



Background information/overview

See PPT in the folder for extra notes and slides to be shared with the class.

- 'Anita and Me' is Meera Syal's debut novel, and was first published in 1996.
- It is a semi-autobiographical novel which won the Betty Trask Award.
- The story revolves around Meena, a British Punjabi girl (the "me" of the title), and her relationship with her English neighbour Anita as they grow up 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 area is predominantly white – Meena and her family think that they are the only non-white people in the village.
- In the area in general though, there was a lot of immigration at the time, including many Sikh families like Meena's. Today about 8% of the population of Wolverhampton and the surrounding area is Sikh.
- Economic problems led to increasing racial tension in the surrounding area, which are referred to in the book.
- In 1968, a few years before the book, Enoch Powell, who was then a Conservative MP, made a speech in Birmingham in which he warned that if immigration was not stopped, it would lead to violence. He used a quotation from the Roman poet Virgil, which led to the speech being referred to as the 'Rivers of Blood' speech. Meena makes reference to it in the book.
- It is considered to be one of the low points of racial relations in Britain. It was one of the things which stirred up racial hatred in the West Midlands area in particular. 'Hatred' is one of the things which trouble Meena most strongly.
- **Meera Syal** - Syal was born in Wolverhampton, Staffordshire, and grew up in Essington, a mining village a few miles to the north. Her Punjab-born parents, Surendra Syal (father) and Surrinder Uppal (mother), came to the United Kingdom from New Delhi. Her father was Khatri, and her mother was Jatt. When she was young, the family moved to Bloxwich. This landscape – and the family's status as the only Asian family in a small Midlands mining village was the influence for Anita and Me.
- Some of the speech is written phonetically to convey the Wolverhampton/Black Country accent. There are videos that the students can watch to get an idea of what the accent sounds like.

Chapter number	Chapter overview	Opportunities to pause	Suggested discussion questions
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● We immediately learn that Mina is in trouble with her father. ● He takes her to Mr Ormerod's shop to force her to admit that she stole money. Meena had claimed that she'd been given sweets for free but in the end admits that she took money to avoid the shame of Mr Ormerod knowing what she did. ● Meena talks about Tollington (the place that she lives). ● She explains that it used to be a mining town but after the mines closed and the men lost their jobs, women went to work instead of their husbands. She refers to these ladies as the 'Ballbearing Committee'. ● Meena recalls first meeting Anita, who lies and claims her dad is a sailor in an advert. Confused by this, Meena spoke to Anita's dad and asked him if he missed the sea. 	<p>11</p> <p>12</p> <p>16</p> <p>19 and 20</p> <p>End of chapter</p>	<p>Syal describes the terraced houses as, 'uneven teeth which spread into a gap-toothed smile'.</p> <p>What impression does she give of the houses? What is the name of the technique used here?</p> <p>What impression do you get of the Big House? How does Meena feel about being outside it?</p> <p>Why is Meena annoyed at the top of this page? How do you know? Is it something worth being annoyed about?</p> <p>Based on what you know about context (and the economy), how are the events that are described here typical of the time period?</p> <p><i>'Meena's dad was overreacting - stealing a bit of money from him is a minor issue. He should have just given her the money when she asked for it!'</i> What do think about this statement?</p> <p>See PPT for other activities</p>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meena recalls a birthday when she went into Wolverhampton with her parents. On the way home, she choked on a sausage but was saved when the car went over a bump and the sausage flew out. ● Meena also comments on the Indian clothes her mother wears when out and the fact her mother refuses to eat out. ● Their neighbours really like Meena's mum. ● Meena talks about her 'Aunties and Uncles', not actual relations but Indian friends who regularly visit and act as extended family. Meena does try to explain this to her neighbour, Mrs Worrall. 	<p>25</p> <p>28</p> <p>End of chapter</p>	<p>What do you think is upsetting Meena's mum?</p> <p>How does Meena feel about her mother? How do you know?</p> <p>What have we learnt about the childhood of Meena's mother in this chapter?</p> <p>See PPT for other activities</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meena remembers overhearing romantic stories of her parents meeting and describes her parent's life in India. 		
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Anita approaches Meena who is sitting outside eating sweets. Anita asks Meena to join her, making Meena feel proud. ● Outside Mr and Mrs Christmas's house, Anita encourages Meena to run up an alley way, shouting. Mr Christmas comes out of the house and shouts at them for making a noise. ● Meena talks about Uncle Alan – a friendly man in his twenties who encourages the children to get involved in various activities for the church. ● Meena talks about Hairy Neddy who plays in a band. She recalls a time his car broke down and his organ (old fashioned keyboard) turned on and started playing music. Neddy was rescued by Sandy who lent him some stockings to tie the organ on the car. ● Meena wishes that her mother was considered 'hard' like some of the other mums in the area. Instead, Meena's mum is compassionate and sensitive. 	<p>39</p> <p>40</p> <p>41</p> <p>44</p> <p>45</p> <p>51</p> <p>53</p> <p>59</p> <p>61/62</p> <p>66</p>	<p>What impression do we get of Anita? What does Meena think of Antia? Why might you end up hanging around with someone who you know you shouldn't?</p> <p>What does 'dog-eared' mean?</p> <p>Who do you know that cares for the environment like Uncle Alan?</p> <p>After being told off by Mr Christmas, Meena feels immediately guilty. How do you think Antia feels?</p> <p>How do you feel about the way Anita is talking to Mr Christmas?</p> <p>What can we infer from Sandy's behaviour? How does she feel about Hairy Neddy?</p> <p>What does Meena want her mother to be like?</p> <p>How does Meena's mum think you should treat your parents?</p> <p>Why would Meena's mum like her to know how to cook?</p> <p>What's happened to Mr Worrall?</p> <p>See PPT for other activities</p>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meena's parents are waiting for her and ask he to come and speak to them. Meena's father tells her an Indian version of 'The Boy Who Cried Wolf' ● Meena recalls her parents mehfil, parties with the Aunties and Uncles. On one occasion, Meena wakes up to hear shouting during one of these parties. She overhears her Aunties and Uncles talking about the horrors of Partition. 	<p>70</p> <p>76</p>	<p>Why does Meena's dad feel the need to tell her the story of the boy and the tiger? What does he hope she will realise?</p> <p>What is Meena's reaction to hearing her dad's package was in fact a bomb? What does this show about what she thinks of Anita?</p> <p>What does Meena start to think may have happened to Mrs</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● That night, Meena is woken by ambulance sirens. Looking outside, she watches as Mrs Christmas is taken off on a stretcher, dead, and Mr Christmas is led away by police. ● Meena overhears Deirdre explaining that she'd gone to speak to Mr Christmas about Anita's behaviour earlier and had found Mrs Christmas who had been dead for weeks. ● Mr Christmas died three weeks later. ● Meena's parents then decide to tell her that they are expecting a baby. Meena makes it clear that this is not something she wants. 	<p>78</p> <p>87</p>	<p>Christmas? How does she feel about the conclusion she has come to?</p> <p>How does Meena react to the news of her mother's pregnancy? Why do you think she reacts like this?</p> <p>What are the good things about having a new baby brother or sister? What difficulties may there be if there are large gaps between siblings like Meena and her new sibling?</p> <p>See PPT for other activities</p>
<p>5</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meena meets Tracey with her new dog but is shocked to discover that they've named it a racist term. When she tells this to her mother, she is shocked although her father insists that this is more ignorance than racism. ● Meena is racially insulted by a woman in a car. She realises, when she sees her father, that this encounter was something that he has experienced several times before and so she keeps the incident to herself. ● On the way to the fair, Anita tells Meena about a witch living in the Big House and the pair of them recite prayers to ward off evil. ● At the fair, Anita introduces the other two girls to the three boys she has let at the fair, but not Meena. ● Back at home, Meena puts on her mother's make-up before the Aunties and Uncles arrive for Diwali. However, this just amuses the adults and she is made to wash it off. ● Meena realises that he is concerned about her life changing when her new sibling arrives. ● At the party, Meena repeats a rude phrase that she has learnt from Anita and her family is embarrassed for her. ● She sneaks off to the fair and spends time with Anita. ● Afterwards, Anita takes Meena to sneak into the garden of the Big House. Inside, Meena finds a statue of Ganesha but then they hear dogs and escape. Meena doesn't tell Anita what she saw. 	<p>92</p> <p>97</p> <p>99</p> <p>100</p> <p>104</p> <p>111</p>	<p>How does Meena feel about the lack of wishes she has received for Diwali? Why do you think this is? Why do you think Syal has included this in the book? What could she be suggesting about the English people?</p> <p>A lady in a car makes a racist comments towards Meena. This seems to be the first time Meena has been insulted because of her race.</p> <p>Meena does not react aggressively - she turns and gets back in the car with her mum. Was this the right reaction?</p> <p>Why does Meena's mum still let her hang around with Anita if she knows she has a bad influence on Meena?</p> <p>Meena adopts the Black Country accent when she is in Anita's presence. 'What yow dooing?' Why does Meena feel the need to alter her accent? Why doesn't she speak like this at home?</p> <p>When talking to the boys, Anita doesn't introduce Meena. Why do you think that is? How do you think Anita feels?</p> <p>'I suddenly realised that mama would not be exclusively mine for much longer'. What does this quotation suggest about the way Meena feels about the prospect of a new sibling?</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On return, Meena discovers her mother going into labour. 	118	<p>Why do you think Meena has lied throughout her childhood?</p> <p>See PPT for other activities</p>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anita and Meena form a gang comprising of local children. They spend time reading magazines and walking around Tollington. Anita encourages a peeing competition with the gang and makes a point of taking part. She then forces her sister Tracey to join in but after the rest of them make cruel jokes, Tracey runs off crying. Meena joins in but is shocked by the incident. Meena decides she wants to start wearing makeup like Anita in order to try and be noticed by boys. She fears, though, that boys will never look at her when she's with Anita and so writes to a magazine for some advice. Meena's dad talks to her about changes he has seen in her behaviour. Meena's cousins come over and are shocked by her new behaviour. Meena steals a charity box from Mr Ormerod's shop to pay for some sweets that she was going to steal before he came out of the back. When Meena, Pinky and Baby return home, Mr Ormerod comes to accuse the girls of stealing. Meena blames Pinky and Baby who are taken home and punished. 	139 143 145 146 155	<p>Is Anita making Meena behave differently, or is Meena just being the person she's always wanted to be?</p> <p>The boys are being mean about Tracey. As her sister, would you expect Anita to stick up for her or to side with the boys? What did Anita do? Why did she do this?</p> <p>Why does Meena not want Anita to know about the letter she is sending?</p> <p>'Meena seems to be confused by her identity. She doesn't seem to know who she is anymore'. Do you agree with the statement? Why?</p> <p>What do Pinky and Baby think of Anita and Meena? How do you know?</p> <p>See PPT for other activities</p>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meena goes to the village fete, hosted by the Pembridges. She upsets her mother when she suggests her brother should go to an orphanage. Meena goes to the fair and overhears Sam being racist. She is even more offended that it was Sam who made these comments - she thought he liked her and hasn't ever been racist towards her before. Meena sees the girls walk past her house in the morning but they do not call for her. Meena's dad tells her that her grandmother is coming over to stay with them for a while to help out her mother. 	181 193 195 198	<p>Meena tells us that her dad likes gambling. What are the problems with gambling?</p> <p>What incident has offended Meena on this page? Why does she feel even more betrayed that it was Sam who made the comment? How should Anita have reacted in this situation? Is Meena surprised by her lack of sympathy? Why does Meena call Anita a 'cow'?</p> <p>'My feet had suddenly gone icy cold.' What does this quotation suggest about Meena's feelings towards her grandmother?</p>

			See PPT for other activities
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meena's grandmother arrives and refers to Meena as 'junglee' showing she thinks Meena is a wild child. ● Meena spends quite a lot of time with her grandmother and her relationship with her brother really improves. ● Meena realises that she needs to pass the 11+ exams so that she can avoid going to the same high school as Anita. ● Meena is unwell but still manages to ask her father if she can play with Anita the day later. Her father tells her she needs to be better before she can do anything. ● Meena's grandmother climbs into bed with Meena and tells her stories about her life in India. 	<p>200</p> <p>215</p> <p>231</p>	<p>Should Meena take her grandmother's nickname of 'junglee' as a compliment?</p> <p>What has Meena realised on this page? Could this be the start of a change in her?</p> <p>Why do you think Meena's grandmother tells her stories about her life back in India?</p> <p>What does she want Meena to know?</p> <p>See PPT for other activities</p>
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meena calls for Anita but Tracy tells her she is already with the horse. ● Fat Sally and Anita have a fight which leaves Anita with bald patches and Sally with a cut face. ● The dog is run over and all of them gather around it. Hairy Ned arrives coincidentally and takes the dog in the back of his car. ● Meena goes home and asks for a vegetarian meal that lunchtime. 	<p>237</p> <p>242</p>	<p>Why would Meena want to be seen as Anita's equal? Has Meena got it in her to be as nasty as Anita?</p> <p>Towards the bottom of this page, Meena becomes quite reflective. How would you describe the ways she feels for Anita at this point?</p> <p>See PPT for other activities</p>
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Anita tells Meena that her mum has left her to go and live with a man elsewhere. ● In order to comfort her, Meena tried to give her a hug and a kiss on the cheek. This reaction is not well received by Anita who pushes her away and asks her if she is a lesbian. ● When Meena tells her parents about Anita's mum, they ask Meena to tell Anita she is welcome to come for tea any time. ● Anita takes them up on the offer immediately. Rather than speaking to each other around the dinner table, she is more interested in watching Top Of The Pops. ● Anita tries to leave the house with some of Meena's things. Meena's mum tells her to go back upstairs and leave them there. Meena is waiting for the confrontation but Anita obeys. 	<p>247</p> <p>249</p> <p>252</p> <p>258</p>	<p>Why does Anita react so forcefully against Meena comforting her?</p> <p>Why is Meena's father upset?</p> <p>Is Anita's behaviour rude, or does she not know any better?</p> <p>How does Meena expect Anita to react when she is told she can't leave the house with some of Meena's things? Why do you think Anita doesn't cause a fuss?</p> <p>See PPT for other activities</p>

<p>11</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meena’s father has been given a promotion. Meena suggests that they go on a trip to India with their extra money. ● Meena’s brother begins to say some words which they are all really pleased about. ● Meena spends a lot of her summer holidays with Anita, Tracy and they horse. ● The local primary school is knocked down. All the people in the village run out to see what the commotion is and realise it’s being filmed by the BBC. ● Sam rides into the camera shot and shouts out a racist comment that really upsets Meena. ● After hearing Anita was involved with the attack on the Indian man in Tollington, she climbed onto the horse for the first time but ended up falling off and breaking her leg. 	<p>263</p> <p>264</p> <p>265</p>	<p>Why does Meena find it strange that her dad called India, ‘home’?</p> <p>Why does Meena tie a piece of string around her wrist?</p> <p>How is Anita’s reaction to her mum leaving different to Tracey’s? Why do you think this is?</p>
<p>12</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meena is told she is going to be in hospital for quite a while due to the severity of the break. ● Her parents visit but she really wants to see Anita, even though she wasn’t remotely concerned when Meena broke her leg. ● Meena decides that she wants to try really hard to catch up with school work while she is in hospital so she has a change of passing the 11+. ● Meena finds out her grandmother is going back to India. ● Meena returns home and finds out afterwards that her friend from hospital, Robert has died. 	<p>282</p> <p>284</p> <p>288</p>	<p>Describe Meena’s feelings on this page.</p> <p>Why would Meena want to see Anita when she clearly isn’t concerned about her?</p> <p>What has brought about the change in Meena? Meena tells us she broke her leg deliberately. Why did she do this?</p> <p>Why does Meena not show how upset and angry she is when she find out her grandmother is going back to India? Would Meena have reacted like this in the past? What’s changed?</p>
<p>13</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meena gets her cast off - one leg is shorter than the other. The doctors explain that it’s normal and it will grow to match her other. ● Meena got a bike for Christmas and decided to give it a ride. ● She sees Tracey who asks Meena to speak to Anita about her relationship with Sam. Meena tells Tracey that she doesn’t want to be friends with Anita 	<p>301</p> <p>314</p>	<p>Tracey is usually a fairly quiet character, forever in Anita’s shadow. Here, she is very very vocal about Anita’s relationship with Sam. What do you think has caused this change in her character?</p> <p>Why did Meena kiss Sam? What did she hope that it would make him think/feel?</p>

	<p>anymore.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Meena's parents have to go to the hospital as Meena's uncle had a heart attack. Meena is left alone revising.● Tracey comes to the door to get Meena's help. She takes her to the place what Sam is being aggressive and assaulting Anita. Tracey runs at Sam.● Sam sees Meena. Meena asks him why he is so racist but he claims that all the comments that he makes weren't towards her.● Tracey ends up in the pond but she can't swim.● At the end of the novel, Meena and her parents leave Tollington to start a new life in Wolverhampton.	<p>327</p>	<p>What do you think Meena's mum was going to suggest happened to the necklace?</p>
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