

Gift from the Sea Study Guide

Gift from the Sea by Anne Morrow Lindbergh

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Plot Summary

Gift from the Sea is a book written by famed author and wife of legendary pilot Charles Lindbergh, Anne Morrow Lindbergh. The subject of tragedy and strength, Anne Morrow Lindbergh shares with the reader intimate tales of her journey to date, 1955.

Anne travels to an island where she will remain for two weeks. For the first week, the author is alone. For the second week, Anne's sister takes up residence. During the first week, Anne struggles with leaving the family behind in Connecticut. Although knowing one must have alone time to contemplate, heal and rest, the author shows some guilt about the solo getaway. It takes a couple of days for the author to get settled in and to begin to embrace the solitude that accompanies the small cottage and the sea. Intentions are good, at first, to do all of those things one thinks to do when there is spare time. Those things remain undone as Anne becomes seduced by both the beach and the sea. The sea is used as a metaphor for the unknown and often turbulent state of life but the author is also eager to point out what wonderful gifts the sea offers, if only one can learn to see and realize their significance.

In addition to the metaphor of the sea, the author compares each stage of life to a particular shell found on the beach. All the beautiful shells cannot, and should not, be collected. One must choose and be content in that selection. The first shell is the Channeled Whelk. The empty shell offers the only sense of protection for the sea creature and the author reflects on possible reasons one might leave one's only known shelter to set out into the unknown. The second shell is the Moon Shell, a precisely formed shell that has a black eye in the center. This shell represents separation and aloneness. The third shell is the Double-Sunrise, a shell that is actually two shells, both perfect and symmetrical, connected in the center with a hinge. The Double-Sunrise represents the fragile state of a new relationship. The fourth shell is the Oyster Shell. It is not beautiful like the others; it is bumpy and has unsightly growths. The author compares it to a house with many additions.

In analyzing each stage of life, the author uncovers mysteries and discoveries about the true nature of humankind, the relationships with self and other humans. The roles of gender are examined with great thought and some humor. The author surmises that the main problem in society today is that people try to do too much and are fragmented. That fragmentation can never bring happiness when the inner self craves nothing but peace and serenity. Still, humankind keeps trying.

Relationships play a great part in this book. Marriages, families and friendships are examined. People are notorious for not being able to accept change when it is necessary to maintain life and love. The author determines that in order to gain serenity, one must realize that there are no perfect days, merely perfect moments strung together. Each must be willing to ride out the storm and embrace what is good.

As the book progresses, the author becomes more comfortable with herself as a person rather than as a woman who plays many roles to many people. With the solitude of the



beach, even with the presence of her sister, Anne allows herself to be who she is and does not pretend to have all the answers. Many writers and philosophers are quoted, their ideas woven into the fabric of the author's reasoning. In the end, Anne seems to have come to terms with the fact she will return to life in the city and the solitude and serenity achieved at the beach will more than likely fade away. However, upon her desk will rest the four shells taken from the beach and hopefully, the shells will remind her of the her conclusions and hopes for the future.



The Beach

The Beach Summary and Analysis

The book begins with the author on a two week vacation at the beach. The sea is chosen because Anne seeks to free herself from the demands of city life. While she deeply desires to maintain her role as wife, mother, artist and public figure, such a lifestyle begins to become all pervasive and takes a toll on the author's spirit.

Having vacationed at the beach many times before, the author is surprised how easy it is to become involved in life and forget the rhythm and the pace of the sea. Unlike the city, there is no rush to accomplish the myriad tasks present in every day life. Residing by the sea opens a different world with different cares and philosophies. Anne speaks of ambitions to complete an array of simple and pleasurable tasks. Every day she travels to the beach with a faded straw bag filled with "books, clean paper, long over-due unanswered letters, sharpened pencils, lists, and good intentions," (pg. 15) The books remain unread, pencil tips broken, and the clean paper remains pristine.

Being alone for two weeks presents a challenge for the author. Anne's ability to clear her mind and focus on nothing but the sea is a difficult task. After a few days, Anne manages to slip into a state of ease, permitting herself to focus on inner thoughts and observations. Anne begins to allow peace.

The solitude and serenity of the ocean overtakes Anne, removing any desire to read, write, or even think. The sea casts a powerful spell which captures Anne and revives the dormant ability to relax, breathe the salty air, and become one with the rhythms of the sea.

The second week allows the mind to awaken. The ability to think returns and thoughts begin to wander. This mindset is not like the consciousness of the city. It is softer and more playful. Unconscious thoughts and dreams are coaxed forth and the author begins to notice the perfectly rounded stone and the rare shells that come to the shore from the bottom of the sea.

The author realizes the sea requires patience and the multitude of rewards it offers will be given in time. They cannot be sought after or dredged from the earth. The sea will not give its treasures to the greedy or impatient. The sea seeks to teach patience and faith that the gifts will come.



The Channeled Whelk

The Channeled Whelk Summary and Analysis

During a daily visit to the shore, the author discovers the empty shell of a channeled whelk, a small snail-like creature. There is evidence a hermit crab also inhabited the shell but there is no indication why either creature deserted its home. Why did the whelk leave its only form of protection? Why did it flee? In contemplating the abandonment, Anne realizes she has also abandoned the shell of everyday life.

The shell of the channeled whelk is a perfect piece of architecture that mesmerizes the author. Each feature of the shell is a seamless work of art, as beautiful as the day it was created. The salt washed exterior was once a dull gold. The alteration of the shell and its beauty is surely an orchestration of nature.

The author spends a great deal of time exploring and analyzing metaphors regarding the sea. The channeled whelk and the life it once held represent an existence of simplicity. Simplicity is in direct contrast to the lives of many women, specifically American women, who are often unable to lead such a life due to the fragmentation necessary to leading a functional life.

Anne compares the shape of her life to that of the shell. The shell appears perfect and symmetrical while the author's life does not. The former shape of life is not something Anne can recall. Surely the shape of her life had also been perfect at one time.

The author contemplates that her life has been shaped by the people who have helped to create it. Anne concludes that the shape of life is formed and determined by innumerable factors such as family, background, education, conscience, desires, and obligations. Despite these factors, Anne's main goal at this point is to obtain peace. To live in grace and to know the stability of a central core are among the author's utmost desires. To Anne, living in grace means experiencing an inner harmony which can be transferred to outside harmony, thereby creating an essential balance. The author considers that living in grace may not be possible at all times. People have periods of being "in grace" and have other times when they are "out of grace". The words to describe these states of being are unimportant.

"I am seeking perhaps what Socrates asked for in the prayer from Phaedrus when he said, 'May the outward and inward man be one,'" (pg. 23).

Several examples are used to prove to the reader, and perhaps the author herself, that simplicity is not only possible but can be achieved if one is willing to make sacrifices. The man who was a prisoner in a German concentration camp tells how he learned to live with very little and there were no regrets in the loss of material things. Anne uses the example of nuns and monks who choose the simple life over the fragmentation of



societal demands. While the author may crave simplicity, it is clear that daily living requires much more and also, her family cannot be forced to adopt this ideal.

It is apparent the author does not regret the choice to marry and have children. It is true the author's life may be made more difficult because it is a life subject to public scrutiny. In addition to the multiplicity of daily life, the author must measure up to great expectations projected by her husband's celebrity, station in life, and the pressures of family. The author does not mourn the lack of privacy as much as the insincerity of those who come and go. The expectations of other people, as well as herself, cause the author to live a life in which several masks are required. The beach does not require illusion or pomp and circumstance. This fact greatly relieves the author who chooses to only entertain those thoughts and people who are genuine and do not care about frivolities.

It is possible to learn and employ techniques for living. Techniques may be cultivated through writings, experiences, and the wisdom of others. One of the most important techniques to learn is that of simplification.

Simplification is not an easy task to accomplish. Anne muses that it is especially difficult when one has a husband and children who have their own desires. The author details the many things that make it nearly impossible to live a life of simplicity. There are errands to run, bills to pay, meals to plan, and supervision of all things "modern" that keep a household functioning at the highest and most efficient level. Anne refers to the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker as well as electricians, plumbers and other mechanics on which she relies. Fostering the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual education of the children is of utmost importance as are extracurricular activities such as basketball, orchestra practice, tutoring sessions, and camp. It is Anne's pleasure to perform the mending, sewing, and the maintenance of the family social calendar. The author compares these things and much more to a circus act which would put any tightrope walker to shame. Anne must remind herself to breathe.

Wise men warn us of the multiplicity of life, not the simplicity. Multiplicity leads to fragmentation that may destroy the soul. Simplicity brings grace.

The American woman seems to be more affected by the multiplicity of life. A large segment of civilized womankind has been discouraged and forced back by poverty, war, collapse, and the struggle to survive. American women are, by and large, free to choose the paths of their lives. It is unknown how long American women will hold this enviable position. For today, it is quite significant.

The American man is not to be ignored. The situation concerns this segment of the population as well. More precisely, it could be said that the trials of multiplicity affect society as a whole. As much as modern society likes to think that these trials and tribulations are new concerns, the truth is that this way of living has always been a pitfall of mankind. Plotinus preached against the dangers of multiplicity in the third century.



Despite the widespread dangers of such fragmentation, it is the woman who suffers the most. Distraction is an element which is inherent in a woman's life. In order to be a successful woman, one is required to have many rays that spread from a central "mother-core", akin to spokes on a wheel. The entire pattern of a woman's life is circular.

The spokes emanating from the mother-core are as varied as the woman herself. A woman must be open and accepting of all points on her compass. These may include her husband, children, friends, and community. Each spoke is like a spider's web to each breeze and each event that enters into its atmosphere. How difficult it is to achieve balance in this situation yet how intensely we deem it necessary. The ideal of achieving an inner inviolable core is desirable yet distant.

The author is both pained and amused by the fact that married women are rarely canonized. It has nothing to do with chastity or children. Anne muses that it has to do with distractions. A married woman's duties of bearing, rearing and educating children, as well as attending to the myriad details of running a household and participating in human relationships run against a creative, contemplative or saintly life. The problem lies not in the choice of career, home or independence. It is basically the dilemma on how to remain intact and balanced against the forces of nature and shocking events in the periphery.

What is the answer? The author claims there is no easy answer. At least not a complete answer. The only things Anne receives are clues from the sea. The shell of the channeled whelk offers an answer in the form of simplicity. The author desires this simplicity but cannot find a single distraction which does not seem necessary. Retirement is not possible. There are responsibilities and obligations that cannot be shed. Permanently inhabiting a desert island is not possible nor is becoming a nun. There are too many gray areas and the author realizes that total renunciation or total acceptance of the world is not the solution. There must be a balance between solitude and communion, retreat and return. During these periods of retreat, something may be learned and carried back into community life.

The idea of achieving simplicity in every day life may not be attainable at present but it is possible to achieve it at the beach. The first step is to shed everything unnecessary. Beach living quickly teaches its residents that it is more important to get along with a little. The first thing the author chooses to shed is excess clothing. The sun requires less than which might be acceptable elsewhere. A small suitcase is all that is needed. The author breathes a sigh of relief to be able to set aside the tasks of sewing, mending, and deciding what to wear. The shedding of clothes also leads to a shedding of vanity.

Shelter is another thing Anne chooses to simplify. An airtight shelter at the beach is not as necessary as it is in the north during the winter. The bare shell of a cottage is sufficient at the beach. The author claims few modern necessities and is not at all disturbed by the lack of heat, telephone, hot water, or gadgets which can break. There are no rugs on the floor. The rugs that were present in the cottage were rolled up and put aside on the first day. Bare floors are much easier to maintain. Bustling about and



fussing over dust are cast aside. Surrounded by pine trees for privacy, there is no need for curtains. The windows remain open at all times and the author has no concern about the rain. Consciousness of the sparse and faded furniture is gone. Unlike life in the city, life at the beach does not require the author to impress anyone. Only those who care not are asked inside the cottage. Anne relates these attitudes to insincerity. Shedding the insincerity equals shedding a mask. The author chooses to shed her mask.

Happy with this newly discovered simplicity, the author recalls a conversation with a friend who spent three years in a German prison camp. The prisoners rarely got enough to eat and were often treated in an atrocious manner. The imprisonment taught the man to live with very little and brought about a spiritual freedom and peace. Americans who are afforded the luxury of choosing between simplicity and complication, choose complication. The prisoner did not have that choice.

Vanity can be ugly. One may collect material possessions for vanity, comfort, security, or beauty. The material possessions are not a part of Anne's beach house yet the cottage is not ugly. Perhaps it is bare, yet it is beautiful. The wind, sun and smell of the pines permeate the air. Cobwebs adorn the unfinished beams in the roof. Anne no longer sweeps away those webs that resemble soft gray hairs nor does she pluck out the gray hairs invading her beauty. The bareness of the cottage cries for some moderate adornment and Anne answers the call. It is easy to decorate with the gifts from the sea. Satin smooth driftwood, whitened skeletons of conch shells and trailing green vines with red tipped leaves bring the cottage to life.

The author wishes it would be possible to take home the cottage which she has grown to love. It suits the simple life so perfectly. Anne knows this is nothing but a dream. The cottage would never be able to house a husband, children, and everything required for a comfortable every day life. Only memories of this simple life can return to Connecticut with the author. Those memories and the channeled whelk will serve to remind Anne of the ideal of this simplified life. The author knows the answer to all of the questions and dilemmas cannot be found inside the cottage or the former home of the channeled whelk, but only inside the author.



Moon Shell

Moon Shell Summary and Analysis

The moon shell is a snail's shell that has a symmetrical face penciled with precision and a perfect spiral that winds from the outer edges over a smooth and milky surface to an inner point. The author compares the inner point to a pupil of the eye which stares at her. In turn, the author stares back. The moon shell is also comparable to a cat's eye or an island; each self contained.

Living life on an island only strengthens the author's thoughts on solitude. Although people live in society, they are really separate beings who are like islands and are careful not to intrude on another's shores. The author refers to the famous quote by John Donne. "No man is an island." The author adjusts the sentiment, stating, "I feel we are all islands - in a common sea," (pg. 40).

People are designed to seek companionship and acceptance. Participating in any number of life events seems necessary, even if the event is seemingly without purpose. Women who may have more time to devote to contemplation find activities to fill the void of time, perhaps to avoid being alone. To be alone suggests rejection and unpopularity and therefore should be avoided at all costs. In order to fill a life, one may join a social group, work at an unfulfilling job, take various hobbies or attempt to compete in areas of a world where she does not belong. Instead, what is needed to fill those empty spaces is solitude.

It is common to avoid aloneness. To be considered alone is to be akin to the wallflower who is the unpopular attendant at any function. To be alone is to be rejected and as such, people go to great lengths to avoid being alone. If one is found to be alone, there are always other distractions to fill the void. Radio, television, movies and the telephone are examples of things people will use to avoid the sense of aloneness. Yet aloneness may be exactly the thing people need the most. In solitude, one may feed the spirit and nourish the core that is unquestionably vital to the whole. Maintaining the health of the core allows a person to give of oneself. Without inner strength and spiritual solidity, one will be depleted and have nothing to offer to society, family, friends or self.

The author states that traveling into her aloneness was a painful experience. Saying goodbye to the family is comparable to an amputation and with it comes the inevitable ghost pain. If allowed, however, one can be as the starfish, grow a new limb and be renewed. Upon such renewal, one feels more whole than before.

Solitude has different effects on different people. To some it means loneliness. For others it means fulfillment. The author begins to see that solitude brings fulfillment as well as an appreciation for others. Even when Anne is full to the brim with aloneness and the serenity that accompanies it, she is afraid of being interrupted by another person and thereby losing this precious treasure. It is not only the artist who owns this



fear. There is also another fear that causes people to be forced into being overly busy or attempt to fill their lives with purposeless activities to avoid being alone.

An artist is often required to give of self in small drops. This giving may seem to be purposeless at times and can cause resentment. Women are, by nature, designed to give but may also feel resentment when the giving is without purpose or fulfillment. Caring for the home and family is not as all consuming as it was before the myriad inventions came into the home to make life easier. The caretaker of the home may feel less indispensable than before and therefore, unappreciated. What is required is fulfillment of spirit but one may not know how to go about feeding one's self. Unable to figure out how to feed the spirit and find one's center, one is apt to partake in activities which may seem fulfilling on the surface but are no more than purposeless motions.

"Mechanically, we have gained, in the last generation, but spiritually we have, I think, unwittingly lost. In other times, women had in their lives more forces which centered them whether or not they realized it; sources which nourished them whether or not they consciously went to the springs," (pg. 52-53).

The author does not suggest that people remove from their homes the very items put into place to make life easier. Instead, women are encouraged to take some of the time that has been saved and through whatever method, use it to feed and nourish the center. The time of solitude can be an hour, a week, or a month. Nor does it matter how the time is used. Any action in solitude will benefit the whole. The moon shell, when placed on the desk in Connecticut alongside the channeled whelk, will serve as a constant reminder of these facts.



Double-Sunrise

Double-Sunrise Summary and Analysis

The author is given an unusual shell by a friend. It is a double-sunrise shell; a shell that is actually two shells joined at the center. Each shell by itself is perfect in symmetry and color. The hinge that joins the two shells is created by correlating points on the center of each. Together, the shells become one yet somehow maintain their own separate identities.

The beach creates a carefree atmosphere between its residents. It is a passerby that gives Anne the shell. The person gives the gift freely without expectation of return. Smiles are given with childlike frequency and intensity. One smiles in return because it is easy and there are no expectations of anything beyond the smile. The author sees these relationships as pure, as they are unencumbered by other influences, pressures, or social obligations. What a relief to have such a simple, easy manner in regards to another human being.

Pure relationships are glorious while they last. In the first stage of any relationship, whether it is with a spouse, child or friend, there is a sense of ease and exploration. There is no one else present between the two people in the beginning of the relationship. In that phase, the relationship is the height of seduction. Between the two exists a perfect unity, a separate universe that consists only of the two people. There are no outside distractions or others to disturb the unity. The experience of being the center of another's universe taps into a human's deepest desire to be loved. It is only when the outside world intervenes that the unity is disrupted and begins to change.

In hopes of clinging to the initial stages of the relationship which seemed so idyllic, people often resist moving onto the next phase. Instead of looking forward to summer, one clings to spring in hopes of maintaining the thing that cannot be maintained. The author expresses regret at the loss of initial passion in relationships, from romantic relationships to those with children, as they travel into the next phase.

In addition to the faded blush come the numerous distractions married to every day life. While a woman may embrace the personality of keeping a home and children, she may lack a sense of self and ways in which to express her creativity. On the other hand, the man may be able to express his creativity in his work but will not have the opportunity to develop the personal relationships readily available to the wife. This dilemma may create a sense of resentment between the pair. Each wants what the other has. It is easy for those resentments to create misunderstandings and problems in the relationship. One may think the solution is to find another partner who will not misunderstand and who will love the person for the individual, not for what the individual does on a daily basis. This is an illusion. One cannot find oneself in another person. Someone else's love is not a suitable replacement for an individual's own sense of self. The author refers to a quote by Eckhart to find the answer.



"I believe that true identity is found, as Eckhart once said, by 'going into one's own ground and knowing oneself.' It is found in the creative activity springing from within. It is found, paradoxically, when one loses oneself," (pg. 69).

In losing oneself in order to regain what is lost, it is likely that the relationship itself may also be lost. Is it possible to "re-find" a relationship whose importance has been obscured? Perhaps. One way in which a pair may rejuvenate their relationship is to recreate the circumstances that existed when the relationship first formed. For a married couple, the answer may lie in taking time to be alone together. It can be a getaway for a day, a week, or even one night away from all of the distractions present in everyday life. Simple pleasures can be reintroduced into the relationship. The pair can enjoy each other once again without the crying child or the ringing phone.

The rediscovery of being alone together does not apply solely to a marital relationship. A parent may strengthen a relationship with a child in the same manner. When a child is first born, the unity of parent and child is tantamount. Even if there are other children, the nursery door may be closed so that the parent may bond with the child. As the child grows, that alone time decreases and may even become non-existent. The absence of those bonding experiences may create a chasm between parent and child, one that may be remedied by recreating the initial individual universe.

Part of the misunderstanding in relationships comes from the impossible ideal that one will be the "one-and-only" in another person's life. While that may be true for a time, it is not possible to go through life maintaining such an exclusive existence. The author refers to the old song, "Don't sit under the apple-tree with anyone else but me." In search of an answer, the author also consults an Indian philosopher who gave an illuminating answer. "It is all right to wish to be loved alone. Mutuality is the essence of love. There cannot be others in mutuality. It is only in the time-sense that it is wrong. It is when we desire the continuity of being loved alone that we go wrong," (pg. 72).

The concept of being the one-and-only, whether it is the one-and-only mate or the one-and-only mother, is not a concept that relates to permanence. There is no happily-ever-after as the one-and-only. According to Anne's friend, "there are just one-and-only moments." The one-and-only moments are justified and to wish the return of them, even for a short time, is valid as long as one knows that it is a temporary thing.

One should not strive for permanent one-and-only moments because it would mean the exclusion of everything else in one's life. If one chose to continually embrace one-and-only moments with a spouse, there would be no room for the children, friends, or work. These realities cannot be excluded for more than a short time. The return of the one-and-only moments, however, can bring a much needed respite from the world and refresh the soul as well as the relationship.

The author compares the shells to the ever-changing phases of life. One cannot represent life as a whole, but if the shells are lined up across the top of the desk, the succession can reflect the different stages of any relationship.



Oyster Bed

Oyster Bed Summary and Analysis

The author continues to be contemplative and somewhat melancholy. Despite the realizations that elude so many, Anne seems to accept and yet regret that the middle years have come. While the author's intention is to survive the societal implications of age, the realities still push in the wrong direction. It is apparent that the author wants to learn to embrace the future and the potential that comes with it. The metaphor of the oyster shell and the home make it clear that while the author strives to move forward, the lure of home and family are much too strong.

The author notes that while it is unrealistic to expect duration in one's life and relationships, it is something everyone strives for and desires. Marriage is intended to bring continuity to a relationship. While this is its intention, the continuity does not ensure that the relationship will be the same as it was on the day of the marriage. The relationship is not to remain in one form or stage as in the double-sunrise stage. The author uses other shells to illustrate the stages of life and in exploring the middle years of married life discovers the next appropriate shell.

The oyster shell is not a rare thing. These shells can be found with regularity on any beach. Although they are common, each shell is a mystery unto itself. Unlike the other shells, it is not beautiful. Small shells cling to its humped back and the whole structure seems to be sprawling and uneven.

"It looks rather like the house of a big family, pushing out one addition after another to hold its teeming life—here a sleeping porch for the children, and there is a veranda for the play-pen, here a garage for the extra car and there is a shed for the bicycles," (pg. 80).

The author is amused by the uncomely shell because it is reminiscent of her life at the moment. The oyster shell is still the best representative of the middle years of marriage as well as the middle years of life.

In the beginning, couples struggle to forge ahead in the world by attaining a home, career, children, and a place in society. There is not much time to sit across from one another and simply enjoy the life being built. It is not as if the couple is simply sitting together and looking outward, rather the couple is working outward to achieve their united goals.

It is through this work that the bonds of marriage are formed. Marriage is usually referred to as a bond but it is actually made up of many bonds or strands of various strengths and textures. There are many kinds of love. At first there is romantic love. Eventually, the romantic love turns to devotion and companionship. Bonds are formed



through loyalties, shared experiences, and interdependencies. The daily life of the marriage includes good habits and bad, communication, triumphs, and complications.

"I do not like to put it down. I do not want to leave it," Anne says of the shell and therefore, her current home life. (pg. 83)

Romantic love is still the focus and that one bond wants to remain the strongest. If romantic love is the only bond, just like the hinge on the double-sunrise shell, what would happen if the hinge snapped? What could hold those halves together?

The author considers the oyster shell to be humble, awkward, and ugly. Its form is not one of beauty but of function. Although it is not as pretty as the double-sunrise or the channeled whelk, the oyster shell brings with it an unmistakable comfort like a pair of old gardening gloves that fit the hand to perfection. It is a vital component to life.

Could the oyster shell be the symbol of married life? Should it last forever? Eventually, the need for the large house with the additions will recede. The children will move away and one no longer has the need to attain or maintain the things once so important. By this time, most have attained or have ceased the struggle to attain their place in this world. There are fewer issues of security and physical struggles have ceased due to the couple's success or failure. Should one continue to live in the emptied house or move onto another phase?

Returning to the initial stage of the relationship is rarely an option. For the life that started out so simply, encompassing only two people, has grown far beyond that small world. There are many more ties and the community is much larger. A new world must be created.

With age comes the need to shed things. Much like the author's realization at the beach house, the needs of middle age are few. One has outlived many needs, desires, and ambitions. In the place of those former dreams comes a quieter time and the desire to fulfill wishes that have always been present but were never filled due to the hustle and bustle of every day life. Society celebrates the young and rarely helps those entering the afternoon of life understand or accept what is happening to them. Attempts to push back the clock are never successful. If the desire to compete with the children is important, it is possible that the afternoon of life will pass by without bringing the intended rest and enjoyment for which it was intended. Adolescence is not the only period in which we are intended to grow. The youth accepts the emotional and physical roller coaster of life for what it is and calls those experiences "growing pains". As an adult in middle years, those same experiences are treated much differently. Instead of recognizing a new set of growing pains, the adult misinterprets the pains and become afraid. Some claim a nervous breakdown or mid-life crisis. Those pains are surely signs of decline, not growth. Great efforts are made to cure the problem and stop the clock while in actuality the clock has no intention of stopping regardless of the action. Simply because the clock continues to tick does not mean that it will soon strike the final hour. Acceptance of the pain as growth potential will make the clock less significant or even non-existent.



Argonauta

Argonauta Summary and Analysis

A rare shell the author is not able to find is that of the Argonauta. The Argonauta is an unusual creature that is not attached to its shell at all. It is a cradle for the young, held in the mother Argonaut's arms until the egg hatches and swims away. The shell is then left behind while the mother sets out to seek a new life. The author sheds any melancholy and allows herself to be entranced by the concept of the Argonauta shell. It is freer than the other shells and is the best representation of the middle years of life. The children have gone and the mother is left to venture out to sea in search of the unknown next step. Fear accompanies the unknown and limits the experiences one may have in this new phase.

This shell is one that may be seen in a rare collection. It is almost transparent and fluted like a Greek column. The shell is feather light and seems prepared to set across unknown seas as was the ship for which it was named, the ship that was the vessel for Jason as he searched for the Golden Fleece. Sailors look favorably upon this shell and consider it be a sign of "fair weather and favorable winds".

Should those in middle age behave as the mother Argonaut and leave behind its former vessel to venture off to sea? What would the sea hold for the future? The other shells cover familiar ground and utilize experiences we have had throughout life. The Argonauta explores entirely unfamiliar territory and may instill a fear of the unknown. The Argonauta may represent a new opportunity for growth, one that is not limited.

Cognisance of the new way of life may bring about other undiscovered notions and perceptions in regards to relationships. Like the Argonauta, once one learns it is not necessary to cling fast to the familiar, a new sense of freedom is born. With this sense of freedom comes the knowledge that one may participate in a relationship loosely and contribute completely as a whole person rather than as a half. The role of a whole person adds to the relationship an entirely different facet, since the whole person is secure in oneness and does not rely on the relationship for identity.

Identity is something a woman must discover for herself. Regardless of outside support, the woman must make her own way and embrace all aspects of being. It is important that the woman realize she is full of ambiguity and contradiction and yet the answers lie solely inside.

"She must learn not to depend on another, not to feel she must prove her strength by competing with another. In the past, she has swung between these two opposite poles of dependence and competition, of Victorianism and Feminism. Both extremes throw her off balance; neither is the center, the true being of a whole woman. She must find her true center alone. She must become whole," (pg. 96).



Surely the same must apply to man. Each person must develop one's own personality, one's own qualities. Doing so may ensure a sort of separation from others but will assuredly allow one to offer more to the other in the end. The realization of self encourages the growth of one's interests as well as the development of personal security. It is not necessary to have another "half" to operate as a whole. Each whole person is fully formed and in the end offers a great deal more to any pairing.

The author ends the solitude at the cottage with a visit to her sister. The addition of another person into Anne's world does not diminish the path on which she is traveling. The sisters function as if in a dance, completing tasks, enveloped in their own work and alone time, and spending time together embracing conversation and quiet. Mornings are used for work and each immerses herself in the projects at hand. The afternoon brings about the physical aspect of the day, calling for any activities that require physical labor. The evenings are reserved for communication and relaxation. Anne muses that the day has been a perfect one and wishes it were possible to make each day follow suit. Life is not filled with continuous perfect days and one must accept that fact. Each day must be a balance unto itself, lived as it comes.

The day represents the give and take of relationships and the author compares the action of balance and maturity to a dance. One must not cling too tightly for fear there will be a misstep. Treading too heavily or holding too tightly will surely destroy the beauty and rhythm of the dance. One must keep in time with the music and enjoy the flow. It will not do to cling to a step that has passed or to venture forward to the next step before it is time. In keeping with the music, each step will fall into place, and the couple will complete the dance in perfect rhythm and synchronicity.

The metaphor of dance exquisitely describes the method in which one may approach the unknown and lack of continuity in life. As when dancing with a partner, it is imperative to flow with the rhythm of the music, freely and unencumbered, lest the dance be stilted or ruined. Holding on too tightly to anything will surely cause its ruin.



A Few Shells

A Few Shells Summary and Analysis

The author packs and prepares to leave behind the island and the island way of life. The realization that the same life cannot be lived in the city, or even the suburbs, saddens her. There are reminiscences of the first days and the signs of culture shock. One has the impulse to collect everything in one's sight, perhaps to preserve the experience. After one's pockets are full, however, one begins to realize that a few of something is better than a lot of something because it forces one to cherish the unusual. Such things are not as appreciated if there are many.

Anne muses that things are special when they are surrounded by space. That space allows each thing to stand out and be noticed and admired. Contrary to the smallness of the island, the space that surrounds it has made it beautiful and special. The selection of items and of people on the island is unique and the space allows one to recognize the characteristics of each. In a city where there are many people, also with unique characteristics, people are not noticed as easily because there are so many. Standing out in a crowd is a difficult thing to do. A unique person stands out on the island because it is likely that there is no one quite the same. Each personality is to be celebrated.

The author is pleased by the number of people on the small island and how it is possible to interact with each one. It is unlikely one would surround oneself with such an eclectic group while at home. At home, one tends to gravitate toward the familiar instead of exploring the unknown. Also, at home, there is not time for conscious reflection with or without those people. There is too much to do. When one is afforded the time to be with others, each minute is precious and must be filled to the brim with activity and conversation. On the island, it is acceptable to be silent in the presence of another. There is no rush and no schedule to follow.

In every day life, tasks can seem overwhelming in part because there is so little time. On the island, Anne takes pleasure in the tasks that would be distasteful at home. When there is a day that writing seems impossible, the author is content to bake biscuits. The tasks at the beach seem to balance the time whereas at home, the same tasks eat away at valuable time one might wish to use for something else.

Anne does not try to fool herself into believing that all of the ruminations and discoveries made will change everything upon the return home. In returning to the Connecticut suburbs, the author plans to make a great attempt at maintaining the balance and will use the shells as a reminder to allow space and time to enjoy life. It is Anne's hope that her realizations may soften the edges and bring a little more joy. Although one's thoughts and visions begin to fade with vacation memories, the author knows it is important to take what was learned and utilize it in the best possible way.



"I must remember to see with island eyes. The shells will remind me; they must be my island eyes," (pg. 120).



The Beach at My Back

The Beach at My Back Summary and Analysis

The author accepts it is time to leave the island and the time for reflection is almost over. Anne trades melancholy for hope. The beach has taught the author the many facets of self and how she might relate the island paradise to every day life without sacrificing the comforts and habits already put into place.. The return to the world at large brings about some other points of view, not about the individual as much as the whole. While one searches for simplicity, inner integrity and fuller relationships, it is possible a person can be so involved in this quest that their outlook on life becomes limited.

One must be aware of the planet and all its inhabitants. The days of being surrounded by a small intimate community and one's family are gone. Today there is an ever-widening circle of which each individual is made aware. Each person is expected to know and care about everything that goes on—not only in one's own community—but in the world as a whole. The author remarks that it may not be possible to take each individual into one's heart and treat each with compassion and care. While the heart is infinite in its power, the lifespan of a person and demands placed on daily life make it impossible to stand up for each person in existence. Instead, people tend to become faceless and part of the whole. Actions are taken on behalf of the whole instead of each individual. The author questions if it is possible to care sufficiently for the whole when it is large and devoid of individuality.

Still, Anne realizes she cannot embrace the entire world and it is not her responsibility to do so. One must choose the right battles. While it is imperative to care about fellow man, the life experience does not give one room to spend every day on a crusade. The individual must care for oneself and one's family. What is left over can be used to care for others.

"I cannot marry all of them, or bear them all as children, or care for them as I would my parents in illness or old age," (pg. 124).

Parents and grandparents of the middle aged in today's society were fortunate enough to be able to care for the family and small surrounding community. In having such a limited scope, each person was seen and enjoyed for the uniqueness of being, not treated as part of the whole. This is no longer an option. Instead, people of today try to deal with the whole, the masses, and make decisions based on what is known about the whole. Is it possible to make wise decisions without knowing the individual? Can one really feel a deep sense of compassion for "the mass"?

In giving into the demands to be concerned with the world at large, people often choose to focus on the problems of the whole rather than concentrate on the problems of self. Are the problems of self more complex than that of the whole? Are they too difficult to



deal with and therefore one focuses on the problems of the masses? Is it because the resolution of the problems of faceless strangers mean less than the solution to one's own dilemmas? Is it possible that one can solve the riddles at the edge of the whole when one cannot solve the dilemmas at the center?

In trying to create and maintain a balance between the individual and the whole, one may sacrifice the present in honor of the future. As with the Europeans who are coming to appreciate the here and now, since it is all they have, people must learn to live in today. If the far past is too far away to be appreciated, the recent past plagued by war, and the future too perilous to hold onto, what else do we have?

The key is to discover and celebrate the center—the individual. Only by learning the truth and beauty in the individual may we deal with the whole and learn to move forward with success. After one learns the true nature of the center will the edges of the periphery begin to come into view.

As Anne leaves the island, nostalgia is already setting in. The beach and the sea have given one much to think about and to turn over in one's mind the way the sea turns over the tide. With this, the author ends her journey.

"The waves echo behind me. Patience—Faith—Openness, is what the sea has to teach. Simplicity—Solitude—Intermittency . . . But there are other beaches to explore. There are more shells to find. This is only a beginning," (pg. 128).



Characters

Anne Morrow Lindbergh

Anne Morrow Lindbergh is the author of *Gift from the Sea*. A writer and celebrity, Anne is known for her tenacity, intelligence, and grace. The author proves she possesses great survival skills in the face of adversity and can also maintain the peaceful life of a wife and mother.

Anne learned about grief with the loss of Charles Lindbergh, Jr., her first child. As devastating as the death was, the Lindberghs managed to go on and forge a good life for themselves and their children. After returning to the U.S. from exile in Europe, Anne and Charles resided in a quiet seaside community in Connecticut where they raised their family. Although there was much to consume her days, Anne Morrow Lindbergh managed to devote herself to art, love, and compassion.

Charles Lindbergh

Although he is only mentioned briefly, and that in the role of her husband, Charles Lindbergh was obviously the center of Anne's life. Anne Morrow Lindbergh was a staunch supporter of her husband before, during, and after the record breaking transatlantic trip. When Charles continued to work with *The Spirit of St. Louis* and to promote his cause of transoceanic airports, Anne was by his side. Their marriage was one filled with difficulty during the time of their son's infamous kidnapping but settled into one of comfort and love.

Lindbergh Children

As with Charles, the children are never mentioned by name. Instead, the author refers to them more as a group. It is obvious Anne's children are a priority in her life and that all measures to successfully raise those children into well-rounded, intelligent adults are taken. Although Anne mourns the loss of time in which she can find and celebrate her own self, the children are never a source of resentment nor seen as a burden.

Anne's Sister

Another unnamed member of the family, Anne's sister represents the ideal of being able to live with another while maintaining one's self. Together, she and Anne co-exist for a week, spending time together in conversation and activity, yet allowing the other to exist in her own fashion. Each does her own thing with work and rest, and the space and the lack of clinging contributes to a fulfilling and joyous relationship.



German Concentration Camp Prisoner

This is the man who shares with Anne his lesson on learning to live with a little, rather than a lot. Living in horrible conditions with not enough food made him realize that the more serenity one has, the fewer things one needs.

Monks/nuns

It is they who choose a life of simplicity and through the absence of family and a busy home. Thus they are able to maintain a grace that often eludes the average person.

Connecticut Friends

Friends in the city experience the same fragmentation that the author warns us against. When there is time to get together, every minute is filled with activity and conversation, further adding to the feeling that life is to be rushed through instead of enjoyed.

Island Friends

Island friendships seem to be formed in the ideal of the "pure relationship." There are no expectations, no demands. There is only the freedom to enjoy the company of another without worrying about what will happen tomorrow.

The Morrow Family

Anne Morrow Lindbergh relays fond memories of family vacations to a Maine island and how the experience was a transformation from city life to the relaxed and laid back life one lives beside the sea.

Philosophers

The author quotes many different philosophers and poets, giving credence to their insight and further proving that the lives we live are not filled with new trials but that we have the same experiences as those throughout history and time.



Objects/Places

The Sea appears in non-fiction

The main object of the story, the sea offers insight and clues for the author's musings.

The Beach appears in non-fiction

The beach is the place where Anne spends most of her time examining and comparing the shells. The beach offers a plethora of gifts from the sea for the taking, each representing a different stage in the author's life.

The Shells appear in non-fiction

There are many shells representing the stages of life and the author details each one's physical characteristics and how it corresponds with the phases each individual must face. The shells, of which there are four—the channeled whelk, the moon shell, the double sunrise and the oyster—are each examined and put in a chronological order to remind the author what stages have passed and give insight about those to come.

Lindbergh Home appears in non-fiction

The Lindbergh home in Connecticut is described as both a quiet place and as one that spawns a lot of activity. It is clearly the center of the Lindbergh world, where all things occur or return, and serves as the control room for the entire family. Although the home is in the suburbs, the flavor of New York City seeps in with its distractions and social obligations. In keeping with the times, the home has many modern amenities which make life easier in some ways, more difficult in others. There is always much to be done.

The Cottage appears in non-fiction

The author stays at a small cottage on the beach. It is bare and faded but Anne admires its simplicity and enjoys the fact that it does not need the amount of care that a home requires. In shedding the pretenses usually connected with a house, the author is able to shed other vanity. The cottage offers comfort and ease.



The Island appears in non-fiction

The island itself is small and holds few people, mostly those on vacation. The atmosphere reflects one of ease and camaraderie, much like the atmosphere of a family home.

German Concentration Camp appears in non-fiction

A former prisoner uses the concentration camp as a most severe reference regarding living with very little. The prisoner learns that the stark conditions allows for almost no possessions, however, it is the time in his life when he feels the most peace.

The Desk appears in non-fiction

The author often refers to the desk in her Connecticut home. This is a place she uses to work and write, spending many hours in contemplation. The shells she will take from the island will adorn the author's desk, a constant reminder of the island way of life and the lessons she learned.

Transportation appears in non-fiction

While in Connecticut, the Lindberghs make use of two cars for both work and travel. The island, however, does not permit the author to have a car. Therefore, Anne uses a bicycle to run all errands. The author is surprised that while the errands take longer on a bicycle, they are more enjoyable.

Modern Devices appears in non-fiction

The cottage at the sea offers no modern devices. The author finds it refreshing to not have to worry about the care and maintenance of appliances. Although the Lindbergh home in Connecticut could not function without hot water, a telephone, a television and a washing machine, the cottage is a different matter. The author revels in its simplicity.



Social Concerns And Themes

Lindbergh identifies women's need for self-realization and the balancing act demanded of women caught between reality and romantic illusions about their role in society. She focuses on the problems of fragmentation caused by the increasing choices both women and men face as the result of the social changes realized by the ideals of feminism. Warning of a certain destructiveness and instability in competitive American society, Lindbergh observes that the overwhelming distractions and pressures women find in their new roles place multiple demands on their time and energy. *Gift from the Sea* recognizes these problems and pressures, but also offers readers an optimistic direction with possible solutions for overcoming this *Zerissenheit* or "tearing apartness." Woven into the narrative are themes of marriage, friendship, coming of age, individualism, and spiritual fulfillment.

The narrative, presented as a series of reflections, is inspired by the narrator's week-long retreat at the beach. During the course of the retreat the narrator gathers seashells that lead her to contemplate various stages and patterns in women's lives. Each of the shells suggests qualities that offer women the means to attain the sense of personal awareness essential to their search for self-fulfillment. The first step in the quest for self-fulfillment is to gain selfknowledge. The process of gaining selfknowledge, or coming of age, involves a period of complete immersion in creative activity or in solitary contemplation; it is a process of learning "to stand alone." Lindbergh asserts that self-knowledge will permit women the possibility of more satisfying relationships and the sense of balance they desire in their lives. Once a woman has accomplished an awareness of her own creative identity and individuality, she will then be able to communicate, and enjoy the emotional growth a relationship based on the union of two wholes will allow. This "pure" relationship finds expression in the *Double Sunrise Shell*, "two flawless halves bound together with a single hinge."

Lindbergh stresses the need for moments of contemplation and solitude, particularly during the "full house" stage, recognizing the demands on those women who wish to fulfill roles as both wife and mother. It is her assertion that the confidence gained through self-awareness will enable her to fulfill these roles without losing herself to them. Lindbergh views life as a process of continual growth. She welcomes the later and middle stages of life as an opportunity to shed the ambitions and possessions of youth. It is this stage, symbolized by the *Argonauta*, that celebrates the possibility of achieving spiritual fulfillment and a sense of "wholeness." Although rare, the *Argonauta* accomplishes the balance of the physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual self.

Lindbergh's insight provides a sensitive expression of the complex social issues facing contemporary American women. Her philosophy suggests that patience, faith and an openness to change will prepare the way for selfawareness. By reevaluating female and male roles without abandoning aesthetic, emotional and spiritual values, Lindbergh realizes a greater individuality and equality for both sexes. By redefining feminism from a humanistic perspective, Lindbergh makes it more accessible.



Themes

Women

Being a woman allows the author to share her unique perspective on a woman's role in the daily life of an American woman. A woman is a complex creature of which much is expected, both in her personal and professional lives. It is true today's woman has more opportunity to explore outside interests than ever before and so she may choose one of a number of paths to find fulfillment. Regardless of those interests and whether or not a woman may choose a career, one is expected to continue to fulfill societal roles as well. Many women are expected to marry and bear children, regardless of the other paths she has chosen. It is a tradition that brings great expectations and obligations.

In addition to taking care of the family, there is a household that must be in order, a husband to watch over, and social engagements to manage. Time is fleeting and solitude is scarce or non-existent. A woman's time must be split up between her activities, most of which include the care of others whether it is the direct care such as feeding and educating the family or acting as a chauffeur for various social and extracurricular events. While involved in such activities, time seems to have no real meaning. Days slip by and the opportunities to uncover one's changing self grow fewer. The author refers to Virginia Woolf and "A Room of One's Own." However, Anne feels that a room of one's own, while imperative, is not enough. A woman needs space, time, and solitude so that she might be able to know herself and therefore share more openly with the world. The question remains: how is it possible for a woman to manage solitude and self discovery without neglecting her other obligations and desires?

Marriage/Relationships

The author holds marriage in high regard. There is a deep belief in the tradition of marriage and the responsibilities and obligations it brings. The continuity of a relationship through marriage is one of the few things that does not change as the union progresses. The relationship of marriage changes with the first piece of property, the first house, the jobs of one or both parties. Still, those joined in marriage often desire the union to be as it was on the first day, before encumbrances present themselves and pressures take away time from the couple's small universe.

In comparison, marriage is much like any relationship, whether it be with a spouse, child, or community. Each begins in a state of bliss. There is a palatable air of seduction in being the entire universe to another person. The initial relationship is made up of two people cocooned in a separate world and removed from the drudgeries of daily life. There is no one else but the other person. The qualities of that person delight and one has not had time to learn bad habits or experience lack of communication. There are no outside interferences that interrupt the ebb and flow of the new relationship. All seems to be perfect in the world.



When a relationship leaves the initial stage and enters the real world, things begin to change. The unspoken expectations of one party may negatively affect the other. What was once spontaneous may become predictable and ordinary. New desires and interests may add a creative twist to time spent together. These changes are only the beginning. Other people and activities are always introduced, altering the relationship. There are other people to be attended to, to be taken care of and nurtured. Still, the main relationship can survive. In order to succeed, each person must learn to change with each phase and embrace the newness of each stage of life.

Balance

Balance is probably one of the most essential things to have in life and yet is probably one of the most difficult to achieve. Constraints on time eat up any efforts at creating or maintaining balance. Most people are never taught the concept of balance, much less the ability to achieve it. Some may state that taking time to center oneself and listen to the inner spirit is nothing but frivolity or laziness. There is no time to rest when there are things to do and worlds to conquer. There are obligations and responsibilities to be dealt with and relationships to foster. In American society, it not only acceptable to ignore solitude in favor of action but it is encouraged and almost considered to be a vital part of life. In carrying out the expectations of others as well as oneself, the solitary and perhaps the spiritual side of life may be ignored beyond one's weekly devotions at church. Balance may even become an illusion and spiritual growth or the development of personal desires may be put on hold until there is more time. Perhaps they will never be fulfilled at all.

However, in remaining off-center, one risks losing experiences that would be available if time for such things were allowed. New adventures could be found and relationships could be born, enriching the life of the individual, if only it were allowed to happen. Physical maladies could be soothed and anxious mental states could be calmed through the use of balance and solitude. On the other hand, when one allows time and room for balance, a serenity becomes available where before there was chaos. Some, particularly those who have not before experienced balance, may not know how to act. Physical, mental and emotional states will improve. The well-being of the individual brings about a new outlook and spreads out to the community, enhancing the lives of those who are touched. It may be possible to teach others how to achieve that same balance, creating a more pleasant atmosphere and society for all.

Style

Perspective

Anne Morrow Lindbergh spent many summers on a Maine island with her family, creating a love of the sea. After she married Charles Lindbergh in 1929, Anne became a celebrated figure, traveling with Charles on transoceanic voyages. After the much publicized kidnapping and death of the Lindbergh baby, their first child, the Lindberghs fled to Europe to try and collect what was left of their lives. The Lindberghs returned to the U.S. due to WWII and took up residence on the Connecticut coast where they raised five children. Anne's days were spent quietly writing and raising children. Although Charles was a worldwide celebrity for his solo flight across the Atlantic, Anne gained notoriety in her own right. Intelligent and determined, Anne accomplished much on her own, including writing best-selling books and becoming the first woman to obtain a gliders pilot license.

Anne Morrow Lindbergh's life experiences as wife, mother and artist have certainly helped to form her thoughts and beliefs written about in *Gift from the Sea*.

Tone

Gift from the Sea has many tones throughout the book. The author rarely refers to past experiences that made her known to the world. Rather, she tends to focus on a more personal journey. Sociology and philosophy abound, with the author making both factual and subjective statements about the structure of society as well as self.

Overall, the book holds a tone of moving forward with hope and meaning. Realizing one's past and that of one's ancestors encourages change and the ability to see the path more clearly.

Structure

The structure of the book is slightly inconsistent. Some chapters are short, while others are long. Some are complete unto themselves, while others are fragmented. At times, the book leaves the reader a bit confused as to its direction but eventually rights itself and moves ahead.

Gift from the Sea reads like a letter to a long lost friend. The familiar tone assists greatly in getting certain points across, as if the author is giving personalized advice rather than a broad overview of an individual's life. Although the book was published in 1955, most of what the author says still holds true, and through the use of quotations from writers and philosophers throughout the ages, she proves that what may seem to be current issues are in fact universal and ageless.



Quotes

Every day she travels to the beach with a faded straw bag filled with "books, clean paper, long over-due unanswered letters, sharpened pencils, lists, and good intentions," (pg. 15).

"I am seeking perhaps what Socrates asked for in the prayer from Phaedrus when he said, 'May the outward and inward man be one.'" (pg. 23).

The author refers to the famous quote by John Donne. "No man is an island." The author adjusts the sentiment, stating, "I feel we are all islands - in a common sea". (pg. 40)

"Mechanically, we have gained, in the last generation, but spiritually we have, I think, unwittingly lost. In other times, women had in their lives more forces which centered them whether or not they realized it; sources which nourished them whether or not they consciously went to the springs," (pg. 52-53).

"I believe that true identity is found, as Eckhart once said, by 'going into one's own ground and knowing oneself.' It is found in the creative activity springing from within. It is found, paradoxically, when one loses oneself," (pg. 69).

"It is all right to wish to be loved alone. Mutuality is the essence of love. There cannot be others in mutuality. It is only in the time-sense that it is wrong. It is when we desire the continuity of being loved alone that we go wrong," (pg. 72).

"It looks rather like the house of a big family, pushing out one addition after another to hold its teeming life—here a sleeping porch for the children, and there is a veranda for the play-pen here a garage for the extra car and there is a shed for the bicycles," (pg. 80).

"I do not like to put it down. I do not want to leave it," (pg. 83)

"She must learn not to depend on another, not to feel she must prove her strength by competing with another. In the past, she has swung between these two opposite poles of dependence and competition, of Victorianism and Feminism. Both extremes throw her off balance; neither is the center, the true being of a whole woman. She must find her true center alone. She must become whole," (pg. 96).

"I must remember to see with island eyes. The shells will remind me; they must be my island eyes," (pg. 120).

"I cannot marry all of them, or bear them all as children, or care for them as I would my parents in illness or old age," (pg. 124).

"The waves echo behind me. Patience—Faith—Openness, is what the sea has to teach. Simplicity—Solitude—Intermittency . . . But there are other beaches to explore. There are more shells to find. This is only a beginning," (pg. 128).

Topics for Discussion

How would the story have changed if the author was in the mountains? In a strange city?

How would the tone of the book be different if the author was not famous and subject to the pitfalls of celebrity?

What differences might the author experience if her husband and family had been at the beach?

What discoveries might be unearthed if the vacation took place in winter instead of summer?

How might the author's thoughts be altered if the shells were replaced with stones or driftwood?

What kind of conclusions might the author have made if she were younger? Unmarried?

How might the second half of the author's vacation have been altered if her sister held different thoughts about autonomy?

How do you think the author will take her island experience and incorporate it into her life in the city?

What might the author's next journey be?

Literary Precedents

The theme of female individualism in *Gift from the Sea* finds some precedent in the fiction of D. H. Lawrence. Ursula's sense of awakening in *The Rainbow* (1915) acknowledges Lawrence's recognition of women's growing desire for independence and need for personal awareness. In *Women in Love* (1920), he alludes to ideal relationships that stress the importance of individuality and the autonomy of both sexes as is true of the "pure" relationship Lindbergh describes. While Lawrence's style tends to be somewhat cynical and critical, Lindbergh's social consciousness is more temperate.

Lindbergh's themes and her literary style also owe much to the work of Virginia Woolf whose exploration of literary techniques and attention to women's issues continues to influence generations of women writers. *Gift from the Sea* may itself be counted as a precursor of the "quest for identity" genre of feminist fiction further developed by writers such as Erica Jong, Susan Isaacs, and Doris Lessing.



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