Your notes

GCSE English Literature: revision notes

Western Lane

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Plot

- England, in the 1980s. Gopi, aged 11, tells the story of her British **Gujarati** Jain family after her mother (Ma) has died. She lives with her father (Pa) and her older sisters, Khush (13) and Mona (15).
- Pa is struggling to cope, and Auntie Ranjan in Edinburgh says the girls are "too wild" and offers to take one of them. Pa starts the three girls on a hard squash training regime at Western Lane, the local sports centre. Gopi, the best player, trains with Ged, a shy boy with a slight stammer, and they enter a junior tournament.
- As Pa misses more work, Mona runs the house and takes a job at a hair salon. On a trip to a funfair in Leicester, the sisters fight. In an angry game, Gopi hits Pa in the face with the ball, and Ged's mother, Linda, stops Ged training with her for a while. Pa is heard talking to Ma at night, so Gopi phones Uncle Pavan.
- Pavan and Ranjan visit, and Pa tells Gopi she can live with them in Edinburgh. She goes. At the tournament in Durham, Gopi wins the final, with Pa and her sisters there. The novel ends with Pavan remembering Pa and Ma while Gopi listens from the balcony.

Characters

- Gopi: the **narrator**. Grieving, loyal and quiet; squash is how she stays close to Pa. She grows up through the novel, including her first period and her shy feelings for Ged.
- Pa: loving but lost in **grief**. He can't talk about his feelings or accept help, so he pours his energy into squash with his daughters.
- Mona: the eldest, who takes on the role of mother, covers for Pa and keeps up the appearance that the family is coping. Khush: the middle sister, who misses Ma and talks to her at night on the landing; she has a temper and fights Mona.

- Ged: kind and shy; his friendship with Gopi grows through training. Auntie Ranjan: strict about how girls should behave, but kind. Uncle Pavan: gentle and open about **grief**, he helps Pa and Gopi to talk.

Themes and context

- Loss and **grief**: the centre of the novel. The family are united by Ma's death but each grieves differently and alone; Pa's **grief** is silent.
- Family and relationships: the sisters support and defend each other, and squash becomes Pa's way of guiding his daughters.
- Growing up: Gopi and Ged mature, and Mona has to grow up too fast. Winning the tournament can be read as Gopi moving towards becoming a young woman.
- Identity and belonging: the girls are of Indian heritage growing up in England, keeping Jain and **Gujarati** traditions (Diwali, **Gujarati** school, food) while facing racism and others' disapproval of their friendships. Social expectations of women are shown through Ranjan's views and Mona's role.

Form, structure and language

- A short novel published in 2023, Chetna Maroo's first. It was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. Maroo was born in Kenya and lives in London.
- Told in the first person by Gopi, in eight chapters. Each chapter opens with a paragraph about squash, so the game frames everything.
- Quiet, restrained writing: much of the feeling is left unsaid, matching a family that can't talk about its **grief**. The squash court, with its repeated drills, is a place of control and discipline when life feels out of control.

Key quotations

- Ranjan says the girls are "too wild", which shows the social expectations placed on them.
- Ged asks Gopi whether she has thought about "what happens after this", which hints at growing up and change.

Key terms

Narrator	The character who tells the story; here, Gopi.
Grief	Deep sorrow after someone dies.
Restraint	Holding back emotion, so feelings are shown through small details rather than stated.
Jainism	An Indian religion; Gopi's family are Jain.
Gujarati	The language and culture of Gujarat in India; the sisters go to Gujarati school.
Motif	An image or idea that keeps coming back, such as squash in this novel.

Your notes

Quick questions

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

1. Who narrates Western Lane?
2. Which sport does Pa train his daughters in?
3. What has happened to the sisters' mother before the novel begins?
4. Where do Auntie Ranjan and Uncle Pavan live?
5. Who does Gopi train with at Western Lane?
6. What does Mona do as Pa struggles to work?
7. What happens in Gopi's angry game with Pa?
8. Where is the squash tournament held?

Answers

1. Gopi, the youngest sister
2. Squash
3. She has died
4. Edinburgh
5. Ged
6. Runs the house and takes a job at a hair salon
7. She hits him in the face with the ball
8. Durham

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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