Studies in the Park Study Guide

Studies in the Park by Anita Desai

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Introduction

Anita Desai is widely recognized as one of India's leading English-language fiction writers. Her short story "Studies in the Park" was first published in 1978, in her collection *Games at Twilight*.

The story is told from the point of view of Suno, a young man whose family is continually pressuring him to study for a major exam which will determine his future educational track. But all of the members of his family□his mother, father, and uncle, as well as his brothers and sisters□make so much noise and interrupt him so frequently that he is unable to concentrates on his studies. In exasperation, Suno leaves his house to study at a cafe; but even the cafe is not without noise and interruptions. Finally, Suno discovers that many young men like himself study in the park near his house, and he too begins to study there every day. One day, shortly before his exam, Suno sees what he interprets as a "vision" in the park: a beautiful, but sickly, young woman lying on a park bench with her head in the lap of another man. Suno is so struck by this "vision" that he experiences a transformation, as a result of which he chooses not to take the exam after all, but to pursue life as an adventure, rather than as a race.

"Studies in the Park" explores several themes which are central to the stories of Anita Desai. The narration is concerned with the internal consciousness of the central character, who struggles for a sense of individuality against the pressures from his family to conform to societal expectations. The internal monologue of the narrative is characteristic of Desai's "stream-of-consciousness" style of writing, and the strongly descriptive language has earned Desai recognition as a leading "imagist" writer.

Author Biography

Anita Desai is recognized as one of India's leading novelists writing in English. She has been noted for her rich imagery and her focus on the interior world of her characters who struggle with finding meaning in their lives and often stray from the path of conformity to the values of their families. Desai was born Anita Mazumdar on June 24, 1937, in Mussoorie, India; she grew up in Delhi. Her mother was German and her father Indian (Bengali), and Desai was raised speaking Hindi and German as well as English. In 1957, she graduated from the University of Delhi with a B.A. in English. In 1958, she married Ashvin Desai, an executive, with whom she had four children. She began publishing short stories in the late 1950s. Because she was taught to write in English, it has remained her preference for fiction writing.

Desai gained recognition with her first novel, *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), in which an Indian woman, struggling with her role in her family, kills her husband and then commits suicide. Her next four novels were *Voices in the City* (1965), *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1968), *Where Shall We Go this Summer* (1975), and *Fire on the Mountain* (1977). Her only collection of short stories, *Games at Twilight and Other Stories*, was published in 1978. She has subsequently written four more novels, *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *In Custody* (1984), *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1989), and *Journey to Ithaca* (1995). She has also written a children's story, *The Village by the Sea* (1982), which was made into a movie in 1992. In 1993, *In Custody* was also adapted to the screen in Hindi and Urdu with English subtitles and produced by Merchant and Ivory. Desai first came to the United States in 1987, where she has taught at Smith College (1987-88), Mount Holyoke College (1988-93), and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, beginning in 1993.

Plot Summary

This story is told from the point of view of Suno, a young man whose family is constantly pressuring him to study for a major exam which will determine his future educational track: "Oh study, study, study, they all breathed at me." But Suno is constantly interrupted and distracted by each and every member of his family. Most of all, "they don't know the meaning of the word Quiet." His father listens to the radio news in six different languages. From the kitchen he hears his mother frying foods and sloshing water around. When his brothers and sisters come home from school, they taunt him and then run away. In addition, his mother frequently interrupts him to insist that he drink milk with sugar in it, "like a baby." In exasperation, Suno leaves his house to try studying at a cafe. But the cafe proprietor, and then the waiter, insist on talking to him. Leaving the cafe, he comes upon a *gram* vendor, who suggests he go to study in the local park. In the park, Suno finds that there are many young men studying, or attempting to study, for the same or similar exams. At first feeling out of place there, Suno begins to go to the park every day to study. Although "it took me time to get accustomed to the ways of the park," he finds that, "soon I got to know it as well as my own room at home and found I could study there, or sleep, or daydream, as I chose." Yet Suno hates everyone else who comes to the park, except the other students. When there is only one month to go before his exam, the pressure from his family increases. His father implores him to "get a first" on the exam: "Get a first, get a first, get a first□like a railway engine, it went charging over me, grinding me down, and left me dead and mangled on the tracks." Then one day in the park, Suno sees something which he later calls a "vision": he sees a beautiful but sickly young woman lying on a park bench with her head in the lap of an older man. Struck by this sight, which he describes as "Divine," or "a work of art," or "a vision," Suno runs home. He is so strongly affected by this sight that "everything else had suddenly withered and died, gone lifeless and purposeless when compared with this vision. My studies, my family, my life□they all belonged to the dead and only what I had seen in the park had any meaning." When Suno returns to the park, he sees the world around him in a different way; whereas before he had resented all the other people, he begins to interact with them in a pleasant way. As a result of his "vision," he decides not to take the exam after all, because "life has taken a different path for me, in the form of a search, not a race" as it is for his father and the others. Suno continues to go to the park, wondering "if I shall ever get another glimpse of that strange vision that set me free. I never have, but I keep wishing, hoping."

Summary

"Studies in the Park" is Anita Desai's short story about the choice of a young Indian man, named Suno, who rejects his family's scholarly objective for his life in favor of a life of exploration and studies of human nature.

As the story begins, Suno bemoans the constant noise in his home, where he is confined to study for his university entrance exam. The sound of the news being read in several different languages comes from his father's room. The noise from the kitchen is a constant clash and clanging of pots and utensils, as his mother prepares meals. Outside on the street, the traffic is a cacophony of bells, whistles and sirens. The delivery of milk is the worst intrusion, because Suno is continually provided milk with sugar in it to provide energy.

The pressure continues to build on Suno, who cannot concentrate in this environment surrounded by people who do not understand the need to be quiet. At one point, Suno races from his room and encounters his father. He takes the opportunity to remind Suno, once more, of the necessity to get a good grade on his exam so that he can one day earn a university degree.

Suno escapes from the house and tries to study in a local cafy. The owner and workers constantly interrupt him. He leaves to walk the streets. As he walks, Suno encounters a street vendor at the entrance to a city park. He tells Suno that many students come to the park for the peace and quiet necessary for their studies.

Suno tentatively enters the park and wonders why he has not thought of the park as a solution to his problem before. At first, Suno finds it hard to concentrate and watches the squirrels and birds play their little games, as well as other students who now read as they walk effortlessly along the paths.

Eventually, Suno becomes comfortable with studying in the park and comes every day for the quiet and the company of peers. Soon, Suno feels more comfortable in the park, than he does in his own room at home. He resents some of the park's visitors, such as athletes and wrestlers, whose intentions are not as noble as his academic pursuits.

Suno's family continues to prod him to study late into the night. Suno begins to sleep at the park during the day, so that he can maintain the fazade of sleepless nights in favor of studies.

Now, there is only one month left before the exams. Suno and the other students in the park assume an almost demented look from intensive reading and lack of sleep. Suno feels as if his books are parasites sucking him dry. He feels as if his brain is jammed, devoid of all lubricant for proper functioning.

One night, Suno's father reminds him of the importance of passing the exam so that he can get a good job someday. Suno recoils from his father's hand on his shoulder, as if

his father's words are a freight train bearing down on him, leaving him dead on the tracks.

Now, everything in the park seems as lifeless as Suno's mood. One day, Suno encounters another student whose face looks "like a grey bone" from exhaustion. Suno touches his own face and is surprised to find that he still has warm flesh. Suno comes to the realization that all these students are dying a slow death. Their arrival at the examination hall will be the final proclamation of death.

Suno thinks that the degrees and educational levels achieved by the students will be just another step toward a life in a dead world. One evening, on his way out of the park, Suno sees a tender scene that changes his world forever.

On a bench behind an oleander tree, lay a young Muslim woman wrapped in a black borkha, her head in the lap of a much older man. The woman's pale skin belies not only an illness, such as anemia or tuberculosis, but also a beauty from which Suno could not remove his eyes. The man caresses the young woman with such tenderness that Suno is riveted to his spot to watch the couple.

Nearby, two little girls play in the dirt, but the couple is oblivious to anyone but each other, gazing intensely into the other's eyes. Suno wonders about the man. Why doesn't he take the dying woman to the hospital? Suno lingers a short while and imagines that the couple is a work of art situated in the park and not a human couple. A quiet laugh from the woman breaks the spell, and Suno hurries away from the scene.

As Suno walks home, he reasons that the couple on the bench is not a vision, but real, live human beings who exhibit more life than anyone else he has ever encountered. From this moment on, Suno's books are dead to him, because he has had a glimpse of real life.

Suno's parents continue to plead with him to continue his studies, but he has no interest in academic achievements any longer.

Suno returns to the park. Now, he's not a student, but a lover of life. He takes the time to interact with the people whom he thought unworthy before. As he engages with his new acquaintances, Suno is always on the lookout for the couple that served as the basis for his metamorphosis. However, they never return.

Analysis

The story is told in the first person narrative perspective, which means that the reader has access to the narrator's thoughts and feelings, as well as the activities in the plot line. This literary technique allows the reader to fully grasp the progress of Suno's metamorphosis from a harried student to an observer of human nature much better than if the transition were only revealed through dialogue. This would take longer to achieve.

The setting for the story is India in the mid 1970's, although the city is never defined. The burden for academic achievement on young men in this country is intense. It involves the entire family, a source of aggravation early on in Suno's story. Culturally, the men provide for families and sometimes extended families. Therefore, the need for a good job is extremely important for financial reasons, as well as family honor.

The author uses the technique of repetition several times during the story, which adds rhythm and emphatic tone. For example, when Suno's father again reminds Suno that it is important to get a first in the exam, Suno feels as if the words are a train bearing down on him. "Get a first, get a first, get a first." The rhythm and the sounds of the words mimic the pace of the wheels of a train.

The theme of life versus death is important in the story, and the author graphically illustrates the difference using the technique of irony. The students, who walk the park almost zombie-like in their quest for a new life, cannot compare to the life shining from the face of the dying woman lying with her husband on the park bench.

It is at this moment that Suno experiences his transition and determines the course of his own life, thus giving significance to the story's title. Suno had come to study in the park, but eventually finds that his most important lesson wouldn't be found in a textbook.

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Characters

The Gram Vendor

The *gram* vendor is a street vendor who first calls Suno's attention to the park as a place of study. The gram vendor is described as having "a crippled arm that hung out of his shirt sleeve like a leg of mutton dangling on a hook. His face was scarred as though he had been dragged out of some terrible accident."

Suno

Suno is the narrator of the story. He is a young man whose entire family is continually pressuring him to study for a major exam which will determine his future educational track. Suno is extremely irritated and distracted by every noise and interruption caused by his family as he sits in his room trying to study. In exasperation, Suno leaves his house to try studying in a cafe; but both the cafe proprietor and the waiter insist on talking to him. Giving up on the cafe, Suno wanders into the local park, where many young men such as himself are studying, or attempting to study, for similar exams. From then on, Suno returns to the park to do his studying. One day he sees a scene which he later thinks of as a "vision": a very sickly young woman is lying with her head on the lap of an older man; the two are so absorbed in one another that they do not notice anything around them. Something about this "vision" inspires a transformation in Suno. He decides not to take the exams after all, not to succumb to the pressure of his family, but to approach life as a "search" rather than a "race."

Suno's Father

Suno's father, like the other members of his family, is seen as someone who both pressures him continually to study for his exam and who distracts him from his studies by listening to the radio news in six different languages.

Suno's Mother

Suno mentions his mother primarily as one of several family members who continually pressure him to study for his exam, yet she is continually making noise, primarily from her cooking, or interrupting him to give him milk with sugar in it.

Young Woman on the Park Bench

One day while in the park, Suno comes across a young woman lying on a park bench with her head resting in the lap of an older man. He describes what he later thinks of as his "vision" in the following terms: "She was a Muslim, wrapped in a black *borkha*. . .I

saw her face. It lay bared, in the black folds of her *borkha,* like a flower, wax-white and composed, like a Persian lily or a tobacco flower at night. She was young. Very young, very pale, beautiful with a beauty I had never come across even in a dream." Although he never sees this woman again, Suno is inspired by the sight of her, his "vision," to seek out a different path in life from that which his family had been forcing him onto.

Themes

Family

Like many of Desai's stories, this one focuses on the theme of the individual struggling to define her- or himself in the face of overwhelming family and societal pressures. Thus, the role of the family is central to the story. Suno is overwhelmed by his family's intrusions into his life. In the first place, it is his family that is putting so much pressure on him to study for the exam: "study, study, study," they tell him. Yet it is also the activities of the family members which make it impossible for Suno to focus on his studies. His father listens to the radio news in six different languages. His mother makes noise in the kitchen with the sizzling sounds of her frying and the sounds of water sloshing around. His younger brothers and sisters tease and harass him when they return home from school. Even the sounds of his father's shoes squeaking on the staircase interfere with Suno's powers of concentration. And his mother, in an effort to help him study, only further interrupts him to make him drink milk with sugar in it. Suno's first step in escaping the oppressive atmosphere of his family life is to leave the house in order to find a quieter place to study. In the process of physically stepping out from the family home, Suno eventually makes a symbolic break from the path they expect him to take in life.

Death in Life, Life in Death

Suno's "vision" of the young woman in the park allows him to truly experience life for the first time. However, before he reaches this point of personal transformation, Suno sees all around him images of death. The death he sees symbolizes the death-in-life he has been leading, studying night and day for an exam his parents are pressuring him to take. Suno first associates his life of studying for the exam with a living death when he speaks with another student whom he meets in the park. Suno notices that the other student's "face was like a grey bone." From this image of bone Suno makes a leap to images of death. "I felt as if we were all dying in the park, that when we entered the examination we would be declared officially dead." Suno thinks of the educational degrees for which he and the other students are studying as being "like official stamps they would declare us dead. Ready for a dead world. A world in which ghosts went about. . . . Slowly, slowly we were killing ourselves in order to join them." Leaving the park, Suno comes across a beautiful dying girl on a park bench. This image of life on the verge of death jolts Suno into a realization about life. Suno thinks of the dying girl on the bench with the older man as belonging "to the dead," but he realizes that "now I had seen what being alive meant." With this "vision," Suno makes the choice to live his own life by refusing to take the exam which for him would only be a stamp of death.

Style

Narrative Point of View

This story is told in the first person, which means that the narrator is a character in the story whose knowledge is restricted to that of his own point of view. The narrator in this story is Suno, a young man at odds with his family life. Suno's firstperson narration is central to the story because it focuses on his internal monologue regarding the pressures his family has placed on him to study for the exam, and the distractions they cause which make it hard for him to study. Because the story is about Suno's internal transformation, as a result of his "vision" in the park, the internal monologue provides the reader with a view to Suno's inner struggles and his renewed sense of the meaning of his life.

Stream-of-Consciousness Narration

Characteristic of Desai's writing style is the stream-of-consciousness internal monologue of her main characters. A stream-of-consciousness writing style aims at representing the flow of thoughts which run through a person's mind; thus, it is often characterized by a disorganized jumble of ideas and images. Suno's stream-of-consciousness narration runs throughout the story, beginning with the opening sentence: "Turn if off, turn it off, turn it off!" It becomes clear that Suno is not actually telling his father to turn off the radio, but is merely thinking, in a frustrated and exasperated frame of mind. Listing the six different languages in which his father listens to the radio news, the narration continues in Suno's stream-of-consciousness thinking: "What next, my god, what next? Turn it off before I smash it onto his head, fling it out of the window. . . ." But of course Suno could never outwardly express this anger toward his father, and so the thoughts which quickly follow these violent thoughts within the same sentence are a warning to himself not to act on his rage: ". . . do nothing of the sort of course, nothing of the sort." Expressing both his rage and his efforts at calming himself within a single sentence presents the reader with a sense of urgency and exasperation which mirrors Suno's internal state. This stream-of-consciousness narration reappears throughout the story, in order to represent Suno's internal state of mind.

Tone

The tone of narration may change throughout a story. In this story, Suno's thoughts about his family while in his room trying to study are particularly sarcastic in tone, and therefore often humorous. While Suno the character is completely exasperated with his family, his descriptions of their activities are exaggerated to the point of satire. Early in the story, Suno describes the hissing sounds of his mother's cooking in the kitchen as a source of irritation in his attempts to study for the exam; yet what begins as description

launches off into fanciful sarcasm and exaggeration: "What all does she fry and feed us on, for God's sake? Eggplants, potatoes, spinach, shoe soles, newspapers, finally she'll slice me and feed me to my brothers and sisters." Suno's sarcastic and exaggerated descriptions of the sounds of his household which irritate and distract him continue in a humorous vein: "The bell rings. Voices clash, clatter and break. The tin-and-bottle man? The neighbors? The police? The Help-the- Blind man? Thieves and burglars? All of them, all of them, ten or twenty or a hundred of them, marching up the stairs, hammering at the door, breaking in and climbing over me□ten, twenty or a hundred of them."

Setting

The setting is a central element of this story. It is set in India, as are most of Desai's stories. More importantly, perhaps, this story is set in two primary locations: Suno's house and the park in which he studies. These two locations have very different effects on Suno. His home is a place of noise, irritation, and intrusion by various members of his family. When he is not being reminded by members of his family to "study, study, study," he is being interrupted in his studies by the various noises they make. The park, on the other hand, while still a reminder of his upcoming exam, is free of the oppressive intrusion of his family on his thoughts. Symbolically, the home represents a place where Suno is expected to conform to the expectations of his family and his culture□to "get a first" in the exam. The park, however, represents a space in which Suno ultimately discovers "life" and, as a result, a sense of "freedom" from these expectations□ particularly the expectation to study for the exam.

Historical Context

Colonization and Independence of India

India was a colony of the British empire for almost a century, from 1858 to 1947. The history of India during this period, therefore, is one of expansion of British power in conflict with organizations, protests, rebellion, and terrorist activism among the peoples of India. Before 1848, India had been colonized and ruled by the East India Company, but power was transferred to the British crown in 1858. In 1876, Queen Victoria of England took on the additional title of Empress of India. Rebellion on the part of the Indians against European colonization was waged off and on throughout India's history of colonization. However, the first nationally organized Indian effort at achieving independence was formed in 1885, with the first meeting of the Indian National Congress. Nevertheless, Britain continued to expand its region of power in the area. In 1886, Britain conquered Burma, which it added to its Indian territory. In 1906, the British government instituted a series of reforms ostensibly to increase Indian political influence. With the advent of World War I in 1914, many Indians willingly fought on the side of the British, with the expectation that their loyalty in war would result in further concessions of British power to Indian self-rule; but the disappointment of this expectation following the war only served to spark further protests. Throughout the inter-war years, Indian resistance to British rule continued, with the Indian National Congress inspired by the leadership of Gandhi. In 1947, when the British Parliament voted in the Indian Independence Act, British rule was finally ceded to Indian self-rule.

Bengal

Desai's father was of Bengali origin. The region of Bengal, primarily Muslim (as compared to a Hindu majority throughout India) was divided into two provinces by the British in 1905, without regard to the concerns of Bengali national identity. While the Bengali had previously been active in resistance to British power, the division of Bengal inspired massive protest. From 1908 to 1910, struggles between Bengali resistance movements and repressive measures on the part of the British government were particularly fierce. In 1911, Bengal was reunited, and the British capital of India was transferred from Calcutta (in Bengal) to Delhi.

Religions in India

In Desai's story, it can be assumed that Suno is from a Hindi family, as he notes that the young woman he sees on the park bench is Muslim. The major religions of India are Muslim and Hindu. During the years of protest against British rule, particularly in the inter-war period, Indians were internally divided in their political goals along these religious lines. Gandhi worked hard to unify the two religions in the cause for independence, but his efforts were ultimately unsuccessful. Thus, when the British

ceded power in 1947, India was divided into two countries□Pakistan was to be Muslim, while India (to be called the Republic of India) would be Hindu. However, the process of instituting this national division was wracked by bloody civil war among Hindus and Muslims.

Languages of India

With the achievement of national independence in 1947, India officially recognized 14 different languages and dialects throughout the nation, while maintaining English as the language for government transactions. The national language was to be Hindi. Thus, while English is not the "mother tongue" of most Indians, many writers choose to write in English. Desai, for instance, has always written in English because, she has explained, it is the language she was taught to write in school. Other Indian writers and intellectuals, however, argue that a true Indian literature should be written in an Indian language.

Education in India

An important element of Indian protest against British rule included a call for various reforms and improvements in the area of education, and particularly for a system of national education. Gandhi's call for the boycott of British products eventually included a boycott of British schools and colleges. During this period, independent Indian schools were established, but were quickly dissolved with government suppression of the movement. Gandhi also pushed for increased educational opportunities for girls, and helped women to organize public protests on this issue. In the post-independence era, various efforts at reform have been instituted by the govern ment in the area of education; major reforms were enacted in 1968, and again in 1986.

Literary Heritage

Desai is one of the leading Anglo-Indian fiction writers of the 20th Century. Anglo-Indian places Desai with other Indian writers whose works are originally written in English (rather than Hindi, or any of India's regional languages). The first Anglo- Indian novel, *Rajmohan's Wife,* was written by Chandra Chatterjee, and the first modern Indian novelist was Bankim Chandra. According to R.K. Dhawan, "The Indian English novelist until the thirties wrote for a readership largely Indian and unmistakably nationalist." Writing in 1989, Dhawan explains that, "The Indian English fiction in post- Independent India has assumed over the preceding thirty years all kinds of colourful traditions. It is now free from the social and political overtones of a rabidly nationalistic variety." Dhawan concludes that "The Indian English novel has enjoyed its golden period during the last few decades." Desai is the most widely recognized of contemporary female Indian novelists, in the company of Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Jhabvala, and Nayantara Sahgail.

Critical Overview

Desai is widely recognized as one of the leading Indian novelists writing in the English language. R. K. Dhawan notes that Desai's novels "have drawn worldwide attention and she stands in the forefront in the world of fiction." B. Ramachandra Rao refers to Desai as "one of the most fascinating original writers in Indo-Anglican writing today." Both Seema Jena and R. S. Sharma state that Desai is "one of the most promising novelists writing in English today in India." Usha Bande concurs that Desai is "one of the most serious yet appealing novelists on the Indian-English firmament." Critics generally agree that, as Rao has said, Desai is "one of the most significant of the Indo-Anglican novelists." Dhawan has stated that Desai "has added a new dimension to the Indian English fiction." Dhawan explains that, whereas previous Anglo-Indian novelists (Indian novelists writing in English) have focused on the external world of Indian culture, Desai "is interested in the psychic life of her characters and her novels reveal that her real concern is with the exploration of the human psyche." Rao points to Desai's focus on character over story, which, he says, "makes her work something very unusual in Indo-Anglican fiction. It gives to the Indo-Anglican novel a poetic depth, a psychological sophistication which were lacking." Jena concurs that Desai "has tried to introduce a modern psychological vein and projects a sensibility generally not encountered in other Indo-Anglican writers of fiction." Sharma notes that Desai's "sensitive handling of the craft of fiction has brought her both popular appreciation and critical acclaim," and that she "has established herself as one of the significant voices in Indo- Anglican fiction."

Primarily a novelist, Desai has published one collection of short stories, *Games at Twilight* (1978), which includes "Studies in the Park." Sharma explains that Desai's short stories "show the same tendency towards a psychological exploration of states of 'being,' that we observe in her longer fiction, but they are more tightly organized and compact." Sharma notes that in most of the stories in *Games at Twilight* "the protagonist happens to be a young adolescent struggling to come to grips with the adult world. The stories capture that moment in their life when reality intrudes in their world of innocence like a hot blast and destroys their complacent acceptance of what appears to them to be real." Sharma concludes that Desai's short stories "have a freshness that makes them a significant contribution to the art of short-story in Indian writing in English."

Desai is known for stories and novels which focus on the internal life of her characters rather than on plot or story. These characters struggle to forge a sense of individuality in the context of oppressive family and societal expectations. As Jena notes, "Her main concern is to depict the psychic state of her protagonists, at a crucial juncture in their lives." In discussing the short stories of *Games at Twilight*, Rao states, "These characters have secret inner lives which make them unique and they react against the inane routine of everyday life." Rao goes on to say that the characters in these stories "are all struggling and sensitive individuals protesting against the drabness and dullness of a life of conformity. These characters are not creatures of habit and, although they differ from one another in degree, they are of the same kind. They are stubbornly unyielding and carefully protect the vision of the secret world of passion and beauty."

Critics also note Desai's use of language and description in conveying the internal monologues of her characters through a stream-of-consciousness flow of words. Jena explains that Desai "has forged a style supple and suggestive enough to convey the fever and fretfulness, the eddies and currents in the stream of consciousness of her characters. The grapple with thoughts, feelings and emotions is reflected in the language, syntax and imagery." Sharma points to Desai's rich imagery and her keen observation of the world around her, pointing out that Desai "observes every sight and sound with an uncommon intensity. Nothing escapes her eyes, not even the legs of a spider."

Rao describes the "imagist" style in Desai's use of language and description in the short stories as a "technique of evoking a mood or atmosphere by carefully piling up innumerable details of the colours, the smells and the sights of Indian life." Rao notes, however, that "this technique which is quite effective in the novels has obvious drawbacks when employed in the short story. Owing to its shorter length, the short story does not offer enough space for Anita Desai to build up the tempo or to evoke the mood as she does in her novels." Nonetheless, Rao's assessment of Desai's style in the short stories is primarily positive: "Within these obvious limitations imposed by the short story as an art form, Mrs. Desai does succeed in giving us very poetic descriptions of the heat and the dust, the beauty and the sordidness of the environment in which her protagonists live. Mrs. Desai's gift for the telling phrase, and her uncanny ability to see the unusual and the unfamiliar are displayed in the short stories as well."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Brent has a Ph.D. in American culture, with a specialization in film studies, from the University of Michigan. She is a freelance writer and teaches courses in the history of American cinema. In the following essay, Brent discusses descriptive language in Desai's story "Studies in the Park."

Desai's fictional style is known for its elaborate and detailed descriptive language, which effectively evokes the internal mood and landscape of a firstperson narrator. In "Studies in the Park," Suno is a young man whose family has put severe and incessant pressure on him to "study, study, study" for a major exam which will determine his future educational and career track. Although his parents have attempted to maximize his study time by sending his uncle away temporarily and giving his room to Suno, and although his mother attempts to nourish his mind with tall glasses of sugared milk, Suno is incessantly disturbed and distracted by the sounds made by the activities of various members of his family in the course of their daily activities. "Studies in the Park" is written from the perspective of Suno's first-person narrative point of view. The narration, then, is itself a portrait of the landscape of Suno's mind; the richly descriptive language throughout the story is a reflection of Suno's internal state of mind. Because Suno's primary goal, at least in the beginning, is to find a quiet place to study, his descriptions of sounds□the sounds of human voices, as well as the various sounds they make in the course of their activities□take on extremely negative connotations. The descriptive language used throughout the story to describe a wide spectrum of human-generated noises is indicative of Suno's mood of extreme anxiety and agitation in the face of familial pressure to succeed on the exam. This essay covers a close analysis of descriptions of noises throughout "Studies in the Park" in order to highlight the ways in which Suno's perceptions of the world around him are a reflection of his internal state of mind.

The story begins with extensive descriptions of the noises Suno hears in his household. The setting of the story in a multilingual modern India allows for Suno's father to listen to the radio news in six different languages. Suno's description of these sounds takes on a tone of hysteria which he only keeps himself from acting upon by way of his own internal voice keeping him in check:

> Turn it off, turn it off, turn it off! First he listens to the news in Hindi. Directly after, English. Broom□ brroom□brrroom□the voice of doom roars. Next, in Tamil. Then in Punjabi. In Gujarti. What next, my god, what next? Turn it off before I smash it onto his head, fling it out of the window, do nothing of the sort of course, nothing of the sort.

Here Desai depicts Suno's perception of the noises around him using descriptive words such as "roar,"

as well as nonsensical made-up sounds such as "Broom□brroom□brrroom□."

In next describing the sounds made by his mother in the kitchen, Suno focuses on the "hissing" sounds of deep fried foods being prepared. In describing the sounds of water flowing from the tap, Suno's description builds a rhythm of repetition meant to reproduce the monotonous and seemingly endless sounds of water flowing: "Ah, now she's turned on the tap. It's roaring and pouring, pouring and roaring. . ." Suno continues the effect of this description through the use of exaggeration: ". . .into a bucket without a bottom." Later he combines these sound descriptions into one sentence which, along with the repetition of such a description, further conveys his irritation: "When my mother fills buckets, sloshes the kitchen floor, fries and sizzles things in the pan, she thinks she is being Quiet."

Suno's description of the household sounds continues, in an incessant manner meant to represent Suno's amplified perceptions of each and every sound throughout the household: "The bell rings. Voices clash, clatter and break." Again, Suno uses exaggeration in his descriptions of these sounds in order to indicate his heightened state of anxiety: "All of them, all of them, ten or twenty or a hundred of them, marching up the stairs, hammering at the door, breaking in and climbing over me□ten, twenty or a hundred of them." Descriptive language such as "marching" and "hammering" evokes images of violence and aggression. When his mother brings him an unwelcome glass of milk to help him study, and the glass tips over, it "clangs on the floor."

Suno's descriptions of human voices, particularly those of his family members, are especially evocative in their negative connotations. He states that his mother's voice "wheedles its way into my ear like a worm." The metaphor of his mother's voice compared to a worm evokes images of dirt, sliminess, and disgust, especially when one imagines it crawling directly into one's ear. When he pulls the ears of his younger brothers and sisters to punish them for disturbing him, they "screech," only to be quieted by another annoying sound when his mother "whacks" them. Suno's descriptions of the sounds made by his father are equally harsh and unpleasant. His father speaks "in a voice that came out of his nose like the whistle of a punctual train." The image of the train returns later in the story, and implies Suno's sense of being run down, as if by a train; the comment that it is a "punctual" train suggests Suno's negative attitude about the rigidity, structure, and discipline imposed on him by the impending exam. His father's shirt can be heard "crackling," and his father walks down the stairs "crushing each underfoot in turn."

Suno attempts to express his irritation and assert his own will in a voice designed to match those of the rest of his family for unpleasantness. In exasperation, Suno "raced out of my room, with my fingers in my ears, to scream till the roof fell down about their ears." But he is checked in this show of anger by the presence of his father. However, when Suno finally does assert his decision to leave the house and study elsewhere, he expresses it in a voice described as "croaking," "screaming," and "screeching." As a reminder of the family noises he is trying to escape, his family members break out in "howls" of protest.

Upon leaving his house, Suno first attempts to study at a cafe, as have many a famous writer. However, both the proprietor, Lala-ji, and the young waiter approach Suno and speak to him in tones described variously as "whining," "sighing," "murmuring," and "babbling," as well as "with an oath." Leaving the cafe and walking dejectedly along, Suno notes that even his posture makes his father "scream." However, Suno encounters the first pleasant sound of the story when he comes upon the gram vendor, whose voice is described variously as "friendly," "not insinuating, but low, pleasant," and "sympathetic." Even when the vendor begins to whistle□a sound which surely would have driven Suno over the edge coming from a member of his own family□Suno describes the sounds in pleasant, positive terms. Suno states that the man "began to whistle, not impertinently, but so cheerfully that I stopped and stared at him."

However, when he enters the park in a continued attempt to find a quiet place to study, Suno is assaulted with more sounds which are offensive to him. He notes the old men who sit in the park "mumbling through their dentures or cackling with that mad, ripping laughter that makes children think of old men as wizards and bogey-men." The women in the park "screamed, just as grey and fawn and black birds do," at their children. However, Suno, upon his first visit to the park, compares his discomfort there to "a visitor to a public library trying to control a sneeze." Whereas he has come to the park to escape noise, he describes his feeling there in terms of an effort to control his own impulse to disrupt an imposed silence (as in a library). Suno notes other students, such as himself, sitting in the park, "reading aloud in turns." Suno himself soon opens a book as he strolls along, "reading to myself in a low murmur." The latter two descriptions, of himself and the other students, are at least neutral, if not pleasant and soothing in their connotations. At first, Suno continues to be distracted by the sounds in the park, such as another student "reciting poetry in a kind of thundering whisper." Suno's irritation throughout the story with the sounds of other human beings is extended to include the very presence of other human beings in the park, for he states that "I resented everyone else who came to the park." The sounds of the old men who have ventured out to get milk are described in terms of their milk bottles "clinking," and their conversation described as taking place in "argumentative, hacking tones." Suno most hates the athletes, who, almost naked, are given massages in the park. Suno's description of the sounds they make concentrate on his feeling of disgust for their bodily presence. The masseuses "huffed and puffed and cursed," with the athletes "groaning and panting in a way I found obscene and disgusting." Suno's disgust with the physical bodies of these men expresses his general feelings of disgust with life□both his own and that of other human beings. And, while Suno notes that afternoons in the park were "quiet," he goes on to describe the irritating noises of the evening visitors. Families sit together, "listening to a transistor radio," the mothers sit together "like flocks of screeching birds," while the young men sit around "moaning" and "the children's cries would grow more piercing with the dark. . ." As the date of the exam grows nearer, the students in the park "talked less" and "mumbled" to themselves. As his anxiety level is raised with the stepped-up pace of his study schedule, Suno notes that he "yelled at my mother," while his family members "made clicking sounds with their tongues."

However, after the "vision" which alters Suno's perception of himself and his life, changing his course from that of a "race" to that of a "search," Suno's perception of the

sounds of other human beings in the park is also altered. Whereas before he could find no end of irritating noises emanating from everyone in the park except himself, Suno now finds himself engaging in pleasant verbal interactions with other people in the park.

> Sometimes I stopped to rest on a bench and conversed
> with one of the old men, telling him who my father
> was and what examination I was preparing for, and
> allowing him to tell me about his youth, his politics,
> his philosophy, his youth and again his youth.

In addition, Suno begins to "joke" with the other students, and even "exchanges a few words" with the yoga teacher. Through this change in Suno's description of the sounds of other human beings, he expresses a change in his internal state of mind□from one of alienation from those around him to one of joy and harmony in the company of his fellow man.

Source: Liz Brent, in an essay for *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

Bussey holds a bachelor's degree in English literature and a master's degree in interdisciplinary studies. She is an independent writer specializing in literature. In the following essay, she explores Desai's use of sound in "Studies in the Park" as a way of depicting how Suno experiences internal and external reality.

One of the most prominent Indian authors writing in English, Anita Desai is known primarily for her novels. Her short fiction, however, displays many of the same techniques, such as her distinctive and evocative use of imagery. "Studies in the Park" is marked by Desai's masterful use of sensory images to create atmosphere and herald change. The result is a story with a strong sense of place, and one that shows how the main character's external environment profoundly impacts his internal struggle. Desai's detailed descriptions of the sounds of Suno's home and of the park show the reader what those places are like, and point up their negative and positive impacts on Suno. In addition, much of Desai's fiction centers on the personal struggles of Indian men and women trying to cope with the contemporary demands of family and society, and this short story is a variation on that recurring theme.

In "Studies in the Park," Desai relies heavily on sounds□from family members' voices to kitchen noises□to describe Suno's surroundings and how he feels in those surroundings. At the beginning of the story, as he studies at home for the exam that will determine his options in the workforce, he feels like the world is closing in on him. He is under tremendous pressure from his family to study hard and do well. His father constantly reminds him, "Remember Suno, I expect good results from you. Study hard, Suno." The pressure increases when his father says, "You must get a first [the highest grade], Suno . . . must get a first, or else you won't get a job. Must get a job, Suno." In addition to his father's words, the chaotic sounds of Suno's home life include his mother's constant chopping and frying in the kitchen, and his siblings' running and screaming. Desai describes discordant sounds on every page to reflect how Suno experiences this environment. Her words and phrases include "voice of doom," "hissing," "clash, clutter and break," "screech," "bawl," "whine," "howls," and "croaked." Such words make clear that the sounds of the household are an assault on Suno's ears and psyche. In fact, the story begins with Suno's urgent desire for his father to turn off the radio news he listens to in various languages□"Turn it off, turn it off, turn it off!" The noise around him is a manifestation of the insensitivity, confusion, and pressure of his demanding situation. Suno thinks to himself, "What about the uproar around me? These people don't know the meaning of the word Quiet."

When he leaves the house and find somewhere else to study, Suno stops in a cafe to have tea and review his textbooks. Because it is the middle of the day, he expects it to be quiet and virtually empty. He is forced to leave, however, when the waiter will not stop talking to him.

The first pleasant sound in the story is heard when Suno approaches the gate to the park, where a food vendor greets him and explains that many students go to the park to

study. As Suno enters the park, he notices that the vendor begins "to whistle, not impertinently but so cheerfully that I stopped and stared at him." The melodious sound and cheerful attitude are strange to Suno.

Once inside the park, Suno continues to notice unpleasant noises, but eventually falls into the rhythm of the park's sounds. He says, "I fell into its routine, its rhythm, and my time moved in accordance with its time." Desai's use of the word "rhythm" reinforces the important role of sound in determining the atmosphere of the park. Here, Suno is able to become absorbed in his studies and his own thoughts, even amidst bustling activity. Up to this point, sounds have represented annoyance and distraction. But the rhythmic sounds of the park, in contrast to the chaotic ones at home, enable him to disconnect from the external world while sitting squarely in the middle of it.

When Suno happens upon a bench where two people are sitting together, he sees something of himself in them, yet at the same time he sees exactly what his life is missing. From their conversation, Suno gathers that the woman is dying. Whether or not this is accurate is of little consequence. What matters is that Suno sees two people who are, like him, completely absorbed in themselves. They even seem to be unaware of the two children playing right beside the bench. The difference is that these two people have found something meaningful□each other□in which to absorb themselves. While Suno feels that he has shut out the world for the sake of doing well on an exam and securing a good job (which is what his family and society expect of him), the people on the bench have shut out the world for the sake of each other. There is clearly a great deal of love between them, be it romantic or familial, and this is an experience unknown to Suno. The relationship between them seems devoid of selfishness, greed, or competition, and strikes Suno as almost divine. He witnesses a profound human connection, something Suno has resisted throughout the story up to this point. With his family, the yoga instructor, the elderly men in the park, and the athletes, Suno has responded with disdain and superiority to everyone around him. The yoga instructor invites Suno to join his group and Suno thinks, "You won't catch me making an ass of myself in public. And I despise all that body-beautiful worship anyway. What's the body compared to the soul, the mind?" When the elderly men look at Suno with a commiserating look, Suno thinks, "As if he's been through exams, too, long ago, and knew all about them. So what?" As for the athletes and wrestlers who sunbathe and have massages in the park, Suno regards them as men who "live in a meaty, sweating world of their own□massages, oils, the body, a match to be fought and won□I kicked up dust in their direction but never went too close." Suno's own thoughts have been as discordant as the sounds of his home.

The two people on the bench make Suno realize how misguided he has been in refusing to connect with the people around him. He comes to feel that because of isolating himself for the sake of the exam, he is himself dying, and that the vision of the man and woman on the bench has brought him to his senses□to health. Before he sees the people on the bench, he questions the meaning of studying for his exam: "Why were we creeping around here, hiding from the city, from teachers and parents, pretending to study and prepare? Prepare for what? . . . Ready for a dead world. A world in which ghosts went about, squeaking or whining, rattling or rustling. Slowly, slowly we were

killing ourselves in order to join them." His vision of the couple, then, is a blessing, and he believes that this turning point actually saves his life. Suno's trance-like state of observation is broken by the faint sound of the woman's laugh. To Suno, the sounds of the business world are "squeaking or whining, rattling or rustling," but the faint laugh of the woman on the bench is the sound of life. Considering that he believes she is dying, this is somewhat ironic. But her laugh shows him that as long as there is still life, there is still the opportunity to embrace it. Suno thinks, "I felt I could never open my books and study or take degrees after that. They belonged to the dead, and now I had seen what being alive meant." Until the small laugh, the scene is completely silent, a technique that demonstrates the uniqueness of the episode in relation to the rest of the story. The silence also creates an atmosphere of importance and sacredness.

Suno's seeing the two people is coincidental, yet his reaction to them changes the course of his life. He comes to view life as a search rather than a race; he understands that he has been fundamentally changed and is now wholly unlike the diligent students still immersed in their textbooks in the park. After Suno's metamorphosis, Desai continues to describe Suno and his surroundings with sound, but the nature of the sounds changes from harsh and imposing to soft and engaging. The park is filled with giggling, joking, conversation, and exchanges. Suno himself converses pleasantly with the yoga instructor, interacts with the elderly men in a mean ingful way, and chats casually with students. While the reader is not shown Suno's new home life, we can infer that his parents' worries will not now affect Suno in the least. Ramachandra Rao of *Journal of Literature and Aesthetics* observed that Suno is like many of Desai's protagonists in that he "acquires a new awareness and a new technique which enable him to protect his integrity as a human being." Suno has essentially exchanged one routine for another; instead of going to the park to escape humanity and its noise, he goes to immerse himself in it. The new routine is one that he believes will lead him to fulfillment and happiness as he connects with, rather than withdraws from, the people around him.

Source: Jennifer Bussey, in an essay for *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Thompson places "Studies in the Park" in context as compared to other coming-of-age stories. "

Studies in the Park" by Anita Desai is a richly symbolic coming-of-age story. In it Suno, a young man preparing for exams at the academy, leaves behind his awkward adolescence and enters adulthood in the span of three months. Unlike those in many coming-of-age stories, Suno's transition into adulthood is not marked by a religious ceremony, a civil promotion, or a secret ritual. Neither is Suno's rite of passage defined, as many are, by a single or a series of tragic events. Instead, his metamorphosis is initiated by his finding in the park a place to study, furthered by his accidental discovery, and completed by his finding within himself a balance of mind, body, and soul.

In another important aspect, Suno's allegorical journey, complete with its startling epiphany, diverges slightly from other stories in this genre. In many coming-of-age stories the protagonist faces a crisis□the death of a loved one or a challenge that requires maturity or courage□that pulls the protagonist from the security of youthful innocence into the difficulties of adulthood. In these stories the crisis constitutes the climax, and the resolution lies in surviving the crisis. Readers invest neither time nor thought in predicting what adulthood holds for these characters. In this aspect Desai's tale transcends the standard coming-of-age story, for in her allegory readers are allowed to see, even encouraged to consider, the hopeful future that awaits Suno.

As the story begins, Suno lives a crowded life in a crowded home with his family. Readers are first introduced to Suno's mother, a woman who tends her family almost fanatically. She is constantly cutting and frying, monitoring her youngest children, checking in on Suno, and offering milk. She is probably uneducated given the setting of the story, and she is a disciplined woman who adheres to a strict schedule of preparing meals, sending her husband to work, and sending her younger children to school.

Suno's father enters into the story from the bedroom where he has just listened to the news in six different languages. In this way he serves as a foil to Suno's mother because he represents the educated individual whom Suno is destined to become. Yet, like his wife, he also represents discipline. He checks his watch as he enters the kitchen and asks for his meal, and readers have the impression that he is as regular as the cuckoo that comes out to announce the hour and no more effectual. He goes off to work, but we do not know where or to what job. When he exhorts Suno to pass his exams so that he can get a job, the father mentions nothing of what type of job this should be. The younger children are, in Suno's words, "wild." They are noisy and messy, throwing their school satchels into his room and leaving their greasy fingerprints on his books. Figuratively, Suno stands atop the fulcrum between the extreme discipline of his educated father and laboring mother on one end and his unruly younger siblings on the other. Though he is studying for his exams when he is first introduced, he is not an adult□he hasn't passed his test. Unlike his disciplined parents, he is compliant only to the extent that he is participating in the program that has been chosen for him without

open rebellion. He is also unlike his siblings in that he is not a wholly undisciplined child who plays at school and everything else as they do.

In setting the scene for this story, Desai focused on the sights, sounds, and even smells that fill Suno's apartment. The effect of her attention to sensory detail is that readers easily understand why Suno, whose hypersensitivity approaches illness, flees his apartment for a calmer place to study. In his search for such a place, he first stops at a tea shop where he witnesses a scenario that could become his future if he does not pass his exams. Confronted by the tea shop's bored proprietor who speaks of the cost of sugar as if it is more important than the war that has caused the rationing of sugar, and a young waiter who failed school at the sixth level and yet is proud that he has a job and can figure a bill, Suno realizes that he cannot study there. On a figurative level, readers understand that neither the shop proprietor's misdirected societal concern nor the waiter's ignorance represent Suno's lot in life.

Suno leaves the tea house and finds himself confronting the iron gates of a city park. The iron bars at the park entrance symbolize that something of value, or something not easily accessible to everyone, lies within the park. As he stands before the gate, Suno is addressed by the *gram* seller. "I'm glad I was never sent to school," the vendor says, and then continues whistling a song about living in paradise. All Suno sees of the *gram* seller is his crippled arm and his scarred face, and Suno's preoccupation with the man's injuries hints that this encounter is meant for symbolic consideration. Perhaps he is a maimed veteran of the war, and his scars serve notice that an education may be valuable if only to save one from the military.

Eventually, Suno enters the park, and he enters as a child. He remembers the times he has been here after running away from school "to lie on a bench, eat peanuts, [throw] stones at the chipmunks that came for the shells, and drink from the fountain." He acknowledges that he never liked the park as much as he liked the streets where boys played marbles or the vacant lot behind the movie house where he and his friends threw rocks at rats. Although his young boy's mind does not grasp the connection, what Suno dislikes about the park is its imposed order. It is like "an hotel, or an hospital, belonging to the city but with its own order and routine, enclosed by iron rails, laid out according to prescription in rows of palms, benches and paths." The park symbolizes Suno's own life, a life seemingly owned by people other than himself and moving forward according to prescribed paths. Looking now at the park as one searching for a place to study rather than as one running from studies, Suno employs a critical eye. He disdains the old men sitting on green benches and "cackling with that mad, ripping laughter that makes children think of old men as wizards and bogey-men." Likewise he rejects the women screaming at their disorderly children and the madmen dancing around and "scratching like monkeys." He does not feel at home with the other students, either, thinking that they belong in the park while he is a "gatecrasher." At this point in the story, Suno's transformation begins. He starts to notice the park's particular rhythms and becomes comfortable enough to "study there, or sleep, or daydream." While acclimating himself thus to the park, however, Suno is not happy with all he encounters. He despises those participating in the "body-beautiful worship" of yoga and describes their movements as "contortions that would embarrass an ape." When asked to participate he declines,

thinking to himself that the body does not compare to the soul, the mind. He likewise criticizes the old men going to gather Government dairy rations. Observing them carrying on philosophical conversations, he guesses that "Certainly it was the mind above the body for these old coots," but still he ridicules them and their passionate theological discourse. The most despicable of all the people in the park, he believes, are the wrestlers who are pampered and massaged and oiled. According to Suno, "They lived in a meaty, sweating world of their own□massages, oils, the body, a match to be fought and won."

Suno's reflections on the yoga participants, the old men, and the wrestlers carry importance because they stress Suno's focus on his intellect, his studies, at the expense of his body and his soul. His disdain for the "contortions" of those practicing yoga and for the wrestlers symbolizes his rejection of the physical part of himself. His contempt for the old men and their philosophical and theological musings illustrates that he is likewise at odds with his spiritual self. In effect, as Suno pursues his studies and rejects his physical and emotional needs, he becomes more and more unbalanced and less and less a whole, healthy individual.

As Suno's exams approach and loom only a month away, his mental state begins to deteriorate. He fantasizes that his books are rooted to his palms as he studies and that they are feeding off of him. He insists that the books "were parasites and, like parasites, were sucking us dry." He speaks to another young man studying for exams and discovers the young man to be little more than a walking specter. "Wait till you do your B.A.," the specter announces, and this statement has the same effect on Suno as the Grim Reaper saying, "I'll come for you soon."

Suno slinks from the park, trying to escape the death that he sees ever-present there, and while trying to escape, stumbles upon the scene that saves him. He encounters a young woman, beautiful and dying, with her head resting in the lap of an old man. Readers do not know exactly why this vision so stirs Suno. Maybe it is the paradox□the irony□of a young, beautiful woman's untimely death that touches him profoundly. Perhaps the vision stuns him because he interprets the young woman as a representation of his own life and the old man, in whose arms she lies dying, as the academic pursuits that are leading him toward an early figurative and literal death. This interpretation makes sense in light of Suno's describing the old man's beard as being "like a goat's, or a scholar's." Most probably what moves Suno is the way the couple looks into each other's eyes, completely alive and absorbed in each other and the moment, a luxury Suno has never experienced and never will without making changes.

Whatever goes through Suno's mind, the scene shakes him. It provides the friction necessary to stop his momentum, and from his resting place he is finally able to look around and consider all the possible directions open to him. That night Suno finally allows himself to sleep after being first confronted by his father's anger and then soothed by his mother's nurture.

When he later returns to the park, he is no longer a boy but a man whose life now strikes a previously missing balance. Whereas before he had disdained both the body,

as evidenced by his dislike for the yoga practitioners and the wrestlers, and the soul, as evidenced by his contempt for the old men and their philosophy and theology, he now values their experiences. He stops to talk with the old men, and more importantly to listen, and he flirts with the possibility of participating in yoga exercises. He states quite clearly that he will not take his exams and, therefore, will not fill the role mandated for him by his father and higher powers. He has learned his most important lesson: he can exercise his free will.

"Studies in the Park" diverges pleasantly from the typical coming-of-age story. In most, the protagonist's survival, especially if physical and mental health accompany the survival, provides both climax and resolution; readers are not encouraged to consider the protagonist's future. In Desai's story, however, while readers are *aware* of Suno's passage into adulthood, they are additionally *intrigued* by the possibilities now before him. They might wish to run into Suno in the park in five, ten, even twenty years and ask him how he's been.

Source: Karen D. Thompson, in an essay for *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Topics for Further Study

India was a colony ruled by Great Britain from 1858 to 1947. Learn more about the history of India during this period. In what ways did the Indians struggle against the domination of British rule? What are some of the major events in the history of this struggle?

India became an independent nation, the Republic of India, in 1947. Learn more about India during the post-independence period.

The two major religions of India are Hindu and Muslim. Learn more about one of these religions. What is their central belief system? What is the history of this particular religious group in India? Where else in the world is this a major religion?

Education has been an important political issue throughout the history of modern India. Learn more about the history of the education system in India during the twentieth century. What signifi- cant developments occurred in the area of education during this period?

Compare and Contrast

Mid-Nineteenth to Mid-Twentieth Century: Between 1958 and 1947, India is a colony under British rule.

Late Twentieth Century: As of 1947, India becomes an independent nation called the Republic of India. Pakistan is created as an independent nation.

Mid-Nineteenth to Mid-Twentieth Century: In 1947, the newly formed Republic of India officially recognizes 14 different Indian languages and dialects, as well as English.

Late Twentieth Century: The Republic of India now officially recognizes 18 different Indian languages and dialects (as well as English).

Early Twentieth Century: In the pre-independence era of Indian history, there is essentially no substantial body or output of Indian literature written in English, known as Anglo-Indian literature.

Late Twentieth Century: A notable body of Anglo-Indian literature emerges in the 1950s and continues to develop.

What Do I Read Next?

Games at Twilight (1978) is Desai's only collection of short stories to date. It includes "Studies in the Park".

Cry, the Peacock (1963) was the first of Desai's novels to win her critical acclaim. It is about an Indian woman at odds with her family and her role in society.

Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980) is a novel about two Indian sisters and their struggles with Indian culture.

Journey to Ithaca (1995), Desai's most recent novel to date, focuses on a European couple's encounter with Indian culture.

Desai's novel *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988) concerns a German-Jewish Holocaust survivor living in India.

Anita Desai's Fiction: Patterns of Survival Strategies (1992) by Mrinalini Solanki addresses philosophical issues raised by Desai's fiction.

Human Relationships in Anita Desai's Novels (1995) by Shashi Khanna discusses themes of interpersonal relations in Desai's novels, in the context of the place of women in Indian society.

Further Study

Bellioppa, Meena, *The Fiction of Anita Desai*, Writers Workshop, 1971.

From technique to critical reception around the world, this book includes a variety of essays designed to lend insight into Desai's writing.

Choudhury, Bidulata, *Women and Society in the Novels of Anita Desai*, Creative Books, 1995.

Critical discussion of Desai's novels in terms of the roles of women in Indian society.

Dash, Sandhyarani, *Form and Vision in the Novels of Anita Desai*, Prestige, 1996.

Critical discussion of language and themes in Desai's novels.

Gopal, N. R., *A Critical Study of the Novels of Anita Desai*, Atlantic Publishers, 1995.

Critical analysis of Desai's novels to date.

Parker, Michael, and Roger Starkey, eds.,*Postcolonial Literature: Achebe, Ngugi, Desai, Walcott*, St. Martin's Press, 1995.

Parker and Starkey review how the aftermath of colonialism is reflected in the literature of various countries.

Pathania, Usha, *Human Bonds and Bondages: The Fiction of Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya*, Kanishka Publishers, 1992.

By comparing the works of two Indian women writers, Pathania explores themes of oppression and perseverance.

Sharma, Kajali, *Symbolism in Anita Desai's Novels*, Abhinav Publications, 1991.

Critical discussion of recurring symbolic images and themes in Desai's novels.

Sivanna, Indira, *Anita Desai as an Artist: A Study in Image and Symbol*, Creative Books, 1994.

Critical analysis of the elements of visual description in Desai's fiction.

Solanki, Mrinalini, *Anita Desai's Fiction: Patterns of Survival Strategies*, Kanishka Publishers, 1992.

This book discusses the many manifestations of Desai's survival theme in her novels and short stories. Solanki shows how Desai's characters struggle to overcome the pressures and hardships of modern life.

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Jena, Seema, *Voice and Vision of Anita Desai*, Ashish Publishing House, 1989, pp. 9, 11.

Ramachandra, Rao B., *The Novels of Anita Desai*, Kalyani Publishers, 1977, pp. 7-8, 62.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Literature of Developing Nations for Students (LDNfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, LDNfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and

undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of LDNfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of LDNfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in LDNfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by LDNfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

LDNfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Literature of Developing Nations for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LDNfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LDNfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Literature of Developing Nations for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Literature of Developing Nations for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from LDNfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Literature of Developing Nations for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from LDNfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Literature of Developing Nations for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of LDNfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Literature of Developing Nations for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of LDNfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Literature of Developing Nations for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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