

Western Lane – Chetna Maroo (2023) – Knowledge Organiser

Contexts and concepts	
Life in the UK: We also see how life is hard in London for the family as Khush and Gopi go to the fort outside behind the house as <i>'no one spat on us from a height and told us to go home'</i> out there. This underlines the fact that migrants do not always welcome in the UK and can be made to feel like outsiders.	Indian/Jain traditions: Maroo discusses a lot of Indian traditions in her book such as Diwali and the use of sindoor. The sisters also go to Gujarati school which helps them feel close to their mother. Maroo also describes lots of Indian food and meals and the ritual behind it. We can also see how Pa is trying to follow the Jain belief that fathers will offer guidance to family members to help grow spiritually and personally.
Squash: Each chapter opens with a paragraph about squash underlining how it pervades Gopi's life and Maroo uses real squash players, with their different styles and lives to underline that sport can be unifying. Gopi uses it as a way to bond with her father and to make friends.	Social conventions: The women in the novel tend to be expected to conform with societal expectations. Ranjan feels the girls are 'too wild'. Mona takes on the role of 'mother' of the family as she is the eldest. Pa struggles in his grief to be the leader of the household and doesn't feel he can accept any help or show any weakness as a man.
Themes and how they link to character and contexts	
Loss and Grief: the whole novel centres on this theme with the loss of Ma. Through Gopi, we see how each of the sisters and Pa and hugely affected by her loss. Maroo shows how the family are united in their grief and support each other, but also how isolating and personal it is with everyone reacting differently and at different times to their huge personal loss.	Growing up: The majority of the characters in the novel are very young and we see them grow and mature. Gopi and Ged are shy and not sure how to deal with their feelings. By the end of the novel, Gopi thinks they are both older and her winning the tournament could be seen as her maturing into a young woman. Mona also changes and has to take on the role of 'mother' while dealing with her feelings for Shaan.
Family and Relationships: Maroo portrays a strong family who support each other in adversity. Pa uses squash to try to guide his daughters. The sisters are close and supportive of each other and also defend and cover for their father when he doesn't fix things and isn't tuning up for work. They want to appear in control and that nothing is wrong. Pa is also very close to his brother, Pavan.	Identity: This is linked to growing up and life in the UK as the sisters try to forge their own identity as they grow up. The fact that they are of Indian heritage growing up in London means that they are trying to fit in with the culture in the UK but also maintain their Indian identity as it means they remain close to their family and their late mother. As they try to integrate, they are also aware that others may not approve of their new relationships.
Characters and what Maroo may want them to represent.	
Gopi: is the main voice throughout the novel and we see everything through her young eyes. She is still recovering from her mother's death and wants to bond with her father. She is loyal and loving to her family and is also growing up and recognising her feelings for Ged but also understanding what she wants to do in life and what she wants to become. We can see her grow in confidence and mature as she wins her squash tournament at the end of the novel.	
Mona: is the eldest sister. She looks after Gopi when she injures her ankle and goes out to find a job when she knows her father is struggling to support the family. Although she is young and naïve (as shown with her experience with Shaan), she also covers for her father and makes sure the family keeps up the appearance that they are coping.	
Khush: is the middle sister and, as with the rest of the family, is missing her mother. She needs to support of her sisters and tries to deal with her grief by talking to her mother at night. She is close to Gopi and supports her when she gets her period. She also has a temper as she fights with Mona when she is rude about Ged and his mother.	
Ged: is a shy boy with a slight stammer. He meets Gopi at Western Lane, and they become close and train together. He is kind and thoughtful to the family and is upset (he loses his semifinal) when he realises that his relationship with Gopi will change now she has moved to Edinburgh.	
Pa: is a loving father who is grief stricken by the loss of his wife and is unable to express his emotions. He struggles to cope with 3 daughters and channels all of his energy into playing squash with them. He is lonely without Ma and talks to her at night. He is a kind man who has close relationships but struggles to ask for or accept help.	
Auntie Ranjan: is Pavan's wife and Pa's sister-in-law. She is a strong woman with very fixed views about how people should behave, but she is also kind and loving. She wants to help Pa and the family and is often cooking for them. She takes Gopi in but has to be persuaded into letting her be herself and play squash.	
Uncle Pavan: is a kind and understanding man who seems to have a lot of empathy. He encourages Pa to talk about his feelings as well as being very open and kind with Gopi when she moves in with them. He supports her with her squash and uses his influence over Auntie Ranjan to come to good solutions. He also talks more openly about grief and allows Gopi and Pa especially to do the same.	

Plot summary

Chapter 1: The chapter opens with an image of the squash court and the noises from it. Gopi, the 11-year-old narrator of the novel, then slowly introduces us to her family and her circumstances. She lives in London with her two sisters, Khush, 13 and Mona, 15. We learn that their mother has recently died and that their father, Pa, is struggling to cope. When they visit Aunt Ranjan and Uncle Pavan in Edinburgh, Ranjan suggested that the three girls are 'wild' and offers to allow one of them to live with them. After this, Pa starts them on a squash training 'regime' at Western Lane, the local sports centre. Here, we are introduced to Ged, and we see that Gopi likes him. Both Pa and the 3 sisters are struggling with the death of Ma. Pa seems to have let things go around the house such as the central heating and Khush begins to talk to her mother in Gujarati on the landing at night.

Chapter 2: Gopi and the family do not go to Edinburgh as planned for Diwali. Pa makes an excuse, and they celebrate at home. Pa gets sent some videos of squash matches which Gopi begins to watch obsessively. She is also struggling to deal with her mother's death; crying and hallucinating seeing her mother when she has a fever. The sisters are upset at Gujarati class when Jinal says her mother, Susilaben, was asking about Pa and how he is coping. The chapter ends with Gopi getting her first period when training at Western Lane and asking Khush not to tell Mona about it.

Chapter 3: Pa feels that Gopi, who is the best squash player of the 3 sisters, needs to play with a better player so she begins to play with Ged. Their relationship begins to grow, and they begin to play together every day by springtime. They learn about a squash tournament from Maqsd and Gopi become keen to go. She is worried about the money, but Pa begins to train her and Ged.

Chapter 4: Gopi and Ged prepare for the tournament. Mona and Khush are not a part of it. Mona talks to Gopi about Ged and how Pa only allows her to play with him as none of the family will find out that she is playing squash with a white boy. Gopi tells her sisters how Pa often smokes cigarettes with Ged's mother, Linda and they make an excuse when Susilaben asks them over to dinner. Mona begins to take over the running of the household and plans meals on a budget as Pa misses more and more of his work appointments. Mona begins to notice Shaan, Maqsd's nephew. Mona also takes a job at the hair salon and starts doing bookkeeping. The sisters go into London to get a new racquet for Gopi which Mona pays for.

Chapter 5: Pa, Gopi, Khush, Mona, Ged, his mother, Shaan and Maqsd go to a funfair in Leicester. Mona and Shaan are seen pouring whiskey into their coke. Gopi feelings for Ged begin to grow. Mona is upset when Shaan introduces her to another girl. Mona mentions that Ged and his mother would not be with them if Ma was alive, and Khush physically attacks her. Mona stops working. Khush tells Gopi that Mona wouldn't have done anything with Shaan as she was worried what the family would think about her being with a Pakistani boy. The family have a visit from Linda and Susilaben; both of whom seem interested in Pa. Mona is worried about Pa and his work. Ged and Gopi overhear Pa talking to Linda about how he is struggling to cope. Gopi plays a game with Pa. Gopi is upset and hits him in the face with a ball, badly bruising his face.

Chapter 6: Ged's mother stops Ged training with Gopi after she hits Pa in the face with the ball. When she sees Ged again, she holds his hand and tells him about a computer game involving cowboys and Native American Indians they were playing at school and how she was embarrassed when everyone looked at her when the teacher talked about 'Indians'. Gopi asks Linda if she can play with Ged again, but Linda is unsure and becomes emotional. At home, Gopi tries to talk to Pa about Ma, but he is unable to. They begin to hear Pa talking to Ma at night and become concerned for him. Gopi decides to call Uncle Pavan.

Chapter 7: Auntie Ranjan and Uncle Pavan come to visit as Gopi had told Pavan about Pa talking to Ma at night. Ranjan makes them dinner and Pa and Pavan go out for a walk. The next morning, Pa takes Gopi to Western Lane. Pa struggles to tell her that she can go and live in Edinburgh with Ranjan and Pavan if she would like. When they get home, Khush pleads with her not to go. Gopi hits some slow balls with Ged at Western Lane, and he promises to come and visit her in Edinburgh.

Chapter 8: Gopi is in Edinburgh with Ranjan and Pavan. She thinks about Pa and his sisters at home as well as the tournament coming up. Ranjan does not want her to play squash, but Pavan changes her mind and takes Gopi to the court. Everyone meets up in Durham for the tournament. Gopi wins her first game. Pa and her sisters all hug her and she sees Ged. Ged and Shaan win their matches, and they are all then in the semifinals the next day. Gopi and Ged talk alone, and Ged asks *Have you thought about what happens after this?*. Gopi makes it to the final and wins a bag and £20. Although she does not initially see Pa, he appears and is happy. Ged hands her the prize and she feels that they are both shy and don't know how to express their feelings. The novel ends with Pavan reminiscing about Pa and Ma with Ranjan and Gopi is listening to them from the balcony above.