

# **The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie Study Guide**

**The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie by Muriel Spark**

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## Plot Summary

"The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie" is a novel by Muriel Spark, whose books often touch on controversial subjects. In this novel, Miss Jean Brodie is the teacher at an all girls' school, the Marcia Blaine School in Edinburgh, Scotland. The novel focuses on the teaching methodologies of Miss Brodie, which are the exact opposite of the other teachers in the junior and senior high school. Miss Brodie chooses a set of six girls to mold and mentor, and these girls are referred to as the "Brodie Set". The Brodie Set is comprised of Monica Douglas, Sandy Stranger, Rose Stanley, Jenny Gray and Mary Macgregor.

Miss Brodie is in a constant struggle with the headmistress, Miss Mackay, because Miss Brodie's teaching methods are not in line with those Miss Mackay deems proper. In reality, while Miss Brodie does not teach the girls out of textbooks or according to school curricula, the girls of the Brodie set are the smartest girls in school.

Sandy finds herself struggling to sabotage Miss Brodie, but the novel's narrative explains why Sandy feels the need to do this. Miss Brodie never guesses it is Sandy who betrays her because Miss Brodie actually believes Sandy is her closest confidante as Sandy grows into her teens and then into a woman. Only one of the other girls ever finds out it is Sandy who betrayed Miss Brodie to Miss Mackay. Subsequently, Miss Brodie is forced into retirement.

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie is a coming of age story about young women struggling to find out who they are and what motivates them during a time of uncertainty, puberty and changes in their lives.



# Chapter 1-2

## Summary

### Chapter 1.

Four of the five girls who make up the Brodie Set are standing at the bicycle rack talking to a group of boys. Three of the boys are named Andrew. The chapter provides a description of each of the girls in the Brodie set and another girl, Joyce Emily, who is trying to become a part of the group. Miss Brodie approaches the girls at the bicycle rack, dismisses the boys and then invites the girls to dinner. The purpose of the dinner is for the girls to help Miss Brodie come up with a plan to circumvent the plot to force her resignation from the school.

The chapter flashes back to the time when the girls were ten years old, and Miss Brodie was their teacher. Miss Brodie always took her class outside in good weather and taught them while they sat on benches under the shade of a tree. Miss Brodie instructed the girls to keep their textbooks handy in case another teacher or administrator came by. Instead of teaching the students from the books, however, Miss Brodie taught them about her own experiences in life. She often talked of being in the prime of one's life, recognizing it and living life to the fullest when there.

### Chapter 2.

This chapter opens with Mary Macgregor as an adult thinking back on her life. This flashback occurs before she dies in a hotel fire at the age of 23. Mary Macgregor realizes some of the happiest times of her life where when she was 10 in the 1930s and in Miss Brodie's class.

When Sandy Stranger is ten years old, she tells Jenny Gray at a tea party at her house that these times are supposed to be the best years of their lives. Sandy tells Jenny how adults are always saying the girls should enjoy their school days because you never know what the future holds.

Sandy reveals her mother is English, which makes her different from the other mothers of Edinburgh, which is where they are living at the time of the novel. After Sandy and Jenny finish their tea, Sandy pulls out a story she has been writing about Miss Brodie and her fiancée. Instead of dying in the war, in Sandy's story he lives and comes back to the school looking for Miss Brodie. In the story, Hugh, Miss Brodie's fiancée, is holding the two girls hostage. Once they are bored with working on the fictional story, they decide to tell witch stories and create spells by the fire.

The chapter then returns to the former classroom of Miss Brodie, who is reading poetry to the class right before it is time to go home for the day. Two additional teachers are introduced, the music teacher, about whom it is implied might be a pedophile, and the high school science teacher.



Sandy tells Jenny the girls in Miss Lockhart's science class can do whatever they want. Jenny responds by telling Sandy that Miss Brodie also lets them do whatever they want. Sandy responds, saying Miss Brodie's job is to teach them, not allow them to do whatever they want.

By 1931, Miss Brodie has had the same class for two years and has chosen her favorite students. Primarily, she has chosen Her favorites are selected primarily because their parents don't complain about her teaching methodology. This is how the Brodie set emerges.

The Brodie set is invited to Miss Brodie's home for tea. The six girls are also privy to Miss Brodie's personal life. In addition, the girls are aware of the struggles Miss Brodie has with the headmistress at the school.

The story then fast-forwards to a conversation Eunice is having with her husband when Eunice is 28 years old. Eunice is a nurse and her husband is a doctor. They are planning a trip to Edinburgh for the Edinburgh Festival, and Eunice tells her husband to remind her to visit Miss Brodie's grave. Her husband asks who Miss Brodie is, and Eunice explains what a special teacher she was.

Eunice also describes Miss Brodie as a spinster and says that Miss Brodie died just after the war. Eunice tells her husband Miss Brodie was forced into early retirement by one of the girls of the Brodie set, but adds she never determined which girl it was.

The story then returns to the 11th year of the girls' lives. The rest of the school is sent home because the heating system is not working. Instead of sending her class home, however, Miss Brodie takes the girls to the Old Town so they can witness where history lived.

## Analysis

Miss Jean Brodie represents the person who goes up against the establishment. In this case, the establishment is the private school. It seems at this point the only reason Miss Brodie is looked up to by her students and down upon by the teachers and administrators is her unorthodox ways of teaching the students lessons.

There is an insinuation the setting is in the past and not within the boundaries of the continental United States,, but the exact location of the school has not yet been revealed in the book.

Chapter Two reveals the setting of the book is in the 1930s in Edinburgh, Scotland. Jenny and Sandy are having a tea party at Sandy's house, but everything they discuss comes back to the topic of sex, which they refer to as "research." From figuring out how one of the workers at the grocery store got pregnant to whether or not Miss Brodie and Hugh had sex and if Miss Brodie will take them to the museum to see the statue there of a naked man, everything they discuss reverts back to sex.



Miss Brodie may be up against the establishment and unorthodox in her ways of teaching the girls, but they learn the same lessons they would have learned with another teacher, but in a more interesting way with Miss Brodie's style. Miss Brodie fully recognizes her style of teaching is not the same of other teachers, but believes it teaches the girls the lessons they need to know to pass their examinations and to live fully in the prime of their lives, when their primes arrive. Miss Brodie wants to ensure each of the girls recognizes the prime of their lives when it arrives.

## Vocabulary

leavon, impressionable, rudiments, regime, grotesque, notorious, enraptured, mimicking, prime, delinquent, crème de la crème, accompaniment, exhilarating, depicted, forsooth, perceiving, splendid, stupendous, ferocity, azure, composure, tussore, ardour



# Chapter 3-4

## Summary

Chapter 3.

The chapter opens describing Miss Brodie as a spinster. While it explains Miss Brodie has the same qualities as other spinsters in Edinburgh, what sets Miss Brodie apart from the others is that she has chosen to teach in a highly traditional school. This chapter also portrays Miss Brodie as a feminist, who is outspoken about her beliefs, and also quotes her talking to men in a “man-to-man” type of way, i.e., on the same level rather than obsequiously, as was usually the case with the subservient women of the era.

In 1931, when the girls of the Brodie set turned eleven and twelve, sex became everything. When the girls return for their last year with Miss Brodie, the latter shares her stories and pictures from her holiday travels to Europe. She instructs the girls to stand their history books open on their desks, so she can continue telling them the stories of her travels through Europe, but it will “look” as if they are having their history lesson in case there are any inquisitive visitors.

While most of Miss Brodie’s colleagues at the junior high school are against her, she does have two supporters. Both of the supporters happen to be male teachers. They are the music teacher, Mr. Gordon Lowther, and the art teacher, Mr. Teddy Lloyd. While the girls believe both are in love with Miss Brodie, Miss Brodie only considers them colleagues and supporters.

While Mr. Lloyd teaches about all of the great paintings, statues and other pieces of art, all the Brodie set seems to focus on is the sexual aspects of the art. The giggles commence so much at one point Miss Brodie escorts Mary out of the room. Later, Monica Douglas tells the Brodie set she saw Mr. Lloyd and Miss Brodie kissing. The other girls cross-examine her in disbelief. Some of the girls end up believing she witnessed the kiss, but others question the authenticity of Monica’s story.

Once this story gets out, the girls become obsessed with whether or not she is the type to be kissed. The girls did notice a change in Miss Brodie’s demeanor, clothing, and appearance after the reported kissing incident. Jenny and Sandy sometimes daydreamed Miss Brodie and Mr. Lloyd had gone farther than just kissing, so they watched for signs of a growing belly on Miss Brodie.

The Brodie girls begin to speculate that it might have been the music teacher, Mr. Lowther, who was kissing Miss Brodie. On the days when Miss Brodie escorts the group to music class, she wears her best new clothes and Miss Brodie appears to be in a state of agitation, before, during, and after music lesson days.



At the end of the war and after Miss Brodie retired, she was having tea with Sandy one day at the Braid Hills Hotel. Miss Brodie admits Mr. Lloyd was in love with her and she with him, and that he even kissed her once in the art room. Miss Brodie admits however, they never had a love affair. This was when Miss Brodie was 56 years old and would be the last year of her life because she had an undiagnosed malignant growth in her body. It is at this time Miss Brodie admitted she is past her prime in life.

During the late fall semester of 1931, Miss Brodie was out of school sick for two weeks. When the Brodie set went by her house to visit, she was not at home. The Brodie set finds out Mr. Lowther is also out of school for two weeks at the same time. The Brodie set is dispersed to the classroom of Miss Gaunt, who does not treat the girls nicely. The story joins Sandy and Miss Brodie having tea together at the hotel, during which time Miss Brodie admits she did have an affair with Mr. Lowther. This was because Mr. Lowther was not married, but Mr. Lloyd was. However, it was Mr. Lloyd that Miss Brodie loved.

Miss Brodie and Sandy discuss who it could have been of the Brodie set that betrayed Miss Brodie. Miss Brodie thinks first it could have been Mary and then thinks it might have been Rose. Sandy in her own mind admits she, herself, is the one that betrayed Miss Brodie.

At different points of the year, Miss Mackay, the headmistress, invites the students into her office for tea and cake. They would discuss their intentions for senior high school. It is at one of these meetings with the Brodie Set that the pattern of questioning Miss Mackay uses implies she is digging for information as to whether Miss Brodie is having an affair with Mr. Lloyd or Mr. Lowther.

At the end of the Easter holidays, Jenny Gray claims a man comes out of the woods, lures her into the woods and shows her his penis. When the police report is filed, the culprit is revealed to be a woman police officer. As Jenny tells Sandy Stranger the story, Sandy abandons the thought of boys and fixates on the policewoman herself.

Even though it has already been revealed that later in life Sandy becomes a nun, at this point in the book, the implication is that Sandy may be a lesbian. As the girls return to school, they decide not to tell Miss Brodie of the occurrence. It seems as if Jenny may have completely made up the story. It also seems as if Jenny and Sandy are deliberately plotting to set up Miss Brodie by creating fake love letters between Miss Brodie and her lover, the music teacher, in their story notebook. In the end, the girls bury the notebook in a hole in the ground.

When Miss Brodie tells the class where she spent her holiday, it turns out to be the town where the art teacher is from. This fact, combined with the way the two are acting toward each other seems to indicate the two have spent the holiday together.

The girls also notice a change in Rose. Rose has cut her hair much shorter. Rose's cheeks seem to be thinner and paler, while her eyes seem to be half-closed rather than wide open. The other girls speculate she may have started her period.





## Chapter 4.

The Brodie set girls are now in senior high school and have moved on to new teachers. School seems like an entirely different world to the girls because the way of learning is so different from that of Miss Brodie's methodologies. During their time in senior high school, the Brodie set began to disband because they had different classes from each other and because it was the intention of the headmistress to separate them.

Even after the Brodie set moved on to senior high school, Miss Brodie still invited them to her house from time to time for tea. They would discuss their new experiences with her, which kept them close and loyal to Miss Brodie as well.

Jenny and Sandy spent some afternoons with Miss Brodie, teaching her Greek as they learned it themselves. About the same time, the two sewing teachers from the school take over as housekeepers for Mr. Lowther. Miss Brodie still visited Mr. Lowther after church on Sundays. As Mr. Lowther began to look thinner, Miss Brodie decided to start visiting Mr. Lowther on Saturdays to make sure the sewing sisters are ordering him enough food for the week. These Saturday visits also meant a pair of the Brodie set could accompany Miss Brodie on her visits since Saturdays are the days the girls typically have tea with Miss Brodie. By this time, Miss Brodie is 43 years old and the Brodie set are thirteen years old. Even after the girls have gone on to senior high school and even though they accompany her to Mr. Lowther's home, Miss Brodie always inquires about their art classes.

Miss Brodie finds out the Brodie set has been making ongoing visits to Mr. Lloyd's home, to his art studio. Miss Brodie questions each pair of girls on their Saturdays with her about Mr. Lloyd, his family, his wife and his children, as if it were the first time she was hearing this information. The girls also let it slip that Rose has been sitting for a portrait painted by Mr. Lloyd. The girls tell Miss Brodie Mr. Lloyd always asks about her and Miss Brodie finds it intriguing that only the Brodie set is invited to Mr. Lloyd's home art studio.

## Analysis

The irony of Miss Brodie being a spinster is that it is her choice to teach in a traditional school, such as Marcia Blaine's. Most spinsters in Edinburgh in the '30s discover new ideas and inject their beliefs in art, education, religion and social welfare.

Miss Brodie is constantly teaching the girls lessons through her stories, pictures and from her own experiences. After each story, Miss Brodie always asks one of the girls a question to ascertain whether or not they have learned something from the story she has just told or the picture she has just shown them.

It is implied Eunice may be the one who betrays Miss Brodie in the future. The implication is made because Eunice went through a time in 1931 when she became very religious, meaning the other girls could not mention sex or talk about anything sexual around her. Since this is the same time period Miss Brodie was caught kissing



Mr. Lloyd and was presumed to be having an affair with Mr. Lowther, it is a foreshadowing of the possibility of Eunice ultimately betraying Miss Brodie.

Because Miss Brodie cannot openly love and take care of Mr. Lloyd, she transfers her sentiments to caring for Mr. Lowther. She lives through the Brodie set and their visits to Mr. Lloyd's house to stay connected to him. The love Miss Brodie and Mr. Lloyd share is forbidden love, so Miss Brodie and Mr. Lloyd use other ways to stay connected with one another.

## Vocabulary

spinster, discretion, valour, indignation, seethed, mirth, convulsions, hypocritical, contagion, defiant, methodical, equidistant, vulnerable, contempt, beneficent



# Chapter 5-6

## Summary

Chapter 5.

Sandy is visiting the home of Mr. Lloyd. The girls of the Brodie Set are fifteen years old at this time. Mrs. Lloyd is also present when they show Sandy the finished portrait of Rose. Sandy tells the Lloyds how much the portrait of Rose looks like Miss Brodie. Deidre Lloyd, Mr. Lloyd's wife, says she has never met Miss Brodie but asks if she is pale or dark. Then Mrs. Lloyd tells Mr. Lloyd to show Sandy the other portraits of Rose. Sandy thinks she can see Miss Brodie in all of the portraits of Rose.

Sandy then discovers some other sketches of some of the other girls of the Brodie set, Eunice and Monica. At first glance, Sandy also sees Miss Brodie's attributes in these sketches. Upon second glance, though, she sees only Eunice and Monica. She mentions to Mr. Lloyd she didn't know the girls sat for him for a portrait. Mr. Lloyd mentions he would like to do a portrait of each of the Brodie girls individually and then a group portrait.

When Sandy responds by saying they would all look like Miss Brodie, Mr. Lloyd kisses Sandy with a wet kiss on her mouth. He says it is to teach her not to look at an artist in that way. Sandy tries to get away, but Mr. Lloyd grabs her and tells Sandy she is ugly. Mrs. Lloyd then calls them down for tea and Sandy has to try to act normal, while the thoughts of what Mr. Lloyd says run through her mind.

Mrs. Lloyd says she has heard so much about Miss Brodie from all of the girls she would love to invite her to tea. Both Mr. Lloyd and Sandy say Miss Brodie wouldn't come because she is so busy. Mr. Lloyd inquires as to whether or not Miss Brodie is still caring for Mr. Lowther, to which Sandy says yes.

Mr. Lloyd says Mr. Lowther has half the female staff at the school caring for him and adds Mr. Lowther has enough money to employ a proper housekeeper. Sandy says Miss Brodie likes to care for him because Mr. Lowther sings to her. Mrs. Lloyd says Miss Brodie sounds like a strange woman and Mr. Lloyd defends Miss Brodie, saying how magnificent a woman she is and that she is in the prime of her life.

Mr. Lowther has considered marrying each of the sewing teachers at one time, but he is only truly in love with Miss Brodie. Miss Brodie refuses to marry him or be anything more to him than a caretaker and a lover. Miss Brodie also knows one of the sewing teachers found Miss Brodie's nightgown in the bed of Mr. Lowther.

Miss Brodie never comes right out and tells the Brodie Set girls of her feelings, or the goings-on in Mr. Lowther's home. At this point, Miss Brodie is still trying to determine who among the girls she can trust or not. Miss Brodie decides she can confide in only one girl of the Brodie set, so she confides only in Sandy.



Sandy tells Miss Brodie she must have left her rosette for the Silver Jubilee in Mr. Lloyd's studio. When Miss Brodie asks what Sandy is doing for the holiday, she mentions her father is taking her to the Highlands and then she'll probably sit for a portrait for Mr. Lloyd.

After the summer holidays, Miss Brodie confides in Sandy more and more, especially as they are playing golf together. Miss Brodie tells Sandy her hopes for excelling will focus on Sandy and Rose. Miss Brodie says she thought Jenny would go far, but thinks Jenny has become insipid. Miss Brodie says her hopes for Eunice have slipped away because of Eunice's interest in a boy and she predicts Eunice will settle down and marry a professional man. Miss Brodie says she has no hopes for Mary and that Monica will earn her degree with honors.

Sandy asks Miss Brodie if she has ever played golf with the senior high school science teacher, Miss Lockhart. Miss Brodie says she didn't know Miss Lockhart played golf. Sandy saw Miss Lockhart and Mr. Lowther playing golf one day, but does not tell Miss Brodie.

Eventually, Mr. Lloyd does paint a group portrait of the Brodie Set. All of the girls are wearing their Panama hats in their own distinctive way. In the portrait, a part of Miss Brodie can be found in each of the girls.

At this point, it has been several months since Miss Brodie has stopped taking care of Mr. Lowther. Miss Brodie mentions if she wanted Mr. Lowther, however, all she would have to do is raise her finger and he would be hers. The following day, a newspaper announcement includes the engagement of Miss Lockhart and Mr. Lowther. At first, Miss Brodie feels betrayed. Then Miss Brodie recalls her true love is Mr. Lloyd and Mr. Lowther was useful to her for the interim.

## Chapter 6.

Once each term, Miss Mackay brings the Brodie Set into her office for tea. Miss Mackay indirectly pumps the girls for information she could use against Miss Brodie to force her into early retirement. At this point, the girls have been friends with Miss Brodie for seven years.

Miss Mackay suggests Miss Brodie imbibes in alcoholic drinks and she fears Miss Brodie's class will not pass their examinations this year. Andy defends Miss Brodie, saying she does not drink, except on her birthday, when she shares a bottle of sherry with the six girls of the Brodie set. Who are now seventeen years old.

In 1937, Miss Brodie focuses more of her efforts on grooming Rose to become Mr. Lloyd's lover and constantly asking Sandy for information. While Joyce Emily Hammond is trying hard to become part of the Brodie Set, the girls are having none of it. Miss Brodie, however, takes Joyce Emily to tea and to the theater alone.

One day at school, Joyce Emily's desk is empty. It remains unoccupied for six weeks straight until someone else is assigned to it. Later, everyone finds out she ran away to



Spain during the Spanish Civil War. Joyce Emily was killed when the train she was on was attacked.

During the summer of 1938, Sandy tells Mr. Lloyd all of his portraits, even those of his own family are beginning to resemble Miss Brodie more and more. Mr. Lloyd kisses Sandy and they start a five-week affair while Mrs. Lloyd and the children are away on summer vacation.

In September, when Miss Brodie returns from her summer travels to Austria and Germany, she calls for Sandy to come and visit her. Miss Brodie tells Sandy Rose has told her that Sandy has become Mr. Lloyd's love interest. Miss Brodie says Sandy is not right to be his lover, but Rose is because Rose has instinct but does not possess insight.

Sandy returns to visit Miss Mackay after she has already graduated. Miss Mackay is still pressing Sandy for information she can use against Miss Brodie. Miss Mackay says Miss Brodie has formed a new set of girls and she is afraid of what she is putting into their minds. Sandy tells Miss Mackay she won't be able to pin anything on Miss Brodie about sex but to try the politics angle, saying Miss Brodie is a Fascist. Sandy admits to Miss Mackay she, too, wants to put an end to Miss Brodie.

Miss Mackay tells Miss Brodie it is one of her own girls that betrayed her when Miss Brodie is forced into retirement in 1939 for teaching Fascism.

As Sandy wanders around Edinburgh, she visits the various churches and monuments and witnesses the behavior of those individuals in social classes different from her own. Sandy believes Miss Brodie wants Rose to become Mr. Lloyd's lover and that Miss Brodie wants Sandy to be the go-between for the affair.

At the point the Brodie Set girls have known Miss Brodie for seven years, they see themselves as one with Miss Brodie. They believe Miss Brodie is in their bones, which is symbolic of the influence Miss Brodie has had on them and their lives since the age of 10.

Even after all these years, Miss Mackay is still trying to discredit Miss Brodie. The ironic part is the girls of the Brodie Set are the most intelligent girls in the school. Miss Brodie writes Sandy a letter at the church where Sandy is now a nun to tell her the reason for her firing was simply an excuse; Miss Brodie still has no idea it was Sandy who had betrayed her.

Even after Miss Brodie dies, each of the girls visits Sandy at the convent each summer. The girls always discuss Miss Brodie and how she always wondered who betrayed her. In the end, when being interviewed by a journalist for a book Sandy wrote, Sandy admits her biggest influence was a teacher by the name of Miss Jean Brodie.



## Analysis

Mr. Lloyd is expressing his love for Miss Brodie by finding ways to overlap and intertwine her features into the various portraits he paints of Rose. The irony is that Rose is very pale and Miss Brodie is dark, so it is a difficult task Mr. Lloyd is somehow able to pull off.

When Mr. Lloyd tells Sandy she is the ugliest thing he's ever seen, he is not talking about how she looks on the outside. Mr. Lloyd is referring to how Sandy is on the inside. It is as if Mr. Lloyd has a premonition or feeling that Sandy may somehow betray Miss Brodie.

It seems as if Mr. Lloyd is staying connected with Miss Brodie through the girls of the Brodie set. He invites the girls to visit his home studio. Mrs. Lloyd serves the girls tea and Mr. Lloyd paints their portraits.

Miss Brodie is substituting her care-taking of and lovemaking with Mr. Lowther for that of and with Mr. Lloyd, who she cannot have. It's ironic the one girl of the Brodie Set Miss Brodie confides in is the one girl who ends up betraying her in the end.

When Sandy says she must have left her rosette in Mr. Lloyd's studio, it foreshadows Sandy may accuse Mr. Lloyd or set him up in some way. Sandy mentioning to Miss Brodie that she will be sitting for a portrait by Mr. Lloyd is also a bit suggestive.

Miss Brodie symbolizes each person entering into the life of another, and how it influences them in one way or another. Whether good or bad, every one of the girls of the Brodie set have some affect on how their lives turn out. In the end, even Sandy, who is the one that ultimately betrayed Miss Brodie, perceives Miss Brodie was a major influence on her life and shaped her into the person she became. The ironic part is Sandy was somewhat devious and plotting when she was a teenager and even threw Miss Brodie under the bus with Miss Mackay, yet she becomes a nun.

## Vocabulary

obliquely, suspicions, insipid, prophetic, pathetic, rogue, deprived, undesirable, enlightened, erroneous, exotic, suicidal, enchantment, expedient, endowed, prominent, irrevocable, enviable, reprisals, guise, calumny, vigorous, renunciation, precocious, reticent



# Characters

## Miss Jean Brodie

Miss Jean Brodie is one of the teachers at the Marcia Blaine School for Girls. Miss Brodie teaches the girls who are part of the Brodie set about unconventional things in life and not usually taught in school.

## Monica Douglas

Monica Douglas is one of the girls that is part of the Brodie set. Monica is 16 years old, great at math and has an anger problem. Her nose is always red and she wears her hair in braids. Monica's legs are fat and resemble pegs, and she wears her Panama hat higher on her head than the other girls that are part of the group. Monica marries a scientist, who demands a separation after Monica throws a hot coal at his sister during an argument.

## Eunice Gardiner

Eunice Gardiner is known as a gymnast and swimmer and for being a part of the Brodie set. Her stature is small and her style is neat. She wears her Panama hat with the brim turned up in the front and down in the back. Eunice grows up to marry a doctor and becomes a nurse. At 28 years old, she and her husband are planning a trip to Edinburgh and Eunice mentions to her husband she wants to visit Miss Brodie's grave.

## Jenny Gray

Jenny Gray is Sandy's best friend and wants to be an actress. Jenny is another girl who is part of the Brodie set. Jenny wears her Panama hat with the front brim bent down. Jenny is the prettiest of the girls in the Brodie set.

## Joyce Emily Hammond

Joyce Emily is new to the school because she has been kicked out of other schools; however, her parents are wealthy so this is their last resort as a school for their daughter. She is a friend of Mary's and she is trying to get accepted into the Brodie set.

## Mr. Theodore Lloyd

Mr. Lloyd is the art teacher at the school. He is one of the only teachers who supports Miss Brodie and her teaching methodologies. Mr. Lloyd has only one arm because he



lost the other in the war. Mr. Lloyd is half Welsh and half English. His voice is hoarse as if he has persistent bronchitis.

## **Mary Macgregor**

Mary Macgregor is the final girl to make up the Brodie set. She is quiet. Mary Macgregor dies in a hotel fire at the age of 23.

## **Miss Mackay**

Miss Mackay is the headmistress of the girl's school.

## **Mr. Lowther**

Mr. Lowther is the music teacher. It is implied he may have an unhealthy obsession with some of the girls, so Miss Brodie stays with her girls during music class. Mr. Lowther, however, is a big supporter of Miss Brodie and her unorthodox ways of teaching.

## **Miss Lockhart**

Miss Lockhart is the science teacher at the senior high school. Even when the girls in the Brodie set are 10 and get ink on their blouses, Miss Brodie sends them to Miss Lockhart's room. Miss Lockhart uses a white solution and a cotton ball to get the ink stain out.

## **Sandy Stranger**

Another girl of the Brodie set is Sandy Stringer. Sandy is known for her small eyes and her vowel sounds. She wears her Panama hat with the brim all turned up and an elastic band around her chin. Sandy grows up to be a nun, known as Sister Helena.

## **Rose Stanley**

Rose Stanley is another one of the Brodie set. She has blonde hair and is known for being sexually promiscuous with boys. She wears her Panama hat dented in on each side and wears her hair in a short bob.





# Objects/Places

## Marcia Blaine School for Girls

The Marcia Blaine School for Girls is a day school for girls. The funder of the school was a wealthy widow. This is the school where Miss Brodie teaches and the Brodie set attend school.

## Edinburgh

Edinburgh is the city in Scotland where the school is located.

## Cramond

Cramond is the name of the home where Mr. Lowther was born, raised and currently lives.

## Old Town

Old Town is the main area of the town that holds all of the historic figures, churches, statues and more.

## Portraits

The art teacher, Mr. Lloyd, who is also the secret love of Miss Brodie paints portraits of each of the Brodie set girls and then a portrait of them as a group. The significance of the portraits is two-fold. First, all of the portraits have some resemblance to Miss Brodie. Second, the portraits are the tie that binds Mr. Lloyd and Miss Brodie since they cannot be together. The Brodie set shares information with Miss Brodie about Mr. Lloyd and with Mr. Lloyd about Miss Brodie.



# Themes

## Coming of Age

One of the primary themes running throughout the novel is growing up and coming of age. In some way, each of the characters learns lessons about growing up and dealing with responsibilities in life that are both larger than themselves, and larger than the confines of school. In the case of the novel, coming of age of a sexual nature is prominent. Primarily, the catalyst for coming of age comes by way of Miss Jean Brodie, who influences the girls during their developmental years from age ten until well into their adult lives. Even Miss Jean Brodie comes of age in the novel, when she keeps talking about being in and out of her prime. The girls explore what sex is and live somewhat vicariously through the stories Miss Brodie tells of her loves and the stories the girls make up in their own minds and even write down in Jenny's notebook.

## Competition

Even though the girls referred to as the Brodie Set stick together and care for one another, they are also in competition with each other. Each girl has her own identity, special talent, skills, traits, or something in particular for which they are known, and they seek to distinguish themselves from the others in various pursuits. Collectively, the Brodie Set girls are in competition with the rest of the school because they are a special group that receives special attention and special treatment from Miss Brodie. Miss Brodie is also in competition with the other teachers because she has her own teaching methodology and way of living life.

Miss Brodie ends up being in competition with both the science teacher, Miss Lockhart, and the two sewing teachers for the attention of the music teacher, Mr. Lowther. Miss Brodie is also competing in an indirect way for the attention of the art teacher, Mr. Lloyd, with Mr. Lloyd's wife and even with the girls of the Brodie set.

In a symbolic way, Miss Brodie is also competing against time. Though she is still young in comparison to others, she is older than the girls she mentors, and understands that she will not be young forever. She therefore tends to live in a far less orthodox fashion than her fellow teachers, and lives far more wildly than other women -especially when it comes to sexuality.

## Friendship

The major, underlying theme of the novel "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie" is friendship. From first appearances, the girls of the Brodie Set appear to be loyal best friends. But while the girls do have a strong sense of a bond, and while other believe the girls present a solid front, they do have some backstabbing tendencies as well as ulterior motives. This includes blatantly saying and doing things behind each others' backs in

the attempt to get ahead or escape trouble. As the reader comes to discover, the girls grouped together really have individual lives, with different interests and beliefs. The only true thing tying them together is Miss Brodie, which allows them some semblance of friendship when they otherwise would not have been friends at all.

However, this unusual set of girls does indeed pave way to friendship of varying sorts. Some of the girls are more faithful and closer to each other than the other girls. For example, Sandy and Jenny are close friends. They are the two girls writing the stories together about Miss Brodie in the notebook. Both girls, likewise, wonder which among them betrayed Miss Brodie, and their bond.



# Style

## Point of View

The novel is generally written in the third person point of view, switching into first person narrative at times, so the reader can be apprised of the inner dialogue of the characters. This is not the case with all of the characters, however. The narrator swings back and forth in telling the story of Miss Brodie and the Brodie Set from the past to the present throughout the book.

The point of view of this novel does not permit the reader to connect closely with any of the characters. The point of view does allow the reader to see each of the characters from the points of view of different characters. The point of view also allows the author to inject her own opinions into the narration and to expand on the events taking place around the main character and each character in the novel without interrupting the flow of the narration. For these reasons, the point of view works well with this novel and the author's writing style.

## Setting

The novel is set primarily at an all-girls school in Edinburgh, Scotland, in the 1930s. The setting of this novel is important because the time period explains the roles of women and men and why many see Miss Brodie and her spinsterhood as a bad influence on her students. The main characters of the novel are at a very impressionable age of ten when they first meet and are taught by Miss Brodie. Miss Brodie's influence on the girls continues throughout their teenage years, and even into adulthood.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware of the impact Miss Brodie is going to have on shaping the adults each of the girls becomes. However, as events unfold, Miss Brodie's influence continuously leaks into the consciousness of the girls of the Brodie set. Even though the primary plot of the novel focuses on Miss Brodie being in her prime, the reader soon realizes it is Miss Brodie's way of teaching the girls motivating each of the characters in the novel to learn and take an interest in a specific area of their individual lives.

## Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is somewhat more antiquated than the language to which readers of modern novels might be accustomed. Although the language of the novel is not formal, it uses language that has begun to go out of modern daily usage, and since it is set in a foreign country, this contributes to the use of different language and words. The language is of an educated nature, strong and descriptive enough, and creates a flow leaving the reader impressed with the words as much as the plot when the novel is done.



The language of the novel is appropriate to the plot because it is typical of the characters in the novel and the education level of the writer. The novel is not in love with its own words, but is descriptive enough that the reader finds enjoyment in the words as well as the plot. The language is not difficult to understand, however, and everything is clear in its context. For this reason, the language of the novel fits well with the plot of the novel.

## Structure

The novel is divided into six chapters. Each chapter is ten to twenty pages long. The chapters tell the story both in exposition and dialogue. The author also injects her own voice in the chapters, giving her opinion of the events surrounding the setting of the novel as well as of the actions taking place within the plot.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows Miss Brodie living and being in her prime. One subplot follows the Brodie set girls as Miss Brodie influences and shapes each of their lives to be the *crème de la crème*. Another subplot follows Sandra's attempts to pretend to be loyal to Miss Brodie, but actually she is the one that ends up betraying Miss Brodie. All these plots come to a conclusion at the end of the novel.

## Quotes

I have frequently told you, and the holidays just past have convinced me, that my prime has truly begun. One's prime is elusive. You little girls, when you grow up, must be on the alert to recognize your prime at whatever time of your life it may occur. You must then live it to the full. (Chapter 1)

Meanwhile, I follow my principles of education and give of my best in my prime. The word 'education' comes from the root e from ex, out and duco, I lead. It means a leading out. To me education is a leading out of what is already there in the pupil's soul. To Miss Mackay it is a putting in of something that is not there, and that is not what I call education, I call it intrusion, from the Latin root prefix in meaning in and the stem trudo, I thrust. Miss Mackay's method is to thrust a lot of information into the pupil's head; mine is a leading out of knowledge, and that is true education as is proved by the root meaning. Now Miss Mackay has accused me of putting ideas into my girls' heads, but in fact that is her practice and mine is quite the opposite. Never let it be said that I put ideas into your head. (Chapter 2)

Next year, you will have the specialists to teach you history and mathematics and languages, a teacher for this and a teacher for that, a period of forty-five minutes for this and another for that. But in this your last year with me you will receive the fruits of my prime. They will remain with you all your days. (Chapter 3)

It is because you are mine. I mean of my stamp and cut, and I am in my prime. (Chapter 4)

Jean Brodie is a magnificent woman in her prime. (Chapter 5)

There was a Miss Jean Brodie in her prime. (Chapter 6)



# Topics for Discussion

## Topic 1

Who is Miss Jean Brodie? Why does she insist on teaching at a conservative all girls school? Why does she always talk about being in her prime? Why does she insist she is in her prime, but never really does anything about it, such as find a husband? What does Miss Brodie recall about her old lover? What does the betrayal of one of the Brodie set do to Miss Brodie? Why is this important? How does it change Miss Brodie's life?

## Topic 2

Discuss the relationship between Sandy and Miss Brodie. Are they friends or confidantes? Is there competition in their relationship? How does Sandy feel about Miss Brodie? How does Miss Brodie feel about Sandy? Why does Sandy think she is in competition with Miss Brodie? What does she do about it? What happens to Miss Brodie? Does Sandy tell the truth? Explain.

## Topic 3

Why does the author introduce all six of the Brodie set girls, but really only focus in on the details of a few of the girls as the story unfolds? How does Miss Brodie influence the choices each girl makes for their futures? Miss Brodie has predictions of how each girl will turn out as a woman? Does she predict correctly?

## Topic 4

Who is Mr. Lloyd? Do you think he has an affair with Miss Brodie? Do you think the kiss in the art room is real or made up? How does Mr. Lloyd attempt to stay connected to Miss Brodie, even though they cannot be together? Why does he allow the Brodie set to come to his home studio, sit for portraits and have tea with him and his wife? Why do the girls come in pairs rather than all at once?

## Topic 5

Who is Mr. Lowther? Why does he end up marrying Miss Lockhart? Do you think Mr. Lowther knows Miss Brodie is truly in love with Mr. Lloyd? Do you think Mr. Lowther believes Miss Brodie is using him or helping him?



## Topic 6

Discuss feminism. What impact does feminism have on the characters of the novel? How does it motivate them? Why is feminism an issue to these students? Does feminism have anything to do with the actions against Miss Brodie?

## Topic 7

Why does Sandy betray Miss Brodie? What accomplishment, if any, does the betrayal bring to Sandy? Does Sandy regret betraying Miss Brodie in the end? How does each character learn to deal with the betrayal?