

Olive Kitteridge Study Guide

Olive Kitteridge by Elizabeth Strout

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Plot Summary

Olive Kitteridge is a novel by author Elizabeth Strout. The story follows the main character, Olive Kitteridge, as she deals with the daily life of living in a small town in Crosby, Maine. As a high school math teacher, Olive Kitteridge is responsible for teaching many of the children that live in the town, once they are old enough to attend high school age. This type of interaction, plus the fact that everyone knows everyone in this small town, leads Olive Kitteridge to form her own opinions and judgments on the various people that live in the town.

Olive's opinions and judgments are not just reserved for the other people that live in Crosby. Olive also has strong opinions and judgments when it comes to her pharmacist husband, Henry Kitteridge, and her only child, son Christopher Kitteridge. The author introduces a series of characters in the novel and then weaves together how these people fit into the life of Olive Kitteridge.

When Olive is younger, married to Henry, and still in the process of raising Christopher, her point of view on life seems to be set in stone. As Olive ages and Olive faces numerous adversities in her life, including Henry having a major stroke where he can't see or speak, Olive's point of view on life starts to change. By the end of the novel, when Henry is dead, Olive starts a new chapter in her life with a recently widowed man in Crosby, Jack Kennison. For the first time in her life, Olive starts looking forward to living rather than focusing on the day when she will die.



Pharmacy Pages 1-16

Pharmacy Pages 1-16 Summary

Henry Kitteridge is the pharmacist for a small town in Maine. He has been the pharmacist for years. His wife is Olive Kitteridge. One of his employees, Denise Thibodeau, helps Henry in the pharmacy. She is very organized and pleasant, and a treasured addition to the pharmacy. Olive says Denise looks mousy.

Henry wants to invite Denise and her husband, Henry Thibodeau, to dinner, but Olive doesn't want to have them over for dinner. Henry invites the Thibodeaus over for dinner anyway and tells Olive when he arrives home. The Thibodeaus follow Henry home from work on Friday. They have dinner with the Kitteridges, including Olive and Henry's son, Christopher.

In the pharmacy, Denise and Henry have a routine. Denise eats lunch and then Henry does. Sometimes, when business is slow, they share a cup of coffee together. While Henry looks at Denise, he often thinks of Denise together with her husband Henry in the trailer where they live. Occasionally, the delivery boy also has lunch in the break room.

On Sunday, Olive refuses to attend church with Henry. They get into an argument over it. Olive states all of the things she has to do in addition to working as a teacher that makes her too tired to attend church. Henry sees his wife not attending church as a statement to the congregation that they are having marital problems. The next morning, on Monday, Olive and Henry talk as if they never had a fight.

When Henry asks Olive about her weekend, she tells him how great it was. She says they went to her in-laws' farm to dig potatoes. She says they had a lot of fun.

Henry thinks of the year that follows as one of the happiest in his life. Henry finds pleasure in the simple gestures and actions he job requires. The two Henrys also get a kick out of greeting each other by name as Denise's husband drops her off at work each morning. Henry starts to think about how he loves Denise, but is not in love with her.

Henry finds that his interaction with the Thibodeaus propels him to love Olive even more. It is often Henry Thibodeau that Henry Kitteridge thinks of when making love to Olive. Olive continues to complain about her life and everything happening in it. She also mentions another teacher at school a lot. He is the one that drives her and Christopher back and forth to school each day.

Denise urges the delivery boy, Jerry McCarthy, to sign up for a night course. When Jerry gets an A in the class, Denise gets him a small cake to celebrate.

Many years later, Henry's hair is gray. Olive tells Henry to bring her home the gossip from church. As Henry drives to church alone, without Olive, he passes where the pharmacy used to be. Now, stands a chain drugstore. Denise now lives in Texas. She is



the same age now that Henry was back when Denis worked for Henry. As he pulls into the church parking lot, Daisy, whose husband died two years ago, is always glad to see him. Henry thinks about how Denise's traditional birthday card has not arrived this year. It's the same one that she has been sending to him for twenty years. Denise has an obese son, Paul, and twin girls.

Pharmacy Pages 1-16 Analysis

It appears if Henry Kitteridge has feelings for Denise that are stronger than that of boss and employee or of work colleagues. There is some foreshadowing that Henry Kitteridge and Denise will have an affair as the novel unfolds. Marital strife between Olive and Henry is another sign that an affair can ensue between Olive and Henry Kitteridge, even though there is an age difference between the two.

Additionally, the Thibodeau marriage and the Kitteridge marriage are at polar opposites. The Thibodeau marriage is new, fresh and happy. On the other hand, the Kitteridge marriage is aged, old and has problems.

Henry Kitteridge seems to be reliving his life and marriage through Denise and Henry Thibodeau. Since Kitteridge is aging, he wants to feel young and reckless again. When Denise tells Kitteridge stories or Kitteridge witnesses events occurring between the Thibodeaus, this helps to spark his own imagination and thought process so that Kitteridge applies it to his own life.

Olive expresses her dislike for Denise and calls her plain and a simpleton because Olive is a negative person. Rather than see the good in a person or in a situation, Olive focuses on and harps on the negative.



Pharmacy Pages 17-29

Pharmacy Pages 17-29 Summary

Henry thinks back to when Denise was still working with him at the pharmacy. She calls Henry's home one night to tell him that Tony Kuzio, Henry Thibodeau's best friend, accidentally shot and killed Henry when they were on their hunting trip. Olive, Henry and Jerry all attend Henry Thibodeau's funeral.

Denise doesn't know how to drive, so Henry teaches her. Once she learns, he takes her to get her license. She's never written a check, so he takes her to the bank to get her first checking account. Henry and Denise's father-in-law help Denise find and move into a new apartment, it's the first time she's lived alone. Fortunately, Henry Thibodeau had life insurance so he left Denise with a nice sum of money.

Henry buys Denise a kitten, which she names Slippers. One day while going to the grocery store, Slippers gets out and Denise accidentally runs over the cat. Olive tells Henry to go comfort his girlfriend. Henry takes her valium and puts Denise to bed. The next day at the pharmacy, he tells Denise he'll take care of her and zips up her jacket.

Henry finds himself getting jealous when Denise talks about Tony Kuzio coming to her house to beg for her forgiveness, or that she saw a movie in Portland. Henry often thinks of being able to take Denise square dancing at Granger Hall, where he told Denise she should go to meet friends in town.

As he sits in church now, Henry thinks about the last time he saw Denise. They had come to visit Jerry's parents with the baby. She's pregnant with their second child. When Henry gets home from church, his card from Olive is there—arrived in the mail on Saturday, but Olive forgot to tell him.

Henry thinks about how when Jim O'Casey's car went off the road, Olive spent weeks in bed. Jim is the teacher that Olive rode to school with. This is when Henry realizes that Olive loved Jim and that Jim possibly loved Olive.

Pharmacy Pages 17-29 Analysis

Ironically, Henry Kitteridge and his wife are living parallel lives when it comes to extramarital affairs. While Henry has never fully acted on his feelings for Denise, up until this point in the novel, his feelings for Denise are strong enough to lead to an affair. While a part of Henry does love his wife, Olive, he sees different characteristics in Denise that he is attracted to on a different level.

Part of what attracts Henry to Denise is that she needs someone to take care of her. Because Denise is so innocent and naïve, Henry feels like she needs him. This is the



opposite of Olive, who is always putting Henry down and questioning what type of man he is.

While the author hasn't revealed much about Jim O'Casey, the way Olive reacts to his death suggests she had stronger feelings for him than is normal for a co-worker and someone you carpool with to work. This suggests that Olive was seeking and found something in Jim O'Casey that Henry isn't offering her in their marriage.



Incoming Tide

Incoming Tide Summary

Kevin Coulson is sitting at the marina, where he grew up until he moved away with his father and his brother when Kevin was thirteen. Patty is serving coffee at the counter of the diner. She sees Kevin sitting in the car, but just thinks he's a stranger. Something is bothering her about the man and then she recognizes him from her childhood.

Kevin drives by his old house. He sees it's been renovated. He has a rifle with a blanket wrapped around it. He watches now at the marina as a woman emerges from a building. Then, he sees Mrs. Kitteridge, his seventh grade math teacher, peering at him through the passenger's side window. She greets Kevin by name and climbs into the car. As Kevin watches the woman go back into the house, she tells Kevin the woman is Patty Howe, used to be Patty Crane. She tells Kevin Patty keeps having miscarriages. Kevin says he remembers Patty and then he and Mrs. Kitteridge talk about how he's training to be psychiatrist in New York City now.

This forces Kevin to think about the brain scans for his mother, looking for the signs of the bipolar. On the other hand, he thinks about how his mother was a pediatrician. Kevin tells Mrs. Kitteridge that he thinks his mother was bipolar. Mrs. Kitteridge says that her son has depression, and that he's a podiatrist now.

Mrs. Kitteridge says her father shot himself, but that he didn't leave a suicide note. She says her mother had a hard time because he didn't leave a note. Patty notices that Mrs. Kitteridge is sitting in the car now with Kevin. Mrs. Kitteridge says Henry's mother was a real nut, so she thinks Christopher had these genes passed onto him. He thinks about how nuts it is to cut yourself, which is what Clara did.

Kevin tells Mrs. Kitteridge that his brother is a drug addict and that his father died last year. He says he lives in Tucson now. He thinks about his affair with Clara and the long and drawn out love affair came to an end.

Incoming Tide Analysis

It seems as if Kevin has returned to his boyhood home to commit suicide. The inference is that Kevin's mother killed herself and Kevin was the one to find her body. Kevin indicates that he is attracted to crazy, including a girlfriend he had by the name of Clara. This suggests Kevin has the Oedipus complex, which causes boys and men to be attracted to women that remind them of their mother.

Mrs. Kitteridge implies that Kevin's mother used a gun to commit suicide too. She mentions that it's unusual for a woman to use a gun. This can be a foreshadowing that his mother didn't commit suicide, but instead was murdered. Kevin's thoughts imply Clara committed suicide too, although by cutting her wrists instead of shooting herself.



Quickly, Mrs. Kitteridge leaves the car and heads toward the marina. She returns shouting for Kevin to come and to hurry. Mrs. Kitteridge points at Patty Howe in the swirling tide of the water. Kevin jumps in and saves Patty. Saving Patty's life, and ultimately the life of the fetus Patty has inside of her, can be the hope that Kevin needs to stay alive and not kill himself.



The Piano Player

The Piano Player Summary

Angela O'Meara is a piano player in a local cocktail lounge. She was once in love with Malcolm. She arrives at work on a Friday night about a week before Christmas. Joe, the lounge manager, smells of booze and mint when she arrives at work. He thinks she drinks and doesn't take her break because she has stage fright.

She drinks prior to leaving the room she rents. The walk from her home to work helps to clear her head, but leaves enough booze in her system to keep up her confidence. While she loves to play the piano, she doesn't love the attention of the audience. When she sees Henry and Olive Kitteridge, she always plays his favorite song, "Come on Irene."

Angie recognizes a man sitting in the corner, Simon, as a former piano player. When he makes a request, she just keeps playing Christmas carols. She thinks about visiting her mother at the nursing home and about the bruises she noticed on her mother. When she's done playing, she calls Malcolm.

Malcolm answers to tell him she can't do this anymore. She thinks his wife must be right there because Malcolm remains silent. Angie returns to the piano and plays Simon's request. Angie thinks about the relationship she had with Simon. He's the only person she ever told that her mother took money from men. When Simon broke up with Angie, he says it's because he feels as if he's dating her and her mother.

Angie talks to Simon. He confirms that he is a real estate lawyer now and that he is good at it. He asks if she ever married. She says no. He says he's married and has three grown children. When she sees the Kitteridges, she starts playing Good Night Irene. Simon mentions that Angie's mother came to see him in Boston and tried to seduce him.

When she finishes her shift, she finds Malcolm waiting for her outside of her house. He's angry that she called his house. He tells her to call him at work when she sobers up, but she knows she won't.

The Piano Player Analysis

The implication is that Angie has been having an affair with Malcolm for twenty-two years. She finally comes to her senses and chooses to end it. She finally realizes that Malcolm isn't ever going to leave his wife for her. It is also implied that Simon is in love with Angie. Simon seems as if he wants to talk to Angie when she gets off work, but she tells him she has to leave right after her shift is over.

Ironically, her once vibrant mother is now paralyzed and helpless. In another twist of irony, Angie will be playing the piano in church on Sunday morning after being drunk on Saturday night.



A Little Burst

A Little Burst Summary

Christopher Kitteridge is married to a woman from out of town, Suzanne. It is their wedding day and they are at the picnic reception. Olive excuses herself from the festivities and goes to lie down on her son and daughter-in-law's bed. Olive thinks about how big of a woman she is—tall and overweight. The house where Christopher and now Suzanne will live was built by Henry and Olive. They designed the house and worked closely with the builder so Christopher would have a place to live after returning from podiatry school.

One of the children from the wedding appears in the bedroom. She tells Olive that she looks dead. Olive tells her that it's not polite to stare and to say things like that. Olive sends the little girl away when she hears Suzanne's mother asking for the bathroom. Henry comes to check on Olive. She says Henry should go say his goodbyes so they can leave. They both agree that he's married a nice woman.

Suzanne and Christopher met when she went to see him for an ingrown toenail while Suzanne was in town for a medical conference. Olive can overhear a conversation between Suzanne and one of Suzanne's friends. They are talking about Suzanne's new in-laws and Olive overhears them talking about Olive's dress and how they can't believe she is wearing it.

Suzanne also says that it's really sucked for Chris as an only child. Olive thinks about a conversation she and Christopher had before Suzanne came along. Christopher told her he sometimes thinks about ending it all. It pains Olive that her own son was scared of her when he was growing up.

Olive uses a magic marker to destroy some of Suzanne's clothes in the closet. Then, she steals one of Suzanne's bras and one of her shoes. Henry comes to retrieve Olive.

A Little Burst Analysis

Olive is a very unhappy person. She always finds the negative in everyone and everything. Her way of dealing with her unhappiness is to find comfort in food, which is why she is so overweight. There is some foreshadowing that Olive might die while she continues to rest in Christopher's bed while Henry goes to say goodbye to everyone.

It seems as if Olive is jealous of Suzanne. This is why she gets upset when she thinks about the look on Suzanne's face while she was gazing at Christopher while he and Suzanne were saying their vows. Olive thinks Suzanne doesn't know Christopher that well at all. On the other hand, Olive is glad that Christopher won't be lonely.

Christopher and Olive's father seem to be living parallel lives, even though her father is dead now. They both suffer depression. They are both quiet and don't talk too much.



Starving

Starving Summary

It's Sunday morning and Harmon is watching a couple in the marina. He thinks about how his wife Bonnie didn't like women that dye their hair. She'd also disapprove of the girl telling the boy she smells like pot, and how the girl is sitting on the boy's lap.

Daisy Foster lives in a cottage near the water. Daisy husband was old enough to be her father, but he died three years ago. She sees Harmon walk up to the door with the donut he brings her. Daisy sees the sadness in Harmon's eyes. She thanks him for the donut and asks how his four grown sons are.

Harmon watches as his wife, Bonnie, putters around the house. He notices how much she's changed since they married. They talk about the boys not calling and not having any grandchildren. Harmon thinks about the year their son, Derrick, went off to college. When Harmon tried to initiate sex with Bonnie, she states that she's done with having sex. This is when he thinks about his tender times with Daisy.

Harmon tells Daisy the young girl he saw with the boy has anorexia. Daisy says it's a shame for girls to be starving themselves. Daisy says she's been cutting down on her smoking. Harmon talks with Bonnie about how it bothers him that not of their sons have an interest in taking over his hardware store.

By November, Nina, the anorexic girl, is asleep upstairs in her cottage. She got into a fight with Tim, Nina's boyfriend, because Tim cheated on Nina with her friend. When Nina comes downstairs, she's so thin that Harmon hardly even recognizes her. They find out Nina was in the hospital for her eating disorder and that she got into trouble with the law for stealing. Olive arrives and introduces herself to Nina. While Nina eats her donut, Olive says Nina is starving and that Olive is starving too.

Olive says everyone is starving. Olive starts crying and tells Nina she's breaking her heart because Nina is so sick. Nina says she doesn't want to be like this and Olive assures her that they're going to get her help.

Olive urges Nina to never give up trying. Olive asks Nina if she hates her mother and Nina says she doesn't hate her. They call Nina's mother to come to get Nina to take her for help.

Harmon starts to keep score as to how intimate the questions are that Bonnie asks him. He also starts asking Bonnie if he knows his favorite things. Harmon remarks at how he knows her favorite things, but she doesn't know his. On Sundays, Harmon visits Daisy. They talk about Nina and her therapy.



Daisy calls Harmon to come by the cottage. When he sees Olive's car in Daisy's driveway, Harmon knows that Nina is dead. Inside, Daisy is crying but Olive isn't. They talk about Nina's death and her funeral. Nina died of a heart attack.

His son, Kevin, calls a few days later to check on his father's depressed state the past few days. Harmon assures Kevin that everything is fine. When they hang up, Bessie Davis, the old maid in town, stays talking to Harmon for quite some time. Harmon goes to Daisy's cottage to tell her that he's fallen in love with her.

Harmon pays to rent a room from his joint savings account. Harmon goes to the doctor but his heart is fine. When Harmon tells the doctor he was planning to leave his wife, the doctor says this is not good.

Starving Analysis

Daisy and Harmon are having an affair. Starving is a metaphor. Daisy and Harmon talk about how the young girl has anorexia. Because Harmon is starving for intimacy and his wife is depriving him of, Harmon turns to Daisy to feed this need. Daisy is starting to starve herself of her cigarettes so that she can quit smoking.

Ironically, Harmon owns a hardware store but their house needs some work, such as cleaning out the gutters. Olive saying everyone is starving means that everyone is missing something in their life that they are looking to fulfill.

While Olive seems so harsh and uncaring, she really isn't. This is also why Olive starts to cry when Olive realizes how sick Nina is. Olive cares and has compassion for Nina and her plight. Olive is looking for reassurance that Christopher doesn't hate her by getting Nina to answer Olive's question about Nina hating her mother.

Harmon is facing his own mortality. This is why he starts to think about all of the illnesses and diseases people he knows has. This is also why Harmon questions how well he and Bonnie know each other. Harmon admitting he loves Daisy and renting a room suggests that he is planning to leave and divorce Bonnie.



A Different Road

A Different Road Summary

Henry is sixty-eight years old while Olive is sixty-nine. An event occurs that change Henry and Olive forever. Their son is now living in California with his wife. Cynthia suggests to Olive that they have crisis counseling because they've change since the event in question.

On their drive home from having dinner with friends, Olive has an urgent need to use the bathroom. She makes Henry pull up to the hospital. When she tells the nurse she had an explosive bowel movement after eating dinner, the nurse urges her to see the doctor because she might have a food allergy. A lady the previous night died of a food allergy.

Two men invade the hospital to get drugs. The criminals threaten to shoot them in the head if Olive and Henry don't do what they tell them to do. When one of the criminals pulls off his ski mask, Olive thinks she recognizes him.

When the other man sees that the boy took off his mask, the man strikes the boy with the butt of his rifle. This is when Olive thinks that they are all going to die. The nurse is praying and Olive tells the nurse to shut up.

Then Olive comes back to sit in her car in the parking lot. She comes here to look at the emergency room door. She thinks about the events of that night and how it changed their lives forever. When Olive drives home, Henry says she was gone longer than he expected. She explains that she ran into Cynthia.

Olive starts to think about how things change—a different road. Olive thinks they will never get over that night because they said things to each other during the hostage situation that they would never get over.

A Different Road Analysis

Tragic events tend to change people. After Henry and Olive undergo their traumatic event, both of them change. They are not the same people they used to be. They tend to be quieter and more cautious than they were prior to the criminals taking them hostage.

Ironically, it is Henry that challenges the criminals at the hospital, and it is Olive that tries to get Henry to shut up before the criminals kill them all.



Winter Concert

Winter Concert Summary

Bob and Jane Houlten are driving in the car to the winter concert at the church. Each of them suffered a mild heart attack this year. Jane thinks about how much she loved working with the young girls that would come to her office with cramps or other problems.

The Haultens see the Kitteridges come into the church for the concert. Jane and Olive worked at the same school but they never spoke much. While the Haultens are talking to the Lydias, Mr. Lydia mentions running into Bob in Miami. After they walk away, Jane asks Bob when he was in Miami. Bob says he must have meant Orlando, not Miami.

When they get into the car, Jane says he hates Donna Granger. Bob says it's not worth the energy it takes to hate Donna. When Bob doesn't look at her when he says it, Jane gets angry. Jane mentions that Donna's youngest daughter, Patty, was nasty girl. When Jane thinks about the way Mrs. Lydia looked at Jane when they were talking about running into Bob in Miami, Jane asks Bob to tell her the truth.

Jane says she can't believe he lied to her. She pleads with him to tell her. He admits that she called him because she had breast cancer, so when he went to Orlando, he also went down to Miami to see her. He said it was awful and pathetic. He admits to spending the night with her, but that it was miserable. Bob says he's only spoken to her once since then. He says he doesn't know if she's dead now or not.

Winter Concert Analysis

Bob and Jane Houlten face their own mortality because they are in their seventies and both had health problems during the year. They both embrace life and try to find the joy in the simple things rather than take life for granted. It seems that Jane was the high school nurse before she retired.

Jane knows secrets about some of the children that grew up in the town from being the high school nurse. She worries that others know things about her own children that she doesn't know. Ironically, Jane senses that Bob is keeping secrets from her, such as trip to Miami. The "her" in Miami is a woman that Bob was having an affair with.



Tulips

Tulips Summary

Mary Blackwell, a medical professional, could have lost her job for gossiping about patients, such as Louise Larkin. The Larkin family seems to be the "black sheep" of Crosby, Maine because of a scandal that occurred. This scandal causes Louise Larkin to stay locked up in her home and nobody ever really sees the Larkins come or go.

One night, Henry is driving to the pharmacy because the alarm is going off. This is one of the rare occasions Henry sees the Larkins as they pulling out of their driveway in the middle of night. Henry assumes they are going to visit their son.

Olive feels very lonely. She thinks constantly about how much she detests her bossy and outspoken daughter-in-law. Four months after the wedding, Christopher and Suzanne move to California. Olive and Henry start their retirement during this time, so they are finding ways to keep busy and active. One of the things Olive chooses to do is plant and grow tulips.

Olive knows Louise Larkin because Louise was a guidance counselor at the same school where Olive worked. After moving to California, Christopher calls Olive and Henry to let them know he's getting a divorce. Olive tries to focus her efforts on planting the one-hundred tulip bulbs she's ordered.

One day, while running into the grocery store to pick up a few items, Henry has a major stroke that leaves him blind and mute. Henry has to live in a wheelchair in the nursing home.

Christopher arrives shortly after the stroke to visit with Olive and Henry.

Olive receives a card from Louise Larkin about Henry. As Olive's life spirals out of control, she continues to think about killing herself. Olive goes to visit Louise. The two women talk but the conversation soon turns into an argument and at the end Louise yells about the woman being a tease and deserving what she got. Olive claims to not know what she's talking about and that she thinks Louise is crazy.

Olive goes to the nursing home to visit Henry. She tells Henry that it's ok to die. she assures Henry that she will be fine.

Tulips Analysis

Henry and Olive are in their seventies at this point. They are starting to face their own mortality. Not only are people they know dying, but now that Henry has had a major stroke, he has reversed his life and now is a helpless child.



Olive starts being nice and compassionate to Henry. She is nicer than she has been to him in the years of the marriage previous to this incident. Louise's statement to Olive about the woman being a tease and deserving to get stabbed suggests that Doyle Larkin, Louise's son, is responsible for stabbing a woman he was involved with thirty-seven times.



Basket of Trips

Basket of Trips Summary

Marlene Bonnie is the wife of the former grocer, Ed Bonnie. Marlene is attending her husband's funeral with her children. After the funeral, the attendees go back to Marlene's house. Olive helps Molly to prepare the food and drinks for the after-funeral get together. While the two women work, Molly asks how Christopher is.

Olive and Henry never told anyone Christopher got a divorce. Marlene tells everyone how nice the service was and she says the children planned it. Carrie Monroe, one of the funeral attendees, ends up getting drunk. Olive steps outside on the porch and sees a gray-haired woman putting out a cigarette in one of the potted plants on the porch. Olive realizes this woman is the one that bought Christopher's house. Olive goes back into the house and asks where Marlene is. When she finds out Marlene went to put Carrie to bed, Olive goes after Marlene.

Marlene tells Olive how Carrie told her that Carrie and Ed had an affair. Marlene asks Olive to take the trip pamphlets basket with her, which is a basket of pamphlets she and Ed would use to talk about trips they would take when he was feeling better.

Basket of Trips Analysis

The occurrences represent the circle of life. In this small town, people are born; grow up; get married; have kids and then grandkids; and then die. In Olive's case, she is also responsible for teaching some of the people that live in the town when they were in high school.

As the various characters are introduced, some of them are Olive's students, which is the case with Marlene. While Olive influenced many of her students' lives, she was a greater influence on some more so than on others.

There is also an indication that life doesn't always work out the way you plan. Marlene and Ed were planning trips and vacations, but Ed died before they were able to take any of them. Olive plans to be a good teacher and mother. She feels as if this didn't turn out the way she planned. Olive thinks that all she has ever done is love Christopher, but thinks he treats her poorly.



Ship in a Bottle

Ship in a Bottle Summary

Anita Harwood tells her youngest daughter, Winnie, that you have to organize your days. Anita's oldest daughter, Julie, is also there. Julie's engagement broke up six days ago, when Bruce, her fiancé, left her at the altar. He wanted to live together but not get married.

Julie is very distraught over the situation. Anita, however, keeps trying to get Julie to snap out of it and carry on with her life. The familial situation for the Harwoods is an interesting one. For one, they don't have a flushing toilet. Jim is building a boat in the garage, which Winnie equates to being a ship in a bottle when she tries to figure out how her father will get it out the door.

Jim Harwood is the school janitor. He's Winnie's father but Julie's stepfather. On the Sunday after the wedding gets called off, Julie doesn't want to go to church because she doesn't want everyone staring at her.

Bruce calls the Harwood home, but Winnie lies to her mother about who was on the phone. when Bruce shows up in the Harwood driveway, Anita tries to shoot Bruce. Julie runs away to Boston to be with Bruce.

Ship in a Bottle Analysis

Anita seems to be a very controlling mother. While her intentions are good, her hovering constantly around her daughters, especially Julie, ends up pushing Julie away. This is why Julie runs away to be with Bruce in Boston.

The ship in the bottle, or the boat in the garage, is symbolic of the lives of the Harwood children. they are trapped in their house with a controlling mother. this eventually causes the relationship between Julie and her mother to "collapse," similar to how a ship in a bottle is collapsed and then slid into the bottle for display purposes.



Security

Security Summary

It's May and seventy-two year old Olive is on her way to New York City for the first time to visit Christopher, his new wife and his two step children. His new wife is also pregnant with Christopher's child. After making all of the arrangements for being gone for a week, Olive boards an airplane for the first time.

Olive wanders around for a while at the airport because she forgets Christopher can't meet her at the gate. By the time Olive reaches Christopher, he's furious. He calms down by the time they reach his house. Olive steps in dog poop when she gets out of the car and then on a toy as soon as she enters the house.

Ann, Christopher's wife, greets Olive warmly. After a vegetarian dinner she doesn't eat, Olive retreats to her basement room and uses the phone to call Henry. Olive tells her about his new daughter-in-law, even if Henry cannot speak back to her. When she's finished, Olive finds a pregnant Ann drinking a beer and smoking a cigarette out in the back yard. Ann says she only has one of each a day. Christopher joins them. When Olive finds out their tenant that lives upstairs is an O'Casey, Olive asks if he's related to Jim O'Casey.

Olive thinks about the first time she saw Jim O'Casey. The following school year, Jim O'Casey starts teaching at the same school as Olive. Then, she thinks about the night she finds out he lost control of his car, ran off the road into a tree and died. Christopher claims the tenant is the son of Jim O'Casey, but then he says he's just kidding with her. Christopher adds that he never liked Jim O'Casey.

As Olive sits in the messy kitchen drinking her coffee, she realizes she slept the best last night that she has in four years, since Henry went into the home. Since Olive found out Christopher fibbed about needing her to come visit because Ann is sick with the pregnancy, Olive is happy because she thinks Christopher really asked her to come because he missed her.

Olive takes the dog, Dogface, to the park and meets Christopher's tenant. Over the next few days, Olive falls into a routine. While she feels as if she is in a strange environment, Olive is also happy. One afternoon, Ann announces to Olive that it's their wedding anniversary.

After about three days, Olive declares it's time for her to go home. Olive and Christopher argue a little bit. Christopher claims Olive agreed to stay for a wee and that she has a temper. Ann steps in to try to referee, but says Olive has to understand that it was hard for Christopher growing up because of the way Olive is. Olive claims all she ever did was love Christopher and he treats her terribly.



Christopher tells her that quite the opposite is true. He calls a car to take Olive to the airport. When she gets to the airport, Olive thinks about calling Christopher to smooth things over but decides not to do this.

Security Analysis

As the airplane takes off, Olive's hope is renewed. Ann is the complete opposite of Suzanne, so Christopher has moved from one of the spectrum to the next in his choices for a wife. For the first time, Olive keeps her opinions to herself. While she thinks one way about Christopher's new family one way in her head, what comes out of her mother is much nicer.

Additionally, Christopher is able to express how he feels about his mother for the first time. He struggles with his need and want to have a relationship with his mother and dealing with the way that she negatively affects him.



Criminal

Criminal Summary

Rebecca Brown is not a thief, but did steal a magazine from a doctor's office to finish reading an article. She calls a catalog company to order a shirt for her boyfriend. Rebecca's mother ran off with a man and joined the church of scientology. This is when her mother cut off her contact from the rest of the family.

Rebecca is looking for a new job. Jobs always seem to be a problem for her. She's worked at an ice cream shop and a law firm. While she's circling potential jobs in the newspaper, her boyfriend, David, tells her that confidence is the key landing and holding down a job.

Rebecca is a former student of Olive Kitteridge. Rebecca thinks about how Mrs. Kitteridge always made her nervous. Rebecca's father was a minister so he was very strict with Rebecca. With all his rules, Rebecca sometimes watched at while he used large amounts of butter, and hoped this would be his downfall.

After David leaves for the gym one morning, Rebecca calls back the catalog company to try to try to change the size of the shirt she bought David. The woman remembers her and they have a conversation. When David gets home, she admits she didn't get the job because she thinks she talked too much.

David tries to tell her that everyone doesn't want to hear about a lot of her personal details. The next day, Rebecca gets a job typing traffic reports. After working there a couple of weeks, she realizes that she'll probably quit. Rebecca starts to think that this can't be her life. David's shirt arrives, but after looking at it, she realizes it's not David's style, but rather the style her ex-boyfriend, Jace, would wear. Rebecca arranges to return the shirt.

The next day at the doctor, Rebecca looks around for something the steal, but there isn't much in the waiting room. She tells the doctor her stomach still hurts and the medicine isn't working. She thinks about telling him that her hands have been shaking and that she feels something is deeply wrong, but she doesn't tell the doctor this. On the way out, Rebecca puts a vase from the waiting room in her backpack and leaves.

That night at dinner, Rebecca and David talk about shoplifting as kids. Rebecca says she never did it because she was scared to get caught. David admits he did it and mentions a couple of incidents. Rebecca says she started cooking meals for her father soaked in butter so that must make her some kind of criminal. David isn't paying attention though because he's watching TV.

At the bar across the street, police cars with flashing lights are in front. One of the policemen brings a handcuffed man out of the bar. She goes to the kitchen and rips up all of the postcards from her mother.



Criminal Analysis

Rebecca has a very low self-esteem. Primarily, this comes from the way she was raised as a child. Rebecca feels that her mother abandoned her to join a cult in California. Since Rebecca's father was very religious and strict, this continued to chip away at Rebecca's self-esteem as well.

Additionally, Rebecca struggles with her spirituality. She believes in God, but it was so forced into her at a young age that she also rebels against it. She even relates a policeman reading a criminal his rights to the poetry in the bible. As an adult, Rebecca starts to steal mundane objects from the doctor's office.

Rebecca's self-worth also leads her to seek approval and relationships wherever she can find it. by the end of the chapter, it foreshadows Rebecca committing a crime, such as arson, that can possibly lead to her own arrest.



River

River Summary

Jack Kennison went to Harvard. The Kennisons have a lesbian daughter that they don't accept.

Henry died in the nursing home, a year and half ago, before Christopher's baby was born. At six in the morning, Olive walks on the path by the river, three miles up and three miles back.

She finds Jack Kennison slumped over on the path, so she stops to see if he's alright. When Olive offers to go get help, he begs her not to leave him alone. He claims he doesn't know what happened to him. He says he doesn't care if he dies but he doesn't want to be alone.

He says he just slumped over and Olive was standing over him when he woke up. He starts to cry and tells Olive that his wife died recently. Olive waits for Jack in the waiting room of the doctor's office. Jane Houlton comes in and Olive compliments Jane's skirt. Olive drives Jack to his car and then follows him home. He invites Olive inside for lunch but she tells him to rest.

On another walk, Olive sees Jack sitting on the same bench. He says all of the medical tests came back normal. When Olive gets home, she calls Jack to invite him to lunch, but he says he prefers to have dinner. When Olive calls Christopher, she finds out that the baby is walking now. She tells him about her dinner with Jack and that her friend Bunny called it a date, which Olive says is stupid. Christopher encourages Olive to go.

Olive and Jack have a series of get-togethers starting with their dinner date. Olive continues to deny to everyone that these are dates. Eventually, Jack admits that his daughter is a lesbian and that she lives with a woman in California. Olive and Jack get into a squabble when Olive finds out Jack voted for Reagan. They make up and end up bonding over the lives they've led, the way that they raised their children and more.

River Analysis

Olive is trying to find a life again without Henry. As the chapter unfolds, there is some foreshadowing that Jack and Olive start a relationship. Olive enjoys her time with Jack but tries to deny it by telling all of the negative things about him. Olive is just one of those people that sees things from a pessimistic point of view.

Olive is really self-conscious about the way she looks, which is why she tends to be so judgmental about everyone else. By the end, however, Olive has a new outlook on life and the way she wants to live out her remaining years.



Characters

Henry Kitteridge

Henry Kitteridge is a pharmacist. He is married to Olive Kitteridge. They have an teenage son, Christopher Kitteridge, when the novel opens. Living in the small town of Crosby, Maine, Henry starts out as the pharmacist for the Village Pharmacy, which is the only pharmacy in town.

Henry seems to be a warm and caring man. He is also relatively quiet. Part of this is because Olive is boisterous and opinionated that she causes Henry to retreat into himself. When Henry hires Denise to work in the pharmacy, however, Henry starts to see life in a different way.

Henry continues to stay with Olive throughout the years. For twenty years, he and Denise stay in touch, even though she is now living in Texas and has a family of her own. In many respects, Henry ends up going through the motions of life rather than truly having an opportunity to enjoy them.

After Henry retires and the pharmacy is bought out by a chain drugstore, Henry ends up having a major stroke. The stroke leaves him blind and unable to speak. Henry lives out his remaining years in a nursing home, where he dies.

Olive Kitteridge

Olive Kitteridge is Henry's wife and Christopher's mother. Olive is a high school math teacher. She's lived her whole life in the small town of Crosby, Maine.

Olive has very strong opinions about everyone in town. While she seems to be very judgmental and outspoken, she also has a compassionate side. Olive does touch the lives of several of her students as they are introduced as characters into the plot of the novel.

Olive is a large woman. She is tall. She is also overweight. This is true for most of her life. Olive seems to turn to food for comfort, which is what causes her to gain so much weight over the years. Her weight causes Olive be very self-conscious.

Olive's father committed suicide. Olive often thinks about taking her own life as well. By the end of the novel, however, when she starts her relationship with Jack Kennison, Olive starts to have a new outlook on life.



Denise Thibodeau

Denise Thibodeau is a mousy girl with glasses. She works at the pharmacy with Henry. Denise is a newlywed, married to Henry Thobodeau for one year. When Henry is shot and killed in a hunting accident, Henry tries to take care of Denise to get her back on her feet.

Denise is very smart and a great deal of help to Henry in the pharmacy. Denise ends up marrying the delivery boy that works at the pharmacy. They move to Texas. Denise continues to send annual birthday cards to Henry.

Henry Thibodeau

Henry Thibodeau is Denise's first husband. Henry Thibodeau and Henry Kitteridge often joke about them having the same name. Henry Thibodeau drives Denise to work every day and picks her up because Denise doesn't drive. Henry also handles all of the bills. He is shot and killed by his best friend on a hunting trip. Henry leaves a great deal of money to Denise from his life insurance policy.

Jerry McCarthy

Jerry McCarthy is the delivery boy at the pharmacy. He is a teenager that just graduated from high school. He still lives in his parents' home. He's overweight and sweats profusely. Denise encourages Jerry to start taking night courses at college. As Jerry continues to get As, he also earns his degree. When Henry Thibodeau dies, Jerry and Denise marry. They move to Texas and have a family of their own.

Kevin Coulson

Kevin Coulson grew up in Crosby, Maine. After his mother committed suicide, Kevin and his brother lived with their father. Kevin leaves Crosby as an adult. He returns to town to revisit his childhood home. It also seems as if he is contemplating his own suicide. Olive Kitteridge recognizes Kevin as one of her former students. They have a conversation about Olive's father and Kevin's mother committing suicide.

Patty Howe

Patty Howe works at a local café at the marina. She is married. She's also been pregnant numerous times, but has miscarried each time. She is pregnant again and she is waiting to tell everyone until she is at least three months along. Kevin Coulson sees Patty when he comes to town. He doesn't recognize her at first but when Olive tells him who Patty is, he remembers that Patty was nice.



Angela O'Meara

Angela O'Meara plays piano in a local lounge. She is also a heavy drinker. Angela has been having an affair with the same married man for the last twenty-two years. She rents a room that is within walking distance to the lounge, so she works to and from work each night. She decides to finally end the affair when one of her former lovers shows up in town.

Suzanne Bernstein Kitteridge

Suzanne Bernstein Kitteridge is Christopher's first wife. Suzanne is a doctor. She and Christopher meet when Suzanne is in town for a medical conference. Olive describes Suzanne as a know it all and bossy. Suzanne convinces Christopher to move to California. After moving there, Suzanne asks Christopher for a divorce.

Ann Kitteridge

Ann Kitteridge is Christopher's second wife. She is the complete opposite of Suzanne. Ann is calm and nice to Olive. Ann has two children from two previous relationships and ends up having a son with Christopher. While Ann is pregnant with Christopher's child, she smokes and drinks.

Christopher Kitteridge

Christopher Kitteridge is the son of Henry and Olive Kitteridge. He becomes a podiatrist. He marries twice. He moves away from Crosby to live in California and then moves to New York. During his second marriage, he has a son with his second wife and helps her to raise two children from her two previous relationships.

Jack Kennison

Jack Kennison went to Harvard. He lives in Crosby with his wife until his wife dies. He has a lesbian daughter that lives with a woman in California. Jack ends up dating Olive after Henry dies.



Objects/Places

Crosby, Maine

Crosby is a small town in Maine. It is the town where the Kitterridges live and where all of the other characters are from or currently live. It is such a small town that everyone seems to know everyone else's business.

Village Pharmacy

The Village Pharmacy is the pharmacy where Henry works as a pharmacist. This is where Henry meets Denise when she is hired to work in the pharmacy. The pharmacy is also where Jerry and Denise meet and form a relationship. The Village Pharmacy ends up being replaced by a chain drugstore.

Church

Henry attends church almost every Sunday. Olive, however, stops attending church with Henry. The church is the location for several events throughout the novel. This includes the winter concert and a funeral.

Tulips

When Olive retires from teaching, one of the hobbies she takes up is planting and growing tulips. Olive and her daughter-in-law, Suzanne, disagree about the proper way of taking care of the tulips. Olive ends up ordering and planting one-hundred tulip bulbs

California

When Christopher and Suzanne leave Crosby, they move to California. Christopher starts and runs a podiatry practice in California. Christopher decides to stay in California after he and Suzanne divorce. Additionally, Jack Kennison's daughter lives in California with her lesbian lover.

New York City

Christopher moves to New York City from California. This is where he lives with his new wife and family. Olive goes to visit Christopher in New York City, which marks Olive's first trip to the city and her first time on an airplane.



Nursing Home

When Henry has a stroke, he lives in the nursing home. Olive visits Henry several times throughout the day at the nursing home. Eventually, Henry dies while living in the nursing home.

Denise's Cards

Denise's cards are an annual tradition between Denise and Henry. Denise sends Henry a card each year for his birthday. In the card, Denise updates Henry on what has been happening in her life over the year.

Jim O'Casey's Car

Olive and Christopher ride to and from school every day in Jim O'Casey's car. Jim O'Casey's car runs off the road and into a tree. When the accident occurs, Jim O'Casey dies in his car.

River

Olive starts walking up and down the path next to the river. One day, this is where she runs into Jack Kennison. By the river is where Olive and Jack start their new relationship.



Themes

Relationships

One of the primary themes running through the novel is relationships. The two primary relationships the novel tackles is the relationships of a family and friendships. The novel lightly touches upon romantic relationships as well.

Friendship is one of the primary types of relationships the novel tackles. Olive never truly forms any bonds or relationships with any women in the town. While she does have a friend, Bunny, that she confides in from time to time, Olive mostly dismisses the advice Bunny offers her.

Henry, on the other hand, seems to be able to form friendships with various people in town. A special kind of friendship blossoms between Henry and Denise. Henry Kitteridge also tries to befriend Denise's husband, Henry Thibodeau.

The novel lightly touches upon romantic relationships. It reveals the marriages of various characters throughout the novel. Olive and Henry seem to have a rocky marriage. Olive bosses Henry around and talks to Henry in a way that puts him down on a constant basis. Jane finds out that her husband saw his mistress behind her back when they run into another couple they know at a winter concert at the church it reveals that you never truly know what happens behind the closed doors of homes.

Coming of Age

One of the primary themes that run throughout the novel is growing up and coming of age, even against adversity, such as having an abusive parent, a parent that commits suicide, and other problems in life. Christopher struggles with the fact that his coming of age includes having a mother that he considers a bully and that he is afraid of because of her temper.

Each of the characters in the novel that were once Olive's students also experience their own coming of age obstacles. Ironically, Olive seems to be compassionate and available to try to help her students to get through the tough periods in their life, even though Olive struggles to accomplish this same goal with her own son.

In some cases, the students Olive taught had to deal with the death of a parent. Specifically, Kevin's coming of age is about his mother committing suicide. This causes Kevin to consider the same option when things in his life didn't quite turn out the way he had hoped in adulthood.

Family

Family is the central theme throughout the entire novel. This is because the storyline is about the lives of this particular family—the Kitterridges. While every family has their trials and tribulations, the Kitteridge family has its own family dynamics that are the same and that are different from those of other families. In the end though, they are a family and they will get through it together, one way or the other.

Additionally, Olive learns that a family is more about the people that are there for you, rather than the ones that are biologically related to you. She learns to appreciate her son's stepchildren. Olive also works to help Jack see that he can have a relationship with his daughter even if he doesn't always agree with the choices she makes in her life.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the third person point of view, from the perspective of the author. The point of view of this novel is intimate, allowing a reader to connect closely with each of the characters in the novel. The book written in this manner allows the reader to get inside the head, thoughts and inner struggles of each character. 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 Crosby, Maine and in New York City during the 21st century. The main characters are involved in the daily life of living in a small coastal town.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware how the main character, Olive Kitteridge, is connected to each of the characters in the novel. However, as events unfold, Olive Kitteridge 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.

Structure

The novel is divided into 14 chapters. Each chapter ranges from 15 pages to 30 pages long. The chapters tell the story primarily in exposition and with some dialogue. The narrator 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 is that of human relationships—family and friendships. One subplot is the coming of age of the characters. Another subplot is family.



Quotes

"She is the plainest child I have ever seen" (Pharmacy Pages 1-16, p. 12).

"Denise, you need some friends" (Pharmacy Pages 17-29, p. 25).

"Kevin Coulson. Hello" (Incoming Tide, p. 34).

"And I've been feeling pretty sorry for you, Angie, all these years" (The Piano Player, p. 58).

"Never trust folks" (A Little Burst, p. 68).

"But maybe I've been selfish. What can I do to please you" (Starving p. 83).

"Olive, we were scared that night" (A Different Road, p. 125).

"I don't ever want to talk about her" (Winter Concert, p. 139).

"You can die now, Henry. Go ahead" (Tulips, p. 161).

"We all want to kill someone at some point" (Basket of Trips, p. 179).

"You'll have to organize your days" (Ship in a Bottle, p. 181).

"I'm not going to be ruled by my fear of you, Mom" (Security, p. 230).

"My father said it didn't look good for a minister's kids to show favorites. In a small town like that" (Criminal, p. 249).

"I wouldn't mind. I would love him with all my heart" (River, p. 264).

Topics for Discussion

Who is the true Henry Kitteridge? Why do you think he feels like he has to take care of Denise? Do you think Henry knows why Olive acts the way she does? Why do you think Henry stays married to Olive?

Discuss the relationship between Christopher and Olive. Why do you think Christopher thinks it's a struggle to grow up with his mother? Why do you think Christopher asks Olive to come to New York City for a visit? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Christopher feel about Olive? How does Olive feel about Christopher? How do Olive's feelings change after visiting Christopher in New York City?

Discuss the relationship between Henry Kitteridge and Denise. Are they friends, colleagues, or something else? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Henry feel about Denise? How does Denise feel about Henry? How do Henry's feelings change? What does he do about it? What happens to Denise?

Discuss the relationship between Olive and Jim O'Casey. Are they friends, colleagues, or something else? Is there true competition in their relationship? Do you think Olive and Jim had an affair? Why does Olive stop eating and sleeping when Jim dies?

Who is the true Olive Kitteridge? Why do you think she negates everything? Do you think she changes in her relationship with Jack? Do you think Christopher and Olive have a better relationship going forward?

Who is Christopher? Is he a tortured adolescent or just a typical man that blames some of his own faults on his upbringing? Why do you think he goes into therapy after his divorce from Suzanne? What role does Ann play in helping Christopher change his life?

Discuss the town of Crosby. What impact does it have on the characters of the novel? How does it motivate them? How does it derail their lives?