Your notes

GCSE English Literature: revision notes

Anita and Me

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Plot

- The adult Meena Kumar looks back on her childhood in the early 1970s in Tollington, a former mining village near Wolverhampton, where hers is the only Punjabi family.
- Meena longs to fit in and becomes fascinated by Anita Rutter, a tough, older girl who leads the local children. Meena tells lies and sometimes steals as she tries to prove herself.
- Her grandmother, Nanima, comes from India to help after Meena's baby brother, Sunil, is born. Nanima helps Meena feel proud of her Punjabi **heritage**.
- **Racism** in the village grows. Sam Lowbridge, a local youth, makes racist remarks, and Meena later learns that Anita was with Sam's gang when an Asian man was attacked.
- Meena is badly hurt in an accident and spends time in hospital, where she befriends a boy called Robert, who dies. She works hard, passes the eleven-plus exam for grammar school, grows apart from Anita, and her family leaves Tollington.

Themes

- **Identity** and belonging, friendship, **racism**, growing up, family, and class and community.

Context

- Meera Syal published the novel in 1996. It is **semi-autobiographical**, drawing on her own childhood in a Black Country mining village.

- Many families came to Britain from India and Pakistan in the 1950s and 1960s. Meena's parents lived through the **Partition** of India in 1947. Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech (1968) stirred up anti-immigrant feeling, and racist attacks were common in the 1970s.

Narrative voice

- It is a **bildungsroman**, told in the first person by an older Meena looking back. This mixes a child's view with adult understanding and humour, showing how much she has grown.

How to get top marks

- Use the narrative voice. Adult Meena looks back at her younger self, so she can both feel things and judge them.
- Have a big idea about **identity**: Meena is growing up between two cultures in a 1970s village, and learning who she is.
- Write about **racism** in Tollington through specific moments that change how Meena sees Anita.

Key terms

Bildungsroman	A story about a character growing up.
Semi-autobiographical	Partly based on the author's own life.
Identity	The sense of who you are and where you belong.
Racism	Prejudice or discrimination against people because of their race.
Partition	The division of British India into India and Pakistan in 1947.
Heritage	The culture and traditions passed down in a family or community.
First-person narrator	A narrator who tells their own story using 'I'.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Who narrates Anita and Me?
2. Where is the novel set?
3. When is the novel set?
4. Why is Meena drawn to Anita?
5. Who comes from India to stay with Meena's family?
6. How does Nanima affect Meena?
7. What role does Sam Lowbridge play?

Your notes

8. Which exam does Meena pass?

Answers

1. Meena, looking back on her childhood
2. Tollington, a former mining village near Wolverhampton
3. The early 1970s
4. Anita is tough and confident, and leads the local girls
5. Nanima, her grandmother
6. She helps Meena feel proud of her Punjabi heritage
7. He shows the growing racism in the village
8. The eleven-plus

What to do next

Practise 12 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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