

Gravity Study Guide

Gravity by Leanne Lieberman

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Plot Summary

"Gravity" is a young adult novel written by Leanne Lieberman. It takes place in Canada, in and near Toronto and on the shores of Lake Missisagagon in 1987. It is told by the main character and protagonist, Ellie Gold, who recounts her experiences about discovering that she is gay and attempting to reconcile that with her desire to be an Orthodox Jew.

The novel begins when Ellie goes to visit Lake Missisagagon with her grandmother, Bubbie, for the summer. Ellie's parents, Ima and Abba, go to Israel for the summer, while Ellie's older sister, Neshama, attends camp. At Lake Missisagagon, Ellie meets a girl named Lindsay, to whom she is instantly sexually attracted. This sexual attraction over time becomes a romantic attraction. Ellie struggles to find common ground between her love of nature and being gay with her Orthodox Judaism. Things are complicated by the beliefs of other characters. Ellie's parents are devoutly religious; Neshama is a non-believer, and Bubbie is a casual believer.

Ellie ultimately goes through a crisis of faith. But after more research and good conversations with her mother, Ima, Ellie moves past her crisis. Ima tells Ellie that God is a force like love and gravity. He cannot be measured, but He is always present, even when other people get in the way. This helps Ellie's faith in Judaism return, and she finally finds a place of rest in her mind and heart where she can be both gay and an Orthodox Jew.



One

One Summary

Fifteen-year-old Ellie and her seventeen-year-old sister, Nashama, are preparing for their summers. Ellie is going to stay with their grandmother, Bubbie, while Nashama goes to camp. Their mother, Ima, and their father, Abba, are going to Israel. It is the summer of 1987, and Ellie can't wait to get away from her home in Toronto and head to Lake Missisagagon where Bubbie has rented a cabin. She is also happy to be away from the Orthodox Jewish household her father runs, and with her lenient grandmother. Ellie, when she gets to Bubbie's, especially enjoys praying outside.

Ellie also gives little thought to her faith. She does what she does because she is supposed to. God is the Creator and Ellie doesn't think much more about Him than that. She enjoys parts of Orthodox Judaism, including the quiet on Saturdays, the day of rest.

At the lake, Bubbie buys Ellie a two-piece swimsuit and she begins swimming.

One Analysis

The first chapter of the novel "Gravity" lightly explores the backgrounds of the characters. Ima and Abba, Ellie's parents, are portrayed as devoutly religious, Orthodox Jews, who are trying to raise their daughters strictly within their faith. They are contrasted with the characters of Bubbie, Ima's mother and Ellie's grandmother, and Neshama, who secretly is an atheist and who rebels against her parents. Ellie is presented as a simple girl who obeys her parents, follows the faith because she is supposed to, and goes on about her life as she can.

Yet the influences of Bubbie and Neshama are just as strong as that of Ellie's parents, though Ellie doesn't seem completely moved by them. Bubbie is a believer, but doesn't hold fast to tradition, attending synagogue, or obeying Jewish law. This holds true when Bubbie buys Ellie a two-piece bathing suit.

Two

Two Summary

Ellie has a deep interest in nature and enjoys being outside. She is reading a book called "Linnaeus: The Man and His Work" as well as other books about nature. She likens the order of things in nature to the order of things in Judaism. Neshama and Bubbie think the order in Judaism is simply sexism and oppression. Ellie is relishing being able to pray outside and then filling her days with catching frogs and studying nature. One morning, she meets a girl named Lindsay who is also fifteen years old and who is looking for her friend Craig. Ellie explains that she and Bubbie are renting the cabin for the month. Lindsay offers to teach Ellie how to fish and paddle a canoe, and Ellie agrees. Lindsay is wearing a white bathing suit and Ellie notices that she can see through it. The two girls part ways for the day and agree to hang out again.

A few days later, Ellie goes to visit Lindsay, who is very wealthy and stays in a beautiful house with a well-kept lawn. Lindsay is very open, enjoys talking about sex, and wants to be a stripper because it sounds like easy work. She doesn't want to be a lawyer like her mother. When her mother's boyfriend, Dave, comes to visit a few days later, Lindsay seeks out Ellie to get away from him. Lindsay teaches Ellie to fish, and discovers that she enjoys looking at Lindsay's body. It isn't the first time Ellie has thought about another girl's body, but Ellie is shocked that she is thinking of Lindsay in such a way, and wonders what her parents would think. Ellie decides she wants to go out and asks Bubbie to mini-golf.

Two Analysis

Ellie's character is further expanded: she has a deep interest in, and respect for nature. She is able to draw parallels between the order and laws of nature, and the orders of law and Judaism. Neshama's character presents something of an antithesis to this view, because Neshama believes God is an invented concept, and believes that religions like Judaism are sexist and oppressive. Ellie disagrees, and does her best to maintain tradition while staying with her grandmother.

But Ellie's world is turned upside-down by the appearance of Lindsay, a well-formed and beautiful girl who is also fifteen. Ellie finds herself unexpectedly attracted to Lindsay, especially her body. The realization that Ellie is attracted to Lindsay shocks her, and makes her think about her Jewish background, and her parents. All of Ellie's experiences up until Lindsay have been consistent with Orthodox Judaism, but the appearance of Lindsay and sexual attraction to her is something inconsistent with Judaism.



Three

Three Summary

The days pass by and Ellie and Lindsay spend their afternoons together swimming, sunbathing, and hanging out. Ellie is still immensely attracted to Lindsay. Ellie brushes out Lindsay's hair, and caresses her arm, which startles Lindsay. The two of them go into Lindsay's house for lunch. There, Ellie learns that Lindsay calls her mother by her first name, Maureen, so that she will listen. At home, Ellie asks Bubbie if she ever did anything when she was younger that she was in trouble for, but won't say why she wants to know.

The next night, Ellie brings over her star chart to seek out constellations with Lindsay, who instead wants to play Truth or Dare. Lindsay dares Ellie to go skinny dipping; Ellie dares Lindsay to do the same. They both take off their clothes and swim out to a raft. The next day, Ellie shows Lindsay a hut she has built, and in it, the two of them kiss for the first time, and Ellie runs her hands down Lindsay's body.

The next day, Lindsay leaves. Ellie is upset because she wants to see Lindsay again back in the city, but didn't get a chance to ask. The next week goes by, and Ellie and Bubbie pack up to head home.

Three Analysis

As time goes on, Ellie finds herself more and more attracted to Lindsay. Theirs is a slow sexual awakening, one of teasing and exploration until they finally see one another naked. Ultimately, the two of them share a kiss. Ellie is enticed and excited about the relationship that could be possible with Lindsay, but Lindsay leaves before Ellie has a chance to ask if they can meet up again in the city. Ellie is therefore left in a state of total uncertainty: how her sexual attractions may be viewed through the lens of Judaism; and if Lindsay ever wants to see her again.



Four

Four Summary

Ellie's parents return home from Israel. Ima and Abba are happy to be back, and Ima asks Ellie about her summer. Ima has smuggled fruit through customs to bring back for Ellie. She has also brought back sand and seashells from the middle of the desert for Ellie, too. Neshama arrives home that night. While Neshama was away at camp, she sneaked out with friends to go to a mall, and bought lots of clothes and lingerie. Neshama has also purchased a bra, panties, and jeans for Ellie. Neshama cannot wait to leave, and is taking correspondence math classes before university.

At home, Ellie reflects on her time with Lindsay. She looks up Maureen McMullen in the phone book, and calls, but is afraid to leave a message and hangs up. Ellie then goes to see her closest friend, Becca Klein, who has been watching Ellie's fish. Ima and Abba recount their beautiful time spent in Israel, and Ima believes she has been called upon at the Wailing Wall to help Jews be more observant. She intends to write, and wants her daughters to be ambassadors.

At Synagogue, Ima rises up and sings loudly during services when she is not supposed to, embarrassing the girls and making them wonder what Ima is doing.

Four Analysis

The return of Ima and Abba can be viewed metaphorically as the return of Ellie's Orthodox Jewish faith. Leaving Bubbie's means returning to a more conservative, strict household. But it is not altogether a return: Neshama brings home underwear and jeans for Ellie, which are small but significant elements of rebellion. To make things more complicated, the visit to Israel has made Ima even more devout, wanting to make other Jews aware of just what it means to be Jewish.

This means that the strict household may even become more strict, directly challenging Ellie's conflicting emotions -her struggle with being an Orthodox Jew and being a lesbian.



Five

Five Summary

Ellie reflects on her parents' born-again Judaism. Both of them were looking for something else in their lives when they met, and discovered they were both looking. They found God together.

Ellie and Neshama return to school. Neshama's best friend is Ruchi, a girl with straight brown hair and the largest breasts in school. Ruchi's younger sister, Jill, is Ellie's study partner, and eats lunch with Ellie, Becca, and Esther. After the first day of school, Ellie goes to Lindsay's school, Havergal College. There, she wants to ask Lindsay why she hasn't returned any of her calls. Ellie sees Lindsay flirting with a boy, and believes it is just a show for the sake of her family. Ellie goes by every day, and one day, bumps into Lindsay. Lindsay promises to call, and Ellie hopes that Lindsay likes her.

Ellie also does some research on being gay, and reads that it is sometimes a phase for younger people. She researches the punishment for lesbianism in Jewish law, which is lashing. Ellie decides to go and talk to Bubbie, but cannot bring herself to do so. Ellie questions her father about doing something that is wrong, even if it is forbidden, and Abba replies that the chosen people are still the chosen people. Ellie decides to memorize the Periodic Table of Elements rather than think about Lindsay, though she cannot stop thinking about Lindsay. During Yom Kippur, Ellie asks for forgiveness for her attraction to Lindsay. She knows in her mind that she should have a crush on boys, and not girls.

Five Analysis

Ellie's emotional distress is magnified by Lindsay's distance and seeming uncaring. Ellie begins to question herself as well, and this plunges her into research. Everything she reads, and everything she has been told thus far in her life, makes her believe that as a girl, she should be attracted to boys, yet she cannot deny her unmistakable attraction to Lindsay.

Here, the author presents the real beginning of Ellie's search for answers, and the agony of her conflicting feelings between her sexual identity and her religious identity. She even goes so far as to believe that she simply might be going through a phase, and attempts to clear her mind of thoughts of Lindsay by doing things like studying the Periodic Table of Elements.

Six

Six Summary

Ellie and Neshama beg Abba to let them go trick-or-treating on Halloween, but he refuses. Ellie buys a witch's mask and a Teen magazine, and decides to wear the mask and go to Lindsay's house after school. At the last moment, she decides not to knock on the door and goes home to ask Neshama what she thinks about boys. Neshama says she wants a real man, not the made-up men in magazines. Neshama also shows Ellie her college applications.

On the first night of the Gold family hosting traditional dinners to raise Jewish awareness, Mrs. McMullen calls and leaves a message, asking Ellie to call her back. When Ellie calls back, Mrs. McMullen reveals that Lindsay is missing, and never showed up at her father's. At dinner, Ima praises marriage and love, and the Orthodox way of life.

Six Analysis

Ima's devout religiosity becomes even more devout as she begins hosting dinners to raise Jewish awareness of the faith. Just as their parents become more conservative, Ellie and Neshama both lurch further in the other direction. Neshama wants to go away for college, and Ellie attempts to go see Lindsay, but loses her nerve at the last second. The dynamic between parents and children becomes even greater, just as Ellie's confusion becomes even greater, and Neshama's rebellion extends to even greater reaches. An unavoidable showdown between parents and children seems painfully apparent.



Seven

Seven Summary

Bubbie is amused by Ima's reaching out to encourage Orthodox Judaism. Ellie has also been doing more research, and famous gay people have all met tragic ends, or have had sad sex lives. Ellie is saddened by the fact that Lindsay still has not called her, and finally lies to Neshama, telling her that she met a boy at the lake.

Ima's dinners continue, where she preaches abstinence and the Torah. Neshama has had enough of it. She plans to fill the pockets of dinner guests with notes against Torah, organized religion, and the Bible. Ellie agrees to keep a lookout. At school, Neshama challenges the authority of the Torah, asking Rabbi Lowenstein why certain parts of the Torah are outdated, but others are kept to religiously. She contends that the Torah also forbids sexual freedom for gays, and intends to ask about it. This unnerves Ellie who asks Neshama not to ask about it. Neshama finally agrees not to, and asks Mrs. Lowenstein about it, instead. Neshama is incensed by Mrs. Lowenstein's answer that gay people can change, believing that gay people are born gay and that's that. Neshama is tired of Orthodox Judaism and can't wait to go to college. She even wonders if God exists at all.

Ellie then questions her faith, and who she is. She wonders how she can be a Jew and be gay, and wonders how the Torah and God are supposed to be good, when they consider her an abomination. She wonders if God exists, or why she should even bother praying.

Seven Analysis

The more research that Ellie does into homosexuality, the more she finds it to be not just difficult, but also dangerous. Further complicating Ellie's distress is that Lindsay still has not returned any of Ellie's calls, or bothered to get in touch with her.

The more and more devout Ellie's parents become, the more and more Ellie begins to question her own nature, and her belief in the Jewish faith. The more her mother expounds about abstinence and marriage, the more and more Ellie questions her faith. Neshama's own stand against Judaism -referring to it as limiting all sorts of freedom, including sexual- awakens a serious doubt in Ellie about the faith that she has observed all of her life.

Ultimately, Ellie begins to question not herself, but her faith. She is fairly confident that she is gay; yet, she cannot see the use of Judaism. This leads her also to questioning whether or not God exists.



Eight

Eight Summary

Ellie explains to the reader she has now been a nonbeliever for a month. Yet at synagogue, she can feel Ima's love for God in the passion of her singing. Ima believes she has had a transcendental experience, where the song took her to another place and another time. She decides the weekly guest dinner will be postponed, so the family can enjoy a quiet evening.

Hannukah approaches. Rabbi Abrams comes by and speaks with Abba about Ima's singing. Abba suggests that Ima might be able to attend Bubbie's synagogue. Abba doesn't want to return to their synagogue, either. Abba asks if Ellie will ask her mother to attend synagogue with her and Bubbie, and Ellie consents. Ellie goes to talk to Neshama about what has happened. Neshama has secretly been working at the mall to earn money. Ellie goes swimming indoors with Bubbie. Bubbie is unhappy about Ima being forced to attend another synagogue.

Lindsay comes by the next night. She has locked herself out of her house. Ellie's emotions run from anger to happiness at seeing Lindsay again. Ima makes Lindsay some food, invites her to stay the night, and then heads up to bed. Ellie and Lindsay decide to talk in the morning. Ellie notices that there are bruises on Lindsay's body, but Lindsay doesn't explain how she got them. Lindsay leaves the next morning without much talk or explanation. Ellie tells Lindsay she can't come around anymore.

On Shabbos, Abba explains to Ima that she has, at least temporarily, been barred from attending services. Ima is stricken with sadness. Neshama has also figured out that Lindsay is Ellie's "boyfriend" and promises not to tell. To cheer up Ima, Ellie and Neshama bring her to Bubbie's to watch movies and eat ice cream.

Ellie heads out to visit Lindsay the next day, where the two kiss and explore one another's bodies.

Eight Analysis

By the eighth chapter, Ellie has become an atheist, and practices Judaism only so far as it matters to her parents. Her belief is gone, though going through the motions still remains. During this crisis of faith, Ellie's mother, Ima, also goes through her own crisis of faith as she is banned from synagogue for her singing. Ima has a serious bout with depression, relieved finally by the love and support of Bubbie, Neshama, and Ellie.

At long last, Lindsay finally surfaces. Her appearance is just as sudden as the first day she and Ellie met. But Ellie is unsure at first about whether or not she is happy that Lindsay is around. She ultimately surrenders to Lindsay, and begins a relationship of sorts with her.

Neshama also figures out that Lindsay is actually Ellie's girlfriend. She expresses no anger or resentment toward Ellie for keeping the secret, or for being a lesbian. This small measure of acceptance from her sister comforts Ellie to a degree.



Nine

Nine Summary

Ellie and Lindsay continue secretly seeing one another. One afternoon, when Lindsay walks Ellie to the subway, Ellie sees Lindsay hitching a ride home. She wonders if a stranger is the source of Lindsay's bruises. She also is angry at the thought that some other person is touching Lindsay.

Ima has been trying out different synagogues, and is getting herself back together. Ellie decides to go see Lindsay to talk to her about hitchhiking. Lindsay explains she does it to disappear and to pretend to be somebody else, but Ellie asks her to stop. Lindsay refuses, and hitchhikes again. Ellie is despondent. She will not return any of Lindsay's calls. Neshama reveals to Ellie she has been accepted to several different colleges, and will be moving away. Ellie confesses she misses Torah, and Neshama tells her to go back to it, that different people find different ways of seeing Torah. Ima begins having dinners again.

Lindsay is waiting for Ellie after school the next day. She wants to know why Ellie has been ignoring her, and Ellie tells Lindsay she has no idea how difficult things are for her, whereas Lindsay has things relatively easy. Ellie tells Lindsay not to call her anymore, and leaves. Lindsay calls twice, and Neshama urges Ellie to call Lindsay back, which she does. Ellie explains to Lindsay she just doesn't want to have fun, but wants a real relationship. Lindsay doesn't, and Ellie hangs up. Neshama comforts Ellie. That night, Neshama explodes in rage and tells her parents she is going to study business. Abba is incensed, and leaves the house.

Ima and Ellie attend a new synagogue, and Ellie questions whether or not Ima really believes in God. Ima does. She says that people act foolish, such as what happened at their original synagogue. God, Ima explains, is like gravity. He can't be measured, but He is a force that is always present, like love, too.

Nine Analysis

The relationship between Ellie and Lindsay continues. It is a difficult relationship to maintain, because of Ellie's family and background, and because Lindsay doesn't take the relationship seriously. Indeed, Lindsay isn't looking for a real relationship, which prompts Ellie to end things between the two of them. Just as Ellie sorts things out with Lindsay, Ima begins sorting her own faith out by visiting new synagogues to see where she will be comfortable attending.

Ima and Ellie also have a genuine and important talk about God and faith. Ima reveals that she truly does believe in God, but as so often occurs, people get in the way of others and God. Such was the case with Ima's expulsion from their old synagogue. She

doesn't blame God, just the people stood between her and God. Ima also explains, invaluable, to Ellie that God is real, and that He is a force like love and gravity.



Ten

Ten Summary

Bubbie, Ima, Neshama, and Ellie gather together to talk about the future. Bubbie tells Ima she needs to let her daughters pursue their interests, the same way Ima did when she was younger. Abba comes into the room and asks what is going on. Ellie announces she wants to study rocks, and in so doing, will be living up to Torah and protecting God's creations.

Bubbie stays for dinner, and lets Ima and Abba know she will be helping Neshama settle in for college. Bubbie asks if Ellie can come along, so she can see the ocean. Abba and Ima agree. Ima even asks Abba to attend the new synagogue with her, and Abba considers it. Ima will be teaching a course on women and Judaism over the summer. Later, Ellie and Neshama have a long talk. Ellie explains that she wants to be a practicing gay Jew.

At school, Ellie asks Rabbi Lowenstein about where the Torah talks about protecting the land. Abba decides to attend Ima's new synagogue. There, Ellie catches the eye of another girl.

Ten Analysis

By the end of the book, Ima and Abba have come to a place where they will let their daughters follow their passions, their dreams, and learn about who they are -just the way that they did when they were younger. Part of that for Ellie means rediscovering God and Judaism, and understanding that her love of nature, and protecting nature, is entirely consistent with Orthodox Judaism.

Part of rediscovering God and her faith also means that Ellie accepts that she is a lesbian. She will still have to come to terms with certain things, but she has at last found a place where she is comfortable.



Characters

Ellie Gold

Ellie Gold is the main character, narrator, and protagonist in Leanne Lieberman's novel "Gravity." Ellie is fifteen years old and lives in an Orthodox Jewish household, with two devoutly Jewish parents. Ellie's sister, Neshama, is an atheist who observes Jewish practices to make their parents happy; and Ellie's grandmother, Bubbie, believes in God but doesn't practice the faith observantly.

Ellie is a sweet and kind girl who loves nature, her family, and practices her faith because it is expected of her. But Ellie's entire life is turned upside-down when she meets Lindsay, a beautiful fifteen year-old girl at the lake during the summer of 1987. There, Ellie discovers romantic and sexual feelings for Lindsay, and the two kiss and share intimate moments.

Back in the city, Ellie and Lindsay continue their relationship as Ellie's parents grow more devout and more conservative. Ellie struggles with her feelings for girls, with her feelings for Lindsay, and with her feelings for Judaism. At last, Ellie rejects Judaism and God, believing that they are inconsistent with her desires in life. Ultimately, after a long talk with her mother, Ima, and seeking to understand Judaism better, Ellie discovers that she can be an Orthodox Jew, study to preserve nature, and be a lesbian.

Ima Chanya Gold

Ima Chanya Gold is the mother of Ellie and Neshama, and wife to Abba Gold. Ima is the daughter of Bubbie, and spent her early life wandering around as a college dropout. Ima realized she was searching for something more, and when she met Abba, discovered they were both seeking God. Over time, Ima becomes more and more devout, culminating in a trip to Israel in which she believes she is given a mission by God. This mission is to educate other Jews about their faith, and she takes on this mission with happiness. She becomes even more devout and conservative, and is banned from synagogue for singing too loudly. This plunges her into depression, which she overcomes with the help of her daughters and her mother. She finds a new synagogue, and entreats her family to join her there.

Ima also proves to be critical in the life of Ellie, who has doubts about God and Judaism. Ima tells Ellie that God is a powerful force, like gravity and love, and that He is always there, whether or not people get in the way of someone's relationship with God.

Abba Gold

Abba Gold is the father of Ellie and Neshama, and husband to Ima. He is the son-in-law of Bubbie. Like Ima, he was searching for something more in his youth, and he found



Ima and God. Over time, Abba becomes more devout and more conservative. He is strict and firm, yet he is also fair. He demonstrates this fairness when he allows Neshama to go away to college, Ellie to pursue the study of nature and go with Bubbie to move Neshama in, and begins attending a new synagogue his wife wishes him to attend with the family.

Neshama Gold

Neshama Gold is the seventeen year-old sister of Ellie, and daughter to Abba and Ima Gold. Neshama is also the granddaughter of Bubbie. Neshama is very liberal and very relaxed, yet she is also militant in her beliefs. She does not believe in God or Judaism, and finds religion to be oppressive and sexist. She frequently challenges authority figures, such as Rabbi Lowenstein at school, and secretly plots to go away to college. She discovers Ellie's homosexuality, doesn't make a big deal out of it, and keeps Ellie's secret. At the end of the novel, Neshama reaches an understanding with her parents, who allow her to pursue her passions.

Bubbie

Bubbie is the grandmother of Ellie and Neshama, and mother of Ima. Bubbie is also the mother-in-law of Abba.

Bubbie believes in God, but she is not a strict Jew like her daughter. Bubbie rarely attends synagogue, and encourages her grandchildren to pursue their dreams. She is supportive, kind, and sweet, and cares for her family. She encourages Ima to find a new synagogue, and helps Ima and Abba realize that their children need the room to explore their passions.

Lindsay McMullen

Lindsay McMullen is the fifteen year-old romantic interest of Ellie, whom Ellie meets at the lake over the summer of 1987. Lindsay is beautiful, and stirs up romantic feelings in Ellie, but is also self-centered and unstable. Lindsay enjoys hitchhiking with strangers, and doesn't want a real relationship with Ellie, which ultimately leads Ellie to breaking off things with Lindsay.

Maureen McMullen

Maureen McMullen is the disinterested mother of Lindsay, and a minor character in the novel "Gravity". Maureen doesn't keep tabs on her daughter, and is more interested in her own affairs than she is in her daughter's welfare.



Becca

Becca is the closest friend that Ellie has back in Toronto. The two have a good friendship, which Ellie ultimately strains by spending more time with Lindsay. Becca though, in true fashion, remains loyal and dedicated to Ellie throughout the end of the novel.

Rabbi Lowenstein

Rabbi Lowenstein is the head of the Jewish school that Ellie, Neshama, and Becca attend. He is conservative, kind, and patient. He entertains Neshama's challenges to Judaism and to the Torah, answering them in kind. Rabbi Lowenstein also gives Ellie more evidence that her love of nature and love of Judaism are not incompatible.

Rabbi Abrams

Rabbi Abrams leads the synagogue that the Gold family attends. After several months of Ima's loud singing, he bans her attendance at the synagogue. He is one of the people that Ima explains come between man and God.



Objects/Places

Toronto

Toronto, Canada, is the main setting of the novel "Gravity" by Leanne Leiberman. It is where Ellie, Neshama, Ima, Abba, Bubbie, and Lindsay live. It is where the Gold family attends Beth El Synagogue, and where Ellie and Neshama attend school.

Lake Missisagagon

Lake Missisagagon is where Bubbie rents a cabin for the summer for herself, and for Ellie. There, Ellie falls even more in love with nature, and meets Lindsay.

The Gold Home

The Gold Home is where a large portion of the novel "Gravity" takes place. It is where the Gold family lives, and where Ima hosts Shabbos dinners.

Bubbie's House

Bubbie's house is where Bubbie lives, and proves to be a refuge against the uncertainties of life for Ellie, Neshama, and Ima. It is where Ellie and Neshama go to escape and get small tastes of independence and freedom; and where Ima begins to get herself together again after being kicked out of Bath El Synagogue.

Beth El Synagogue

Beth El Synagogue is where the Gold family attends Jewish services. It is where Ima sings loudly, drawing the wrath of other members, and leading to her being kicked out.

The Ravine

The ravine is a local landscape feature through which Ellie often walks and thinks about life and the things affecting her. It is while walking through the Ravine that Ima and Ellie talk about God, life, and Judaism, and where Ima explains that God is always present, and is a force like gravity and love. This encourages Ellie to believe that she can still be a practicing Jew while also being a lesbian.



Lindsay's House

Lindsay's house is where Lindsay lives, and where Ellie visits frequently. It is where both girls carry on sexual relations with one another.

The Subway

The subway is the mode of transportation that gets Ellie to Lindsay's house. It is also entering the subway that Ellie first observes Lindsay's penchant for hitchhiking.

The Torah

The Torah is five books of Moses of the Old Testament, which provides instruction for how Jews should live their lives. It is the rules of the Torah to which Ima, Abba, and Ellie accede to follow.

Clothing

Clothing tends to be a focus of concern for Ellie throughout the novel "Gravity". It proves instrumental and provides a physical form of rebellion and conservatism. When Ellie is at home, she dresses modestly, in skirts and covers up her body. When she is at the lake, she wears a two-piece swimsuit, and Neshama smuggles home a bra, panties, and jeans for Ellie.

Notebook

Notebooks are important for both Neshama and Ellie. Neshama uses notebooks to write down thoughts and ideas to challenge Rabbi Lowenstein about Judaism; and Ellie uses a notebook to jot down questions to see where Judaism and her love of nature coincide.



Themes

Faith

Faith is the overarching theme in the novel "Gravity" by Leanne Lieberman. It touches every aspect of the novel and impacts each of the characters in various ways. It sets the stage as well for a showdown between Ellie, Neshama, and their parents.

Ellie and her family are Orthodox Jews. They observe and practice the faith religiously. Ellie recognizes that this is part of her identity. Even when she is away from her parents, and visiting her grandmother, Ellie carries on with prayers and Orthodox observances. Ellie's sister, Neshama, is an atheist and only pretends to be Orthodox to make her parents happy. Neshama believes that God is a constructed idea, and that religion is sexist, racist, and oppressive. Bubbie, grandmother of Ellie and Neshama, is a believer in God but not a religious Jew. This makes the Gold parents conservative, Neshama liberal and secular, and Bubbie lenient and disinterested in the faith.

Ima and Abba Gold have grown more devout and religious over time. Following a visit to Israel, Ima believes she has been called upon by God to instruct more Jews about their faith. This leads her to become even more devout. This in turn causes Neshama to rebel even more against her parents' faith, applying to colleges behind the backs of her parents. Ellie, meanwhile, finds comfort in the fact that there is order in nature and order in Judaism.

When Ellie realizes she has feelings for girls, she is conflicted about her faith, trying to discover how she can reconcile being a lesbian and being Jewish. This ultimately leads her to doubt God's existence and Judaism, and she becomes an atheist. Yet she finds she misses her faith, and after a long talk with Ima about God -where Ima explains that God is always present, like gravity and love, but that people get in the way of that sometimes- Ellie decides that she can be a lesbian and be Jewish. Her love of Judaism is further strengthened by the understanding that a love of nature is also entirely consistent with Judaism.

Family

Family is a major theme in the novel "Gravity" by Leanne Lieberman. At every step of the way, family is present in Ellie's life. Sometimes it is for the worse, but usually it is for the better.

Ellie's family, despite its Orthodox Judaism, is warm and close in addition to being a strict and conservative. The bonds of family can be felt in how Bubbie rallies behind Ellie and Neshama, telling Ima and Abba that Ellie and Neshama must be free enough to follow their own dreams and live their own lives. Ellie, Neshama, and Bubbie rally behind Ima and care for her when she is banned from attending Beth El Synagogue for



singing too loudly. Abba also rallies behind his family by allowing his daughters to pursue their dreams, and attending the new synagogue with Ima.

Ellie is also very concerned about the well-being of her family, and concerned about what they will think about her being a lesbian. She is mortified when Neshama figures it out, but relieved when Neshama stands beside her and keeps her secret. By the end of the novel, through all of the trials that each of the characters has faced, their family has grown closer.

Love

Love is a major theme in the novel "Gravity" by Leanne Leiberman. It exists in two forms in the novel: familial and romantic.

On the familial side, the bonds of the Gold family are strong not just because of family, but because of love of family. The love that Ima and Abba have for their children is strong and telling. They are supportive, yet they have high expectations of their daughters, wanting them to become teachers. Yet, they are also around to care for their daughters, from driving them to school to providing a good life for them. An illustration of Ima's love and attentiveness to Ellie, for example, occurs when she brings home shells and sand from the Israeli desert for Ellie, knowing Ellie loves nature. Abba's love for his family is on display when he allows his daughters to pursue their dreams, and when he agrees to attend a new synagogue with his loving wife.

Romantic love also exists in the novel, emanating from Ellie herself. Once she realizes she is attracted to girls, she realizes she wants a romantic relationship. She falls in love with Lindsay and goes out of her way and risks alienating her family by seeing Lindsay. She desperately wants Lindsay to return her love, but Lindsay does not and so Ellie moves on.

Style

Point of View

Leanna Lieberman tells her novel "Gravity" in the first-person narrative, told by the novel's main character and protagonist, Ellie. This is done because the novel deals with Ellie's struggle to find common ground between her faith as an Orthodox Jew, and her undeniable attraction to other girls. By telling the novel in first person rather than third, the author allows unchecked access into the mind of the narrator, which would not necessarily be possible with third-person narration. The reader is able to personally understand Ellie's thoughts and fears, hopes, and desires, securing a much more intimate relationship between character and reader.

Setting

The setting of the novel "Gravity" by Leanna Lieberman occurs primarily in two places: the city of Toronto, and Lake Missisagagon. It is at Lake Missisagagon that Ellie meets Lindsay, and discovers her own romantic feelings are for other girls, not boys. It is in Toronto where Lindsay must come to terms with her sexuality and her faith as an Orthodox Jew. The settings are important: At Lake Missisagagon, Ellie is free from her restrictive upbringing and surroundings, and therefore is able to explore her sexuality with Lindsay. It is in Toronto that Ellie must reconcile parts of her life with her faith.

Language and Meaning

Since the narrator of the novel "Gravity" is a fifteen-year-old girl, Leanne Lieberman uses simple and straightforward language to tell her story. The language is not flowery, overly poetic, or vague, and therefore, it is easy to traverse. The ordinary language makes Ellie's character relatable to young readers where most of them are presumably female.

Structure

Leanne Lieberman divides her novel "Gravity" up into ten chapters, with each chapter being arranged chronologically. This is done because the plot is straightforward, not needing complex structuring to tell. Lieberman has a point to make, and does so with ease. This is also beneficial for the reader, who is not dragged down in structural difficulties, and can easily traverse the text to glean the message.



Quotes

"Taxonomy. God's creations in neat sets. Judaism is a lot like taxonomy, even if Bubbie and Neshama think it's only oppression and patriarchy."

-Chapter 2, p. 19

"Boys, Ellie. You're supposed to like boys. Right."

-Chapter 2, p. 39

"I dare you to kiss me,' she whispers. 'I want to know what it's like -to kiss a girl.'"

-Chapter 3, p. 59

"Neshama has always been waiting to escape."

-Chapter 4, p. 72

"I leave the library somewhat relieved. Maybe we just experimented, maybe I'll grow up and learn to like men. Maybe."

-Chapter 5, p. 96

"In the secular world, people often fall in love with a person's appearance rather than their soul. "

-Chapter 6, p. 121

"I'm so sick of a mean God who insists on stupid things like only eating animals with split hooves. How does that make you a better person?"

-Chapter 7, p. 140

"I want to shove Lindsay aside, shut the door in her face. Either that, or take her in my arms."

-Chapter 8, p. 162

"We can't measure love, but we can never deny its existence."

-Chapter 9, p. 222

"The sea is never the same. Each time the tide comes in, it's different. And when the tide changes, the plants and animals adjust."

-Chapter 10, p. 234

"I want everything Ima says about how to get married."

-Chapter 10, p. 235



Topics for Discussion

Each of the characters in the novel "Gravity" have different understandings about God and Orthodox Judaism/religion. Identify the beliefs of Abba, Ima, Ellie, Neshama, and Bubbie. Where do they stand on religion itself? Which of these characters and beliefs do you think is correct? Why? Provide evidence to support your claim.

Discuss the theme of family in the novel "Gravity." Where is family strongest and where is it weakest? Describe the Gold family. Are they close? Why or why not? Does this matter to Ellie?

The theme of love is very important in the novel "Gravity." In what forms does love appear in the novel? Why does it matter? How does it affect Ellie's actions and beliefs?

Discuss the ways in which Ellie is able to find common ground between her belief in Orthodox Judaism, her love of nature, and her attraction to girls. Do you think this common ground is settling and reassuring to Ellie? What other challenges will Ellie face?

Discuss the theme of faith in the novel "Gravity". Why is it so important to Ellie, Ima, and Abba? Why is it unimportant to Neshama and Bubbie? How does faith affect each of their lives?