

The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole, Aged 13 3/4 Study Guide

The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole, Aged 13 3/4 by Sue Townsend

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Plot Summary

Before Harry Potter arrived on the scene, Adrian Mole was the most famous adolescent in English literature. Unlike Harry, Adrian Mole inhabits a comic, but very real world, filled with adolescent worries about love, sex, his future, and acne. The first in a very successful series of novels told in diary form, subsequent works record Adrian's struggles and successes into adulthood. The diary begins when Adrian is age 13 $\frac{3}{4}$, and ends with Adrian's fifteenth birthday. During the course of this year and a quarter, Adrian falls in love, suffers through his parents' marital problems, and pursues his ambition to be an intellectual and a writer. Pandora, the love of his life, is brainier than Adrian, and her parents are in a higher income class than Adrian's. She falls for Adrian after an uncharacteristic impulse to rebel causes him to wear red socks instead of the required black to school. Together they form a committee to continue the disruption. Frequent outbreaks of acne keep Adrian in fear that he will lose Pandora.

Adrian's other problems include being bullied in school, his increasing interest in sex, and his parents. Not exactly model parents to begin with, when their marriage breaks down, Adrian's home life becomes even more chaotic. After his mother runs off with the next-door neighbor, Mr. Lucas, Adrian's father, George, is temporarily cheered by his relationship with Doreen Slater. But when George loses his job, he sinks back into depression. Though she is annoying at times, often her house is the only place where Adrian and the family dog can find some peace. She also deals with Barry Kent, the school bully who demands protection money from Adrian on a daily basis. Another important member of Adrian's world is Bert Baxter, an old man whom Adrian helps out, and who, at one point, comes to live next door with Adrian's new neighbors, the Singhs, before being moved into an old folks home, where he meets Queenie. Later, they marry and set up house together. During a vacation in Scotland with his mother and her boyfriend, Adrian makes friends with an American boy named Hamish Mancini.

Despite these distractions, Adrian is determined to become an intellectual. He writes to a well-known TV intellectual, Malcolm Muggeridge, asking for information on how to be an intellectual but gets no response. He sends off a number of poems to the BBC, the national television and radio network, and is encouraged by the responses he receives from John Tydeman, who is obviously amused rather than impressed by Adrian's efforts. Toward the end of the year, Adrian's mother returns home, and shortly after, his father finds a job. Order, of a sort, is restored in the house before Adrian turns fifteen. He is now able to shave, but still legally a child and no freer to do what he wants.

Set in the early 1980s, in an unnamed town in the midlands of England, the novel portrays the effects on an ordinary working-class family of rising unemployment and cuts to education and medical services that defined the period. It was also a time when ordinary English women were beginning to express a desire for freedom from their traditional domestic roles, shown in the actions of Adrian's mother and those of Pandora and her mother. Because many of the words and references are likely to be unfamiliar to an American reader, the American edition provides an Afterword with explanations for these words. The Afterword takes the form of a letter exchange between Adrian and

Hamish Mancini, an American boy Adrian meets in Scotland. Hamish asks for explanations for a list of unfamiliar words. In his letter, Adrian explains these words.



Jan. 1 - Jan. 31, pp. 1 - 24

Jan. 1 - Jan. 31, pp. 1 - 24 Summary

The story of Adrian Mole's life is revealed through the daily entries he makes in his diary. Published in England in 1982, Adrian's diary also offers us a view of the social and political life in England at that time. Adrian wakes on the first day of the new year with a spot on his chin. His diary entry also contains his list of new year's resolutions, which include promises to help the blind, the poor, and the ignorant, and to stop squeezing his spots. Adrian's parents are his subject for much of the month. George, his father, is a salesman. His mother, Pauline, is a stay-at-home mom. After their drunk and noisy New Year's celebrations, they both come down with flu. Adrian is surprised when the meals he prepares for them are left uneaten. Mr. Lucas, their next door neighbor, makes several visits to see Adrian's mother and takes her out to do the grocery shopping, while Mrs. Lucas is kept busy doing endless chores at home. A new girl named Pandora joins Adrian's class and he falls for her. He is miserable when his best friend, Nigel, gets to date her. Wondering if he's becoming an intellectual, Adrian writes to a well-known TV intellectual, Malcolm Muggeridge, asking for advice about the condition but hears nothing. Adrian joins a school group called the Good Samaritans and goes to visit Bert Baxter. His first encounter does not go well. In fact, he hopes that he has called to the wrong house. Bert smokes and drinks and has a fierce dog named Sabre. He reports Adrian to the headmaster, Mr. Scruton, for leaving his hedge-clippers out in the rain. Mr. and Mrs. Lucas announce their divorce, and Adrian is pleased that his mother is taking the time to console Mr. Lucas, while his father cooks the supper. Throughout the month, Adrian expresses his concern about the unhealthy food his mother serves, but she tells him to go buy himself an orange when he complains about a lack of Vitamin C.

Jan. 1 - Jan. 31, pp. 1 - 24 Analysis

Since the novel takes the form of entries in Adrian's diaries there are none of the usual descriptions of locations or people. Adrian is writing these comments to himself so he can dispense with such details since he has no need to remind himself of where he lives or what the people around him look like. The reader is therefore left to form impressions of the world in which Adrian lives from the information Adrian provides. Because it is diary style, Adrian's direct, unself-conscious language gives the reader an immediate sense of the kind of boy Adrian is and the kind of family he lives in. His parents are not overly concerned with parental roles. They like to smoke and drink and don't pay too much attention to things like healthy eating. George, his dad, feeds cherry brandy to the dog during the New Year's celebrations. In a seeming reversal of roles, it is Adrian who worries about such things as eating a healthy diet and he often seems more mature than his parents. Yet, his immaturity is revealed by his misunderstanding of the nature of Mr. Lucas's interest in his mother. After Mr. Lucas's marriage ends, Adrian is pleased to think that his mother is helping to console Mr. Lucas. But it's clear to the reader from



details Adrian provides, such as when he waves to his mother and Mr. Lucas when they come out of the betting shop and they don't see him. We can guess from other things Adrian has mentioned, that they are having too much fun together to notice Adrian, yet he assumes they simply didn't see him.



February 1 - February 28, pp. 24 - 43

February 1 - February 28, pp. 24 - 43 Summary

Adrian's parents are too busy fighting with each other to be sympathetic to his feelings for Pandora. Having been married for fourteen and a half years, Adrian decides they can know nothing about love. Mrs. Lucas has gone to live at the Women's Refuge but returns to her house with a group of women to remove the furniture and the garden plantings. Mr. Lucas moves into the Mole's house until he can get some furniture. Adrian's mother now has a job as a typist at the insurance office where Mr. Lucas works and she has given up housework. She's had her ears pierced and now wears work overalls instead of dresses and skirts. Adrian's dad explains that he and Pauline are going through a bad patch. On Valentine's Day, Pauline receives a large card from Mr. Lucas, and a small one from Adrian's dad. To keep out of the way of the constant fighting, Adrian takes the dog and visits his grandma. Around Valentine's Day, Adrian gets a letter from the BBC (the British Broadcasting Corporation), from a man named John Tydeman, for some poems Adrian had submitted in hopes of having them read on the radio. Mr. Tydeman is careful to say that Adrian's work is not exactly good, but it has something that caught his attention. He encourages Adrian to submit his work to the school magazine and advises him to get used to rejection. The letter makes up for the fact that Adrian received no Valentine cards, while Pandora got 17, Nigel got 7 and even Barry Kent got three. Barry Kent has begun to bully Adrian, threatening him with violence if he doesn't give him protection money every day. To provide the money that Kent demands, Adrian gets a paper route from Mr. Cherry, who runs the local newsagent shop. On his first day there are a lot of complaints because Adrian delivers the papers that normally go to Corporation Row, a working-class neighborhood, to Elm Tree Avenue, a more prosperous neighborhood, where, he discovers, Pandora lives.

February 1 - February 28, pp. 24 - 43 Analysis

Many of the details that Adrian relates give us an insight into life in England in the early 1980s. The effects of the women's movement took hold a little later there than in the United States, and we can see some of the changes taking place in the actions of Pauline, Adrian's mother, and of Mrs. Lucas, his neighbor. Like many women at the time, Pauline wants to work outside the home. For a Christmas present, Adrian gives her a green Lurex apron to wear while cooking and cleaning, but Pauline never wears it. She begins brushing up on her typing and gets a job in the insurance office where Mr. Lucas works. After that she gives up doing housework, and Adrian's dad frequently has to do the cooking. She gets her ears pierced and starts to wear work overalls. These are more indications that she is refusing to play the traditional female role in the house and wants to assert her equality and independence. After Mrs. Lucas, who is seen working like a slave in the house, leaves her husband, she finds support from other women in the Women's Institute. Together they assert Mrs. Lucas's rights to much of the household fixtures.



March 1 - March 31, pp. 44 - 68

March 1 - March 31, pp. 44 - 68 Summary

Adrian's mother tries to explain to him that she needs to find herself and how marriage can be like a prison for some women. Adrian is not convinced since he sees women out and about every day. He spies Mr. Lucas looking at Big and Bouncy, a pornographic magazine, in Mr. Cherry's shop and considers telling his mother. When Mr. Cherry gives Adrian some back copies of the same magazine, Adrian considers that it is all right for him to read this type of magazine since he is an intellectual, but ordinary people like Mr. Lucas who read it should be ashamed of themselves. When Adrian wakes up with his face covered in spots, his mother is unsympathetic, so he phones his grandma who comes in a taxi to collect him. The doctor is called in to visit Adrian and declares that Adrian has a common case of acne. His parents announce their divorce but neither wants to leave the house, so his father goes to live in the spare room. Things come to a head when George and Mr. Lucas have a fight in the front yard with the neighbors looking on. Mr. O'Leary, the Irish neighbor, sides with George, while Mrs. O'Leary expresses her sympathy for Adrian, "the child," causing everyone to look at Adrian, who works hard at looking particularly sad. The next day Pauline and Mr. Lucas leave together for the town of Sheffield. The only good news in the month is that Pandora and Nigel break up. And Nigel asks Barry Kent to stop harassing Adrian for a few weeks because his parents have split up. Barry says he'll think about it. Adrian continues to visit Bert who lives in a very untidy house and is frequently ungrateful for the help Adrian gives him. Bert goes on a day trip with the Evergreens, a group for old people to which Adrian's grandma also belongs. They take a trip to Skegness, a popular seaside resort. His grandma tells Adrian how Bert was thrown out of the Evergreens for bad behavior. When it was time to return home there was no sign of Bert so a search party had to be sent out for him. He showed up two hours later, alone and drunk. Then the police had to track down the search party. Two of the pensioners had died since the outing and Adrian's grandma blamed Bert for their deaths as well. Adrian takes Bert to see Pandora's pony, Blossom, because Bert used to work with horses. The social worker wants Bert to go into an old folks home, but he tells them that his grandson comes in every day to see him. Bert was once married and has four children, two of them are in Australia. Adrian thinks that the two living in England should visit him.

March 1 - March 31, pp. 44 - 68 Analysis

In many ways Adrian can be an annoying character. At times he has a overly high opinion of himself and is always willing to make allowances for himself while he criticizes others, as, for example, he finds excuses to read Big and Bouncy magazine, but considers it unfit material for Mr. Lucas to read. Yet, Adrian endears himself to us by his genuine generosity as displayed in his willingness to befriend Bert, and his willingness to put up with his sometimes cranky nature. We know it's not something he does to look good in front of others, he would confess such feelings in his diary, or else

drop Bert. Adrian's appeal to readers is that mix of good and bad that we all share. We can identify with him. It makes him seem real and human, and not just a character invented by a writer. We can find him annoying at times and endearing at others, the kinds of responses we feel for people in our own lives.



April 1 - April 30, pp. 68 - 89

April 1 - April 30, pp. 68 - 89 Summary

On April Fool's Day, Adrian comments on how so many people failed to see the humor in tricks played upon them, but when Barry Kent puts itching powder down his back he is not amused. On April 2, Adrian turns 14. Most of his presents are unexciting, but he gets money from his mother and Mr. Lucas; conscience money, he calls it. With his mother now living in Sheffield with Mr. Lucas, life with his dad is a challenge. George mopes about the house and Adrian has to take him grocery shopping and lend some of his birthday money to buy the groceries since George can't find his bank card. Concerned that George is suicidal, he is not pleased when he learns that a new woman, Doreen Slater, and her young son, Maxwell, have entered George's life. His grandma, who didn't approve of Pauline, does not approve of Doreen Slater either. Bert sends him a card that includes a mention that his drain needs unblocking. Nigel is still upset about his breakup with Pandora who is now going out with Craig Thomas. During Easter vacation, Adrian goes to stay with Nigel and discovers that his style of living is much superior to Adrian's. Nigel's bedroom has black walls and white carpet, and is filled with all the latest technology. Adrian returns home wondering how how different things might have been if his dad had been willing to slave his life away like Nigel's dad to create a similar life for his family. Pauline sends him a postcard inviting him to Sheffield. He goes, and despite being annoyed with her, he is glad to see his mother, but is disgusted by the way Mr. Lucas can't keep his hands off her and calls her "Paulie." Mr. Lucas tries to win Adrian over by giving him a penknife with lots of attachments. Adrian is impressed with the knife but grows no warmer toward Mr. Lucas. In his absence, Doreen Slater and her son have visited, and Doreen has ironed Adrian's clothes in preparation for his return to school, but her gesture doesn't win him over either. Barry Kent continues to menace Adrian and throws his "snap-lock executive briefcase" onto the rugby pitch. Adrian ends the month worried about finding enough money to keep Barry Kent happy, but he can't ask his father because George's job is not going well and he is worried about the mounting bills.

April 1 - April 30, pp. 68 - 89 Analysis

Adrian is in the often typical position of the child whose parents have split up. His parents are preoccupied with their own problems and so Adrian often fails to get much support from either of them, especially from his mother who has now left the house. He takes his mother's departure well, breezily telling his father that life must go on when his father seems close to despair. Adrian then surprises himself by how pleased he is to spend time with his mother when she invites him to stay with her and Mr. Lucas in Sheffield. Looking at the cheap apartment where his mother is now living, he is annoyed on her behalf and believes she deserves better. But the weekend with his mother is one in which he's indulged. Fashionable new trousers to replace his out of date ones, Chinese food and a trip to see a daring new movie, Monty Python's *The Life of Brian*,



make it the kind of weekend we didn't see him enjoying at home. Meanwhile he is also being indulged by Mr. Lucas, whom he now considers a creep. Mr. Lucas tries to win him over with a gift of an intricate penknife. Adrian is impressed by the penknife but not willing to change his mind about Mr. Lucas. Doreen Slater also attempts to make a good impression on Adrian by ironing his clothes. But Adrian is not impressed.



May 1- May 31, pp 89 - 105

May 1- May 31, pp 89 - 105 Summary

The financial situation at Adrian's house continues to get worse and the bills aren't being paid. When the electricity company shows up and cuts off the supply, Adrian gets into trouble with his father for having allowed them into the house. Only a visit to his grandma restores Adrian's good humor. Eating toast and sitting in front of her electric fire he can relax for a while. Even Bert offers to help out with the offer of an oil heater, which Adrian declines, fearing that the dog might knock it over and cause a fire. George cheers up when he gets news that Pauline is coming home. He puts his relationship with Doreen aside, telling her that nobody can replace Pauline. Only Adrian understands that his mother is coming for a short visit, nothing more. His grandma makes a surprise visit while he and his dad are contentedly eating cold beans. Adrian is reading *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens, and his father is reading a copy of *Playboy* by candlelight. Grandma sorts things out by paying the electricity bill. She makes them get up for church on Sunday, and gives them lunch afterward, but falls out with her son when he breaks a milk jug. After George has tried and failed to make any impression on Barry Kent, Grandma goes off to confront him, and returns with all the protection money he'd gotten out of Adrian. Now Adrian begins to worry about his future career. He considers he is at a crossroads in his life. His ambition to be a vet is undermined by his hopeless scores in science. He considers being a comedy writer for TV, a sponge diver, then settles on a career as a poet. He decides to redecorate his bedroom after he decides that he is way too old to have Noddy wallpaper. Noddy is a popular character from children's stories by Enid Blyton and the subject of a popular TV show for children. But several coats of black paint fail to cover up Noddy and the other characters. When he buys a joss stick to cover up the paint smell, his father accuses him of taking drugs. Even the dog cries to be let out of the room.

May 1- May 31, pp 89 - 105 Analysis

The future looms large for Adrian, as for any adolescent. The very fact that everything seems possible makes it all the more anxiety-making. Adrian may sound overly dramatic when he announces, "I am at the crossroads of my life." His belief that his wrong choice could result in a great loss to the veterinary world is equally unrealistic. At this point in his life how is he to know what kind of career suits him? Yet, this part of his life is all about preparing for adulthood, so he naturally feels concerned about what he'll be capable of doing. Despite the fact that his father is mostly too absorbed by his marital problems to pay much attention to his son, George gives Adrian some sound advice. Even though he is hopeless at science, Adrian still thinks he should pursue a career as a vet. George gives him some sound advice when he advises him to concentrate on the subjects in school that he is good at. He also offers a dose of reality when he points out that a vet's life isn't all that glamorous. And his advice is a lot more

constructive than that of schoolteacher Mr. Vann, who tells Adrian that you don't need academic qualifications to be a TV comedy writer; you just need to be a moron.



June 1 - June 30, pp 105 - 122

June 1 - June 30, pp 105 - 122 Summary

June starts out badly. George receives a letter from work to say he has been laid off. He begins drinking and smoking heavily. Doreen comes around to sympathize and brings her young son, Maxwell, with her. Adrian calls her the Stick Insect because she is so thin, but he begins to warm to her. She has certain charms—for one thing, she makes excellent jam pies with lots of jam in them. Unfortunately, Doreen answers the phone to Pauline, and when Adrian gets on the phone, Pauline demands to know what she's doing there. Feeling rebellious as a result of all the chaos in his life, Adrian wears red socks to school instead of the required black. He is given a lecture on the dangers of not conforming to rules by the head of the school, Mr. Scruton, and is sent home to change his socks. George is furious and phones Mr. Scruton to inform him that his son will wear whatever color socks he wants. Pandora organizes a sock protest and asks Adrian to be the principal speaker. The committee meet at Pandora's house, where her parents serve them coffee and health biscuits. Her mother's name is Tania and her father's name is Ivan, and they give Adrian a book entitled *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, a classic work describing the oppression of the working class. Adrian mistakes the word "philanthropist," someone who does good works, with "philatelist," someone who collects stamps, and doesn't see the connection. Wearing red socks to school and singing "We shall not be moved," they are met by Mr. Scruton, who suspends them. Pandora cries because her academic career may be in the balance, and Adrian begins to regret his action. But on the positive side, Pandora and Adrian are now a couple. It's official, and Adrian is prepared to overlook the fact that Pandora smokes five cigarettes a day and has her own cigarette lighter. The Red Sock Committee comes up with a solution to their dilemma. They will wear red socks under their black socks. And Adrian is willing to put up with a little discomfort for the sake of a just cause. The good news is followed by bad, when Adrian learns that Bert is sick, and feels guilty for having neglected him. Together, Pandora and Adrian make up Bert's bed and phone for the doctor. They clear a path through the rubbish so that the ambulance men can take Bert out on a stretcher. Bert's dog Sabre comes home with Adrian and Adrian's dog moves to grandma's house. Bert appears to be dying and gives Adrian some out-of-date currency to phone his daughters, but Adrian can't find the phone numbers. The phone calls aren't necessary when Bert revives, but now it is Adrian's turn to fall ill. He is diagnosed with tonsillitis and is concerned he won't be well enough to participate in the wedding celebrations surrounding the wedding of Lady Diana Spencer to Prince Charles. He is also anxious to see his mother, but when she does visit, the emotion wears him out and he feels he is having a relapse. Meanwhile, Bert has made a fast recovery and wants to leave the hospital. Adrian wishes he could exchange a peaceful hospital bed for the chaos he is surrounded by. His dad is sick of looking after the troublesome Sabre and his grandma is tired of having to look after Adrian's dog. The month ends with Adrian's recovery and his determination to take things easy so that he can regain his former energy.



June 1 - June 30, pp 105 - 122 Analysis

Although Adrian doesn't express much interest in politics, the subject comes up very often. Elsewhere we learn that Adrian's father is a supporter of the Conservative political party, while his diary entries in June tell us that Pandora's parents are supporters of the Labor Party. They are part of a growing number of better-educated, wealthier people who, in the 1980s, were giving their support to the Labor Party, traditionally the representatives of the working class. These new Labor Party supporters were largely dismayed by the rising unemployment and public spending cuts arising from the policy of the country's Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Also, unlike Adrian's family, where there's clearly not much interest in politics, Pandora's parents display some radical tendencies. George is angry when Adrian is sent home from school for wearing the wrong color socks, but we sense that the newly laid off George is angry with life and is looking for an excuse to shout at someone. By contrast, Pandora's parents are sympathetic to Adrian's rebellious act. They ask if the fact that he chose to wear red socks, red being the symbolic color of socialist revolt, was for a reason. Their names, Ivan and Tania, suggest that they are of Russian origin and therefore well informed about socialism and rebellion. They also discuss the Tolpuddle Martyrs, a group of nineteenth-century English laborers considered to have been the first to form a kind of labor union and were punished as a result.



July 1 - August 31, pp. 122-150

July 1 - August 31, pp. 122-150 Summary

The month of July begins for Adrian with a visit from the school inspector unsympathetic to his desire to recover completely from his tonsillitis and demanding he return to school immediately. A few days later a "brown-skinned" family move into the vacated Lucas house next door, leading George to observe that it is the beginning of the end for the neighborhood. Adrian and Pandora decide to welcome the Singh family to the neighborhood and show them that not everyone is a racist like George. Adrian's own skin is in great condition, a fact that he attributes to love and Lucozade, a health drink he'd been drinking during his illness. When school breaks up for the summer, Pandora goes on vacation to Tunisia, causing Adrian to write poetry and feel depressed. His grandma wonders if he's constipated. Bert meets the Singhs and Adrian discovers that Bert speaks fluent Hindi. The social worker wants Bert to go into a nursing home, but the problem is solved when the Singhs invite him to live with them. The street party organized to celebrate the royal wedding on July 29 brings all the neighbors together. Though George is bitter about his unemployment and considers that money is being wasted on fireworks when people are out of work. Bert and the Singhs join Adrian and his dad to watch the royal wedding on the TV. Everyone feels patriotic and proud to be British, including the Singhs and the Irish O'Leary family across the way. By July 31, Adrian is sick of hearing about the royal wedding, but is cheered by the thought that Pandora will soon be home.

On August 1, Adrian receives an invitation from his mother to vacation in Scotland with her and Mr. Lucas. Pandora's return from Tunisia is prevented by a baggage handlers' strike at the airport. Adrian and Pandora have several long and expensive conversations by phone before she arrives home safely. They have a passionate reunion behind Pandora's father's tool shed. George is going to Skegness, a seaside resort on the east coast of England, with Doreen and Maxwell, and seems happy that Adrian has chosen to go to Scotland with his mother instead. Pandora suggests that the separation may be good for them since their relationship is heating up too much. The sights of Scotland mostly leave Adrian unimpressed. He makes friends with an American boy, Hamish Mancini, whose mother is on her fourth honeymoon, and, Hamish later suggests, may soon be on her fifth divorce. Determined to become a writer, Adrian writes down his thoughts about Scotland on the return journey, and plans to send it to the BBC.

July 1 - August 31, pp. 122-150 Analysis

The marriage of the twenty-year-old Lady Diana Spencer to the thirty-three-year-old Prince Charles, the heir to the British throne, was a source of great excitement in England in 1981. Street parties like the one on Adrian's street, took place on and around July 29, 1981, the date of the wedding, all across Britain. The event stirred patriotic

feelings and a spirit of inclusiveness. Politics and ethnic differences frequently divided people.

Adrian describes his father's negative attitude to the news that an Indian family is moving into the street. And the O'Learys are always described as an Irish family who display a "typically Irish" taste for alcoholic parties. But the good feelings created by the wedding event causes these differences to be temporarily set aside. Later we will see politics creating tension in Pandora's family, but the royal family is shown as being above politics, allowing people to unite in their pride in being British. With rising unemployment and cuts to school and medical services, George makes a valid point when he complains about the cost to ordinary people of the royal wedding. But even he surrenders to the pageantry of the event and watches it on TV along with the rest of the country.



September 1 - September 30, pp. 150 - 168

September 1 - September 30, pp. 150 - 168 Summary

September begins with the news that Mr. Singh has to return to India to look after his parents and so Bert will have to move back to his own house. Adrian is annoyed to learn that Mr. Singh believes he cannot trust his women with Bert, but Bert is flattered to be considered in such a light at his age. When Adrian and Pandora clean up Bert's filthy house in preparation for his return, Bert isn't impressed. He wants to know what's wrong with a dirty house. Forced to consider the question, Adrian concedes that he doesn't know what's wrong with living in a dirty house. He receives a letter from his new American friend Hamish, but fails to understand Hamish's use of American words and expressions. Nor does anyone else to whom he shows the letter. The new school year begins with Adrian in need of a complete new school wardrobe since he's been growing so much. His father is not pleased with having to fork out the money. Adrian points out that he hasn't paid with real money since he used his American Express card. Adrian is delighted when he is made a school prefect/monitor. His duty involves taking the names of students who arrive at school late. Pandora is made a monitor too. Her task is to ensure silence among the students while they wait in line for their school lunch, which Adrian refers to as school dinner. He isn't impressed with the new dinner menu that now includes mostly fast food staples like hamburger and doughnuts. Adrian considers protesting to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, unaware that it is her cost-cutting programs that have led to the reduction in quality in the food. A school trip to the British Museum in London is a disaster. When the teacher, Miss Fossington-Gore, loses control of the situation and Barry Kent causes numerous disturbances by jumping into a fountain and getting lost in a sex shop, Adrian and Pandora take charge. Adrian provides a precise account of the trip and receives two merit marks for his report, Miss Fossington-Gore takes sick leave, and the British Museum thinks about banning all school parties in the future. Bert is now having trouble with his legs and the nurse thinks he will be better off in the local old folks home. But Adrian thinks the home looks like a museum and the old people in it exhibits. Pandora grows too large for her pony, Blossom, and is heartbroken when she has to sell her. Adrian sums up September as "nothing but trouble."

September 1 - September 30, pp. 150 - 168 Analysis

The return to school shows Adrian and Pandora at their most unattractive and pokes gentle fun at the human desire for recognition. Both of them are pleased to be made prefects or monitors. Flattered by the idea of stepping into new roles of authority, neither is aware of how ridiculous those roles are. Adrian is being asked to be a snitch. He is to take the name of any student he sees trying to sneak late into school. Pandora's role is equally silly. She is to ensure silence among the students as they wait in line for lunch.



After a day trip to the British Museum goes haywire, Adrian takes pride in the fact that Mr. Scruton, the unpleasant head of the school, compliments both him and Pandora for taking charge of the situation. The effect is to make us feel that they are older than their years in their eagerness to please authority figures and do the right thing. But it is this mix of pleasant and unpleasant characteristics and the unconsidered way Adrian reveals them that makes him and his world seem so real.



Oct 1 - Oct 31, pp. 168 - 186

Oct 1 - Oct 31, pp. 168 - 186 Summary

October begins on an even worse note. Adrian wakes to find his face covered in spots. Ashamed, he tries to avoid Pandora. She assures him it won't affect their love, yet her kisses lack their usual passion. As always in difficult times, Adrian looks to literature for comfort and support, and takes out of the library *Progress, Coexistence and Intellectual Freedom* by Andrei D. Sakharov. He soon abandons this work as boring, and turns to *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte. This book inspires Adrian to go on a mountain survival trip and to persuade Pandora to come too. He feels that if he can get Pandora to somewhere high, they can regain their old passion. The social services take Bert into the old folks home, where Adrian and Pandora are reluctant to visit him since the place makes them lose their desire to talk. Adrian is also worried about his dad, who stays in bed and watches afternoon TV. To spare him more worry, Adrian hides the large phone bill, mostly the result of his calls to Pandora, under his mattress. The dog had gone missing, causing Adrian more worry, but Grandma phones to ask when the dog is going to be collected. He'd shown up at her house, but didn't do too well there, since Grandma was too strict with him. Adrian leaves for his trip to the mountains with his bag packed so full of food that he can hardly move. After a half day in the wilds, he is relieved to be back in civilization. The doctor is annoyed at having to come to his house to look at the blisters on Adrian's heels. But Adrian fears gangrene and, additionally, fears that he will be maladjusted because of his father's neglect. A letter arrives in the post reminding Adrian that he is scheduled to have his tonsils out. He's been on the waiting list to have them out since he was five years old. Adrian goes to see Bert in case either one dies, and is not heartened by Bert and Pandora's stories of people who didn't survive operations. Adrian records in minute detail his suffering in the hours before and the days after his operation. During Halloween, his suffering is particularly bad as he has to endure the noise of all the nurses and off-duty policeman enjoying themselves in the hospital grounds dressed up as witches and wizards. This makes Adrian determined to pay for private medical care as soon as he can, instead of relying on the free public health service.

Oct 1 - Oct 31, pp. 168 - 186 Analysis

Throughout his diary, Adrian's choice of books to read is a reflection of as well as a comment on his present situation. In the month of May, when the electricity is cut off and his father's financial problems are mounting, he reads *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens. In March, when his parents are fighting constantly, he is reading Tolstoy's *War and Peace* from the library. In none of these cases do the books offer any help or insight into his own problems. In October, uncertain of Pandora's affection now that his spots have reappeared, Adrian takes out *Progress, Coexistence and Intellectual Freedom* by Andrei D. Sakharov, a book that provides a scenario for creating a better future for mankind. Having read *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte, a story of passionate love, he

determines to get Pandora to go on a mountain trip in order to revive their love. Adrian's estimation of himself as an intellectual results in him selecting books that he frequently cannot understand. But, because he is reporting these details in his diary, he is refreshingly honest. The cover of the Sakharov book proclaims it is "an inestimably important document." After dipping into it, Adrain proclaims it is "inestimably boring." Reading *The Black Prince* by Iris Murdoch, he admits to only understanding one word in ten, and is resolved to some day actually enjoy reading a book by Iris Murdoch.



November 1 - December 31, pp. 186 -219

November 1 - December 31, pp. 186 -219 Summary

Home from the hospital, Adrian's dad takes him to a bonfire party organized to raise funds for Marriage Guidance Councillors' Expenses, where Adrian throws the most recent phone bill into the fire. Even the news that Princess Diana is pregnant can't cheer George up. A frank talk with Pandora results in Pandora says she doesn't want to marry Adrian in two years time when they can legally do so. She wants to go to university and have a career. Adrian writes a poem about autumn and sends it to John Tydeman at the BBC, in hopes that it will be accepted and impress Pandora. Adrian and Pandora start a literary magazine in school, for which he writes a tell-all piece about Barry Kent, expecting it to rock the school to its foundations. Five hundred copies go on sale but after a number of price reductions, only one copy is sold to Barry Kent, who wants to read what Adrian wrote about him. Pauline sends a telegram to say she is coming home. Even the dog smiles at the news.

December begins with the phone being disconnected. When George tries to phone about a job and discovers the dead phone he goes wild. Cleaning up Adrian's room, Pauline finds his stash of porn magazines and the phone bill. Adrian is forced to pay the phone bill out of his savings. Broke, depressed, and feeling abused, he steals a key ring from Mr. Cherry's shop. Guilt ridden, he tries to replace the key ring and is caught by Mr. Cherry, who writes to his parents to tell them. Adrian is cheered by a letter from John Tydeman, who says the BBC has already received too many poems about autumn. His suggestion that Adrian try again sounds like a commission to Adrian, who writes back to know how much he will be paid for his next poem and if he can read it on the radio himself. Pauline says she intends to wear her fox fur coat to the school's Christmas concert. Having given it to Pandora, Adrian is forced to break into her house to retrieve it. The school concert is a disaster, though Adrian considers his performance as Joseph brilliant in a modern interpretation of the Christmas Nativity story. Adrian gets a racing bike for Christmas, something he'd really wanted, since he feels it's time he became independently mobile. Christmas dinner is a disaster. The frozen turkey takes hours to cook, George gets drunk, and the guests, a mix of in-laws and Bert and his now fiancée, Queenie, don't get along. The next day, Pandora and Adrian exchange gifts. She gives him aftershave. He gives her underarm deodorant. The spirit of Christmas dwindles along with the alcohol content in the Mole household, and the dog pulls down the Christmas tree. On the last day of the year, Adrian looks back at his eventful year, pleased that so much has happened and he's still only 14 $\frac{3}{4}$.

November 1 - December 31, pp. 186 -219 Analysis

Adrian's desire to marry Pandora as soon as it is legally possible and Pandora's very different vision for her future reflect the then present tensions between men and women in England. The humor lies in seeing a pair of teenagers acting out the same issues.



Adrian is mimicking the traditional view of male and female roles in marriage. Although he is not certain of what it will be, he will pursue a career, while Pandora is to settle for a little job in a cake shop, if she can fit it in with her domestic duties. But we are already aware of how capable Pandora is, and later in the school year, we see how well she does in class, compared to Adrian, who is often forced to copy her homework. The news that Adrian's mother is coming home also conveys the confusion of women during this time. Before she ran off with Mr. Lucas she had complained to Adrian about marriage being a prison. After a short period away, she has discovered that George wasn't the problem and that there were a lot of things she enjoyed about her marriage, and that she has a way to go before she can find a new role for herself. Influenced by the same ideas and forces that were then changing women's roles in England, the younger Pandora is free to pursue the now accepted course of first establishing her identity in the world before she enters marriage.



January 1 - April 3, pp. 220 - 252

January 1 - April 3, pp. 220 - 252 Summary

Adrian makes his list of New Year's resolutions. They are more practical and less idealistic than last year's. Nigel visits and finds fault with Adrian's new bike, causing Adrian to fall out with Nigel and to be less pleased with his bike. Bert and Queenie get married and move into their own home. Adrian fears that although he's an intellectual, he's not really that clever. He begins copying Pandora's homework and feels better. The financial situation at Adrian's house has become very serious. Pauline takes a job collecting the coins from game machines in colleges and cafes. She gives it up because she says she was sexually harassed and has an allergy to the coins. George starts building spice racks and when he sells one to Mrs. Singh next door spends the money on a bottle of champagne to celebrate. Pandora's parents are having problems because of their political differences. Politics is beginning to dominate school life too. Miss Elf, who has an unemployed boyfriend, is angry that that Mr. Scruton has a picture of Mrs. Thatcher over his desk. She blames the prime minister for the high unemployment. Someone breaks into his office and paints a mustache on Mrs. Thatcher. Shortly after, Miss Elf resigns. Adrian and Pandora form a radical group called the Pink Brigade. Adrian believes his new outcrop of spots would be helped with a little lovemaking with Pandora but she refuses to become a single parent for the sake of his spots.

In March George finally gets a job. He is in charge of a group of youths cleaning up the litter along the canal. His initial delight is followed by depression when he starts the job. Pandora and her mother have now joined Pauline's women's group, while George looks after the children. Adrian is pleased to learn that Elizabeth Sally Broadway is in love with him. Then Adrian is attracted to Barbara Boyer. When word gets out about this, Pandora spends the afternoon crying in the matron's office. Barbara breaks it off with him on the eve of his birthday and he has a shave to cheer himself up. His fifteenth birthday is slightly dimmed by the knowledge that he is still legally a child and can't do anything he couldn't do the day before. The day after, his dad takes him to the hospital because a section of a model airplane sticks to his nose when he tries a little glue sniffing. This is very embarrassing, but Pandora promises to visit him. Love is the only thing that keeps Adrian sane.

January 1 - April 3, pp. 220 - 252 Analysis

In the first three months of the year, Adrian's continuing frustrations and elations are played out against the many changes taking place in society. Caught up with his own worries—his inability to keep up with his schoolwork, his sexually charged relationship with Pandora—he is merely a recorder of these changes. George, his father, gets a job at last, but it is not on a par with his previous job as a salesman. With the high unemployment rates in England in the 1980s, he can't afford to turn it down. The women, Pauline, then Pandora and her mother, continue to pursue their search for a



new female identity. George continues to believe that women are best suited to working in the home, but he doesn't dare express his opinions out loud. In school, political realities are being felt too. Miss Elf's boyfriend has a university degree but can't get a job. She blames the Prime Minister for the situation, and though it is not stated, it is clear that it is Miss Elf who breaks into Mr. Scruton's office and defaces the portrait of Mrs. Thatcher that hangs over his desk. Adrian's political beliefs are pretty superficial. He admits to liking Mrs. Thatcher, but later, under the influence of Miss Elf, declares himself a radical and against almost everything.

Afterword to the American Edition

Afterword to the American Edition Summary and Analysis

In his letter to Adrian, Hamish Mancini gives him a cure for his acne that involves a dead frog. Having read Adrian's diary, he supplies a list of words that he needs Adrian to make sense of for him. He also mentions that his mother is now in a clinic for alcoholics. Adrian responds, saying that Hamish's recipe for a cure for his acne sounds disgusting. He confides that his mother no longer cooks and that his dad and himself have to forage for food as best they can. He supplies short explanations for the words Hamish doesn't understand.



Characters

Adrian Mole

Adrian Mole is the main character. Since the novel takes the form of the diary he is writing, we see events through his eyes. From his diary entries we can form a very clear picture of Adrian. He is a kind of anti-hero, someone with flaws that make him seem human and therefore someone with whom we can identify. He dislikes sports, worries constantly about his health and his frequent outbreaks of acne, and believes himself to be an intellectual even though he has trouble keeping up with his schoolwork. He is frequently self-deluded. The poetry and prose he writes is hilariously pretentious. And, in fact, much of the humor of the book is to be found in the gap between Adrian's assessment of events and the reader's perception of them. For instance, he does not realize that his mother is becoming romantically involved with Mr. Lucas. He thinks she is merely being sympathetic to him after his wife leaves him. But from the details Adrian provides the reader can see what is really happening. Though he may be pretentious and boastful at times, Adrian has a generous heart, as can be seen by his relationship with Bert, the old man he takes care of. He may complain about Bert's grumpy nature and the filthy condition of his house, but he is there for Bert in times of crisis. Adrian often feels very sorry for himself when ill, but at the same time he deals without self-pity with a frequently harsh home life, and with his parents frequently too absorbed by their own issues to pay him much attention or even provide him with regular meals.

Pandora Braithwaite

Pandora Braithwaite: The love of Adrian's life, Pandora appears more practical, more competent, and a lot more intelligent than him. She lives in a better part of town than Adrian, has her own pony, Blossom, and she and her parents vacation abroad. Her parents show more interest in her than Adrian's parents do in him. And although there is tension between her parents at times, it is over political disagreements and nothing like the situation with Adrian's parents who split up for a time and when together, drink and smoke and argue a lot. Pandora is more levelheaded than Adrian. Adrian wants them to get married as soon as it's legal, but Pandora has other plans. When the relationship seems to be getting too passionate, she suggests that the separation caused by Adrian's trip to Scotland will be good for them. It is precisely because she appears to have all the right answers all the time that we don't warm to her. But we have only Adrian's descriptions to go on, and since he idolizes her, she appears always to have the right answers. One of the few times when we can feel sympathy for her is when she finds out about Adrian's short-lived relationship with Barbara Boyer and spends the afternoon crying in the matron's office.



George Mole

George Mole is Adrian's father. Before he gets laid off from his job he works as a salesman selling storage heaters. Later, after he experiences a depressing period of unemployment, he gets a job supervising young, unemployed boys to clear up litter along the canal banks. The job is a step down for him but with millions losing their jobs during this period in England he has no choice but to take it. He is a working-class man who enjoys drinking and smoking, and tends to get drunk around holidays like Christmas and New Year's. And when drunk, he behaves irresponsibly. For instance, he feeds the dog cherry brandy during the New Year's celebration. After a weekend at his friend Nigel's house, Adrian is disgusted that his father hasn't slaved like Nigel's dad in order to fill the house with luxury items and the latest technology. When his wife, Pauline, leaves him for Mr. Lucas, George has a relationship with Doreen Slater, but it's clear he loves Pauline and is very happy when she comes back home. He isn't happy though, with Pauline's new ideas about breaking out of the traditional role of housewife and mother, but he only expresses his opinions in a low voice, and when Pauline holds her women's meetings at the house, he meekly takes care of the children.

Pauline Mole

Pauline Mole is Adrian's mother. Just as Adrian is grappling with all the new experiences with which adolescence is presenting him, Pauline, his mother, is undergoing changes too. In England, in the 1980s, women were beginning to question their role as stay-at-home mothers and housewives. Influenced by these ideas, Pauline starts to wear overalls and has her ears pierced in an effort to reflect her new sense of herself. She reads *The Female Eunuch* by Germaine Greer, at that time, the most influential book in England about women's liberation. Pauline tries to convey to Adrian some of the new ideas she is encountering in books like this. She tells him that for some women, marriage is like a prison. But Adrian, who doesn't understand that his mother is speaking metaphorically (i.e., using a word to suggest a likeness), says he sees women on the street all the time. Her decision to run away with Mr. Lucas is partly the result of her confused state of mind since she very soon returns home. But at home she continues to explore her ideas, taking part in women's groups and learning self-defense. Women in 1980s England wanted the right to work and Pauline gets the chance, first as a typist and then collecting coins from video game machines. She quickly gives up both jobs, suggesting that while she likes the idea of no longer doing the cooking or the housework, there are aspects of being liberated with which she's not so happy.

Bert Baxter

Description



Grandma

Description

The dog

Description

Mr. Lucas

Description

Mrs. Lucas

Description

Nigel

Description

Doreen Slater

Description

Maxwell Slater

Description

Tania Braithwaite

Description

Ivan Braithwaite

Description

Queenie

Description



Sabre, Bert's dog

Description

Mr. Scruton

Description

Miss Elf

Description

John Tydeman

Description



Objects/Places

Malcolm Muggeridge

Malcolm Muggeridge was a real-life intellectual who made frequent appearances on British TV in the 1980s. Adrian writes to him, asking him for advice on being an intellectual but he doesn't respond

The BBC

BBC stands for the British Broadcasting Corporation, roughly equivalent to NPR in the United States. Adrian frequently submits his poems and prose to the BBC and mistakes the encouragement of John Tydeman, an editor, for an actual commission to submit more of his work.

Betting Shop

Bets are placed on horse and dog races at the betting shop. Adrian sees his mother and Mr. Lucas coming out of a betting shop, which suggests that their relationship is one based on superficial pleasures such as gambling and having a good time.

Women's Refuge

After she leaves her husband, Mrs. Lucas moves into a women's refuge where women like herself with no financial support can assist each other.

Abba

Abba was a Swedish pop group who came to fame when they won the Eurovision Song Contest in 1974. With his references to this band, Adrian displays his middle-of-the-road tastes in music, unlike his friend Nigel, who is a punk on the weekends and is supposedly listening to groups like the Clash and the Sex Pistols.

The Royal Family

The Royal Family refers to Queen Elizabeth, Prince Philip and their children. The Royal Wedding of her eldest son, Charles, to Lady Diana Spencer, on July 29, 1981, is the subject of a number of entries in Adrian's diary.



GCEs

GCEs refer to the General Certificate of Education exams that Adrian must pass in order to go on to university.

Elm Tree Avenue

Elm Tree Avenue is the middle-class street where Pandora lives and where Adrian delivers the wrong newspapers. Meant to deliver newspapers like The Times and The Guardian, newspapers associated with educated, middle-class values, he delivers newspapers like the Mirror and the Sun, newspapers preferred by the working classes with more entertainment than news.

Corporation Row

Corporation Row is the working-class street where Adrian should have delivered the Mirror and the Sun newspapers, but instead gave them the newspapers intended for Elm Tree Avenue.

Sainsbury's

Sainsbury's is the supermarket where Adrian and his father shop after his mother leaves. Known for its higher prices, it may not have been the choice of his mother when she was doing the shopping.

St. Patrick's Day

St. Patrick's Day on March 17 is the occasion for Adrian's neighbor Mr. O'Leary to get drunk at ten o'clock in the morning. Adrian's diary is filled with stereotypes which provide some of the humor. When an Indian family, the Singhs, move in next door, Adrian's father has a racist response but the families soon becomes friends.

Sheffield

Sheffield is the name of the town to which Adrian's mother and Mr. Lucas run away. Known only for its manufacture of stainless steel cutlery, there is no suggestion of romance or excitement about the name, and it is a comment on the affair, which soon ends.

Skegness

Skegness is a seaside resort on the east coast of England. It is where Adrian's grandma and Bert Baxter go on a trip with an old folks group and where Bert causes trouble. Cheaper airfares in the 1980s meant that the English could now afford to go to Spain and other places where they were guaranteed sunshine vacations, and that places like Skegness, likely to be windy and wet, were only for the old and the very poor.



Themes

Adolescence

Adrian's diary conveys all the surprises and insecurities of adolescence in a comic way. He discovers for the first time what it is to be in love when a new girl, Pandora, joins his class, and suffers agonies when she chooses to go out with his best friend, Nigel, for a time. He frequently wakes up with spots on his face and frets that they are affecting his life. Pandora assures him that she doesn't mind his spots, but he thinks her kisses are less passionate as a result. His curiosity about sex increases too, and only the level-headedness of Pandora prevents him from finding out more. His sense of himself and his abilities are frequently at odds with reality. His poetry and his prose, for example, are terrible, yet he persists in thinking it is good enough to be accepted by the BBC, the national TV and radio station, and imagines they might be willing to pay him for it. John Tydeman, the BBC editor, who responds to Adrian's letters, is clearly amused by his efforts, yet he sees something in them that he wants to encourage. Adrian is not a genius, as he likes to think, but a typical adolescent whose efforts reflect the stage he is at in his life, and, who, if he persists, may yet turn into the writer he wants to be. The changes in his New Year's resolutions from one year to the next suggests that Adrian has grown up somewhat in the year in between. His diary begins on January 1 with his resolutions for the year. Though he doesn't give the year, we know from things he talks about like the Royal Wedding that it is 1981. His resolutions include a number of vague promises to help the blind, the poor, and the ignorant. There is nothing specific about these promises and it seems he has written them because they sound good. The following year his resolutions are more specific to his own life, and include promises to be kind to the family dog and try to forgive the school bully.

Bullying

Adrian is the victim of bullying in school by Barry Kent, who threatens Adrian with violence unless he pays him protection money. On one occasion, Barry Kent throws Adrian's "snap-lock executive briefcase" on to the rugby pitch. There's no use asking his father for help, Adrian decides. His father has too many financial worries of his own. Since this is a comedy, the subject of bullying is dealt with humorously. It is presented as an inevitable part of growing up. The description of the briefcase Adrian brings to school makes it clear that he is the kind of nerdy kid likely to be picked on by someone like Barry Kent, who is shown as disruptive and not very bright. The subject provides more humor when Adrian reveals that his father's attempts to deal with Barry Kent are useless but it is his grandma who succeeds in sorting him out. We never learn how she did it, only that she returns to Adrian all the money he had given Barry Kent, and from then on, Adrian is left alone by Barry Kent. Barry Kent merely laughs when George Mole approaches him, but he caves in to the firm authority of a little old lady who is not afraid of him and knows how to put him in his place.



Love

His love for Pandora is one of the strongest emotions that Adrian experiences. He suffers when his friend Nigel goes out with her at first, and is ecstatic when Pandora turns her attention to him and they quickly make it known to their school friends that they are officially "in love." But Adrian learns that love is complicated. His love for Pandora is combined with a recurring fear that he cannot retain her interest. And he is also capable of letting his attention wander from her when he temporarily develops an interest in Barbara Boyer. We see Adrian's limited, adolescent view of the world when he declares that his parents know nothing about love. Having discovered love, Adrian thinks his feelings are unique. He has yet to mature into an understanding that every human being has the capacity to experience the same emotions. And, as Sue Townsend shows us, Adrian's relationship with Pandora mirrors events in his parents' relationship. George fails to hold on to Pauline, who runs away with Mr. Lucas, leading George to fall into a depression. But George's feelings for Pauline do not prevent him from beginning a relationship with Doreen Slater, which he quickly ends when he thinks Pauline is coming home. We don't hear about friction in the relationship between Bert Baxter, who is in his eighties, and Queenie, whom he meets in the nursing home and marries soon after. Their relationship is another reminder that love is not only experienced by the young. Adrian may snicker at the idea of their honeymoon, but theirs may be the perfect version of contented love, and yet another example to Adrian that love is not just for the young.

Style

Point of View

The story is told in the first person throughout since it is the confidential thoughts that Adrian Mole is committing to his diary. His perspective is fallible. He frequently does not draw the correct conclusions. At the same time the reader is given enough information to form a more accurate impression of what is really going on. For instance, Adrian sees nothing wrong with Mr. Lucas spending all his time at the Mole house, while his wife is at home working all the time, washing windows and even pouring cement, jobs that Mr. Lucas should at least be helping with. When Mrs. Lucas leaves her husband, Adrian considers that his mother is simply being kind when she spends all her time with him. The reader can tell from the details what is really going on between Adrian's mother and Mr. Lucas. Much of the humor of the book depends on the distance between Adrian's assessment of a situation and what the reader can see based on the details provided. Adrian likes to think of himself as an intellectual, and frequently takes books out of the library that he can't understand. One book he considers a great work is *A Town Called Alice* by Nevil Shute. Having read it he wishes he could have an intellectual conversation with someone about it. Published in 1950 and again popular in 1980s England after it was made into a television series, the book's appeal is to a general audience, and not the intellectual audience of which Adrian likes to consider himself a part.

Setting

The novel is set in England in the early 1980s. Because the story takes the form of a diary, we are not given the name or much physical description of the town where Adrian lives. Adrian is committing only the details of his life that are of interest to him, so there is no need to write in his diary information he already knows. Only when he takes a vacation in Scotland do we get some details of locations, and even then, very few, since Adrian isn't very impressed with most of the places he visits. But despite having none of the information we usually expect from a novel, we can form a very clear impression of Adrian's world from the details he gives us in passing. Near the end of the book, one of Adrian's teacher's defaces a portrait of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher by drawing a mustache on her and writing "Three million unemployed" across her chest. Adrian's father loses his job and goes through a lot of financial and emotional hardship before he finds another job to which he is less suited and which doesn't require any qualifications. These details tell us that the author has set the story in a world that reflects actual events in England in the 1980s, when there was mass unemployment and Margaret Thatcher, who had become prime minister in 1979, was a deeply unpopular leader. Some of Adrian's diary entries are comments on events of the time. Adrian's disgust with the new school food that is no longer cooked on site but brought in from a central location in prepackaged form reflects the government spending cuts in education that



resulted in cheaper, inferior food being served for school lunches for the last thirty years, and is only now being replaced because of its effect on children's health.

Language and Meaning

The author uses the kind of direct, simple language that you would expect to find in a diary, where the intention is not to impress another reader but to simply record events. Generally, Adrian is under the influence of some emotion when he is committing his thoughts to his secret diary. He is often stressed or fearful or unhappy and his direct language conveys the sense that he is writing from the heart. This unself-conscious style helps to convey a sense of realism in the novel. Once or twice Adrian gives examples of the writing style he uses when he is writing to impress, as when he writes his thoughts about Scotland at the end of his vacation there, or the prose essay about autumn that he submits to the BBC. In these instances, his style is laughably ornate and pretentious. By writing a successful novel in plain, everyday English, Sue Townsend is showing us that simple language is best.

For American readers many of the idiomatic words and phrases will sound unfamiliar. Even for audiences in England, the many references

to TV and sports personalities and politicians, which added to the success of the book when it was published, aren't as familiar nowadays. But an Afterword that takes the form of a letter from Hamish Mancini in New York, asking Adrian to explain the meaning of a number of words, and Adrian's letter in response helps to make a lot of these words clear.

Structure

The novel takes the form of a diary. Though the year is not given, we know from details of actual events that the year is 1981. When the diary entries begin, on January 1, Adrian is aged 13 $\frac{3}{4}$, and the diary ends on April 3, the day after his fifteenth birthday. Instead of chapter breaks, the story is divided by the months in the year, with an entry for each day of every month. Some of the entries include in their heading information about public holidays, full and new moons, as well as more obscure church calendar information. This information creates a sense of realism in that it reminds us of the kinds of information, some of it not very useful, that an actual diary might contain. The entries for some months can span twenty or more pages, with only about nine or so pages devoted to each of the months of the new year that lead up to Adrian's fifteenth birthday. Summing up his own story at the end of the year, he says, "A lot has happened. I have fallen in love. Been a one-parent child. Gone intellectual. And had two letters from the BBC." Apart from the breakup of his parents and his relationship with Pandora, other subplots involve his friendship with Bert Baxter, whose dirty house, aggressive dog, and his various illnesses take up a great deal of Adrian's time. Adrian also notes the times he spends with his Grandma and his relationship with the family dog, who, although he

is never given a name, is clearly an important member of Adrian's world, and whose disappearance causes Adrian a lot of anxiety.



Quotes

"Pandora smiled at me in school dinner today, but I was choking on a piece of gristle so I couldn't smile back. Just my luck!"

Page 15

"My spots are so horrific that I can't bear to write about them. I will be the laughingstock at school. I am reading 'The Man in the Iron Mask.' I know exactly how he feels."

Page 57

"I wish my mother would come home. I had forgotten how nice she is."

Page 84

"Barry Kent threw my snap-lock executive briefcase on to the rugby pitch. I have got to find two pounds quickly before he starts throwing me on to the rugby pitch."

Page 89

"Lucas spilt candle-wax over his new suede shoes. It was the only cheerful incident in a tragic day."

Page 95

"I wouldn't mind being a sponge-diver, but I don't think there is much call for them in England."

Page 97

"He is very nice, he gave me a book to read; it is called The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists. I haven't looked through it yet but I'm quite interested in stamp collecting so I will read it tonight."

Page 111

"Pop-eyed Scruton must have been tipped off because he was waiting in the fourth-year cloakroom. He was standing very still with his arms folded, staring with poached-egg eyes."

Page 111

"Then they shut him up in the ambulance and he was sirened away. I had a big lump in my throat and my eyes were watering. It must have been caused by the dust."

Page 115

"My grandma tightened her lips, she is not keen on black, brown, yellow, Irish, Jewish or foreign people."

Page 135

"What is wrong with living in a dirty house?"

page 152



"I have been moved to a side ward. My suffering is too much for the other patients to bear."

Page 185

"The dog is very pleased my mother is back. It has been going about smiling all day."

Page 199

"Phoned the Samaritans and confessed my crime. The man said, 'Put it back then, lad.' I will do it tomorrow."

Page 202

"I am an intellectual but at the same time I am not very clever. "

page 226



Topics for Discussion

Adrian Mole is far from being one of the popular boys in school. He has no interest in sports and likes to think of himself as an intellectual. Yet millions of readers have loved him and his diaries. What is it about Adrian that appeals to so many readers, both young and old?

The author of this book is a woman. Does she create a believable adolescent boy in Adrian Mole? Or does she appear to be on the side of the female characters, making the male characters like Adrian, George Mole, and Mr. Lucas, look foolish by comparison?

Discuss the place of literature in Adrian's life. Adrian reads constantly, and the titles of the books he reads always seem appropriate to the situation he is in at that moment. Do you think his reading helps him or do the book titles merely provide a comic comment on the various situations in his life?

Discuss the topic of bullying in the novel. Barry Kent bullies Adrian into paying him protection money, but when Adrian's grandma goes to see him he pays back all the money. What might she have said or done to deal successfully with him, where others, like George Mole, have failed?

Discuss the role of Adrian's parents. Frequently they appear to ignore Adrian. But Pauline is trying to find her place in the world, and George has to find another role for himself after he loses his job. Does knowing they have their own problems make them more sympathetic characters or are they simply bad parents?

Adrian meets an American boy, Hamish Mancini, in Scotland. In Hamish's letters to Adrian we learn that he visits a therapist and that his mother is on her fifth divorce. How believable is he as a representative of American youth? What might you add or take away from the details of this character if you were asked to supply a more accurate representation of a young American?

Adrian's friend Bert Baxter is in his eighties, and Adrian himself marvels at the fact that they are friends. Is their relationship believable? Or does Sue Townsend include Bert and his story because she is more comfortable writing about adults than adolescents?