

Edna in the Desert Study Guide

Edna in the Desert by Maddy Lederman

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Plot Summary

“Edna in the Desert” is a young adult coming of age novel by Maddy Lederman which recounts the experiences of thirteen year-old Edna as she spends the summer with her grandparents in their California desert home. When the novel begins, Edna is a very spoiled, very disrespectful girl whose parents are very wealthy. Her parents have had enough of her misbehavior and rudeness, so they decide that Edna will spend the summer with her grandparents near the quiet, dusty town of Desert Palms. Edna is horrified. There is no cell service, no television, and no internet. Her only source of entertainment are a bunch of women pioneer books her parents have purchased for her for the stay.

Edna is unsure of her grandparents, either. Grandma is large, imposing, and hardworking. Grandpa is quiet, withdrawn, and sits on the porch all day. Edna decides to head off into the desert, determined to die rather than spend the summer in such a horrible place. Yet as she begins to sweat and grow thirsty, death does not seem to be a good option. She passes out, and upon waking discovers a handsome boy on a dirt bike headed for her. The boy introduces himself as Johnny, and reveals that a search is underway for her. Johnny radios in that he has found Edna, and brings her back to her grandparents' place. Edna is smitten with Johnny.

Back at the house, Sheriff Wegman warns Edna about the grave dangers of wandering off into the desert. The newspaper even prints a story about the event, which confirms in Edna's mind how boring the area is. Through the article, she learns that Johnny is seventeen. Despite the fact that he is older, she decides to pursue him. She is thrilled to discover his family owns the town's grocery store, and that Johnny makes deliveries out to Grandma each week. She looks forward to his next visit. In the meantime, Grandma puts Edna to work doing chores and tending to the property. It is work Edna has never done before. At the same time, Edna reads her books about pioneer women who gave up safety and security to travel West. Edna comes to have great respect for them, and for her grandmother, as she does her own chores and completes her own tasks.

Each time Johnny shows up, Edna dresses as cutely as she can, and does her best to flirt with him. She asks him to bring her to an oasis. He does so with Grandma's permission. The two end up kissing, but Johnny insists it cannot happen again because he is too old. Edna strongly disagrees. She decides to plan a birthday party for Grandpa because she knows Johnny will attend. She uses old silverware, dishware, old white Christmas lights, and old furniture found in the garage to prepare an outdoor setting. Grandma is even moved to bake a pineapple upside-down cake for the occasion, and to prepare other food.

The guests arrive, and are thrilled. Edna learns more about her Grandpa since many of those in attendance are Vietnam veterans like Grandpa. One even goes so far as to credit Grandpa with saving his life. While music is playing, Edna is stunned to see her grandfather stand up and tap his foot, the most movement she has seen from him. She knows the time he spent in prison, together with his head injury from the war, have



made him a near-invalid, so his movement is a welcome thing. Edna is complimented by everyone, including Grandma, for what she has done. It makes her feel guilty because she did it to get Johnny to come over, not out of love for her grandfather.

Edna's further efforts to romantically pursue Johnny do not work out. As a result, she begins to grow closer to her grandparents, taking comfort in their presence and their stability. She and her grandparents go into town to attend church and go out to eat afterward. Edna is once again stunned and thrilled when her grandfather orders coffee for everyone. As the summer ends and her parents come to pick her up, Edna sits out on the front porch with her grandmother and grandfather. She knows she should have done it sooner. She also knows she will be coming back to the desert.



Chapters 1, The Cure – Chapter 6, The Boy

Summary

Chapter 1, The Cure – Thirteen year-old Edna is being driven by her parents, Jill and Edward, and her little brother, Brandon, to the home of her grandparents for the summer. Edward, is a successful and very wealthy film director who is very traditional when it comes to family. He is in charge. Jill is a much-sought-after etiquette blogger with her own manners company, Shimmer. Edna is a late-bloomer, is very rebellious, disrespectful, and is often mean. As a result of this and an incident at school with gym socks and a substitute teacher, Edna will be spending the summer with her grandparents in Desert Palms, California. Edna's grandparents have lived in the desert since after the war when Grandpa was sick. There is not much around, Jill explains. Jill reminds her daughter to be a good guest, and that her grandparents have a telephone now. Edna feels carsick.

Chapter 2, Deserted – Edna's grandparents live in a small cabin on a large plot of dusty land where Grandpa spends most of his days on the front porch Edna and her parents see a coyote as they drive in. Grandma is a large and imposing woman. She greets them as they arrive. Edna will be sleeping in the pantry on a cot since there is no guest room. She learns there is no television. Edna contemplates driving away in her father's car. She thinks her parents are still angry about the Mondell incident, when her volcano experiment accidentally exploded in Ms. Mondell's class. Edna watches as her parents drive away, hoping it is some kind of trick and that they will turn around and come back for her. They do not.

Chapter 3, Edna vs. Grandma – There is little around the cabin apart from a garage, a storage tank on stilts, and two eucalyptus trees. It is very hot and dry. The furnishings of the cabin appear as if they are from the late 1950s or 1960s. Grandma has Edna begin helping with chores right away, such as drying dishes and putting them away. Edna then decides to read the female pioneer books her parents bought her, but Grandma interrupts her. Grandma says that Edna will shape up this summer, and will do things other than reading. She will be given a list of rules, chores, and side-projects to accomplish. One such rule is to not bother Grandpa. Grandma says that reading is fine, but Edna must back it up with something else. Edna tries calling her parents, but their phones go straight to voicemail. Angry, she rips up Grandma's list. Grandma then locks Edna out of the pantry.

Chapter 4, Dying in the Desert – Edna walks out in the desert, imagining what he funeral will be like. She soon becomes very thirsty and sweaty. She screams when she sees a snake. She begins to have second thoughts about dying in the desert. She begins to panic, and does her best not to cry.



Chapter 5, Still Dying – Edna wakes up after having passed out to see a bunny nearby. She is still incredibly thirsty, and wonders where the bunny gets his water from. She stumbles across a coyote carcass, and sees vultures circling overhead. She begins crying and wonders if she is hallucinating. She then sees a cloud of dust coming toward her.

Chapter 6, The Boy – A handsome, thin boy named Johnny appears on a dirt bike. He gives Edna some water. He knows who she is, and tells her she can't just wander off in the desert. Edna develops a crush on him instantly. Johnny radios into Wayne to say that Edna has been found. He brings her home. There, Edna sees that multiple locals, and the police, had gathered together to search for her. Sheriff Wegman warns Edna about wandering off in the desert since it can mean death. The local reporter questions how Edna got lost in the desert. She explains she isn't a local, that she is from Brentwood in Los Angeles. Edna thanks everyone as they leave. After praying before dinner, Grandma comments that she can't understand what Edna's stubbornness is all about.

Analysis

“Edna in the Desert” is a young adult coming of age novel by Maddy Lederman which recounts the experiences of thirteen-year-old Edna as she spends the summer with her grandparents in their California desert home. When the novel begins, the groundwork for the theme of Coming of Age is laid clearly and distinctly through the place from which Edna will grow. She is rude, disrespectful, selfish, and spoiled. This can be seen through the way in which Edna complains and argues with her mother as they head toward Grandma and Grandpa's place.

The place in which Edna finds herself is isolated both physically and technologically. Apart from a landline telephone, there is nothing modern: there is no internet, no television, and no cell service. This means Edna will have only herself, her grandparents, and what is at hand for entertainment. The lack of technology forces Edna elsewhere, such as reading the books about pioneer women. The reader should pay attention to Edna's reading of these books. At first, she reads them because she needs something to do in her down time, but later, she will read them out of enjoyment and because she is inspired by the women in them.

However, Edna's initial experiences are all negative. Her attempts to one-up Grandma the way she one-ups her parents fail. In some situations, it is because Edna is powerless against circumstances, such as the desert. In other situations, Edna has no control over her grandmother, such as when her grandmother locks her out of the pantry after Edna tears up the list of rules and chores. Edna's lack of power in the present lead her to conclude that she must go about getting what she wants through other methods. Yet Edna must grow even from a place like here.

That Edna should be sent to stay with her grandparents also brings forward the theme of Family. Edna isn't being sent off to a camp or boarding school to work her issues out,



but is sent to spend the summer with her grandparents for the summer. This is striking due to the fact that a wealthy family like Edna's has no shortage of options available for discipline and behavior modification, but she is sent to stay with family. It is clear that there is some underlying reasoning for this, not yet apparent to Edna or the reader. As the reader comes to learn, there are a variety of reasons, including that taking away the trappings of wealth and forcing Edna to focus on the things that truly matter are among them. And Edna's grandparents will come to mean everything to her by the end of the novel.

It is also early in the novel that the theme of Love slowly begins to emerge. This can be seen in two places. The most obvious example is how quickly Edna is smitten with Johnny. She develops a crush on him immediately. The second, more subtle example comes through Edna's grandparents. She wonders how her grandmother can bear to be in a place so remote and so isolated with a man who barely does anything for himself for company. To the reader more so than to Edna, the answer is obvious. Grandma stays with Grandpa in such a place, and cares for him constantly, out of selfless and true love.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Edna sent to stay with her grandparents over the summer? Why is she sent to stay with them as opposed to a fancy clinic or sent away to a summer boarding school?

Discussion Question 2

What is Edna's first impression of her grandparents and where they live? Why? What do you believe colors her perceptions this way?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Edna decide to wander off in the desert? Is her choice a smart one? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

rebellious, sadistic, etiquette, premeditated, immobile, flailing, lilt, exerting, pittance, poignant, mystified, audible



Chapters 7, Exile – Chapter 12, The Next Delivery

Summary

Chapter 7, Exile – Edna finds adjusting to life at the cabin to be difficult, for she often has long stretches of time with nothing to do. Edna learns the area in which her grandparents live is called Dream Valley. Edna spends much of her spare time daydreaming. On the phone with her father, Edna decides to make him feel guilty by referring to the place as a shack and the potential for her to die. Edward is unmoved, even when Edna cries. She annoyed that she isn't getting much of what she wants lately.

Chapter 8 – Edna comes to realize that the pantry is the most private place her grandparents could have let her sleep, and she becomes grateful for it. Edna is moved by the strength of the pioneer women she reads about, who left comfortable lives for the wilderness. Edna also sees how much work Grandma does around the cabin, and how Grandpa is very quiet and does so little. She begins sitting with Grandpa on the porch and studying the land and animals around her. She learns that Grandma hones her creativity in a cactus garden. She begins to value the few words that pass between herself and her grandmother, and she begins doing whatever she can to generate conversation, such as saying that she might paint the porch.

Chapter 9, Delivery – Edna puts on her cutest clothes when Johnny swings by the house with a weekly delivery of groceries and mail. Johnny tells Grandma he will check the oil in her car, a Bronco, which impresses Edna. Johnny takes the Bronco out for a quick drive to keep it in running order. He gives Edna a copy of the newspaper, which features a story about her getting lost in the desert, and a photo of her and Johnny. She learns through the paper that he is seventeen years old, wishes Johnny was younger, but then wonders why it makes a difference to her.

Chapter 10, Pineapple Upside-Down Cake – The more and more Edna reads about the pioneer women, the more and more she is impressed with them by everything from their sacrifices to traveling through terrible places like deserts. One such pioneer was Mrs. Anderson, married at nineteen, whose husband went West several years before she did to find gold and make a home for her to come to. That night, Edna dreams of the cabin as a boat on the ocean, and when she wakes up, sacks of flour and salt have spilled. A small mouse is rummaging among them. Edna knows she can't wait another week to see Johnny. She discovers a dessert recipe book in the pantry in which there is an old article about Grandma making pineapple upside-down cakes at the San Diego County Fair. Edna decides a trip into town for groceries to a dessert—pineapple upside-down cake—is the best option to see Johnny. Grandma is very quiet upon Edna's mentioning of the article, but calls in an order for groceries from Bishop's. Grandma agrees to show Edna around town the next day.



Chapter 11, Town – Edna makes herself look as grown up and attractive as possible for the trip into town. Grandma packs two gallons of water, fruits, and snacks for the drive into town. It reminds Edna of Mrs. Anderson's journey West. It takes fifteen minutes to reach the small town of Desert Palms, with homes and essential stores and offices. There are also many tattoo parlors. She sees many murals throughout the town. On the side of one building is a mural telling the story of a doctor who treated World War I veterans whose lungs had been hurt by mustard gas and how those veterans came to live in the dry desert for comfort. She asks if this is what Grandpa suffered from, but Grandma explains he was in a later war. Edna has Grandma take pictures of her in front of all the murals they encounter. Another mural shows a picture of an oasis. Grandma confirms the oasis actually exists. They go into Bishop's store for shampoo at Edna's request. Edna is thrilled to find Johnny working, who points her to the shampoo aisle.

Chapter 12, The Next Delivery – Edna wonders about how she can get Johnny to like her. When Johnny arrives, she does her best to make conversation, asking him about how his ride out from town was. Johnny mentions that until Edna came, her grandmother ordered the exact same things each week. She asks Johnny about the oasis. He says there is one surrounded by an inn and cabins. He decides to take Edna with Grandma's permission.

Analysis

Edna still has much to learn and grow from. The groundwork for the theme of Coming of Age continues to be laid as Edna resorts to desperation in the attempt to escape her present circumstances. This includes tugging on her father's heartstrings, appealing to his emotions to get him to bring her home, but he does not fall for Edna's half-ploy. As the reader learns, Edna's tears are real, even if the attempt to appeal to her father is not entirely genuine. Her behavior here is childish, and it is behavior quickly forgotten in the presence of love and family.

As Johnny begins making his weekly deliveries, Edna forgets her desire to leave and begins to focus on getting Johnny to like her. She does her best to make herself look pretty and grown-up in order to attract Johnny's attention. He makes her forget everything else, and their brief encounters together begin to make her happy. Through these encounters the theme of Happiness emerges. Happiness is something that Edna will begin to pursue, but the happiness she ends up having will not be the kind of happiness she initially envisions.

At the same time, Edna's mood begins improving as she falls into a routine of helping out around the house and property. Without realizing it, Edna begins to become happier. She has a sense of purpose, and the chores and tasks she is assigned end up giving her a sense of belonging, of being needed. As she does this work, she begins to sympathize and respect not only the female pioneers in her books, but her grandmother as well. She comes to appreciate how much her grandmother does and realizes that her grandmother's life cannot be easy.



Here, Edna slowly begins to come of age through the experiences she has had. She is beginning to see outside herself, and to understand others and who they are. For example, she becomes especially grateful for the few, but very meaningful words that pass between herself and her grandmother. These few words are a measure of genuine happiness for Edna.

The theme of the Past is also evident in this section. As she comes to value more about her Grandma, she also learns more about the past as it relates to Desert Palms and to Grandma and Grandpa. Desert Palms was once a thriving community that declined as suburban communities were sought over desert communities. The dry desert air and quiet desert landscape became a remedy and respite for the veterans of numerous wars, including World War I and Vietnam. Grandpa himself is a veteran of the Vietnam War, and the war irrevocably altered his life. The specifics of this are not yet clear, but it is clear that the past has heavily influenced Grandpa and Grandma's present place in life.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways does Edna grow as a person in these chapters, especially when it comes to her grandmother? In what ways has Edna not grown? Why do you believe this is?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Edna insist on throwing a party for Grandpa? Do you believe she is wrong in her reasoning and motives? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Edna come to respect the pioneer women and her grandmother so much in this section of the novel? How does this affect her behavior and her attitude? Why?

Vocabulary

profanity, philosophy, fortitude, catatonic, arduous, trepidation, transcontinental, disproportionately, effusive, truncated



Chapters 13, Oasis – Chapter 18, Souvenirs

Summary

Chapter 13, Oasis – Johnny drives Edna to the oasis and resort. Compared to town, it is bright and beautiful. Edna is amazed. Johnny's family actually owns the place. His aunt lives on a houseboat at one end of the water. Johnny explains the oasis in the mural is a different one from the one at the resort. The mural oasis has gone dry. Johnny also explains his family has been delivering groceries to Grandma and Grandpa for years, and that like Grandpa, a Vietnam War veteran, there are lots of veterans living in the area. Two young couples, Bob and Susan, and Sherry and William, invite Johnny and Edna to play volleyball with them. But the men are high and rude, so Johnny decides to leave. When Bob tells Johnny to pop Edna's cherry, Johnny punches him in the face. He holds Edna's hand and leads her away. He is annoyed so many people come to the place to do drugs. They kiss, but then Johnny tells her to kiss someone her own age. Edna insists Johnny isn't that much older, but Johnny doesn't want to take advantage of a someone who is thirteen.

Chapter 14, The Kiss – Edna is thrilled with the kiss. She invites Johnny to the birthday party she decides that she and Grandma are going to be throwing for Grandpa. At the cabin, she begins calling party stores, but all four party stores in the Southern Desert Basin are no longer in business. She also realizes that there aren't enough people to invite, so she decides to approach Grandma. Grandma thinks it might all be too much, but Edna persists. Grandma asks her if she is that rude to her parents, and she explains she is much more disrespectful to them. Grandma worries about her husband, Zeke, who is struggling with head trauma. The last words he spoke—"I love you, Mary"—were said over a year before. She thinks it might be good for Zeke to be around other people and decides to think on the party altogether.

Chapter 15, It's On – Edna is thrilled when Grandma says they can have the party. Grandma's guest list has twelve names on it, including Johnny. Edna decides on invitations made by phone. Everyone agrees to go.

Chapter 16, The Logistics – Edna now considers how to make her grandparent's house and property look festive. Her efforts to order supplies from Perfect Party four hours away ends in failure, as Edna's credit card is over the limit. Disappointment turns to panic as Edna wonders how she will make the party happen. She wanders out to the garage, wondering why most of it is full of furniture from San Diego that was never unpacked. She discovers old music tapes her grandfather used to listen to and writes down the artists on an old pad from Sand Castle Inn on Pismo Beach. She finds three dusty surfboards and two metal folding tables.



Chapter 17, The Breezy Personality and the Dirt – Edna finds that Johnny has gotten his hair cut short when he delivers groceries. Edna finds it attractive. She asks for his help in bringing out the metal tables. Johnny discovers a number of old guns, including old BB guns, among the things in the garage. They decide to shoot cans before getting out the tables. As he does so, a nest is dislodged and dirt and twigs fall all over Edna, making her cry because she only wants to look good for Johnny.

Chapter 18, Souvenirs – Edna calls Johnny at his family's grocery store to ask about obtaining fifteen chairs. Johnny says he'll talk to Betty about it. Grandma gives Edna permission to use anything she wants in the garage for the party. As Edna looks for things to use, such as big, old-fashioned white Christmas lights, she organizes the garage. Grandma pitches in, too. Edna decides to use old handkerchiefs for napkins, makes flowers with wire and tissue paper and arranges them in old bottles, and pulls out old wine glasses. She finds an old wedding photo of her grandparents from years before. Her grandfather is wearing his Marine uniform. She decides to hold onto it, like a souvenir. Johnny later delivers the chairs.

Analysis

Despite the growth of character that Edna has experienced, her own concerns remain chief to her. Her pushing of Grandma to have a birthday party for Grandpa is not done with celebrating Grandpa's life in mind, but with finding a way for Edna to see Johnny again. The kiss that they have shared—an indication of love and of coming of age for Edna—is something that Johnny believes should not have happened. He believes he is too old for Edna, but this does not deter Edna in the least.

Like Edna, Grandma is not deterred by her current circumstances, either. Her love for Grandpa is very clear and very strong, and here the reader sees the theme of Love return again. Her husband's last uttered words, "I love you, Mary," were stated over a year earlier, but they still sustain Grandma. While Grandma believes that Edna's desire for a party is a ploy to get her way, Grandma believes that having people around might do some good for Grandpa. Out of love for Grandpa, she decides to allow the party.

Edna, despite her less-than-genuine motives, goes all-out for the party. As she works on putting everything together, she realizes she has plenty at hand to work with. She doesn't have to spend money to make a nice party. It is another example of Edna's character growth and proof that Edna's parents were correct in seeking to separate Edna from unfettered access to wealth.

It is while going through the garage that Edna continues to discover elements of the past. Among these is an old photograph of her grandparents on their wedding day. Grandpa appears in his Marine uniform, bright, happy, and alert. It is a far cry from how he exists now. The wedding photo becomes symbolic of everything that has been lost and left in the past. Who Grandma and Grandpa are now seem to have no connection to who they were, but their common bond of marriage and love that joined them in



marriage continues to sustain them now. Thus the theme of the Past is also relevant in this section.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Edna decide to tackle party decorating herself? What does she use to decorate for the party?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you believe that Edna decides to keep the photograph of her grandparents on their wedding day as a souvenir?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Edna continue to pursue Johnny even though Johnny says he is too old for her? Do you believe Edna should be pursuing Johnny? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

beguiling, bucolic, improbable, consummation, appalled, insurmountable, compensate, mundane



Chapters 19, The Day Of – Chapter 24, Reality

Summary

Chapter 19, The Day Of – Edna spends hours pulling weeds around the house, and lays down old carpets on the sandy ground. She sets up the tables, chairs, old dishware and glasses, napkins, lights, and silverware. It looks beautiful. Grandma, meanwhile, commits to baking the pineapple upside-down cake. Edna does her best to look nice. She tries stuffing her bra with tissues but decides against it. She compliments her grandparents on how they have cleaned up. Grandma compliments Edna in turn. Dust can then be seen from the first guests to arrive.

Chapter 20, The Party – Freddy and Raul, two fellow veterans, are happy to be there. They drink sodas with Zeke and compliment the party setup as Johnny arrives. Bill Bishop and his wife (Johnny's grandparents) then arrive. They are thrilled to be there, and compliment Edna on the setup. Johnny's Aunt Betty also arrives, as does Laura, Zeke's home healthcare worker from years before. Johnny and Jenny then arrive. Jenny, who works at Bishop's, is beautiful. It makes Edna jealous. Jenny and Johnny appear to have gotten into an argument. Everyone loves the sandwiches and sides that Edna has made. Raul then toasts Grandpa, noting how he met Grandpa at the VA hospital seventeen years ago. He says that Grandpa came into his life at a critical time and saved his life.

The cake is then brought out. It is delicious. Grandma tells Edna that if it wasn't for Edna, she never would have done a cake. Edna accidentally spills some cake on Johnny when Jenny glares at her. She then brings Johnny inside to clean him up. Outside, everyone dances. Grandpa even stands up during the music, taps his foot, and holds Edna's hand. She finds it to be the best few minutes of the party. Edna becomes upset when Johnny and Jenny dance together. She busies herself with cleaning. As everyone leaves, Grandma compliments Edna on being such a good girl. Edna feels guilty, and doesn't have the heart to tell Grandma everything was a ploy for Johnny. Thinking about how her Grandpa stood up, as well as all of Grandma's compliments, causes Edna to cry.

Chapter 21, Aftermath – Grandpa taps his foot to the music while Edna and Grandma clean up the party. Edna realizes her grandmother isn't one to force conversations and says what she means when she says things. Edna feels let down, because she has had so little time with Johnny and because Johnny appears to be in a relationship with Jenny. Edna knows she will have to clear things up with Johnny the next time she sees him.

Chapter 22, The Pink Lipstick Negotiation – When Johnny makes his next delivery, Edna confronts him about Jenny. Johnny explains Jenny is his ex-girlfriend and that his



parents couldn't stop talking about Edna or the party. He explains that Jenny was mad because he wouldn't let her drive. Johnny says he and Edna can just be friends. Edna disagrees, citing everything from the kiss to Johnny punching a guy for her as proof they are more than friends. They kiss again to see if there is something there, and there is. Edna asks Johnny to take her to a drive-in theater. He agrees, and goes to ask Grandma. Grandma isn't thrilled to see lipstick on Johnny's face from Edna. Grandma says she'll think about it.

Chapter 23, The Drive-In – Grandma agrees to let Edna go to the drive-in theater with Johnny provided she goes along as a chaperone. This makes Edna angry, but she is still thrilled to be out with Johnny. At home, after Grandma goes inside, Edna and Johnny kiss again. Johnny then announces he can't see Edna anymore, and races off. Meanwhile, Grandma is surprised by how quickly the affection between Johnny and Edna has grown, and she is also surprised by how fast Johnny leaves.

Chapter 24, Reality – Edna is at once both happy and heartbroken. Edna feels like gloating since she has enjoyed the summer so much despite her parents, but she decides not to gloat because her love for Johnny makes her want to be a better person. She can't wait to see him again when he delivers groceries despite what he said the other night. She is let down when Johnny's great-uncle Ken delivers the groceries with a note for Edna. It is a picture of the oasis with the words "You know why." Edna talks to Grandma about what is going on. She asks what Grandpa would think of her. Grandma thinks Grandpa would think Edna was a smart, courageous girl. Edna then asks about the past with Grandpa. Grandma explains he was a prisoner of war in Vietnam, and has been deteriorating fast in the past few years. Edna realizes her Grandma has essentially been alone for a long time and must be depressed. She hugs her Grandma's arm.

Analysis

Edna's preparations for the party lead her to be quite satisfied with herself. The party takes on a rustic elegance between the found items Edna uses for the party, and how she employs them. The party's decorations receive the compliments of everyone who attends, including Grandma. There is nothing showy, nothing wealthy, nothing rich about the party. It is a genuinely good time where people come together to celebrate with each other, not a gathering based primarily on show. In many ways, Edna follows the example of her party. Her decision to stuff her bra is undone. She will go to the party as she is, not as something she is not. This demonstrates tremendous character growth on the part of Edna.

Grandma's compliments to Edna on the party weigh heavily on her mind. She ends up feeling horrible about the party because Grandma believes it has been done genuinely for Grandpa, while Edna has truthfully done it in the hopes that it would bring her closer to Johnny. Grandma's unchecked and straightforward emotions hit home with Edna, and she becomes closer to her grandmother as a result. Like the party and her ensemble for the party, Edna realizes there is nothing fake about Grandma at all. She is who she is,



and she has fast become a positive role model for Edna. Here, family proves to be immensely important. Indeed, Edna's favorite and happiest moments in the party come when Grandpa stands up and taps his foot to the music.

Edna realizes she, Grandma, and Grandpa are genuinely happy. They are happy not because of popularity from social media or money, but because of the genuineness of their lives, of their time spent together. The sense of family between them is strong. Unwittingly, Edna has been bringing life back to her grandparents, while her grandparents have been giving her a firm footing and a sure foundation.

Her familial experiences, and her romantic experiences, have all combined to give Edna a new perspective on life. The genuine happiness she has experienced with her grandparents is a kind of happiness she hasn't experienced much of before, while her love for Johnny makes her want to be a better person. The mantle of responsibility, from family work to the almost-relationship Edna is in with Johnny, prove to be just what she needs. Taken together, these create new possibilities for Edna moving forward.

Thinking about Johnny and her grandparents also demonstrates that Edna has moved beyond her own selfishness. Her recognition that throwing the party just to be near Johnny was wrong speaks volumes about how far she has come as a person. Her punishment for the true motives for the party is self-inflicted. It is guilt. It is a point from which Edna will continue to grow because now she knows that she has to make up for something—not just for the sake of atonement, but self-improvement.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Edna feel guilty about the party she has thrown after it ends? Why does she feel this way?

Discussion Question 2

What are Edna's happiest moments from the party? Why? What do you believe this signals with respect to Edna as a person?

Discussion Question 3

Does the party go according to Edna's plans? Why or why not? Regardless as to the party going according to plans, what does Edna take away from the party in terms of her moral character as a person? Why?

Vocabulary

improvisations, gussied, treacherous, ominous, conjure, luxurious



Chapters 25, Darker Days – Chapter 27, Edna Leaves the Desert

Summary

Chapter 25, Darker Days – Edna continues tending to chores around the cabin as the summer draws to a close. She has nightmares about torture based on her grandfather's wartime experiences. Edna decides she has to talk to Johnny but is unable to reach him. She begins to wonder if her grandfather wants to go somewhere, too, but is unable to do so. She wonders if he might like a ride in the Bronco.

Chapter 26, Grandpa's Outing – Grandma, Grandpa, and Edna go to church for Grandpa's outing. Everyone is thrilled to see them. Edna, who is not religious, begins to pay attention to the pastor's sermon, intrigued by what he is saying about being good and how it is hard to do the right thing and be good. It is hard to resist temptation, the pastor says. Even while in the desert Jesus struggled with temptation. Edna begins to think about how much she has in common with Jesus, such as being lost in the desert. After the service, Johnny sits down beside her. Edna asks him if he believes in God. He says he believes in something like God and in doing what is right. Edna says she believes in God, but doesn't think God is more difficult to figure out than the Bible lets on. As the church clears out, Edna finds it hard to believe that she isn't going to be spending the rest of her life with Johnny. Grandma, Grandpa, and Edna then go to lunch at the Railroad Diner. Grandpa puts his hand on Grandma's knee, just like he always used to. Grandpa even orders coffee for everyone. Grandma and Edna are thrilled with this.

Chapter 27, Edna Leaves the Desert – Grandpa does not speak again that summer, but Edna is grateful for hearing him order coffee. She likes how Johnny attends church, and about how her encounter with him was one she did not plan on having. As the summer ends, she realizes she has made the pantry like a home, with a collection of rocks and weathered glass. Edna is given letters to borrow and read that her grandparents wrote to one another years before. The letters will give Edna a better understanding of both her grandparents. A note is included from Grandma with a Winston Churchill quote about not looking too far ahead, and is signed with love from Grandma. Edna cries. While waiting for her parents to arrive, she sits out on the front porch with Grandma and Grandpa. She wishes she had done it sooner. She also knows she will be returning to the desert.

Analysis

As the novel concludes, Edna has become a completely new person. This is demonstrated symbolically in how she has come full circle in her consideration of her grandparents and how she joins them on the porch. When the novel began, she



disdained that her grandparents, especially her grandfather, would sit on the porch. She felt no connection with them at all, and wondered how or why anyone would just sit on the front porch. Now, as she waits for her parents, she understands why. She knows the past is a powerful thing, and that sometimes, unspoken love shared between family, and simple peace and quiet are the best things in life. With a deeper love and appreciation for her grandmother and grandfather, she joins them on the front porch.

Although her romance with Johnny seems to be stalled at best, Edna is not terribly disappointed in the end. She has still had a wonderful summer of experiences, especially growing closer to her grandparents and hearing her grandfather order coffee. Her decision to voluntarily accompany her grandparents to church is also a change for her. Edna is not very religious, though she does have some faith. She likes the fact that Johnny attends church, however. Her meeting Johnny at church—something she did not intend to happen because she voluntarily chose to attend church at her grandmother's suggestion—gives her faith in the future and what might someday be.

Edna is already looking forward to future visits with her grandparents. These future visits will be built upon the present, which will by then become the past. The reader should note that Grandma gives Edna a stack of old letters between her and Grandpa, letters which Grandma hopes will help Edna better understand who Grandpa was (and still is, more or less). These letters are essentially physical memories, and are among the things that Grandma prizes most among her possessions. Her entrusting of these letters to Edna is a beautiful and sacred act of actual trust and faith in Edna, and a symbol of the family bond and love that has grown between them.

Discussion Question 1

While Edna's summer has not ended the way she would have wanted it, she has still enjoyed it and plans to come back to visit her grandparents the following summer. Why? What does this say about Edna as a person?

Discussion Question 2

What is the symbolic importance of Edna coming to sit with Grandma and Grandpa on the porch?

Discussion Question 3

What are the reasons Grandma loans Edna her old letters? How does Edna respond to this? Why?

Vocabulary

congregation, charisma, abstract, dramatic, analogous, urbane



Characters

Edna

Edna Miller is the main character of the novel “Edna in the Desert” by Maddy Lederman. Edna is the daughter of Edward and Jill, and the older sister of Brandon. When the novel begins, Edna is a pretty thirteen year-old girl who is very disrespectful, rebellious, selfish, and childish. She is driven out to Desert Palms to spend the summer with her grandparents in the hopes that this will whip her into shape.

Edna is angry that she has been left in the middle of nowhere. Her grandparents are quiet and don't even have television. Edna storms off into the desert when she realizes she cannot have her way and passes out from the heat. She is found by Johnny, a local boy who brings her back to her grandparents. Edna is instantly smitten with Johnny, and looks forward to his visits when he delivers groceries for her grandparents.

Edna gets Johnny to bring her out to an oasis resort his family owns, after which they kiss. Johnny says he is too old for Edna, but Edna is undeterred. She is determined to have Johnny. She encourages her grandmother to have a birthday party for her grandfather so that Johnny will attend, giving Edna the perfect opportunity to see him again. The party goes wonderfully, and Edna ends up feeling horrible because her motives for the party did not have her grandfather at heart.

As the summer winds down, Edna decides to stop pursuing Johnny so actively, and to focus on her grandparents. She has gained a tremendous amount of respect for her grandparents—for her grandfather's war service and her grandmother's dedication to caring for him—and she realizes that she fits in. She has been given a sense of purpose over the summer by having responsibilities, has grown closer to her family, has become genuinely happy, and feels more grown-up for the almost-romance she has had with Johnny. She wants to be a better person as a result, and has already made great strides towards accomplishing that.

Grandma

Grandma Mary Miller is the wife of Zeke, mother of Edward, mother-in-law of Jill, and grandmother of Edna and Brandon. She is originally from San Diego County, but now lives in Desert Palms. As a young woman, she won the San Diego County Fair prize for baking for her pineapple upside-down cake. Grandma Mary is described as a large, quiet, imposing woman who says little, but everything she says has meaning. She does not prattle on, but speaks when important. She is strict but kind, and deeply loving of her husband and granddaughter.

She has long cared for her ailing husband, living alone and isolated to do so. She agrees to help whip Edna into shape, and does so by making sure Edna has chores and productive things to do. As time passes, Edna brings Grandma out of her shell to the



point of baking a pineapple upside-down cake for a birthday party for Grandpa for the first time in years. Grandma's tender concern for Edna can be seen in how she worries over Edna dating Johnny, and how Edna will improve over the course of the summer by applying strength where needed, and love where necessary.

Grandpa

Grandpa Zeke Miller is the husband of Mary, father of Edward, father-in-law of Jill, and grandfather of Edna and Brandon. Zeke is a Vietnam War veteran, during which time he was a prisoner of war and tortured. Having sustained head injuries, Edward did his best to live a normal life, but the last few years have seen serious deterioration in him. Edward hasn't spoken in over a year, and spends his days quietly sitting on the front porch. Nevertheless, he is aware of what goes on around him, such as when he taps his foot to the music at his birthday party, or when he orders coffee at the diner. By all accounts, he was a kind and good man before his health declined, and he clearly appreciates having his wife and granddaughter around.

Johnny

Johnny Bishop is the love interest of Edna in the novel. Johnny is a seventeen-year-old local who helps his family run their general store. He is kind, polite, and morally upright. When Edna goes missing in the desert, it is Johnny who finds her. Although he kisses Edna several times, and though he almost becomes involved in a relationship with her, he doesn't let things go very far because he knows he is too old for Edna at the moment. The future is open, but at that moment, it simply cannot be.

Edward

Edward Miller is the father of Edna and Brandon, the husband of Jill, and the son of Mary and Zeke. Edward is a famous Hollywood director who has made a fortune for his family. However, Edward's upbringing doesn't let him fall into taking what he has for granted. He is very moral and very selective about spending money. When he realizes Edna has become too spoiled and too disrespectful, he brings her to stay with his parents for the summer.

Jill

Jill Miller is the mother of Edna and Brandon, the wife of Edward, and the daughter-in-law of Mary and Zeke. Jill is an etiquette and manners blogger who is well-known among elite circles. She, like her husband, believes Edna has become too spoiled and disrespectful, and so she agrees that Edna needs to spend the summer with her in-laws.



Brandon

Brandon Miller is the younger brother of Edna, the son of Edward and Jill, and the grandson of Mary and Zeke. He is seen only briefly in the early part of the novel, during the drive to Grandma and Grandpa's place. He is happy and very much a typical little kid, annoying his older sister and bouncing around the car.

Sheriff Wegman

Sheriff Wegman provides law enforcement for the Dream Valley and Desert Palms area. When Edna goes missing, Wegman helps organize the search party to find her. Upon her return, Wegman reminds Edna that wandering around the desert is dangerous in any situation, but especially to someone who is not familiar with the area.

Jenny

Jenny is a gorgeous girl of seventeen who works alongside Johnny at Bishop's, and who briefly dated him. She smokes cigarettes, is rude, and has already had her driving permit suspended. Edna is fiercely jealous of Jenny because she is older and so attractive. She is especially unhappy when Jenny arrives with Johnny to the birthday party.

Raul

Raul is a Vietnam War veteran and old friend of Zeke's. The two met at a Veterans Administration hospital many years before during a particularly bad time in Raul's life. Although Raul doesn't go into detail in the novel during his birthday toast to Zeke, he credits Zeke with saving his life.

Symbols and Symbolism

Telephone

A landline telephone is the only piece of modern technology that Grandma and Grandpa have at their place. The telephone is Edna's only connection to the outside world, and she uses it to keep in touch with her parents, to inquire about party supplies, and to invite people to Grandpa's birthday party. Originally, Edna believes she will die without modern technology beyond a phone, but comes to realize that in-person experiences are better than on-screen appearances.

Books

Books about female pioneers in the Wild West are given to Edna by her parents when they drop her off at her grandparents' desert cabin. They are intended not only to be summer reading, but to teach Edna about the hard lives of women who came before her, and how she should be appreciative for the most basic things in life, such as family, food, and shelter. Edna begins reading the books out of boredom, but ultimately becomes inspired by them. She is especially impressed with Mrs. Anderson's story. Mrs. Anderson was married at nineteen and traveled West alone to follow her husband once he had established a life for them. Edna comes to view her grandmother in the same fashion, as a pioneer woman eking out a life for herself and her husband in an isolated area.

Newspaper article

Edna finds an old newspaper article about Grandma winning the San Diego Fair baking contest with her pineapple upside-down cake in an old cookbook. The article features a young, happy, vibrant Grandma. It makes Edna wonder what happened over the past few decades. It also inspires her to get Grandma to bake a pineapple upside-down cake for a birthday party she decides to throw in honor of her grandfather so that Johnny will attend.

Pineapple upside-down cake

Pineapple Upside-Down Cake is Grandma's baking specialty. When she was younger, she baked pineapple upside-down cake frequently, even winning a competition at the San Diego Fair. As of late, with life being more difficult, Grandma has not baked a cake in years. When Edna discovers Grandma knows how to bake delicious pineapple upside-down cakes, she encourages Grandma to bake one for Grandpa's birthday party. Grandma does so, and the cake is a hit at the party. It is the first time in years she has made it, and she credits it all to Edna.



Old wedding photo

An old wedding photo of Grandma and Grandpa is discovered in the garage by Edna. The photo, taken on their wedding day, features a much younger Grandma and Grandpa. Grandma is in a beautiful dress while Grandpa is in his Marine uniform. Edna decides to keep the photograph as a souvenir. The photo reminds her of how physical things and appearances can change, but how the important things, like love, remain, growing stronger each year.

Old Christmas lights

Old Christmas lights are discovered in the garage by Edna when she is searching for party decorations. The lights are the old, large bulb style, and are white in color. She uses these lights to decorate for the party by stringing them up to add class and illumination. Edna's efforts at decorating come off charming, and she is roundly complimented for her work.

Old handkerchiefs

Old handkerchiefs are discovered in the garage by Edna when she is searching for party decorations. She decides to use them for napkins, and bleaches them so that they will turn out crisp, clean, and bright white. They give the rustic party decorations a touch of class. Edna's efforts at decorating are complimented by all who attend.

Ford Bronco

A Ford Bronco is the all-wheel vehicle that Grandma and Grandpa own. It remains in the garage and is rarely ever used. Edna learns that it remains in operating condition through the efforts of Johnny, who checks the oil and takes the car for quick trips to keep it in running order. When Edna asks to go into town, Grandma agrees to drive her and takes the Bronco. After the party, Grandma and Edna bring Grandpa to church and then to lunch in the Bronco.

Old letters

Old letters between Grandma and Grandpa from decades before are kept carefully by Grandma in the present. Grandma loans these letters to Edna so that Edna may see what kind of man her grandfather was, and still is. The entrusting of the letters to Edna is also a symbolic demonstration of the love and actual trust Grandma has in Edna.

Groceries

Groceries are ordered by phone and delivered to Grandma and Grandpa's house every week from Bishop's General Store. The groceries are delivered by Johnny during the summers, and Edna looks forward like nothing else to seeing Johnny when he delivers groceries. Johnny explains that Grandma always orders the exact same things each week, but that Edna's arrival has changed things up. Grandma is now ordering different things, reflective of the change in her life by having Edna around.

Settings

71200 Cottontail Drive

71200 Cottontail Trail is Grandma and Grandpa's address. It is located some fifteen minutes outside of the center of Desert Palms and is surrounded by desert. The property features a small cabin with a living room and kitchen, a pantry, a guestroom, and a bathroom. The cabin has a landline phone. The property also features a water tank and three-car garage. Two car bays are full of old furniture and possessions, while the third car bay is where Grandma and Grandpa's Ford Bronco is kept. Edna is given a makeshift bedroom in the pantry, since it is the only other private room in the house. Edna decorates the shelves with the rocks and weathered glass she collects. The house and property become the site of Grandpa's birthday party later in the novel, and Edna decides she will be back again to visit as the novel ends. It is rather cut off from the world, with no cell phone service and a landline phone the only form of communication to the outside world, and this is done to show how isolated Edna feels. It also allows Edna to be fully immersed in the world of her grandparents and away from any distractions. No doubt the house's isolation is part of the reason why Edna's parents chose that location as the place to send her as punishment.

Desert Palms

Desert Palms is a small, dusty old town in Dream Valley, California. Desert Palms was once an area predicted to be full of growth, but the growth never materialized. The area has instead become a haven for war veterans and their families seeking peace and quiet. Desert Palms proper, hosts a number of essential stores and buildings, and numerous residences as well. Among the stores is Bishop's General, which sells a variety of products in addition to groceries. Desert Palms also has at least one church and is host to the diner where Edna, Grandma, and Grandpa eat near the end of the novel.

Bishop's General

Bishop's General Store is located in Desert Palms, California. It is owned and operated by the Bishop family. Among those who work at Bishop's is Johnny, who makes food deliveries during the summers. While Bishop's General sells a variety of products, it specializes in groceries. Edna convinces her grandmother to make a stop at Bishop's under the guise that she needs to purchase shampoo. In reality, she wants to see Johnny.

Oasis resort

The oasis resort is located near the town of Desert Palms, California. It is owned and operated by the Bishop family, specifically Johnny's great aunt, Betty. The oasis resort is lush, beautiful, and well-tended to. It is popular with younger people, who seek out the isolated place to do drugs. This annoys and angers Johnny to no end. At the oasis, a young man makes crude sexual remarks about Edna, causing Johnny to punch him in the face. The oasis resort is also where Johnny and Edna kiss for the first time.

Los Angeles

Los Angeles is Edna's hometown city, located on the coast of California. In Los Angeles, Edna's mother works as an etiquette specialist and blogger, while her father is a successful and famous movie director. Edna's life in Los Angeles is one of luxury and wealth, and it causes her to take things for granted. She becomes spoiled, rude, and disrespectful. Too obsessed with material things, and too rebellious for her own good, Edna is taken out of Los Angeles for the summer to stay with her grandparents in Desert Palms. At first, Edna misses her life of leisure in Los Angeles, but she ends up realizing by the end of the novel that she will miss her grandparents more when she leaves.



Themes and Motifs

Coming of Age

Coming of age is an important theme in the novel “Edna in the Desert” by Maddy Lederman. Coming of age involves the personal, spiritual, moral, or emotional growth and maturation of an individual often based on real world experiences, events, or mistakes. In the novel, it is Edna who comes of age through the time she spends with her grandparents, and her almost-relationship with Johnny.

When the novel begins, Edna is very much a spoiled rich kid. She is selfish, rebellious, and disrespectful. She has been a handful at school and at home. Edna’s parents have had enough, her father especially. Having grown up in humble circumstances, Edward has not allowed money to go to his head, and he refuses to allow his daughter to continue growing up jaded and disrespectful. Edna will be spending the summer with Edward’s own parents, who live in a small cabin in the middle of the desert.

Life with Grandma and Grandpa is far different than life in Los Angeles. With only a landline telephone, there is no wireless internet, no television, and no cell phone service. This forces Edna to rely on her grandparents for socialization, and forces her not to be wrapped up in herself through technology. At the same time, Grandma gives Edna a list of chores and rules, things Edna has never had before. She reluctantly follows the rules and does the chores she is assigned. At the same time, she begins reading books about pioneer women who gave up the safety and security of their lives for new lives and experiences in the West. Additionally, she becomes smitten with Johnny, and does her best to involve herself romantically with him, another experience outside the norm for Edna.

Edna comes to feel needed and as though she has a purpose through the chores she does. She begins to compare herself and her grandmother to the pioneer women in the books for their hard work, causing Edna to respect the pioneers, her grandmother, and herself. She comes to thrive on the conversation between herself and Grandma and looks forward to even the subtlest actions from Grandpa. Edna’s most selfish act, throwing a party for her grandfather just to see Johnny, is also her undoing. When she is praised for the party, Edna feels horribly guilty inside because the party was not done exclusively for her grandfather. This is a major turning point in Edna in terms of selfishness, who realizes her happiest moments at the party had nothing to do with Johnny but everything to do with holding her grandfather’s hand, watching him stand, and tapping his foot to the music being played. She comes to value family most, and to put them first, even before herself.

As the novel ends, Edna comes to the realization as well that her love for Johnny makes her want to be a better person. She spends the rest of the summer focusing on her grandparents, spending time with them, and speaking with them. She even attends church with them, something she never does at home. When she first arrived in the



desert, she thought it ridiculous that her grandfather sat on the porch all day and did nothing. Now, waiting for her parents to pick her up, she sits with both her grandparents on the porch, wishing she would have done it sooner. She vows to return to the desert, when at the beginning of the novel, she didn't even want to be there in the first place.

Family

Family is an important theme in the novel "Edna in the Desert" by Maddy Lederman. Family involves mutual love, compassion, loyalty towards, and emotional, spiritual, and physical support of individuals who may or may not be blood-related, but who still behave in the fashion of the traditional family unit. Family can be found consistently throughout the novel, and family affects the plot of the novel in important ways, especially when it comes to Edna.

When the novel begins, Edna's mother and father have decided that Edna has become too spoiled, selfish, and disrespectful. They love their daughter dearly, and this is seen through their desire to want their daughter to be a better person. They do not send her off to a camp or a behavioral modification treatment center or anything of the sort. They bring her to stay with Edward's parents for the summer. Edward, growing up in humble circumstances with wonderful parents, knows that family is an important thing, and family issues are best left to families. This is seen in his trusting Edna's grandparents over luxury treatment centers in LA.

Edna is angry with her parents for forcing her to stay with her grandparents. Despite her anger and regular hostility toward them, it is clear she loves them. Readers will note that she gets a lump in her throat when her parents drive away and how Edna's attempts to guilt-trip her father into coming back to get her result in her genuinely crying out of missing her parents. Edna's own initial depression at being left in the desert with her grandparents quickly fades as her grandmother instills tough love in handling Edna. She makes sure Edna follows the rules of the house and does her chores. This gives Edna a sense of purpose and belonging. It helps her to focus on things beside herself, such as her family. She comes to greatly admire and respect her grandmother and grandfather as she spends more time with them, and learns about them.

By the end of the novel, Edna has grown so close to her Grandma and Grandpa that she can say her happiest moments from the party are of Grandpa tapping his foot to the music. She can also say she deeply respects Grandma in ways unimagined at the start of the novel, especially given Grandma's loyalty to Grandpa, and her willingness to help care for Edna herself. When Grandma decides church and lunch are in order, Edna is only too happy to go along. While waiting for her mom and dad to arrive—and with a newfound sense of respect for them—Edna joins her grandparents on the front porch, wondering why she didn't do it sooner. Edna knows, however, that she will indeed be returning to the desert to visit her grandparents again.



Love

Love is an important theme in the novel “Edna in the Desert” by Maddy Lederman. Love comes in many forms, but it is romantic love that is chiefly dealt with in the novel. The theme of love can best be seen through Edna and her Grandmother, as they both love the men in their lives.

For Grandma, romantic love revolves around Grandpa. She has been married to him for decades, perhaps as many as fifty years. Edna discovers an old wedding photograph of Grandpa and Grandma, and the two of them look thrilled, as though they are the happiest people on Earth. Edna knows that now, Grandpa is not quite right in the head. For Grandma to have stayed with Grandpa even though such trials is a testament of the strength of the love she has for him. The fact that Grandpa’s last words over a year before were a statement of love to his wife are a testament of the depth of Grandpa’s love for Grandma. In effect, they become a model couple for Edna to emulate.

For Edna herself, she is at the age where her friends are all beginning to experiment with kissing and asking boys on dates. She is disappointed she will be stuck in the desert for the summer, believing that her first chances at romance will be delayed. However, Johnny’s arrival to rescue Edna from getting lost in the desert signals Edna’s first real crush. She becomes obsessed with finding ways to see Johnny again, from anxiously awaiting his food deliveries to asking her grandma to ride to the store for shampoo to throwing a birthday party for her grandpa on the hopes Johnny will attend. Edna becomes concerned with her appearance, more than ever before. This desire to appear more adult, to appear better physically is later mirrored in her desire to be better morally and personally. As Edna considers it, being in love with Johnny makes her want to be a better person.

Johnny is a moral young man himself. While he certainly has some kind of feelings or romantic inclinations toward Edna, he believes she is too young for him at the moment. He rightfully tells her so, but Edna is undeterred. She spends much of the novel seeking to make him her boyfriend, but Johnny rightfully resists these attempts for the time being. Johnny demonstrates to Edna what moral character looks like, and Edna herself comes to accept that things may or may not pan out with Johnny in the future. Yet, she is a better person for the love she has for him, and for the summer they have had together as well.

Happiness

Happiness is an important theme in the novel “Edna in the Desert” by Maddy Lederman. Happiness—what makes someone genuinely content and to feel fulfilled—chiefly concerns Edna. Edna’s understanding of happiness comes not just through her own experiences, but through learning and understanding others as well.

When the novel begins, Edna believes happiness is wealth and popularity at minimum. Yet, she is clearly not a happy person. She is moody, unkind, and disrespectful. Her



arrival at the cabin to spend the summer with her grandparents is also best by unhappiness. She feels out of place, and feels isolated without the convenience of modern technology. All she has for entertainment is books. She resorts to reading them out of sheer boredom.

As she begins to pull her own weight around the house, and as she begins to learn more about her grandmother, she comes to read out of inspiration and motivation. She is stunned by, and admiring of, the choices the female pioneers in her books made to be happy. For example, 19-year-old Mrs. Anderson braved a journey across the United States to be with her husband. Simply being with the one she loved was happiness enough, and this helps Edna to reconsider her own happiness, and her grandparents.

Edna's grandparents have a simple life, but they seem to be quite content and happy. This is especially remarkable for Grandma, who must do everything around the house and property while simultaneously caring for Grandpa full-time. Grandma doesn't complain because she does it all out of love. She is happy to have a simple life, is happy to be with Grandpa, and is grateful for the time she has left with Grandpa.

Edna herself comes to be more appreciative of family, and her love for Johnny makes her want to be a better person. She comes to find she is immensely happy when she is around both her grandparents, and Johnny. Simple love of family and love of a boy prove to be more than enough happiness for Edna. She realizes that she doesn't need wealth or technology to be happy, but merely a place to fit in, to feel accepted and loved, and to belong. She feels as if she has a purpose with Grandma, Grandpa, and Johnny, and that is to love them. Love then, for Edna, is the greatest happiness of all.

The Past

The past is an important theme in the novel "Edna in the Desert" by Maddy Lederman. Thematically, the past—incidents, events, situations, and circumstances in a person's history—can largely affect the present. The past has tremendous bearing on the novel in various ways.

Edna's own immediate past has led her to having to spend the summer with her grandparents. Having grown up privileged—her father is a famous and wealthy Hollywood director—Edna has become spoiled, selfish, disrespectful, and rebellious. Her antics at school and her rudeness at home have resulted in her parents realizing that some drastic change is needed to prevent her from going further down the wrong path. They do not want Edna's past to continue to be her present, or her future.

Edna's arrival at Grandma and Grandpa's house leads her to ask many questions about how they ended up in such a remote location. Much of it stems from Grandpa's war experiences. Edna discovers a photograph of Grandma and Grandpa taken on their wedding day, with Grandpa in his Marine uniform. Edna learns that Grandpa was a prisoner of war for an entire year in Vietnam. Coming home with head injuries, Grandpa struggled to live a normal life, but in the past few years, he has been deteriorating



quickly. Out of love for her husband, Grandma has remained faithfully by his side at their desert home.

The reason they chose the desert home was because Desert Palms was predicted to be a burgeoning, quiet, and suburban community once upon a time. The dry air and the peaceful atmosphere also proved to be important for war veterans. While the desert is relaxing and healing to the veterans and their families, the town itself never grew as it was predicted to. Instead, generations of the same small families have grown up in the town, such as the Bishops. The Bishops not only own the general store, but the oasis resort nearby as well. As a result, the area maintains a small-town feel in the present, and continues to be an attraction for war veterans.

Styles

Point of View

Maddy Lederman tells her novel “Edna in the Desert” in the third-person limited-omniscient perspective. The third-person narrator relates Edna’s story to the reader, as well as providing important contextual information about situations and other characters as well as Edna’s own thoughts and motives. For example, the reader is given Grandma’s critical consideration and understandable concerns about Edna wanting to go out with Johnny so much. This provides a greater depth to events in the novel and helps to explain why Grandma accompanies them to the movies. The limited-omniscient aspect adds both a sense of realism and drama to the novel. In the real world, no one knows everything that is going to happen in the next few seconds or minutes, so that the narrator and characters of the novel do not know either means the novel has a realistic atmosphere to it. Yet, the unknown also leads to a sense of drama. For example, no one knows how Edna’s attempts to win Johnny’s heart will turn out until the end.

Language and Meaning

Maddy Lederman tells her novel “Edna in the Desert” in language that is simple and straightforward. This is done for at least two reasons. First, the novel is aimed at an audience of young adults and young teens. The language employed is reflective of both the age group and the level of education of intended readers. Second, the novel is about a thirteen-year-old girl, so it is only natural the language employed to tell Edna’s story is simple and straightforward, reflecting both her age and her level of education. The language employed in the novel thus gives it an authentic, contemporary feel, and makes the characterization of Edna as a thirteen-year-old all the more believable.

Structure

Maddy Lederman divides her novel “Edna in the Desert” in 27 numbered, titled, linear, and chronological chapters. Each chapter is numbered from 1 through 27, and given a title. Each chapter’s title therein deals with a specific set of circumstances or issues relating to that chapter. For example, Chapter 20, The Party, deals with the events of the party that Edna throws under the guise of her grandfather’s birthday, when in reality she just wants to see Johnny. This simple and straightforward approach allows the reader to remain focused on the evolving plot. It is also reflective of the target audience of the novel—young adults—and makes reading easier for them by allowing them to pass through the plot unobstructed by complicated or confusing structuring.



Quotes

So about an hour away from Grandma and Grandpa's, Edna's parents explained: they'd given it a lot of thought and that something would be for Edna to spend the summer in the desert with her grandparents, starting now.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1, The Cure paragraph 21)

Importance: Unhappy with Edna's rebelliousness, disrespect, and spoiled nature, Edna's parents decide that a summer with Edward's parents will do Edna some good. Here, the entire foundation for the plot of the novel is revealed as Edna's nature leads to her having to spend the summer with her grandparents. Edna is angered and annoyed that she will not be able to spend the summer the way she wants to, but this serves to be a foundation from which she will grow.

You're going to shape up this summer, Edna, and that will not include reading all day.

-- Grandma (Chapter 3, Edna vs. Grandma paragraph 19)

Importance: Edna's early attempts to outdo and one-up her grandmother all fail. This includes Edna's reading out of boredom to escape from the mundane day-to-day life she has so far with her grandparents. Grandma reminds Edna that there is nothing wrong with reading, but that she must do something physically requiring in order to benefit herself. Grandma is determined that Edna is going to shape up, and Edna is hopelessly outclassed.

Edna had seen people die in the desert in movies, so she had some idea of what to expect. They just walked until they passed out. It wouldn't be hard to kill herself this way, she imagined, because she didn't have to do anything.

-- Narrator (Chapter 4, Dying in the Desert paragraph 1)

Importance: Unable to get her way, Edna has had enough. She wanders out into the desert on her own in a very dramatic fashion, seeking a fashionable death. She imagines what her funeral will be like, and what the attendees will think and say and feel. However, Edna soon realizes that death is not a fashionable thing to do.

In any case, Edna couldn't wait an entire week to see Johnny again.

-- Narrator (Chapter 10, Pineapple Upside-Down Cake paragraph 7)

Importance: Edna is rescued by Johnny. She becomes smitten with him immediately. She is thrilled when she learns he delivers groceries out to her grandparents once a week. After his initial delivery, she knows she cannot wait another whole week to see him. She therefore asks that her grandmother take her into town for shampoo. Edna's burgeoning love for Johnny will come to have important consequences for her later on.

Edna wanted to be nice and attractive, and she had no idea how to get a boy to like her, especially not within the few minutes of a grocery delivery once a week.

-- Narrator (Chapter 12, The Next Delivery paragraph 2)



Importance: Edna does everything she can to get Johnny's attention. This includes making herself look as pretty as possible and dressing as cutely as possible. Yet, the few minutes Johnny spends at the cabin while dropping off food is not enough for Edna to have an impact on him. She decides she will have a better chance at the party.

It would never occur to Mary to make Zeke a party, but if Edna was going to do it, she wasn't sure she wanted to deprive him of it.

-- Narrator (Chapter 14, The Kiss paragraph 57)

Importance: Mary decides to allow her granddaughter to throw a party for Zeke's birthday. Mary hopes the socialization will be good for Zeke, and she erroneously believes that Edna is doing this out of the goodness of her heart for Zeke. Despite this, the party will have important consequences for both Zeke and for Edna, and both in a very positive fashion. This also demonstrates that Edna is bringing back some life and enjoyment into the lives of her grandparents. They are teaching her to be more grounded; she is teaching them to enjoy life a little more.

There were too many improvisations, like the sheets, the homemade flowers and the mismatched silverware. Still, it was charming, maybe because it wasn't serious. In any case, Edna decided it was better than what she'd have paid thousands for it she'd hired Perfect Party.

-- Narrator (Chapter 19, The Day Of paragraph 2)

Importance: Edna uses anything she can find to decorate for the party, from old Christmas lights to handkerchiefs and silverware. The party assumes a classy, rustic feel. Edna is proud of the result, finding it to be relatively charming. It helps her to realize that she doesn't need money to make do, and that she doesn't need to hire experts to decorate for a good party. Likewise, it causes her to focus on the point of a party—to bring people together to celebrate—rather than the superficial aspects of a party, such as who catered, who decorated, what the theme was, etc.

If it wasn't for you, Edna, I never would have done this.

-- Narrator (Chapter 20, The Party paragraph 87)

Importance: As the party ends, Grandma pays Edna a tremendous compliment here. Edna, however, is horrified because she feels so guilty after receiving such a genuine compliment. Edna did not throw the party for Grandpa, but to get Johnny to come over. It is a watershed moment of change in her life. She decides that she owes it to her grandparents, and to herself, to do better. Her grandparents have given her unconditional love, and she has not been totally genuine with them, yet.

Life is fragile.

-- Narrator (Chapter 21, Aftermath paragraph 1)

Importance: Believing that Johnny is taken, Edna is saddened. She is also amazed at how quickly things can change: from elation at being kissed to feeling heartbroken, all



within a few days. She realizes the same is true for all people, including her grandparents. Life is not a constant thing. It changes quickly. Sometimes it is for the better, other times, it is for the worst. What matters is appreciating the life one has, the simple things, and the moments of happiness one experiences.

She hoped that life was nothing if not unpredictable, and that if things were going to change, they would hurry up about it.

-- Narrator (Chapter 21, Aftermath paragraph 5)

Importance: Still reflecting on things with Johnny, Edna continues to consider the ups and downs of life. She might not be able to have Johnny now, but that could change in the future. The future is not always predictable. She might not be as close to her Grandma and Grandpa as she could be now, but this too can change in the future. Between Johnny and her grandparents, Edna is focusing on the good, beautiful, and true things in life, things that bring about happiness and change for the best. Indeed, Edna's love for Johnny, and her growing relationship with her grandparents, make her want to be a better person. She hopes these changes will hurry up.

Edna would have gloated that she got the better revenge against her parents than she could have imagined by enjoying herself so much this summer, but being in love with Johnny made her feel above all that. Being in love with Johnny made her want to be a better person.

-- Narrator (Chapter 24, Reality paragraph 2)

Importance: As the summer winds down, Edna reflects on everything that has happened. Edna has moved beyond wanting to one-up her parents, because she is genuinely happy and genuinely changed. Here, the theme of Love is spoken to, as Edna's romantic feelings for Johnny have helped transform her life. She wants to be a better person than she has been for him, and this in turn makes her realize that life is not about revenge or selfish desires, but about loving and being loved in turn, and in pursuing genuine happiness and fulfillment.

She wished she'd brought out a third chair a long time ago, but it was nice that they were there together now. In any case, Edna knew she'd be coming back to the desert.

-- Narrator (Chapter 27, Edna Leaves the Desert paragraph 18)

Importance: As the novel draws to a close, Edna and her grandparents await the arrival of Edna's parents. Edna, sitting on the front porch with them, realizes her only regret from the summer is that she didn't bother to sit out with her grandparents sooner. She has become immensely close with them, and wishes this would have occurred sooner as well. Nevertheless, she vows to return to the desert to spend more time with them, and it is a vow she intends to keep.