

# **Orange Is the New Black Study Guide**

**Orange Is the New Black by Piper Kerman**

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## Summary

This memoir, written by Piper Kerman, captures the author's yearlong stay in a federal women's prison. Through this narrative, Piper is able to communicate her experiences in prison and shed light of some of the issues of the United States criminal justice system. Throughout the memoir, Piper shares her first hand accounts of life in prison, telling her own story while sharing the stories of many of the women she met along the way.

The book began at Brussels Airport, where Piper committed the crime that changed her life. There, she laundered money for a drug trafficking operation. A naïve college graduate, Piper had become romantically involved with Nora Jansen, a woman heavily involved in the operation. Before long, Nora had convinced Piper to travel with her and eventually launder money. After seeing the dark side of the drug business, Piper moved to San Francisco in hope of leaving this life behind her.

While in San Francisco, Piper started dating Larry, her eventual fiancé. Larry and Piper moved to New York, where Piper was eventually tracked down by the police. After years of awaiting her sentence, Piper was sentenced to fifteen months in Danbury women's prison.

Despite her initial nervousness, Piper formed many meaningful relationships with her fellow inmates. Early on, Piper learned that the only thing she had to fear in prison were those in power. Throughout her stay, Piper was able to undergo a personal growth process in which she learned the value of community, resilience, and self-preservation. By the end of the memoir, Piper is stronger and wiser than she was before, profoundly effected by those she learned from in Danbury.

For the majority of the memoir, Piper relays her experiences in Danbury, sharing the stories of various inmates while citing various injustices of the prison system. The memoir serves simultaneously as recognition of the lives of the many women Piper encountered and an exposé of the dark side of the criminal justice system. In writing this memoir, Piper is able to share her experiences while drawing mainstream attention to the harsh realities of life in a women's prison.



# Chapters 1-3

## Summary

Orange is the New Black is the memoir of Piper Kerman, a woman who spent one year in prison as a result of her brief involvement in a drug trafficking operation. The story began with Piper's criminal involvement and progressed to reveal the dramatic influence it had on her life.

The first chapter begins in the Brussels Airport, where the author, Piper recounts her fateful decision to become involved in a drug trafficking and money-laundering scheme. This was Piper's only direct instance of money laundering, although she dated and travelled with Nora, a woman heavily involved in the business. In the airport, Piper eventually recovered her bag full of drug money after frantically searching, expecting the worst.

The novel then flashes back to Piper's graduation from Smith College. Coming from a family that values education very highly, this was a very important accomplishment for Piper from their point of view. She, on the other hand, felt as if she had finished what her parents required and yearned to forge her own path in life.

Piper chose to remain in Northampton after graduation, partly because she loved the area and partly because she was too disorganized to arrange an alternative. While there, Piper began socializing with a group of hip and sophisticated lesbians, among them Nora. Their group was characterized by mystery, sophistication, and style and Piper yearned to be a part of it.

When Nora mysteriously disappeared, Piper began to wonder why. She eventually returned with a larger apartment and much more luxurious lifestyle. Piper was suspicious. Nora eventually took Piper out for a drink where she openly shared the details of her involvement in a drug trafficking operation. Piper was at first taken aback by the information but eventually began to overlook their presence in her relationship with Nora. Since Nora's dealings with drugs always occurred out of town and Piper had never been exposed the harmful effects of drugs, the reality of her situation grew somewhat distant. Still, she knew she had to get out of Northampton.

Piper decided to move to San Francisco with a friend, Lisa B. Right before the move, Nora invited Piper to come to Indonesia with her on a business trip. Craving adventure and with no intention of actually committing any crimes personally, Piper agreed to go. Nora promised to pay for her ticket and fell through on her connecting flight from Paris to Bali.

Once arrived in Bali, Piper met up with Nora and her coworker Jack. The four enjoyed relaxing days and nights of sunbathing, drinking, and partying. On one particular day,



Nora dared Piper to jump off of a giant waterfall. After Piper jumped, Nora followed, stating she would not have had Piper not gone first.

On many of the days, Jack and Nora would transport units of drugs while Piper was sent on errands here and there with a majority of time spent in a mixture of relaxation and worry. She was overcome by the simultaneous wealth and poverty she saw in the nation. For four months, Piper continued to travel with Nora, feeling increasingly detached as time progressed. Finally, Nora asked Piper to help her transport drug money between airports. Feeling bound to her, Piper agreed. After her agreement, Nora then asked Piper to carry drugs. The plan eventually fell through and Piper decided to break things off with Nora and return to San Francisco.

In Chapter Two, Piper tried to put her criminal past behind her. She returned to San Francisco, where she felt accepted and free of the worry of her past. She did not share her past with anyone, hoping to forget what had happened and begin again.

Scared to date after her experience with Nora, Piper started a friendship with a man named Larry. Although the friendship started off platonically, Piper was confused to find she has feelings for Larry. After a while, the two began dating and eventually moved to New York together.

One afternoon, U.S. Customs Officers Maloney and Wong arrived at Piper's apartment to inform her she was being indicted on charges of drug smuggling and money laundering. Thinking she had put this part of her life behind her, she was stunned to hear this information. She had not yet told Larry of her criminal background and headed to his office to explain the situation and call her lawyer. Larry was very understanding and vowed to stay with her during this difficult time. Her family, too, was extremely disappointed but supportive.

Piper's lawyer informed her that because she was indicted on a conspiracy charge, fighting the charge could potentially lead to ten years in prison. On the other hand, pleading guilty would unquestionably result in jail time, but with a much shorter sentence. She decided to go with the latter.

Shortly after Piper's court date, Alaji, the kingpin in the drug operation was arrested in London on a U.S. warrant. While the U.S. worked to get Alaji to go to trial, Piper's prison sentence was postponed as she would be needed to testify against him. This postponement lasted nearly six years, during which Piper found it very difficult to explain her situation to others and thus tried to forget her fate.

Larry provided Piper with comfort and support and was able to help her carry on with life even in the wake of her impending sentence. Finally, Larry proposed to Piper and the two decided it was time to tell Larry's parents, who took the news surprisingly well.

Shortly after, the U.S. effort to extradite Alaji fails and Piper's sentencing date was set. As her sentencing, Piper made a sincere and apologetic statement before the court and was sentenced to 15 months in a federal women's prison.



Chapter 3 began with Larry bringing Piper to Danbury Prison. Piper said good bye to Larry and with him the life she was forced to leave behind. She was scared of the prospect of being unable to see or speak to her family for an indefinite amount of time but knew she must be brave in order to overcome the harsh realities of life in prison.

She was immediately given a number and a change of clothes, stripping her of any identity she had had before. She received a brief medical screening and was then brought to her new counselor, Mr. Butorsky. Mr. Burtosky seemed like the most humane person Piper has dealt with so far, and she immediately began to see him as her protector.

She was then brought to the camp by a nice looking lady in a white van who she was surprised to learn was also a prisoner. The lady, Minetta, was very kind with Piper, now referred to as Kerman. She was led around the racially diverse prison and greeted by many of the white prisoners. She soon observed that women were greeted by members of their own "tribe," or racial group, when entering the prison. Those same tribe members were the ones who shared toiletries and support in times of need.

As she continued her tour of the prison, Minetta told Piper that the dorms were off limits and led her to her room with five other women. One of them, Annette, was an Italian woman from New Jersey. The other was Miss Luz, a small bald woman recovering from breast cancer. Annette told Piper that Mr. Burtosky was crazy and could inspect rooms for perfect form whenever he wanted to. The women were counted at 4 p.m. sharp and then called to dinner in the order of how well they did in their cleaning inspection.

Annette told Piper Mr. Toricella, a counselor, was sympathetic and would let inmates make phone calls if they asked. He allowed Piper to call Larry, who she told he can visit over the weekend. Other prisoners provided Piper with toiletries until she received money for her own and after a few conversations she began to find similarities with a few women. Still she felt entirely alone. Observing Miss Luz and the lack of medical treatment available in prison, she resolved the worst thing to do in prison is to become sick.

## Analysis

The opening setting of the first chapter of the memoir served to introduce the reader directly to the criminal action which laid foundation for the rest of Piper's memoir. By beginning the novel at "the scene of the crime" the author is able to give insight into her emotions and panic at the time. By beginning the story here, the author allows for the reader's first impression to be of her criminal activity. In this way, the author showed honesty and openness with the reader from the first page of the memoir, making her a more believable and redeemable individual throughout the memoir.

After sharing her experience in the Brussels Airport, the author includes a flashback to her college graduation. This flashback serves to juxtapose her criminal activity with her prestigious, upper class upbringing. In this way, Piper makes clear from the first chapter



that criminals cannot be typified and that those in prison cannot be judged solely on common conceptions.

After exposing the reader to both of her identities, Piper continues to explain how exactly she had become involved in these illegal activities. A recent college graduate at the time, Piper was both naïve and adventurous, a combination that led her to folly in this undertaking. Her fascination with Nora, mixed with her innocence led her to trust this woman despite her involvement in drug trafficking. Piper explained that the drugs actually seemed distant to her as she was solely exposed to the lavishness that accompanied their profits.

It was not until she began travelling with Nora that the dark side of the drug business was made apparent to her. Characterized by a sense of optimism and opportunism at this point in the memoir, Piper continued to trust Nora, even after she failed to provide her a plane ticket on their first drug-related trip together. This first failure of Nora to follow through on her promises to Piper served to foreshadow her eventual betrayal. This foreshadowing is continued when Piper finally arrived in Bali and Nora was not there to pick her up from the airport. Throughout the trip, Nora grew somewhat distant to Piper. Finally, her untrustworthiness was solidified when Nora dared Piper to dive off a cliff, following only after Piper had served as a guinea pig. In retrospect, Piper realized this incident should have allowed her to see Nora for her untrustworthy self.

The trip to Bali, Indonesia served as a loss of innocence for Piper. Having come from an upper class background and attending a prestigious private school, she had not previously been exposed to life's harsh realities. Having had a very stable life thus far, Piper had lived to please her parents and was then longing for her own adventure. However, she did not consider the negatives to the life she pursued. Befriending Nora and the other stylish and interesting people involved in drug trafficking seemed at once harmless and exciting to Piper. It was not until she grew closer to Nora that she was able to see the harsh reality of her character. Nora's lifestyle mirrored that of Indonesia. Piper was overcome by the juxtaposition of poverty and drug use to wealth and affluence she saw in the country. This was her first exposure to the harmful effects of drugs and crime, a concept that seemed distant to her previously.

Piper left Indonesia with a sense of sadness and regret, yet still felt bound to Nora in their courtship. It was not until Nora directly asked her to carry drugs that she was able to realize she was nothing more than an accessory. In this realization, Piper showed that she was no longer as innocent and trusting as before and, after an instance of money laundering, made the decision to leave the life of crime behind her.

When Piper arrived in San Francisco at the beginning of Chapter 2, she came with a feeling of freedom and renewal. She thought that she had escaped a life of crime and that she could simply let the past be the past. Her relationship with Larry served as a stark contrast to her relationship with Nora. In addition to being the opposite sex, Larry was everything Nora was not. Larry was safe, with a stable career, a trusting personality, and a genuine love for Piper. Piper's courtship with Larry symbolized a return to a safe and stable lifestyle she so desired after her brief criminal involvement.



Once solely craving adventure and uncertainty, Piper now understood the value of trust and reliability in a relationship

She was shocked when she learned of her indictment but eventually accepted her fate. This was Piper's first encounter with harsh consequence and served to further her from the innocent college graduate she had been a few years prior. Piper now realized that she was an adult and her stable upbringing could no longer save her from the consequences of her decisions.

After her sentence, Piper's prison sentence was postponed indefinitely. This postponement led to a feeling of detachment as she found it very difficult to communicate what she is going through to others. This detachment mirrors the detachment she felt while traveling with Nora on her business trips. This emotion, then, was linked to the criminal lifestyle and the estrangement those committing crimes feel from the world around them. Piper was even estranged from herself, in a sense, as she did not really see herself as a criminal and the concept of a looming prison sentence remained distant until it became a reality.

After Piper and Larry became engaged, they decided to tell Larry's parents about Piper's situation. Expecting them to panic due to their calm and old-fashioned upbringing, the couple was surprised to experience their calm and helpful reaction. This scene contributes to the book's central theme of perception vs. reality. People are not always what they are expected to be and one cannot judge a person solely on outward appearance.

At her sentencing, Piper made an honestly apologetic statement about the impact her decisions had on her loved ones. This statement in the face of fear showed the maturation of her character. She was no longer a carefree youth in search of adventure at any cost. She had grown to put others before herself and fear more for their well-being in her absence than her own.

When Larry drove Piper to prison to begin Chapter 3, she stripped herself of her jewelry and valuables, symbolically leaving behind her individuality and old life. She then said good-bye to Larry and was overcome by the notion she would not be able to see him or her parents for an indefinite and most probably long period of time. She resolved that she must be brave as it is the only way to preserve her remaining sense of self. In this realization, Piper showed a mental maturity and fortitude she did not have in the past. She resolved not to allow herself to be led or influenced by others who may lead her astray. In saying this, she was rejecting the younger self that allowed her to be led into crime and forming a new stronger self, ready to face the situation head-on.

Piper was then introduced to her counselor, Mr. Burtosky, who she immediately began to see as a guardian. This showed that she yearned for the love and support she had had at home and needed to be sure someone could support her through this troubled time.





When she entered the prison, Piper immediately observed the racial divide between inmates. Inmates seem to be separated into “tribes” based on race. These “tribes” had an unspoken bond and provided support for one another. This observation introduced the theme of racism, which is a prevailing theme throughout the memoir as a whole.

Another theme introduced in this section was that of corruption in the criminal justice system. From the minute Piper entered the prison, she was treated as a number, not as a person. She was treated inhumanely and without any consideration by most of the prison staff. She also observed the improper medical care available to inmates. Her roommate, Miss Luz was suffering from breast cancer and did not appear to receive any special treatment. It did not take long for Piper to realize that the lives of the inmates were not highly valued.

The theme of detachment appears in this chapter as Piper communicates and finds similarities with many of the inmates, only to be left feeling entirely alone. She felt completely out of her element, fearing any wrong move. She also grew to quickly resent the canvas colored shoes that clearly mark her as a new inmate, further estranging her from the vast majority of the prison.

## Vocabulary

airy, jettisoned, exhorted, dilettante, effusively, ecstasy, trelliswork, epaulettes, wry, occult, Wiccan, bacchanalia, strata, balked, extradite, mercurial, fervently, foolhardy, verboten



# Chapters 4-6

## Summary

Chapter 4 began with orientation, in which Piper and eight other new inmates were required to attend a day long orientation session in which they were introduced to all of the prison major departments in the most lackluster presentation possible. Many of the presentation speakers were extremely condescending, while others seemed to pity the inmates. It was here that Piper was fully exposed to the lack of help available to inmates who were ailing or abused. Healthcare was only available for those with life threatening illnesses and sexual harassment accusations against those in power would go nowhere, as the only evidence would be the word of the inmate. It seemed, by the end of the presentation, that all of the prison's assistance programs were no more than a charade.

After the presentation, Piper returned to the main camp, where she and the other new arrivals were to spend a month as A&O's, meaning admission and orientation status. The inmates at this level were awaiting medical clearance and were allowed to do very little and responsible for shoveling snow in the early morning. During this first month, Piper was overwhelmed by the amount of rules, both official and unofficial, she observed in the prison society.

The next day, Friday, Piper received her first visit from Larry. She was overjoyed to see him. The visitation room had very strict rules and policies for the inmates, including limited physical contact with visitors and a strip search at the end of each visit. Although some inmates were too humiliated by the proceedings to allow visitors, Piper was not among them. The joy of seeing Larry trumped and infringement on her personal freedoms.

As her stay progressed, Piper became more and more familiarized with the rhythms of prison life. She started to receive more and more books and other gifts from the her friends and family, and even some strangers who had been inspired by her story. Piper felt comforted by the support but still estranged. Piper began to see that much of the systems at work in prison were caused by a deeply ingrained racial tension.

Annette continued to look out for Piper, introducing her to Nina, a street smart Italian who Piper got along with very well. She also became familiar with a few other inmates, little Janet and Yoga Janet, who both came from a middle class background and were imprisoned on drug charges. She also met Pop, the head of the kitchen, who she found took great pride in her job after making a derogatory comment about the food that was not well received.

As her stay continued, Piper found that the racialism at work was not only a result of her fellow inmates, but the prison staff as well. The dorms, which were assigned by the counselors, were for the most part racially divided, causing them to be referred to as "The Suburbs," "The Ghetto," and "Spanish Harlem."



As the weeks went on, Piper tried to stay to herself to avoid trouble. However, she found many of the inmates going out of their way to support and befriend her. She was taken aback by the kindness and support she received. The people she was surrounded by were nothing like she had expected. There was even a nun, Sister Ardeth Platte, who had been arrested during a nonviolent peace rally. The Italian American inmates, especially, are disgusted by her imprisonment.

Piper continued to receive comforting mail from friends and family. One day, she received a news article from her best friend Kristen telling her that New Yorkers were wearing orange in support of her circumstance.

Chapter 5 began with Piper being relocated to the B Dorm, also known as “The Ghetto.” Miss Natalie Malcolm was a very well respected and cooperative woman who worked in the kitchen and needed a new roommate. Thus, Mr. Burtorsky, taking a special liking to Piper, assigned her to be Natalie’s roommate.

One of her first nights there, Piper witnessed an altercation in which one inmate urinated on another’s floor. “The Ghetto” was sure to be different than her old room. As time progressed, she found it to be much louder and more rambunctious as well.

Shortly after, Valentine’s Day arrived and Piper was surprised to see how many inmates received affectionate cards from one another. Despite warnings and rumors, Piper had never witnessed any lesbian relationships and did not have the faintest idea where one would be able to carry on so intimately in the crowded prison. Nonetheless, Piper received no cards from inmates, but a book of poems from Larry that she greatly treasured.

After nearly a month in prison, Piper received her money and was able to shop at the commissary. She tried to repay the inmates who had helped her but they were not interested in repayment. They had given selflessly.

One night, a black inmate came to Piper’s cell looking for Miss Natalie, who was not there. Shamefully, she felt afraid due to the woman’s race. Piper, who had never been a racist outside of prison, feared the racism surrounded her was having an effect. Although afraid at times, Piper felt herself longing for the companionship of her black dorm mates, feeling bound by race in her old social circle.

Shortly into her stay in the B Dorm, Piper came to realize the insufferable condition of one of the bathrooms. Infested with maggots and flies, the showers were unusable and the prison staff remained completely unconcerned. After realizing that the prison provides laundry detergent, Piper wondered why certain things were provided and others were not. She wondered who dictated what was necessary and was deemed livable by authorities.

Through careful observation of other inmates, Piper decided that rituals and routine were the only thing that made life bearable in prison. She decided she would have to empty her own in order to pass the remaining time in her sentence.



To begin Chapter 6, Piper and Little Janet were assigned jobs in Construction and Maintenance Services. Mr. DeSimon, the leader of their program, instructed Piper to lead the others assigned to her team to study and learn the basics of electricians, a topic none of them had any prior knowledge of. A week after the assignment, DeSimon drove the women off of the plantation to clean a correction officer's home. This sort of work continued during the assignment, which showed Piper that many of the prison rules were made to be broken.

After working in maintenance for some time, Piper accidentally took home an extra screwdriver, an offense that could result in a month of solitary confinement. Panicking, she disposes of the screwdriver and waits in an irrational panic that she will be caught.

Joyce, one of Piper's coworkers due to leave Danbury, asked Piper to dye her hair. After dying her hair and cooking with her dorm mates, Piper was reminded of the comforts of college life and considered the similarities of the two.

Piper was then encouraged to apply for the town driver position by Mr. Burtorsky. However, as the driver was also expected to snitch on inmates, Piper declined.

Soon, Nina was preparing to leave for a nine month drug program. This was the only rehabilitation program available to prisoners and was housed in a high security prison. Nina, Pop's Bunkie, offered Piper her place in the bunk in "The Suburbs" as Pop was able to get any Bunkie she requested. Feeling this switch would be disloyal to Miss Natalie, Piper declined.

## Analysis

Throughout Chapter 4, the rules and systems of prison were heavily emphasized and examined. Piper observed that unofficial social rules were of equal if not greater importance than prison enforced rules. Piper, unfamiliar with the rules and afraid to ask too many questions, tried to keep to herself as much as possible. She was surprised to realize that in prison, order was not so much challenged by inmates as it was proliferated. This was evident in Pop's reaction to Piper's negative commentary of the prison's food. Although Piper saw Pop's job as a prison mandated way to kill time, Pop saw her job as part of her identity and took Piper's comments very personally. Thus, prisoners held on to any thing that made them an individual, even if this individuality was granted by those in power.

Another topic reinforced in this chapter is that in prison, everything has a cost. In exchange for contact with loved ones during visitation hours, inmates were patted down and strip-searched. Basic hygiene materials, such as soap and toothpaste, were only available at cost. Nothing was ever truly free or guaranteed in prison.

Piper's maturation process is also extremely evident in this chapter as she again showed sincere concern for her visitors. Although she was the one facing the horror of prison life, she is much more concerned with the fear and shame that her loved ones



were facing. Having once thought about only personal consequence, she was now growing selfless and shifting her concerns to loved ones.

The central theme of racism was heavily emphasized in this chapter. The division of dorms into “The Suburbs,” “The Ghetto,” and “Spanish Harlem” was explained. As these divisions were assigned by counselors, this provides an example of institutionalized racism. Thus, racism between prisoners was solidified and encouraged in its application by those in power. Piper also experienced help and support from those of the same race and though she did not actively avoid inmates of other races, she felt a strong social pressure to stay with her “own kind.” In this way, racism is emphasized as a foundation for the supreme social hierarchy dictating prison culture.

The theme of perception vs. reality is emphasized as well throughout this chapter. This can be seen in the characterization of the two women named Janet. The first, little Janet, was a 20-year-old girl attending college who was now serving more than five years in prison. Yoga Janet was an intellectual and socially active woman of around 50 years old. Both were arrested on drug related offenses. This serves as an example of the inability to judge those in prison on the common societal notions. Many of those in prison were not dangerous criminals, but rather kindhearted people who had made a mistake. This point was further emphasized in the tremendous amount of care and support Piper received from other prisoners since her arrival. It is then solidified in the case of Sister Ardeth Platte, a nun imprisoned during a nonviolent protest. Her placement in prison serves to allow the reader to question the merit of the criminal justice system and its ethical value in society.

This chapter also introduced the background for the memoir’s title, “Orange is the New Black”. Piper received word women in New York City were rallying behind her cause by wearing orange in support of her plight. Thus, Piper’s predicament led to media coverage of her story and allowed the public to see that not all criminals were “bad” or “dangerous.” Some were just victims of an immature mistake from which they could not escape.

Chapter 5 includes a strong emphasis on the unfairness of the U.S. justice system. The dangerous conditions in the bathroom, coupled with the unavailability of free hygienic materials, showed that the government was only willing to provide the bare minimum necessary for human survival.

This unfairness and corruption is further emphasized in the racism displayed by Mr. Burtorsky. As counselors, he and Toricella were responsible for dorm and room assignments, which they separated mainly by race. Liking Piper solely due to her race and middle class background, he provided her with a suitable roommate that prisoners of different ethnic backgrounds did not have access to. This racism, beginning in those with authority, was translated onto prisoners, who were bound in social interaction by race.

The theme of ritualization is also heavily emphasized in this chapter. Throughout her stay in Danbury, Piper noticed that most every action in the prison was ritualized. As she



continued to observe other prisoners and their actions in hopes of gaining insight into the social norms and working of the prison, she began to realize these rituals were necessary for survival in the prison. These rituals served as the only access to control and normalcy available to the inmates and, therefore, allowed them to pass away their time in the most endurable manner possible. Piper then began to partake in the rituals, finding them necessary to preserve the sanity and individualism she still had.

Piper's experience working in maintenance in Chapter 6 further exemplifies the corruption of the criminal justice system. First, women with no prior knowledge of electrical systems were assigned to complete tasks that were dangerous without proper training. Therefore, the lack of regard for the health and well being of the inmates is exemplified. Second, the inmates were required to clean the homes of correction officers, clearly a breach of the rules, but one that was overlooked because it benefitted those in power.

The ability of DeSimon to calmly require the prisoners to do unlawful work is juxtaposed to the panic Piper felt after accidentally taking an extra screwdriver. Habitual rule breaking was completely acceptable for staff, yet for an inmate, it could lead to very harsh consequences. This contrast made clear the importance of power differential in prison.

After dying Joyce's hair and cooking with her dorm mates, Piper was left feeling much more feminine and comfortable. She considered the similarities of single sex living in college and in prison and decided they are much more similar than originally expected. This scene contributes to the theme perception vs. reality as Piper came to realize her fellow inmates were not so different from herself after all.

Again, corruption of the criminal justice system is exposed as Mr. Burtorsky encouraged Piper to apply for the town driver position, a position reserved only for white inmates. As a newer inmate, it was not entirely fair for Piper to be granted a job requiring so much responsibility, but race was placed before experience. As the town driver was also seen as the town snitch, Piper declined, putting her allegiance to her fellow inmates above her personal interests. This loyalty was further exemplified when Piper turned down the offer to move to "The Suburbs" for the good of her roommate Miss Natalie. Although she had been warned against it, Piper was forming a personal connection to the other inmates and beginning to see "The Ghetto" as her home.

## Vocabulary

lulls, forgo, purgatory, quid pro quo, monotony, disheveled, compadre, unabashed



# Chapters 7-9

## Summary

Chapter 7 began with Piper observing the many opportunities available for religion and worship at Danbury. In her experiences, however, most of the worshipping prisoners made much more of a show of their prayer than was necessary, leaving Piper with an air of skepticism and annoyance.

When Easter arrived, Piper found that the holiday was celebrated communally between the inmates. The kitchen prepared a large feast and all were welcome to share in the festivities, making them feel more at home.

Nina's departure for the extensive drug program marked a much sadder event for Piper. As the first true friend Piper experienced the loss of, Nina's leaving struck Piper very powerfully. Piper also began growing closer to Pop, beginning to see her as a mentor and source of strength while trying to retain her sense of self behind bars. She also learned more about Pop's crazy life of crime on the outside. Married to a Russian gangster at 18, prison had taken everything from Pop and yet she still retained good humor and a sense of optimism.

Mr. Burtorsky was replaced by Mr. Finn, another counselor who was also racist and with less of a tendency to complete paperwork. He, like Mr. Burtorsky, showed a preference for Piper, seeing it as a waste to keep drug criminals imprisoned.

Chapter 7 ended with Piper's recounting of visits from friends and family while in Danbury. She remembered how comforting the strength of loved ones was at this time. No matter how they felt, they acted as if all was well, giving Piper a sense of normalcy in her chaos.

Chapter 8 began with Piper's interaction with Allie B, an inmate who could not wait to leave prison so that she could return to her drug-infused lifestyle. Piper worried for her but was met with her own issue when Morena, also known as crazy eyes arrived at the prison and tried to pursue a romantic affair with Piper. Morena, a big time drug dealer, complained that the girls in the prison were too silly and that she needed the love of a "real woman," namely Piper. After rejecting her advances, Morena finally began to ignore Piper, sensing her lack of interest.

Like Morena, however, Piper was beginning to feel a strong sexual desire brought on by her forced abstinence. When Larry visited, she longed for his touch but was reprimanded by the prison guards for even a second kiss.

Piper also began to observe the prison culture, seeing some stand strong while others grew too content or even comfortable in prison. The release of such people accounted for an inability to assimilate to life outside without getting swiftly reintroduced to those things that had them imprisoned to begin with.



As time progressed, Piper began to find that the “wackos” she was surrounded by were having a negative impact of her worldview. She needed an escape, and she saw one through the highly coveted radio that only certain inmates seemed to have access to. Having tried to purchase one for weeks at the commissary, Piper finally approached Lionel, who worked in the Warehouse about the item. That week Lionel mysteriously made the radio available to Piper.

Piper thought about the power-differential between prisoners and prison guards, especially when they partook in relationships. The chapter ended with Piper considering the perpetual lack of privacy or intimacy in prison life.

Chapter 9 started with the celebration on Mother’s day in Danbury. Mother-daughter relationships were very important to the women of Danbury, as 80% of all women in prison have children. Many of the inmates had “prison families” in which the women were able to have the comfort and guidance of mothers while serving as mentors to daughters and sisters.

One woman, Doris, went into labor and was brought to the hospital in handcuffs. After the delivery, she was brought back immediately, without her newborn child. Piper considered the shame and guilt associated with being a mother or daughter in prison. She watched as mothers missed pivotal events in their children’s lives. And children lost loved ones without the ability to say good-bye.

Piper considered her own mother and her strength despite life’s hardships. She hoped that she had inherited some of this bravery as well. Although she felt guilty for what she had put her mother through, she knew her mother would never show fear or disappointment in her visits, giving Piper strength.

Meanwhile, Piper’s relationship with a young inmate, Amy was strengthening. Amy was beginning to see Piper as her “prison mom.” Just as Pop had guided Piper, it was now Piper’s turn to guide Amy.

Although Piper felt a wall of privacy in place between she and her roommate, Natalie, she did know that she was serving eight years and had two children. She had also heard from Pop that Natalie was quite tough when she needed to be, which was essential to avoid being taken advantage of. Pop explained that when serving a long sentence, prison became your life and that toughness was especially important.

Piper reminisced about the rebellious youth she once was while listening to some of her old favorites of her new radio. She resolved that although that self is the one who landed her in prison, she still loved and held on to her. At work one day, shortly after the passing of her anniversary with Larry, Piper used a lift at work. The danger and excitement of this experience allowed her to reconnect with her adventurous spirit.

At the end of the chapter, Piper made a comparison of her fellow inmate Delicious to her old friend Candace. Regardless of race, class, or criminal background, the two were absolute doppelgangers to Piper. This comparison confused Delicious.



## Analysis

In Chapter 7, the Easter celebration emphasized the aspect of family in prison. The inmates banded together, especially during the holidays, to provide comfort and support for one another in trying times. This, like many other elements of prison life, thwarted Piper's preconceived notions of life behind bars.

Her first experience with personal loss in prison occurred when Piper was faced with Nina's departure to the drug program located in the high security prison. This sadness shows that Piper was beginning to think of her fellow inmates as family, accepting her sentence as a part of her life and Danbury as a temporary home. This new relationship with prison life was further emphasized through her mentorship from Pop. Piper looked up to Pop and saw her as a support system for the hardships of prison life. She respected and emulated Pop's steadfast ability to serve her time without letting the system get to her. Piper's reliance on Pop showed that she was allowing herself to grow and learn from those around her, no longer in fear but in acceptance of her surroundings.

Pop is characterized in this chapter as a symbol of resilience and steadfast optimism despite her current condition. Piper learned a lot from Pop and was in awe of her mental fortitude. Pop represents the strength of many of the prisoners and showed Piper that prisoners were far more admirable than the media gave them credit for.

Chapter 7 also emphasized the importance of appearance and its impact on the ability of the women to maintain their self-respect and dignity. For Amy, self-beautification was a coping mechanism with which they were able to prove to themselves that life still had some semblance of normalcy and to prove to loved ones that they were, in fact, alright.

The unfairness of the criminal justice system is again emphasized in this chapter as Piper told of the many visitors turned away after long hours of travel when counselors failed to turn in paperwork. Piper, living for her weekly visits from Larry and her family, thought about how horrible such an experience would be and was saddened by the lack of fairness or care employed by prison staff. This point was further emphasized when even Mr. Finn, a staff member, voiced his disapproval of Piper's sentence.

The theme of isolation is again reinforced as Piper thought of all of the prisoners without visitors or any real contact with the outside world. Prison was a very isolating place, leaving people very much alone even after departure. Recounting her visits and the strength offered by family and friends, Piper juxtaposes her experience to those who have lost these connections.

In Chapter 8, Allie B. exposed the inefficiency of the criminal justice system in her strong desire to go back to the life of crime she had led before. Prison had offered her no rehabilitation or options for self-betterment after her stay was through. Thus, without an alternative, Allie craved the only form of escape she knew, narcotics.



This concept is revisited when Piper considered the high rate of women returning to prison. While Piper's connections to the outside world allowed her to separate her experience from real life, other lacking these connections came to grow comfortable in prison. For others, conditions in prison were even better and more secure than those at home. Prisons offered no real solution or reform for those released, leaving 2/3 of all those in prison to return.

This chapter also reinforces the abuse of power by prison guards when Piper was reprimanded and publicly humiliated for sharing a second kiss with Larry. The guards led the prison by fear and threats, always asserting their power and authority over the inmates. Piper combatted this unfair power balance with mental fortitude. Thus, her response to the bullying of the guards emphasizes the theme of self-preservation throughout the memoir. Control over one's own life was very important in prison, the only way to triumph and come out stronger.

Lionel's ability to make the radio available to Piper showed the inconsistency of rules in Danbury, furthering emphasizing the importance of power and the corruption inherent inside the prison society.

The power-differential aspect of prison, as well as corruption of the criminal justice system, is furthered in the sexually abusive relationships between prisoners and prison guards. These relationships were perhaps the most unequal imaginable and an inmate's involvement in one would almost always result in their punishment when the relationship was discovered, with no consequence to the guard. Piper considered the lack of intimacy in these relationships and in the lives of all prisoners, constantly under supervision and decided there were nothing was truly private in prison.

Chapter 9 explores the important role of motherhood in Danbury. As about 80% of women in prison are mothers, this is a very important aspect of prison life. "Prison families" served as a support system for women missing their mothers or children at home. The mother-daughter bond played an enormous role, allowing the inmates to retain their sense of self through solidarity with fellow inmates.

The role of shame and guilt in the life of the inmate was examined through familial bonds. Some inmates refused to see mothers or daughters, feeling the shame they had brought upon their family. This again reinforced the isolating effects of prison life, separating some from even the most unconditional forms of love.

Piper's relationship with her own mother is also examined more thoroughly in this chapter. Piper admired the ability of her mother to remain strong under even the worst circumstances and hoped that she too had this strength. Piper did not yet realize, however that it was this strength and resilience that had gotten her so far in her sentence. This emphasizes the importance of family, a predominate theme throughout the memoir.



The strength Piper had acquired, however, was becoming apparent to the other inmates. Amy started to see Piper as a mother, showing her maturation process and acceptance into prison society.

Piper's reminiscing about her former self-contributes to the theme of self-preservation. Although her rebellious and adventurous nature had led to her illegal activities, Piper still clung to that aspect of herself and would not let go. Despite her mistakes, Piper still loved herself and would not let prison take that away from her. This sense of adventure is further portrayed in her volunteering to use the lift, verifying her ability to retain her adventurous spirit.

Piper's comparison of Delicious to her friend Candace at the end of the chapter reinforces the concept that those in prison are not so different from those outside. Regardless of background, people are still people and connections are drawn everywhere.

## **Vocabulary**

prostrations, incarceration, roistering, compound, voracious, unnerving, vicarious, culling, simpatico, wry, formidable, dejected, sophomoric, girth, witticisms



# Chapters 10-12

## Summary

Chapter 10 begins with Piper recounting all she had learned so far in prison and the people she has learned from. Although Piper's friends were shocked at her adjustments, Piper resolved that the key to surviving prison was to conform, but not so far that you are unable to function afterwards.

It then shifted to Natalie's educational accomplishment. After years of studying, Natalie was finally able to pass the GED test. Mrs. Jones, an "OG" or original gangster inmate serving a long sentence, was working on an educational achievement of her own. She was enrolled in a college business class and came to Piper to ask for help. She soon learned that Mrs. Jones wanted someone to help her cheat, not tutor her. Against her better judgment, Piper agreed to complete Mrs. Jones' assignment because this was better than allowing her to fail.

The focus was then shifted to the arrival of three new inmates, nonviolent political protestors who were assigned to teach in the GED program. Stumpy, the guard in charge of the program openly shared that he did not care about the education of the inmates so long as he was paid. One day, Stumpy had an argument with Alice, one of the pacifist teachers in the program. To the outrage and protests of all of the inmates, he had her put in SHU. It was the first time Piper saw a prison guard scared.

Piper attended a graduation ceremony as a guest of Mrs. Jones to celebrate the achievement of the GED and collegiate students. During the ceremony, the valedictorian, Bobbie, delivered a powerful and defiant speech, noting that this was a day for the graduates to celebrate themselves in spite of their current situation.

In Chapter 11, Piper started to become more accustomed to life in prison and found that time was moving faster. During work in electric, Piper and the other inmates would share the bathroom with the carpentry workers. Piper found herself escaping to this bathroom often, as it had the only lockable door in the camp. One day, Mr. Thomas, the head of carpentry took her to work for his department and brought her to a huge lake where the inmates painted picnic tables. Already resenting DeSimon, she made it her mission to be switched to carpentry.

When a space opened up in the carpentry department, Piper asked Mr. King, the boss of this department, to switch. He agreed but needed DeSimon to sign a cop-out form. DeSimon refused out of spite. Time went on and DeSimon grew more intolerable until one day he had Piper engage in a humiliating act in which she was forced to apply copious amounts of lube to cables while DeSimon compared them to a horse cock. Piper reported this incident to DeSimon's boss and was switched to carpentry within a few weeks.



The chapter ends with the realization that one of Piper's coworkers, Pom-Pom, had a mother who was employed in the same position in Danbury. The prisoners then chatted about their appreciation of Akon's "Locked Up" as an anthem for life in prison.

Chapter 12 begins with Piper conversing with Allie B. about why she would want to return to a life of drugs after being clean for so long. She could tell Allie was better educated than most and had a chance others did not. However, she realized the criminal justice system did nothing to rehabilitate drug addicts, merely replacing illegal drugs with legal ones they would lose access to after release.

Vanessa, a transgender woman, arrived during Chapter 12, and despite skepticism she proved to be a very kind and conscientious inmate. Piper went on to explain the importance of pedicures in prison society. The prison had two pedicurists, Rose and Carlotta, and every prisoner visited one with undying loyalty.

Piper also faced irritation over the course of this chapter over the system and the poor choices of those around her, making her feel much too engrossed in prison life. This irrational fact, caused in part by the impending Children's Day, left Piper wondering how people could continue to remain in prison despite its influence on loved ones. When Children's Day did arrive, Piper was overcome by so much happiness in such a sad place. When time came for the kids to leave, Piper laid in bed and wept.

Later, Piper received an appointment for the gynecologist. Although others had advised her against the appointment, she refused to be deprived of her medical health. The appointment was absolutely miserable and left her feeling powerless and alone.

The chapter ended with Piper observing herself naked for the first time since she arrived. She looked different, but definitely not broken.

## Analysis

The opening of Chapter 10 signifies that despite Piper's fears upon entering, she had actually assimilated quite well to life in prison. Piper's perception of prison was extremely different from the reality of the situation. The unexpected and deeply impactful bonds she made kept her strong and resilient throughout her experience.

The chapter continues with a focus on learning and personal and educational growth. Piper's earning to cope and triumph in prison, Natalie's GED results, and Mrs. Jones' graduation all serve to show that the inmates had triumphed in the face of adversity and succeeded in spite of prison's injustice.

The incident between Stumpy and Alice added to the theme of corruption. Even the imprisonment of Alice was corrupt in itself, as Alice was a pacifist and was arrested during a nonviolent protest. When she defended herself in an argument with Stumpy, a guard who accepted payment for a program he does not take care of. He then had her sent to SHU in an effort to exert his power over her. Even though the prisoners rioted enough to scare the guards, their collective effort was still not enough to change



anything, further emphasizing the power differential. Thus, the corruption of the system won again.

The graduation ceremony at the end of the chapter is a very powerful scene in the memoir. Bobbie's confident and defiant speech dared to defy the system she was a part of. Although aware of the lack of opportunity for ex-convicts and the corruption with which she was surrounded, Bobbie vowed to prevail. The message was important to all those at the ceremony not only the graduates. Despite their efforts to beat the inmates down, the criminal justice system could not stop their achievement. This adds to the theme of self-preservation.

The opening of Chapter 11 with Piper's trip to the lake signifies Piper's newfound appreciation of the beauty of the ordinary. Although the lake was not unlike any other lake she had grown up near, her long-term prohibition from natural beauty left Piper wanting more. The lake signified freedom and although she knew she could not have this freedom, she wanted to remain as close to it as possible.

The instance of sexual abuse from DeSimon was yet another example of abuse of inmates and corruption of the criminal justice system in the memoir. This corruption was further emphasized through the realization that Pom Pom's mother had also been in Danbury and worked in the same department. The criminal justice system did not set inmates up for success but rather future generations of trouble. This point is finally exemplified in the lyrics of a popular song the prisoners listen to, stating the inability of inmates to move on and do better with their lives, shackled by the criminal justice system.

This point is reinforced in the beginning of Chapter 12, when Piper's conversation with Allie B. causes her to contemplate the lack of true help available to those with drug problems. Drug addictions were not cured, but rather replaced with legal drugs, showing that authorities did not care about what was right, only what was lawful. Prisons were, in fact, a vengeful and therefore corrupt system aimed not at rehabilitation but punishment. Thus, prisoners were released angry or defeated but certainly not better than they came in.

Vanessa serves as another example of perception vs. reality. Everyone expected Vanessa to be the constant center of attention but found that she was indeed more considerate and reserved than expected.

Pedicures were another way of the women to engage in self-preservation. The ability to have beautiful toes despite the ugliness of their lives in Danbury was a way for the women to embrace their femininity and avoid letting the system get to them. Their loyalty to one pedicurist over another was an example of the social constructs of prison society mirroring that of the outside world.

The irritation Piper felt at the seeming inability of those around her to escape the criminal justice system despite its effects on loved ones was caused by her increased connection to her fellow inmates. Although the solidarity in prison was comforting and



empowering, it could also lead some to take on the burden of others. This sincere anger and confusion for the sake of other was yet another sign of Piper's maturation. This was also seen in Piper's weeping after Children's Day.

Martha Stewart's prison sentence was included as an example of privilege and its corruption of the criminal justice system. This corruption was reassured in Piper's experience at the gynecologist. The appointment was held in a completely unethical manner. Piper was left in pain and embarrassed, feeling as if the system had left her more broken.

Standing naked with herself was Piper's first and only intimate experience in prison. It finally allowed her to see how far she had come in her resilience.

## Vocabulary

galvanizing, regimented, insidious, paradox, institutionalized, retribution, ballistic, defiance, continuity, collegians, oblivion, restorative, retribution, discretion, demurely, histrionics, enigmatic, disinclined, admonished, penitence, varnished



# Chapter 13-15

## Summary

Chapter 13 begins with the passing of a smoking ban in Danbury, a new measure that disturbed many of the inmates. Piper considered the irony of the fact that smoking killed 435,000 people a year compared to the 17,000 killed by the illegal drugs many of her peers were imprisoned for.

The population in Danbury was dwindling as they had stopped accepting new inmates in an effort to avoid taking in Martha Stewart.

In September, Danbury held its annual prison Job Fair, which merely gave “lip service” to the assertion that prisoners would have any hope of returning to a smooth and meaningful lifestyle upon exoneration. Although Piper was lucky enough to have a job waiting for her after her sentence, she knew very few others could say the same. Although the outside presenters at the job fair met the inmates with much more respect than any others thus far, the topics covered made the lack of career training available in prison extremely apparent.

Meanwhile, the prison continued to receive press in light of the Martha Stewart case. One day, the women came upon a published interview with Levy, a former inmate. In the interview, Levy completely exaggerated the conditions of the prison, comparing her stay to a vacation. The other inmates were infuriated, as their hardship was misrepresented so thoroughly.

Later in the chapter, it was Vanessa’s time to leave the prison. At her going away party, Vanessa delivered a very moving speech which she ended with, “I had to come here to become a real woman.”

The following Saturday, the ladies had a movie night, where they watched, *Walking Tall*, starring *The Rock*, who they all loved. The ladies also cooked using food stolen from the kitchen. The stealing of food was one of the infractions prisoners could more or less get away with due to the scarcity of space in SHU.

The day before her birthday, Piper was interrupted on her evening run by Amy calling her inside. After making her way inside, Piper was shocked to find all of her friends joined in celebration of her birthday. Piper was truly touched by all of the kind letters and gifts she received from the friends she had made in Danbury.

Chapter 14 opened with the impending departure of Yoga Janet. As Yoga Janet was one of Piper’s closest friends, Piper found herself ashamed to admit she was sad about Janet’s departure. Although she wanted the best for her friend, Piper was conflicted with the impending loss of one of her biggest sources of support and camaraderie. While using the yoga tapes Janet left behind, Piper realized she had seen the yoga instructor





in the hotel in which she stayed when she was originally sentenced. She took this as a sign and continued to pursue yoga.

One of the CO's, Officer Scott became romantically involved with Cormorant, an inmate. Although Finn rarely enforced rules, he took special interest in attempting to thwart their affair. Eventually, Comorant was placed in SHU for her policy violations and Officer Scoot, who received no punishment, resigned in protest. Pop was not surprised by this unfair policy and said that she had seen worse happen.

Many of the prisoners asked Piper for help writing letters given her level of education. Pennsatucky, seeking an earlier release date, decided to ask Piper for a letter to her judge. Piper, with very little advice from Pennsatucky, crafted a letter about her remorse, her cooperation, and her desire to become better for the sake of her daughter. Receiving the letter, Pennsatucky cried and asked Piper how she knew.

When Larry called, he mentioned his parents were going to come visit. Piper was very nervous for the visit because she had never spent time with them without Larry present and did not want prison to be her first opportunity to do so. Larry reassured her it would be okay. This conversation caused Piper to think about her own mother, for whom she was worried. Pop reassured her that if her mother was anything like Piper, she would be okay.

With a new influx of prisoners after Martha Stewart's arrival in West Virginia, the prison was out of control and stricter rules were being enforced to try to combat the chaos. Two inmates, Bianca and Lump-Lump, were sent to SHU for attempting to smuggle in contraband. Still, Piper was able to continue giving Pop her nightly foot massages as Pop was among those granted special privileges.

Although the prison was full of New York Yankees fan, Piper continued to root for the Boston Red Sox during the playoffs. When the Red Sox did successfully defeat the Yankees and continued to the World Series. Piper watched each game intently, not expecting a win despite their excellent performance. When they finally did win, Piper broke out in tears, remembering that she had once said she would do hard time for a Red Sox victory. At the time, both things had seemed so distant and unrealistic. She cried at the irony of it all.

Chapter 14 begins with one of the CO's, a former military personnel, experiencing a mental break. He ripped through Dorm A, scaring the residents. When he was taken away, the inmates received their first ever apology from the FCI.

Piper, who had been feeling much better about her stay in prison, received some very upsetting news. Her grandmother was not doing well and she would most likely not receive furlough, which was reserved for the death of an immediate relative. This left Piper feeling defeated, kept from her loved one at a time when it mattered most. She resolved to keep to herself to avoid admitting she had been finally defeated.

Piper thought of the other inmates she had seen experience the loss of loved ones. She recalled one instance in which a young woman lost her mother and was prohibited from



attending the funeral when her family arrived in a car they had not registered in their paperwork. Pop begged Piper not to let the BOP succeed in making her bitter.

One of the inmates, Gisela, was set to be released. Piper had a conversation with Gisela regarding her impending release. Although Gisela was frightened about her release, she held faith in God that everything would work out. Hearing Gisela speak so passionately about God, Piper realized the true value of religion to the inmates. She then understood why so many of her inmates held so tightly to their religious beliefs.

Although Piper felt that she had been able to exert some power over her own life thus far, she found that her inability to see her grandmother had stripped it all away. Despite her strength over the past ten months, she now felt completely powerless, just as the system wanted her to.

Unexpectedly, Little Janet was granted immediate release, the first Piper had seen during her stay. The event was truly miraculous and all of the inmates were overjoyed for her. When Larry visited, Piper shared the good news with him while he tried to share the joy of his house hunting experiences with her. Although the two were clearly excited, the cause of this excitement seemed foreign to the other, creating a lapse in communication.

Upon her return from the visit, Piper was touched inappropriately by a guard. She recalled an instance in which an inmate was sentenced the SHU for reporting sexual assault by a guard.

When Piper ran on the track listening to her favorite radio show, she felt as if she was able to preserve part of her self. One inmate, LaRue, was beginning to infuriate Piper by walking slowly on the track as Piper was running, interfering with her routine. One day, Piper lashed out at LaRue, smacking her headset out of her hand. She immediately realized the error of her action and apologized, resolving to control her anger.

Piper and a few of her bunkmates got in trouble for a minor offense. Knowing that she would not be sent to SHU but there was nothing she could do to avoid punishment, Piper refused to argue with the CO, which seemed to disappoint him. She was assigned extra work for the Thanksgiving holiday.

Piper recalled that in her youth, she had thought that stoicism was the root of strength. She thought that she was in full control of her life and her happiness. In her experiences in Danbury, this belief had proven false. Although stoicism did help her maintain some control over her life, it was the support and strength of others that got her through the most difficult times. She felt these other women had made her better. When her grandmother died, she hoped she could forgive Piper's absence. A year later, Piper received a letter from Rosemarie with two photos of her grandmother she had left behind.



## Analysis

Chapter 13 makes very apparent the hypocrisy of the government policies. The chapter begins with the BOP's ban on cigarettes. Although cigarettes are one of the number one killers in the United States, the ban was imposed for financial incentives rather than for the health and safety of the prisoners. The legality of cigarettes over illegal drugs, given the comparison, of their death tolls, points to even more hypocrisy in lawmaking systems.

The Job Fair provides further irony, as the speakers suggest using resources such as the Internet that the inmates have no access to. Further, the issue of the possibility of hire with a criminal background is simply brushed over, painting an unrealistic picture of the possibility for a hopeful future.

Although many of the women were understandably distraught over Levy's description of Danbury, Piper saw a defense mechanism in her lies. Although Levy had complained tirelessly throughout her stay, she felt the need to publicly deny the terrible conditions she endured. She was unable to face the public shame and humiliation of admitting what she had gone through in prison and thus thought it best to lie in an attempt to avoid coming to terms with reality.

The closing of Vanessa's speech revealed the personal journey she went through during her stay at Danbury. In saying that she had to come to Danbury after thanking the women who had helped her along the way, she drew attention to the power of prison relationships. The solidarity found in the shared experiences of the inmates had a deep impact on Vanessa's life, just as it did on Piper's. This solidarity was reinforced in the following passage when Piper discussing the unifying effects of The Rock. Danbury itself was personified in this actor, who brought together women of every race and social standing in a mutual appreciation.

The ending of Chapter 13 with Piper's birthday party shows the significance of the friendships that she had made during her time in prison. It also caused Piper to realize that she was truly appreciated in the community she had been accepted into.

At the beginning of Chapter 14, Piper's sadness at the loss of Yoga Janet reinforces the magnitude of the relationships formed in Danbury. Her seeing the familiar yoga instructor as a sign to continue yoga shows that she continued to use yoga as a comforting exercise, keeping the balance and structure in her life despite the loss of a close friend.

The discrepancy in punishment of Officer Scott and Cormorant for the same violation was yet another example of corruption of the criminal justice system. Inmates truly did not have any rights in prison and this served to exemplify that fact.

Piper's letter for Pennsatucky demonstrates the close and meaningful bonds between the inmates. Although Pennsatucky had never explicitly told Piper of her hopes and



dreams for her daughter, Piper's close bond allowed her to see who Pennsatucky truly was as a person and the potential she could have outside prison.

Pop's reassurance about Piper's mother showed the strength Piper had, even if she did not yet realize it. Piper had previously wished she had inherited her mother's strength and this passage proved that she had. Both women were strong and brave, even in the face of huge adversity.

Pop's ability to circumvent the rules, even with the installment of stricter policies emphasized the power differential in prison and the inconsistency of policy.

Piper's emotional reaction to the Red Sox victory was brought on by her realizing that everything had changed. A Red Sox victory once seemed as unrealistic as a prison sentence. Now, both of these things were a reality. The events brought her back to her perfect suburban life, before her criminal deviance and the decisions that would shape her life forever. She considered the unpredictability of life and how everything could change in an instant. The victory was thus compared to Piper's prison sentence as she was reminded of the unpredictability of life.

In Chapter 14, Piper's defeated feeling throughout her grandmother's illness shows that part of her self had been defeated by the lack of control the criminal justice system allowed her. Although she felt as things could not possibly be worse, she went to great lengths to avoid making this known to the BOP. This showed that even in her most desperate state, Piper refused to give up complete control of her life. The strength that Piper had acquired in her unwillingness to let the system break her was what would get her through this situation.

Piper's situation, as well as the situations of the other inmates that were not granted furlough, showed that in the prison system, paperwork was valued far more than people. The inmates were not treated as humans with emotions, but rather numbers in the prison system. This reinforced the BOP's desire to break those in prison rather than reform them.

Piper's conversation with Gisela allowed her to see the true value of faith to inmates. Faith gave them a way to see beyond themselves and their circumstance. It allowed them to be bigger than their current situation. The faith of these prisoners gave them hope for a better future and this hope radiated onto Piper in her interactions. Thus, this conversation allowed the whole experience to come full circle, with Piper realizing the passionate faith of her fellow inmates had had a positive impact on her life as well.

Piper's powerlessness when facing the impending loss of her grandmother shows that stoicism could not solve all of her issues. Its help in combatting the lack of power available could only go so far. This reinforced one the biggest lessons Piper had learned in prison, that she could not truly control her own life. Life was complicated and unpredictable and this was something she had learned to come to terms with in prison.

The inability of Larry and Piper to understand one another's excitement draws on the barriers caused by prison. When integrating into prison life, people are left with their



own sense of reality, making return to their normal life very difficult. This concept is captured in this exchange.

Piper's lashing out at LaRue results from LaRue's breaking of Piper's routine. This emphasizes the obsession with routine experienced by inmates. As routines were the only thing inmates could control, they grew to rely on them totally for order and balance. Piper's realization of her inappropriate anger made her realize that the prison lifestyle was getting to her. In an effort to preserve her control, Piper had lost control and harmed someone, breaking the unspoken bond of solidarity among prisoners.

Piper's interaction with the CO when she was in trouble showed that she would not let the system break her. Although the CO wanted her to be afraid, she refused, winning a small victory over the system.

Piper's realization that the relationships she developed in Danbury were in fact much more important than her own stoicism in allowing her to cope was yet another example of her personal growth. She resolved that although she had failed in being a law abiding "good girl," she had succeeded in becoming a good person with the help of the women in Danbury. This also served as an example of the differences between the stereotypical criminal and the actual women in Danbury. Although these women had made mistakes, they were all good people, aiding one another in self-betterment.

## Vocabulary

elusive, pennant, jinxing, roughneck, vile, wretched, inexplicably, surreally, shuddering, industriously, mild-mannered, rattled, unprecedented, rudimentary, misadventures, rectitude, brusquely, furlough, walloped, unscathed, stoicism, transgressions, staunchness, pettiness, contrarians, tempestuous, perfunctory, impropriety, invective, stigmata, scorn, inconsolable



# Chapters 16-18

## Summary

Chapter 16 begins with Natalie and Pop preparing to leave for the halfway house. Natalie was nervous about the change but Piper comforted her. Piper was nervous as well because she had just received word she might be called to Chicago to testify against Jonathon Bibby, a man involved in the same drug operation but whom she did not know personally.

After Natalie's departure, Piper moved in with Faith, who had also been arrested on drug charges and was constantly worrying about her daughter. One day, she received a letter from Pom-Pom, whose life outside prison was worse than life inside. She lived in a neighborhood with daily gunfire, where she slept on the floor with little access to food. As strange as it seemed, Piper wished Pom-Pom was back in prison. Similarly, Amy spoke to Piper about her fears of leaving Danbury. She had no idea if she had a home to return to and could not get in contact with her family. The injustice angered Piper.

Nearing the end of her sentence, Piper was required to attend reentry classes, which she found to offer very unrelatable and condescending advice about life after prison, with one woman comparing the struggle of reentry to dieting to fit into a holiday dress.

Piper continued to get many visits from her loved ones, with the main topic of conversation being her return home. She did not have the heart to bring up the possibility of her trial in Chicago delaying the event.

In the camp, Mr. Richards tortured the inmates by continually screaming through the speakers that were placed just feet from sleeping inmates. Shortly before Christmas, Larry told Piper she was being called to testify in the Jonathon Bibby case. Piper put aside her nervousness and decided to partake in the Camp's Christmas celebration, watching Elf with her Bunkie, Faith. The camp was temporarily transformed into a winter wonderland with the hard work of the inmates and joy was found in the desolate place.

Shortly after, an article Larry had been working on for some time appeared in the New York Times. This article was about his loved for and decision to marry Piper. The article brought joy to Piper in one of her darkest times yet and she saw it as the greatest gift she could receive.

New Year's seemed to be a very emotional time in Danbury as it was a very concrete way for the prisoners to mark the time spent away from the outside world. Shortly after, on January 3, Piper was called to pack out. She would be boarding Con Air to attend the trial in Chicago. Many of her fellow inmates gave her advice and tricks that would be useful to navigate the harsh condition associated with BOP transportation. Piper gave Larry a final phone call, letting him know she may not be able to call for quite some time. Two days later, she was shipped out.



Chapter 17 opened with Piper and some of the other inmates preparing for departure on Con Air. Ms. Welch, a food service officer with whom Piper was very familiar, was assisting in the preparation. The inmates were shackled by their hands and feet to walk across the tarmac. Among the inmates were Piper's friend Jae and her cousin Slice.

When they got on board, there was a great variety of prisoners, including many crude men yelling derogatory things at the women. Con Air was not at all direct, taking many stops along the way to pick up all kinds of criminals. When the plane landed in Oklahoma City, the women were unloaded and shown to their temporary quarters.

Piper was again overwhelmed by the difference in surrounding, which was much worse than Danbury. Most of the food was inedible, there was absolutely nothing to do to pass time, and the pay phones could not connect to her loved ones. Piper soon found that many of the rituals she had learned in Danbury did not apply here. LaKeesha, her new Bunkie, was heading to Danbury and had tons of questions.

At lunch, Piper saw Nora and became instantly enraged, assuming a separation order had been placed. She conferred with Jae, who agreed to back have her back if she needed to fight Nora. Although she wanted to, Piper could not bring herself to fight Nora as he was so close to her release and did not want to delay it in any way.

After Jae and Slice were shipped out, the lack of routine started to become more and more intolerable for Piper. She continued to give LaKesha advice for Danbury, feeling like a seasoned inmate.

After a while, she too was shipped out on a flight in which she was seated next to Nora. She refused to look at her for the duration of the trip.

When the plane arrived in Chicago, the inmates were brought to a federal prison, which reminded Piper immediately of a psych ward. Fittingly, many of the inmates were under psychiatric watch or on medication to keep from harming themselves or others.

Nora started trying to speak with Piper. Piper initially resisted. However, after realizing her codefendants were all she had, she resolved to forgive Nora and come to befriend her and her sister.

The federal prison in Chicago proved to have even less order and worse conditions than Oklahoma City. For the first time in her journey, Piper felt as if her conditions were truly intolerable.

After a few days, Piper decided to come right out and ask Nora what had happened since their break up. Nora told Piper that she had tried to quit drug trafficking but was met with threats from Alaji. Someone, most likely Jack, had turned in both Nora and Piper, among others. Nora claimed that she tried to keep Piper out of it, but to no avail. Although Piper was skeptical, she could not help but feel badly for Nora.

In Chapter 17, Piper explained the drudgery of life in Chicago MCC. Although males were allowed to have jobs, females were not. The lack of emotional support in Chicago



also caused Piper to realize just how right she had been about her preference of community over stoicism. She recounted the ability of the women in Danbury to get her to rethink her lone-wolf lifestyle in exchange for a healthier, more complete life of community.

Desperate to leave Chicago MCC, Piper was perplexed by her simultaneous hatred for and urge to forgive Nora. She knew that forgiveness was the only way to move forward but occasionally found she needed to lash out at her.

Since Chicago MCC was a predominately transient facility, many of the inmates came to Piper for legal advice as she had come from a “real jail.” When Piper was called to speak with her lawyer, an officer again seemed perplexed as to why she was in prison.

Searching for the connection she missed in Danbury, Piper reached out to her ex-convict pen pal Joe Loya for support. His shared experience offered comfort to her.

As time progressed, Piper and the Jansen sisters kept the motto, “It can always get worse,” to help them navigate their new lives in Chicago. When Piper got word that Larry was visiting, she was overjoyed. However, she was careful not to brag, as jealousy could be dangerous in prison.

After the visit, the inmates were given the option of sign up for recreation time on the roof of the prison. As this was their first chance to go outside, most of the inmates signed up. Upon arriving on the roof, Piper and Nora saw the Congress Hotel: the exact location where Piper’s criminal involvement had began.

At the trial, Piper’s question focused mainly on Nora, as she had never even seen Bibby until the trial. In the end, he was found guilty. Piper wanted nothing more than to go back to Danbury and then home.

As Piper’s release date approached, it become clear she would not be returning to Danbury. She started to feel stressed as no one acknowledged her upcoming release date, making her feel as if it might be delayed yet again.

Waiting for her release, Piper contemplated her stay in Danbury. Although many had advised her to avoid personal relationships in prison, Piper had learned that it was through the support of others that she was able to find the strength to carry on.

She also considered the criminal justice system as a whole. Piper considered the lack of pride jailers took in their work. She wondered why people had to be locked up when not even jailers seemed to acknowledge their existence.

Finally, on her expected release date, Piper was told to pack out and prepared to exit Chicago MCC. She saw Larry and ran to him, feeling as if nothing could stop her now.





## Analysis

In Chapter 16, Natalie's position reinforced the hardship of motherhood in prison. Pom-Pom's situation outside of prison and Amy's fear of a similar situation showed the bleak reality of life for most ex-convicts. Without any transferrable skills, they were dropped right back into the lives that had led them to crime in the first place. The lives of criminals were a lot more complicated than the BOP assumed and the current system did nothing to increase their chances of survival on the outside.

The reentry classes were yet another example of a futile BOP program designed to make it seem as if inmates were being properly prepared for life after prison. The condescending nature of the classes and their ineffective advice showed the BOP did not really have a vested interest in their efficacy or the turn out of the inmates upon release.

Piper's choosing not to bring up the trial during visits showed personal growth as she put the feelings of her loved ones above her own. Although the situation was stressing her, she chose to keep in to herself for the good of the people she loved.

The Christmas festivities in Danbury shows the strength of the community present there. Although the prisoners could not be with families for the holidays, they created their own sense of family and went on despite the situation. This again proved the resolute nature of the inmates and their unwillingness to let their situation break them. This sense of joy despite sadness was again reinforced in Larry's New York times article. In this way, the strength and resilience of the inmates is emphasized in their keen ability to find the good in the bad.

In Chapter 17, the theme of rituals and order are emphasized in Piper's confusion with the lack of rules and order in Oklahoma City. All of her coping mechanisms seemed to be invalid in her new surroundings, leaving her distraught.

When Piper saw Nora, her ability to control her urge to fight showed her maturation and ability to reason with herself. She was no longer willing to make foolish decisions for temporary pleasure. She had to get out of prison, both for her good and the good of her loved ones.

The author used irony when describing the flight back to Chicago. Piper was seated next to Nora and heading back to the place where she had originally committed her crime. Returning there with the woman who had gotten her into the whole mess seemed to make sense in an ironic way.

Piper's decision to forgive Nora despite all she had done shows the true maturation process she had undergone. In explaining her decision to let go of her anger and accept the role she had played in her own demise, Piper shows an emotional maturity she had developed along her long journey through the prison system. This decision plays a large role in the final characterization of Piper as an emotionally mature and selfless person. This maturation was further emphasized when Piper asked Nora directly about how she



had been found out, rather than relying on assumption. Her ability to sympathize with Nora, even after all the negativity she brought into Piper's life, proved that she had completed a journey of maturation during her time in prison.

Piper's self-reflection in Chapter 17 adds even more to her maturation process. Piper considers her former stoicism and how the women in Danbury had allowed her to realize that it was not just the crime she committed but her outlook on life, that was wrong. The wisdom she gathered from these people had led her to this point of self-actualization and contentment with her character. Her forgiveness of Nora, despite her anger towards her is an example of the genuine nature of her maturation.

Again, an officer acted shocked that Piper was in prison, drawing on the central theme of perception vs. reality throughout the memoir. Since Piper did not fit the stereotype, it was difficult for people to accept that she was a criminal.

The placement of the Congress Hotel in the final chapter of the book allowed the plot to come full circle. Seeing the place where she had started her criminal activity, Piper knew that it was almost behind her. In seeing this place, she was reminded of how far she had come.

Piper's recollection on the people she had learned from throughout her stay in Danbury served as a conclusion to her emotional growth and maturation process. Piper had learned to depend on and appreciate others, a lesson that would follow her throughout life. Her closing consideration of the injustice of the criminal justice system emphasized the importance of this argument throughout the memoir and left the reader to question their faith in this corrupt system.

The freedom she felt upon release served as a direct opposition to the fear she felt at the opening of the book entering into criminal involvement. She was finally able to put the past behind her and take back control of her life.

## Vocabulary

infantilizing, insulation, farcical, perplexed, insomniacs, debilitating, invective, commandeered, boasted, humanoid, dingy, awestruck, particleboard, bizarrely, chipper, misadventure, stewing, shackled, boudoir, disgruntled, prone, tarmac, jackbooted, idling, designation, marshal, indeterminate, riffed, agitation, acute, phalanx, decrepit, constricting, stymied, clamdiggers, cacophony, disheveled, alchemy, vocational, egotistical, couriers, antagonism, rapport, transgressive, muster, perjure, infernal, squandering, burlier, mercurial



# Important People

## Piper Kerman

Piper is the author, narrator, and protagonist of the memoir. She became briefly involved in money laundering for a drug trafficking operation while dating a woman name Nora who was living an extravagant lifestyle through the help of drug money. Piper was at first enraptured by Nora's lifestyle, but soon became disenchanted after glimpsing the uglier truth behind the industry. Although she realized quickly that she wanted to escape the world of drugs and tried to put the past behind her, Piper was eventually found out and sentenced to fifteen months in Danbury prison, the primary setting of the memoir.

From the beginning of the memoir, Piper is very honest and open in her narration. By beginning the memoir by revealing her criminal background to the reader, Piper established a sense of trust from the start. In this way, the reader is able to believe and sympathize with Piper's account of Danbury and to connect with her and the other individuals in a meaningful way.

Throughout the memoir, Piper experienced a maturation process. Upon entering into criminal activity, Piper was only concerned with her own life and did not consider the consequences her actions could have on others. She also lacked life experience and was very naïve to the potential consequences of dangerous activity. Throughout her sentence, Piper grew into a person much more concerned with others than with herself. Throughout her interactions with the women in Danbury, Piper developed a deeper understanding of the importance of caring for others.

Another very important element of Piper was her transition from heavy reliance on stoicism to a reliance on others. As Piper matured, she challenged her long held views on the value of stoicism and realized that pure self reliance was what had led to her misguided actions in the first place. The ability to rely on others and act as a reliable person changed Piper for the better, allowing her to understand the error of her ways and develop as an individual.

Piper was also characterized by a spirit of adventure. She first entered into the drug business because the people involved seemed fun and adventurous. Even after this sense for adventurous landed her in prison, Piper still loved the adventurous person she once was. Throughout her development, Piper learned to preserve her sense of self in a responsible way. She was no longer reckless, but still adventurous and ready for new experiences.

Throughout the course of the memoir, Piper remained resilient. As she represented the experiences she had in the prison system, she emphasized the importance of self-preservation in a system that tries to strip people of their identities. In her ability to preserve her sense of self, even in the face of adversity, Piper proved to be a strong person. In recounting her experiences in this memoir, Piper was able to shed light on



the reality of life in women's prison and enlighten readers on the true identities of those behind bars.

## Nora Jansen

Nora was a love interest of the author, Piper. Nora was involved in a drug trafficking and money laundering operation. The operation afforded her a luxurious lifestyle, but at the eventual cost of her freedom. Being young and naïve, Piper trusted Nora and travelled with her on drug-related business trips. Nora finally coaxed Piper into involvement in money laundering.

Nora is characterized as a woman of betrayal and mystery. She symbolizes both adventure and decadence. Piper's experiences with Nora allow her to lose her sense of innocence and realize the consequences sometimes tied to a glamorous lifestyle. Nora's lifestyle emphasized the theme of perception vs. reality. Although she seemed to be living a life of glamour and freedom in her travels, she was actually caught in a web of drugs from which she could not escape.

In the beginning of the memoir, Nora and Piper were similar in their sense of self-reliance and strong desire for adventure. Piper's experiences with Nora were her first insight into the potential dangers of total self-reliance. In this way, Nora was responsible for Piper's loss of innocence both in her exposure to the drug business and the potential negatives of stoicism. Nora served to magnify the potential consequences Piper could have faced had she not matured and learned from her mistakes. Thus, their eventual reunion and Piper's inability to connect with Nora further emphasized the personal growth Piper had experienced.

Nora also served to symbolize the selflessness Piper had gained throughout her time in Danbury. After years of hating Nora, Piper finally came to forgive and even feel sorry for her. Her ability to forgive a woman who had so altered her life showed that Piper had experienced genuine personal growth over the course of her stay in prison.

## Larry Smith

Larry was Piper's long-term boyfriend. He provided support and guidance for Piper in her time of need. Throughout Piper's stay in Danbury, Larry visited every weekend and was always available for emotional support. Larry symbolized the importance of reliance on others throughout the memoir. Larry's unconditional love and support had a profound effect on Piper and allowed her to reshape her values and rely on others.

Larry's juxtaposition to Nora was a very important part of his characterization. After trying to escape her life of crime, Piper met Larry and began to fall for him. Having previously believed herself to be a lesbian, Piper was at first confused by her attraction to him. In addition to his gender, Larry differed from Nora in just about every way. He had a stable and successful career, was trustworthy, and loved Piper unconditionally. In



stark opposition to her former lover, Larry served to symbolize the new life Piper hoped to lead after her brief criminal activity.

Piper's relationship with Larry allowed her to grow and develop. His support in spite of her mistakes allowed Piper to see the value of reliance on others and encouraged her to show support to her fellow inmates. Her reliance on Larry showed Piper how lucky he was to have love and support outside of prison and encouraged her to show this support to those without it.

## Pop

Pop was about fifty years old and married to a Russian gangster. She was in charge of the kitchen and took great pride in her job. After insulting the food, Piper was met with anger from Pop. This was her first encounter with inmates taking pride in and identifying with the jobs they were assigned. This, like many other efforts taken in Danbury, was an act of self-preservation essential for enduring a sentence. Pop was very well respected by the prison guards and was allowed to choose her own roommate and live in the dorm of her choosing.

Throughout her stay, Pop came to serve as a maternal figure to Piper. She symbolized optimism and resilience against the corrupt system. Pop offered Piper a constant reminder of the importance of self-preservation in prison. Through her strength and determination, Piper and the other inmates were inspired to be strong and stay true to themselves despite their situation.

## Yoga Janet

Yoga Janet was a 50-year-old inmate serving a two year sentence for a marijuana charge. She was very intellectual with a strong regard for the environment and world peace. She, like Piper, came from a middle class background and was arrested for drug charges. With her peaceful mindset and high level of education, Yoga Janet served to further the theme of perception vs. reality in the prison system.

Yoga Janet was also a very close friend of Piper throughout her sentence. She offered companionship and advice for adapting to life in Danbury. When she was released, Piper was ashamed of the sadness she felt at the loss of such a close friend.

## Little Janet

Little Janet was a 20-year-old college girl who had been arrested on vacation for acting as a drug mule. She spent a year in Caribbean prison and was then transported to the U.S. to serve a sixty month sentence.



Like many of the other inmates, Little Janet call into question the justice behind the U.S. drug laws. Like Piper, Little Janet had made a mistake and was now sentenced to spent a majority of her thirties behind bars.

Little Janet was also the only inmate in the memoir to be granted immediate release from Danbury. Immediate release, or an immediate termination of one's sentence was an extremely rare occurrence. This almost miraculous event showed the confusion and inconsistency of the criminal justice system.

## **Alaji**

Alaji was Nora's contractor in the drug trade. Alaji was the kingpin in the whole drug business and his arrest led to Piper's sentence being delayed for years as she was to testify against him at his eventual court date.

After years of trying to bring Alaji to the U.S. for a trial, prosecutors were unable to arrest him due to sanctuary laws. Thus, Alaji was free to continue in his life of crime while most of the more minor members of his operation were sentenced to years in prison. This situation emphasized the unfairness of the criminal justice system.

## **Mr. Burtorsky**

Mr. Burtorsky was Piper's first counselor at Danbury. When Piper first encountered Mr. Burtorsky, she could not help but see him as a source of protection against the harsh realities of life in prison. As the story progressed, however, Mr. Burtorsky was characterized as a racist and Piper soon came to learn that he was only kind to her due to her race and social class.

In his blatant racism, Mr Burtorsky contributed to the central theme of corruption of the criminal justice system. In his treatment of the inmates, he showed special preference and regard for middle class white women, reserving jobs and better room assignments for only them. By separating the bunks mainly by race, Mr. Burtorsky contributed to the systematic racism at work in Danbury.

## **Mrs. Kerman (Piper's Mother)**

Throughout the memoir, Piper's mother is symbolic of Piper's source of strength throughout her sentence. Piper often thought of the way in which her mother was able to face any hardship with confidence and bravery. She often worried about disappointing her mother although she was thankful for her calm and soothing nature during visits.

As the memoir progressed, Piper began to see the similarities between herself and her mother. Although the prison sentence was difficult for both of them, the women had the



strength to endure without becoming defeated. In this way, the women characterized as similar in their strength and resilience in the face of adversity.

## DeSimon

DeSimon was Piper's supervisor when she worked in the electric department of the prison. He was a corrections officer who thrived on bullying the inmates of Danbury. From the very start of their assignment, DeSimon had the women leave the facility to fix the homes of other corrections officers. Although this broke many of the prison rules, DeSimon did not seem to worry.

In one pivotal scene, DeSimon sexually harassed Piper in her workplace. After this incident, Piper was able to switch departments but there did not seem to be any negative actions taken against DeSimon.

DeSimon's character emphasized quite heavily the injustice and inconsistency of the criminal justice system. His frequent rule breaking was juxtaposed to the heavy scrutiny and lack of freedom the inmates faced.

## Miss Luz

Miss Luz was one of Piper's original bunkmates. She was overcoming cancer in the prison. Her unfortunate state shed light on the lack of proper medical care available to those in prison.

## Sister Ardeth Platte

Sister Ardeth Platte was Yoga Janet's roommate. She was a nun imprisoned during a nonviolent peace rally. Her sentence in Danbury showed the ineffectiveness of the criminal justice system in the imprisonment of nonviolent and productive members of society. Sister Ardeth Platte's character shed light on the need for change in the criminal justice system.

## Annette

Annette was Piper's first roommate, or "Bunkie," in Danbury. An Italian woman from New Jersey, Annette was not very different from many of the women Piper had known outside of prison. Annette served to represent the frequent misconceptions people have about those in prison. She did not at all fit the normal stereotype for an inmate. She was kind, supportive, and generous to other inmates. Annette was the first mother-like figure Piper had in Danbury. The support she offered made Piper feel safe and comfortable in her new environment and allowed her to rethink her misconceptions about prison life.



## Allie B.

Allie B. was a young inmate who was former drug addict. She often spoke about wanting to return to the outside world so that she could return to drugs. Her outlook emphasized the need for a criminal justice system that reforms inmates rather than just serving as a form of punishment.





# Objects/Places

## Brussels Airport

The Brussels Airport is where Piper committed the crime of money laundering. The memoir began here and this thus serves as the setting representing the beginning of her journey through the world of crime, the story's central focus.

In choosing to begin the story here, Piper showed herself to be an open and believable narrator. In allowing the reader's first impression to be that of her biggest mistake, Piper presented herself as trustworthy and thus added validity to the rest of her story.

As this was the setting of her crime, Piper's anxious attitude in Brussels Airport was juxtaposed to the freedom she felt upon release from prison at the close of the memoir.

## Northampton, Massachusetts

Northampton, Massachusetts is the location of Smith College, the college Piper attended. Piper's family thought very highly of education and her graduating from Smith College satisfied their expectations of her. Piper chose to remain in Northampton after graduation rather than moving for a new experience. Growing bored on the place, she entered into a social circle of people she found interesting and sophisticated. Among these people were Nora and the others involved in the drug trafficking business.

Northampton served as the setting in which Piper grew tired of her innocence. In an effort to please her family, Piper had avoided the adventure she so desired. In leaving Northampton, Piper symbolically left her innocence behind her.

## Indonesia

Indonesia is the first place to which Piper traveled with Nora during her involvement with drug trafficking. In Indonesia, beauty and decadence were juxtaposed in such a way that mirrors the lavish yet unethical life Nora tempted Piper to become a part of. While in Indonesia, Piper experienced a loss of innocence as she was for the first time exposed to the frightening reality of drug trafficking.

## San Francisco

San Francisco was where Piper relocated to after her brief involvement in drug trafficking. San Francisco represented change and escape for Piper. She saw it as an opportunity to leave her former self behind her.



## New York

After meeting Larry in San Francisco, he and Piper moved to New York. They had a wonderful life there and Piper almost forgot about her criminal past. Eventually, two officers arrived at Piper's door for her arrest. It is there that her past was brought back to life as she awaited her sentence.

## Canvas Shoes

In Danbury, canvas shoes were given to the inmates upon arrival for the first few days of their sentence. These shoes were a mark of inexperience and vulnerability in the prison system.

## Headsets

In Danbury, many of the women had headsets that allowed them to listen to radio or television programs. These headsets offered escape from the mundane prison. In order to obtain a headset, an inmate would have to ask one of the inmates working in the warehouse. Thus, the headsets represented the inconsistency of prison rules and thus a small freedom.

## Yoga

Yoga allows the inmates a sense of escape and community throughout the memoir. While participating in group yoga, the women were able to experience a temporary sense of enjoyment and escape. It was one of the routines that made life bearable.

## Lake at Danbury

While working in carpentry one day, Piper was brought to a lake on the Danbury grounds. This lake came to represent beauty and freedom in spite of oppression. The ability for a beautiful natural body of water to be present even under the worst circumstances reminded Piper that she could be strong and would soon be free.

## The Congress Hotel

The Congress Hotel adds a sense of continuity to the memoir in its placement at the beginning of Piper's criminal activity and the end of her sentence. When Piper saw the Congress Hotel at the end of the memoir, in the presence of Nora, she felt a sense of irony. She was brought back to the day she had entered into the drug business and felt relieved to be leaving that life behind.



# Themes

## Perception vs. Reality

A very important theme throughout the memoir is perception vs. reality. This theme begins in Piper's association with Nora. Although Nora appeared to live a lavish and carefree life, she obtained her money through drug trafficking and was actually trapped in an operation she wanted to escape. Like Nora, Piper was drawn to drug trafficking by the glamorous people involved and learned the harsh reality of the business after being exposed to the terrible effects drug addiction can have on human lives.

The theme is then continued through Piper's experiences in Danbury. As a white, middle-class, college educated woman, Piper did not fit the typical stereotype for a prison inmate. As the narrator of the memoir, she is able to serve as an example of the common misconceptions of those in prison.

From the beginning of her sentence, Piper was very surprised to find that many of her fellow inmates were very similar to her. In Danbury, she was met with warmth and care. This was extremely different from the common portrayal of criminals as rough and cruel.

Throughout the memoir, Piper cites facts that mirror her personal experience in Danbury. In this way, the theme was further validated for the reader. In this way Piper is able to shed light on such issues as the over-imprisonment of drug-related criminals, the lack of rehabilitation and health efforts in prison, and the systematic oppression resulting in more than two-thirds of inmates returning to prison. Through the combination of personal experience and statistical evidence, this theme has a profound effect on the memoir and thus the reader.

## Corruption in the Criminal Justice System

Corruption in the criminal justice system is a very important theme throughout the memoir. At the start of the memoir, Piper received special treatment from her counselor because she is white and middle class. As her sentence continued, she began to realize that the bunks were separated mainly by race and that assignments were given by counselors. This served as an example of institutionalized racism, which played a large role in the lives of prisoners. In addition, most of the more desirable jobs at the prison were reserved for white inmates.

In addition to the role of racism, lack of medical care for all inmates was a prevalent issue throughout the memoir. Inmates were told not to seek medical care if they did not have a life threatening illness. Inmates who were pregnant or recovering from cancer received no special treatment and were subject to the same treatment as other prisoners.



Many of the correction officers exhibited corruption in Danbury. There were various instances of sexual harassment in which correction officers took advantage of powerless inmates. Many other correction officers bullied inmates in order to assert their power over them.

Lack of rehabilitation was another prominent issue contributing to this theme. Many of those in prison had come from extremely harsh circumstances or were suffering from drug addiction. Prison offered only one option for drug rehabilitation for certain inmates and no route to obtain a career or housing after their release. Therefore, many prisoners were left to return to the harsh conditions that had led them into crime in the first place.

## Self-Preservation

Throughout her stay at Danbury, Piper learned that self-preservation was essential to surviving one's stay in prison. This theme is emphasized throughout the memoir by various individuals in their ability to stay true to themselves despite the prison's attempts to strip them of their individuality.

Pop personified this trait in her ability to remain an upbeat and multifaceted person throughout her lengthy prison sentence. Pop was able to adjust to life in prison without letting the authority figures get to her. She found power in "working the system" and knowing what freedoms she could get away with. She served as a mentor to many of the inmates, including Piper.

Throughout the memoir, many of the activities that Piper and the other inmates partake in are acts of self-preservation. Yoga, exercise, and listening to headsets allow the inmates temporary escape from their surrounding. In partaking in enjoyable activity, they were able to hold on to the sense of self they had in the outside world.

This theme is very important as it helps the reader understand the coping mechanisms of those in prison. It also adds to the conflict between inmates and authority figures, emphasizing the efforts of authority to remove any sense of individuality. The ability of the inmates to preserve their sense of self characterizes them as courageous and strong in the face of adversity.

## Detachment

Detachment, as it relates to crime and imprisonment, played a large role throughout the memoir. Throughout Piper's experiences with criminal activity and imprisonment, she felt a continual sense of detachment and isolation.

The theme of detachment was first introduced when Piper began traveling with Nora for drug-related business. When she left on the trip, she lied to her family about her plans, feeling as if she was doing wrong from the very start. Throughout the trip, the group's relaxation was perpetually mixed with anxiety, leaving Piper feeling isolated in fear.



Even Nora had become distant. It was then that Piper first realized the detachment that comes with a life of crime.

When Piper attempted to escape her past, she was again faced with this sense of detachment, as she could not reveal her past to even her most trusted friends. After Piper was found out by the police, her six year long wait for her sentence only magnified the feeling. She found the situation impossible to communicate to others and eventually stopped trying. She felt the detachment of crime follow her just as its consequences had.

When she arrived at prison, the detachment was worsened as she had limited contact with her loved ones. Many of the inmates were separated from their families for so long that they had become permanently detached. Others were too ashamed of their situation to let loved ones visit. Thus, prison left many feeling removed from their previous lives, so much so that they were often unable to readjust after release.

Even within the prison, detachment played a role between inmates. Although some women were very open about their lives before Danbury and the reason for their sentence, others never spoke of it. There was always a barrier between even the closest inmates, brought on by the shame and fear of the prison system.

## Family

Family, in both the literal and figurative sense, played a very important role throughout the memoir. Although some of the prisoners did maintain connections with their families, others were completely detached from the outside world. For comfort and support, the women formed prison “families” that they were able to rely on throughout their stay.

Family played an especially important role for the narrator, Piper. Throughout her stay, her fiancé, Larry, and parents continually visited her, offering emotional strength in her time of need. Piper mentioned many times throughout the memoir that she could not have made it through her sentence without the love and support of her family. The strength they demonstrated offered her strength and comfort through her difficult time.

Many prisoners, however, were separated from their families due to their sentence. The shame associated with imprisonment caused many of the women to avoid visitation and cut communication with loved ones. Other women simply did not have familial support due to the circumstances of their upbringing. These women felt especially isolated and lacked the emotional support of loved ones outside. The inability to connect with family members plagued many of the women in Danbury.

In order to cope with their lack of connection with their former lives, many of the women created families within Danbury. Women who had been in prison for a long while served as mentors, or “moms” to new arrivals. In this way, women could feel the support of family and community even while imprisoned.

# Styles

## Structure

The memoir is structured in such a way that the main focus is on Piper's stay in prison. The first two chapters take place outside of prison and serve primarily to give background as to why Piper was serving her sentence. Although much time is covered in these chapters, descriptions are kept brief as their purpose is only to provide support for the memoir's main focus.

When Piper arrived in Danbury, events and people are described in a much more in-depth manner than in the introductory chapters. As "Orange is the New Black" is a memoir of Piper's year in a woman's prison, it is important that all of her experiences are described in detail to allow the reader to share in her experiences.

The memoir is divided into 18 chapters, with each chapter named for an important quote or plot point in that chapter. In this way, the reader is reminded of the central theme and tone of each chapter. At the end of the memoir, Piper's release from prison is described in a short passage in order to keep consistency with the brevity of the introduction.

## Perspective

The memoir is told entirely in the first person narration of Piper Kerman. From the opening of the memoir, Piper maintains a very open and honest tone with the reader. The opening of the memoir in the Brussels Airport is very important in contributing to this sense of openness. As Piper begins her story with a description of her criminal involvement, she allows the reader's first impression to be that of her criminal past. This gives the opening a confessional tone and allows for an increased sense of believability throughout the memoir.

As the memoir progresses, Piper includes very detailed descriptions of individuals and events, allowing the reader to experience the story in the most accurate way possible. Piper also includes various statistics throughout the book that contribute to the validity of the story. Many of the experiences of the inmates are represented by statistical figures on prisons. In this way, Piper is able to connect her accounts to the greater U.S. prison system. Also in this way, she writes the memoir not only as a story, but as a political statement for change in the criminal justice system.

## Tone

Throughout the memoir, Piper maintains a very transparent tone with the reader. In revealing various details about her background, including those that do not favor her, Piper represents her story genuinely and allows the reader to believe her account wholeheartedly. This is a very important aspect of the memoir because it is Piper's

honest tone that allows the reader to sympathize with her and the other inmates. Therefore, Piper is able to convey her message effectively and challenge the reader to consider her criticism of the criminal justice system.

In addition, the memoir also includes a very sympathetic tone. By appealing to the reader's emotion, Piper communicates her plight so that the reader can sympathize and even relate to her issues. By presenting her crime and the crimes of the other inmates as mistakes, rather than malicious actions, she appeals to the sympathy of the reader. Also, by describing the inmates as kind and compassionate, Piper allows the reader to rethink their beliefs about those in prison.

Finally, the memoir maintains an adversarial tone towards the criminal justice system. By citing statistics on incarceration and providing first hand accounts of the injustices of prison, the memoir serves not only to tell a story but to make a statement. Exposing the injustices of the criminal justice system plays a very large role in this memoir and this tone contributes to the theme.



## Quotes

Indonesia offered what seemed like a limitless range of experience, but there was a murky, threatening edge to it. I'd never seen such stark poverty as what was on display in Jakarta, or such naked capitalism at work in the enormous factories and the Texas drawls coming from across the hotel lobby where the oil company executives were drinking."

-- Piper (chapter 1 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** In this quote, Piper describes the intersecting prosperity and poverty in Indonesia. Here, Indonesia is compared to the drug trade as brilliance and decadence coexist in a particularly unsettling manner.

I had only the most tenuous idea of what might happen next, but I knew I would have to be brave. Not foolhardy, not in love with risk and danger, not making ridiculous exhibitions of myself to prove that I wasn't terrified – really genuinely brave. Brave enough to be quiet when quiet was called for, brave enough to observe before flinging myself into something, brave enough to not abandon my true self when someone else wanted to seduce or force me in a direction I didn't want to go, brave enough to stand my ground quietly.

-- Piper (chapter 3 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** In this quote, Piper asserts her understanding of the bravery necessary to survive life in prison. She also contrasts her present self from her younger self who had allowed her love of risk and danger to lead her into criminal activity. In this quote, Piper vows to be a stronger version of herself, a promise she keeps throughout her sentence.

Apparently, orange was the new black."

-- Piper (chapter 4 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** This quote explains the context of the memoir's title. Piper's story had drawn media attention as it shed light on the reality of those in prison. Piper's experience served to represent the plight of many young people suffering in prison as a result of a brief mistake.

She had lost everything, yet managed to take a dozen years in prison and hold it all together and make the best of it. Pop was cunning and exuberant. She was kind, but she could also be ruthless. She knew how to work the system and also how not to let them break you. And they were always trying."

-- Piper (chapter 7 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** In this quote, Piper explains the multi-faceted personality Pop, a fellow inmate. Despite her circumstance, Pop retained her sense of self and was resilient in her efforts to overcome the oppression of the prison system.





I hated the control the prison exercised over my life, but the only way to fight it was in my own head. And I knew I wasn't better than any other woman locked up in here, even the ones I didn't like."

-- Piper (chapter 8 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Piper explains the importance of self-preservation in prison. As a central theme in the memoir, self-preservation serves as a way for inmates to retain a sense of normalcy without letting the system break them. This quote also emphasized the importance of community in prison as all inmates had to stand together to resist those corrupt individuals in authority.

It occurred to me that I had never seen my mother defeated, even when life presented difficulties and disappointments. I hoped our resemblance extended beyond our blue eyes.

-- Piper (chapter 9 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** This quote explains the important relationship between Piper and her mother. Piper learns strength in the face of adversity from her mother and is thus able to cope with life in Danbury.

No one else is going to do it, babe. The feds aren't going to take care of us in this shithole. We have to do it for each other."

-- Piper (chapter 9 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** Piper is speaking to Amy and explains the importance of community in the prison system. The inmates only have one another to rely on and thus must stand together. This represents Piper's role as a mentor to a younger inmate and her transition away from stoicism as she matures.

You've got your little year to do, and I know it seems hard to you, but when you're doing serious time, or life, things look different. You can't put up with shit from anyone, because this is your life, and if you ever take it from anyone, the you're going to have problems."

-- Pop (chapter 9 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** Pop explains the reality of the criminal justice system for those with long sentences. Although for some prison is temporary, for others, it becomes a way of life.

But our current criminal justice system has no provision for restorative justice....Instead, our systems of 'corrections' is about arm's-length revenge and retribution, all day and all night. Then its overseers wonder why people leave prison more broken than they went in."

-- Piper (chapter 13 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** Piper explains the fundamental error with the criminal justice system. Without any form of true justice or rehabilitation for criminals, many get caught up in a lifetime of criminal activity, becoming more hopeless with each sentence.



In the last ten months I had found ways to carve out some sense of control of my world, seize some personal power within a setting in which I was supposed to have none. But my grandmother's illness sent that spinning away, showed me how much my choices eleven years earlier and their consequences had put me in the power of a system that would be relentless in its efforts to take things away."

-- Piper (chapter 16 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** Piper explains the negative impact imprisonment has on families. With furloughs rarely granted, many inmates are denied the ability to say good bye to loved ones. This quote also shows Piper's maturation process as she is more concerned with others than herself.

I shushed her and patted the long blond curls she was so proud of, and inside I grieved angrily over the insanity of locking up children, and then returning them to neighborhoods that were more desperate and dangerous than jails."

-- Piper (chapter 16 paragraph 8)

**Importance:** This quote serves as an example of the lack of rehabilitation efforts available in prison. Many inmates are left to face the harsh conditions that had led them to crime in the first place, with no hope of a career or way to improve their lives.

The women I had met in Danbury helped me to confront the thing I had done wrong, as well as the wrong things I had done. It wasn't just my choice of doing something bad and illegal that I had to own; it was also my lone-wolf lifestyle that had helped me make those mistakes and often made the aftermath of my actions worse for those I loved."

-- Piper (chapter 18 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** In this passage, Piper acknowledges her maturation process and her move away from the stoic attitude that had so negatively impacted her life. She realizes all of the good her Danbury relationships had done and is grateful to be coming out a better person than she came in.



## Topics for Discussion

**Is prison really beneficial for criminal reform? Back up your argument with examples from the memoir. What, if anything, might be a better system?**

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**This memoir shows the impact America's "war on drugs" has on the lives of women. Should drugs be legalized? What, if any, changes should be made to the U.S criminal justice system in relation to drugs.**

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**Examine Piper's relationship with Nora. What does each of the characters want from the relationship? What draws the two together? What qualities do the women share? What makes them significantly different?**

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**Do you believe that Nora's claim that she did not turn Piper in? Why or why not?**

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**How are the systems put in place by those in power furthered by the inmates? Why is a power structure so essential to life in prison?**

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**Discuss some of the obstacles in place for ex-convicts seeking reentry to the free world. How does one's stay in prison continue to shape his or her life even after the sentence is completed?**

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**Compare Piper's worldview upon entering prison to her worldview upon leaving. What has changed? What has remained the same?**

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