

The Ladies Auxiliary Study Guide

The Ladies Auxiliary by Tova Mirvis

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



Contents

The Ladies Auxiliary Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	4
Chapter 1.....	5
Chapter 2.....	7
Chapter 3.....	9
Chapter 4.....	12
Chapter 5.....	15
Chapter 6.....	16
Chapter 7.....	18
Chapter 8.....	20
Chapter 9.....	21
Chapter 10.....	22
Chapter 11.....	24
Chapter 12.....	25
Chapter 13.....	27
Chapter 14.....	29
Chapter 15.....	30
Chapter 16.....	32
Chapter 17.....	34
Chapter 18.....	36
Chapter 19.....	38
Chapter 20.....	40
Characters.....	41
Objects/Places.....	52



Themes..... 59

Style..... 61

Quotes..... 63

Topics for Discussion..... 66



Plot Summary

An outsider brings awakening to a close-knit but closed-minded Jewish community in the novel *The Ladies Auxiliary* by Tova Mirvis. Batsheva Jacobs, an eclectic Jewish convert, becomes the object of gossip on the first day that she moves in the Memphis Jewish community. The ladies try to accept Batsheva because the Rabbi's wife seems to approve of her but their opinions change when the girls who Batsheva teaches become more rebellious. They blame the negative changes on Batsheva and try to force her from the community. Themes in the novel include hypocrisy in religion; the emptiness that can take over religious rituals; and the danger of judging a person by their appearance alone.

Before they have even met Batsheva, who moves into their community late one Friday, the Jewish women of Memphis have already decided that they do not like her. She dresses differently from them; she has converted to Judaism instead of being born into it; she sings too loudly at the shul; and her daughter does not act like their children do. Because the Rabbi's wife, Mimi does like Batsheva, the others try to like her as well. They find her enthusiasm for the rituals of their religion, which have grown old and tired to them, refreshing. They are even impressed that Mimi allows her only son, Yosef, to study with Batsheva.

It is when the already troubled youth of the Jewish community begin to rebel in earnest that the ladies once again turn against Batsheva. They blame her for the changes that they see in their children without realizing that it is their own hypocritical ways that create the rebellion. The situation comes to a head when one teen girl runs away from home. Batsheva is voted out of her teaching job, a move that the ladies hope will make her leave Memphis.

When the Rabbi's son leaves town because he has discovered that he doubts his own religion and is not sure if he even want to be associated with the Jews anymore, the women of the town are shocked, saddened, and hurt. They assume Yosef leaving is also because of Batsheva. Even the normally open-minded Mimi allows herself to be swayed by the women's gossip about what might have gone on between Batsheva and her son. The issue between Batsheva and Mimi is cleared up when the two meet one another as they each go to the shul to seek solace for their own personal hurts. Although the other women of the town never fully seem to understand what has transpired, they seem to see in a small way through their experience with Batsheva, the hurt and devastation that their own actions and talk can bring to an entire town.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

An outsider brings awakening to a close-knit but closed-minded Jewish community in the novel *The Ladies Auxiliary* by Tova Mirvis. Batsheva Jacobs, an eclectic Jewish convert, becomes the object of gossip on the first day that she moves in the Memphis Jewish community. The ladies try to accept Batsheva because the Rabbi's wife seems to approve of her but their opinions change when the girls who Batsheva teaches become more rebellious. They blame the negative changes on Batsheva and try to force her from the community. Themes in the novel include hypocrisy in religion, the emptiness that can take over religious rituals, and the danger of judging a person by their appearance alone.

Batsheva and her daughter Ayala attract attention right away when they move into a Jewish community in Memphis just as the members of the neighborhood are preparing for Shabbos. The women of the neighborhood realize immediately that Batsheva wasn't born Jewish because of her blonde hair. She also dresses more provocatively than any of the Jewish women from Memphis. They watch as Batsheva unpacks and Ayala sits in the grass and watches. When she finishes, Batsheva lifts Ayala to kiss the wooden mezuzah on the doorpost before they go inside.

Mrs. Irving Levy uses a basket of food for Shabbos as a cover for visiting and getting information about Batsheva. She learns Batsheva came to Memphis because she wanted to be part of a small community and that she knew someone who had lived in Memphis. After her visit, Mrs. Levy calls Helen Shaowitz and reports that there is something about Batsheva that is not right. Helen is quick to spread the information. During their Shabbos dinners the talk turns to Batsheva. Helen has learned Batsheva was married to someone from Memphis. At Tziporah Newburger's house, Edith Shapiro reveals she has learned Batsheva was married to Benjamin Jacobs, a boy from Memphis who was killed in a car accident.

Chapter 1 Analysis

One of the aspects that makes this book interesting is the look that Mirvis gives the reader into the day to day life of the Jewish people. She easily incorporates their traditions and describes the ways that the people celebrate their religion, such as the celebration of Shabbos, in her work. Instead of giving a dry, preachy detailing of what each religious day symbolizes and how it should be observed, Mirvis show the way that the people actually observe these religious traditions. She writes of the flurry of activity right up to the last minute that it is allowed on the evening of Shabbos. For instance, the women are on the phone exchanging information about Batsheva right up to the last minute that these conversations are allowed. This chapter also begins to address the emptiness with which the Jewish people have begun to observe their holy days. The



women see Shabbos not so much as a time of worship but as a time of rest for themselves because it is the only day that they aren't allowed to do any work. While some of these Jewish terms are used in a context in which a non-Jewish reader can pick up on the meaning of them, some of these terms are not defined. For instance, there is a reference to Batsheva picking Ayala up to kiss the mezuzah that had been left on the doorpost by the family who had lived there before. It might be necessary for a non-Jewish reader to do a little research to realize this fixture is important in the life of the Jews because it is a case in which the religious laws are held, a reference to the Old Testament instructions that the Jewish people post the laws of the Bible on the doorposts of their houses.

One of the main themes of the novel is the despicable way that Batsheva, as an outsider, is treated when she moves into the small Jewish community in Memphis. The women notice her immediately and recognize immediately, even though they don't know her or anything about her, that she doesn't belong among them. They immediately shun her because she is blonde, they immediately believe that she has not been born into a Jewish family. They also believe that her clothing is inappropriate. Her shirt is too tight, and the gauzy material of her dress too thin. Notice the wording of the description is that the women could almost see the shape of her legs underneath, meaning nothing could actually be seen, but that the women were looking for reasons to dislike her.

As is common in a small town, the ladies immediately begin trading information to see if they can determine who this stranger is and whether or not she has ties to their area. Through their shared knowledge and information that one of them gets when she goes and questions Batsheva - under the pretense of being neighborly and bringing food - about her past and her reasons for coming to Memphis.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

The Jewish ladies of Memphis continue to make their case against Batsheva as she comes in late to shul. The ladies believe that her dress is too provocative for church, that she sits too close to the front of the shul and that she sings too loudly. Leanna, who is not a native from Memphis, wishes they would give Batsheva a break. Leanna does ask Tziporah if they are supposed to ostracize Batsheva just because Tziporah has a bad feeling about her.

After shul, Batsheva and Ayala stand at the edge of the crowd. Naomi Eisenberg is the first of the group to introduce herself to Batsheva. She gets an immediate feeling that she and Batsheva could be good friends. She decides not to ruin Batsheva's positive idea about the community by telling her it was great if you worked to be like the other people there. She instead tells her Good Shabbos and walks away. Bessie Kimmel and Estelle Marks are the next to talk to Batsheva. Bessie believes the community will be able to teach both the mother and child the proper way behave and act. At the food table, Batsheva accidentally bumps into Yoseph, the Rabbi's son who is home to study a year with his father. Yoseph tells Batsheva some of his memories of Benjamin, Batsheva's late husband. She confides to Yoseph that she came to Memphis because she hoped to raise Ayalah the way Benjamin had been raised. Batsheva notices Yoseph's father looking at him. When she mentions it to Yoseph, a guilty look crosses his face and he goes to join his father.

Chapter 2 Analysis

In shul the next morning, the women continue to belittle Batsheva. First they condemn her because she comes in late, she also sits too close to the front of the sanctuary for their tastes and also sings too loudly. The fact that Batsheva sings so loudly seems to bother the women most of all because instead of considering that it may be Batsheva's way of showing and expressing her own praise and worship, they see her loud singing as being prideful and boastful. Meanwhile, they are so consumed by paying attention to what Batsheva is doing that they aren't on the proper pages of the worship books. Some of them even have the texts turned upside down, a sure sign that they aren't even following along with the service. The women also seem shocked when Batsheva kisses the Torah with her bare lips when it is passed around the shul while the other ladies touch the Torah with their shiddurs, then kiss their shiddurs.

In instances where they women wonder what the appropriate action is, they look to Tziporah Newburger, whom they believe is the most religious of their group. Tziporah tells the lady that Batsheva's actions are immodest and that she is calling attention to herself. The other ladies immediately agree. Their willingness to take everything that Tziporah says at face value, indicates an unwillingness by the women to think on their



own. They are willing to be led by Tziporah without doing any research on the matter. They don't realize that just because someone does something differently, this does not necessarily make their actions wrong. This inability to accept anything or anyone who is different from them is one characteristic of the Jewish women of Memphis.

The only woman who seems disturbed by the gossiping of the other women is Naomi Essenburg, who is not a native of Memphis. She wishes that the women would stop judging Batsheva so rigidly before they even give her a chance. She has made a comment about this out loud before she has even realized that she has done so. Naomi realizes that by speaking out against Tziporah, she will incur the woman's wrath, along with that of the rest of the group. Because Naomi understands what it is like to be in Batsheva's shoes, and realizes the woman is not bad just because she is different, she speaks out without even thinking about the consequences. After she realizes what she has done, Naomi immediately begins to try to make amends with Tziporah because she realizes that she could quickly become an outsider, shunned by the main clique of Jewish women, just as Batsheva is.

Notice also in this chapter that a point is made to show how special Yosef is, not only to his mother and father, but also to the entire community. The Rabbi and Mimi had believed after several miscarriages that they would not be able to have a child of their own. It is after several years that Yosef is born to them. They have high hopes that he will become a Rabbi like his father. Because he is special to the Rabbi and to Mimi, Yosef is also a special member of the community as a whole. The women put Yosef on a pedestal. He is honored as a special child. In their eyes, Yosef can do no wrong. It is especially upsetting to the women when they see Batsheva talking to Yosef just as if he were any ordinary person because they have always treated him with such honor and awe.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The neighbors watch as Batsheva takes a walk each morning. These walks always take her to the house where Benjamin grew up. On the last day of July, Batsheva knocks on the door and asks the people who live there if she can look around the house.

Marilynne, who lives in the house where Benjamin grew up, is struck by Batsheva's continued belief in God even after the death of her husband. When Marilynne asks Batsheva about her faith, Batsheva admits that she had been angry, but that she realized that God must have had a reason for allowing her and her daughter to escape the accident unharmed. Marilynne is more comfortable with the way that Batsheva describes her religion than the way that the other Jewish women have described their reasons behind their faith.

As they walk back home, Ayala suddenly sits down and begins to cry. Batsheva asks her what is wrong, then hugs her. Leanna comes across the two of them and asks Ayala if she'd like to swim at her house. The following day, Deena, Leanna's daughter greets Ayala as she joins the neighborhood kids for the swimming party and encourages her to be part of the group. When Leanna takes her children to the library instead of their usual swimming party, Ayala goes to Mrs. Levy's house to see if she knows where the other children are. Feeling sorry for Ayala, Mrs. Levy fixes her a snack. She questions Ayala about the way her mother spends her day. She learns that Batsheva is not much of a cook and that she paints. Ayala also tells Mrs. Levy though don't have visitors any more because her father is dead. She adds her grandparents were unhappy with their move because they didn't know anyone from Memphis. Mrs. Levy thinks about her children and wonders what they see missing from Memphis.

Helen happens to see Batsheva in the dressing room at Loehmann's. She is surprised to see Batsheva trying on skimpy dresses. While Helen is studying Batsheva she notices a tattoo in the shape of a rose on her shoulder. Batsheva mentions to Helen that she must have seen the tattoo. When Jocelyn joins the two in the communal dressing room, Helen goes to greet her. Batsheva tells Jocelyn that Helen had been looking at her tattoo. Batsheva volunteers that she got the tattoo when she was in high school, before she converted to Judaism. Helen is surprised that Batsheva is not interested in having the tattoo removed, which she sees as a way to help Batsheva fit in.

Later, Tziporah Newburger announces to her friends that Batsheva is using the community mikvah, an act which she considers inappropriate. Bessie Kimmel believes Batsheva is doing nothing wrong by using the mikvah while it would be a different story if she needed to use it and wasn't. Although Tziporah wants to feel rejuvenated and refreshed by the ritual cleansing, she never does. Batsheva, however, tells how refreshed it makes her feel. Tziporah tries to explain to Batsheva why she believes it is improper for her to use the mikvah. Batsheva argues just as strongly that she does it because she wants to, not just because it is a required ritual.



As Naomi Eisenberg hears about the other ladies' encounters with Batsheva, she decides to go and visit Batsheva. Batsheva admits to Naomi the neighborhood no longer seems as perfect as it did when she first arrived. Naomi warns Batsheva how hard life in their small community can be on an outsider. Because she had once discouraged a couple from moving to their neighborhood by talking to frankly about it, Naomi decides not to go very far with her conversation with Batsheva.

Rena Reinhard finds some clothes that will fit Ayala while cleaning out her closets. Rena notices Batsheva's paintings while she is in the house. Rena describes the paintings as making her feel confused. Batsheva talks to Rena about her late husband, making Rena burst into tears. She is considering getting a divorce from her husband because she suspects that he is cheating on her. Batsheva takes the time to talk to Rena and make her feel better about her situation.

Chapter 3 Analysis

In this section of the novel, the hypocritical nature of the women who live in Batsheva's new neighborhood comes into light. One of the major issues in this chapter is the idea of Batsheva's use of the mikvah. The mikvah is intended as a way for women to cleanse and purify themselves after their monthly period so that they can begin having sexual relations with their husbands again. Because Batsheva has no husband, Tziporah believes that Batsheva's use of the mikvah is inappropriate. When Tziporah confronts Batsheva with her opinion, Batsheva argues just as strongly that she uses the mikvah not because it is a ritual and is required, but because she feels spiritually cleansed afterwards. Since Tziporah has already indicated that she yearns for a feeling of spiritual purity after using the mikvah, but never has it, could it be that she is jealous of Batsheva because she does find meaning and refreshment from the ritual? Tziporah sees the mikvah as one other ritual, one other step in her religion that brings her no satisfaction or joy. To see another do the same ritual with joy that one finds frustrating can be irritating.

Helen's hypocrisy in her religious beliefs is portrayed clearly in the dressing room scene. She doesn't want anyone to know that she is Jewish. She wants to be just another lady out shopping. For this reason, Helen never asks salesclerks for help because she doesn't want them to ask why she chooses only long skirts and high collared blouses. Helen also makes her husband wear a cap to cover his yarmulke when they are in public. Since this head covering is a sign of their religion, Helen doesn't want anyone to see it and realize that they are Jewish. Again, in the dressing room, Helen looks in envy at the stylish clothes that Batsheva is trying on. It makes one wonder if God appreciates a life lived in accordance to His rules when the person really wishes that they could be doing something else. Helen also seems obsessed with the idea that Batsheva has a tattoo. What seems to bother her more than anything else about the tattoo is that Batsheva is not embarrassed or troubled by it. She is not interested in having it removed or covered up because it is a part of her and a part of her life.



Just as Batsheva doesn't hide her tattoo, she doesn't hide other aspects of her life either. This is demonstrated when Rena Reinhard visits Batsheva to give her some clothes for Ayala. Although the house is messy, Batsheva does not apologize for the mess or try to blame it on Ayala or make excuses for the clutter. For Batsheva, this is the way that she lives. Similarly, when Batsheva talks to Marilynne about her faith, she presents an idea of religion that Marilynne finds more pleasing and palatable than the one that the other women of the community present. While these other women speak of rules and regulations, Batsheva refers to faith, love and purpose. It seems at this point that although Batsheva was not born a Jew, she may have a deeper and more lively understanding of her religion than those who have been Jew all of their lives.

Contrasting with Batsheva's honesty are the hidden aspects of the lives of the other Jewish ladies that call the Memphis neighborhood their home. Jocelyn, for instance, can not give up her sin of eating shrimp salad. It is also known that several of the ladies in the Jewish community have gone mixed swimming when they are away on vacation even though they would swear they had never done so and believe that the practice is scandalous.

By now, most of the women know that Batsheva has moved to Memphis because she wants her daughter to experience the life and the childhood memories that Benjamin did as he grew up in that Memphis neighborhood. Note, however, that as Batsheva talks to Marilynne about Benjamin, that he had always talked about feeling suffocated in that small town. It could be that Benjamin presented to Batsheva a rosier picture of his childhood that he actually experienced.

Notice also the way that the Jewish women also latch onto Ayala and seem to believe that Batsheva is not a proper mother for her. They first notice Ayala's patience as she waits for her mother to finish unpacking as she sits in the yard. They note that their children would have whined and pulled at their skirts. After their visit to Benjamin's childhood home, Batsheva squats down on Ayala's level to talk to her daughter when she plops down on the sidewalk and begins to cry. The women also notice that as Batsheva looked around the social hall after the services in the shul, she described things to Ayala and talked to her as if she were an adult instead of a child, an attitude that the Jewish women see as improper. Mrs. Levy wonders if Ayala is getting the proper homemade food that she needs, but is at the same time offended when Ayala comes to the door in her underwear even though Batsheva explains she was just preparing to give the child a bath when Mrs. Levy knocked.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

In Chapter 4, many of the community ladies are at Kahn's Kosher Mart when they come across Batsheva doing her shopping. The ladies notice that Batsheva buys things that don't require cooking. Helen admits that she is tired of cooking special meals for Shabbos. Bessie admits that she buys her food from a restaurant then passes it off as her own. Mimi, the rabbi's wife, enters the store and to Helen and Bessie's surprise, she hurries to greet Batsheva instead of them. The ladies are jealous because Mimi and Batsheva seem to have formed a bond with one another.

The ladies call Mimi in an attempt to get information about Batsheva but Mimi does not give in to their questions and even has a bit of reproach in her voice for the questioners. They believe it is her way of insisting that they give Batsheva a chance. Mrs. Levy decides to go and visit Mimi Friday, just to see if she can get any more information about Batsheva. As Mrs. Levy plies Mimi for information, Becky Feldman and her daughter, Shira, who have been invited, arrive. They appear to have been arguing with one another.

The ladies are surprised when Batsheva walks in without knocking, but Mrs. Levy gets down to the business of trying to learn all that she can about her. She finds out that Batsheva was originally from Virginia. Becky accidentally asks Batsheva about a shul there, forgetting that Batsheva converted to Judaism. Mrs. Levy takes advantage of the embarrassed silence to ask Batsheva why she decided to convert. Batsheva admits that she had felt called to Judaism. She tells how she had walked into a shul in New York to find it full of singing and clapping. As the others in the shul drew her into the service, Batsheva tells the women she felt like that was what she had been missing. She tells Mrs. Levy that she stayed at the shul until there were only five people left intensely talking about religion and God. One of these people was Benjamin. Batsheva began learning about Judaism with the rabbi and converted to Judaism one year later. She and Benjamin were married soon afterward. Batsheva also tells Mrs. Levy that she changed her name when she became Jewish. When Shira tells Batsheva she believes the name change is cool, Becky claims her daughter is only saying that to upset her. Mimi changes the direction of the conversation and asks Batsheva what she plans to do in Memphis. Batsheva tells her that she plans to look for a job in which she can use her art skills.

The Rabbi and Yosef come back from shul and the Shabbos celebration begins. Although the Jewish women usually love attending Shabbos at Mimi's, Becky is unable to get in the proper mood because of her problems with Shira. She tries to encourage Shira to sit near Yosef, but instead Batsheva gets the chair that Becky had hoped Shira would get. Talk turns to the reputation of the Memphis Jewish community. Batsheva tells the group that her rabbi had told good things about their community. When the rabbi



asks Batsheva what shul she attended, Becky realizes she knows someone who attends that same shul.

As Becky watches Batsheva fill her plate, she decides the woman must be vegetarian, information that angers Becky. Becky is also offended by a comment that Batsheva makes to Yosef and again when Batsheva offers to help Yosef clear the table. Becky believes this is very inappropriate as she hears the two of them laughing as they clean. Becky is again irritated when Batsheva begins a discussion about the lesson that Yosef and his father have been working on. She can not believe her ears when Batsheva asks Yosef if he will tutor her on a private basis. Mimi encourages the idea, and even offers to watch Ayala.

Later that evening, the Rabbi tries to talk to Shira about school. The school has been a concern for the community as it has gotten smaller. The girls in the school are unhappy, even after many attempts had been made to get them excited about school. Again, Becky is shocked when Batsheva suggests that the girls need a create outlet in which to express themselves. Although Becky laughs at the idea, Mimi suggests that Batsheva start teaching art to the girls. Because Mimi has so openly accepted Batsheva, however, the other women also begin to welcome her.

Chapter 4 Analysis

It is in this chapter that the women of Memphis begin to change their opinion of Batsheva. Since Mimi, the Rabbi's wife, has made it so clear that she likes Mimi, the others are determined to do so also. It appears that the women of this community believe in Mimi very strongly and are highly influenced by her opinion, perhaps even more so than those opinions of Tziporah or Mrs. Levy, who appear to be the leaders of the gossip clique. While Mimi appears to be a good role model as she will not join in the women's gossip about Batsheva, it is still not right for the ladies to use any one person on which to chart the direction for their lives. The majority of the ladies do not think for themselves, they only follow the crowd.

Another theme is introduced in this chapter. This is of the trouble that the people of the Jewish community are having with their young people. Although they have tried everything that they know to do to help them to be satisfied with their lives, the young people are still not happy. This shows very plainly in the relationship between Shira and her mother. Shira is at the point in her life in which she wants to revolt and pull away from her parents. Becky, her mother, believes that there is nothing that she can do to make the relationship with her daughter any better. Yet at the same time, she does not try to keep the relationship from getting worse. Although Shira obviously isn't interested in Yosef, Becky tries to push her daughter in the young man's direction. She also fusses over Shira when this obviously makes the girl even more frustrated. On top of everything else, when Shira shares the idea that she believes Batsheva's reason for changing her name is cool, instead of recognizing her daughter's individuality and allowing her to have her own opinion, Becky believes, and goes so far as to share the opinion, that Shira has said this only to hurt her. Becky is so troubled by her failing



relationship with her daughter that she tries to find hints that there is a similar bad relationship between Batsheva and her own daughter. Although Ayala is not even yet five, Becky believes that she can already sense some embarrassment on Ayala's part because her mother is not like everyone else.

At Mimi's Shabbos dinner, Becky is offended again and again by Batsheva's behavior. She believes it is in bad tastes how easily Batsheva converses with the Rabbi and his family, particularly Yosef. She also thinks that both Batsheva and Yosef are being improper as they laugh with one another as they clean up the table after dinner. Becky again is shocked when Batsheva asks Yosef to study with her on a private basis and is appalled when Yosef and his parents agree to the proposition. It appears that in Becky's mind, Batsheva can do nothing right.

Another proposition made during the Shabbos dinner is that Batsheva be allowed to teach art to the high school girls. Becky believes this is improper because she doesn't think that creativity and individualism are things that should be encouraged in a Jewish woman. It is this belief that could be causing much of the trouble between Becky and her daughter, who obviously seems the need to try to express herself in a community in which the members are expected to conform to specific rules and ways of behavior.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

In their first learning session together, Batsheva and Yosef decide to learn about the reasons why the Jews do the things that they do. Yosef confesses to Batsheva that he is not entirely comfortable with the idea of learning with her, he holds the belief that learning with a female will distract him from his lessons. Helen happens to run into Batsheva as she is returning from her time at the shul with Yosef. She is disturbed by how happy Batsheva is with her learning arrangements. While Helen learned from her mother how to run a Jewish house, she has not delved much into the theology behind Judaism. She wonders if it is too late for her to start learning.

During their next session, Yosef and Batsheva learn about repentance. In another session they discuss the laws of Shabbos. Although Batsheva wants to know the reasons behind the commandments God had made, Yosef explains to her that all the reasons should not be known as it might cause some people to find reasons to stop performing the rituals. Batsheva's counter argument is that she does not want to just go through the motions of the religion, but instead wants to know why she is doing what she is doing. As the ladies in the community see Batsheva's excitement in her learning, they find that they want to be more like her.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Since the women of the community have accepted Mimi's friendship with Batsheva as a sign that she is acceptable, they begin to see beyond their reasons for disliking her to find reasons why they might be able to like her. Helen sees Batsheva's excitement about her lessons with Yosef. Although Helen has been a Jew all of her life, she admits to herself that she really doesn't know why they perform the rituals that they perform. She wonders if it is too late in her life for her to begin learning about her own religion. The other women also pick up on Batsheva's excitement about their ritualistic religion that has become dry and boring to them. They find themselves wishing that they could be more like Batsheva in her enthusiasm for their beliefs.

Meanwhile, Yosef admits to Batsheva that he has always thought that learning with a woman would be distracting to him. That is what he has always been taught through the entirety of his Jewish life. As they dig deeply into their religion, Yosef is not as excited about learning the reasons behind the Jewish rituals as Batsheva appears to be. He reasons that by questioning their rituals too deeply, they could find reasons why they are no longer valid. Batsheva, however, argues that in order to follow the rituals, she feels that she must have a reason why she is doing what she is doing. She does not feel satisfied just going through the motions of a ritual.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

In Chapter 6, the school year begins and Batsheva starts her job as the art teacher at the Jewish school. Mimi pushed the idea of the art class, even calling the Ladies' Auxiliary to ask if they would sponsor the program. Rena Reinhard, who is the auxiliary president, hesitates at first, but uses the opportunity as a way to return the kindness that Batsheva had shown to her.

Troubles with the girls who are now in the twelfth grade have been an ongoing issue at the school. The troubles began when the girls were in the eighth grade. During a Shabbos the children had spent at school, the girls had snuck into the portion of the building where the boys were sleeping. Rumors in the community indicate the children played what the Jews considered risqué games even though the girls claimed they only talked. From that time until now, there have been new shenanigans by the girls each year.

As the high school girls file into her classroom, Batsheva tries to strike up a friendly rapport. She passes out paper and pastels and asks the girls to draw self-portraits. She is met by a stare, intended to be confrontational, from Shira, but Batsheva only smiles in return. She offers to let the students ask her questions about herself. No one takes her up on the offer. When the students don't respond even after she threatens to ask them questions, she has them walk with her to a field that can't be seen from the school. Once they are outside the girls seem to relax. Shira admits to Batsheva that they hate the school. They talk the disadvantages of the small school and what could be done to make it better. When Batsheva takes them back inside, they act more interested in the self-portraits that Batsheva has asked them to draw.

When Rena calls Batsheva to talk about how the art class has gone, Batsheva tells her the girls are unhappy, but that she believes that the art class will help. She hopes to make the girls appreciate being in a small school and concentrate on what they have instead of what they don't have.

Batsheva not only reaches out to the children of the Memphis Jewish community, but also to their parents. She invites the women of the community to a Rosh Chodesh celebration at her home. The women worry that it will be a feminist party and aren't sure they want to go. Although Tziporah's husband discourages her from going to the party, Naomi's husband seems pleased that Batsheva is trying to start something different in the community. Leanna, also, is excited about the party. Mrs. Levy is also doubtful of the party while Helen believes that it might be fun. When the women learn that Mimi is supportive of the party, however, they believe they have no choice but to attend.

The ladies are surprised how pretty Batsheva's house has been made when they walk inside. Mimi is obviously pleased that so many people have come. The women are



unsure as Batsheva asks them to light candles and recite a blessing for the new moon. She has the women, some who are from outside the community, sit in a circle. As Batsheva leads them in a lesson, then gets them singing, the ladies realize that she has a faith that eludes them. Batsheva even manages to get the ladies dancing. As they dance, they come out of themselves just for a short while and try to be more like Batsheva in her relaxed, comfortable manner.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The important aspect of this chapter to note is that there has been trouble with the girls before. This trouble began four years before Batsheva ever even came to the Memphis community. Although the community leaders know that the girls are unhappy at the school, they don't know what should be done about their unhappiness. Batsheva takes the simple step of trying to connect with the girls and finding out from them what they believe the trouble is with their community as well as getting suggestions from them on how to fix them.

Note also in this section that Rena is thrilled that Batsheva believes that her art class will help the girls. But the people of the community seem to believe that Batsheva and her art class will be able to turn this problem that has been growing for four years, around quickly and return the girls to their former, happy selves.

The response that the ladies of the community have to Batsheva's party is also interesting. Those who are originally from Memphis believe that the party means trouble while those that have experienced life outside the limits of the small town believe that it will be fun. Mimi helps Batsheva prepare for her celebration and encourages the ladies to attend. Although at the beginning of the party there is some grumbling about the strange things that Batsheva asks them to do, they soon begin to recognize in Batsheva an enthusiasm for Judaism that they don't have. They wish that they could be more like Batsheva in her acceptance of herself and her beliefs. They find themselves trying to imitate her moves as she leads them in a ceremonial dance.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

In Chapter 7, the people of the community begin to notice how well Batsheva has bonded with the teen girls. She even invites the girls over one Shabbos afternoon. She takes her cues from the girls and they ask all about her life. She talks about the experiences that she had before she became a Jew and shows them her tattoo when they ask. Batsheva tries to explain to the girls how she believes now in the modesty of the clothes the Jews wear but Shira argues that the dress code is superficial. Batsheva learns that the girls want reasons for the things that the adults ask them to do. She tries to explain to them that if they were to give up their religion, they would eventually realize that they had given up a special part of their life.

One day after class, Shira Feldman comes to Batsheva's room with a scowl. Batsheva learns that she has been kicked out of class until her mother brings her a skirt that covers her knees. She tells Batsheva she doesn't feel like she can call her mom because she is already grounded. Batsheva fixes her up with a new skirt made out of a piece of gold fabric. After she is finished with the skirt, Batsheva talks to Shira about the things that are bothering her. Shira wants to go to Columbia or Brown, not the Jewish college that her parents want her to attend. She tells Shira that it is okay to struggle with her faith. Yocheved comes to get Shira. She is the one who is supposed to be closest to the girls, and feels as if Batsheva is replacing her.

As the girls spend time with Batsheva, their mothers notice changes in them. They help more around the house and voluntarily participate in Jewish rituals. Even Shira appears to have calmed down. At the conclusion of the chapter, the women have decided that Batsheva may have been sent to them by God to save the girls of the neighborhood.

Chapter 7 Analysis

It is in this chapter of the book that the women of the Jewish community finally begin to go almost overboard in their belief that Batsheva can single handedly save their girls. In the short period of time that Batsheva has worked with them, the girls have become more polite and helpful at home. They go overboard believing that Batsheva has been sent to save their children.

Meanwhile, the girls are extremely curious about Batsheva's life before she was a Jew. They wish they could wear short skirts and tight pants. Shira shares with Batsheva that she believes that the Jewish dress code is superficial. She tells Batsheva that the girls want to know why they are being told to do as they are.

A large portion of this book is dedicated to the unique troubles that Jewish students have in an Orthodox world. They find their dietary requirements embarrassing when among non-Jewish friends. They also are embarrassed by the way that they are unable



to take part in any activities or celebrations on Friday night or early Saturday because of their celebration of Shabbos.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

In the fall, the Jewish women of Memphis become pre-occupied with the coming High Holidays. During the holiday of Sukkot, Batsheva gets the whole neighborhood involved in building her sukkah. Mimi and Yosef even get in on the action. Mimi is excited about the way that the whole community has gotten involved in the spirit of Shabbos. The ladies assure that Batsheva that as she celebrates Sukkot for as many years as they have, it will become boring to her as it has to them. She has the women string beads on yard to hang on the outside walls of her sukkah. Even Mrs. Levy gets excited about the beadwork. Later, as all of the families celebrate Sukkot, there is a distant wish in each of the women's heart that they had been invited to join Batsheva and the odd group of people she had invited, as part of her Sukkot celebration.

Chapter 8 Analysis

In this section of the novel, Batsheva gets the entire community involved in building her sukkot. Even though the older ladies try to assure Batsheva that in several years the idea of building a sukkot will be as boring to her as it has become to them. Batsheva, however, even manages to get the stodgy ladies of the community interested in stringing beads to decorate her sukkot.

Notice the reference to the relationship that is developing between Batsheva, Yosef and Ayala. Although the relationship might only be one of friendship, the author describes the three of them as looking like a family. In a way, this reference gives the idea that something inappropriate might be developing between Yosef and Batsheva.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

While in Goldsmith's, Edith Shapiro runs into Mimi who tells her that Yosef has decided to delay going back to yeshiva when he had planned. He has decided instead to study with his father for a year. Edith runs into Tziporah in the same store and shares the news. Tziporah swears it must be a rumor but Edith assures her that she heard about Yosef's decision from Mimi.

It turns out that Esther Abramowitz, the Rabbi's secretary, was the only one besides the Rabbi and his family who knew anything about Yosef's struggle with his decision not to return to yeshiva. She had overheard a conversation between Yosef and the Rabbi about the topic. The women of Memphis expect their children to go away to school, but to move back with a wife or husband in tow. Yosef's deviation from this plan causes the women to worry. Their own children have deviated from the plan but they never expected Yosef to do so.

On day when she sees Yosef on his way to study with Batsheva, Naomi Eisenberg catches up to him and walks with him. Although Yosef tells Naomi he is excited to be staying in Memphis to learn with his father. Once the women hear this information from Naomi, they start to get excited about Yosef staying.

Chapter 9 Analysis

It is in this chapter of the novel that the people of Memphis learn that Yosef has decided to stay in Memphis and learn with his father instead of going back to yeshiva to study. They are worried that this is a bad sign as they believe that there is a specified pattern that all children from Memphis should follow. They are supposed to go away from home to learn, then return home with a spouse and settle in Memphis. Although their own children did not follow this plan, the women are highly offended that Yosef, the golden child, is deviating from what they believe is best for him. When the ladies get used to the idea, however, and convince themselves that staying is Yosef's idea, they come to believe it is a good decision as they will get to see him and enjoy his company more often.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

In Chapter 10, it seems as if Batsheva has finally earned a place in Memphis. There are still things that remind the women that Batsheva was not born a Jew, but with the Rabbi's help, they even become accustomed to these things. Rena Reinhard continues to confide in Batsheva about her troubles with her husband. Leanna calls Batsheva for advice about her relationship with her in-laws. On Shabbos afternoons, the women find themselves at Batsheva's house. They ask her questions about the outside world.

Because Batsheva is doing so much for the community, the ladies decide to help her by finding her a new husband. This is where things seem to begin to go wrong again as Batsheva resists their attempts to fix her up. Although some of the women believe Batsheva is being uncooperative to spite them, Naomi tells them that she has learned from Batsheva that she had an affair with a man after Benjamin died. The women are stunned and try to determine what might have happened to cause her to act that way. They decide there is no way that Batsheva can be religious and have had an affair.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Levy visits Mrs. Ganz and learns that Mrs. Ganz overheard a conversation between Batsheva and Mimi while she was feeding the ducks at the park. The other women have confided their problems to Mimi but don't understand how Mimi can be so forgiving of Batsheva. The women feel as if they have been tricked by Batsheva in some way.

Although the other women lose their interest in setting Batsheva up with Aaron, Jocelyn goes through with her dinner plans with no success. The women come up with different rationales of why Batsheva has such a nonchalant attitude toward getting remarried. Some believe she wants only a sexual relationship and are afraid she will be a bad influence on the girls in her class. Edith Shapiro worries that Batsheva showed no interest in Aaron because she has her eye on Yosef.

Chapter 10 Analysis

It is in this section of the novel that Batsheva begins to lose ground with them women of the community. They have become accustomed to her odd ways, but now decide that she needs to be married as the rest of them are. It is this desire to get Batsheva married off that begins to cause the women to be suspicious of Batsheva's intentions once again. Additionally, Batsheva has confessed to Naomi that she had an affair after Benjamin died. The man was a friend of the couple while Batsheva's husband was alive and the two became close as a result of their grief. It was because of this affair that Batsheva decided to move to Memphis. From this confession, the women draw unfounded conclusions that Batsheva only wants a sexual relationship without getting married, that she has her eyes on the Rabbi's son for this role, or that she already is



having an affair with a man in Memphis. They learn from Mrs. Ganz that Batsheva has even talked to Mimi about her indiscretions and that Mimi has forgiven Batsheva. Though the other women have similarly taken their sins to Mimi for forgiveness and understanding, they are surprised that Mimi could be so forgiving of Batsheva. They seem to believe somehow that Batsheva's sin is worse than the ones for which they have needed forgiveness.

It is important to notice in this chapter the similarity between teenaged girls questions to Batsheva about her past before she became a Jew and the women's similar curiosity. Although they don't realize it, the women and their daughters really have much in common with one another. Both groups are curious about the non-Jewish world and both groups also admire Batsheva's open-minded nature.

The women of the Jewish community demonstrate their closed mindedness when they indicate that there is no way that Batsheva could be religious if she had had an affair. They see their spirituality as black and white with no shades of grey. They are also quick to point out Batsheva's sins while ignoring their own. Since they have learned of the affair, it is like the women of Memphis have finally found a solid reason to shun Batsheva, as if they had been looking for one all of the time even though they had pretended to like the woman.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

In Chapter 11, Chanukah is approaching. The women of the neighborhood notice Ayala, Batsheva, Yosef and Shira acting strangely. They will not let on what they are doing. The only other person whom they tell about what they are doing is Mimi. The secret project is uncovered the first night of Chanukah when Batsheva, Yosef, Ayala and Shira wheel what they have been building into their front yard. The adults watch from their windows while the children gather at Batsheva's yard. When they are all there, the sheets are pulled off to reveal the biggest menorah they have ever seen.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Now that the ladies have discovered a legitimate reason for them not to like Batsheva, they begin to be suspicious of all of her actions. When she, Yosef, Shira and Ayala make a huge, decorated menorah for the town to enjoy for Chanukah, the women are suspicious of Batsheva's actions and believe that she is up to no good. At the same time that they are no longer sure that they want to be associated with Batsheva, the women are also jealous of her. They believe that they are being deliberately excluded from the project in an attempt to hurt them and deviate from the way that things have always been. In reality, though, the small group is only trying to create a nice surprise for their neighbors.

Even as they admit they like the menorah because it gives them something festive to look at, they try to find something wrong with the project just because Batsheva did it without consulting them first. Notice also at the conclusion of the chapter that the author uses the menorahs that the children have made in Batsheva's art class as a way to demonstrate how Batsheva's influence has infiltrated the community.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

In Chapter 12, things begin to go very badly. The adults decide to allow the high school girls to go to Gatlinburg with Batsheva as their chaperone. When the girls return from their trip, they say it was the best trip ever because of Batsheva. They talk about staying up late at night talking about marriage and religion, and helping to take care of Ayala. When the parents see the pictures of the trip, they believe the girls look too happy. The only evidence they find that any rules have been broken is in one of the photos where the girls are wearing makeup and strange hairstyles with their skirts rolled up. Although the girls claim the look the way they do because of lighting and wind, Hadassah tells her parents one night what really happened during the trip.

Haddassah tells her mother that Batsheva had told the girls about sex among other things. After Hadassah goes to bed, her mother calls Becky. When Becky hangs up with Ruth, she calls Tziporah. Tziporah, in turn, calls Mrs. Levy. Mrs. Levy assures Tziporah that she will take care of the problem.

A week later Tziporah sees Shira sitting in McDonald's with a boy, eating a cheeseburger. Shira looks at her and waves. She then kisses her boyfriend on the lips. Tziporah calls Becky to let her know what has happened. When Becky confronts her daughter, Shira tells Becky that she does not believe in their religious beliefs and, in fact, does not even believe in God. She tells her mother that all she and her mothers' friends care about is what other people think of them. This statement angers Becky and she slaps her daughter. To make matters even worse, Hadassah and Ilana are smoking marijuana. Rabbi Fishman tells the girls' mothers that if there any other similar problems, he will call the police. In shul on the next Sabbath, Batsheva is the only person to whom the girls will talk. She tries to explain to them that they don't need to get involved in drugs. The community leaders, however, decide that it is Batsheva's fault that the girls are being led astray.

Chapter 12 Analysis

After Chanukah, the opinion of the community toward Batsheva takes a sharp downward turn. They are suspicious of what might have happened on the girls' senior class trip to Gatlinburg and believe that their suspicions are founded when they see pictures of the girls wearing makeup with their skirts rolled up. They believe this one picture is proof that Batsheva allowed to girls to go wild while they were under her care. One girl, Hadassah, who seems more susceptible to guilt than the other girls, tells her mother that Batsheva told them about sex one evening. Since they already are aware that Batsheva has had an affair, they do not believe that she is the proper person to be teaching the girls about sex. They seem not to remember that the girls have also told them about the way that Batsheva would have them wake up early each day so they

could daven together. She had also talked to them about religion and high school and what they wanted to do with their lives.

Things become even worse when Tziporah sees Shira eating a cheeseburger in a McDonalds with a boy. When Becky confronts her daughter about her actions, Shira tells her mother that she isn't even sure that she wants to be religious anymore. She tries to explain to her mother that the rebellion is not coming from anything that Batsheva is doing but instead from the way that the women of the community acts. The girls see that all they are concerned about is appearances. Becky only becomes angry with Shira and refuses to try to see her side of the argument. When Mrs. Levy learns through the gossip chain what has happened, she assures the others that she will take care of the problem.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

In Chapter 13, the women of Memphis begin to see more and more faults in Batsheva when they begin looking. Becky Feldman contacts an old college roommate who lived in the same area of New York as Batsheva to see if she can find anything more out about Batsheva's past. Sarah confirms that Batsheva had an unusual relationship with another man after her husband died. She also mentions that for a while Batsheva had even stopped attending shul and had been seen eating in nonkosher restaurants. The women are shocked by the idea that Batsheva had a time of being unreligious because Batsheva had seemed so dedicated.

Tziporah decides to hold a special class to help right the wrongs of Batsheva's actions. When Tziporah calls Mimi about her class, she does not get the positive reaction that she had expected. Mimi explains that she is worried the class might lead to a blame session.

The night of the class, Mimi motions for Batsheva to come and sit beside her. Tziporah teaches the lesson, then passes around paper for each person to write down a mitzah, or law, that they planned to work on following more closely. The women leave the lesson feeling better until it is discovered Batsheva did not write anything on her piece of paper. At this point, the women enlist Yocheved to spy on Batsheva's art class. The women aren't sure if Batsheva notices the changes in their behavior toward her or not. They do notice she seems sad and guarded.

Leanna decides to continue her friendship with Batsheva despite the way the other women act. She doesn't believe that Batsheva is the cause of the problems with the girls. She invites Batsheva to lunch and the two talk about what has been happening with the high school girls. Batsheva admits to Leanna that she believes the girls' parents need to lighten up on them and be proud of them for how good they are. Leanna agrees. Unfortunately, Mrs. Levy overhears the conversation and becomes angry. She makes a speech to the two about keeping things the way they are. After her outburst, Leanna confesses to Batsheva that the women believe that Batsheva is a bad influence on the girls. Batsheva is shocked by the women's opinion of her. She tells Leanna that she had expected more of the small community. In an effort to make her feel better, Leanna tells Batsheva she believes this rough spot will blow over and that she is doing a great job with the girls.

Chapter 13 Analysis

In this section of the novel, the ladies of Memphis really crack down on Batsheva. Becky, who appears to be upset with Batsheva because she blames Batsheva for her daughter's behavior, calls an old college roommate to see if she can get any more



information about Batsheva. Now that the women have learned that Batsheva has a past, they are determined to dig up any incriminating information that they possibly can on her.

As a way to try to address the problems that she sees in her community, Tziporah decides to have a class to address laxness in following the Jewish rules. Tziporah prides herself in being a leader in the community and also one of the most religious of the women. Although Mimi generally encourages the classes that Tziporah wants to teach, she is surprised when Mimi is not as supportive of this class as she'd hoped. Mimi is concerned that the class will turn into a blame session. Although she does not join in the ladies' gossip, she apparently is aware that the ladies are blaming Batsheva for the problems in their community. She is gently trying to discourage Tziporah from making matters worse than they already are. Tziporah apparently doesn't take the hint as she goes ahead and plans her class. In the guise of being generous, she invites Batsheva. It becomes known that the ladies are extremely curious if Batsheva even recognizes her activities as sinful or not. The ladies are asked to write about a sin that they struggle on a piece of paper. Mrs. Levy walks out of Tziporah's house behind Batsheva and notices that she drops her piece of paper. When Mrs. Levy picks it up, there is nothing written on it.

Unlike the other ladies who are snubbing Batsheva and hoping that she will get the hint about what she has done wrong, Leanna decides to continue to be a friend to Batsheva and let her know what has turned the others against her. Batsheva is truly surprised to find out why the ladies are so angry with her. Her comment to Leanna is that her past should have nothing to do with her future. While she admits that she did drift away from her religion, she was just too tired to do everything after the death of her husband. Batsheva admits that she didn't talk much about the time after Benjamin's death because she was afraid that people would misunderstand some of her actions, which is exactly what has happened.

One comment that Batsheva makes to Leanna is one that should be brought to the attention of the women who are so busy gossiping about her. She wonders how those same women might have reacted if they had gone through the same tragedy that she went through. She adds that she didn't go back to Virginia because she knew that if she tried to live there, she would stick out and be talked about. She had thought Benjamin's hometown might be a better fit for them. She has learned one important lesson through her move to Memphis. Although the people of the Jewish community in Memphis considered themselves more religious than others, they really didn't treat one another any better than any one else did.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

The relationship between Yosef and Batsheva is the focus of Chapter 14. The women are worried about this close relationship between the two. One day while Batsheva is out walking, Yosef goes to her house and stands at the edge of her yard. She greets him happily when she returns. They visit for a while on the porch. Batsheva tries to get Yosef to talk about what is bothering him. She confides her problems with the women who are blaming her for the problems with the girls. Yosef finally leaves, saying he is late to learn with his father, even though he doesn't seem to want to go. Meanwhile, the Rabbi is handling a phone call from Tziporah when Yosef finally comes to study. Yosef seems troubled and distracted at first, but soon becomes engrossed in his study.

Chapter 14 Analysis

This chapter seems to be leading the reader to believe that there is some sort of improper relationship between Yosef and Batsheva. Although he was once excited about the opportunity to study with his father, Yosef now seems to be dreading their sessions. Note also how surprised that Yosef seems to be when he hears of the trouble that Batsheva is having with the women of the community. He, like Leanna, believes that the women's insistence that Batsheva is responsible for the problems with the girls is crazy.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

On a snowy day in mid-March, Yosef is once again at Batsheva's house. The women feel betrayed when they watch Yosef go inside Batsheva's house. They imagine the two of them are having an affair. The school closes early that day because of the snow and Rena Reinhard walks Ayala and some of the other children home. About 45 minutes after Ayala arrives, Batsheva, Yosef and Ayala are seen outside playing in the snow. The women feel as if Batsheva is stealing Yosef away from them. Esther Abramowitz, the church secretary, has an opportunity to talk to Mimi about her concerns for Yosef. Mimi feels that her son is wrestling with something that he will not tell her about. She says the Rabbi does not seem to see that anything is wrong.

One day Esther discovers Yosef sitting in the empty sanctuary and takes the opportunity to speak to him. As they talk, she comes to the conclusion that he is lovesick for Batsheva. She remembers a time when a man had looked at her in that way and now wishes that she had given him a chance. Although she doesn't, she longs to tell Yosef to follow his heart.

Mrs. Levy notices how closely together Yosef and Batsheva are sitting as they study at the shul. She interrupts the two of them angrily to return a pan belonging to Mimi. Mrs. Levy later sees Mimi at the grocery store and learns that she is having Batsheva over for dinner. Mrs. Levy is surprised that Mimi is still associating with Batsheva. The two have a spat about Mimi's decision to let Yosef have his space. Mrs. Levy stomps off after she attempts to convince Mimi that Batsheva is trying to seduce Yosef, which Mimi insists is not true. After Mrs. Levy leaves her, Mimi lets out a sigh. She seems confused and unsure of what to do next.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Because of their high expectations of Yosef, the women of Memphis are very angry with him because of the amount of time that he is seen around her house. The writer continues to build suspicion in the reader's mind that Batsheva and Yosef are having an affair. Mrs. Levy, the community busybody, finds an excuse to interrupt the two as they are studying. She believes they are sitting too close together. Later when Mrs. Levy sees Mimi at the grocery store, she tries to convince Mimi of her suspicions that Yosef is having an affair. The argument between the two goes back to the original argument over child raising that has been affecting the entire community. While Mrs. Levy argues that Yosef's parents should set rules and boundaries for him, Mimi argues that this will only smother him and push him further away. It is obvious that she is concerned about her son but has just as little idea what is the best to do for him as any of the other mothers. She has decided to give her some the space that he needs to make his own decision. Because Mrs. Levy is so afraid of losing the town's golden child, she tries to bully Mimi



into keeping her son on a tighter leash. She also feeds Mimi the uncertain information that Batsheva and Yosef are having an affair. It appears that although Mimi wants to trust Batsheva and especially Yosef, the gossip that is flying around town is beginning to get to her.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Matters get even worse in the Jewish community when Batsheva invites the girls to a Purim seudah party at her house. At first, the women refuse to let their daughters attend but when Arlene gives in and allows Ilana to attend, the other mothers soon follow suit. At Batsheva's party, the girls begin to sing and dance. Although they had not been invited, the high school boys also show up at Batsheva's house. Batsheva allows them all inside, determined not to ruin their fun, but also seems nervous about the situation. When the girls still haven't come home after midnight, Becky and Arelene walk over to Batsheva's house. At Batsheva's the house is in disarray and the girls offer no excuses for not being home. Becky notices that Shira is not there. Batsheva turns to Ilana who bursts into tears. She tells them that Shira has run away with her boyfriend, Matt. Batsheva is as surprised as everyone else.

In the next days, the women are shocked that Shira had left. They are suddenly aware that their own children could do the same thing. Once the girls are back in school, Yocheved rearranges their schedules so that they will not have art class for several weeks. She also tries to have an intervention with the girls about Shira leaving, but it fails miserably. Even though she isn't teaching art, the older girls still stop by and talk to Batsheva frequently. Batsheva tries to call Becky but she hangs up on her. The next day, she walks over to the Feldman's house. Becky accuses Batsheva of being the reason that Shira left but Batsheva tries to explain to Becky that Shira felt unhappy and constrained. When she is alone, Becky acknowledges to herself that she had seen the rebellion coming in Shira for years. Becky had been like Shira as a teen. She had been strict with Shira hoping to prevent her from making the same mistakes that she had. She feels that in the end, she may have been the one who pushed Shira to run away.

The women of the Ladies' Auxiliary get together to decide what should be done about Batsheva. They decide the best plan of action is to try to get Batsheva fired. They turn to Rena Reinhard, who is the auxiliary president. Rena agrees to get a meeting together so the topic can be discussed but she secretly does not believe that Batsheva is the reason for the problems in their community.

Chapter 16 Analysis

It is in this chapter of the novel that the author first relates the actions in the book with Biblical happenings. During the holiday period of Purim seudah, the ladies see themselves as Esther fighting to free their daughters from the evil Haman, who they believe is represented by Batsheva. Despite this characterization, however, the ladies still allow their daughters to attend a Purim Seudah party at Batsheva's house. The holiday is one of wild revelry, even for the Jews, and things appear to be getting out of hand, even for Batsheva, when the high school boys show up. What Batsheva doesn't

know is that Shira is planning to use the confusion of the party as a chance to sneak out of town with her non-Jewish boyfriend.

Interestingly, each person identifies things that they might have been able to do differently to keep Shira from leaving town. While they all see how their actions might have contributed to the puzzle, they still place the blame for Shira's disappearance solely on Batsheva. Even Becky realizes that Shira had been showing rebellious tendencies for years before they even knew Batsheva. It is only to herself that Becky wonders if she pushed Shira away by suffocating her with too many rules and expectations. In public, however Becky lashes out at Batsheva, blaming the entire case of Shira leaving on Batsheva. She even goes so far as to say that Batsheva should have known what Shira had planned and tried to stop her.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

In Chapter 17, Batsheva has learned the Ladies Auxiliary is meeting to discuss whether or not she will keep her job. While Batsheva spends even more time than ever with Yosef, the ladies notice that Mimi seems to be avoiding Batsheva. Naomi and Leanna promise to do everything they can to help Batsheva. The school library is filled to capacity on the night of the meeting. Rena has already decided that as president, she needs to remain objective. Mrs. Levy is the first to speak. She argues that Batsheva has exposed the students to things in which they should not be involved. Helen makes a statement in agreement with Mrs. Levy in order to try to get back in her good graces. Jocelyn suggests they give Batsheva another chance. Naomi speaks in favor of Batsheva saying that she was the only one patient enough to draw her daughter, who was usually shy and quiet, out of her shell. Naomi adds that she feels ashamed to be from Memphis because of the way they are treating Batsheva. Leanna also speaks in favor of Batsheva.

The meeting gets completely out of control when Shira's name is mentioned. Rena finally has to scream for quiet. Most of the women agree they are doing what they need to for their children. They believe that without a job, Batsheva will move away, also leaving Yosef alone. As they think of Yosef, they turn to look at Mimi, who looks tired. Although she would usually give her opinion of any serious issue facing the community, this time she is quiet. She only looks at her lap. The vote is made by silent ballot. It comes out against Batsheva, but is closer than anyone expected. After the vote, the ladies realize they don't know how everyone else voted or which side they had taken. They feel like strangers.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Although the women of the community had believed that ganging up on Batsheva and dismissing her from her job would unite them again, the decision to which they have come has actually pulled them further apart. Because the vote is done by silent ballot, no one knows how anyone else has voted. Although these women are afraid to speak out loud against the opinions of Mrs. Levy and Tziporah, it becomes obvious that there are a few of them who are not afraid to vote using their own opinion when they have the opportunity.

During the meeting, all of the women notice how tired and quiet Mimi is. They had expected her to speak out either in favor of or against Batsheva keeping her job but Mimi does neither. She only looks even more tired and surprised at the outcome of the meeting. It is as if she is getting a clear look at the mindset of the community for the first time. It is unsure if Mimi is acting the way that she is because she had been such close friends with Batsheva and is now beginning to believe that the ladies might have been

right about her or if there is something else that is weighing on Mimi's mind. Either way, Mimi leaves the library without giving the ladies any words of advice, encouragement or discouragement. This lack of input from their idol leaves them more lost than ever.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Mimi goes straight home after the meeting with confusion still on her face. Leanna and Naomi decide they must be the ones to break the news to Batsheva but Batsheva seems to already know the outcome of the meeting. She doesn't want to know any details. When the other women return home, their daughters are waiting for them. Ilana screams at her mother that Batsheva was helping Shira. She tells her mother that what has happened was the fault of her mother and her mother's friends. Similar conversations go on in other homes. As the women think about what their daughters have said, they realize their children have been looking at them with scorn for quite some time.

After the meeting, it seems that Batsheva and Yosef spend more time together than ever. Batsheva tells Yosef she feels she has been made the scapegoat because the people had to have some way to explain Shira running away. Yosef is angry at both himself and his community. Helen overhears part of this conversation and walks home feeling uneasy with herself. The ladies all feel tired and overworked as they enter their Pesach celebrations. At the end of their seders, the groups fill cups of wine for the prophet Eliyahu who is said to make appearances on Earth sometimes.

When they see Batsheva in shul the first day of Pesach, the ladies realize she no longer looks sad, but angry. After services, Mrs. Levy makes over Ayala until Batsheva tells the child it is time for them to go home. This angers Mrs. Levy and she decides to speak her mind. In front of her friends and family, Mrs. Levy blames Batsheva for the problems in their community and tells her that they want her to leave. The women are shocked by what Mrs. Levy is saying in public even though they have often agreed in private with her point of view. It is when Batsheva tells Mrs. Levy that parents can't force their children to be religious that Mrs. Levy looks at her own children. She realizes how embarrassed they are by her. She finally realizes that her children had not stayed in Memphis because they had not liked what they had encountered there. None of Mrs. Levy's children or friends come to stand beside her and support her in her arguments.

Helen sees Batsheva and Ayala in the park some days later and speaks to them even though she knows that it will make Mrs. Levy mad. Batsheva comments that it must be nice to have family for the holidays and Helen finally realizes why it was so important to Batsheva that she be friends with the girls. She insists that the two come to join her family. She finally realizes that it has been her willingness to follow the crowd despite her own ideas that has been paining her so much in the last few days. When Helen returns home, Mrs. Levy calls. Helen makes an excuse to hang up quickly. In the days between the celebration of Pesach and Shavuot, the community celebrates the wedding of Helen's daughter as well as the birth of Bessie's grandson.



Chapter 18 Analysis

It is in this portion of the novel that one of the ladies, Helen, finally wakes to see what she has missed about Batsheva. Her eyes are opened when she hears Batsheva and Yosef discussing how angry Yosef is with his community but not until she sees Batsheva and Ayala alone in the park that she realizes how much her willingness to follow the rest of the crowd in ruining Batsheva has bothered her. Now, she thinks about how lonely Batsheva must be with no close friends or family. For this reason, Helen takes a step out against Jocelyn, Mrs. Levy and Tziporah by inviting Batsheva and Ayala to join her family.

The following Shabbos in shul, Mrs. Levy takes her dislike for Batsheva a step too far. It is in front of the entire congregation, as well as her own extended family, that Mrs. Levy accuses Batsheva of ruining their entire community. Although she believes that her children will stand by her assertions, she realizes when she looks at her faces that this is why they do not live in Memphis. They appear to be ashamed of her. Even Mrs. Levy's life long friends who have supported her through all the years will not stand beside her once they realize how awful their thoughts sound when they are voiced aloud.

It is important also to notice in this section how much more the mothers are interested in their cleaning routines than in their relationships with their daughters. Although their daughters are trying to understand why they have fired Batsheva and trying to explain the real causes of the problems, the mothers will not listen. They indicate they don't have the time to deal with their daughters as they prepare for the next holiday. They describe their daughters' behaviors as temper tantrums. They don't realize that it is their own unwillingness to talk to them about the things that are really bothering them that has pushed them away from their mothers and attracted them to Batsheva who is willing to listen to their problems.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

One morning, the town wakes up to discover an unusual stillness at Mimi's house. The Rabbi does not show up for shul as normal. There is no movement at the house. Around noon, the Rabbi leaves the house and goes straight to his office. Although the ladies call Mimi's house, no one answers. Mrs. Levy and Helen both go to the house but no one answers the door. Near the end of the day, Esther goes to the house and begs Mimi to tell her what is wrong. Mimi tells her that Yosef has left.

The ladies believe at first that Batsheva and Yosef have left together. After dark, Mimi leaves her house and goes to the shul. As her eyes adjust to the dark, Mimi realizes that she is not alone. The other person turns out to be Batsheva. Batsheva already knows that Yosef is gone. Mimi explains how Yosef had come to them telling them that he had never had to chance to think things through and decide what he wanted for himself. Mimi learns from Batsheva that it was while they were learning together that Yosef had realized the answers that he had been taught no longer seemed satisfying to him.

Mimi asks if there was any sort of relationship between Batsheva and her son. Batsheva assures her that there was not. Mimi bursts into tears and apologizes to Batsheva. After the ladies learn about Mimi's encounter with Batsheva, they realize how wrong their account of Yosef's leaving them was. The community is stunned because the way that Yosef left makes it appear as if he wants no part of them.

The women finally understand what it was that way haunting Yosef so much in his last days with them. They can't imagine him being anywhere other than Memphis and can't imagine Memphis without him. They realize they never really knew the real Yosef, only the person they had wanted him to be.

Chapter 19 Analysis

It is in this section of the novel that the women of Memphis get a real eye opener. Yosef leaves Memphis. It is when he leaves that they realize that they never even really knew Yosef. They only knew the image of him that they had created. Apart from Memphis and Jewish studies, there was no Yosef. They can't imagine him being anywhere else. Even this perfect young man who never rebelled, and never went against his parents' wishes has ultimately given up on everything that he ever knew in order to get to know who he really is and what he really wants out of his life.

Although the community is shocked when Shira runs away, they had already recognized her as a rebellious teen. Although they didn't expect it, it doesn't really surprise them. With Yosef, his decision to leave comes out of the blue. Although they had noticed he seemed different and was moody and preoccupied, they assumed that Batsheva was influencing him and leading him astray. In fact, the women of Memphis believe so



strongly that Batsheva has caused Yosef to have an affair that they at first wonder if Batsheva has gone with him. When they learn that it has been their own behavior that has caused Yosef to leave, they almost wish that he had had an affair. They believe that this sin would have been easier for them to handle and understand than what has really happened. At least then they could have blamed his disobedience on Batsheva.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Mimi gives a class for the women in honor of Shavot. The women hope that this is a sign the community will be coming back together. Mimi teaches on the Book of Ruth how God used Ruth, a strange lady from a strange land, as part of the lineage for King David because of her personal characteristics and in spite of her past. As the ladies walk home, they imagine the heavens opening and instead of seeing the Ten Commandments being handed down, they see their own town, which seems small and insignificant. Behind this town they see a line of women back from their ancestors holding hands, connected by their religion and ritual. They see their daughters too, but there is a gap they will have to stretch across to reach their hands. Although the women search the sky for answers, they find none.

Chapter 20 Analysis

In this concluding chapter, Mimi has found a Biblical character that relates to Batsheva and her condition. Because of her nationality, Ruth is not readily accepted in her mother-in-law's hometown. Like Batsheva, however, Ruth has the characteristic of a good woman. God recognizes her goodness and sets her up as part of the lineage from which David, the king of Israel, will come. Again, the women see themselves as characters in the Bible but instead of being the ones in the right, they see themselves as the ones who were critical of Ruth. They realize the ways that they have acted in reference to Batsheva have been wrong and that they don't want to be known as that type of people.

Also significant in this portion of the novel is the women's vision of the line of Jewish women from the beginning of time up to their own daughters. While most of the women are holding hands, the younger generation stands at a distance from the others. The mothers realize they can reach their children, but that they will have to stretch out beyond themselves to do so. Even after the vision has disappeared, the women continue to scan the sky, looking for answers that they realize are not as easy as they once believed them to be.

The last sentence of the novel, the indication that the women were no longer sure of what they were seeing is significant because it describes the complete and utter feelings of disconnection among the women who were once so close. They have realized that each of them has their own personality and opinions. They have also realized from Yosef running away that they should not take anything at face value. While they expect their children to act a certain way, their children may want something completely different. They also realize what a distance they have placed between themselves and their children as a result of all of the expectations that they have had for them.



Characters

Batsheva Jacobs

Batsheva Jacobs could be considered the main character in this story as she is the focus of the action. Batsheva is the widow of Benjamin Jacobs who was killed in a car crash about two years prior to the time period of the novel. She has a daughter, Ayala, who is almost five years old. Batsheva has decided to move to Memphis, the town where her late husband grew up, believing that the small community will be good for her and Ayala. She wants her daughter to be raised in the same atmosphere as her husband.

Batsheva was not born Jewish, but converted to Judaism after she met her husband. She still has an excitement about her new religion as well as a desire to learn about the reasons behind the Jewish rituals. This excitement and desire to learn sets Batsheva apart from the other members of the Jewish community in Memphis. Although there is nothing wrong with her doing so, Batsheva gets off to a bad start in Memphis because she moves into her new home just before sundown on the evening of Shabbos. The other women first notice that Batsheva is blonde, and also that she doesn't dress as conservatively as the other Jewish ladies of Memphis. The Memphis ladies form their first impression of Batsheva quickly deciding that they do not like and that she will not be good for the community.

Since the Rabbi's wife suggests it, the Ladies Auxiliary decides to sponsor an art program at the high school and hire Batsheva as the teacher. She quickly becomes friends with the teenaged girls in her class. It is first believed that Batsheva will be good for the girls, as they have been troubled and rebellious in previous years, but when the girls don't change their rebellious ways, they wind up deciding that Batsheva is to blame. Things come to a head when Shira, one of the girls in the class, runs away. Although the girls try to convince their mothers that it was not related to Batsheva, Batsheva is fired from her job. Shortly after she is fired, the Rabbi's son, with whom Batsheva had been studying, also leaves Memphis. Although the women try to find a reason to blame Batsheva for Yosef leaving, they cannot do so. Some healing comes at the end of the novel for Batsheva when the Rabbi's wife teaches a class on the book of Ruth. There is an obvious comparison between the eclectic Batsheva and Ruth, who is allowed to be part of the lineage of King David even though she is a stranger to all the other people in the area to which she moves. The lesson of the story is that the women of Memphis should not have judged Batsheva by her outward appearance but instead by her personal characteristics.

Helen Shayowitz

Helen Shayowitz is one of the members of the group of gossiping ladies, but learns at the end of the novel that she has only joined the group to be well thought of and liked.



At the beginning of the novel, Helen is easily influenced by her group, particularly Mrs. Levy with whom she seems particularly close. She always verbally agrees with anything that Mrs. Levy has to say even if she doesn't really think that what she is saying is right. Helen is self-conscious about being Jewish and often asks her husband to hide his yarmulke under a ball cap when in public. When Batsheva begins studying with Yosef, however, Helen feels a pang of wistfulness and wonders if it is too late for her to start learning the specifics of her religion. Helen also loves Mimi, the Rabbi's wife. She is one of the people whom Helen aspires to be like. It is Helen who sees Batsheva trying on clothes in Loehmann's and spots her tattoo. When Jocelyn comes into the dressing room as well, Helen points Batsheva out to her. Although she believes that Jocelyn is being nosey, she listens as Jocelyn grills Batsheva about her past.

During much of the time that Batsheva comes under fire, Helen is too pre-occupied with her daughter's wedding to really pay much attention to what is going on. At the meeting in which it is to be decided if Batsheva will be fired or not, Helen feels torn in two as she knows Mrs. Levy expects her to vote against Batsheva but knows that Mimi has been supportive of the woman. Helen makes a comment against Batsheva teaching at the school because she hopes it will earn her points with Mrs. Levy.

One day after Batsheva is fired, Helen sees Batsheva and Ayala eating alone in the park and decides to invite them to eat with her family even though she knows that Mrs. Levy will never forgive her for doing so. She suddenly realizes that she has been feeling guilty for the way that she has always followed Mrs. Levy's lead and hasn't thought for herself. After Yosef leaves, Helen fires off at Mrs. Levy accusing her of being part of the reason that Yosef has left. This is the official end of their 39-year-old friendship.

Becky Feldman

Becky Feldman is the mother of Shira Feldman, a seventeen-year-old Jewish girl known for being scandalous and rebellious. Becky is one of the major player in the group of ladies who seem to try to rule their community in Memphis. She considers herself an expert at being able to look at a person and determine if they are Jewish or not. She tags Batsheva as not being born Jewish right away. She also plants a seed in her friends' minds that Batsheva might have come to Memphis to follow a lover or start an affair. Although Shira is not interested, Becky tries to nudge her toward Yosef, the son of the Rabbi, every chance that she gets.

Becky is invited to a Shabbos at Mimi's house to which Batsheva is also invited. It is obvious that Becky has already decided not to like Batsheva as she allows herself to be offended by the other woman numerous times during the evening. She is offended by the way that Batsheva comes into the Rabbi's house without knocking, the foods she chooses to eat and the way she makes easy conversation with the Rabbi and Yosef. From the beginning, Becky has her doubts about Batsheva teaching the art class but goes along because Mimi encourages it. Although Becky still doesn't entirely trust Batsheva, especially since her daughter seems to prefer Batsheva to her, she is relieved that her daughter appears to be a little bit happier.



This relief disappears when Shira runs away from home while at a party at Batsheva's house. Becky blames Batsheva for her daughter's actions even though Batsheva claims to have known nothing about Shira's intentions. Becky continues to blame Batsheva even after Batsheva tries to apologize and talk to her. Although she doesn't admit it to anyone else, Becky was just like Shira when she was a teenager. She was rebellious to the point that her parents sent her away to school. It was during this time that she had turned herself around. Privately Becky wonders if she might have pushed Shira to rebel and run away because of all the rules that she placed upon the girl.

Mrs. Irving Levy

Mrs. Irving Levy is the oldest and most influential member of the ladies group in Memphis. She is a busybody and a gossip. She likes to exert her control over all of the members of the community, particularly Helen. When she feels that she is no longer in control of a situation, Mrs. Levy becomes angry and domineering. On the first day that Batsheva comes to Memphis, Mrs. Levy takes her a basket of food in order to try to find out why she has come to Memphis. Mrs. Levy does, however, develop a special relationship with Ayala, baking her goodies and spending time with her. As for Ayala's mother, however, Mrs. Levy takes charge of getting the gossip train going about Batsheva and keeping it going, always pointing out things that Batsheva was doing that were normal and portraying them as being sacrilegious or profane.

It is to Mrs. Levy's shame that none of her children live in Memphis. When she has her fight with Batsheva in the social hall of the shul, Mrs. Levy realizes why her children don't live near her. They are embarrassed of her. In fact, when Mrs. Levy comes face to face with Batsheva and tells her that she is a threat to their community, no one will support her because they finally realize how terrible their thoughts have sounded all this time.

At the meeting to decide if Batsheva will be fired from her teaching position, Mrs. Levy insists that Batsheva has exposed the children to dangerous things. She argues they must fire her in order to save their community. While most everything that Mrs. Levy does is in the guise of saving the community, she is actually just not wanting anything in the community to change. She wants to keep things safe, as they have always been.

Mimi Rubin

Mimi Rubin is the wife of the Rabbi of the Memphis Jewish community in which this novel is set. She is also the mother of Yosef Rubin. After many miscarriages, Mimi thought that she could never get pregnant but was finally able to carry Yosef to term. She has high hopes that her son will eventually become a rabbi, just like his father. In her community, Mimi is the light that guides all of the other women. They look to her for advice on what they should do and how they should react to the things going on around them. Because Mimi approves of Batsheva despite her odd ways, the other women try to accept her as well. Mimi also encourages the Ladies Auxiliary to hire Batsheva as the



art teacher at the school, a decision that gives Batsheva a place as a role model for the girls.

As relations between the community and Batsheva degenerate, Mimi becomes more and more despondent. She realizes that something is wrong with Yosef but her will not tell her what is wrong. It appears that she is confused by all of the things that are happening in her community. She wonders if she misjudged Batsheva. Mimi is devastated when Yosef leaves Memphis. She goes to the temple where Batsheva happens to also be. It is while Mimi is talking to Batsheva that she learns the truth about why Yosef left as well as the extent of his relationship with Batsheva. Although she could have easily blamed Batsheva for causing Yosef to leave, Mimi instead chooses to hear Batsheva's side of the story.

Naomi Eisenberg

Naomi Eisenberg originally lived and grew up in Memphis, but has allowed the outside world to mold her view of Memphis. Although she has returned to Memphis, she doesn't always agree with the other women of the Ladies Auxiliary. Naomi is the first person who speaks to Batsheva during her first day at the shul. All of her life, Naomi had wanted to move away from Memphis. Naomi wants to warn Batsheva about how difficult life can be in Memphis for outsiders, but decides not to do so. Shortly after their first meeting, Naomi invites Batsheva out for yogurt and finds out about Batsheva's past for herself. She also tells Batsheva about what their community is really like with its gossip and backbiting. Naomi has done this before and had gotten the other ladies angry with her but she doesn't care. As the two get to know one another better, Naomi begins walking with Batsheva. During one of these walks, Naomi asks Batsheva about men and Batsheva admits to her that she had an affair after Benjamin died. Naomi tells the other women about this in her good intentioned attempt to set the record straight about Batsheva's lack of interest in Aaron Fox. Naomi believes that Batsheva is having a good influence on the girls, especially since her daughter, Kayla, had overcome her shyness while she has been in Batsheva's class. Naomi is one of the few people who continues to support Batsheva even after the rest of the community condemns her.

Tziporah Newburger

Tziporah Newburger is another of the ringleaders for the group of Memphis gossipers. She is considered to be the most religious of the small group of women. It is she who pronounces that Batsheva's habit of kissing the Torah with her bare lips was immodest. It is also Tziporah who discovers that Batsheva is using the community mikvah even though she isn't required to do so. Tziporah gives Batsheva a ride home after they meet at the mikvah and attempts to explain to her why it is improper for her to use the mikvah but is unable to convince Batsheva that what she is doing is wrong. When Tziporah learns that Batsheva had an affair with a man after her husband had died, she feels vindicated about her obsession with Batsheva using the mikvah as there was something wrong with the practice after all.



It is Tziporah who sees Shira eating at McDonald's with her non-Jewish boyfriend and has to tell the girl's mother about her encounter. After Yosef leaves, Tziporah tells the women that she had known all along that they shouldn't have trusted Batsheva. During the meeting to learn Batsheva's fate as the art teacher at the school, Tziporah is the one to call for the vote. She is also one of the leaders who calls for the meeting to take place. During the meeting, Tziporah asks the group if they want their daughters to end up like Shira, a comment that makes Becky want to slap Tziporah.

Leanna Zuckerman

Leanna Zuckerman is not a native of Memphis. She originally lived in Chicago. Leanna quickly becomes irritated with the other women's gossiping about Batsheva. Although she doesn't intend to, Leanna makes a snide comment about the women's gossip causing Mrs. Levy, one of the group's leaders, to become angry with her. Leanna is often ostracized for her habit of wearing culottes, a type of clothing that some of the women believe is prohibited by the laws of the Torah. Leanna helps Ayala feel like part of the community by inviting her to join her children in a swimming party at her house. Leanna and Batsheva soon become friends. Leanna often calls Batsheva for advice about her inlaws. When the community members begin talking about Batsheva in earnest, Leanna feels caught between her friend and the rest of the community. She finally decides to take Batsheva to lunch and tell her about the things that are being said. She agrees with Batsheva that the people of the community are using her as a scapegoat because she is different. Leanna is one of the people who continues to support Batsheva even after the remainder of the community turns against her.

Rena Reinhard

Rena Reinhard is the president of the Ladies Auxiliary at the time that the group decides that Batsheva must be forced from her position as art teacher at the Jewish school. Rena decides that because she is president she should remain neutral about Batsheva, giving her an excuse not to anger her friends, and at the same time not have to tell that she doesn't think that Batsheva has caused any of the problems with the high school girls.

When Batsheva had first moved to Memphis, Rena had taken her some of the clothes that her daughter had outgrown for Ayala to wear. She is struck by Batsheva's honest nature. She is also moved to tears by the way that Batsheva talks about her late husband. When Batsheva asks what is wrong, Rena admits to her that she and her husband have been discussing getting a divorce because he is seeing another woman. At the conclusion of the novel, Rena does finally confront her husband and ask for a divorce. She has finally realized that she is not as concerned about what people might say about her as she wants a new life for herself.



Esther Abramowitz

Esther Abramowitz is the secretary for the Rabbi. As a woman of sixty-nine who is still single, she has adopted the Rabbi and his family as her own. She is the first to know about Yosef's plans not return to school because she overhears the Rabbi and Yosef talking about it in his office. Later, Mimi admits to Esther that she is worried about Yosef. Esther wants to tell Mimi that she believes that Yosef has been spending too much time with Batsheva and that she has noticed he had developed a tendency to not fully concentrate while davening. Esther happens to come across Yosef alone in the shul and takes the opportunity to talk to him. One of the things that she talks about is the time that he spends with Batsheva. He tells her that he knows about the woman's past and that she deserves a chance to be accepted by the community. Because she believes Yosef looks lovesick, she remembers the time she met a man in Miami but had been scared things might not work out. Although she discourages Yosef, she really wants to encourage him to follow his heart.

Yocheved Abraham

Yocheved Abraham is a single, twenty-nine year old who was the closest thing the girls in the Torah Academy's high school had as a role model before Batsheva moved to Memphis. Yocheved has recently moved back to Memphis from New York and serves as the school's Hebrew teacher. Yocheved is sullen and angry because she is not married. She is also jealous of Batsheva for filling a role that she believes she should be filling. Yocheved had hoped to feel appreciated in Memphis, but is instead feels like she is living in Batsheva's shadow. When the yearly trip comes up for the senior girls, Yocheved refuses to go with them because she feels the girls are tired of her and she does not want to go if she is not wanted. Yocheved is also the teacher who discovers Hadassah and Ilana smoking marijuana at the school. After Shira runs away, Yocheved tries to have an intervention with the girls but does not have any success in getting them to talk to her. Yocheved also agrees to eavesdrop on Batsheva's art class to make sure nothing unusual is happening in the class.

Jocelyn Shanzer

Jocelyn Shanzer is one of the ladies of the Memphis Jewish community. She is described as a person who has been popular since she was born. She is the one who remembers that Benjamin had married a girl who had converted to Judaism. Jocelyn is one of the ladies who sees Batsheva's tattoo in the dressing room. Similar to Batsheva, Jocelyn had also converted to Judaism instead of being born into the religion. Jocelyn is not good at reading Hebrew and is relieved to see that Batsheva has included a transliteration with an unfamiliar blessing so that those who have trouble with Hebrew won't be embarrassed. What is most disturbing to Jocelyn is her sin of eating shrimp salad even though it is not kosher. Giving up shrimp salad is the change that Jocelyn indicates she needs to make in her life. It is Jocelyn who tries to set Batsheva up with



Aaron Fox. At the Ladies' Auxiliary meeting concerning Batsheva's job, Jocelyn suggests that Batsheva be given another chance.

Yosef Rubin

Yosef Rubin is the son of Mimi Rubin and the Rabbi. He is the child that the couple never thought they would have because Mimi had so many past miscarriages. In the novel, Yosef has returned home from yeshiva where he has been studying to be a rabbi. He agrees to spend time each day learning about Judaism with Batsheva. Yosef decides not to return to yeshiva but instead spend a year studying with his father. He is really masking his desire to not return to yeshiva at all. His parents, his father especially, have put such pressure on Yosef to become a rabbi that he is afraid that he will devastate them when he does tell them. It can be assumed that it is during his learning with Batsheva that Yosef realizes he is doubting his own beliefs. The way that the community treats Batsheva also seems to trouble Yosef. He seems shocked by what the ladies of his community have done to Batsheva just because she is different from them.

Shira Feldman

Shira Feldman is the daughter of Becky Feldman. Shira is one of the more rebellious of the teens in the Jewish community. She often skips school and has been sent home several times for wearing clothes that are too revealing. Shira does not want to go to the traditional Jewish college, but instead wants to go to Brown. Shira is accepted to the school but her mother tears up the acceptance letter and makes Shira write a letter to say she isn't going to attend. Shira becomes close to Batsheva because she feels that Batsheva is the only adult who is willing to listen to her. However, Shira doesn't even tell Batsheva about her plans to run away with her non-Jewish boyfriend. Shira's running away causes the community to focus its attention on Batsheva as the cause of Shira's disobedience.

Arlene Salzman

Arlene Salzman lives by the idea that if she ignores the things that bother her, they will go away. When her daughter is caught smoking outside the school, Arlene realizes that everything that she has ever thought was true about her community is wrong. Arlene tries to tighten the reins on her daughter when it comes to Batsheva's Purim seudah but she eventually gives in and allows her to attend. Arlene, like the other mothers, is too caught up in her holiday preparations after the Ladies Auxiliary meeting to deal with her daughter. She seems to put more importance on having her recipes and her house just so instead of making things right with her daughter. Ilana tells her mother that Shira did not run away because of anything that Batsheva did but because of Arlene's friends. Arlene does not take the time to understand what Ilana might have meant by her comment.



Edith Shapiro

Edith Shapiro is a sad, widow woman whose four sons have become rabbis and have moved away from Memphis. Yosef has a close connection with the lady and visits her every Shabbos afternoon. Edith is concerned about Batsheva's relationship with Yosef because she feels that the two are getting too close. She is afraid that Batsheva is interested in marrying Yosef. Even after Yosef seems to lose interest in other people in the community, he continues to visit Edith. During one of these visits, Edith decides she will find out what is wrong with Yosef. After talking to Yosef, Edith decides that the trouble with Yosef is that he is bored with Memphis. Edith is one of the community members who remembers the ground breaking for the Jewish school in the community. She grew up in a time when there was still a great deal of anti-Semitism in Memphis.

Mrs. Ganz

Mrs. Ganz is a woman who lives alone in the Memphis Jewish community. She is often forgotten at the holiday times but Batsheva invites Mrs. Ganz to her Sukkot celebration. When Mrs. Levy tries to entertain Mrs. Ganz with the gossip about Batsheva's affair, Mrs. Ganz tells Mrs. Levy that she already knows about the affair because she heard Batsheva and Mimi talking about it at the park. Although she rarely leaves her house, Mrs. Ganz does attend Tziporah's class intended to help the ladies of the community identify the things that they need to improve in their own lives. During the Ladies Auxiliary meeting to determine if Batsheva will remain at the school, Mrs. Ganz says only that Batsheva seemed nice enough to her.

Rachel Ann Berkowitz

Rachel Ann Berkowitz is one of the community members who has a daughter in Batsheva's art class. She agrees to allow her daughter to attend Batsheva's Purim seudah but chooses to walk her daughter to the party so she can see the girls' costumes. She reports to the other women that she got the feeling from Batsheva that she did not want any adults at the party. During the Ladies Auxiliary meeting to decide if Batsheva should keep her job, Rachel makes the comment that Batsheva should have tried to keep Shira from running away. She argues that even if Batsheva hasn't done anything wrong, she is a bad influence on the girls. Rachel believes Batsheva gives the teens the idea that they can do whatever they'd like without having to worry about laws and religious norms.

Ayala Jacobs

Ayala Jacobs is the daughter of Batsheva and Benjamin Jacobs. Although she is not quite five years old when the novel begins, the women of Memphis note that she has a look in her eyes as if she were much older. Ayala has blonde hair, like her mother. She is being raised Jewish. While the women of Memphis do not like Batsheva, they are



immediately attracted to Ayala. They seem to believe it is their duty to take care of Ayala because they believe that her mother is not doing so correctly. When the women consider running Batsheva out of Memphis, the only thing that bothers them about what they are doing is that Ayala will be leaving also.

Arlene Salzman

Arlene Salzman is part of the group that gossips about Batsheva. Arlene never really takes an active stance against Batsheva but never speaks in favor of her either. Arlene is the mother of Ilana, one of the girls who was caught smoking marijuana. After Ilana is sent home for this infraction, Arlene refuses to answer her phone or participate in any talk of the incident. It is Arlene who decides to allow her daughter to attend Batsheva's Purim seudah, which causes the other mothers to allow their daughters to go as well. It is Arlene who goes to Batsheva's with Becky when the girls have not returned home after midnight the evening of the party to find that Shira is missing.

Hadassah Berner

Hadassah Berner is the one girl among the high school girls who seems to be concerned about getting in trouble for doing things that might be against the rules. The girls often refer to her as a "goody goody." It is Hadassah who tells her parents when went on in Gatlinburg including the fact that the girls went out with make-up and rolled up skirts as well as the talks about sex. Later, Hadassah is caught smoking marijuana behind the school. She tells her mother she smoked the drugs because the other girls were angry at her for telling about what had happened in Gatlinburg.

Rabbi Rubin

Rabbi Rubin is the beloved rabbi of the Memphis Jewish community. He recalls to Batsheva how friendly the people were when he and Mimi first moved to Memphis. Rabbi Rubin's goal is for his son to grow up and become a rabbi just like him. The Rabbi has put an extreme amount of pressure on Yosef since he was young to get him to do the things that he expects of him. The Rabbi is pleased to have his son learning at home with him, but when Yosef announces to his father that he does not want to go back to yeshiva at all and does not know if he still wants to be religious, his father is devastated.

Benjamin Jacobs

Benjamin Jacobs is the son of Barbara Jacobs. The family lived in Memphis when Benjamin was growing up. Benjamin later moved to New York where he met Batsheva one day in the shul. The two are married and have a daughter. Benjamin is killed in a car crash in the Catskill Mountains. He has been dead two years before the time period in which this novel is set. Batsheva tells Marilynne Ackerman, the woman who lives in



the house in which Benjamin grew up, that her husband did not want to move back to Memphis because he found the town suffocating.

Marilynne Ackerman

Marilynne Ackerman is the lady who lives in the house in which Benjamin grew up. She allows Batsheva and Ayala to look around inside her house. Marilynne listens while Batsheva talks about Benjamin, then shares her story of her conversion to Judaism. Marilynne is struck with the feeling that the religion that Batsheva sounds like something she would be interested in being a part of, unlike the religion that the other Jewish ladies of the neighborhood have told her about.

Sarah Klein

Sarah Klein is Becky Feldman's friend from college who lives in the neighborhood of the Carlebach Shul. Sarah tells Becky that she did remember Batsheva and also had memories of a man with whom she'd had some sort of relationship with after the death of her husband. Sarah tells Becky that after this relationship, Batsheva had stopped going to shul and that someone had even seen her in a nonkosher restaurant.

Bessie Kimmel

Bessie Kimmel is the lady who works in the mikvah. Part of her job is to make sure that the ladies have cleaned properly in preparation for their purification. Unlike Tziporah, Bessie does not see any harm in Batsheva using the mikvah even though she is not married. Bessie does, however, make snide comments about how loudly Batsheva sings her first day at the shul.

Matt

Matt is the name of the boy with whom Shira takes up. Tziporah's opinion of him is that he is not Jewish and probably not even religious. It is during Batsheva's Purim Seudah party that Shira runs away with Matt. The two make it all the way to California before Shira calls her mother to tell her that they are all right, just taking a break from real life.

Mayer Green

Mayer Green is a man who is always at the shul fixing things up even though he has no paying job there. Everytime he sees Yosef, he tries to ask him a question about Jewish beliefs or customs that will stump him.



Roslyn Abraham

Roslyn Abraham is Yocheved's mother. She attends the meeting about Batsheva's job and is pleased when the women say they think the girls should spend more time with Yocheved.

Marty Reinhard

Marty Reinhard is Rena Reinhard's husband. Rena suspects that Marty is having an affair. There have been several times that he has been seen at The Peabody Hotel having drinks with a redheaded woman. The two are talking about getting a divorce.

Aaron Fox

Aaron Fox is the man with whom Jocelyn tries to set Batsheva up on a date even though Batsheva tells Jocelyn that she does not believe that he is her type.

Rabbi Abrams

Rabbi Abrams is the rabbi with whom Batsheva studied while she was considering converting to Judaism. He is the rabbi at the Carlebach Shul.

Doreen Sheinberg

Doreen Sheinberg is the secretary at The Torah Academy. She arranges to Yocheved to get in to see the school principal when she finds Hadassah and Ilana smoking marijuana.

Barbara Jacobs

Barbara Jacobs, who was from Memphis, is the mother of Benjamin Jacobs, who becomes Batsheva's husband.



Objects/Places

Friday Afternoon

It is on a Friday afternoon that Batsheva and Ayala arrive in the Memphis Jewish community.

Shabbos

Shabbos is the seventh day of the Jewish week and a day of rest and worship. Shabbos begins at sundown on Friday and lasts through sundown on Saturday.

The Shul

The shul is the temple, or place of worship for the Jewish town.

The School

This Jewish community in Memphis prides itself in having its own Jewish school although enrollment is very low. When the school building was originally built, its ground breaking was covered by the Memphis newspaper The Commercial Appeal.

White-Blond Hair

It is Batsheva's white-blond hair that gives the women the first clue that she was not born Jewish.

Wooden Mezuzah

This wooden case holds specified verses from the Torah. It is this Jewish symbol that Batsheva lifts Ayala to kiss before they enter their new rental home.

Memphis

Memphis is the city in Tennessee to which Batsheva and her daughter, Ayala, move. In the novel, Memphis is described by the Jews who live there as the Jerusalem of the South.



New York

New York is the city where Batsheva lived with her husband Benjamin until he was killed in a car accident.

Catskill Mountains

It was while they were driving in the Catskill Mountains that Batsheva, Benjamin and Ayala are involved in a car wreck that kills Benjamin.

Five Years

Five years is the amount of time that Benjamin and Batsheva had been married when he was killed.

Shelby Farms

Shelby Farms is a park near the outskirts of Memphis. It is toward this park that Batsheva walks on some mornings.

Two Years

It has been two years since Batsheva's husband was killed.

Leanna's Culottes

Leanna wears these culottes in public, a sign that the other women believe show that she has a certain amount of disregard for the way things are done in the Jewish society.

Dressing Room at Loehmann's

It is while they are trying on clothes at Loehmann's that Helen sees Batsheva's tattoo.

Tattoo in the Shape of a Rose

Batsheva got this tattoo in the shape of a rose when she was still in high school, before she converted to Judaism.



Red Satin Gowns

Helen imagines what it might be like for her to purchase and wear one of these fashionable red satin gowns.

The Community Mikvah

The mikvah is for use by married women for ritual cleansing after their periods. Although Batsheva is not required to, she uses the mikvah, which causes Tziporah to condemn her.

The Yogurt Shoppe

The Yogurt Shoppe is one restaurant in Memphis that has recently decided to start serving kosher food.

The Posh Nosh

For many years, The Posh Nosh is the only restaurant in Memphis that serves kosher food.

Oversized Paintings

Rena Reinhard is surprised to learn these oversized paintings that are displayed on Batsheva's walls were painted by Batsheva.

Batsheva's Disorientation Period

Batsheva refers to the time after Benjamin's death her "disorientation" period.

Kahn's Kosher-Mart

It is at Kahn's Kosher-Mart that many of the Jewish women shop.

Torah Academy

Torah Academy is the name of the Jewish school in Memphis.

Virginia

Virginia is the state in which Batsheva says that she was born.



Carlebach Shul

Carlebach Shul is the shul where Batshva and Benjamin met, and where Batsheva was moved to convert to Judaism.

Memphis Commercial Appeal

It is this newspaper that covers the ground breaking for the Torah Academy.

Batsheva's Classroom

Batsheva's classroom is a room that had formerly been used as a teachers' lounge, a storage closet, a science lab and an audiovisual room.

Truth or Dare, Spin the Bottle

It is these games that the Jewish mothers fear their children played during the Shabbos evening that the girls snuck past a chaperone rabbi to spend time with the boys.

A Note Rolled into a Scroll

It is on this scroll that Batsheva writes her invitation to the women of the community to attend a Rosh Chodesh celebration at her home.

Rosh Chodesh

Rosh Chodesh is a Jewish celebration in honor of the new moon.

Batsheva's Sukkah

Batsheva involves the entire community in creating a beautiful booth in her backyard for the celebration of Sukkot.

Stern College

Stern College is the college to which Shira's mother wants her to attend.

Yeshiva University

Yeshiva University is the university were Yosef had been studying to be a rabbi before he decides to take a break from learning at school.



Audobon Park

Audobon Park is the park where Mrs. Ganz overhears Batsheva and Mimi talking about Batsheva's affair.

Shrimp Salad

Shrimp salad is the one forbidden food in which Jocelyn still allows herself to indulge.

A Huge Wooden Menorah

It is this huge wooden Menorah, painted silver, that Batsheva, Yosef, Shira and Ayala create for the neighborhood.

Gatlinburg

Gatlinburg is the Tennessee city to which Batsheva and the girls go on their school trip.

A Cheeseburger

Tziporah is surprised one day when she peaks into McDonald's to see Shira sitting there eating a cheeseburger.

McDonald's

Although the food at McDonald's is not kosher, Tziporah peeks in the window just to see what it is like there.

Marijuana

Marijuana is the drug that Hadassah and Ilana are caught smoking outside of the school.

Batsheva's Piece of Paper

Batsheva drops a piece of paper outside Tziporah's house on which she was supposed to write a fault that she hoped to overcome. The other women are disturbed to find that the piece of paper is blank.



Purim Seudah

Purim Seudah is a day that celebrates the release of Queen Esther, Mordechai and the Jews in Persia from Haman. It is on this day that the Jews let loose and celebrate.

A Small B at the Bottom of a White Card

It is with this small B that Batsheva signs the cards inviting the students to her Purim Seudah party.

Brown University

Brown University is one of the universities that Shira applies for but her mother tears up the acceptance letter and makes Shira write a letter stating that she will not be attending.

Home Economics Classroom

Tziporah hopes that Batsheva's room can be turned into a home economics classroom.

White Keds

White Keds are the shoes that Helen's daughter insists on wearing for her wedding.

Lace-Covered High-Heeled Pumps

Helen picks out these lace-covered, high-heeled pumps for her daughter to wear at her wedding but the daughter would rather wear tennis shoes.

The School Library

The school library is where the meeting about whether or not Batsheva should be allowed to continue teaching is held.

Riverside Drive

The Beckers are driving along this street when they see Batsheva and Yosef walking along the river.



Pesach

Pesach is the Jewish holiday of Passover, a commemoration of the story of the Israelites' escape from slavery in Egypt.

Shavuot

Shavuot is the holiday that celebrates the giving of the Torah to the ancient Jews on Mount Sinai.

Peabody Hotel

It is at the Peabody Hotel that Tamara, Helen's daughter, is married.

Book of Ruth

Mimi chooses to lead a Bible study on the Book of Ruth.



Themes

Hypocrisy

One of the major themes in this novel is the idea of the way that hypocritical thinking and behavior can affect members of a community and/or a religious organization. A hypocrite is generally assumed to be someone who claims to have high moral standards but does not act like a person of those high moral standards should act. Although they do not realize it at first, the women of Memphis are highly hypocritical. Instead of welcoming Batsheva into their community, the gossip about her and choose to dislike her because she is different. They criticize her ways of dressing and believe her manner is too provocative. They also find fault with her because she sits too near the front of the shul and sings too loudly.

Meanwhile, the women of Memphis are struggling with fatigue from their years of celebrations and festivals in which they no longer find any meaning or spiritual satisfaction. The fact that Batsheva still finds joy and excitement in these same festivals is a point of envy and jealousy for some of the other women. Her enthusiasm makes them dislike Batsheva even more.

Now that their daughters are getting older, they are beginning to recognize the hypocritical thoughts and behaviors of their mothers. They begin to resent their parents and their religion as they see their mothers enforcing rules upon them that their mothers don't follow. It is not until some major changes take place, including one teen girl running away and the Rabbi's son leaving the religion, that the women realize how badly their behavior is affecting the entire community.

Judging by Appearance

When Batsheva first moves to Memphis, the women judge her based on her appearance. They look at what appears to be by her inability to cook, her more feminine way of dressing and her non-Jewish past that she is up to no good. They do not believe that Batsheva is a good Jewish influence on the teens simply because of what they have heard of her, and not by actually getting to know her personally. The only two people in the community who do bother to get to know Batsheva accept her as a sincere Jewish convert. The rest of the community uses her as a scapegoat for their problems because she is different from them.

It is not until Mimi teaches the Bible class on Ruth that the women begin to understand that they should not base their opinions of a person just on their past, or just on the way they look. God, for instance used Ruth, who was not from a chosen people to be part of the lineage for King David. He realized that Ruth was more than just her past and more than just her appearance. She was used to do great things for God because of her faith in the present.



Parenting

Parenting and the different opinions of how parenting should be done is another major theme in this novel. The majority of the women of Memphis believe that tightening their control over their children and enforcing the rules is the only way to raise a good child. It is this very issue of parenting over which Mrs. Levy and Mimi have a tiff while talking in a store. Mrs. Levy is trying to insist that Mimi tighten the reins on Yosef and get the boy under control while Mimi feels that she must give Yosef his space to determine for himself what is best. The lesson at the end of the novel is that no matter which type of parenting one chooses, the children are still likely to rebel. Shira's mother believes that she has rebelled because of the strict rules that she put in place for the girl. Yosef, on the other hand, has taken all of the space that his mother has given him and has decided, also, to leave Memphis and the religion.

Another aspect of the theme of parenting is the opinion that the ladies of Memphis hold of Batsheva's parenting. They are surprised by the way the Ayala behaves and also by the way that Batsheva treats her. On their first day in Memphis, the ladies watch as Ayala sits patiently on the lawn while her mother unloads their car. They note that their children would never have left them alone for that amount of time. The women also make comments about the way that Batsheva talks to her daughter like she is an adult. They don't think this is proper. They also don't approve of the things that Batsheva tries to pass off as meals for Ayala. They are concerned that Ayala is not getting the nourishment that she needs. They are also worried that Ayala is not learning the proper things that a Jewish girl should since her mother is such a bad example. In reality, however, Ayala seems to be more well adjusted than the other children in the neighborhood.



Style

Point of View

This novel is written from the first-person point of view of a group of unnamed narrators. It can be determined that the narrator is a collective as they always refer to themselves as "we" never as "I." These narrators are the women who live in the Jewish community in Memphis and have made up their minds before they have even met Batsheva that they don't like her. They glean the information from their own personal experiences with Batsheva as well as the gossip that they have heard from others about Batsheva's influence on the community.

The story is told through exposition and a relatively small amount of dialogue. A good portion of the novel is dedicated to describing the day-to-day life of the Jewish people and the background of the community as well as the traditional celebrations of the religion. It is also through exposition that the narrators are able to first lay out the reasons that they dislike Batsheva when she first moves to Memphis, describe their tentative acceptance of her strange ways, and then outline the reasons for their ultimate rejection of her.

Setting

The novel is set in a small Jewish community in the southern city of Memphis, Tennessee. The closely-knit community is referred to by its members as the "Jerusalem of the South." Those people who have lived in this community all of their lives believe that the community is sheltering and deeply religious. Those who have moved into the city see the atmosphere as being suffocating. The teens of the town struggle with the hypocrisy they see in their parents' lives despite the rules they try to enforce on their children.

There are several significant settings included in this novel. One of these is the Jewish school in which Batsheva teaches. This is an especially important setting since most of the troubles in the novel originate with the high school girls. Other important settings in the novel include: the community mikvah, where the women go for their monthly purification; the shul, where Batsheva meets Yosef for the first time; Mimi's house, where it is decided that Batsheva will be allowed to learn with Yosef; Batsheva's house, where several community parties, including one for the youth, are held; Jocelyn's house, where Jocelyn tries to fix Batsheva up with Aaron Fox; Kahn's Kosher Mart, where the women of the neighborhood shop; McDonald's, where Tziporah sees Shira eating a cheeseburger; Audobon Park, where Mrs. Ganz overhears Mimi and Batsheva talking about Batsheva's affair; Loehmann's, the clothing store where Helen notices that Batsheva has a tattoo; and Riverside Drive, where the Beckers see Yosef and Batsheva walking by the river.



Language and Meaning

An important aspect of this novel is the incorporation of the Jewish traditions and holy days into the text. The inclusion of these day-to-day festivities and rituals helps the reader to better understand and identify with the lives of the Jewish people. It is only through introducing what their life is like that one can understand how hard it is for these people to incorporate into a Christian society. For instance, their Shabbos, the holy day of the week, begins on an evening when everyone else is celebrating the end of the work week with football games, parties and get-togethers. The Jewish women also have a custom of dressing modestly. Though it doesn't seem to bother the older ladies that much, the younger Jewish girls feel as if they are being punished because they are not allowed to wear stylish clothes.

Because she describes much of the Jewish way of life in her novel, Mirvis includes Jewish terms in these descriptions. Some of the holidays and festivals are given a brief description of what special occasion the people are observing while others do not include a description. Some of these are well known enough that they need no explanation, such as Chanukah, while the reader might want to do some research into some of the other festivals and celebrations to become better acquainted with them. The same goes for the objects used in Jewish worship. It can be determined what most of the items are just by using context clues included in the book but some may want to do a little more research to understand their significance to the Jewish people.

Structure

This novel is divided into 20 chapters with each chapter headed only with a chapter number. The longest chapter is 36 pages while the shortest is a mere 6 pages.

The plot of this novel is not really complex, but what happens affects a variety of people in a variety of different ways. The main idea of the novel is that a new, strange person moves into a small community of people who resist any type of change and don't like anyone different from themselves. Because this woman is so different, and doesn't try to conform, the women begin blaming the rebellion of their children on this woman because she reaches out to the girls in an attempt to be their friend. Each person in the novel is affected differently by Batsheva's introduction into the town and the way that the people react to her.

Although the author does include information about the Jewish customs and ways of life into the novel, the story moves along without dragging because these customs are incorporated into the story line just as the Jews incorporate the festivals into their lives. Because of these descriptions and also because the narrator is a group of people instead of a single voice, much of the story is told in expository form. There are scattered portions, however, where the characters do interact with one another in dialogue.



Quotes

"It was inappropriate that she moved in when she did. Not that there was any religious prohibition against it, but it wasn't something we would have done" (Chapter 1, p. 1).

"But Batsheva sang, loud enough for everyone to hear. She knew the words, and to our surprise, her Hebrew sounded natural, even better than some of ours. But the fact that she was singing so loudly was evidence enough that she wasn't one of us" (Chapter 2, p. 20).

"Usually she liked living here, but today, she was tired of hearing what people had to say about Batsheva; she wished they would give the poor woman a break. Leanna didn't dare say this out loud though" (Chapter 2, p. 21).

"Helen Shayowitz and Mrs. Levy spoke about the importance of obedience and discipline, of following all parts of a rigorous system, of being connected to the past. What Batsheva was describing sounded a lot more appealing, almost something she could be part of" (Chapter 3, p. 39).

"Doing it only because it's commanded would take the joy out of the mitzvah. Anyway, I think that we need to emphasize the spiritual aspects of Judaism more. Sometimes they get left behind, and when that happens so much of what it's about gets lost" (Chapter 3, p. 58).

"Judaism wasn't about self-interpretation; it wasn't a new age religion where you were supposed to create your own meaning. It was a very old tradition with very old laws. Batsheva had been Jewish for what, five years? Who was she to say what it was and wasn't about" (Chapter 3, p. 59).

"But Mimi offered no news and though her voice was kind and patient, we detected a hint of reproach; she was warning us in her soft way to give Batsheva a chance" (Chapter 4, p. 74).

"But for most of us, Mimi's friendship was a kosher seal newly printed on Batsheva's forehead and it changed everything" (Chapter 4, p. 94).

"If we had been in her situation, who's to say if we would have had the strength or desire to stay religious. We saw in her a kind of faith that eluded us, one that would allow us to lose ourselves in it" (Chapter 6, p. 119).

"For Edith Shapiro, the failure of the setup gave her more reason to worry about Yosef. She had noticed how comfortable Batsheva and Yosef were together. Maybe Batsheva had her eye on him and that was why she had shown no interest in Aaron Fox" (Chapter 10, p. 167).



"You can think whatever you want, but I see through everything here. It's all fake. It doesn't mean anything to any of you. All you and your friends care about is what people think" (Chapter 12, p. 188).

"We felt as if we were bargaining with God, offering our good deeds like collateral against our children's souls" (Chapter 13, p. 202).

"For Leanna Zuckerman, the tension was unbearable. She was like a double agent in the midst of a spy game - not wanting everyone else to know that she sympathized with Batsheva and not wanting Batsheva to know what people were saying about her" (Chapter 13, p. 205).

"I'm just saying that we need to be proud of how good our kids are and not drive them crazy by forcing them to be something they're not" (Chapter 13, p. 206).

"Maybe I was being naive, but I thought that in a community like this, where people are supposed to be thinking about how God wants us to treat each other, it would be possible to make a place for myself. I thought that people would be more accepting and understanding. But I guess I was wrong" (Chapter 13, p. 209).

"She seemed struck by her realization that despite our rules and rituals, the way we treated one another wasn't necessarily better than anywhere else" (Chapter 13, p. 209-210).

"But as she spoke, she felt a terrible regret for the opportunity she had passed up in Miami, and a small part of her longed to tell Yosef to follow his heart, to take the kind of chance she had been afraid of" (Chapter 15, p. 227).

"I was this miracle child that wasn't supposed to be born, and my whole life I've tried to live up to their expectations" (Chapter 15, p. 229).

"I feel ashamed to be from Memphis right now. All this talk about how friendly we are as a community, what a special place this is - what does any of it mean if we treat someone who's a little different than us in such a close-minded way" (Chapter 17, p. 263).

"No, Mom, you don't understand. What happened on the class trip and the marijuana and Shira leaving, none of it was Batsheva's fault. It's your and your friends' fault" (Chapter 18, p. 270).

"People need a way to make sense of Shira running away, and rather than taking a look at themselves, they're looking at me" (Chapter 18, p. 272).

"But now I feel like I'm seeing what this community really is for the first time and I can't believe I never saw it before" (Chapter 18, p. 272).

"Not only had she been unable to prevent her daughter from making the same mistakes she had, but maybe she had even driven her to them" (Chapter 18, p. 276).



"And Mrs. Levy finally understood: her children's practical reasons for living away were excuses. The truth was, they wanted no part of her, no part of Memphis. Her own children had taken a look around and not liked what they had seen" (Chapter 18, p. 280).

"For the first time, she saw herself from a distant perspective and hated what she saw: a woman who had followed the crowd, who hadn't stopped to think for herself" (Chapter 18, p. 282).

"Hearing that Yosef was gone was like hearing the news of a death" (Chapter 19, p. 286).

"When we heard what had happened between Mimi and Batsheva, part of us still wanted to blame Yosef's leaving on Batsheva, to hold on to the idea that they had had an affair and that was the cause of all our troubles. But we found that it was getting hard to believe our own version of events" (Chapter 19, p. 290-291).

"It wasn't his leaving as much as it was his rejection of our community and what we believed in. In leaving like this, Yosef was saying that he wanted no part of us" (Chapter 19, p. 291).

"Instead of viewing the roots we had set down here as nourishing and supporting, we tried to imagine seeing them as twisting round and round each other in overly close, strangling connections" (Chapter 19, p. 291).

"Without Mimi, we were confused, a mass of people with no leader and no direction, like the Jews in the desert, aimlessly wandering in search of some elusive place" (Chapter 20, p. 298).

"We saw ourselves as characters we didn't want to be and we wished we could change what we had said and done" (Chapter 20, p. 299).



Topics for Discussion

What do the women of Memphis find in Batsheva that they do not like before they even talk to her the first time?

Describe the challenges faced by the Orthodox Jewish teenagers in the story. Do you believe that Batsheva contributed to their rebellion? Why or why not?

In the novel, the author gives a great deal of information about the Jewish rituals and their way of life on a day-to-day basis. Why is this description of their way of life important to the novel? Is it ever distracting from the story? Explain your answer.

During her "date" with Aaron, Aaron seems to be concerned that creativity and self-expression might not be things encouraged by the Orthodox Jews. Why might he feel this way? Why would a religion be threatened by its members being creative and able to express their emotions and feelings in art?

How does hypocrisy by the members of any religious organization, not necessarily just Jews, impact and influence those around them? In what ways is this hypocrisy demonstrated in this novel? How does it affect the other characters in the novel?

Compare and contrast the benefits of being a member of a small community with the negative aspects of these same communities. Do you prefer a small community or a large city? Give reasons for your answer.

What do the women of Memphis realize about themselves when Josef leaves? How does Batsheva figure into his leaving? How do the others of Memphis play a part in his decision to leave Memphis?

Describe the cycle of events from Batsheva moving in and the people of the community disliking her to the eventual turn of events that helped them to like her, then the downward turn that again made them dislike her again.

Why is it significant that the author compares the way the women of Memphis feel during the troubles in their community with the way that the early Jews felt during their persecution?