

The Boston Girl Study Guide

The Boston Girl by Anita Diamant

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Plot Summary

“The Boston Girl” is a historical novel by Anita Diamant which takes the format of a casually-related oral autobiography from main character and principal protagonist Addie Baum, to her granddaughter, Ava, who is studying to be a rabbi.

Addie is born in 1900 to Jewish-Russian immigrant parents in Boston, Massachusetts. Her parents are very traditional, especially her mother. Her mother sees Addie’s two older sisters as aberrations: Betty lives on her own and works, and is very pro-American. Celia is beautiful and feminine but unmarried at 29. As Addie moves through her teenage years, she watches as Celia gets married and dies, and watches as Betty marries Celia’s widowed husband, and they thrive financially. Addie’s mother is not thrilled about the paths her daughters have followed in life, but is nevertheless thrilled when both of them get married. To their mother, there is no greater purpose for a woman other than to marry and bear children.

As a teenager, Addie falls in with a good group of friends at the library and begins working for Celia’s husband as a secretary in his factory. Most of the friends that Addie makes through her time at the library become lifelong friends, and they introduce her important and famous figures fighting for social change. At the same time, Addie moves into real estate with Celia’s husband, and then strikes out on her own, taking secretarial work at a newspaper.

At the newspaper, Addie later moves into writing and advocating for social issues, some of which eventually get her into trouble, and get her fired. Addie, however, is undaunted. She continues to write and advocate for social change, and continues to visit with her friends. In her mid-20s, Addie meets Aaron Metsky, a kind and gentle lawyer advocating for social reform, and the two quickly fall in love and become engaged. Their marriage is postponed for a while as Aaron finishes up his current spate of social work, and prepares to relocate to Boston in order to be with Addie.

In Boston, Addie’s mother is both delighted that Addie is going to be married, but also careful of her future son-in-law, as any good mother would be. Before the wedding, Addie’s mother has a heart-attack. Before she dies, Addie’s mother tells Addie that she is sorry if she has ever hurt Addie, and that she only ever wanted the best for her children. As a result, Addie and her mother reconnect and reconcile before she dies. Addie later marries Aaron. They have two granddaughters and five grandchildren. Aaron supports all of Addie’s endeavors.

Addie eventually writes a book about sexual experiences and pregnancy of girls which earns her a teaching position at Boston University. Aaron dies in the early 1980s, a staunch liberal Democrat, and Addie gives the account of the story of her life – what becomes the novel – to her granddaughter, Ava, in 1985.



Section 1, Pages 1 – 64

Summary

In 1985, Ava asks her grandmother, Addie Baum, how Addie came to be the woman she is as part of an interview for acceptance into an unidentified program. Addie has five grandchildren, including Ava, who have all done amazing things with their lives, from teaching to social work to medicine. Each of Ava's relatives have been named after deceased relatives from Addie's past. For example, Addie's daughter, Clara, is named after Addie's older sister, Celia.

Here, the novel jumps back in time from 1985 to 1900.

Ava's parents Mameh and Papa, and two older sisters, Betty and Celia, emigrate from Russia to Boston, and in 1900, Addie is born. Addie is raised in the North End in a cramped apartment. By 1915, Papa is working in a belt factory, and Celia is working in a shirtwaist factory. Betty has moved out to Mamah's dismay. Mameh worries that Celia is 29 and unmarried, but compliments Celia on her delicate femininity, while Addie, 15, is built like her mother – solid, but not overweight. Addie's parents also consent to only one year of high school for her. Addie explains that she herself started to be her own person by going to the library and its reading club.

The library under the control of Miss Edith Chevalier, referred to as a settlement house for its community importance, has more than just books. It has literary groups for girls, a woodshop to teach a trade to the boys, and English classes for immigrants, among other things. Edith is impressed with Addie's reading ability, so she has Addie recite Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's famous poem "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere" for the Saturday Club, composed of older girls, at which a famous professor will be giving a lecture about Longfellow. Edith tells Addie that girls in that day and age need some impetuosity, and gumption. Mameh is incensed that Addie is going to recite the poem, and attempts to stop her from going, but Celia and Papa intervene. Addie then goes to recite the poem, and is cheered. Edith Green, who runs the pottery shop at the library, invites Addie to Rockport Lodge, an inn for young ladies in a coastal town north of Boston. Rose Reardon, president of the Saturday Club, insists that Addie join. Addie also meets the Jewish sisters Helen and Gussie Frommer, and is heavily complimented by the Italian beauty Filomena Gallinelli, an artist and full-time employee of the Salem Street Pottery Studio.

The time that Addie spends at Rockport Lodge is amazing to her, from the rural landscape to the beautiful ocean to the wonderful people. Addie rooms with Filomena, working as Edith Chevalier's assistant at the library to afford to go. It is the first time Addie ever sleeps in her own bed. The 20 girls at the lodge – all of different faiths and backgrounds – decide to call themselves the Mixed Nuts. The girls take a hike around Rockport, seeing everything from the scenery to the beautiful houses in which people live. Addie befriends a girl named Irene, and comes to greatly admire the 19-year-old



Filomena, who seems worldly and adult-like to Addie. While Addie and the other girls talk about marriage and having families, Filomena insists she will never get married.

Addie reflects on her own family, and how she didn't know her father very well. By the 1980s, she explains, it was common for fathers to change diapers and read stories to kids. In the 1910s, men worked and were to be left alone at home. Back at home, Addie is amazed to learn that Celia has become engaged to Mr. Herman Levine, a widowed man 10 years older than Celia who owns his own business and has two children, Myron and Jacob. Celia explains she has known Levine for three years, and he proposed to her the month before, not telling anyone until she had made up her mind. However, Celia's marriage means that Addie will have to leave school and get a job to support the family. Betty returns for the wedding, and she is very much a modern, very pro-American woman, who nevertheless cries when Celia is married. Afterwards, Mameh and Papa argue constantly, with Mameh resentful that Papa had ever made her move to America where so much is different, and during which time Mameh lost a baby boy while at sea. Levine hires Addie as a secretary for his small shirtwaist factory. There, she makes a good salary, helps to grow the business, and continues to attend the Saturday Club.

Analysis

"The Boston Girl" is a novel by Anita Diamant which takes the format of a casually-related autobiography from main character and principal protagonist Addie Baum, to her granddaughter, Ava, who is studying with an unknown goal in mind as of yet. Family becomes an important theme in the novel immediately, as Addie, the grandmother, is asked to recount her life's story to Ava, her granddaughter. Clearly, Ava loves her grandmother dearly, and respects and admires her to the point that her grandmother's life is worth an interview for her field of study. Indeed, it can clearly be seen in the way that Addie speaks to Ava, just how much she loves Ava – and all of her family members. This can also be seen in the way that the newer generation is named after the older generation. Although the names are not the same, they are often very similar, and suggest a sense of continuity between the past and the future of the family. Family itself means everything to Addie's mother – and so does tradition.

Here, through Addie's mother especially, the theme of America becomes quite clear. While much of American society and culture may seem old-fashioned and traditional to many Americans, both of the contemporary era and the twentieth century, America was seen as radically progressive by many of the immigrants to the country. This is quite true of Mameh, for through her eyes, the past, and the present –America – can clearly be seen. An unmarried girl in her 20s in America, like Celia, for example, would be considered normal today, but to the old country, and to the eyes of Mameh, it is abnormal. A girl of 29 should be married with growing children, not single and working. Likewise, Mameh has thrown her hands up with Betty – who is not only not married, but actually lives on her own. This would be unheard of in the old country. For much of the early part of the novel, Betty might well not exist in Mameh's eyes, so disgusted is she with Betty for living on her own. Indeed, Betty's love of America is quite clear in nearly



every encounter with Mameh, for Betty spares no expense at contrasting a better life in America with a worse life in Russia.

Early in the novel, the themes of friendship and feminism also become quite apparent. Betty's desire to live on her own, and Celia's unmarried state, are both forms of feminism given the day and age in which they live, and especially given their upbringing. Nothing would be thought of a man living on his own, or being unmarried at the age of 29, but for a woman, it is quite unusual. In a sense, there is a matching of equality between Betty, Celia, and men in this regard. Addie's own desire to go and visit the library, as well as to join clubs and go to Rockport with her friends, signal not only the theme of friendship, but feminism once more. Although the girls do not travel to Rockport alone, they do so without men. Indeed, the Rockport Lodge is not intended for men – only for women. That the girls travel to and stay at Rockport Lodge without the assistance of men demonstrates a level of independence and feminism, for, like men, they are doing something on their own without male chaperones. Additionally, Filomena – the most beautiful of all the girls – not only works full-time, but has also vowed she will never get married – a shocking and very feminist statement for that era.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways is America contrasted with the old world, especially when it comes to the attitudes and beliefs of Mama and Betty? Where would either of them prefer to be? Why?

Discussion Question 2

In what ways is feminism presented so far with respect to the characters of Addie, Betty, Celia, and Filomena? Are any of these forms of feminism to be considered radical for their time? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Compare and contrast the characters of Celia and Filomena when it comes to marriage. Why is Celia unmarried at 29? Why does Filomena not want to get married? When Celia marries, is it out of her own free will, or is she forced into it?

Vocabulary

superstitious, quaint, impetuous, erratic, shtetl, shul



Section 2, Pages 65 – 130

Summary

When Addie is 16, she has her first kiss with Harold George Weeks of Bath, Maine, at a dance in Rockport. Harold is a Coast Guard cadet, and is very tall. He wants more than just a kiss, but Addie won't give anything more to him. That autumn, Levine and Papa discuss celebrating Thanksgiving now that they are Americans, and registering to become permanent citizens. Levine and Celia also believe that women should have the right to vote, but Celia won't hear of a Thanksgiving turkey for dinner, wanting kosher chicken instead. She has been struggling to grow close to Levine's sons, saying they miss their real mother. Sometime later, Harold is stationed in Boston, and runs into Addie. She agrees to have dinner with him. Afterwards, they kiss, and he calls her his girl. They see a movie a Charlie Chaplin movie a week later and Harold feels her up. They go to the Parker House for their next date, during which time he explains he is being transferred to Washington, D.C. He then tries to bring Addie upstairs to sleep with her, but she bites him on the way up, and flees. She berates herself for not having seen what kind of man Harold was from the start. Tragedy follows, as Celia commits suicide by slitting her wrists, though the family believes it is an accident. Addie blames herself for showing up to visit Celia late, but the responding police officer assures Addie it was not her fault, and that if anything, Addie gave Celia a fighting chance.

1917 comes on. Filomena remains a steadfast friend of Addie's, comforting her during the shock of losing Celia. While at Rockport Lodge, Filomena brings Addie along to meet an artist on Old Garden Road, an introduction arranged by Edith Green. The artist, Leslie Parker, is an early flapper, about 20 or so in age. Filomena doesn't exactly like Leslie at first, though Leslie offers Filomena use of her ceramics studio. The girls meet Leslie's older artist friend Bob Morelli the next day. He is 35 and separated from his wife. While he and Filomena work with clay, Leslie gets Addie to try on a pair of pants – which makes Addie feel like trying new things, such as riding a bike or going to college. Leslie thinks that Bob and Filomena have hit it off, and explains that Bob's wife is crazy, but he hasn't actually divorced her out of consideration for their son, which makes Bob a rare gentleman. Over the rest of the vacation, Filomena begins spending more and more time with Bob, making Addie annoyed that Filomena is carrying on with a married man. In the end, Filomena and Bob cannot stay together.

Back in Boston, Levine transitions his company to producing men's shirts, and has Addie take a class to learn to use a typewriter professionally. She also decides to take a class on Shakespeare after accidentally stumbling into it. The teacher, Mr. Boyer, is so good at what he does that he in part convinces Addie to become a teacher as she gets older. As the other girls get older, they marry and leave the Saturday Club, and new girls join in. Addie later learns that Filomena has become pregnant, and has attempted an abortion, which makes Filomena extremely ill. Her life is saved only by the quick actions of Addie, Rose, Irene, and Betty to get her medical help. Filomena ends up moving to Taos, New Mexico, to be with Bob Morelli. Meanwhile, a year after Celia's death, Betty



decides to marry Levine, for she has become pregnant by him. Betty later gives birth to a boy who is named Leonard. Papa delights in having a grandson of his own.

Analysis

As the novel continues, feminism again becomes an important theme in this section – though not in so radical a way as the modern reader might suspect. For Addie, feminism is not a reason to be able to have sex, but proves to be a way for her to be able to reject sex, especially unwanted sex. When Harold makes sexual advances on her, Addie consistently turns him down. Harold's rebuffing is a shock to him – that a woman would have dared say no to him, and that he should be rejected by any girl at all. For Addie, feminism is not necessarily a reason to do the same sorts of things as men, but to be able to say not to men, and to be able to decide things on her own. Feminism also is apparent in more subtle places as well in the novel. For example, Celia's refusal to have a Thanksgiving turkey, preferring instead a kosher Thanksgiving chicken, isn't merely a question of the beauty and devotion of her faith, but an assertion of power as a woman.

Feminism can also clearly be seen among Addie and her friends in these chapters. Addie's encounter with Leslie exposes her firsthand to the flapper lifestyle, and to wearing pants. Indeed, Addie explains to her granddaughter that she felt powerful in pants, like she could do things she had never imagined doing before – such as riding a bike. At the same time, Filomena, who is as beautiful as she seems to be perpetually single, falls in love with, and moves to New Mexico with, an older, married painter. Here, there is a sense of feminism in the actions of Filomena as well. While one must certainly question the morality of such an affair – and Addie very clearly does – the fact that Filomena, a woman, is taking her destiny into her own hands is undoubtedly a feminist act. Filomena's later abortion – which nearly leads to her own death – is also a morally questionable act (and many of her friends do question it), her resolve to do what she wants to do in life is yet another feminist act. Men can do as they please, morally right or wrong, and so too will Filomena do the same. When Betty marries her dead sister's widowed husband, Mameh is beside herself with shock – but again, this is a feminist act, as Betty herself has decided on the marriage.

Friendship proves to be as important as feminism in this section of the novel. Addie has become almost best friends with Filomena, and the two girls tell one another nearly everything – good or bad. For Filomena, this means telling Addie about Bob, and her plans to move with him to New Mexico. When Filomena's abortion nearly claims her life, her friends – whether or not they question the moral nature of what Filomena has done – do not hesitate to seek out medical help on behalf of Filomena. Filomena later credits her friends with saving her life. Here, friendship is of the utmost importance, and is literally a matter of life or death.



Discussion Question 1

What is so unusual for Addie about trying on pants? How do they make her feel? What do they make her want to do? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Filomena's decision to have an affair, and run away with, a married man, is a morally-questionable feminist act. Do you believe that all acts of feminism must be moral in nature? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

In what way does friendship become a matter of life and death for the girls in this section of the novel? Why is friendship seen in so dramatic a way?

Vocabulary

assignation, suffragette, treif, kosher, bickering, traipsing, slovenly



Section 3, Pages 131 – 200

Summary

When World War I begins, most Americans are not interested in it until America enters the conflict. Levine transitions his factory to meet government demand for uniform shirts. He makes a lot of money from the war, though it also makes him uncomfortable. The entire family relocates to the West End, to first and second-floor apartments to be close to one another. The apartments have indoor plumbing, electricity, and Addie gets her own room with a door.

1918 sees the arrival of the Spanish Flu epidemic. As many as 500 people a week die in Boston. Among them is Levine's son, Myron. A day later, Leonard dies. The flu eventually passes, and becomes a horrible memory. No one has been left unaffected, and no one wants to talk about it. Betty becomes pregnant again in 1919 and gives birth to a boy named Eddy. Addie takes a quick liking to Eddy. Betty later becomes pregnant with a second child. The end of the war also means that Levine's business contracts end, and Betty convinces him to go into real estate. It proves to be a very successful venture. It also gets Addie interested in politics, society, and sports. Though she is shy about men because of Harold, Addie is also romantically-inclined, wondering when she'll meet a good man. She runs into Ernie Goldman, an acquaintance from the Shakespeare class, on a trolley. Ernie, a war veteran, is formal but very kind. She knows he was injured during the war, and knows he must have been suffering from what is now known as PTSD. After an incident at the beach where he has flashbacks to war when some kids set off firecrackers, his parents send him to a sanitarium in Colorado, and Addie never sees him again.

By 1922, Levine has made enough of a name for himself in real estate to go into business with an even bigger real estate man, Morris "Mo" Silverman. Addie decides to take a summer job working at Rockport Lodge. The director of the lodge that summer is Gloria Lettis. Addie keeps busy cleaning the place as 60 girls come and go. Addie befriends Hannah, the black washerwoman, who is great at telling stories, and Mrs. Morse, the black cook. Mrs. Morse tells Addie that a girl should always have her own money so she is never beholden to anyone else. Mrs. Morse is later smacked by an unknown assailant, for her son is mixed up with Canadian rum-runners. It turns out that George, her son, is the assailant, and demands money from his mother to fix his problems. George then attempts to force himself onto Addie sexually, but Mrs. Morse drives him back at knifepoint. The next night, George returns, and all the girls rally in defense of Mrs. Morse. A 13 year-old girl named Lucy Miller, who had been sexually molested at the age of 10 by George, tells her uncle – an upstanding man and Temperance Movement member – about what George has done to Mrs. Morse, and George is never seen again.

A newspaper reporter comes to do a story on Rockport Lodge, the most popular society writer in Boston, known only as "Serena". Addie discovers her true identity is Mrs.



Charles (Tessa) Thorndike, a member of the same upper class at whom she likes to poke fun. She explains to Addie that her mother-in-law does not approve of her column writing, but that her husband finds it funny. Tessa agrees to take Addie on as a secretary to help with writing columns, but the job doesn't come through. Meanwhile, Levine and Betty announce they have purchased a whole house in Roxbury, designed for two families. Everyone will be moving there, except Addie. She takes a room at Mrs. Kay's Boarding House on Tremont Street. Mameh is incensed and thinks the boarding house is nothing better than Jewish whorehouse. She says she is finished with Addie, but Levine and Betty remind Addie that Mameh is just angry and doesn't mean it. Addie then throws up. Addie then takes a job as a typist for the evening newspaper "Boston Evening Transcript". Mr. Morton ("Mort") hires Addie at once. Slowly, she moves into editing and then writing columns herself, though she does not get credit for them, having to write about society under the pseudonym "Henrietta Cavendish".

Analysis

In this section of the novel, the theme of America again becomes quite important, as the United States enters World War I. Early in the war, Americans have little to no interest in what is going on across the world. America is, overall, still relatively isolationist. The section of America that has concern for what is going on are the members of the immigrant community, many of whom are receiving terrible news about the war. When the United States is forced to enter the war, the American attitude for the war becomes overwhelmingly positive and in favor of it – and as a result, America's economic power is geared toward military action. The war, though won by the Allies and lost by the Central Powers, however, is not without its consequences. As the war winds down, Levine must lay off many of the extra workers he brought on to meet wartime demands for shirts. Addie dates a soldier who has returned to America with PTSD. As the war winds down, the Spanish flu comes roaring into the United States and claims the lives of some 500 people in Boston each week, including two of Levine's children. The heartache and loss endured by Addie and her entire family at these deaths – and here, the theme of family is quite clear – is tremendous and overwhelming. As Addie makes clear at one point, it is a terrifying and heartbreaking thing for a parent to lose a child.

Addie herself, now in her 20s, begins to look for her next step in life. She has a job that pays decently, and while beautiful and eligible, is not ready to settle down yet – though she does indeed want to get married. Here, the theme of feminism is subtle, but apparently clear once indicated. Addie will marry on her own terms and in her own time, and will not be arranged into a marriage by her parents, and will not be pressured into marriage based on the dictates of the prevailing social and cultural norms. Of her own free will, and in accord with the independence of feminism, Addie takes on work at Rockport Lodge, and there befriends Mrs. Morse and others, all of whom teach Addie important life lessons. For example, Mrs. Morse reminds Addie to always have her own money, so that she is never beholden to anyone else – a man or another woman. It is advice that Mrs. Morse's son does not take – and the girls of the lodge, without a man to help them, rally around Mrs. Morse against her son.



Addie's ultimate act of feminism in this section of the novel – and indeed, her greatest act of feminist independence to date – is to refuse to move in with the family in Roxbury. She will instead take a room at a boarding house, and here, the theme of America once again becomes prevalent. While it is not uncommon for American girls and women to take a room in an all-female boarding house for one reason or another, it is unheard of for girls from the old country – and Mameh is spitting mad that Addie would decide to do so. Mameh considers boarding houses to be whore houses, and demonstrates that, while America at the time has a ways to go in terms of gender equality, it is light years ahead of the rest of the world in many ways.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Levine feel so bad about making money during World War I? What happens as a result?

Discussion Question 2

Addie's desire to marry, though not yet, and her decision to work at Rockport Lodge over the summer, can both be considered acts of feminism. Do you agree or disagree with this assertion? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Mameh react so poorly to Addie's decision to take a room in a boarding house? Is Mameh's reaction at all understandable given the time and place in which she lives? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

epidemic, rendezvous, marcelled, bilious, gallivanting, cahoots, tres-chic, ensemble, chutzpah



Section 4, Pages 201 – 272

Summary

Is it now 1925. Addie is regularly writing a society column under the name of Henrietta Cavendish. She is even sent out to do interviews and report on society events and society-related news. One of the events she covers is a talk by a black anti-lynching advocate, Mrs. Mary Holland. Addie believes that women trying to right a terrible wrong belongs on the women's page. The story is edited, but still run, causing many people to cancel their subscriptions to the paper. However, attention on the paper has increased, and the publisher and most others at the paper are happy about it. Addie's superior, Ian Cornish, asks her out to dinner. She agrees. However, he gets drunk and says women do not belong in the newsroom, says Negroes have smaller brains, and that Jews and Communists are behind movements like the anti-lynching campaign. Addie walks out on him, and he apologizes the next day. Still, she ignores him.

Addie meets up with Edith Chevalier, who tells Addie to never apologize for being smart, and to come over to her house on Sunday for a good conversation with friends. There, Addie meets many good people, including the president of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, the director of the Boston School Lunch Program, a history professor from Wellesley College, and a female doctor. Other girls are younger, and include social workers, librarians, teachers, and a law student, Rita Metsky. The conversation is about politics and books, and not about fashion or flowers. Their guest speaker is Rita's older brother, Aaron, a lawyer for the National Child Labor Committee who has been pushing for child labor laws. Aaron and Addie go out for dinner, and he walks her home. She doesn't want the evening to end. She spends the night at his sister's flat, for they get back to the boarding house too late, and everything is locked up. They end up kissing the next morning when Aaron comes to meet her.

Addie says that she believes in luck, and it was luck that got her to meet Aaron, that his sister just happened to suggest having him give a talk to Edith's group, and she just happened to be in the right place at the right time. Addie and Aaron begin spending as much time as possible together, from dinners to concerts, because Aaron lives in Washington. Much of their relationship is by mail, for they write to each other three times a week. Aaron plans to move to Boston and marry Addie. He gives Addie a gold locket inside which is inscribed the day they met – March 29, 1926. Mrs. Kaye dies in her sleep soon after, and Addie is forced to move to Roxbury temporarily. Meanwhile, Addie gets a promotion and a raise at work. She also befriends Katherine Walters, a widow whose husband died in World War I. Katherine herself has become a Buddhist, feminist, and socialist. She encourages Addie to write more hard-hitting stories, but to submit them to magazines like *Atlantic Monthly* and *The Nation* rather than papers. *The Nation* publishes her first piece, but it gets Addie in trouble at work. The publisher fires Addie, and Mort is sad to have to carry out his orders, wondering why Addie could not have used a pen name instead.



Addie does not tell her family she has been fired. Addie's friend, Gussie, gets Addie a job with a lawyer, where Addie makes more money in fewer hours. About this time, phones begin to flood the market, and Gussie believes that sooner or later, everyone will have a telephone. Aaron soon returns, and asks Addie's family for permission to marry her. Betty is thrilled. Mameh is unhappy that the relationship has been kept secret. Nevertheless, the families meet, and hit it off. Sometime later, Mameh suffers a stroke which leaves the right side of her body and face paralyzed. She apologizes to Addie for anything she has ever done to hurt her, intentionally or unintentionally, and Addie willingly makes peace with Mameh. A few weeks later, Mameh dies.

Analysis

As the novel continues, feminism remains an important theme. This comes in Addie's employment at a newspaper, and has nothing to do with her having a job – but has everything to do with what she does with that job. As she gains more experience and more responsibility at the job, she uses what she has to focus on social issues – a very feminist thing to do, when all she is expected to do is either to type, or cover female-related news stories. However, the social issues that Addie writes about – from child labor to lynching – are hard-hitting and concern not just the issues themselves, but the women fighting to effect a change. It is through her efforts that Addie not only meets a number of amazing women advocating for such change, but men as well – including her future husband, Aaron Mesky. Indeed, Addie's relationship with Aaron progresses quickly, and as she wants it to progress. It is a mutual decision between Addie and Aaron to pursue each other – as opposed to previous cases like Harold or Cornish. However, Addie risks a lot by stepping out so far socially with her job – and ends up losing her job as a result. Interestingly enough, the head of the paper attempts to save Addie despite his disagreeing with her – but the publisher will not hear of it.

Interestingly enough, feminism also reappears subtly in Addie's courtship with Aaron – as does the theme of love. It is an old-fashioned romance and courtship, with Aaron seeking permission to marry Addie. This is all done by mutual agreement between Addie and Aaron, as equals, rather than as one being dominant over the other. Addie also demonstrates that a woman can both have a career, and be a wife. Feminism doesn't have to mean that a woman is forced to make one choice or another. Men, for example, can be husbands and fathers as well as have careers – and so, too, can women. This, plainly demonstrated by Addie, is all true feminism.

Addie navigates the time after her being fired by relying on friends and looking to family, just as they have relied on her in the past, and here, the theme of friendship remains strong. For example, Gussie helps Addie to find a job with a lawyer. Addie also comes to learn more about the world and the movements and religions in it by befriending Katherine Walters – an avowed feminist, socialist, and Buddhist. Family also plays an important role in Addie's life at this point, as they consent to her marriage with Aaron, but also as Addie and her mother make amends for the past after Mameh suffers a stroke. Mameh survives a few months longer, but ultimately dies. Her death breaks the



heart of her family members, and demonstrates that, despite Mameh's constant fussing and hardline traditionalism, she was still loving and beloved.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Addie not tell her family that she has been fired from her job? What ultimately happens as a result of her losing her job?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the courtship between Addie and Aaron. Is this courtship feminist? Is it traditional? Is it both? Does it even defy a label? Explain.

Discussion Question 3

Why is it so important to Addie that she and her mother ultimately make amends? What is crucial about the timing of Mameh and Addie forgiving one another for the past?

Vocabulary

petition, gullible, kvetching, uppity, sanctity



Section 5, Pages 273 – 320

Summary

After Mameh's death, the family struggles to continue on. Addie attends classes and continues to work. The date of Addie and Aaron's wedding is set for June. They decide to have a wedding shower as well – a new fad. Rita plans it, and everyone from Irene to Miss Chevalier to Filomena attends. It is a lovely affair. The friendship between Filomena and Addie picks up right where it left off, without a catch. Addie wears a simple tan dress for her wedding. About a year later, Papa remarries to the widow Edna Blaustein. Aaron and Addie honeymoon in Rockport.

Years pass, and 1931 comes on. Addie reflects on how well Aaron did everything he set his mind to, but how being a father was what he did best, and was a natural talent for him. He loves to bring his daughters, Clara and Sylvia, to the library, and to read bedtime stories to them. Addie herself was always worried about being a good mother. Times get tough during the Great Depression, but the family weathers the storm by everyone sticking together. For example, Levine moves Addie's family into a building he owns in Brookline and wouldn't allow them to pay rent, but merely mow the lawn in return.

With her girls in school, Addie takes classes in social work to teach and work with delinquent and struggling youth, focusing on girls pregnant out of wedlock, and suffering after having abortions or children. She also focuses on the first sexual experiences of the girls, from rapes to their wedding nights. Eventually, Addie writes a book called "Unmasked Questions" which comes out the same year as "The Feminine Mystique" by Betty Friedan, but gets lost in the fuss over Feidan's book.

The book leads to a teaching job, however, at Boston University, where she receives lots of letters thanking her for writing "Unmasked Questions". Years later, when their girls are in college, Addie and Aaron visit New Mexico where they learn that, at the age of 59, Filomena has married an art collector named Saul Cohen. Aaron dies in the early 1980s. Addie misses him like crazy.

By 1985, many of Addie's family and friends have passed away, from Edith Chevalier to Katherine to Betty and Levine. Filomena is still alive, and Addie intends to fly down to see her in New Mexico. She encourages Ava to come with her, knowing that Ava's near-fiancée, Brian Miller, won't mind. Addie says she is in great physical health, and looks forward not only to the day that Ava is married to Brian, but to the day that Ava becomes a rabbi. Addie will be 90 when that happens.

Analysis

The loss of Mameh is devastating to the family, but they rally together, and move forward. Their family does not contract, however. It expands to include Aaron, and the



two children that Addie and Aaron end up having. Here, the themes of feminism and America can also be seen through the marriage of Aaron and Addie. The marriage is a matter of equality between husband and wife, and Addie continues to work and pursue social justice while being a wife and husband – clear proof that real feminism does not limit the choices of women to either being a wife and mother, or having a career. It is a clear point that author makes that Addie is able to pursue all of her dreams, and not just some of them at the expense of others.

Likewise, the theme of America is also noted in this section of the novel. Earlier in the book, Addie comments that fathers worked, and were to be left alone when they got home. It wasn't a lack of love or caring, but simply how things were done – always in the old country, and oftentimes in America. However, American is the exception to the rule, and even America's traditional views of fatherhood are changing as Aaron becomes fully engaged in the lives of his children, as well as working. Feminism ultimately ends up finishing out strongly in the novel, as Addie devotes her life to studying was then considered to be a taboo subject – girls and their sex lives. It is a field of study that gains Addie a professorship at Boston University. Fascinatingly, as the novel ends, the field in which Ava is studying is revealed. She is training to become ordained as a female rabbi – a modern American and feminist twist in and of itself.

Discussion Question 1

What is Aaron like as a father? In what ways is he a traditional father? In what ways is he a modern father?

Discussion Question 2

Addie admits to being terrified of becoming a mother, even though she loves being a mother. Why is this?

Discussion Question 3

For Addie (and for the author), what is feminism like? Do you agree or disagree with this position? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

mourning, petrified, valedictorian, delinquent, hocking



Characters

Addie Baum

Addie Baum is the narrator and principal protagonist of the novel “The Boston Girl” by Anita Diamant. Addie, born in the year 1900, is the wife of Aaron Metsky, is the youngest child of Papa and Mameh, and is the sister of Betty and Celia. Addie’s life story is conveyed in the novel to her granddaughter, Ava. Much of the story Addie tells is of her early life – from the age of 15 through her early 30s. During this span of time, Addie becomes an early feminist, as she endeavors to be financially independent, have a career, and be a wife and mother at the same time. Addie makes a good group of friends through everything, including Filomena and Rita, whom help are helped by Addie in turn as time passes. She writes about social reform movements, advocates against lynching, and ultimately publishes a book about the first sexual experiences of girls and women, as well as pregnancy and abortion called “Unasked Questions”, which secures her a teaching spot at Boston University.

Ava

Ava is the youngest granddaughter of Addie, and is interviewing her grandmother as a part of her studies. Ava is training to become a rabbi – a first for the family, and as a female, a rare thing for the Jewish faith.

Filomena

Filomena is a gorgeous Italian girl a few years older than Addie, that Addie meets and befriends at Rockport Lodge. Filomena vows she will never get married, though she carries on a multi-year affair with a married painter, and nearly dies performing an abortion on herself. She is saved by Addie and their friends. Filomena ultimately moves to New Mexico to be with her painter, but the affair does not work out. At the age of 59, Filomena gets married, and at the end of the novel, Addie is planning a trip to visit Filomena in New Mexico.

Mameh

Mameh is the mother of Addie, Betty, and Celia, and wife of Papa. Mameh is very traditional, and very old-fashioned. She abhors the fact that Celia waits so long to get married, that Betty lives on her own, and that Addie later decides to live on her own as well. Mameh’s anger with her daughters and their life decisions is not borne out of intolerance or hate, but out of love and the way that Mameh was raised. She is very old-world, while her daughters are very much Americanized. By the end of her life, Mameh has made amends with her daughters, including Addie.



Papa

Papa is the husband of Mameh, and the father of Addie, Betty, and Celia. Papa is a good man who works hard, but because of tradition, doesn't spend too much time with his daughters. He is a good role model for Addie, though, due to his loyalty to his family and his hard work, and he demonstrates the traditional, old-world model for manhood. When Mameh dies, Papa is devastated, but remarries less than a year later. As he grows older, he grows more religious.

Betty

Betty is the sister of Celia and Addie, and is the daughter of Mameh and Papa. Betty, though born in Russia, is a very Americanized young woman who loves the United States and its promises of a better tomorrow. She very much believes in, and succeeds in achieving the American dream. She lives on her own and works, and later marries Celia's husband after Celia dies. Betty has several children, and is thrilled when Addie ends up getting married.

Celia

Celia is a beautiful, feminine girl, and is the daughter of Papa and Mameh, as well as the sister of Betty and Addie. Celia doesn't get married until she is 29, and then it is to a widow with children. Celia, however, has difficulties in life, perhaps stemming from having to work in a factory as a child, and commits suicide by slitting her wrists, though her family claims it was all an accident.

Levine

Herman Levine is a widowed man with two children who becomes the husband of Celia, and then later the husband of Betty after Celia dies. Herman is a good man who owns a factory producing shirts, and later moves into real estate, where he becomes immensely wealthy. He cares for his entire family, and ensures that they always have a place to live, and food to eat, even in the most difficult times, such as the Great Depression.

Aaron Metsky

Aaron Metsky is the husband of Addie, and the brother of Rita. Aaron is a handsome and intellectual man who is also a lawyer pressing for social reform by way of adopting legislation against child labor at the state level. He addresses a group of people at Edith Chevalier's house, during which time he meets, and is immediately smitten with, Addie. The two fall in love quickly and later get married. Aaron becomes a modern father, traditionally providing for his family, but also taking an active part in the raising of his daughters. He ultimately dies in the early 1980s.



Rita Metsky

Rita Metsky is the younger sister of Aaron, and a new friend of Addie's after meeting Addie at Edith Chevalier's house. It is Rita who suggests that Aaron come and address the group of friends and activists, and it is because of her, and Chevalier's invitation to Addie, that Addie and Aaron first meet.



Symbols and Symbolism

Books

Books are practically consumed by Addie beginning as a teenager, and throughout her life. Addie loves to read, and begins to spend time at the library, where she ends up joining various clubs and literary groups, and makes the friends she will have for life.

The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere

“The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere” is a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, about the beginning of the American Revolution and the efforts of Paul Revere and his compatriots to warn the surrounding countryside of the approach of British troops. The poem is recited by Addie before the Saturday Club lecture of a professor who has studied Longfellow.

Romeo and Juliet

“Romeo and Juliet” is a play of tragedy and romance written by William Shakespeare and studied by Addie in one of her classes taken while training to be a modern, professional typist. Addie comes to love the play, and the teacher of the class, which in turn helps inspire her to become a teacher.

Typewriters

Typewriters are becoming very common in America during the early 1900s, and all modern, professional businesses especially begin to use them. Addie is paid to take classes to learn how to use them, so that Levine’s shirt business, and later his real estate business, will be up with the times and just as professional as other businesses.

Stories

Stories are researched and written by Addie for the Boston “Evening Transcript” newspaper. These stories all relate to women in some way or another, and Addie uses the stories to highlight the efforts of women for social reform, and the social reform issues themselves.

Gold locket

A gold locket is given to Addie before she married Aaron. The locket is inscribed with the date of their first meeting – March 29, 1926 – and is worn by Addie all her life.



Kosher chicken

Kosher chicken is purchased to be consumed at Thanksgiving at the insistence of Celia as Levine's wife. Though she consents to celebrating Thanksgiving, she will not consent to serving a turkey, and this small act of independence is demonstrative of subtle feminism, as well as faith.

Pants

Pants are worn by Leslie and other flappers in the novel, and are tried on by Addie while in Rockport with Filomena. Gender identity historically is distinguished by clothing – with men wearing pants and women wearing dresses. To wear men's pants is both a symbolic and revolutionary act of women gaining greater freedom and independence. For Addie, wearing pants makes her think she can do new things in life, from riding a bike to going to college.

Unasked Questions

"Unasked Questions" is the title of a work of sociology by Addie, published at the same time as "The Feminine Mystique" by Betty Freidan. "Unasked Questions" is an examination of first sexual encounters among girls and women, as well as experiences with things like rape, pregnancy, and abortion. "Unasked Questions" earns Addie a teaching position at Boston University.

Tape Recorder

A tape recorder is used by Ava to document Addie's life story as Addie tells it. Addie checks to make sure that Ava's tape recorder is ready as Addie begins to tell her life story.

Settings

Russia

Russia is the homeland of Addie's family and her ancestors. They immigrate from Russia to the United States in the very late 1890s. While Mameh misses Russia terribly, especially for its old-world traditions and practices, Betty believes Mameh romanticizes Russia. Betty is old enough to remember the dirt floors and absolute poverty of life in Russia, and will never go back to it for anything in the world.

Boston

Boston is the capital of Massachusetts, and is the city to which Addie's family emigrates from Russia. Boston is where Addie is born in the year 1900, and lives her entire life. She truly loves Boston, for it is where her family has settled and grown up, and is where she has made so many friends at the library, and done so much with her life- from writing, to teaching, to advocating for social reforms.

Rockport Lodge

Rockport Lodge is a girls-only, female-run vacation lodge in Rockport, Massachusetts, north of Boston. Rockport Lodge is where Addie and girls from the Saturday Club make weeklong vacations throughout the years, and spend much of the summer. It is at Rockport Lodge that Addie ultimately takes a cleaning job to be able to spend the entire summer there.

The Library

The library, referred to also a settlement house, is a community center which serves as host to clubs, activities, classes, and groups that range from the Saturday Club to literary groups to trade classes for boys. It is at the library that Addie spends much of her time, reading and making friends, and ultimately becoming a member of the Saturday Club itself. The library is a beautiful building that is also known for having electricity early on, when many homes and buildings do not yet have electricity.

New Mexico

New Mexico is a state in the American Southwest, and is where Filomena goes to live to continue her affair with Bob Morelli. When Morelli leaves New Mexico to return home to his wife and son, Filomena remains living in New Mexico. There, she is visited a few times by Addie and Aaron, and at the end of the novel, Addie is planning yet another trip to New Mexico, for which she invites her granddaughter, Ava along.



Themes and Motifs

Friendship

Friendship is an important theme in the novel “The Boston Girl” by Anita Diamant. Friendship proves to be monumentally integral to the life of Addie, and to her friends as well, and also proves heavily influential with respect to the plot.

When Addie is 15 years old, she begins to spend time at the library in order to read, to get away from home for a little while, and to have some time to herself. However, the time Addie spends at the library ultimately leads to her joining a girls’ literary club, and later, the Saturday Club. It is in the Saturday Club that Addie ends up making a number of friends, some of them very good friends, and many of which will come to be crucially important to one another throughout the novel.

Addie’s first true friends at the club include some of the organizers and managers, including Edith Chevalier. Edith not only encourages Addie to become a member of the Saturday Club, where Addie makes even more friends, but encourages Addie to have some gumption as well, and to never apologize for being intelligent. Chevalier later encourages Addie to attend a meeting at her house, where Addie meets her future husband, Aaron. In the Saturday Club, Addie meets and befriends a number of girls, including Gussie, who will later help Addie to secure a job with a lawyer when Addie is unemployed, and the beautiful Filomena, who will essentially become Addie’s best friend. Addie and Filomena spend as much time with one another as possible, and their friendship lasts their entire lives, leading them to visit one another as often as they can, even after Filomena moves to New Mexico. It is an act of friendship which rallies Addie and the other girls around Filomena after Filomena performs an abortion on herself, and nearly dies as a process. The quick action by Addie and the other girls saves Filomena’s life.

Addie also strikes up friendships with numerous other people as well along the way. Her writing abilities and social reform interests are expanded by her friendship with Katherine Walters. It is Katherine who encourages Addie to write more hard-hitting pieces about social reform and submit them to magazines like “Atlantic Monthly” and “The Nation”. This lays the groundwork for Addie’s eventual foray into studying the first sexual experiences of girls and women, as well as to publish a book on the subject called “Unmasked Questions”.

Feminism

Feminism is an important theme in the novel “The Boston Girl” by Anita Diamant. In the novel, the author advances feminism in both subtle and overt ways, and defines feminism through the events of the novel as not only equality between the sexes, but as the ability for women to make their own choices and choose their own paths in life.



The finer, and more subtle aspects of feminism can be seen in various places in the novel. Celia's decision to wait until she is 29 to get married, as well as her decision to marry who she wants, are a tremendous break with the past where parents would choose the men their daughters would marry. This is especially a break from the old country, where Celia would have not even had a say in the matter. When Celia is married, she asserts her will in small but important ways – allowing her family to celebrate Thanksgiving, but compromising that there will be a kosher chicken rather than a turkey for dinner. Betty, who very much maintains a pro-American viewpoint throughout the novel, will not return to the old ways in Russia for anything. She lives on her own, works, and decides to marry who she wants to marry, when she wants to marry him – all to the chagrin of her father, and the stunned reaction of her mother.

Addie, too, is a feminist, and her feminism is seen in both subtle and overt ways. Subtly, she does the things she wants, simple though they may seem – such as joining literary groups and going to Rockport Lodge with the other girls. She takes on work as she grows older, not only to support the family, but to have her own money so she will be reliant on no one else, man or woman. Addie goes on to write about social issues when working for a newspaper, even when many men do not want to risk their jobs by writing about such things. Addie's romances only ever go as far as she wants them to go until she meets Aaron, during which time their romance and marriage proceed according to mutual, equal agreement between them both – a clear break from tradition. Addie's decision to live on her own before the marriage is also outrageous to her mother, and one of Addie's most overt feminist acts. After Addie is married, she does not choose a domestic life over a career – she manages to do them both, and very well at that. She demonstrates that real feminism respects the choices of women – whether they will be homemakers, career-oriented, or a mix of both.

Feminism is also expressed in numerous other ways in the novel as well. Katherine Walters is an avowed feminist who encourages Addie to push her writing further, and to submit social reform stories to various digests, journals, and magazines. Edith Chevalier reminds Addie that all girls should be a little impetuous at least, and have gumption in the modern age. Mrs. Morse reminds Addie that all women should have their own money, so that they are reliant on no one except themselves. At the same time, the suffragette movement is underway, in which women – and men – are advocating for the right of women to cast votes in elections. It is a transformative period of American history that Addie herself ends up experiencing firsthand.

Family

Family is an important theme in the novel "The Boston Girl" by Anita Diamant. Family, thematically, involves the love, compassion, loyalty, encouragement, and support of and between individuals who may or may not be blood-related, but who act in accord with the traditional family unit. Family proves to be tremendously influential, and invaluable, not only to Addie's life, but to the plot of the novel as well.



Addie is the first child born in America, in the year 1900, to Papa and Mameh. Addie grows up knowing she is loved and cared for by her mother, father, and sisters, Betty and Celia – even if they don't always all get along with Mameh. Mameh's primary concern is that of her family. She is often antagonistic toward her daughters – Betty and later Addie for living alone, and Celia for not getting married until she is 29 – but she pushes them to live a certain way out of love for them. No matter how annoyed she becomes with her daughters, and no matter what she says to them, her loyalty to them, and love for them, is unbreakable. Papa, who has been raised with the idea that fathers are to work and come home and not be bothered, also loves his family deeply, working hard for them, and doing the best he can to relate to his daughters despite his old-world upbringing in Russia. Though Addie never knows her father very well personally, she does indeed know very well that he loves her deeply. Her sisters also support Addie in all that she does, and Betty is thrilled to see Addie working and living on her own.

As the novel progresses, Celia marries Levine and brings him and his two sons into the family, forming an even larger family. Levine's factory does well, and he hires his new family – Addie – to be a secretary and handle paperwork. When Levine makes the transition from shirts to real estate, he brings Addie along with him out of loyalty to his family, and out of a sense of professionalism based on how well Addie does her job. When Celia dies, Betty marries Levine. When Levine really strikes it rich in real estate, he buys a massive, two-family home so that his immediate family, and his extended family – Papa, Mameh, and Addie – can live there as well. When times get tough during the Great Depression, Levine makes sure his family is cared for materially and financially, allowing Aaron, Addie, and their infant daughters to live in one of his best buildings, rent-free.

When Addie gets married to Aaron, they begin their own family, and have two daughters. Addie loves being a wife and mother, and loves how well Aaron does at being a father. Aaron is very much a modern American father – not only working to earn money for the family, but taking an active interest in his family as well. He is able to have the best of both worlds, just as Addie is able to balance her family and a career. They bring their daughters up with the idea that they can overcome any obstacle and achieve any dream they set their minds to. Their daughters, in turn, bring up their own children in the same way – so much so that Addie's grandchildren end up being teachers, social reformers, doctors, and even a rabbi.

America

America – both the country, as well as everything it stands for (its ideas, values, morals, ethics, and socio-cultural attitudes) – proves to be an important theme in the novel “The Boston Girl” by Anita Diamant. America both tremendously influences the plot of the novel and the life of Addie Baum.

America is contrasted early on with the old world of Russia in every single possible way. Addie is the first child born in America in the year 1900, and she is able to learn about what life in Russia was like by studying her parents, and listening to what Betty has to



say on the subject. Addie's parents are incredibly old-world, in their customs and their beliefs. For example, Mameh is aghast that Celia is 29 and unmarried, and is incensed that Betty dares to live on her own. In America, it is not uncommon for girls to marry in their 20s (though, decidedly, it is believed that girls should be in their early 20s at the latest when they marry), and it is not unusual for girls to live apart from their families given the right situation.

That each of her daughters choose who they want to marry is also unbelievable to Mameh, though she eventually consents to each of the marriages. In America, choosing a marriage partner is as old as the country, though there are still matched marriages being made for some. Papa, who works hard for his family, has little personal contact with them, just because that is how he was raised: the man works, and he is left alone at home. This is contrasted with the American idea that, yes, fathers are to be the principal providers, but they should also have a personal relationship with their families – such as is the case with Aaron and his daughters later on.

Even the physical and psychological differences between America and the old country in Russia are contrasted. Betty, old enough to have experienced old Russia, will never return to it, and thinks her mother's memories of Russia are sentimental rather than realistic. Life in Russia, Betty explains to Addie, was miserable. The very air stank like animal feces, and the floors in the poorly-built houses were made of dirt. In America, Betty demonstrates the hope there is for a better future, and how much opportunity there is for all people if they are willing to work hard enough. Addie takes this to heart, and endeavors to do something important with her life. She, like Betty, feels America is full of promise, and that nothing is ultimately impossible.

Love

Love is an important theme in the novel "The Boston Girl" by Anita Diamant. Love often takes many forms, but in the novel, here, love principally takes the romantic form. Romantic love in the novel is something that many characters seek out, and either ends up being a good thing, or a heartbreaking thing.

Like nearly all girls, when Addie is a teenager, she dreams of love, romance, and marriage. This becomes clear to see when Addie is at Rockport Lodge with the other girls, all of whom talk about marriage and having children – except for Filomena. While many of the other girls are getting married as teenagers or young adults, Filomena vows that she will never get married. This, too, calls into question whether or not Filomena believes she will ever fall in love. As it happens, she does fall in love – but with a married painter, Bob Morelli. Filomena begins a multiyear affair with Bob, even following him to New Mexico to be with him. The affair does not end well, and Bob returns north to be with his wife and son. Filomena remains behind, and remains single for decades until she falls in love again and marries at the age of 59.

Addie herself goes through a series of boyfriends – all of them ending either sadly, or in disgust. Addie's first kiss comes from a Coast Guard cadet, Harold, who is more

interested in having sex with Addie than actually having a relationship with her that might lead to marriage. At the age of 16, Addie makes the moral choice that she will not have sex with Harold, and leaves him. Addie next goes on to date a Great War veteran named Ernie. Ernie is formal, but gentle and kind – and Addie takes a quick liking to him. Ernie, however, suffers from PTSD, which has shaken him to his core, and he is taken away to live in a sanitarium in Colorado by his parents. Addie never sees him again. Her third attempt at romance comes with Ian Cornish, who ends up being a misogynistic jerk. He treats Addie poorly, uses crude and cruel language, and demonstrates racist tendencies – all things which Addie rejects him for.

Addie, however, finally finds real romantic love with Aaron Metsky, which begins as an intellectual meeting of the minds. Aaron and Addie both have a love of social reform, and have dedicated their lives to pursuing it. Romantic attraction to one another quickly follows, and quickly develops into real love. It is an old-fashioned American romance, complete with dates, letters, and gifts, and a mutual, consenting decision to get married. Aaron even seeks out the permission of Addie's family in order to marry Addie, and is approved. The marriage is a long and happy one which produces two daughters, five grandchildren, and lasts until Aaron dies in the early 1980s.



Styles

Point of View

Anita Diamant tells her novel “The Boston Girl” in the first-person reflective omniscient narrative mode. The novel primarily comprises the firsthand account of Addie Baum’s early life – from the age of 15 through her early 30s – and takes the form of a casual interview with her granddaughter, Ava, who is recording Addie’s words on a tape recorder. The events that Addie describes occur mostly between the mid-1910s and early-1930s, with Addie relating those events decades later, in 1985. As such, Addie is able to look back at her life reflectively, and omnisciently, for everything she speaks about has already happened – and long before the interview.

Language and Meaning

Anita Diamant tells her novel “The Boston Girl” in language that is casual, relaxed, and straightforward. The novel, which comprises the firsthand account of Addie Baum’s early life (from her teens through her early 30s) is a very personal and intimate account being told from Addie to her granddaughter in a very informal way. As such, the language is casual and relaxed, and Addie is straightforward in speaking about her life and passing along sound advice. Addie knows it is important to make her points succinctly and without flourish, just as she learned them herself in life. Thus, the language that she uses is clearly reflective of her humility and straightforwardness.

Structure

Anita Diamant divides her novel “The Boston Girl” into nine principal parts, with each untitled part being an individual or set of years from 1915 to 1985. Each part is further subdivided into chapter-like vignettes, titled but unnumbered, which recount incidents, events, or situations in Addie’s life. The novel begins and ends in 1985, with the seven parts between proceeding chronologically from 1915 to 1931, and beyond. The novel itself is Addie’s firsthand account of her own life early on, and so the informal and casual structure of the novel reflects the casual and informal nature of the autobiographical interview Addie gives to her granddaughter.



Quotes

Ava, sweetheart, if you ask me to talk about how I got to be the woman I am today, what do you think I'm going to say?

-- Addie (Section 1, Nobody Told You? paragraph 1)

Importance: Here, the foundation for the entire novel is set in the form of an interview between Addie and her granddaughter, Ava. The reader understands that he or she will now be listening to (reading) Addie's account of her early life.

How did I get to be the woman I am today? It started in that library, in the reading club. That's where I started to be my own person.

-- Addie (Section 1, That's Where I Started to Be My Own Person paragraph 24)

Importance: As Addie describes her early life, she also reveals how influential books and the library were to her. Beyond providing a good education, the time Addie spends at the library helps her to establish a sense of self and independence.

If it hadn't been for Filomena I don't think I would have gone out of the house after work or on weekends all that winter.

-- Addie (Section 2, It Was Like Waking Up From a Bad Dream paragraph 1)

Importance: Following the death of her sister, Celia, Addie has a terrible time. She is despondent and listless. It is only her friendship with Filomena that helps Addie to weather the storm and get back to life as normal, as much as is possible after the death of someone so loved.

Even a broken clock is right twice a day.

-- Papa (Section 2, You May Kiss the Bride paragraph 24)

Importance: Papa ends up being thrilled about Betty's marriage to Levine, beginning to believe that America is a land of opportunity after all. Papa has long been pessimistic about Levine's hopeful nature, and he hands an offhanded comment to Levine through Addie, telling her that even someone like Levine is bound to be right two or three times, much like a broken clock.

A girl should always have her own money so she's never beholden to anyone else.

-- Mrs. Morse (Section 3, A Girl Should Always Have Her Own Money paragraph 5)

Importance: Here, Mrs. More hands Addie some sound advice about money and independence. While the remark could indeed be construed as feminist in nature, it can also be seen as sound advice for anyone, regardless of gender.

I was always surprised when people told me I was pretty. I couldn't see it then, but when I look at old pictures of me, I have to say I was kind of cute.

-- Addie (Section 3, It Made Me Feel Like a Real Boston Girl paragraph 2)



Importance: When Addie is younger, her failed romances often lead her to believe she might not really be that pretty. In general, Addie doesn't care so much for her looks, believing that who she was as a person, rather than what she looked like, was more important. But looking back, she is able to say she was cute after all.

Didn't a story about women trying to right a terrible wrong belong on the women's page?
-- Addie (Section 4, Nice Turn of Phrase paragraph 29)

Importance: As Addie begins to write about social issues and social reform, she begins to encounter numerous women involved in the movement to reform. As her assignment is to cover topic relative to women, she figures it is only natural that the women who are trying to right a wrong belong on the women's page.

Never apologize for being smart.

-- Miss Edith Chevalier (Section 4, Never Apologize for Being Smart paragraph 9)

Importance: One of Addie's earliest influences, Edith Chevalier, reminds Addie that girls should be a little impetuous, and need gumption in the modern age. Chevalier likewise reminds Addie that intelligence is a good thing, and is something important that she should be proud of. She should never apologize for being smart – and as predicted, Addie's intelligence will prove to be how she and her future husband first truly connect.

Luck, on the other hand, I believe in. And it was pure luck that I met your grandfather.

-- Addie (Section 4, Luck. I'm Telling You. paragraph 2)

Importance: Addie believes in luck over fate. She believes that it is luck she met Aaron, having to have met up with Edith Chevalier in the right place at the right time to be invited to the right event – at which Aaron is speaking due to the weight his sister has pulled on his behalf.

I was going to marry Aaron no matter what my parents said.

-- Addie (Section 4, What's His Name? paragraph 8)

Importance: In a move of feminism and independence, Addie decides that she will marry Aaron whether or not her parents approve of the marriage. She is in love with Aaron, and it is her life. Fortunately, there is no real drama, as Addie's family does indeed come to accept Aaron – but this demonstrates the degree to which Addie's independence has grown.

Sometimes friends grow apart... But sometimes, it doesn't matter how far apart you live or how little you talk –it's still there. That was Filomena and me.

-- Addie (Section 5, You Never Looked at Me With Anything But Love paragraph 1-2)

Importance: Here, Addie comments on the importance of friendship, and how friendships sometimes turn out. Decades later, she is still best friends with Filomena,

and is planning a trip out to see her in New Mexico very soon. Filomena is almost 90, now, while Addie is in her mid-80s.