

My Sister Lives on the Mantelpiece Study Guide

My Sister Lives on the Mantelpiece by Annabel Pitcher

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Plot Summary

My Sister Lives on the Mantelpiece is a novel by English writer Annabel Pitcher. In this novel, Jamie Matthews is ten years old. Five years ago, his sister Rose was killed when a terrorist's bomb blew up a trashcan in Trafalgar Square in London. Jamie's family fell apart in the years that followed. His sister Jas, Rose's twin, struggles to be her own person while his mother chooses to leave to be with another man, and his father is lost in the bottom of a vodka bottle. As Jamie tries to navigate childhood trapped in this bubble of overwhelming grief, he discovers that adults are not always right and that grief can be an all-consuming emotion. *My Sister Lives on the Mantelpiece* is a coming of age novel that deals with issues that no ten-year-old child should have to navigate. Jamie not only survives but thrives.

Jamie Matthews has a sister named Rose who lives on the mantelpiece in his family home. Every year, Jamie's father tries to empty the urn in which Rose lives into the ocean, but each year he cannot bear part with the ashes. Then, on what would have been Rose's fifteenth birthday, Jamie's mother announces that she has been having an affair with a man she met in a support group and leaves to be with him. In an attempt at a new start, Jamie's father packs up the family and moves to the country.

Jamie likes the new house and the fact that his cat, Roger, can roam free. However, Jamie dislikes his new school. When Jamie arrives at school on the first day, he is forced to sit beside a young girl named Sunya. Sunya is a Muslim. Jamie's father dislikes Muslims, blaming all Muslims for the terrorist bomb that killed Rose. In fact, Jamie's father moved the family to the country to avoid living near Muslims. Now Jamie does not know what he is supposed to do. Sunya makes multiple overtures of friendship but Jamie ignores them all in fear of upsetting his father.

Jamie misses his mother and wishes that she would come for a visit. When he receives a birthday present from his mother, a Spiderman shirt, he decides to wear it until his mother comes for a visit. Jamie wears the shirt every day, refusing to take it off. Finally Jas buys him deodorant to keep him from smelling.

Sunya continues to attempt to befriend Jamie. When Sunya draws a picture of the devil and implies it is their teacher, hanging it in the classroom and making it appear as though a class bully has done it, Jamie cannot help but become her friend. However, when they learn the Ten Commandments and Jamie learns that it is a sin not to honor his mother and father, he begins to ignore Sunya again to honor his father. However, it is not long before Jamie realizes that by disliking Muslims, his father is also breaking a commandment. Unfortunately, it is too late to fix the pain that he has caused Sunya.

On Parents' evening, an event at his school, Jamie is deeply saddened that his mother did not show up. At the same time, Jamie is horrified when his father learns that Jamie has been writing stories about Rose as though she is still alive. When Sunya and her mother arrive, Jamie is embarrassed when his father attacks Sunya's mother for being a



Muslim. At home, Jamie is yelled at by his father and then his father disappears for days into a drunken stupor.

Jamie and Jas enter a talent contest. Jas does well and is asked to return by the judges, but she refuses to come back without her brother. Later, they see that their mother was already present. The mother leaves quickly, but not before revealing that she did not give Jamie the tee shirt. Jamie knows that Jas did it.

The next day, Jamie finds Roger dead on the side of the road. Jamie is devastated by the death of his cat. His father helps him bury the cat and then he decides to throw Rose's ashes into the pond at the back of their house. The death of Roger has helped everyone have more understanding of death and grief. Later, Jamie and Sunya make up when Jamie saves her from the school bully.



Chapters 1-6

Chapters 1-6 Summary

In Chapter 1, Jamie Matthews has a sister named Rose who died five years ago from a terrorist's bomb. Part of the pieces recovered at the sight of the bombing was cremated and sit on the family mantelpiece. Jamie does not remember Rose well because he was only five when she died. Jamie's parents think it is odd that he never cried, but Jamie does not. A few weeks ago, Jamie's mother left the family to live with a man she met in a support group. The man, Nigel, lost his wife the day of the bombing. Now Jamie, his sister Jas, and his father have moved to the country to escape the overwhelming number of Muslims in the city and so his father can get a new job.

In Chapter 2, Jamie's birthday is coming. He will be ten. Jamie hopes his mother will send him something, but nothing comes before or on his birthday. Jas makes Jamie a nice cake. Jamie remembers how Jas came home on her fifteenth birthday with short, pink hair. Jas no longer looked like rose, who was her teen. This seemed to compound the fight her parents were already having. Their mother left that day.

In Chapter 3, on his birthday, Jamie gets a pair of soccer cleats from his father, but they are too small. Rose gives him a book, but it is one he has read. Jas takes Jamie to the park and they play soccer for a while. Back at the house the mail has come, but it is only a card from Jamie's grandmother in Scotland. Jamie spends the rest of the day with Jas watching the Spiderman movie. Two days later, Jamie receives a package from his mother. It has a Spiderman t-shirt in it and a note in it that says she looks forward to seeing him in it. For this reason, Jamie vows to never take the shirt off.

In Chapter 4, Jamie dislikes his school. Although it is a Christian school, the girl he is forced to sit beside is a Muslim. Due to the fact that his father dislikes Muslims, Jamie is worried about sitting by this girl. Their first assignment is to write a story about their wonderful summer. Jamie cannot think of anything to write. The girl, Sunya, tells him to make it up. This forces Jamie to pretend Rose is not dead when he has to read the story later to the class. At lunch, Jamie tries to make friends, but has little success. Sunya tries to give him a ring made of poster tack, but he refuses it even later when Sunya helps him as a boy called Daniel teases him.

In Chapter 5, on the anniversary of Rose's death, Jamie recalls how they were in Trafalgar Square for a picnic at their mother's insistence and Rose wandered away despite the fact their father called her back. A bomb in a trashcan went off and Rose was caught in the explosion. Jamie's father has always blamed Jamie's mother for not making Rose obey him. At school there is an assembly for the victims of the bombings. Jamie is glad no one knows the truth about Rose. The next day, Jamie's father, sister, and he go to the beach to throw Rose's ashes into the water. However, just like on each previous year, Jamie's father cannot let go of the ashes.



In Chapter 6, Jamie continues to have trouble at school. Daniel continues to tease him. Daniel hides a bunch of things in Jamie's gym bag and claims that Jamie stole them. When the headmaster calls Jamie's house, Jas answers and defends Jamie.

Chapters 1-6 Analysis

Jamie Matthews is a typical ten-year-old kid. He likes superheroes and loves junk food. He loves his cat and he reads a lot. However, Jamie's home life is nothing like normal. Jamie's sister was the youngest child killed on October 7 when terrorist bombs went off in trashcans all over London. The death of their daughter has devastated Jamie's parents who each cope with the pain in different ways. Jamie's mother has turned to outside support, finally abandoning her family to be with a man who lost his wife on October 7. Jamie's father, on the other hand, has remained with the family physically, but has abandoned the care of his children to a bottle of vodka.

Jamie's sister, Jas, is fifteen. Jas is Rose's twin. For many years after the bombing Jas's parents liked to dress her up like Rose, practically forcing her to take on the role of her dead sister. This has caused Jas to act out, to take on the dress and appearance of the Goths, teenagers who dress all in black and wear heavy white and black makeup. Jas is trying to find her own identity while forced to become something of a parent in the household, caring for Jamie and herself in the best way she can. However, Jas has her own emotional problems as illustrated by her decision to stop eating.

Jamie and his family have moved to the country. However, when Jamie starts school he finds himself forced to sit beside a young Muslim girl. The terrorist group who took credit for the bombing that killed Rose were Muslims. This has caused Jamie's father to become an outspoken denouncer of the Muslims. Due to this, Jamie is afraid to befriend the young Muslim girl, afraid that by doing so he will be disrespecting his father and Rose's memory. This is unfortunate because Jamie is finding it difficult to get along with the other kids at school. The only girl who is willing to befriend Jamie is the Muslim girl, Sunya.



Chapters 7-13

Chapters 7-13 Summary

In Chapter 7, Jamie continues to hope his mother will come to visit. Therefore, when Jas gets a late night visit from her boyfriend, Luke, Jamie is disappointed it is not his mother. At school the next day, the kids tease Jamie for the theft they still think he committed. At lunch, the kids surround Jamie and start making fun of him. Daniel even spits on him. Then Daniel is called inside by a girl who says the teacher wants to see him. When the students later return to class, they discover that someone has drawn a picture of the devil that looks like the teacher. Daniel is implicated in the prank because he is the only student to have gone into the building during recess.

In Chapter 8, it is Halloween. Jamie goes out trick or treating with Sunya without telling his father. After they get their candy, Jamie and Sunya sit under a tree to eat their candy. When Sunya tries to ask Jamie why he keeps wearing the same shirt over and over, he gets upset and leaves. Sunya follows them. Then Jamie's father arrives in his car and offers them a ride home. Jamie's father cannot see Sunya's face because of her ghost costume, so he does not realize she is a Muslim.

In Chapter 9, Jamie is offered a spot on the soccer team because a player is injured. Sunya supports Jamie when he is afraid to go into the locker room. During the game, Jamie plays hard. Jamie ends up making the winning goal. The team is happy and appreciate Jamie's effort, all except Daniel. Daniel waits for Jamie on his way home and beats him up.

In Chapter 10, Jamie limps home to find Jas gone and his father passed out. Jas and her father argue when she comes home late. Jas comes to Jamie's room, but cannot see him in the dark. The next morning, Jamie tells Jas that he was injured in the game. At school, Jamie and Sunya have a brief fight, but then she shows him her hiding place and Jamie tells her about Rose.

In Chapter 11, Jamie sends an invitation to his mother to attend Parents' Evening at his school. Then Jamie goes to Sunya's house to have lunch. Jamie feels bad that he cannot tell his father about this, and he even spends some time looking through the house to find proof that all Muslims build bombs in their bedrooms. However, Jamie discovers that Muslims are just like everyone else. Sunya even tells him how she was born and raised in England. At home, Jamie's father made dinner. Over the meal, Jas tells him that she has a boyfriend.

In Chapter 12, Jamie's teacher begins teaching the class about the Ten Commandments. She tells them they cannot go to heaven if they break the commandments. Jamie thinks of Rose and realizes he must be good so he can be in heaven with her. However, one of the commandments tell Jamie that he must honor his parents. Jamie knows he is not honoring his father by being friends with Sunya, so he



begins ignoring her again. At home, Jas invites Luke to dinner to meet her father. It is an awkward experience.

In Chapter 13, the next day, Jamie's father tells Jas that Luke is gay because he dyes his hair. Then Jamie's father begins bad mouthing Muslims again. Jamie realizes that his father is telling lies about his neighbors, breaking one of the commandments too. This helps Jamie realize that adults are not always right and he decides it is okay to be friends with Sunya. Jamie tries to speak to Sunya, but she ignores him. At the same time, Jamie witnesses Sunya being bullied by Daniel and his friends. However, Jamie does not stand up for them.

Chapters 7-13 Analysis

Jamie continues to hope his mother will come see him, but she continues to ignore his requests for her attention. For this reason, Jamie continues to wear the Spiderman shirt even though it has become very dirty and smelly. Wearing the shirt has become something of a safety blanket to Jamie, a symbol of his hope that his family will one day return to normal.

Jas continues to struggle with her dual roles as teenager and adult figure in the household. Jamie's father begins paying more attention, trying to become more present in his children's lives. However, when Jamie's father sees the evidence that Jas is growing up, and begins having the typical fights a father has with his teenage daughter, he begins to sink back into emotional outbursts and his drinking.

Jamie's relationship with Sunya is complicated. Jamie likes Sunya as the person she is. However, his father has filled him with lies about Muslims and Jamie finds himself looking for proof of these lies when he goes to Sunya's house. At the same time, Jamie realizes that he is dishonoring his father by making Sunya his friend. For a time this causes a break in the relationship, but then Jamie comes to the understanding that his father is telling lies about Muslims and that this negates the dishonor Jamie is causing. Unfortunately, it is too late for Jamie to repair the damage he has done to his friendship with Sunya. The friendship is very important to Jamie, not only in his personal growth in discovering that all adults are not always right, but also because she is the only person in his life who truly understands him and cares about what happens to him. The loss of this friendship could have profound implications for Jamie.



Chapters 14-17

Chapters 14-17 Summary

In Chapter 14, Jamie returns home from school to find his father searching through the boxes in the cellar that contain Rose's things. Jamie's father then takes a picture with Rose's handprint on it with him to bed and falls into a drink induced stupor. The next day an inspector comes and watches the class as the teacher teaches. The students are assigned to make a reproduction of the stable scene at Jesus's birth. Sunya wants to make a rhino, but the teacher will not let her. Later, when the projects come out of the oven, they discover someone has placed horns on all of Daniel's characters and animals. Jamie knows that Sunya did it and he thanks her.

In Chapter 15, when Jamie gets home from school, he discovers a message on the answering machine saying that Jas has not been going to class. Jamie confronts her and learns that she has been spending the days with Luke. However, Jas promises to go back to school the following day. The next day is Parents' Evening and Jamie is disappointed to find his mother has not come. Then, when Jamie's father is shown his writing, Jamie is horrified that his father has to discover that he has been writing about Rose as though she is still alive. Then Sunya and her mother walk in.

In Chapter 16, Jamie's father begins yelling at Sunya's mother about how Muslims are all killers. Then Jamie's father takes him home and finds Jas on the couch with Luke. Jamie's father kicks Luke out of the house and forbids Jas from ever seeing him again. Then Jamie's father yells at Jamie, calling him a liar and accusing him of not loving Rose. Then he disappears into his bedroom. Later, Jamie convinces Jas to enter a talent contest with him.

In Chapter 17, during the last week of school before the winter break, Sunya refuses to speak to Jamie despite his multiple tries to draw her out. Jamie has apologized to Sunya a lot, but again she refuses to speak to him. On Christmas, Jamie's father is drunk and sleeps through the day. Jas keeps looking out the window for some unknown thing. Then Luke brings her a card that makes Jas very happy, giving Jamie the idea to make a card for Sunya. Jamie sneaks over to Sunya's house to give it to her and is nearly caught by her father twice.

Chapters 14-17 Analysis

Jamie's father falls deeper and deeper into depression as he sees more and more signs of Jas growing up, something that Rose will never be able to do. When Jamie's father learns that Jamie is writing stories about Rose as though she is still alive and is friends with a Muslim, it pushes him over the edge and he spends days in bed in an alcoholic stupor. It is a difficult time for Jas and Jamie as they are forced to celebrate Christmas alone without either of their parents.



Chapters 18-23

Chapters 18-23 Summary

In Chapter 18, on the morning of the talent show, Jamie and Jas sneak out of the house early and drive to Manchester with Luke. Jas almost chickens out several times, but Jamie keeps her there by telling her that seeing them on stage will get their parents back together. However, Jas knows that their mother has abandoned them.

In Chapter 19, Jas changes her mind at the last second and agrees to go on stage with Jamie. They go on and are too afraid to speak or sing. However, Jas becomes courageous and they begin to sing. The judges make them stop and ask for Jas to sing alone. When she does, the judges offer for Jas to come back to the second round if she will come without Jamie. Jas refuses. Afterwards, Jas and Jamie discover that both of their parents came. It turns out Jamie's mother had been out of the country for several months and did not get any of their letters. Jamie also discovers that his mother did not buy him his Spiderman shirt.

In Chapter 20, Jamie is saddened when they return home, but his father makes an effort to connect with him. The next day, Jamie cannot find Roger. When Jamie searches for Roger outside, he discovers that he has been killed by a car. Jamie is overwhelmed with grief.

In Chapter 21, Jamie wants to cremate Roger so he can always keep the ashes as his father did with Rose. However, it is too cold and wet to start a fire, so Jamie's father insists on burying Roger. As they bury Roger, Jamie's father throws Rose's ashes into the pond.

In Chapter 22, school resumes a short time later. Everything is basically the same. However, when Jamie sees Daniel teasing Sunya during the break, he confronts Daniel. Jamie ends up beating up Daniel to make him stop teasing Sunya and trying to tear her hijab from her head.

Chapter 23. Jamie has to go to the headmaster, but after school more kids than ever say goodbye to him. Sunya thanks Jamie for saving her and then walks home with him. They visit Roger's grave. Sunya allows Jamie to kiss her briefly before running away. Jamie finally takes off the Spiderman shirt. Then Jamie gives Jas a teddy bear in thanks for the shirt.

Chapters 18-23 Analysis

Jamie has an idea that if he and Jas enters a talent search that their parents will get back together. For this reason, he manages to convince Jas to help him by coming up with a song and dance they can do. Jas nearly chickens out, telling Jamie that she knows her mother has abandoned them. Jamie is not aware of the extent of the



abandonment until Jas tells him. This scene reveals for the reader how deeply the abandonment affects both Jamie and his sister.

Jamie's mother does come to the talent show, but it does not magically repair the family. However, this meeting allows Jamie to learn the truth about the shirt he has been wearing non-stop. Jamie's mother did not give it to him. Jamie has finally come to see that parents are not perfect and that sometimes they do the wrong thing. Jamie can see that his mother has chosen Nigel over him and Jas and that this will not change no matter what he does. While it is difficult, it allows Jamie to move on.

When Roger dies, Jamie is shocked and filled with grief. Jamie finally realizes why his father behaves as he does about Rose. Jamie is fully prepared to respond the same way to Roger's death, but his father can see what is happening and he stops it. Jamie's father finally comes to terms with rose's remains and he disposes of them as he has tried to do multiple times since her death. It is a climactic moment in the book, showing the reader that while still grieving, each member of the Mathews family is attempting to move on with their lives, to remember to value what is still alive.

Jamie and Sunya make up. Again Jamie has realized that parents are not always right. Hence, Jamie allows himself to embrace his friendship with Sunya instead of allowing his father's grief to stop him. It is an important step in Jamie's personal growth and in his own understanding of grief and the world around him.



Characters

Jamie Matthews

Jamie Matthews is just turning ten when the novel begins. Jamie lives with his father and sister Jas. Jamie once had another sister, Rose, but she was killed five years prior to the opening of the novel in a terrorist attack. Jamie barely remembers Rose, but his parents and sister continue to grieve her deeply.

Jamie and his family has just moved to a new place and Jamie has to start a new school. Jamie dislikes the school because he is bullied by other students. Jamie also dislikes that he is forced to sit at a table beside a Muslim girl. Jamie's father dislikes the Muslims and talks bad about them constantly because the terrorists who set off the bomb the day Rose was killed were Muslims. However, Jamie comes to like the Muslim girl very much and is bothered by how his friendship with her might be and in reality is perceived by his father. However, Jamie comes to understand that adults are not always right and that sometimes its okay to do things that are right even if an adult says you should not.

Jasmine 'Jas' Matthews

Jas is Jamie's older sister. Jas is also Rose's twin. After Rose's death, Jas's parents encouraged her to dress and act like Rose to keep alive Rose's memory. Jas eventually grew tired of this, however, and began searching for her own identity. Jas dyed her hair pink and began dressing in the Goth style, black clothes and heavy makeup.

Jas becomes something of an adult figure in Jamie's life even though she is only five years older than him. This makes it tough for Jamie to see how the actions of their parents hurt Jas just as much as it hurts him. However, when Jas finally admits to her own pain and disappointment, Jamie begins to realize the truth about his mother and the fact that she has no intention of ever coming back to the family. Jas is a great source of support for Jamie and a good example of how to behave.

Rose Matthews

Rose was ten years old when her family went on a picnic to Trafalgar Square. Rose was playing with Jas, spinning around, when her father called her back to the family. While Jas responded and went to her father's side, Rose continued to drift away from the family. When their father said she should come back, her mother said she should be allowed to drift away as long as she was careful. Moments later a bomb went off in a trashcan near where Rose was standing, killing her instantly. Rose's death continues to haunt her family, ruining her parents' marriage and turning her father into an alcoholic.



Jamie's Father

Jamie's father is a construction worker who has been out of work for many years. Jamie's father is consumed with grief after Rose's death. He does not seek outside help, but instead he buries himself in his grief by talking to Rose, pretending that her urn is some part of her. Jamie's father makes the family provide Christmas presents to Rose's urn and he gives the urn food on Rose's birthday. Every year, Jamie's father tries to toss Rose's ashes into the ocean on the anniversary of her death, but each year fails to do so. However, when Roger, Jamie's cat, dies, Jamie's father sees the mistake of what he has done and he throws Rose's ashes into the pond behind their house.

Jamie's Mother

Jamie's mother is also grieving the loss of her daughter. However, instead of drinking and becoming obsessed with Rose's death, Jamie's mother has sought outside help. In a support group for family members of those killed on that fateful day, Jamie's mother met a man who lost his wife. They began an affair. On Jas's fifteenth birthday, Jamie's mother left the family to move in with her lover. Jamie wants his mother to come home and comes up with schemes to make her do so, but finally realizes that his mother has abandoned him and will not be coming back.

Sunya

Sunya is the Muslim girl that Jamie is forced to sit beside in class. Sunya is immediately friendly to Jamie, but Jamie ignores her attempts at friendship because she is Muslim and his father dislikes Muslims. However, Sunya eventually persists enough that Jamie becomes her friend. The friendship is tumultuous because Jamie keeps finding himself overcome with guilt that he might upset his father by being friends with Sunya. In the end, however, both Jamie and Sunya realize that they can be friends even if their parents do not approve.

Daniel

Daniel is a bully at Jamie's school. Daniel dislikes both Jamie and Sunya, so he teases them mercilessly on the playground. When Jamie makes the winning score in the soccer game, Daniel beats him up because he is jealous of the attention Jamie gets. Later, Jamie and Daniel get into a fight at school and Jamie beats up Daniel to protect Sunya from Daniel's teasing.

Mrs. Farmer

Mrs. Farmer is Jamie's teacher. Mrs. Farmer is a grumpy old woman who has little patience for the children in her class. Mrs. Farmer is also a devote Christian who



spends a great deal of time lecturing the students on proper behavior. Jamie does not like Mrs. Farmer much.

Gran

Jamie's gran, his father's mother, lives in Scotland. The reader never meets Gran, but Jamie comments on her throughout the novel, mentioning sayings that she has said to him over the years. It appears that Gran is Jamie's moral compass through most of the novel.

Nigel

Nigel lost his wife in the same bombings that killed Rose Matthews. Jamie's mother meets Nigel in a support group and they have an affair. Later, Jamie's mother leaves the family to be with Nigel.



Objects/Places

Letters

Both Jamie and Jas send letters to their mother on several occasions in the hopes of making her come see them. Their mother gets the letters too late to attend some of their events, but manages to make it to the talent show.

Angels and Clouds

Mrs. Farmer uses several levels of clouds and angels representing each of the students in the class to encourage good behavior and good work.

Poster Tack Rings

Sunya makes two poster tack rings and puts small stones in them, one white and one brown. Sunya gives the brown one to Jamie as a token of their friendship. Later, when they stop being friends, Sunya gives Jamie her ring and refuses to take it back until the end of the novel when they renew their friendship.

Clay Nativity Sets

The students in Jamie's class are tasked with making clay nativity sets during the visit of a school inspector. Sunya, mad at the teacher, puts horns on all of the characters and animals in Daniel's nativity set.

Spiderman Shirt

Jamie receives a Spiderman shirt for his birthday. Jamie thinks the shirt is from his mother, so he refuses to take it off until she can see it. However, Jamie later learns his sister, Jas, gave it to him to make him think his mother remembered his birthday.

Gold Urn

Rose's ashes are kept in a gold urn on the mantelpiece of the Matthews' home.

Talent Show

Jamie sees advertisements for a talent show on television and talks Jas into going with him. Jamie hopes that his parents will sit in the audience and they will get back together when they see Jas and Jamie sing.



Pond

The Matthews have a pond in the garden in their country cottage. This is where Jamie's father spreads Rose's ashes at the end of the novel.

Trafalgar Square

Trafalgar Square is a park in London. The Matthews' go to Trafalgar Square on October 7 to have a picnic. That day Rose is killed when a bomb goes off in a trash can.

London

Jamie and his family live in a flat in London when Rose dies, but later Jamie, his father, and Jas moved to the country.



Themes

Grief

Rose's death has a huge impact on the Matthews family. Jamie's father drowns himself in vodka because he cannot deal with the absence of his daughter and the finality of death. Jamie's father spends a great deal of time denying Rose's death by bringing food and other items to Rose's urn, making the family pretend she is still alive and an active member of the family. This sets up a complicated dynamic in the family, making the two living children in the family feel as though they are invisible, as though their father no longer cares about them.

Jas struggles with the death of her sister. Rose was her twin, making the loss twice as difficult for Jas. However, Jas does not have the support of her parents in dealing with her unique circumstances. Instead, Jas's parents dress her like Rose and seem to like to pretend that Rose is still alive and Jas is not. This leaves Jas struggling to find her own identity. Jas begins to dress oddly and dyes her hair pink so that she will no longer look like Rose and be compared to her.

Jamie does not remember Rose. Jamie's parents are always asking him why he does not cry for Rose and why he does not write things about her in his homework assignments. Jamie cannot answer his parents' questions and he is often annoyed by this need of theirs to keep Rose alive for him. Jamie would rather move on with his life, something the rest of his family should probably do, but do not know how to do. Grief overwhelms this entire family, making it the major theme of the novel.

Coming of Age

Jamie is a naive ten year old when the novel begins. In some ways, Jamie is very much a small child still. Jamie tries to trick his mother into coming home, he waits for her visit daily by wearing the same shirt day in and day out. Jamie lies to his teacher and writes wild stories about Rose to avoid admitting what really happened to her. Jamie responds to many of the problems in his life with the maturity expected of a child his age.

As the novel develops, Jamie begins to learn more and more about the real world. Jamie discovers that the Ten Commandments forbid him from dishonoring his parents, making him worry that his friendship with Sunya is disrespectful. However, he also discovers that his father is breaking some of the commandments by spreading lies about his neighbors. This helps Jamie learn the lesson that not all adults do the right thing. When he learns this lesson, Jamie becomes free to befriend Sunya without guilt.

Jamie grows up a lot in this novel. Jamie remains a typical ten year old, but in the course of going through his parents' separation and meeting Sunya, Jamie learns a great deal about the world of adults and how to navigate through it. In fact, Jamie learns that sometimes mothers do abandon their kids, but that does not have to be the end of

the world. Jamie also learns that not all Muslims are terrorists. In the end, Jamie learns to think for himself and this is a good lesson for a child to learn.

Friendship

Jamie has no friends in his school in London. The only time the other kids speak to him and are nice is on October 7. Everyone knows that Jamie's sister was killed when a terrorist's bomb went off in Trafalgar Square. This is attention Jamie does not want and he attempts to avoid at his new school.

When Jamie begins his new school, he tries to make friends but he is instantly made a target by the school bully. Jamie struggles, trying to avoid befriending the one person who wants to be his friend, a Muslim girl named Sunya. However, Jamie eventually does make friends with Sunya and discovers that she is a better friend than a dozen of the other kids in his class. This friendship is important to Jamie and the reader suspects it will last a long time. This makes friendship an important theme of the novel.

Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the first-person point of view. The narrator of this point of view is Jamie Matthews. Jamie tells his story in a quick and abbreviated narration that gives the impression of a young child telling a story to a trusted friend or adult.

The point of view of this novel allows the reader to develop an intimate relationship with the main character, making the reader care what happens to Jamie. This point of view is restricted to Jamie, however, therefore the reader is restricted to the knowledge that only Jamie has. This can cause something called unreliable narrator in which the narrator gives the reader false information either because he is trying to hide something or because he simply does not understand. In this novel, Jamie is somewhat unreliable because he does not have all the information necessary to tell the reader about Rose's death, about his father's grief, and about his mother's situation.

Setting

The novel is set primarily in the countryside of England outside of London. The setting is new to the main character of the novel. Therefore, the reader gets to discover the setting along with the main character. The setting seems like a safe place, a normal place. However, the reader learns immediately that in London, not far from the primary setting, the main character's sister was killed by a terrorist's bomb. The reader also learns this was done by a group of Muslims and the main character quickly discovers a Muslim girl in his class.

The setting of this novel is a typical, modern setting. The main character and his family live in the country where they have gone to make a new start for themselves. However, this new start turns into a return to the same old stuff. This setting works with the plot because it presents a normal modern setting for a normal English family. However, there is nothing normal about this family, creating a setting that is ironic in its apparent safety.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple English. The novel does not contain any foreign words. The grammar of the novel is filled with sophistication, making it seem a little too sophisticated and educated for a ten year old, but it is a language that is easy for the intended audience to comprehend.

The language of the novel is casual, the kind of language one might expect to find in a novel for young adults. The main character is a ten year old boy, therefore some of the language seems a little too educated for him. However, this does not detract from the

quick-paced writing or unique dialogue that makes it seem like a child speaking quickly to a trusted adult. Hence, the language of the novel works well with the plot.

Structure

The novel is divided into twenty-three chapters. The novel is recounted primarily in narration. There is dialogue in the novel, but it is written as though someone is recalling what happened and repeating the dialogue rather than the traditional style of dialogue that is set off by quotations and pronoun assignment. This gives the pace of the novel a kick, making the novel speed through the linear timeline in which it is written.

The novel has one main plot and multiple subplots. The main plot follows Jamie as he struggles to survive the implosion of his family. One subplot follows Jas's subtle attempts at rebellion and to find her own identity. Another subplot follows Jamie's relationship with Sunya. All the plots of the novel come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"My sister Rose lives on the mantelpiece" (Chapter 1, p. 5).

"Apparently it's tiny and they talk about God all the time even if they're just doing science, as they believe in Adam and Eve not evolution and Jurassic Park like everyone else in the country" (Chapter 2, p. 10).

"I counted six girls and seven boys and my new teacher made me sit next to the only Muslim in the school" (Chapter 4, p. 22).

"Dad's fingers curled around the ashes. His knuckles turned white as he squeezed. He looked up at the sky. He looked down at the beach. He turned his head toward me and then stared at Jas. It seemed as though he wanted someone to shout DON'T DO IT but we stayed silent" (Chapter 5, p. 37).

"The fish is alone. I know exactly how he feels" (Chapter 7, p. 46).

"At least one person was glad to see me. At least one person was happy I'd made it home alive" (Chapter 10, p. 64).

"I grabbed her hand and Daniel shouted Sissy Spiderman's caught Curry Germs but I ignored him. I said I'm sorry and I meant it and Sunya nodded but did not smile" (Chapter 13, p. 86).

"It's just hard she said as she scrubbed the cups. To think of anything else. To keep away from him. You'll understand one day. I didn't say anything, but I thought I understood just fine" (Chapter 15, p. 96).

"I was glad Jas had her eyes closed 'cos I didn't know what to do with my face or hands or the enormous truth that our dad was a drunk" (Chapter 17, p. 106).

"Two faces, staring in opposite directions. Silent. Like strangers. Not Luke. Not Sunya. Mum and Dad" (Chapter 19, p. 126).

"Dad gave me my second hug ever" (Chapter 22, p. 140).

"The superhero had disappeared. In his place stood a boy. In his place stood Jamie Matthews" (Chapter 23, p. 150).



Topics for Discussion

Who is Rose? What happened to her? Why was her body in pieces as the narrator describes in the beginning of the novel? Why did her parents fight over these pieces? Why does the narrator say that Rose lives on the mantelpiece? What is actually on the mantelpiece? How does this impact the family?

Who is Jas? What color is her hair? Why has Jas dyed her hair this color? What does this say about Jas' understanding of her own identity? How does Jas respond to her parents' behaviors in the aftermath of her sister's death? How is her change in hair color a response to the way her parents have been treating her since Rose's death?

Who is Jamie? Why does he say he does not remember Rose? Why do Jamie's parents worry that he did not cry when Rose died? Why is this important? Why did Jamie go to a therapist? What did this therapist do for Jamie? Did it help? How is Jamie treated in the family? How does this reflect what happened when Rose died? How does Jamie respond to the way in which his father acts?

Who is Jamie's father? Why does Jamie's father say bad things about all Muslims? Where does this anger come from? Is this anger justified? How does Jamie's father treat him at the beginning of the novel? Why does Jamie feel sad when she sees that his father has been drinking? How does Jamie feel about the things his father says about Muslims? How does this impact Jamie's friendship with Sunya?

Who is Sunya? Why is Jamie unhappy when he learns he will have to sit next to her? Why does Jamie refuse to accept Sunya's overtures of friendship? Why does Sunya think she and Jamie have something in common? What does Sunya suggest her hijab is? What finally convinces Jamie it is okay to be friends with Sunya? Why does he later begin ignoring her again, only to make up again?

Why does Jamie wear his Spiderman shirt every day? Why is Jamie afraid to take it off? Why does no one in Jamie's family try to make him take the shirt off? Why does Jas buy a can of deodorant for Jamie? Does it help? How much wear and tear does the shirt go through before Jamie finally takes the shirt off? What finally make Jamie take the shirt off?

Why does Jamie's father take Rose's ashes to the beach each year on the anniversary of her death? Why does he fail to throw the ashes into the water? What does he make Jamie and Jas do each time they go to the beach? What is the significance of spreading the ashes? Why does Jamie's father finally spread the ashes? Where does he spread them? How does this affect the family?