upset Meena when they tell her they are expecting another baby. They have a large family and spend time all together regularly.
Nanima	She is Meena's grandmother who comes over from India. She only speaks Punjabi and calls Meena, 'Jungle' to show she thinks she is wild.
Sam	Sam is always kind towards Meena but she soon discovers that he is racist. He attacks an Indian man.
The Villagers	There lots of people in the community. Some make racist comments to Meena's family without really realising. The Ball Bearing women are loud and assertive due to their situation with their jobs because of the economy. They resemble the type of person Meena is likely to become, rather than like her mother.

Character relationships

Meena has a complex relationship with Anita. She is determined to be in her company and circle of friends, but doesn't always enjoy the time she spends with her. Meena looks up to Anita; she sees her as someone to learn from. With Anita being older, but also seeing too much before her time, she seems to know much more about the world which Meena finds an attractive quality of a friend.

Meena's parents are very much in love. They are really family orientated and want the best for Meena. However, they don't stop Meena being in Anita's company despite them knowing Anita will lead her astray.

One of the biggest influence in Meena's life is her grandma. She gains Meena's respect instantly and is a catalyst for her change.

Pupil book review

Suggested further reading

Life isn't all Haha Hehe by Meera Syal

The History Boys by Alan Bennett

The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini

Sari, Jeans und Chilischoten by Meera Syal

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee

Vocabulary	Definition	Word root
Vulnerability	<i>The quality or state of being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally.</i>	Root - vulner- (wound) <i>early 17th century: from late Latin vulnerabilis, from Latin vulnerare 'to wound', from vulnus 'wound'.</i>
Undulating	<i>Moving with a smooth wave-like motion.</i>	Root – Unda- (a wave) <i>mid 17th century: from late Latin undulatus, from Latin unda 'a wave'.</i>
Commemorating	<i>Recalling and show respect for (someone or something).</i>	Root - memor- (relate/minddul) <i>late 16th century: from Latin commemorat- 'brought to remembrance', from the verb commemorare, from com- 'altogether' + memorare 'relate' (from memor 'mindful').</i>
Dilemma	<i>A situation in which a difficult choice has to be made between two or more alternatives, especially ones that are equally undesirable.</i>	Root – lemma (premise) <i>early 16th century (denoting a form of argument involving a choice between equally unfavourable alternatives): via Latin from Greek dilēmma, from di- 'twice' + lēmma 'premise'.</i>
Rudiments	<i>The basic principles/foundations of a subject.</i>	Root – rudis (unwrought) <i>mid 16th century: from French, or from Latin rudimentum, from rudis 'unwrought', on the pattern of elementum 'element'.</i>
Instrumental	<i>Serving as a means of pursuing an aim.</i>	Root – unknown <i>from Old French instrumental, from Medieval Latin *instrumentalis, from Latin instrumentum "a tool, apparatus"</i>
Hostility	<i>Showing or feeling opposition or dislike; unfriendly.</i>	Root – host – (enemy) <i>late Middle English: from French hostilité or late Latin hostilitas, from Latin hostilis</i>
Derogatory	<i>Showing a critical or disrespectful attitude.</i>	Root – rog (to ask. The prefix 'de' means away so the literal translation would be 'move away from asking') <i>early 16th century (in the sense 'impairing in force or effect'): from late Latin derogatorius, from derogat-'abrogated', from the verb derogare (see derogate).</i>
Confrontation	<i>A hostile or argumentative situation or meeting between opposing parties.</i>	Root – front (forehead) <i>1630s, "action of bringing two parties face to face," for examination and discovery of the truth, from Medieval Latin confrontationem</i>