

Annie on My Mind Study Guide

Annie on My Mind by Nancy Garden

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Contents

Annie on My Mind Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1-2.....	6
3-4.....	8
Chapter 5-6.....	10
Chapters 7-8.....	12
Chapter 9-10.....	14
Chapters 11-12.....	16
Chapters 13-14.....	17
Chapters 15-16.....	19
Chapters 17-18.....	21
Characters.....	23
Objects/Places.....	28
Themes.....	31
Style.....	33
Quotes.....	36
Topics for Discussion.....	38



Plot Summary

Liza chronicles her love affair with a girl called Annie. Only seventeen and largely in an environment that doesn't accept homosexuality, they initially have to hide away their feelings. When they are eventually exposed however, it only makes them stronger and more determined to spend their lives together.

Annie and Liza first meet at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. They hit it off immediately, entertaining some children with a fake duel in the American Wing. Before they part, they exchange telephone numbers.

At her private school called Foster's, Liza attends the opening of her friend Sally's ear-piercing business. As school president, Liza is slightly taken aback at the blood around Jenny Piccolo's ear, but is happy to see Sally has taken all the right precautions. She has alcohol to sterilize the needle, ice to numb the ear, and a potato to stop the needle going in too far. Everything looked in order and so she is surprised when a freshman approaches her later in the corridor to tell Liza that the headmistress Mrs. Poindexter wants to see her in connection with Sally's ear piercing.

Mrs. Poindexter tells Liza that she has breached the reporting rule. Basically she saw Sally doing something wrong and yet failed to report it. As school president that is not good enough and she tells Liza that she will have to attend a student council meeting to find out her fate. It could be worse than normal because the school is looking for financiers and such an incident could scare away potential investors. In fact, Jenny, the girl whose ear was infected, is the daughter of Mr. Piccolo who is one of the school's biggest supporters.

Back at home Liza is delighted to hear her friend Annie has rang. She immediately rings her back and the two girls arrange to meet at the Cloisters on Saturday.

At Liza's hearing, the school decide to suspend both her and Sally for one week. After that week Ms. Poindexter says she will put Liza's position school president to a vote of confidence.

Liza's parent's opinion of her suspension differs. Liza's father think Liza should have known better and certainly better than Sally, who he refers to as a twit. Liza's mother's opinion is more measured. She feels that the school has dealt with Liza too harshly. After all what did she really do that was that wrong?

Annie's opinion differs even more. At the meeting at the Cloisters, she tells Liza that she has never heard of anything so ridiculous. She attends a public school and they have problems everyday with drugs and violence where ear piercing would be seen as nothing. Liza agrees to visit Annie's school during her suspension.

Two visits to Annie's school open Liza's eyes to another reality. During her first visit, she is stopped by security at the door who want to know why she isn't at school. When



Annie tells them she is suspended, they ask her to leave immediately. The second time Annie manages to sneak her into the cafeteria. Here Liza is shocked to see a boy swinging a bike chain around his head. Annie tells her it is normal behavior and as she can see most kids are ignoring him.

Back at her own school Liza is struggling to cope. On her first day she is reelected as school president, the students reward her with a warm round of applause, and Sally gives a rather strange speech. She says that she regrets her actions and to make it up she would like to raise funds for the school. Liza can't help but feel that the school has somehow forced Sally into it. Angry, she decides to phone Annie - her line back to reality.

Annie shows Liza a letter that she has written for her. She tells Liza though she is gay and in love with her, she doesn't want to pressurize Liza into anything she doesn't want or is not ready for. Liza tells her that she is not pressurizing her into anything. She is not only confident she is gay, but that she can return Annie's love.

Annie and Liza relationship deepens. They enjoy a romantic meal at an Italian restaurant and give each other gold rings as Christmas presents. The only problem is that soon as one tries to touch the other the other turns away. Their frustration builds into their first argument, but also clears the air. Eventually they agree to stop running away from their feelings.

Liza agrees to look after her teacher's - Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson - cats while they are on holiday. It is the first time that she has had a space to her own and sees it as the perfect opportunity for her and Annie to spend some private time together.

Every morning Annie and Liza meet at the house for breakfast and coffee. One day Annie works out from the books on their shelves that Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson are gay. The discovery liberalizes the two girls and after a fantasy duel wearing saucepans as helmets, they fall onto Ms. Steven and Ms. Widmer's bed and kiss. Much later they are woken up by a loud knock at the door.

Liza opens the door to her friend Sally and her very religious teacher Ms. Baxter. Ms. Baxter brushes past Liza and seeing Annie upstairs demands she comes down while she searches through the bedrooms. What Ms. Baxter finds shocks her and when moments later Ms. Stevenson and Ms. Widmer are standing goggle eyed in the doorway, she accuses them with of interfering with minors. Before she leaves with Sally, she tells Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson that she will be reporting them to the school.

Liza has no choice but to tell her parents about her sexuality. Her mother takes it badly, but her father is more supportive. Together he says they will go to Liza's hearing which will take place the following week.

It doesn't take long for the board of trustees to realize that Liza's hearing is a farce. As the red haired woman says it has nothing to do with the school whether Liza is gay or not. The more serious matter, she says, is the teacher's influence on the other students.



A week later Liza is reinstated at school, but Ms. Stevenson and Ms. Widmer have been sacked.

Annie and Liza visit Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson at their home. Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson tell them they are retiring to their country home where they will spend their time painting and writing. In fact they tell Annie and Liza that their dismissal was probably the best thing that could have happened. They are also very supportive of Annie and Liza's relationship, telling them not to worry about what others think and say. They will always have each other.

Liza calls Annie from her university. They haven't spoken in months, but arrange to see each other during the holidays.



Chapters 1-2

Chapters 1-2 Summary

On a rainy November day, Liza writes a letter to her friend Annie. She tells her how much she misses her and remembers the times they had together. She apologizes for not replying to her letters, but she didn't quite know what to say. Even as she writes, she knows she is not going to post the letter.

Exactly a year earlier, Liza visited the Metropolitan Art museum to research a school project on solar energy. It wasn't unusual for Liza to visit museums - her dream was to become an architect and so from her an early age she had set out to study all the old styles.

In the American Wing of the Museum she hears someone singing and turns to see a 17-year-old girl, the same age as her, with long black hair and a small child like nose, wearing a cape. She looks slightly bizarre, but nonetheless interesting and Liza can't stop herself from asking her her name. My name is Annie she replies.

Minutes later the two girls are in the room that contains the Tower of Dendur. Again Annie shows her strange side by bowing at the picture as if she is standing in front of some spiritual artifact. Liza is embarrassed especially since people are looking at them, but instead of walking away she quickly leads Annie to the Hall of Arms where, bar a couple of young boys at one end of the room, the section is empty. Annie takes advantage by pretending to draw a sword and screaming at Liza that she is seeking revenge for Liza unhorsing her. This time Liza laughs at her antics and pulls out her own imaginary sword. The two girls duel, shouting insults each other. Only the intervention of a security guard breaks up the fun.

Before they part Liza and Annie exchange telephone numbers.

The next day Liza leaves her brownstone house in the Heights in New York with her brother Chad to walk to school. Halfway there Chad turns on her angrily, telling her she hasn't listened to a word he has said for the last ten minutes. She must be in love, he taunts.

While she puts her things in her locker, Liza sees a sign on a door written by her friend Sally Jarrell advertising ear piercing for \$1.50 per hole. Liza says at that point Sally was her favorite person at school. Like her Sally doesn't quite fit in. Liza is the school president, and reasonably popular, but doesn't feel she has any close friends. In those terms Sally's outsider mentality at least makes her life at school tolerable.

When Liza enters Sally's ear piercing clinic during break, Sally is piercing Jenny Piccolo's ears. There is a lot of blood, but as school president Liza is happy to see that Sally has taken all the right precautions. She is using alcohol to sterilize the needled, ice



to numb the pain and a potato to stop the needles from going in too far. As far as Liza is concerned everything is in order.

Later that day, Liza is talking to her teacher Ms. Stevenson when a freshman comes up to tell Liza that the headmistress Mrs. Poindexter wants to see her. The freshman tells her that she saw Jenny come out of the nursing office with her father and go straight into Mrs. Poindexter's office. She thinks it is connected to what Mrs. Poindexter wants to talk about with Liza.

Chapters 1-2 Analysis

In this opening section, Liza meets Annie for the first time. The way she describes the meeting, apart from the understandable lapse towards the end, immediately shows the honesty that she will display throughout. Instead of describing her meeting as love at first sight, which would be understandable considering it is told in flashback, she admits she found Annie a little embarrassing. When Annie bows her head in the tower room, she wants to run away.

The novel is also about being honest with your feelings. Once Liza opens up to Annie, she finds that she can take her place she hasn't been since her childhood. In this section, Annie and Liza pretend to duel for the hand of a maiden.

Liza likes Sally for the same reasons she likes Annie. In this section she describes her as one of the few people in the school who is an individual. Sally's descent from there into the school's most pious student proves just how difficult it is to keep one's identity.

If Liza was not such a strong character, she may have gone the same way. Initially Liza tries to cover the difference she feels by accepting the role as school president - a role that gives her an excuse to distance herself from the other students. It works until she is faced with her first problem at the school council meeting.



3-4

3-4 Summary

Liza enters Mrs. Poindexter's office. It is a surprising ugly space - the plain walls and empty desk contribute to a dry, cold atmosphere one doesn't need to be surrounded by when one is visiting the headmistress. Mrs. Poindexter while not a formidable figure is a stickler for the rules and immediately she questions Liza on why she did not report Sally for ear piercing.

According to Mrs. Poindexter Liza has breached the school's reporting rule. Namely that if you see a student doing something against the rules then you should report them immediately. In her defense Liza tells her that she didn't think Sally was doing anyone any harm - she took all the right precautions and it wasn't like she was forcing them to have their ears pierced.

Mrs. Poindexter is not impressed, but admits the situation has created more problems than just Liza breaking one of the school rules. Foster's, she says, is struggling financially. Not only could they do without the bad press, which Jenny's ear infection could generate, but Jenny's father Mr. Piccolo is the main person behind their current campaign to generate more funds. As president Liza has put the campaign in jeopardy. It is a serious matter and on Friday, they will hold a student's council to decide Liza and Sally's fates.

When Liza finally arrives home, she sees, to her delight, a note from her mother saying someone called Annie called. Liza dials her number and the two girls arrange to meet at the Cloisters on Saturday.

Liza and Sally attend the disciplinary hearing. They are usually chaired by the school president, which is Liza, but in this special case a girl called Angela is in charge. Or she is supposed to be. Mrs. Poindexter is always the one in control of the meetings. Even when Angela tries to say something she interrupts and sometimes contradicts her. Liza knows how Angela must feel - Poindexter had done the same to her many times.

To show the seriousness of what Sally had done, Miss. Poindexter invites Jenny into the room. Despite that Jenny's ears are swollen and a little bloodied, Liza sees she has been forced to come and looks a little apologetic about what she says - that Sally's actions have made her father think twice about helping the school. Sally bursts into tears, saying she is very sorry for actions. She never meant anything bad and she will do anything to make amends.

Nonetheless the council, at Poindexter's prompting, suspends Sally for infecting people's ears and Liza for a breach of the reporting rule. In addition, she tells Liza her position as school president will be put to a vote of confidence.



Liza is furious. She feels they are both being treated like criminals when they have done nothing particularly serious.

3-4 Analysis

At this point in the story, Annie and Liza's relationship has yet to get serious and they are still fully concentrated on their own lives. Liza for example is embroiled in her school hearing. It is this hearing that shows how empty and many ways ridiculous her life at the school has become.

In the hearing, Liza is suspended for breaking the school's reporting rule - a rule that states that students should report themselves or other people if they see them do anything wrong. To the reader this rule seems incredibly unfair and almost impossible to keep. For Liza it must have seemed like part of her life, until now. Suddenly, confronted with its consequences, she sees how ridiculous is it is.

It feels even more ridiculous when her father scolds her. In his opinion, Mrs. Poindexter was right to suspend her. She should have known better. Presented with such extreme opinions of such a minor incident, and by people whose opinion she should respect, she decides to call Annie - the only person she feels that understand her.

By the end of the section they have arranged to meet at the Cloisters.



Chapter 5-6

Chapter 5-6 Summary

Liza tells her parents that she has been suspended from school for a week. Her mother is very understanding, feeling, while Liza has made a mistake, the school is treating her unfairly. Her father takes a different point of view. He thinks Liza should have known better.

Liza meets Annie at the Cloisters. They are both excited to see each other and Annie tells her that she has been thinking about their first meeting all week. Liza has to admit that she has had other things on her mind and tells her about the suspension. Annie thinks the whole situation is ridiculous. She attends a public school and something like that, when the school has a problem with drugs and violence, would be seen as insignificant.

Later while the two share a picnic, Annie asks Liza if she thinks it is too much when she pretends to be other people. Liza says she loves it, and is delighted when Annie tells her that Liza is the first person she has met in New York that makes her want to act real. Her parents, both Italian, moved to New York from California and since then Annie has found it difficult to make friends. Liza, she says, is the first nice person she has met. If she isn't anything better during her suspension, she would like Liza to come to see her school. Liza thinks that is a great idea.

Back at home, Liza finds it difficult to cope with her suspension, particularly as her family keep bringing up the subject - sometimes in quite vindictive ways. One night her father reads an article about discipline problems in schools and Chad finds an article about a boy who broke into a school office after the school expelled him. Eventually she can't take anymore and leaves for a walk.

While looking onto the Hudson River, someone comes up from behind and grabs her. "Saved your life!" A voice says behind her. It is Annie. The two of them walk for awhile before heading back to Liza's house.

Annie stays for dinner. She gets on very well with Liza's parents, particularly her mother who she talks about music - Annie's favorite subject. At the end of the evening Liza's father, accompanied by Liza and Chad, drives Annie home.

Living in a poor looking apartment in a rough area, Annie tries to persuade them that they don't need to take her all the way to her door. Liza can see Annie is embarrassed, but knows her father at that time of night is right to take her all the way up.

The next day Liza gets an insight into Annie's everyday life. Visiting her school, she gets stopped by a couple of security guards who question why she would want to see the school and why she isn't at school herself. Liza admits that she has been suspended by



Fosters and the guards ask her to leave the premises. It is not until school finishes that Liza catches up with Annie.

Annie and Liza spend the rest of the day traveling back and forth on the ferry, pretending, on each journey, they are arriving in America for the first time. By the end of the evening they are holding hands under the stars.

Chapter 5-6 Analysis

In this section, Annie confirms the ridiculousness of the school's decision to suspend Liza. Annie attends a public at such an incident would be seen as nothing. Despite Annie's ability to drift into her own world the readers are beginning to see it is nothing more than a defense mechanism and that she knows more about the realities of life than Liza.

This is proved when Liza visits Annie's school. She is shocked to see security guards standing at the entrance and has no idea how to deal with them. She could have told them an innocent lie, but instead she opts for the truth (that she has been suspended) and the guards eject her from the premises.

While Annie shows Liza the reality of her life, Liza shows Annie that she doesn't have to be ashamed of it. When Annie for example is worried about showing Liza her apartment, Liza reassures her that she loves her apartment. To her it is a new and exciting world.

Both girls it seems have something to give to the other and that something could potentially make them grow into a better person.

The one thing they can't do as Liza is be ashamed of who they are. After they kiss for the first time the two girls promise to stop running away from their true feelings.



Chapters 7-8

Chapters 7-8 Summary

Annie finally sneaks Liza into her school. Liza finds it quite an experience. At lunch a boy begins to swing a chain above his head and a teacher tackles him to the floor before leading him away. Annie tells Liza the boy does the same thing almost every day and every day a teacher escorts him out of the hall. In fact, it has become so routine that no one takes notice of him anymore.

Afterwards the two girls visit the Botanical Gardens. Annie is enchanted. She has seen beautiful gardens in California, but didn't know such places existed in New York - Liza she says is making her see the city in a whole new light. With Annie occasionally running up to flowers, calling out their names and smelling them, the two girls happily skip through the garden.

Liza decides to visit Annie at her apartment with a present of an African flower. Annie grandmother Nana opens the door. She is an Italian woman and her English is slightly faltering, but she immediately takes to Liza who she says is responsible for finally putting a smile on her granddaughter's face.

Annie is not so pleased to see her friend and alone together in her room, she begins to cry. She tells Liza that she feels embarrassed that Liza has seen how her and her family lives. Additionally she has never really had a friend before - Liza is the first person she has felt comfortable with since she was much younger and hung out with a girl called Beverly. Annie tells Liza that they were so close that sometimes they would talk all night and kiss - "the way little girls sometimes do."

After thanksgiving dinner, Liza and her family are surprised to hear their doorbell. It is Annie and her father. Annie is standing there slightly embarrassed, but her father, a confident Sicilian, invites the family for a ride in his taxi. From inside the taxi Liza can see Nana waving to them. Liza's parents decline, but Liza is more than happy to come along. As Chad tells Annie before he closes the door - Annie's family are neat.

Liza and Annie's relationship takes another turn while they are sitting on the beach in Coney Island. Without thinking Liza puts her arm around Annie and kisses her. Both girls pull apart quickly and for a while don't know what to say. As soon as Liza gets up to throw away her garbage, however, Annie asks her to come back. Annie tells her that the kiss is alright with her and she hopes is alright with Liza. Liza is confused. She admits she is in love with Annie, but doesn't know if that means she is gay.

Liza returns to school. She finds it surreal. The first day she is reelected in as school president, the school giving her a warm round of applause. Sally gives a speech where she tells everyone that she is very sorry for what she did and would like, with her boyfriend, to raise funds for the school. What she says makes Liza feel uneasy - she



feels that Sally has been put up to something that deep down she has no interest in doing. The only thing she can think to do to give her back some sense of reality is to phone Annie.

At Annie's house, Annie shows Liza a letter she has written for her. She has written that she knows for herself that she is gay - she has always known that. What she is worried about is pressurizing Liza into a relationship. Putting down the letter Liza tells Annie she is not conflicted. She knows also that she is gay.

Chapters 7-8 Analysis

When Liza goes back to school, she starts to see things that perhaps she didn't see before. For example, she starts to notice how much control Poindexter has, in Liza's opinion, manipulating Sally into raising funds. Compared to her new found love for Annie it all feels like a surreal version of her life rather than a reality and she finds her calling Annie for reassurance.

In some ways, this is imbued with humor since most people would think Annie would be the last person someone would call to bring them back to earth. But this call symbolizes what Liza wants Annie to give her. She is perhaps not providing it for her at the moment, but she feels one day she will.

This is further reinforced when Annie shows Liza a letter she has written to Liza stating that she doesn't want to pressurize Annie into anything. For the first time Annie has done something that feels real and Liza responds by declaring that she too is gay.



Chapter 9-10

Chapter 9-10 Summary

Annie and Liza get their parents' permission to eat alone at an Italian restaurant that Annie knows. Sat In their own corner, lit by candle light, they have lovely, romantic evening. Annie recommends all the best dishes and, though they are underage, she manages to persuade the waiter to bring them a half bottle of wine. By the time they both arrive at their respective homes it is very late and their parents are both very angry.

Because of that night their parents refuse them permission to travel together to Vermont. They have a wonderful time at home anyway. One day in Central Park they help some younger kids and their older brother build a camp before moving off to spend some time alone.

They have both bought presents for each other for Christmas and sitting on a park bench they nervously hand each other their gift. Liza is the first to open hers. It is a gold ring that she had pointed out to Annie in an antique store. When Annie opens hers it is almost exactly the same present.

Annie and Liza are starting to feel so close that Liza says their relationship reminds her of a Plato story she once read. Plato said that a long time ago people were all attached to another half - some people were male and female, but others were male and male and woman and woman. The gods in a fit of anger split them up and ever since people have been trying to find their other half. Liza sees Annie as her other half.

The two girls start to find the physical attraction they feel towards each other difficult to cope with. They go so far, but always pull back. One day while they are washing dishes Liza holds Annie from behind, drawing her close. When Annie turns around to face her, however, Liza walks away.

Finally, their shyness turns into anger. At a museum, Liza talks so angrily to Annie that she storms off.

Liza is a very upset and for the next few days feels a sense of panic. She phones Annie's house, but Nana suggests she phones back when they are both in a better frame of mind. Liza agrees and the next day she waits for Annie outside her house. The two girls decide it is ridiculous to always be running away from each other and promise they will stop running away from their feelings.

A school meeting takes place at Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson's house to decide about how to raise funds for the Foster's School. Mrs. Poindexter reads out a letter from Mr. Piccolo. He states with college fees so expensive, parents are no longer so willing to fund private schools. His letter leads the group onto a conversation about public schools and how they are rampant with bad behavior. Liza disagrees she says that while private



school shield you from real life, public schools prepare you for it. After a long argument they decide to organize a student rally.

Chapter 9-10 Analysis

As the situation at Liza's school become increasingly farcical, her relationship with Annie deepens. Liza in particular begins to accept that she is gay and starts to read books on homosexuality. The problem they have is that they are failing to physically consummate their relationship. Everything is wonderful part from this one problem. Liza calls it shyness, but that it is perhaps more out of an embarrassment of who they. They both know that seventies society will find it difficult to accept that they are gay so part of them is still denying that it is true.

In the end however, the author represents it as a normal part of any relationship. Like in many healthy relationships the problem develops into argument, which then clears the air. The problem is still there, but they have taken the step of admitting the problem to each other, which can only strengthen their relationship.



Chapters 11-12

Chapters 11-12 Summary

It dawns on Liza that after the summer she and Annie will be attending different colleges. They may not have much more time left to spend together and what time they have left they need to make the most of it. Of course it is getting difficult to tiptoe around the issue with their parents. What they need is a private place of their own, so when Ms. Stevenson asks Liza to look after her cats and the house for a few days it proves a blessing. Finally the two girls have somewhere where they can act themselves.

Together in the house, Annie and Liza's relationship hit new levels. Every morning they have breakfast together and plan their futures. Their conversations are sometimes tinged with sadness. They not only know they may not have much longer together, but are still struggling to physically consummate their relationship.

Chapters 11-12 Analysis

Another problem that the two girls have to overcome is their tendency to drift into a fantasy world. In this respect, having Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson's house to themselves does not help them. Every morning they meet for breakfast, but it is not real. It is not their house. They are trespassing into someone else's life. One feels if they keep putting reality to one side, it will rise up against them.



Chapters 13-14

Chapters 13-14 Summary

For the first time since entering Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson's house, Annie decides to venture upstairs. What she finds will change their lives forever. Shouting for Liza to join her, she excitedly shows her Ms. Stevenson and Ms. Widmer's bookcase. It is full of literature on homosexuality. Annie and Liza look at each other in surprise - Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stephenson are like them.

The discovery leads to a discussion about how Liza and Annie should runaway together. As it turns it is not a serious idea. Both girls balk at the idea of telling their parents and both girls chide the other for being gutless. Annie says her parents and her grandmother, Sicilains, could never understand while Liza says her parents wouldn't exactly be happy with the idea either. In the end they decide, that more than anything they would like to spend the night together in the house.

Initially the idea is better than the reality. They want to touch and hold each other, but can't bring themselves to do in someone else's house. Instead they try to forget themselves by reading from King Arthur. First Annie acts a story, mustering all the theatrics she can, and then Liza takes her turn. Midway through Liza's story the two of them start acting out their favorite fantasy of dueling over a maiden. They go so far into it that they soon forget where they are and begin battling on the staircase wearing saucepans as helmets and using metal trays as shields. The game continues on the landing and then eventually into the bedroom where they fall onto the bed giggling. When Liza sees Annie's hair has fallen across her face she brushes it away and then kisses her. Annie kisses her back and then "the rest of our shyness together just vanished."

After what seemed a very long time, the two girls are woken up by a knock on the front door.

Annie tells Liza to stay in the room and she would have agreed if the person hadn't screamed if she they didn't open up she was calling the police. Telling Annie to stay where she is, Liza puts on her clothes, walks downstairs and opens the door. On the Porch gaping at her half dressed, are Ms. Baxter and Sally.

Ms. Baxter is initially concerned if Liza is alright, but then seeing the light on upstairs she brushes past her. At this point Annie tries to creep into another room, but Ms. Baxter sees her and orders her downstairs. Annie eventually does as she asks and stands helplessly with Liza, grasping her hand as Ms. Baxter walks through the bedrooms. In each room they hear her say words says as "dear lord". When she eventually comes down she is looking more righteous than other, claiming "Sodom and gormarraah are around us." It is this point that Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson arrive home.



Initially perplexed at the presence at so many people, Ms. Baxter's accusations send Ms. Stevenson, into a fury she has to try very hard to control. Ms. Baxter tells them she had always suspected they were gay, but to be presented with the facts so brutally is very hard for her to take - goodness knows what Sally must think. Obviously she claims they have already polluted the minds of Annie and Liza. Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson shepherd both Ms. Baxter and Sally out of the house just as Ms. Baxter is threatening to report the incident to the school.

As soon as they are gone, Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson turn their attention on Annie and Liza. Ms. Stevenson in particular is furious, feeling that Liza betrayed their trust. Eventually Ms. Widmer persuades her to calm down. She says they are currently too angry to discuss the matter in a rational way and suggests that Annie and Liza come back the next day for lunch. By then however, they would have had time to calm down.

Chapters 13-14 Analysis

In this section, Annie and Liza descend so much into a fantasy world they forget where they are. The trigger is seeing the homosexual literature on Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson's shelves. Finally they have found a couple like themselves and that knowledge releases all their tension.

After a fantasy battle through the house, they fall on Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson and kiss. Interestingly the most intimate moment in the book - consummating their relationship - the author decides not to describe. It is as if she wants to leave it a private moment between the two girls.

Once again, however, their descent into fantasy puts them into trouble. When they finally wake up, someone is banging on the door.



Chapters 15-16

Chapters 15-16 Summary

The next day both Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson are in a calmer frame of mind. Ms. Stevenson states while she is still angry with Liza, Ms. Widmer had helped her understand what it was like when they first met at seventeen. If they had been given a house to themselves at their age, they may well have done the same thing. She stresses, however, that they all have a rocky road ahead. They have no doubt that Ms. Baxter will report them all to the school -at least themselves and Liza - and it is likely to cause a scandal. They suggest, while it will be difficult, that Liza tells her parents about her relationship with Annie and before they hear it from anyone else.

Walking back with Annie, Liza confesses she is terrified about having to tell her parents and thinks it is only fair that Annie does the same. Annie refuses. She says there is no need to tell her parents - they are unlikely to find out about the incident whereas Liza's parents most certainly will. Eventually, after a long argument, the two girls embrace, agreeing that they love each other and that the most important thing is that they stay together.

The next day at school, Miss Poindexter calls Liza to her office. In tears she tells Liza that due to the incident at Ms Widmer and Ms. Stevenson's house the school is suspending her. Pending a hearing she could also be expelled. As Liza leaves the office, Mrs. Poindexter picks up the phone to talk to Liza's parents.

Liza arrives home to see her mother in tears. She tells Liza she is upset, but not angry, telling her daughter she understands about such things. As a young girl she also had an adolescent crush on a friend called Judy. It is part of growing she claims and like most people she soon understood it for what it was - an experiment. She knows Liza is going through a similar phase but really it was nothing more than innocent fun. She looks at her daughter and asks her if it was more than that then she should tell her. For the first time in her life Liza lies to her mother.

Her father proves to be a tougher obstacle. He says he always thought that he was a liberal person who had no problem with anyone who was a little different. Confronted with his daughter's homosexuality, however, he is seriously starting to questions his ethics. Nonetheless, he says, he wants Liza to understand that she is still his daughter and no matter what he will always love her. With that said, he takes Liza and his wife out for lunch.

The day of the hearing arrives. Liza attends with her parents. Also in attendance is a red haired woman, a man called Mr. Turner, Mrs. Poindexter and Ms. Baxter. Ms. Stevenson and Ms. Widmer's hearing is separate from Liza's and they wait for their turn outside.



It is an emotionally charged meeting. Ms. Baxter speaks so angrily at her horror at seeing the girls half-naked, moments after the throes of their passions, that it prompts Liza's mother to stand up to defend her daughter. In the end Liza needs no help. Confronted with the evidence, the red haired woman says that the hearing is a farce. In this day and age Liza's sexuality should at the very least be tolerated. Mr. Turner agrees and believes that Mrs. Poindexter and Ms. Baxter's overtly pious views have wasted everyone's time. The point they decide is not Liza's sexuality, that is her own business, but the negative influence of the two teachers.

Liza is furious. She wants to scream that the Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson had no influence on her whatsoever. It is a simple matter of her being in love with someone. No more and no less than that.

Chapters 15-16 Analysis

In this section, Ms. Baxter brings the two girls back into the reality of what Liza now sees as a farcical and scary world. Ms. Baxter completely overreacts, stating lines like we have Sodom and Gomorrah all around us and when Ms. Stevenson and Ms. Widmer arrive threatens to report them to the school.

One wonders at this point about what kind of life Ms. Baxter has had. Why isn't she married? Is she just unhappy? It brings forward the theme that one is not truly happy until they have found their other half. In comparison, Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson seem an unbreakable force. Nothing that Ms. Baxter could do could hurt as long as they are together. The reader can see how well they work together when Ms. Baxter confronts them. Ms. Stevenson, the strong person in the relationship, is ready to protect everything she has. Ms. Widmer, the more sensitive one, has the ability to calm her down.

Liza's life hits new levels of farce at her hearing, especially when Ms. Baxter takes the stand. This time, however, the fantasy world of Foster's Academy has been broken by outsiders - The chairman Mr. Turner and a woman the author only refers to as the red-haired woman. They both agree that Mrs. Poindexter has overstepped her authority and the school has no right to question Liza's sexuality.

The incident show just how isolated from reality Foster's Academy has become.



Chapters 17-18

Chapters 17-18 Summary

Liza and Chad are watching the Mets on television when they hear the post arrive. Chad runs downstairs to pick it up, but he is soon calling for Liza to come down as well. A letter has arrived from the trustees' board - the verdict of the hearing. At this point Liza states she doesn't particularly want to go back to Foster's and would be relieved if they expelled her. The only problem is that an expulsion would go on her record, which could in turn delay her entrance to MIT. Nervously she opens the letter.

In the letter Mr. Turner explains that Liza is not only free to go back to Foster's, but, if she wants, she can keep her position as class president. They can see no reason whatsoever to punish her further.

It is Liza's first day back at school and she is understandably nervous. The first few people she meets, though misguided, are still trying to be kind. Perhaps the most misguided is Walt. He tells her that just because she is confused he still wants to be her friend, and if she wants he will help her overcome her problem. Liza thanks him, but tells him she can handle it on her own.

In general the girls' reaction is worse than the boys'. When Liza enters the bathroom, a girl brushing her hair, says in loud voice "hi Liza" and everyone but Liza leaves. Liza tries to hide her anger by telling herself that it is nice to have the bathroom to herself. She doesn't really believe it.

The nicest person to Liza is her friend Conn. After displaying a genuine happiness at seeing her back, he tells her that the boards of trustees have given Poindexter her notice for her bad judgement. She has to leave school at the end of the year. Liza can't help but feel pleased.

Liza's worse fears are confirmed when she discovers that Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson have not come back to school. Sally tells her that she spoke at their hearing, telling the board that Liza idolized Ms. Stevenson and that she had no doubt Ms. Stevenson had been an influence on Liza's behavior.

Liza and Annie visit Ms. Stevenson and Ms. Widmer at their house. They are surprised to see that the two teachers are moving out. Ms. Stevenson tells them it is of course hard for to have lost their jobs, but they still have each other and anyway they have been through a lot worse. Ms. Stevenson was once discharged from the army when they found love letters addressed to her from Ms. Widmer.

Ms. Stevenson tells Liza and Annie that people can be ignorant, but there is nothing you can do but get on with your own lives. In this regard they have decided to retire to their home in the country side. They suggest that Annie and Liza also rise above what people think and concentrate on finding their own happiness.



Back in the present, Liza decides to phone Annie. Amidst much tears the two girls decide to travel home together for Christmas.

Chapters 17-18 Analysis

The people's reaction to Liza's homosexuality brings up the question of how much people are influenced by what society says is wrong and what it is says is right. Interestingly the individuals in Liza's life, such as Conn, are only supportive of her. It is only the people that the author represents as not strong enough to have their own opinion who react negatively. Many of the problems come when people are standing in groups. When Liza walks into the girls' bathroom, the other girls all walk out. A while later in science class a group of students gather around in the hope they will hear about Liza's sex life.

A little later Liza and Annie visit Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson at their house. At this point the students can see that Ms. Stevenson and Ms. Widmer are basically older versions of Annie and Liza. Like Ms. Stevenson Liza is a strong person with a quick temper. Like Ms. Widmer Annie is a sensitive, dreamy type. Additional like Annie and Liza, Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson met when they were seventeen. In this respect they are the role models for the two younger girls.

In fact it is Ms. Widmer's words that help Liza decide that she needs to call Annie.



Characters

Liza

Liza is the novel's narrator. She claims she is a lonely person, though more out of choice than necessity, choosing to spend her time studying architecture. Her goal is to attend the architectural course at MIT.

It is while researching her solar project at the Metropolitan Museum that she meets Annie - the girl that changes her life forever. Annie helps Liza face up to her sexuality, which she eventually finds was the root of her feeling like an outsider.

Liza hints that before their meeting she hid herself behind her school activities at Foster's Academy. As school president, she ran the student council meetings and overlooked the behavior of the students.

For this reason the Foster's headmistress, Mrs. Poindexter, suspends Liza at the beginning of the novel for not reporting Sally Jarrett. According to Mrs. Poindexter for a school president to breach the school's reporting rule is unforgivable.

While one gets the feeling that before she met Annie she would have taken such punishment as something she deserved - simply as it was being handed down to her by a figure of authority - her blooming relationship with Annie gives her the confidence to question the verdict.

Annie feels disgusted that the school could suspend her for such a harmless act and through showing Liza her public school and her life, in comparison another world, she helps Liza forget about school altogether. By the end of the book all that really matters to Liza is their relationship.

It almost proves Liza's downfall. Liza and Annie's actions at Ms. Stevenson and Ms. Widmer's house expose her as a homosexual and cause Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson to lose their jobs.

In the end, however, everything works out well. While some people react badly to finding out she is a lesbian many others don't. The reality is that hiding her true self from people was a lot worse.

Annie

Liza represents Annie as a vulnerable girl whose music and imagination help her escape the reality of her everyday life, which in comparison to Liza's life is harsh.

Annie's family are immigrants from Sicily and her father has yet to make it in America. He first tried California, but then decided to try his luck in New York, moving his family to



one of the city's poorer areas. As Liza says Annie's family lives in an ugly yellow building in a street full of abandoned brownstones. In addition they have sent Annie to a public school full, according to Annie, of drugs and violence. The school even has security guards at its front entrance.

As an intelligent, sensitive girl, Annie finds the realities of her situation hard to deal with and feels embarrassed when she has to introduce Liza to her family. Compared to Liza's, she feels her home life is pathetic. It takes up a lot of Liza's energy to prove her otherwise.

Liza teaches Annie how to face up to her fears and not to be afraid of reality. It is a process that takes the whole book.

Many times Annie's fantasy world puts both girls into trouble. The first time is at the museum when a guard steps in to stop the two girls' fantasy duel. The second time is far more serious. When they play out a similar situation at Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson's house it results in the sacking of the two teachers and Liza having to tell her parents she is gay.

Interestingly Annie's actions have no repercussions on her own life, which sums up Liza and Annie's relationship. Liza represents Annie as a figure close to a lost orphan girl, suggesting she is too delicate to cope with what Liza goes through in the story. Annie, for example, claims that unlike Liza's parents, her parents could never understand that she is a homosexual.

There is no doubt that Annie is damaged goods, even when Liza calls Annie at the end of the story, one feels there are still issues in her life Annie needs to resolve.

Ms. Stevenson.

Ms. Stevenson is the art teacher at Foster's Academy. Though she possesses a harsh temper, Liza considers her one of the best teachers at the school and a person whose views everyone respects.

She is one of the few people able to stand up to Mrs. Poindexter. In the first student council meeting Liza hints that she even has some power over the headmistress, saying "Mrs. Poindexter looking at Ms. Stevenson as if trying to tell her that she was letting Angela run the meeting after all." and that "Ms. Stevenson got her to say the part about it not going on their records."

She particularly shows her strength of character after Ms. Baxter exposes her and Ms. Widmer as homosexuals. Talking to Annie and Liza, she says Ms. Widmer and her have had to hide their sexuality all their lives. The air force, she says, dismissed her after they found love letters in her room from Ms. Widmer. Now the school has dismissed them in similar circumstances she says that they are retiring to the country. They are not running away. Ms. Stevenson says in the country she will finally have the time to concentrate on her art.



At the end of the story, Sally claims that Liza idolizes Ms. Stevenson and that Ms. Stevenson influenced her decision to become a lesbian. While Sally's opinion is too blinkered to have any significance, there is no doubt that there was always something in Ms. Stevenson Liza identified with. And vice versa. In the last chapter the reader finds out that like Annie and Liza, Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson fell in love at 17.

Ms. Widmer

Ms. Widmer is the English teacher at Foster's Academy. Like her partner Ms. Stevenson she is popular with the students, described by Liza as one of the few teachers who could make poetry both interesting and fun. When, for example, Ms. Widmer gives the students homework, they may all let out a groan, but as Liza says it is not a genuine reaction. Everyone loves Ms. Widmer's classes.

Part of Ms. Widmer's charm is that she is a calm, thoughtful person - very different to her partner, the quick tempered Ms. Stevenson. For example when Ms. Stevenson is fuming over Liza's breach of trust, Ms. Widmer calms her down, reminding her of what they used to be like at the same age. At the end of the book, Ms. Widmer's philosophical advice to Annie and Liza proves invaluable.

In many ways she can be seen as an older version of Annie - dreamy and vulnerable and with an inclination to the arts. While Ms Widmer loves poetry for example, Annie loves music. Additionally. Ms. Stevenson is a reflection of Liza older self - strong and quick tempered. That Ms Widmer and Ms. Stevenson's relationship has lasted so long makes them the perfect role models for Liza and Annie.

Mrs. Poindexter.

Mrs Poindexter is the headmistress at Foster's Academy and every bit as controlling as that title would suggest. Though the student council meetings are supposed to be run by the students, she always has the final say. During Liza and Sally's hearing, Liza gives the reader is given the impression that though none of the other students agree with her decision there is nothing they can do.

On the surface Mrs. Poindexter often poor decision making comes from financial pressures. The school is in dire need of investors and she is paranoid that bad publicity such as Sally ea rpiercing incident could scare away investors. The reality however is that by suspending Liza and Sall, and also her reaction to Liza's homosexuality, is likely to cause more negative publicity than needed.

In the end a school hearing brought in by Ms. Poindexter to discuss the incident at Ms Stevenson and Ms. Widmer's house, decide that Ms. Poindexter is no longer up to the job as headmistress - her views are just too old fashioned. Liza for one is happy to hear that Ms. Poindexter will be leaving the school at the end of the year.



Ms. Baxter.

Liza represents Ms. Baxter, a teacher at Foster's Academy, as overtly pious and in many ways the antagonist of the novel. It is Ms. Baxter that exposes Ms. Stevenson and Ms. Widmer's relationship and Ms. Baxter turns Sally into a similarly pious person. Ms. Baxter claims that Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson are a bad influence on the children at school but from Liza's point of view it is Ms. Baxter's old fashioned and backward views that ia having the bad influence. With Mrs. Poindexter sacked, one feels feels, even hopes, that Foster's Academy will no longer have room for her type.

Sally.

From Liza's point of view, Sally changes from being one of the school's few individuals to being the most vehement and pious protestors of Liza's sexuality. Liza suggests Sally is unfairly influenced by Ms. Baxter, but certainly there has to be something in Sally that identifies with what Ms. Baxter's views. Certainly there is evidence early on that Sally is not the stong person Liza intially thought. After Mrs. Poindexter suspends her for the ear piercing incidet, Sally bursts into tears. She is then, it seems, easily forced into raising funds for the school, even though Liza thinks that she would prefer not to do it. It seems however that Sally is very impressionable.

Chad.

Chad is Liza's brother. A kind and loyal person, he is very supportive of his sister throughout her experiences.

Liza's father.

Liza's father is an honest man, who when he finds out his daughter is gay, admits that while he sees himself as very liberal, he struggles with the idea of Liza being a lesbian. Nonetheless, he pledges his full support.

Liza's Mother.

Liza's mother finds it more difficult than her husband to cope with her daughter's homosexuality and even refuses to believe it is true. She calls it an adolescent crush and remembering a similar relationship she had herself as a teenager. This raises the question if Liza's mother herself is attracted to women, but was too scared to accept it. She is certainly very defensive about the issue, particularly when she hears what Ms. Baxter has to say.

Nana

Nana is Annie's Sicilian grandmother. Though it is hard to know if she knows they are gay, she is very supportive of Annie and Liza's relationship.



Objects/Places

Foster's Academy

Foster's is a private school that Liza and Chad have attended since they were very young. Currently the school is having financial problems, which is the reason the headmistress Mrs. Poindexter is so sensitive about even the smallest of problems. She is afraid any type of scandal will frighten away potential investors.

Annie's School

Annie attends a public school that she claims is rife with drugs and violence. Two guards stand at the entrance ready to search anyone who comes through. When they hear that Liza has been suspended for example they refuse her entrance. Later, after Annie has sneaked her in, Liza witnesses a teacher tackling a boy who is swinging a metal chain around his head. According to Annie the boy does the same thing every day.

The Ferry

Annie and Liza travel back on forth on the Staten Island Ferry, pretending, each time, they are immigrants arriving in America. It continues until someone notices they have been riding the ferry for the last few hours.

Coney Island

On the beach on Coney Island, Annie and Liza kiss for the first time.

Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson's House

Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson's house is located in Cobble Hill in Brooklyn. It used to be considered a bad neighborhood, but now it very cosmopolitan. Liza likes the area because many types and not just one type live there. Liza thinks the house is just as nice. It is a three floor town house with heavy beamed ceilings that make some rooms look like a cave. Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson hold a school meeting here and Liza and Annie are caught in the throes of passion by Ms. Baxter when Liza is supposed to have been looking after Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson's cats.



Liza's Apartment

Liza lives in the heights - an area she describes as pretentious - with her parents and brother Chad. She says little about the apartment, but the reader can guess by the area it in that it is a large apartment where Liza feels comfortable spending a lot of time. Her bedroom is dedicated to architecture, a subject she feels great passion for.

Annie's Apartment

Annie lives in a poor, but identified part of New York in what Liza describes as an ugly yellow building surrounded by empty brownstones. When Liza comes over to see her, Annie is embarrassed to show her her room. It is mostly bare with only a few plants to brighten it up.

Annie's Letter

Annie writes a letter to Liza stating that she is gay and in love with her. However, whether Liza is gay or not, she says doesn't want to pressurize her into anything she would feel uncomfortable with. The letter helps Liza realize just how much she loves Annie.

The Metropolitan Museum

The first time they meet Annie and Liza are both looking around the Metropolitan Museum. In the American Wing they have a pretend duel before the security guards steps into break up the fun.

Botanical Gardens

Annie is delighted when Liza takes her to New York's Botanical Gardens. She tells her that she has no idea that New York contained such beauty and can't help running to each of her favorite flowers, smelling them.

Gold Rings

For Christmas Annie and Liza give each other gold rings.

Mrs. Poindexter's Office

Liza describes Ms. Poindexter's office as brown, depressing, and in desperate need of something to brighten it up. The only two times she enters is when Mrs. Poindexter

wants to discipline her for the incident in breaching the reporting rule and again when Ms. Baxter catches her with Annie.

The Parlor

The Parlor is the room where the student council takes place.



Themes

Finding Your Other Half

Half way through the story, Liza relates a story by Plato. Plato wrote that everyone used to be attached to another person called their other half, which could have been the same sex or the opposite sex. One day, the human race upset the Gods and so the Gods split each person apart. Since then it is said that the role of each human is to find his or her other half. Liza is very taken by this story, not only believing that Annie is her other half, but that it proves that it is ok to be gay.

It also suggests that Liza is one of the few people strong enough to go and find who is truly made for her. In this respect, the author represents other characters such as her mother and Ms. Baxter as much weaker. Liza's mother tells a story for example about how she once had a crush on a girl called Judy. She tries to dismiss it as an adolescent crush, but she is so defensive about it that one feels that it was much more. Ms. Baxter is so scared of her sexuality that she has never even married. Neither woman come across as happy.

The two happiest characters are Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson. They have sacrificed everything to be together and because of this have a true understanding of love and by extension life.

Although Ms. Poindexter does not seem happy there is a suggestion that it is because she has lost her other half- her husband. Liza and her parents' tolerance of her views support the idea that she was a much lighter person when he was alive.

Facing Up to Who You Are

Many of the weaker or unhappier characters have something they use to hide behind. Ms. Widmer hides behind her religion, Liza's mother hides behind her work and Ms. Poindexter hides behind her position as headmistress.

At the beginning of the story, Liza and Liza and Annie are also hiding their true selves. Annie hides behind her fantasy world and Liza hides it behind her position as school president. Their relationship brings them into a reality that they find is much more conducive for life. In fact through the stronger, characters they soon see that understanding and experiencing life is what makes one happy.

The stronger characters include Liza's father, Ms. Widmer, Nana and Ms. Stevenson. Each one of them are very honest with their views, even when it could it makes them look bad. For example Liza's father states that he always thought he was a liberal person, but confronted with his daughter's homosexuality he feels confused. This honesty allows him to work through his fears and in the end understand his daughter and homosexuality on a deeper level.



Nevertheless the author believes there is room for fantasy, only it has to be directed into something more useful. In this regard Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson lead the way by deciding to concentrate on poetry and art respectively.

These people have a huge influence on Annie and Liza. By the end of the book not only have both of them seemed to have grounded themselves, but Annie has substituted her fantasy world with music and Liza has substituted her world with architecture.

The Nature of love

The author takes a realistic view of love. According to the story finding the right person is not all romantic games. In fact she suggests it is that mindset that can often destroy a person. Ms. Widmer for example has developed the notion that one should only have a responsible relationship with someone of the opposite sex - anything other than that is evil. Despite her idea being increasingly at odds with modern society, she refuses to relinquish the idea - an idea that is obviously making her unhappy and bitter.

From the author's point of view the idea of love is for each person to support the other to achieve what they truly want from life. This cannot be achieved if either of the partners stays in their own world.

All of Annie's and Liza's problems occur when they both descend into Annie's powerful imagination. Things start to move forward when they start expressing their feelings. For example the letter Annie writes to Liza confessing her sexuality finally allows Liza to admit that she is also gay.

In these terms the author holds up Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson's relationship as the perfect example. Though very much in love, Ms. Widmer is unafraid to confront Ms. Stevenson about her anger. Ms. Stevenson, a very strong character, is not afraid to protect Ms. Widmer when she has to.

Together they give each other what the other lacks, allowing them to build their own empire. When the school board sacks them they are not as upset as perhaps a couple who concentrated only on their own interests. Both of them have helped the other develop their individual talent, which now they have been sacked, they can concentrate on developing further in their home in the country.



Style

Point of View

The novel starts in the third-person point of view and then continues from Liza's point of view as she tells the story of Annie and herself. It ends again in the third person.

Interestingly the sections from the third person represent Liza as more vulnerable than she represents herself in the first person. While in the third person, which occurs in present time, she is at university and perhaps more comfortable with who she is, in the first person point of view, though she knows she is different, she is always trying to fit in. In particular she accepts the role of school president. The rest of the first person point of view shows how she works herself up to the point where she fully confident in herself.

From this perspective, Liza's point of view never quite seduces the reader as it would if she was a more confident character throughout. The reader sees immediately how ridiculous the rules are at Foster's Academy and that Liza has the wrong idea about Sally. The reader is always one step ahead of Liza and cannot always believe how naive she is being.

It is Annie who shows Liza how ridiculous many elements of her life are. In particular she tells her no one in her school would have been punished for ear piercing. As their relationship becomes stronger so does Annie's point of view. By the end Liza represents herself as virtually unaffected by the school's opinion of her sexuality.

Setting

There story has many settings; Foster's Academy, the Metropolitan Museum, Annie's school, Liza's house, Annie's house, Brooklyn, New York, and many others.

Alot of the settings contract greatly from each other, showing first how much Liza needs to learn about the world and second the difference between her and Annie's upbringings. While Liza lives in a lovely neighborhood in the heights, Annie lives in a very rough area among abandoned buildings.

In this respect, Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson's house, located in what Liza describes as a multicultural neighborhood, something her neighborhood would love to be, is in between both of their worlds - a world that by the end of the book, the girls would love to inhabit. The time they spend there is the happiest times they experience.

Though they both go to very different schools the author represents both of their schools as oppressive. While Annie's school has security at its entrance, Liza's school has ridiculous rules anybody would find difficult to live by. Both places represents what the author seems to believe is a system that oppresses individuality.



The place with the most oppressive feel to it, however, is Mrs. Poindexter's office. Liza describes this room as very bland and ugly - both characteristics that reflect what goes on in there. It is here that Mrs. Poindexter subjects Liza to views that have nothing to do with modern society.

Language and Meaning

Mostly written in the first person, the language reflects Liza's feelings. When she is at school for example, it reflects her feelings of anger and frustration. When she is with Annie, whether they are having argument or flirting with each other, the author writes in a more passionate language. At these points he is more inclined to represent the setting as romantic. For example on the Staten ferry, Liza and Annie hold hands under the stars.

Occasionally when they are playing roles from the medieval times, Liza and Annie's dialogues becomes like King Arthur characters. This always represents their escape from reality and always ends with someone jolting them back into the real world. For example the security guard in the metropolitan museum.

This kind of dialogue becomes less and less as they slowly find out their true selves. By the end of the book their language is more direct. Though also quite urgent, reflecting their need to be with one another once more.

The language is particularly adept at reflecting the changes in the girls during the time they spend at Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson's house. As they become more comfortable they start talking like an old couple, making plans for their future. Though mostly it has no substance, it acts as the bridge between their old selves and their new selves.

By the time Ms. Baxter exposes them as lesbians, the two girls' language has become far more serious and grown up. It is no longer just about them. They are now more willing to let other people in.

Structure

Liza's story begins on the first day she meets Annie at the Metropolitan Museum in New York and ends with Liza have to deal with the ignorance of some of her school over her sexuality. By that time however, Liza has built the confidence to deal with it.

Her strength comes from her relationship with Annie. Starting off with showing Annie as someone who is quirky and a bit of an outsider, her character is slowly revealed until Liza realizes that she is, as the Plato story states, her lost half.

At this point, the story gives the two protagonists a private space where they can consummate their relationship. It proves to be the turning point of the story. Though they were both struggling with reality before, they are no passed it and their fantasies,



though fun, only create problems. In this respect, Ms. Widmer, their teacher, exposes them as homosexuals. At this point the writer introduces Ms. Widmer and Ms. Stevenson as their gurus.

Like them Ms. Stevenson and Ms. Widmer are gay and like them met at 17. Through sharing their experiences they help Annie and Liza get through their problem, eventually leading to Liza and Annie's reconciliation at the end.

As the book begins with Annie thinking about the reconciliation, the structure story also works as an argument as why she should contact Annie again. The reader can see, and at times, through Liza's brutal honesty, know that they are made for each other. If she doesn't phone back Annie she would only be running away. Running was something she did at the beginning of the novel and after having to face up to her parents and schoolmates, not something she can do by the end.

Fittingly after they have spent so much time reenacting the past, Liza contacts Annie by modern means. Finally, they are both ready to confront the modern world.



Quotes

"Annie, I still can't write, I guess, for I already know I'm not going to mail this" (p. 4).

"It was her eyes I noticed most. They were as black as her hair, and they looked as if there was more behind them than another person could possibly ever know" (p. 8).

"'But you're...' I stopped, realizing I was about to say beautiful - surprised at thinking it, and confused again. Annie's smile deepened as if she's heard my thought, but then she turned away. 'I should go,' she said. 'It's getting late'" (p. 14).

"If a student breaks a rule he or she is supposed to report himself or herself by writing his or her name and what rule he or she has broken on a piece of paper and putting it into the box next to Ms. Baxter's desk in the office" (p. 27).

"The infections were bad, sure. But Sally didn't set out to cause them. In fact, she did everything she could to prevent them. And she didn't force anyone to have their ears pierced. Sure, it was a dumb thing to do in the first place. But it wasn't - oh, I don't know, some kind of - of criminal thing, for God's sake" (p. 45).

"You must think I am an awful child," she said with her mouth full. "I forget most people don't like pretending that way after they're much older than seven" (p. 57).

"You see sometimes why I prefer white birds" (p. 80).

"Have you ever felt close to someone? So close that you can't understand why you and the other person have two separate bodies, two separate skins" (p. 91).

"Without thinking, I put my arm across her shoulders to warm her, and then before either of us knew what was happening, our arms were around each other and Annie's soft and gentle mouth was kissing mine" (p. 92).

"I couldn't think of anything else to say, either. Mostly I just wanted to put my arms around her, but at the same time I felt in awe of her-this was a whole new Annie, an Annie I hardly knew" (p. 114).

"It's in something Plato wrote...It says that...all people were really pairs of people, joined back to back, and that some of the pairs were man and man, some woman and woman...These double people went to war with the gods and the gods, to punish them, split them all in two. That's why some lovers are hetrosexual and some are homosexual" (p. 115).

"I went downstairs to Dad's encyclopedia and looked up HOMOSEXUALITY, but that didn't tell me much about any of the things I felt. What struck me most, though, was that, in that whole long article, the word "love" wasn't used even once" (p. 143).



"There's no need to pretend to be other people anymore, ever again, is there, Liza" (p. 159).

"One of us got up and pulled the shade down most of the way, and turned on a light in the hall. It made a wonderful faraway glow and touched Annie's smooth soft skin with gold. After a few minutes, I think most of the rest of our shyness with each other vanished" (p. 160).

"The "shambles," I realized, was because of the umbrellas and saucepans. And part of me wanted to laugh at that absurd line - "persons of similar persuasion;" it sounded like the equally absurd "persons of the Jewish persuasion;" "I am of the lesbian persuasion" (p.201)

"I want you to know I'm behind you all the way - I can understand Sally's reaction, but - well, I'm not going to desert a friend just because of a little - sex problem or anything. I mean, the way I figure it, it's just like any other handicap" (p. 217).

"I just wondered," she said smoothly, "if you could tell me, from a scientific standpoint, of course, just what it is that two girls do in bed" (p. 218).

"Don't punish yourself for people's ignorant reactions to what you are" (p. 232).

"Annie Ms. Widmer was right. Remember-about the truth making one free? Annie-I'm free now. I love you. I love you so much" (p. 234).



Topics for Discussion

What are the differences between public and private schooling? How have the two forms of education molded the two main characters in the novel?

How does Annie try to combat the guilt she feels at her sexuality? How does her relationship with Liza help her to see herself in a better light?

Give two examples of how religion and their old-fashioned morales affected Mrs. Poindexter and Ms Baxter's judgement. What does the way the author deals with these two characters suggest about what she feels about religion and old-fashioned attitudes?

How has society's views of homosexuality changed since the book was published in 1981? How would Foster's school deal with the incident today?

How have Ms. Stevenson and Ms. Widmer hard experiences molded them into the people they are in the book? What does this say about the effect hard and alienating experiences can have on a person's approach to life?

How does the story express the theme of finding your true self? How does it effect the characters that don't try to find who they are, but follow others?