

NW Study Guide

NW by Zadie Smith

(c)2016 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

NW Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	4
Chapters 1 and 2.....	5
Chapters 3 and 4.....	7
Chapters 5 and 6.....	8
Chapters 7 and 8.....	9
Chapters 9 and 10.....	10
Chapters 11 and 12.....	11
Chapters 13 and 14.....	12
Chapters 15 and 16.....	13
Chapters 17 and 18.....	15
Chapters 19 and 20.....	17
Chapters 21 and 22.....	18
Chapter 23.....	19
NW6 Pages 113-136.....	20
(W1) Pages 137-162.....	22
(W1) Pages 163-189.....	23
NW6 Pages 190-200.....	24
Host Pages 201-219.....	25
Host Pages 220-240.....	26
Host Pages 241-263.....	27
Host Pages 264-284.....	29
Host Pages 285-304.....	30
Host Pages 305-325.....	32



[Host Pages 326-346..... 34](#)

[Host Pages 347-358..... 35](#)

[Willesden Lane to Kilburn High Road..... 36](#)

[Shoot Up Hill to Fortune Green, Hampstead to Archway, Hampstead Heath, Corner of Hornsey Lane and Hornsey Lane..... 37](#)

[Visitation..... 38](#)

[Characters..... 39](#)

[Objects/Places..... 42](#)

[Themes..... 44](#)

[Style..... 46](#)

[Quotes..... 48](#)

[Topics for Discussion..... 51](#)

Plot Summary

NW is a novel by author Zadie Smith. The story follows the lives of various people that grew up in and live in the NW neighborhood of London. The main character in the first half of the novel is Leah Hanwell. Leah has a loving mother, Pauline, and a loving husband, Michel. Being a white woman married to a black French man poses its own challenges, but these are not challenges that are new to Leah. Her best friend, Natalie is also black.

Leah has reached adulthood wondering when all of her friends became so grown up while she feels as if she isn't on the same level as they are. She loves Michel, but he is ready to take their lives to the next level by buying a house and having kids. Leah is secretly doing everything she can to avoid any of these plans, including stealing Natalie's birth control pills so she can take them without Michel knowing she's on the pill. Leah even has an abortion without telling Michel she was ever pregnant.

The second half of the novel follows Leah's best friend, Natalie Blake. Natalie Blake comes from the same neighborhood as Leah, but her family couldn't be more different. In addition to overcoming poverty obstacles, Natalie also faces the challenge of being black. Natalie manages to make it as an attorney, marry a successful financial expert and have two children. Natalie, too, however, is leading a secret life of her own. Even with all of her success, she yearns for a different life, which causes her to respond to personal ads where couples are seeking a third sexual party.

The novel reveals that even those that grow up in the same neighborhood can end up with very different lifestyles. While Leah and Natalie are able to lead middle-class lives, some of the other people that they knew growing up are drug addicts and thieves.



Chapters 1 and 2

Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

A redhead is lying in a hammock. She's reading a magazine and trying to write on glossy magazine pages with a pencil, which isn't working. She's writing that she is the sole author of her dictionary. The redhead mentions that Michel is still at work and that he says that not everyone can be invited to the party. Additionally, the redhead thinks that not everything can be shared in marriage. The hammock the girl is in tips and the papers go everywhere.

The doorbell rings and Leah, the redhead, opens the door to a frantically screaming woman. The woman, who introduces herself as Shar, is waving a bill in her hand and screaming about her sick mother in the hospital. Leah invites Shar in for tea. While she's making the tea and talking with Shar, she notices that Shar's clothes are dirty and there appears to be something wrong with her face. Leah agrees to call Shar a cab to get to the hospital.

Shar realizes that both the woman and Leah went to the same school. Shar starts talking about other people that went to school with them and what they are up to now. Leah admits that she took a pregnancy test this morning and that she's just found out she's pregnant. Shar places her hands on Leah's belly, pronounces it a girl and predicts that she will be a lot of trouble and Leah will have to constantly watch her.

Leah goes up to the bathroom, making the excuse that she has to get the money that Shar needs for the cab. She cries in the bathroom until the taxi arrives. As Shar is getting into the cab and Leah is giving Shar the money she needs, Michel, Leah's husband walks up. When Leah tells Shar who he is, Shar comments on him having a girl's name and how good looking he is. Leah says that he is French, originally from South Africa, and that he's a hairdresser. Shar promises to return tomorrow to pay Leah back when Shar gets money from her paycheck.

Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

When the redhead is writing and thinking that she is the sole author of her dictionary, she is saying that she is the only one in control of her own destiny. Michel saying that not everyone can be invited to the party is a metaphor for saying that not everyone lives the same life. The papers scattering everyone is also a metaphor for the redhead's life being scattered.

Leah appears to be unhappy about her pregnancy. It can be that she doesn't want children, or that she isn't sure how Michel is going to react to the news that she's pregnant. The two women represent two different classes. While they both went to the same school and appear to come from the same neighborhood, they live contrasting

lives. While Shar is dirty and had an abusive husband and three children, Leah seems to be living a more posh life and so far doesn't have any children.



Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

When Leah tells her mother, Pauline, about Shar, her mother says she's been robbed on her own doorstep by a crack-addicted gypsy. Pauline asks what Michel said, pronouncing his name Michelle. Leah says he wants to go looking for her to get the money back.

Pauline blames Leah being gullible on her being an only child. Pauline also blames the problems on the foreigners in England. Pauline asks to speak to Michel. The only thing the two connect on is Leah's mistakes. Leah goes down to the communal hammock to smoke marijuana with their neighbor Ned.

Michel, Leah and their dog Olive are enjoying croissants at a local pastries' shop. The man at the counter is wearing a turban. Michel is talking about a clinic. Leah points out Shar to Michel as Shar buys a pack of cigarettes in the shop. Michel points at Shar and demands their money back.

Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

It seems as if Michel wants Leah to get pregnant. He keeps talking about their moving forward and about a clinic. This suggests that Leah has not told Michel that she is pregnant yet. This can be an indication that Leah is not planning on keeping the baby.



Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

Leah provides an overview of how she and Michel fell in love and what their relationship has been like over the years. She talks about how the physical attraction between the two of them was immediate. The order of their relationship, however, also seemed to be backward. As they are lying in bed now, having been married for years, Michel keeps talking about her age and them being more military about trying.

Saturday mornings while Michel is working at the salon, Leah is free to do what she wants. As Leah dances she looks at herself in the mirror. She wonders where the time has gone. The doorbell rings. There's a girl crying that her mom's had a heart attack. The girl laughs. She is so high that she turns around and leaves because she's forgotten her lines.

Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

Michel seems almost obsessed with them having a baby. The ironic part is that Leah is already pregnant. Rather than tell Michel this, however, she is keeping it a secret. Leah seems to have apprehension about their relationship in general, which can be the reason she is keeping the pregnancy a secret from everyone.

Leah seems to be self-conscious. This is especially true when Michel is around. It's as if Leah has lost her own true identity when her husband is in the room. This is why she feels so free to be herself when he is working at the salon on Saturday mornings. It also seems as if Leah and Michel are too different. Michel is black. Leah is white. Michel likes rap music. Leah prefers older hits. Michel wants children. Leah doesn't seem to want children.



Chapters 7 and 8

Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

Leah is thinking about an apple tree. She is relating to the apple tree—how it grows and blooms; hibernates for the season; and then blooms one again. Michel wants to move forward. he keeps talking about buying their own home.

Leah is at work. She's thinking about how she is the only white woman in a sea of black women from various African countries. She's hiding her pregnancy from her co-workers as well as her family. She tries to act normal at work, but she always feels as if she has to act different in order to fit in. The women are always making comments. Some of them even remark on how Leah's white and she has the last black man on earth.

Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

The apple tree is symbolic of Leah's life. She's thinking about how she is the same as the tree. the tree is the same tree that has been blooming and dying, blooming and dying for years. As the tree blooms and die, life around it is changing, while the tree remains the same. Leah is questioning if she is the same girl or if she has changed. She feels as if she is the same thing, but that things have changed in her life, but she doesn't want to change with these things.

Michel, on the other hand, is ready to keep moving, taking their life to the next level. while she remains silent about her feelings, Leah is hesitant to move on, to take their life to the next level, such as having a baby. It seems as if Leah is just going through the motions at this point in her life.

Leah is even going through the motions at work. She feels self-conscious because she is the only white women on her tem. She feels self-conscious because the black women always remark about her having a black husband. Leah is trying to be normal. She's trying to act the way that she thinks other people think she should act.

Chapters 9 and 10

Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

Leah prints out directions. It doesn't say what the final destination is, except the address itself. Leah describes the people sitting in the waiting room. She also takes about all of the diversity of the people in London, in general.

Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

It appears as if Leah has printed directions to a clinic. She talks about an expectant father in the waiting room. She can be there for a checkup on the baby about her pregnancy. She can also be there to find out what her alternatives are for terminating the pregnancy.



Chapters 11 and 12

Chapters 11 and 12 Summary

Leah spots Shar on the street. When Shar recognizes Leah, Shar drops the phone receiver of the payphone in Shar's hand. Leah walks up to Shar and instead of her own voice, Leah hears Michel's voice as she tells Shar she wants her money back and Leah calls Shar a thief.

Leah also thinks about the number thirty-seven. She believes it is a lucky number. This includes thinking of an address, 37 Ridley Avenue. It's a boarded up house right now.

Leah meets her mother to go shopping. On their way to the stores, they run into an addict begging on the street. He's selling a train fare card. Pauline starts to negotiate the sale with him. The man turns out to be a guy Leah went to high school with, and even had a crush on when they were growing up.

Chapters 11 and 12 Analysis

Leah is keeping the pregnancy a secret from Pauline as well. Leah finds it ironic how people can grow up with the same opportunities, yet turn out with such drastically different lives. For example, the boy she grew up with has turned into a junkie trying to sell fare cards on the street to make money to feed his habit.



Chapters 13 and 14

Chapters 13 and 14 Summary

Michel is on the computer online trading with Leah's inheritance. Leah wants to get on the Internet, but Michel tells her she has to wait until he's done. While Leah waits, she smokes three cigarettes. She overhears one of the neighbors yelling at her children. Then, Leah sees Colin Hanwell, her dead father appear near her house. When he approaches, they talk about her dog, Olive, and Leah's happiness. Michel announces the computer is free.

As Leah walks through her neighborhood, she notices how it has deteriorated over the years. When Leah spots Shar, she notices she has a black eye that has turned into a yellow bruise. Shar's eye is weeping uncontrollably. When Leah walks up to Shar, Shar admits she stole her money and that she's a drug addict. Leah tries to offer Shar help for the drugs and the abuse but Shar shrugs Leah off and tells Leah to leave her alone.

Chapters 13 and 14 Analysis

When Leah thinks of her father, she thinks of the Ukrainian nurses that cared for him. She also thinks about a scrape he got on the edge of the games' table that never went away and never healed. She implies that her father died last year and that he left her some money, which Michel is now using to trade securities online.

It seems as if Leah is relating the decay of her city and country to the influx of foreigners, drugs and crime. This is certainly how her mother feels about the changes in their country.



Chapters 15 and 16

Chapters 15 and 16 Summary

Leah has taken some pamphlets from work about addiction. She gets off the bus and starts to walk towards Number 37. Before Leah gets to the house, she throws up in the bushes in front of what used to be her childhood church, but is now apartments. When Leah reaches Number 37, she slides the pamphlets into the mail slot.

Leah thinks about how she searched for a home remedy, but can only come up with hat pins and gin baths. Since she knows this won't work, she is sitting in the office with her old credit card from college so that Michel won't see it. She thinks about the procedure when she had it in college. The doctor was counting down backwards from ten and by the time he gets to seven, Leah is asleep. When she wakes up, she thinks minutes have passed, but her old lover says it's been two and a half hours.

When Leah wakes up this time, she thinks about how this is her third time having the procedure. The first two times, she was a little over two months pregnant. This time she was three months pregnant.

Leah and Michel are visiting Leah's best friend, Natalie, her husband, Frank, and their children, Spike and Naomi. Natalie mentions that Leah is always trying to save someone. Michel says several women and a couple of men are living in the house and running the scam of getting people's money. They also talk about Nathan Bogle, the guy they went to school with that Pauline and Leah saw selling travel cards.

Michel tells Frank that he's dabbling in online trading with the money Leah's father left to them. Frank gives Michel some advice, which causes Leah to lash out at Frank. Frank leaves and Michel starts berating Leah for treating Michel badly. She says she was just defending Michel. When Natalie returns with Naomi, Leah notes the look of longing on Michel's face.

Chapters 15 and 16 Analysis

It seems the street Leah once grew up on is now deteriorated into crack houses, rundown and boarded up house. What is left of the neighborhood has been changed, such as the church converted into apartments. Number 27 is the crack house, the boarded up house, where Shar and others like her squat. Leah is dropping the pamphlets off for Shar in an attempt to try to get Shar help for her drug problem.

Leah is at an abortion clinic. Since she couldn't find a home remedy or old wives' tale way of terminating the pregnancy, she is there with her own credit card so Michel doesn't see the charge for it. It appears as if Leah's indecision as to what to do with the pregnancy forced her to wait until the last minute to decide to have an abortion.



Leah feels as if her friends have outgrown her. While they've all moved on with their lives, she is still stuck in the same place. While Leah feels this way, she also doesn't do anything about moving on wither life. When she had the opportunity to have a family and become a mother, she chose to abort the baby instead.



Chapters 17 and 18

Chapters 17 and 18 Summary

Leah is walking with Natalie, Naomi and Spike to the church that Pauline attends. Natalie and Frank want to start attending church so that their children can get into a good school. As they walk through the deteriorating neighborhood, Natalie asks Leah if she is sure this is the right way to the church.

The church appears as if it is a blessing out of its hellish surroundings. As they walk through the graveyard, Natalie explains to Naomi and Spike the difference between the recently dead and the long-time dead. Leah reads the tombstones and she even thinks she envisions her own saying that she should take it easy from this heat wave for the next forty-eight hours. Then she thinks it says she should take it easy for the rest of her life. As the church service lets out, Natalie picks up a pamphlet to start reciting the history of the church.

Leah thinks about how Natalie always picks up the pamphlets. She also thinks Natalie must have become an adult in their years between sixteen and eighteen while Leah was smoking pot. As the vicar seems to be approaching the woman, and Natalie continues to recite facts and information from the pamphlet, Leah hears bits of pieces. Leah hears someone asking if she's okay and if she needs some water. Leah feels her knees buckle.

Pauline is visiting Leah. Pauline talks about how she used to faint too. When Leah calls Olive to sit with them, Pauline mentions that she is allergic to what is probably going to be her only grandchild. While Pauline rambles on and on, Leah thinks about Shar. She thinks about how while she's pushing the pamphlets into the slot at Number 37 that Shar opens the door and suggests they run away together. Leah thinks about Shar's long black hair being in her mouth as they rest on the bed.

The phone rings. When Leah answers it, it is a voice she doesn't recognize. The voice says she's their problem and to stay away from her and keep her pamphlets. The voice also calls Leah a dyke.

Chapters 17 and 18 Analysis

The church represents a religious symbol in the sins and evil that have become part of the neighborhood on Willesdon. Drugs and crime have moved into the neighborhood where Leah and Natalie grew up, but the church still stands as a holy symbol of the good in the world. Leah faints in the church.

Pauline implies that Leah and Michel are taking too long to have children. This is why she says Olive is likely her only grandchild and Pauline is allergic to the dog. Leah

thinking about running away with Shar implies that Leah is a lesbian. The anonymous caller seems to concur with this though process because the caller calls Leah a dyke.



Chapters 19 and 20

Chapters 19 and 20 Summary

When Leah tells Michel about the phone call, he gets very angry. He asks if the caller was Nathan. Leah says she thinks it was but cannot be one hundred percent sure it was him. Leah chooses not to tell Michel that the caller called her a dyke.

When Michel and Leah are coming out of the grocery, Leah says he thinks it is Nathan in a phone booth. Michel starts a fight with the guy, who turns out not to be Nathan. When he starts kicking Michel, Leah pleads with the man to stop because she is pregnant. the man kicks Olive and threatens to shoot Michel if he ever comes near him again.

Chapters 19 and 20 Analysis

Leah opts not to tell Michel that the caller called her a dyke because it is true that she is a lesbian or at least bisexual. Michel's instinct is to protect his wife. Little does Michel know but Leah is not being completely honest with him about anything, including their relationship, the baby, or her sexuality.



Chapters 21 and 22

Chapters 21 and 22 Summary

Michel and Leah arrive home with Olive. Ned asks if they are okay. They recount the story. Olive seems to be fine. They talk about whether they should leave her to go to the dinner party tonight. Since she seems to be normal, they decide to go.

At the dinner party, everyone is talking about their parents wanting to come to live with them at the same time they are having babies of their own. Everyone is from India, China and Africa—from everywhere but here. After recounting the fight story, Natalie tells Leah to tell the story about the woman who came to their front door.

On the way home, Leah and Michel bond over how different they are from everyone at the party. They get into a small scuffle but make up by the time they reach their front door. They kiss in the hallway and start to fool around. The next morning, Leah finds Olive dead under her nightstand with bloody foam coming out of her mouth.

Chapters 21 and 22 Analysis

Michel points out that their lives are just as unhappy as everyone else's at the dinner party. It's just in a different way. It seems as if Michel and Leah are in a lower class than their friends, so their problems differ slightly from those in a higher class that have money. Michel and Leah decide not to take Olive to the very because of the cost. In the end, it costs them more than money. It costs them their dog's life.



Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

All through the month of July Leah mourns the loss of Olive. The women at work don't understand because all animals smaller than a donkey are vermin in their respective countries. The only way that Michel and Leah have moved up is by being safer and more secure. They've added a heavy duty lock to the apartment and now Michel picks Leah up at the train station after work.

Leah continues to hide the birth control pills she stole from Natalie's bathroom. She locks herself in her own bathroom to take the pills in secret. Then, it's the month of August.

To celebrate carnival, Leah and Michel accept an invitation to a party at an apartment of one of Natalie and Frank's friends. Michel hears a new story about a man who was killed by two young men while entering his house in the same neighborhood where Michel and Leah live. Michel says they need to move. Leah says she doesn't want to move.

Frank arrives before Natalie. When Natalie arrives, the husband and wife look at each other without any recognition or greeting. Leah ends up a little drunk, but has a good time.

Leah is picking up photos at the pharmacy. The girl cannot find the photos, but eventually finds a Hanwell envelope misfiled under the wrong letter. When Leah starts looking through the pictures, she sees photos of Shar and what must be Shar's friends. She makes a scene about the pictures not being her pictures and how she doesn't think it's a coincidence that Shar's pictures are under Leah's name. Michel drags Leah out the door.

Chapter 23 Analysis

Even the cultural differences of mourning the loss of a pet are different. Leah continues to keep secrets from Michel, such as taking birth control pills so that she cannot get pregnant, when Michel thinks they are trying to have a baby. The look exchanged between Natalie and Frank when Natalie arrives at the carnival party suggests to Leah that even perfect couples are not so perfect after all.

It seems as if Shar is taking on Leah's identity. This explains why Shar's photos are under Leah's name at the pharmacy.



NW6 Pages 113-136

NW6 Pages 113-136 Summary

Felix and Grace are in her apartment at NW6. She's getting ready to leave for work and Felix is walking around naked. As Felix looks at Grace, he thinks of how feminine she is. Felix says he doesn't have to work until Friday. Grace says they need to be scheduling him for Saturdays because that is when the work comes in, Felix is trained and Felix has his certificate.

Grace says she's going to Angeline's to get ready with her for carnival. When Felix makes a face, Grace says they can go together to carnival another day because they have each other. Grace mentions Angeline doesn't have anyone.

Felix has a manila envelope handed to him from a guy he used to know when he was growing up. Felix thinks about how his errands are secret errands. Felix goes to visit his father. his father's apartment is a mess and stacked up with African masks and other paraphernalia. Felix suggests his father sell the stuff at carnival.

His father says his Spanish girlfriend left him and took his van, so he has no way to get the stuff to carnival. He also says he's old and that's not his style of music anymore. Felix keeps saying his father's girlfriend owes him forty quid. Felix picks up a book Grace suggested. Felix's father says if Grace wants a real boy from the projects she should be impressed by him because Felix was just born there.

Felix opens the envelope that contains a book that is about Garvey House, which is the projects in England where he grew up. He starts flipping through the book and reading the captions with his father. since his father lived there, Felix's father knows everyone in the pictures and he tells Felix small facts about who each person is. His father says he should be in that picture.

When Lloyd, Felix's father, finds his own picture in the book, he's reading a book in the picture. Lloyd says he was always reading and that's where Felix and his siblings got their brains. Lloyd also starts carrying on about where his money is for the author publishing his picture in a book. Lloyd warns Felix about always getting caught up with the ladies.

When Felix is leaving, he runs into his father's neighbor, Phil Barnes. Phil Barnes is also in the book Lloyd is looking at, and Felix has known Phil Barnes his whole life. Phil asks about Felix, Lloyd, Felix's twin sisters and his brother. Felix thinks about how Phil is the only one that asks about his brother Devon.

Phil also talks about Felix's mother. he says she was a great woman. As the two men walk toward the bus stop, they see another neighbor, Mrs. Mulherne. They help her get her things off the bus and to her apartment. Felix thinks about how Mrs. Mulherne and other women in Garvey House would comment about how Lloyd always took care of the



four kids alone. When Felix leaves, he thinks about how he met Grace at a bus stop. She believes their meeting was s fate. Felix gets onto the train.

NW6 Pages 113-136 Analysis

The inference is that Felix is involved in some illegal activity. This is why his errands are secrets. Additionally, it is inferred that Felix is the one that beat up Michel because he keeps using the word bruv, which is also what the guy beating up Michel was calling Michel.

Ironically, Lloyd tells Felix to stop chasing women, but Lloyd is known for chasing women. What Phil Barnes says and what the other women said about Felix's mother suggests that she was either a drug addict, or that she had mental problems. Another implication is that Felix's youngest brother, Devon is in prison.



(W1) Pages 137-162

(W1) Pages 137-162 Summary

Felix meets with Tom Mercer, who is a white boy that has a car for sale. Tom seems to be surprised that Felix is black, which Felix thinks always happens when he talks to someone on the phone and then meets with them in person. As Felix looks at the car, Tom's girlfriend, Soph, keeps calling him on his cell phone. Tom says they're asking a thousand dollars, but Felix says he won't get anyone to buy this car but a mechanic. Tom comments on how it's a good thing Felix is a mechanic.

The two men walk to a nearby pub to have a drink and negotiate the deal. Felix talks about the various types of jobs he's done over the years, including being a drug dealer. At one point, Tom asks Felix if he has anything stronger than the beer he's drinking. Felix makes a joke about how his girlfriend says he has a sign on his head to ask him for weed. The two men settle on four hundred dollars.

On his way to his next destination, Grace calls. She's asking if Felix got in touch with Ricky about the leak in the apartment. He says he'll take care of it when he gets home. She asks Felix what Lloyd thinks of the book and tells Felix to put Lloyd on the phone. Felix lies, saying Lloyd is in the bathroom. Then, Grace is distracted by her work and hangs up.

Felix passes two prostitutes on the way upstairs to his Annie's apartment. She's in the bathroom taking a bath, so she summons him in there. When she asks for an ashtray and he looks around the apartment to locate one, he notices that her apartment is similar to his father's apartment—a lifetime of things crammed into a small space.

(W1) Pages 137-162 Analysis

Tom and Felix represent the dividing line between very different upbringings. Tom has older parents that are still married and provided him with everything he can need and more. Tom's life is posh and easy, even though Tom thinks his life is hard and a struggle.

Felix, on the other hand, comes from the projects, from Garvey House. His mother did have mental problems, so her care for him and his brothers and sisters was not what it should have been. Lloyd took care of the children, but they were poor and he likes to dabble in smoking weed, so it wasn't the most productive of households.

Felix has had a series of jobs in order to make ends meet. Some of the jobs are legal, but his drug dealing is obviously illegal.



(W1) Pages 163-189

(W1) Pages 163-189 Summary

After helping Annie out of the tub, a man comes to the door. He says he represents the landlord in collecting money for fixing up the common areas of the building. Annie tells the man that her relative, the lord, owns this property and she doesn't think he would want him harassing her. Felix tells the man to leave the necessary paperwork and he'll have her sign it by the end of the week. He thinks about his Annie's agoraphobia. As she convinces Felix to go up on the roof with her, she talks about film producers paying to use the deck, fixing it up and having sex with her.

On the roof, Felix tells Annie that he's serious about Grace and won't be coming to see her anymore. When she tries to get him to drink with her, he tells her that he's clean and sober and suggests she do the same. They end up in a struggle and they have sex. Felix urges her to take an after-pill to ensure she doesn't get pregnant. Annie assures Felix she doesn't want to have his children.

They continue to argue as Felix leaves the rooftop and returns to the apartment. She starts to cry as Felix leaves. While he's walking down the building stairs, he hears a thud and sobbing, as if Annie has fallen to her knees to cry.

(W1) Pages 163-189 Analysis

Felix implies that Annie was once a film star. It also seems as if she rented out her deck for film production because it has the best view of London. It seems as if she is agoraphobic, so she does have some mental problems. Additionally, she seems to have a drug problem too—prescription medication, alcohol and heroin.

Ironically, Annie comes from a royal family line, yet she chooses to live in squalor, as an alcoholic and drug addict. She also has mental problems that the drugs and alcohol exacerbate. In another twist of irony, while Felix should be the one that is a drug addict and alcoholic that comes from the projects, he is the one that is clean, sober, and trying to get his life together so that he can move forward with Grace.

Grace and Annie represent two sides of a coin. Annie has a wealthy family, but met Felix when he was her drug dealer. She loves him, but she has an angry personality and professes not to want to get married, have children and live the family way of life. On the other side of the coin is Grace, Grace is a hard worker. She loves Felix, but she instills knowledge and goal-setting in him. They want to get married, have children and live what they consider to be a normal life together.



NW6 Pages 190-200

NW6 Pages 190-200 Summary

Felix gets on the train. He sits near two men wearing hoodies and earbuds when a seat becomes available near them. When a pregnant woman boards the train, she tries to get one of the men to move his feet so she can sit down. When she isn't successful, Felix tries to help, but one of the guys tries to pick a fight with Felix. Felix gives up his seat and walks away.

As he's walking from the train, Felix sees three missed calls from Devon in prison. Felix thinks about how his mother, Jackie, came to visit a few years ago. Even though everyone told him not to let her in his house, he did. Jackie, Devon and Felix spent a few good days together before she left with Devon's cash card and some of his jewelry. The following summer, when Devon is nineteen, he's convicted of armed robbery.

He also reveals that he and Devon are half brothers. He thinks about the time his mother sat him down along with his twin sisters, Ruby and Tia. She tells them she met a white man that she's going to live with in Southampton. She leaves and comes back one day with a baby boy called Devon that she leaves with Lloyd.

Felix feels someone poke something into his back and demand his cash and phone. He sees the two men from the train, one on each side of him. He gives it to them, but when they demand the zirconia earrings Grace gave him, he refuses. He feels as if someone punches him, but then feels warm liquid spill out of his mouth.

NW6 Pages 190-200 Analysis

Ironically, now that Felix is on the right path, he ends up getting robbed by muggers and thugs. Additionally, what he thinks feels like a punch is Felix getting shot by the muggers. Felix getting shot, which causes blood to come out of his mouth foreshadows that he is going to die.



Host Pages 201-219

Host Pages 201-219 Summary

The story turns into small vignettes describing how Keisha Blake and Leah Hanwell become friends. Additionally, it describes the girls' friendship from the time they start as friends at the age of four, up through their teenage years. Keisha and Leah become friends after Pauline saves Keisha from drowning in a pool. While neither of the girls' families are well off, Keisha's family is black and Leah's family is white. Since there are some dividing factors in their two races, there are some dividing factors in the types of lives each girl lives.

At Leah's house, Keisha is introduced to serving tea on a tray, where at her own home, she doesn't have a tea tray. Leah loves to get into Keisha's older sister's, Cheryl, makeup, because at home Leah isn't permitted to have makeup of her own. While the girls are in elementary school and junior high school, this is when Leah forms a crush on Nathan Bogle. Keisha and Leah share everything.

By the time the girls are sixteen, however, their tastes are starting to diverge. It doesn't totally rip the girls apart, however. They remain friends but are having a hard time overcoming some of their differences. Leah gives Keisha a vibrator as a present when they are sixteen, and this is how Keisha learns about orgasms.

Host Pages 201-219 Analysis

These sections of the novel paint a picture of Leah's childhood. It seems that at a young age, Leah is attracted to girls. Since this is the time period when Leah also has a crush on Nathan, it suggests that Leah is struggling with her sexuality. Since she believes it is wrong to be a lesbian or bisexual, she is likely hiding her feelings for Keisha.

The closeness and bond the two girls share suggests that Leah eventually reveals her feelings for Keisha to Keisha. One of two things can happen. Keisha and Leah either have a sexual relationship, which can explain the lesbian relationship Leah refers to earlier in the book. The other option is that Leah revealing her feelings ends the friendship between the two girls.



Host Pages 220-240

Host Pages 220-240 Summary

Keisha continues to experiment sexually. When Marcia Blake, Keisha's mother raids the room Keisha shares with Cheryl, Marcia finds Keisha's vibrator. Marcia confronts Keisha with it and when she finds out Leah is the one that bought it, Marcia says Keisha cannot hang around with Leah anymore. For a year and a half the girls do not hang around with each other.

After Cheryl is six months pregnant, Marcia decides to take a different approach with Keisha. Marcia fixes Keisha up with a boy, Rodney bank, who comes from a religious family as well. Keisha and Rodney become inseparable. They even apply to the same colleges. When they go to college, the girls rekindle their friendship, but continue to leave completely different lives.

Keisha is focused on school, while Leah seems to focus on drugs and drinking. Keisha and Rodney live in the dorms, while Leah lives in a posh house. Rodney slides religious pamphlets under the doors of the rooms in Keisha's dorm, so the other kids stay clear of Keisha and Rodney, and vice versa.

When Keisha visits Leah at her college for the third time, Keisha has changed her name. she now goes by Natalie.

Host Pages 220-240 Analysis

Keisha struggles with her coming of age and her religious beliefs. While she knows some of the things she and Leah are doing are wrong, she feels compelled to be a normal teenager. Keisha continues to struggle with right and wrong, good and evil, as she goes away to college, starts having sex with Rodney, and she comes to realize that Leah is drinking and drugging.

While it seems as if Leah is drinking alcohol and doing drugs as an experimentation phase during her teen years, it can also be that Leah is trying to hide her true identity. While Leah is intrigued by religion because Keisha and her family are religious, it appears to be that when the girls are kept from hanging around each other, Leah chooses evil over good. In this respect, Keisha is a good influence on Leah, keeping Leah from completely going off the edge. When Leah doesn't have Keisha anymore, however, Leah spirals out of control.



Host Pages 241-263

Host Pages 241-263 Summary

While Natalie is attending her law classes, she meets Frank De Angelis. As classes continue, Natalie learns more about Frank. When Leah arrives for her third visit to Natalie, Natalie uses it as an excuse not to see Rodney. When Leah is visiting, Natalie notices an Asian girl at a dinner they attend together. Natalie watches as Leah acts intimate with the Korean girl, Alice.

Natalie breaks up with Rodney Banks and dates a series of men after Rodney. While they are all far less attractive to Natalie than Frank is, Natalie still doesn't approach Frank. Natalie tries to dabble in the war cause for Serbia because a guy she is sleeping with is interested in the cause. When he doesn't call her and she doesn't call him, Natalie ends up not going on the intended trip.

On Leah's advice over the years, Natalie starts to dabble with drugs, such as Ecstasy. As Leah continues her course of study to become a lawyer, she continues to encounter Frank. As they attend a barrister dinner for students, professors, judges and barristers, Frank and Natalie start to form a romantic relationship. At one of these dinners, later in their relationship, Frank is drunk and makes a fool out of himself and Natalie when he makes some comments that can be construed as racist.

In class following the debacle, Frank apologizes. This touches Natalie because no other man she has been with has ever really admitted he was wrong and apologized. As their relationship continues, Frank starts to share more about himself with Natalie. His father was from Trinidad and his mother is Italian. He, essentially, was the product of a brief affair in the seventies.

Host Pages 241-263 Analysis

While Natalie represents the working class in London, Frank seems to represent aristocracy of a different country. Natalie is starting to pull away from Rodney because she is drawn to Frank. Natalie witness Leah act with Alice they way Natalie has witnessed Leah acting with boys many times suggests that Leah is either a lesbian or bisexual.

Natalie is intimidated by Frank. She is attracted to him, but feels as if they come from different worlds. This is what prevents her from approaching Frank in a romantic way. It appears as if Natalie Blake is having an identity crisis. She is trying to figure out who she is and who she wants to be through the various men that she dates, has sex, and with which she has relationships.

Natalie even tries to compare her own personality to the personality of other people she knows. For example during college, a girl Michelle Holland, is someone Natalie went to

Brayton with when she was growing up. Natalie dissects Michelle's personality to see how her own personality compares to her schoolmate.



Host Pages 264-284

Host Pages 264-284 Summary

When Leah and Frank meet, Frank cuts up some cocaine while Leah rolls up a bill to snort the cocaine. Frank knows that in order to love Natalie, he also has to love Leah. When Natalie meets Frank's mother, his mother says she's the first woman Frank has introduced to her. She also states that Frank isn't going to be a lawyer, but it's simply something for him to study. Frank flunks the bar exam, but takes a job in finance at a large firm.

Natalie thinks about how her mother taught them to save as children, using piggy banks. Now that she is adult, the money she saved is finally a substantial amount. When Natalie goes to the bank, she finds out all of her money is gone. When she talks to her mother, her mother admits she gave it to the pastor for a short-term loan and that he lost it all.

Frank says he talked with his mother and they want to give Natalie the money she lost. Natalie and Frank are planning to marry in an intimate ceremony alone in Italy. Natalie and Frank honeymoon in Italy for two weeks. The waiters at the hotel where they stay notice that Frank speaks perfect Italian.

Natalie is working on a legal team for a trial. The team leader inappropriately touches Natalie. Natalie tells Leah but not Frank. When Natalie stops hanging around with the legal team socially, Dr. Singh, a law professor, suggests Natalie see a therapist. Natalie meets with the therapist at a local café.

Host Pages 264-284 Analysis

Natalie's status changes when she starts to date and then marries Frank. Frank comes from a family that has money and then he goes on to make his own money working for a financial company. Race, culture and ethnicity continues to be a point in the novel because even the trial Natalie is working on with her team keeps coming around to the race rather than the issue itself.

Natalie's team leader on the legal team even mentions that race is not the issue and seems to point at Natalie, as if she is the symbol of race since she is Jamaican.



Host Pages 285-304

Host Pages 285-304 Summary

Leah IMs Natalie to tell her that she's getting married. Natalie starts working at a law firm in NW, where she grew up. She even represents some of her former classmates from Brayton, although they are younger than she is. Natalie and Frank buy a house.

On the day they close, Frank doesn't even come home from work. Natalie ends up taking Leah to the apartment to watch Natalie take herself over the threshold. The two women smoke a joint out on the balcony.

When Natalie visits her mother, it's as if nothing has changed. Her mother is having financial problems, so Natalie is going over the finances with her. Marci Blake complains about Jayden, the youngest getting married. Natalie starts to tell her mother that he's not interested in women but Marcia cuts her off.

While having brunch with another couple, Natalie realizes that she isn't very fond of her own husband. She thinks they rushed into marriage without getting to know each other. Even when Natalie asks Frank about giving her mother the money she needs, he refuses. One day, Natalie steals an apple tree branch from the front yard of a house on Hopefield Avenue.

In essence, Natalie and Frank are living separate lives. Natalie tends to leave for work before Frank. She also comes home before him. The only time they really spend together is on the weekends. Natalie also works often n weekends, which seems to be to spend less time with Frank.

Natalie starts secretly checking a website, but it isn't clear what they website is yet.

Host Pages 285-304 Analysis

Natalie appeals to her morals, which is why she takes a lower paying job at a less notorious firm. Similar to Leah, Natalie constantly questions when she is truly going to grow up and become an adult. Similar to Leah, Natalie feels as if she is going through the motions. Since neither girl has expressed these feelings to each other, they don't know that they feel the same way about their lives.

Again, Leah and Natalie are living parallel lives when it comes to their marriages. Neither woman is happy with their relationships with their husbands. Neither of them knows the other one isn't happy. They both think that the other one has a perfect life and marriage.

The apple trees are also symbols the two friends share. For Leah, the tree represents the circle of life. For Natalie, it represents hope.

It seems as if Natalie is getting ready to lead a double life. While she'll be a successful lawyer by day and mother and wife at night, it seems as if she's going to have a secret life from everyone that she knows.



Host Pages 305-325

Host Pages 305-325 Summary

Natalie is planning a picnic at her house. She's inviting Leah and Michel to attend. Natalie is making a big deal out of it and Frank doesn't understand why. Leah goes to visit Cheryl, who has three kids now, and is still living with their mother. The sisters get into an argument about how Cheryl is living her life.

Natalie continues to check the website listings. She continues to just look, and is not yet participating in whatever activity the website offers. By the time Leah and Natalie are twenty-eight, they start receiving emails with pictures of women and their babies.

Nathan runs into Natalie in the park. Nathan is smoking and hanging out with a couple of young girls. Natalie gets really drunk at a party. Her bother Jayden is there. All he can talk about to everyone is what a great person Natalie is and all of her accomplishments.

Natalie shares her office at work with a co-worker, Melanie. One day, Melanie comes to work very upset. She wants to leave her husband. She also has a young daughter, so Melanie is worried about what will happen to her daughter if she leaves her father.

Natalie and Frank buy a new home. Both continue to be very busy with their careers. Natalie gives Leah and Marcia a tour of the new place. Natalie and Leah start feeling the pressure to have kids. Natalie is waiting for Leah in the park. Natalie uses her phone to check the website listings, her email and to read the news. When Leah arrives, the friends catch up on each other's lives. Natalie contemplates when it is the right time to tell Leah her news.

Fourteen months later, Spike is born. Hidden behind pictures of the children on the computer is the website of listings.

Host Pages 305-325 Analysis

The picnic is so important to Natalie because she is trying to uphold her image. Outwardly, she wants people, especially Leah, to think she has a great and successful life. Inside, however, Natalie feels very differently about her life.

Natalie and Cheryl represent how two kids raised by the same parents and in the same home can turn out completely different. Natalie went to college, has a successful career, and a husband and children. Cheryl gets pregnant at a young age. She continues to have more children without an education or a job. Instead, Cheryl lives off of the British equivalent of welfare.

The pictures of mothers and babies Leah and Natalie receive indicate that these are mothers giving up their babies for adoption. It can be that the women are working with



an organization to help these women, or that the women are part of Natalie's legal work and Leah's non-profit organization work. One night, after seeing one of these emails, Natalie switches over to the website. This time she contributes something to the site and goes to bed. In the middle of the night, she gets out of bed and removes the posting she wrote.

The news Natalie needs to tell Leah is that Natalie is pregnant with her first child. When Natalie has Naomi, she is going through the motions. She seems to lack the typical feelings that a mother has when she gives birth. Natalie simply feels as if this is the next step in her life.



Host Pages 326-346

Host Pages 326-346 Summary

About this time, the stock market plummets, which causes a bunch of problems at Frank's work. Natalie and Frank have to stop renovating the basement and be a bit more careful with the money they spend. Natalie starts to write a novel about her experience with the change as a wife.

Natalie has lunch with her cousin, Layla. As Natalie interacts with Layla, she sees how different their lives are. Natalie looks at her cousin and wonders when Layla became an adult, even though they are the same age. Natalie feels as if she is in drag all the time—as a daughter, as a sister, as a mother, as a wife and in court.

Natalie continues to check the listings on the website. Now she is replying to the listings. She is also replying to her replies. While at the playground with the kids, Natalie gets into an argument with a young man because he is smoking in the playground. Natalie causes a big scene, while the parents of the other kids back her up.

Natalie is searching for an address. It turns out to be a couple in their sixties, which is much older than they said. When Natalie sees this, she turns and walks away as the couple calls for her to come back.

Host Pages 326-346 Analysis

Natalie is still in search of her identity. She feels as if everyone she knows is grown and an adult, while Natalie is not. This is in spite of the fact that Natalie has a very successful career, a successful husband, money and a family of her own. Natalie feels as if she is always wearing a costume. She changes costumes to fit the situation.

It seems as if Natalie is checking listings for people looking for threesomes. The first one she goes to is an older couple, so she doesn't go through with it. Leah's father dies, so Natalie goes to the funeral. Natalie goes to a house of another couple in NW. they do drugs together but they never get around to having sex.



Host Pages 347-358

Host Pages 347-358 Summary

Natalie continues to arrange sexual encounters with couples. One of her encounters is with two young men—either cousins or friends. She ends up taking control of the situation because the two boys keep arguing about how it should take place.

Frank finds Natalie's secret email address on her computer. After reading the messages, he confronts Natalie. Their house is full of visiting relatives. Natalie just walks out of the door with what she has on and doesn't take anything with her.

Host Pages 347-358 Analysis

In a way, Natalie wants Frank to find out what she is doing. She leaves the website and her secret email up on her computer. It was just a matter of time before Frank found out about what she is doing.



Willesden Lane to Kilburn High Road

Willesden Lane to Kilburn High Road Summary

Natalie starts walking toward her old neighborhood. When she gets there, she finds the street near her childhood home is cordoned off and filled with police. The policemen won't let her on the street because they say that there was an incident.

Natalie runs into Nathan Bogle. Nathan helps her climb over a wall to get her into the NW area. Nathan says she's flying and wants Natalie to join him. As Nathan prepares the drugs for them to smoke, Natalie starts crying. They do drugs together and talk about people from the old neighborhood.

As the helicopter circles the neighborhood looking for the criminal involved in the incident, Nathan and Natalie, who Nathan keeps calling Keisha, hide in doorways and alleys.

Willesden Lane to Kilburn High Road Analysis

Nathan is telling Natalie that he is high on drugs. He's asking Natalie to do drugs with him so they can high together. It appears as if Nathan Bogle was involved in the incident. The police are looking for him. Ironically, Natalie stands up for the law and she is not hanging around with a criminal that breaks the law.



Shoot Up Hill to Fortune Green, Hampstead to Archway, Hampstead Heath, Corner of Hornsey Lane and Hornsey Lane

Shoot Up Hill to Fortune Green, Hampstead to Archway, Hampstead Heath, Corner of Hornsey Lane and Hornsey Lane Summary

As they reach one of the tube stations, Nathan tells Natalie to wait for him. When she catches up to him, he's talking to two girls. Natalie asks Nathan who they girls are as they continue walking. They continue to evade the helicopter when it comes close to them.

Natalie keeps talking to Nathan about the old days. Nathan says he doesn't remember any of that stuff because he forgot it a long time ago. At Hampstead Heath, a man and woman perform sexual acts on each other. Natalie continues to question Nathan about the girls he was talking to. She asks if the one with the headscarf is Shar.

Natalie asks if Nathan if he's running crime rings and if he calls people's houses to threaten them. When they reach the bridge, Natalie climbs up on the ledge. Nathan gets her to climb down because he wants to go somewhere warmer.

Shoot Up Hill to Fortune Green, Hampstead to Archway, Hampstead Heath, Corner of Hornsey Lane and Hornsey Lane Analysis

It appears as if Nathan is a pimp. The girls he is talking to work for him. The implication is that the man and the woman having sex at Hampstead Heath is Natalie and Nathan, but they never use their names. Natalie is trying to find out if Nathan is the one involved in ripping Leah off for her money and then making the threatening call to Leah's house.

Natalie is contemplating jumping off the bridge to commit suicide. When she climbs down, she is confused as to what was saved by her not killing herself.



Visitation

Visitation Summary

The morning after, Natalie wakes up in her bed. Frank is dressed and leaving the house. She tries to get him to read the letter she wrote and left for him. He just says that he'll pick up the kids tonight at seven. Natalie spends the day with the kids, taking them around shopping and to the pet store.

Michel calls Natalie. He says that Leah isn't speaking, that she's just lying in the hammock in the yard. He says he found out that Leah is taking Natalie's birth control pills. Natalie tells Michel she doesn't know anything about it.

Natalie goes to Leah. Natalie talks to Leah until Leah finally starts speaking again. Natalie tells Leah that she knows something about the murder that she read about in the paper this morning. Natalie and Leah contact the police and report what Natalie knows.

Visitation Analysis

At this point, Leah and Natalie have both been living secret lives. Their husbands have both uncovered at least a part of their secrets. It seems as if Frank is not willing to forgive Natalie at this point, if ever. Michel, on the other hand, seems willing to forgive Leah for her deception.

Natalie realizes that the "incident" in the NW neighborhood is connected to Nathan Bogle. This is why she tells Leah she thinks she knows what happened and they contact the police.



Characters

Leah Hanwell

Leah Hanwell is tall and lanky. She is very fair-skinned and has red hair. She is married to Michel. On the morning that Shar shows up at Leah's front door, Leah tell Shar that she is pregnant, and that she just found out this morning. Leah is an only child.

Leah's father dies of cancer when Leah is in her early twenties. This seems to have an adverse effect on Leah's behavior. During her adolescence and early adulthood, Leah experiments with drugs and alcohol. By the time Leah is married to Michel, she still seems to smoke pot and rink, but doesn't seem to do any harder drugs than this.

Leah also seems to be struggling with her sexuality. During college, she was having sex with both men and women. While she is married to Michel, she still seems to yearn for women, including fantasizing about being with Shar. Additionally, Leah seems to abhor buying a home or having children, which is what Michel wants them to do to take the next step in their lives.

Shar

Shar is dirty and appears to have something wrong with her face. She has three children and is now a single mother. She says her husband has been gone for two years. She also claims he beat her and raped her. When Shar shows up at Leah's front door, she's crying to borrow money so she can get to the hospital where they've taken her sick mother.

As Leah continues to see Shar, Shar seems to be involved in taking drugs. She often wears her hair in a headscarf, which contains her long black hair. Additionally, Shar seems to be involved somehow with Nathan Bogle. It's unclear if Nathan is Shar's pimp or in charge of Shar's involvement with the crime ring.

A few times Leah and Shar see each other, Shar admits to stealing Leah's money. When Leah tries to offer Shar help, Shar refuses it.

Michel

Michel is Leah's husband. He's French and originally from South Africa. He works as a hairdresser at a local salon. Micehl is constantly talking about ways to take their lives to the next level. He wants to buy their own home and have children.



Pauline Hanwell

Pauline Hanwell is Leah's mother. Pauline seems as if she is very prim and proper. For example, when she serves tea, she serves it on a tray instead of just handing her guests their cups and saucers. By trade, Pauline is a nurse. Pauline is responsible for saving Natalie's life from drowning when Natalie and Leah were four years old.

Ned

Ned is one of Michel and Leah's neighbors. When Leah needs to take the edge off, she often approaches Ned for pot. He is known to have marijuana and often smokes it with Leah.

Colin Hanwell

Colin Hanwell is Leah's father. He is also Pauline's husband. Colin dies of cancer when Leah is in her early twenties. Leah looks up to her father and even sees visions of him at times.

Natalie

Natalie is a black woman. She grows up in a family with a sister who continuously gets pregnant and a younger brother who Natalie thinks is gay. Natalie is constantly trying to excel and break out of the poverty she grew up experiencing. Natalie marries Frank and has two children, but she also carries on a secret life where she has sex with couples for her own pleasure.

Frank

Frank is Natalie's husband. They attended law school together. Frank, however, went on to work in the financial industry instead. Frank comes a family with money, but he never knew his father. Frank's mother is Italian and his father is from Tobago.

Keisha Blake

Keisha Blake is Natalie's legal name. She grew up as Keisha. When Natalie went on to college and was attempting to change her identity, she changed her name from Keisha Blake to Natalie Blake.

Rodney Banks

Rodney Banks is Keisha Blake's first boyfriend. They date in high school and part of college. Rodney is very religious. Keisha breaks up with Rodney.



Objects/Places

NW

NW is a neighborhood in London. It is the neighborhood where Leah, Natalie and Nathan grew up. However, as the novel begins, the neighborhood is run-down, crime, and drug-ridden.

Courtyard

The courtyard is the patch of grass and hammock in between the different apartment units where Leah and Michel live. Leah often goes down to the courtyard to sit in the hammock. She also smokes pot with Ned in the courtyard.

Graveyard

The graveyard is outside of the church Natalie and Leah visit with Natalie's children. as Leah reads the inscriptions on the tombstones, she relates to each of the lives. Leah also relates the lives of the dead to her own life and what her own tombstone should say.

Pamphlets

Leah gathers numerous pamphlets from her job. Leah slides these pamphlets into the mail slot of the house where Shar is squatting. The pamphlets offer Shar ways to get home for her abusive relationship and drug addiction. The pamphlets are also what prompt the threatening phone call to Leah in her home.

Abortion Clinic

The abortion clinic is where Leah sits observing the others waiting in the room. This is Leah's third or fourth trip to the abortion clinic in her lifetime. Leah goes to the abortion clinic alone to abort the baby she is carrying from Michel, and Leah doesn't even tell Michel she is pregnant.

Birth Control Pills

Leah locates birth control pills in Natalie's medicine cabinet. Leah steals the pills from Natalie and starts secretly taking them. when Michel finds the birth control pills with Natalie's name on them, he confronts Leah and Natalie. Natalie, however, doesn't know that Leah took the pills or that she has been taking the pills.



Website Listings

Natalie starts reading website listings looking for people to join couples in sexual acts. At one point, Natalie posts her own listing on the site, but she ends up removing it. Natalie peruses these website listings and arranges to meet with various couples throughout the second half of the novel.

NW6

NW6 is an abandoned and boarded up home in the NW neighborhood. It is the home where Shar is squatting with the people she hangs with that is presumably in the crime ring. NW6 is the mail slot where Leah drops off the pamphlets for Shar to get help.

Olive

Olive is a small dog. She belongs to Leah and Michel. When Michel gets into a fight with the guy on the street, the guy kicks Olive. Olive subsequently dies from internal injuries.

Bakery

Leah and Michel are sitting in the bakery with Olive. This is when they see Shar for the first time after Shar takes money from Leah. Michel confronts Shar for the first time in an attempt to get their money back from her.



Themes

Relationships

One of the primary themes running through the novel is relationships. The two primary relationships the novel tackles are romantic relationships and relationships between friends.

Friendship is one of the primary types of relationships the novel tackles. Even though Natalie and Leah have been best friends since they were four years old, and even though they come from the same neighborhood, they have always lived very different lives. Natalie and Leah seem to struggle with their friendship because each of them thinks the other one is more grown up than the other.

Leah and Natalie are each living a secret life. Even though they are best friends, they don't confide their secrets to each other. The two women don't even confide their fears with each other. In a way, this makes it seem as if their friendship is a surface friendship rather than a deep and meaningful one.

The novel also touches upon romantic relationships. Leah and Michel are married. Even though they are married, they want different things for their lives. Michel wants to buy a home and have children. Leah doesn't want either of these things, but she also doesn't communicate her feelings to her husband. Instead, Leah keeps secrets from Michel, including secretly taking birth control pills so she doesn't get pregnant.

Frank and Natalie seem to have a very superficial marriage. They appear to have married because it was the thing to do for Frank, and because it was a social and financial step up for Natalie, rather than the fact that they truly love each other. Natalie, too, is keeping secrets in her marriage. When Frank uncovers Natalie's secret, it puts their marriage in jeopardy.

Coming of Age

Another of the primary themes that run throughout the novel is growing up and coming of age, even against adversity, such as growing up in poverty or losing a father to cancer. Leah struggles with the aftermath of her father's death to cancer, which leaves her constantly questioning what direction she wants her life to take and which direction her life is actually going. Because of her loss, Leah has a hard time forming bonds and relationships with people. Instead, Leah's coming of age forces her to lie and keep secrets from the people she supposedly loves.

Natalie too struggles with her coming of age. She is trying to break out of the impoverished home where she grew up. Natalie's coming of age also causes her to face an identity crisis. Natalie's search for the person she truly is even propels her to change her name so that she blends in more with her schoolmates and work colleagues. Natalie



too starts keep secrets from a young age and continues to do so throughout her adulthood.

Culture

One of the sub-plots throughout the entire novel is about the cultural differences between the residents in London. There is an emphasis on the novel of the color of each person's skin, the country where they come from and the cultural traditions for each.

Additionally, the plot is about how these various cultures and people with different backgrounds come together. They all have to learn how to live, work and play in harmony. For some, this seems to be easy, while others seem to struggle with the fact that people from India, Africa and other countries are now numerous in London. While the cultures of this area have numerous differences, they also have similarities because in the end, all of the people are human beings.

The individuals that come from the NW neighborhood are another cultural point in the novel. Natalie, Shar, Leah and Nathan all grew up in the NW neighborhood. While Leah and Natalie were able to go to college and make something out of their lives, Shar and Nathan chose a different path. Nathan and Shar chose a life of crime and drugs. This fact points out that some of what happens to people in life is nurture and some is nature. All of these people had similar experiences as children but turned out very different as adults.

Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the third-person point of view, from the perspective of the author, Zadie Smith. The point of view of this novel is intimate, allowing a reader to connect closely with each of the main characters in the novel. The book written in this manner allows the reader to get inside each character's head, thoughts and inner struggles. The point of view also allows the author to inject her own opinions into the narration and to expand on the events taking place around the characters and the occurrences taking place.

Setting

The novel takes place in London, specifically the NW neighborhood, during the 21st century. The main characters are involved in the daily life of living after growing up and coming from the same neighborhood in their childhoods.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware how each of the characters is connected to one another. However, as events unfold, the NW neighborhood where they all come from is a constant part of the plot, the lives of the characters and even the outcome of the novel.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is relatively simple and easy to read. The language is from the 21st century, which is when the novel is set. The language is descriptive enough that it helps to explain the situations and is detailed enough for the reader to truly understand. Since the novel is based in London, there are some terms and words that are British English, as opposed to American English. There is also a lot of slang used throughout the novel.

Structure

The novel is divided into 23 chapters in the first half of the novel. The second half of the novel is divided by addresses in the NW neighborhood and specific street locations. Each chapter ranges from 10 to 20 pages long. The chapters tell the story primarily in exposition and with some dialogue. The author injects her own voice and thoughts throughout the book, providing her opinions and feelings of the events unfolding in the novel. The narrator switches back and forth between the past and the present.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot concerns human relationships, including romantic ones and friendships. One subplot is the coming of age of the characters. Another subplot is culture.



Quotes

"I am the sole author of the dictionary that defines me" (Chapter 1, p. 3).

"You're a really good person. I was meant to come to your door. Seriously! You're a spiritual person. There's something spiritual inside you" (Chapter 2, p. 16).

"Sometimes I think it's because here's just the one of you" (Chapter 3, p. 19).

"—and need to see a proper doctor. A clinic. We keep trying. And nothing. You're thirty-five this year" (Chapter 4, p. 23).

"Things change! We're getting there, no" (Chapter 5, p. 28).

"My mum had a heart attack - heart attack? Five...pounds" (Chapter 6, p. 30).

"Same girl? Next step" (Chapter 7, p. 31).

"Whenever I'm thinking: Where did all the good brothers get to? I think, breathe: at least there's Meeshell."
Chap. 8, p. 39).

"These directions are for planning purposes only" (Chapter 9, p. 41).

"Everybody" (Chapter 10, p. 42).

"Proud of yourself? Thief. I want my money" (Chapter 11, p. 45).

"I'd heard, but I hadn't seen it with my own eyes" (Chapter 12, p. 51).

"If you tell me you're happy, you're happy and there's an end to it" (Chapter 13, p. 57).

"Let me help, maybe I can...there are places that...that help" (Chapter 14, p. 61).



"Number 37" (Chapter 15, p. 63).

"Leah...always trying to save somebody" (Chapter 16, p. 67).

"Le, you all right" (Chapter 17, p. 79).

"Fuckin' dyke cunt" (Chapter 18, p. 88).

"She tells Michel all of it bar one word" (Chapter 19, p. 89).

"Michel. Don't make it worse" (Chapter 20, p. 92).

"Do you think we should leave her tonight" (Chapter 21, p. 95).

"Don't you think they're as bored as you are" (Chapter 22, p. 100).

"Her photos. My envelope" (Chapter 23, p. 109).

"So brave, looking after them four wee ones by yourself. She's not good enough for you, dear. You deserve better. Everyone feels so bad for you" (NW6 Pages 113-136, p. 133).

"And in the end, you just got to be the best you that you can be" ([W1] Pages 137-162, p. 151).

"You're lucky that you find life easy, Felix" ([W1] Pages 163-189, p. 187).

"Should have caught me two hours ago, blud. Two hours ago I was loaded" (NW6 Pages 190-200, p. 197).

"I don't think women can really be beautiful. I think they can be so attractive and you can want to shag them and love them and blah blah but I think really only men can be completely beautiful in the end" (Host Pages 201-219, p. 218).



"That's your luxury. We haven't got the time to care about trees" (Host Pages 220-240, p. 240).

"You're the only person I can be all of myself with" (Host Pages 241-263, p. 246).

"He is Italian" (Host Pages 264-284, p. 277).

"Working the weekend. Again. Shame" Host Pages 285-304, p. 300).

"It's as if no-one ever had a baby before" (Host Pages 305-325, p. 313).

"Come back" (Host Pages 326-346, p. 340).

"What is this? 'KeishaNW@gmail.com.' What the fuck is this? Fiction" (Host Pages 347-358, p. 353).

"People shouldn't do a lot of things they do" (Willesden Lane to Kilburn High Road, p. 364).

"Who were those girls" (Shoot Up Hill to Fortune Green, p. 371).

"You should. It rules the world" (Hampstead to Archway, p. 375).

"Pull your knickers up" (Hampstead Heath, p. 380).

"What do you do to your girls? You send them out to thieve? You pimp them out? Do you phone women up? Do you threaten them" (Corner of Hornsey Lane, 382).

"This is where I was heading" (Hornsey Lane, p. 383).

"I think I know what happened in Albert Road" (Visitation, p. 400).

Topics for Discussion

Who is the true Leah Hanwell? Why do you think she decides to not tell Michel that she is pregnant? Do you think Leah is struggling with her sexuality? What do you think happens to Leah after Michel finds out she's been taking birth control pills?

Discuss the relationship between Leah and her mother. How does Leah feel about her mom? How does her mom feel about Leah? How do Leah's feelings change after her father dies?

Discuss the relationship between Leah and Natalie. Are they best friends, acquaintances or something else? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Leah feel about Natalie? How does Natalie feel about Leah? Why don't the best friends confide in each other about their secret lives?

Discuss the relationship between Natalie and Frank. Are they in love or did they marry for other reasons? Is there true competition in their relationship? Why do you think Natalie decides to go back to Frank after he discovers her secret? Do you think Frank forgives Natalie?

Who is the true Natalie Blake? Why do you think she changes her name from Keisha to Natalie? Why do you think she writes a letter to Frank when she comes home? Do you think she wanted Frank to find out her secret?

Who is Nathan Bogle? Why do you think he turns to drugs? Do you think Nathan is the one responsible for the crime ring? What role does Nathan play in helping Natalie change her life?

Discuss the NW neighborhood. What impact does it have on the characters of the novel? How does it motivate them and how does it derail their lives?