

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Anita and Me is a film by producer Metin Hüseyin and was published in 2002. It is based on Meera Syal's novel of the same name and tells the story of Meena Kumar and her family in 1970s England.



The following tasks will help you to focus on certain aspects of the film and have been designed to support your understanding of the characters, the make-up of the film and the cultural context.

FOCUS ON THE BEGINNING

Before you start watching the whole film, just take a look at the first two minutes of the film. Describe what you see and explain what happens.



Then discuss your expectations of the film:

- Who are the two girls? What are they like? What is their relationship?
- What will happen in the story? Take a guess and exchange your ideas with the others.
- Did the first two minutes make you want to see the film?
If yes, explain why and reflect about how the introductory scene managed to make you curious.

REVIEWING

While you are watching the first eight minutes of the film, take notes about life and lifestyles in

- Tollington
- Meena's family
- the Asian community ('aunties and uncles')



THE TOLLINGTON FAMILY

After viewing this part, describe and compare life and the people's lifestyles in Tollington, in Meena's family and within the South Asian community.

Include information about...

- the characters and their behaviour, their attitudes and relationships,
- social background: jobs, housing, family, clothing
- social interaction: ways of talking to each other, relationship to children



WRITE A CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Choose one of the following characters and analyse the way he/she is characterised: What impression does the audience get of the character? Which filmic devices are used for writing a character analysis and what effect do these techniques have?



Meena	-	Meena's mother	-	Meena's father
Mrs Ormerod	-	Uncle Allan	-	Auntie Shaila

MEENA'S FRIENDSHIP TO ANITA

When Meena's parents state that she must not see Anita again, Meena says she feels 'ripped in half' and expects Anita to feel the same. In order to explore the different characters' perspectives on this incident, **choose one** of the following tasks:



- Write a diary entry Meena could write in her diary. Think about what Anita's friendship means to Meena, how she feels about her parents' expectations, why she misses her friend and what she would like to do about it.
- With a partner write a dialogue between Meena's mother and father. Imagine they discuss Meena's behaviour (especially after stealing the charity tin) and exchange their ideas about their daughter, what they are worried about, what they want their daughter to do and how they want to deal with this incident.
- Write a letter from Meena to the Cathy and Clare column asking for advice about the 'ban' and write a reply by the magazine in which you give Meena some advice about what she should do.
- Prepare and act out a role interview with either Meena or Anita in which one of you takes over the character's role and answers questions about your behaviour, your attitudes, thoughts and feelings. The rest of the class or group asks questions about things you want to know about (for example behaviour, thoughts, feelings, motives, etc.).

HELP: WRITING A ROLEPLAY

Before you take over the role, you need to explore the character's thoughts and feelings by writing a role biography.

Some of the following questions can help you:

- Who are you? What is your name? How old are you?
- Where do you live? Who belongs to your family? Are they important to you?
- What do you look like? How do you dress? How do you move?
- What is your social background? Where did you grow up?
- What is important about your parents? Which influence do they have in your life?
- Who are your friends? What do they mean to you?
- What makes you happy? What do you enjoy? What is important to you?
- What are your dreams, sorrows and fears?
- What is your biggest problem at the moment? How do you feel about it?



WHO IS NANIMA?

Take notes about Nanima – on her outward appearance, her background (as much as we know about it), her behaviour. Write a short character portrait of her.



NANIMA AND MEENA

Describe Nanima and her relationship to Meena. What role does Nanima play for Meena's development? Which influence does she have on Meena and her identity?



COMPARE YOUR RESULTS

Read out your character portraits to each other and give feedback to your fellow pupils. Then discuss your personal reactions to Nanima: What do you think about her?



PREPERATION

Analyse which role Nanima plays for Meena's development within the story: What influence does she have on Meena? How does Meena or her behaviour change when Nanima comes to visit?



You may wish to consider some of the following scenes and Nanima's and/or Meena's behaviour:

- Nanima's arrival and her first meal with the family (00:54:46-00:56:26)
- Nanima drawing the dagger to scare off Sam and his friends (00:57:00-00:57:46)
- Nanima and Meena meeting Mrs Ormerod in the street (00:57:46-00:58:30)
- Nanima singing songs to Sunil and Meena (00:58:31-00:59:04)
- Nanima telling a story about India (01:03:50-01:05:38)

MEENA'S DEVELOPMENT

Illustrate Meena's development throughout the story in a flowchart



Step 1: Think about the different stages of her development.

Step 2: Make a list about who (people) or what (events) changed her or had a lasting influence on her.

Step 3: Illustrate Meena's development by showing which stages she goes through and which people or which events influenced her or led to a change in her behaviour or personality.

Step 4: Be prepared to present and explain your illustration to your classmates.

Please note: You can add pictures, cartoons, quotations or symbols to show how Meena's identity develops.

COMPARE YOUR RESULTS

Now as we've returned back to class, get together in groups.



Present your illustrations to each other.

Explain the design of your illustration.

Ask the others if they have any questions or whether they agree with your interpretation.

Compare your illustrations with each other. Find similarities and differences in the way you present Meena's development. Are there aspects in the illustrations you agree or disagree with?

Try to develop a 'new' model which everybody in your group can agree with. Present your joint model and the results of your discussion to the rest of the class.

MEENA'S CHARACTER

Write a character portrait of Meena and describe her development throughout the film.

**DISCUSSION**

How would you define 'identity'? Who or what influences your identity?

Meena is part of many different groups. Which of these groups does she belong to by choice or by chance? Do any of the groups overlap? (cf. www.filmeducation.org)

family - friends - classmates - extended family - neighbours - villagers - Uncle Allan's church - the wenches - grammar school pupils - readers of Jackie magazine - South Asian immigrant community

Discuss which of these groups have the biggest influence on Meena's identity and how she defines herself.

**COMPARE YOUR RESULTS**

Make a list of the five most important groups and discuss your list with a partner.

Be prepared to give reasons for your choice.



RECOLLECT RACIST ATTITUDES

There are several scenes in the film where characters behave or react in a way which shows us their stereotypes or prejudices or even racist attitudes. Make a list of scenes you remember.



REVIEWING

Choose one of the following scenes and watch it another time:

- Anita at the Kumar's dinner table (00:48:37-00:50:59)
- Anita and Nanima in front of Mrs Ormerod's shop (00:57:46-00:58:30)



Explain what role stereotypes and / or prejudices play in that scene. Make suggestions about how the characters could react differently. Think about how the dialogues would have continued.

ACT IT OUT!

Prepare and act out a role play:
Enter the situation and decide how you would react.
Act out the scene for the rest of the class
and be prepared to discuss your ideas.



BACKGROUND CHECK

Anita and Me is set in 1970s England.

In order to explore the cultural context, it is necessary to do some research about the following key words.

In groups, choose one key word, research the Internet and prepare a presentation about the 'most important facts' about...

- Life in the 1960s/70s
- The 'Black Country'
- Race relations in the UK
- Enoch Powell and his 'Birmingham Speech' (1986)
- Immigration from South Asia and South Asian minorities in the UK
- Indian culture(s) and traditions (for example festivals, clothing, music, food)

**DISCUSSION**

Reflect about how your new knowledge changes your understanding of the film or the characters.

**VERIFY YOUR RESULTS**

Discuss whether you think Meena's story is a representative or a rather special one.

