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| **Meena Kumar** |
| **Reduce*****In no more than 50 words, summarise how Meena is presented in the novel.*** | Meena Kumar, ‘too mouthy, clumsy and scabby to be a real Indian girl, too Indian to be a real Tollington wench’ (p. 150), a girl ‘stuck between various gangs’ (p. 25), symbolises a child at the cusp of adolescence. She is made to feel like she has to choose between identities and worlds, just so she can prove that she belongs. When we are first introduced to nine-year-old Meena, she is immediately presented by Syal as someone who has a desire to rebel and fabricate truths, a desire for which she finds an outlet in thirteen-year-old Anita Rutter, who gives ‘voice’ to all the ‘wicked’ things she has ‘often thought but kept zipped up’ (p. 138). Perhaps Syal uses Meena’s desire to challenge societal and cultural boundaries to emphasise her inner conflict, highlighted especially by the restrictive metaphorical adjective ‘zipped’, amidst the external reality of living as a first-generation immigrant in 1960s Tollington, facing both overt ostracism as well as ignorance and microaggressions. It is interesting to note that Meena, who ‘never wanted to be anyone except herself’, only ‘older and famous’ (p. 146), starts to feel ostracised for her ethnic identity. She wants to ‘shed her body like a snake’ and emerge ‘reborn’ (p. 146), just so she can fit in. This simile in particular reveals not only the compulsion for a complete transformation but also alludes to the revulsion she starts to feel for who she is and what she stands for. It is Nanima’s arrival that serves almost as a moment of anagnorisis when she realises that this ‘urge to reinvent’ is driven by unfounded ‘shame’ (p. 211). We then see Meena begin to reclaim her sense of confidence as well as identity. She decides that she will no longer be Anita’s ‘shadow’, but her ‘equal’ (p. 237), and starts to see Anita for more than who she projects herself to be, stepping over the ‘fine line between love and pity’ (p. 242) in a moment of remarkable emotional maturity.Although presented as a morally insightful person, Syal also reveals moments of weakness in Meena through some of her reckless choices. This includes lying, stealing, falsely accusing others of her misdeeds as well as resisting to stand up to injustices committed by the Wenches Brigade. Yet we also see Meena’s fierce desire to protect her family and friends, empathise with the voiceless and demonstrate unwavering courage in standing up to bullies to fight both racism and discrimination.Finally, we see Meena emerge victorious, making peace with who she is, ‘heal[ing]’ both ‘mind and body’ and recognising that she was never a ‘bad girl, a mixed-up girl, a girl with no name or place’, but someone who could indeed be empowered by their cultural hybridity to ‘belong’ wherever they ‘stood’ (p. 303). Syal’s message is clear through Meena’s affirmation – belonging is arbitrary and shouldn’t come at the cost of conformity. That it is ‘choice’ more than anything else, one which can result in true empowerment and contentment.  | **Success Criteria*****Using the mark scheme, highlight where the assessment objectives have been met in the model paragraph.*****AO1 – Read, understand and respond to texts. Use quotations and discuss them.****AO2 – Analyse the text using subject terminology.****AO3 – Include social and historical context.** |
| **Transform*****Using the novel, draw three images which represent Meena and her actions in the novel. Label with appropriate evidence.*** | **Magpie*****Select at least three key words from the analytical text above that you could use when writing about Meena at different points in the text. Make sure you define them.***

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 | **Criticise*****‘The most important change we see in Meena is how she starts to stand up to Anita.’****To what extent do you agree with the above statement?*  |
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| **Anita Rutter** |
| **Reduce*****In no more than 50 words, summarise how Anita is presented in the novel.*** | Known as the ‘undisputed ‘cock’ of our yard’ (p. 38) Anita symbolises an extreme consequence of neglect, abuse and social deprivation. When we are first introduced to Anita, she is presented by Syal as the solution to Meena’s need for liberation. Anita, like Meena, is keen to rebel, enjoys adventure and loves the outdoors. What’s interesting is how Anita doesn’t begin the friendship until she tests Meena, and how quickly Anita, with her ‘foghorn voice, foul mouth and proficiency at lassoing victims’ (p. 38–9), reveals the cruel and domineering aspects of her personality and propensity to both intimidate and dominate. The use of this metaphor in particular illustrates the power and control she has over those around her. It’s as if she imprisons them under her spell, despite her offensive demeanour. Anita’s fury is so ‘powerful’ that it is even described as ‘almost tangible’ and her ‘wordless seething tempers’ (p. 186) clearly terrify those around her. Perhaps Syal uses Anita to remind the reader of how dangerous it can be when brutish behaviour is unchecked, and how quickly it can escalate. This includes Anita’s coercion and control of her friends, tormenting of her own sister, bullying of Mr Christmas, instigating Meena’s stealing, attacking Fat Sally in a violent but composed way, and brazenly supporting and celebrating Sam’s brutal and racist assault. Despite Anita’s facade of bravado and indifference, Syal brings our attention to how she also succumbs to vulnerability on more than one occasion, and how she may be a ‘naughty girl but not a wicked one’ (p. 268). She too, has a ‘fear of ostracism’ (p. 142), revealed through subtle fabrications like pretending to wear a bra or bursting into tears in response to her mother’s condemnation. She also shows child-like ignorance that ‘Deidre had no intention, ever, of buying Anita a horse’ (p. 242), yet rides one with unparalleled expertise and affection. Furthermore, she collapses after putting their injured dog out of its misery, demonstrating the physical and emotional toll the act has on her body. It is no surprise that Meena begins to ‘pity’ her and Meena’s mama also feels sorry for the ‘poor, poor girl’ (p. 250). Meena recognises that Anita is more in ‘need’ of her than the other way around, yet is sadly incapable of accepting kindness when she is given it. Ultimately, we see Anita reduced to someone without choice. She is friendless and motherless, and shows no growth or insight, even when Meena writes to her before leaving Tollington. Anita’s future looks bleak and without ambition, where, according to her own sister, she may turn out just like their mother. Syal is possibly trying to suggest that Anita’s dishonesty, cruelty and inaction on some occasions are unforgivable. Anita may have had power and influence throughout the narrative but ultimately loses to Meena on moral grounds.  | **Success Criteria*****Using the mark scheme, highlight where the assessment objectives have been met in the model paragraph.*****AO1 – Read, understand and respond to texts. Use quotations and discuss them.****AO2 – Analyse the text using subject terminology.****AO3 – Include social and historical context.** |
| **Transform*****Using the novel, draw three images which represent Anita and her actions in the novel. Label with appropriate evidence.*** | **Magpie*****Select at least three key words from the analytical text above that you could use when writing about Anita at different points in the text. Make sure you define them.***

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 | **Criticise*****‘Syal presents Anita as a character who is solely responsible for her own fate.’****To what extent do you agree with the above statement?*  |

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| **Daljit Kumar – mama** |
| **Reduce*****In no more than 50 words, summarise how mama is presented in the novel.*** | Mrs Kumar, ormama, symbolises grace, resilience and moral fibre. She is the type of woman whose ‘serenity masked backbones of iron and a flair for passive resistance’ (p. 110), who has lived more than one lifetime. When we are first introduced to mama, she is described by Syal as someone who comes from a ‘small Punjabi village’ (p. 34) and is proud of her heritage. She carves out a brand new identity, driven by the compulsion to assimilate felt by immigrants in 1960s Britain. She learned that ‘she would get fewer stares and whispers if she had donned any of the sensible teacher’s trouser suits’, practised ‘discretion’ in her attire and spoke ‘English without an accent’ (p. 25). Perhaps Syal uses these sibilant verbs to emphasise the pressure that looms over people like mama. It reminds us of how life-changing it can be for a person’s sense of self, as well as their understanding of what it means to truly belong. It is the latter that fuels mama’s desire to educate and guide Meena with firm affection, instilling purpose and ambition: ‘You prove you are better. Always’ (p. 25). It is therefore unsurprising that Meena sees this duality within her: ‘To everyone else, she was the epitome of grace, dignity and unthreatening charm’, treated with ‘deferential respect’, yet to Meena, there is a ‘monster beneath the mother’ (p. 28). It is interesting to note that this juxtaposition is also reflective of the theme of mother-daughter relationships and generational conflict. Meena feels misunderstood, and often finds it difficult to connect with her mother, admitting that she is not a ‘Yard Mama’ (p. 53), and that the only time she can relate to her is when she sees any hint of fiery passion within her. Mama is uncompromising when it comes to matters of morality. This is evident in her decision to deny Deidre the benefit of her ‘impeccable manners’ (p. 90) upon learning her racist name for their dog. She is fully devoted to her family and dedicates her time and efforts to educating Meena about her past, regularly drawing parallels between her life now with the world she came from, with orchards and peacocks and ‘rainy monsoon nights’ (p. 35). Mama recognises sacrifice and what it means to be ‘intelligent but poor’ and live frugally: ‘My mother never ate out, never’ (p. 26). Although mama’s adherence to cultural traditions and beliefs occasionally causes friction between her and Meena, she is still determined to make Meena feel a sense of belonging and establish a grounding in her cultural identity. She takes her to a gurdwara to connect with her religious heritage and attempts to teach her ‘rudiments of Indian cuisine’ (p. 61).As the text progresses, Syal draws our attention to mama’s flaws and biases as well. For example, her assumptions about ‘English’ familial practices and an occasional sense of righteousness about her own cultural values: ‘She never sees her own grandchildren [...] Her kids should be shot’ (p. 135). However, mama is seen to be receptive and occasionally changes her stance. This is especially true as her interactions with members of the Tollington community increase and become more meaningful, revealed as she stands in the ‘doorway, rapt’ (p. 217) observing Mrs Worrall’s kindness to Nanima. It is also evident when she realises that Deidre has been ‘seeking approval all her life’ (p. 216), softening her stance towards her, and when she learns that ‘*that* Anita Rutter’ is in fact a ‘poor poor girl’ (p. 250) who is both neglected and abandoned. What remains consistent, however, is mama’s compassion and faith in Meena’s character and capabilities. She is described by Meena to be ‘regularly’ found ‘in front of the television news with tears streaming down her face’ empathising with ‘those poor children [...] those poor miners [...] those poor soldiers’ (p. 52). Mama’s solicitude is unparalleled: ‘enough heart for the rest of the world’ (p. 52). It is therefore no surprise that as Meena matures, she begins to admire her for her integrity, as mama too starts to believe that her daughter shares her strength and will succeed: ‘She is my daughter. She will pass it, no problem’ (p. 303). | **Success Criteria*****Using the mark scheme, highlight where the assessment objectives have been met in the model paragraph.*****AO1 – Read, understand and respond to texts. Use quotations and discuss them.****AO2 – Analyse the text using subject terminology.****AO3 – Include social and historical context.** |
| **Transform*****Using the novel, draw three images which represent mama and her actions in the novel. Label with appropriate evidence.*** | **Magpie*****Select at least three key words from the analytical text above that you could use when writing about mama at different points in the text. Make sure you define them.***

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 | **Criticise*****‘Syal presents mama as someone who wants to control her daughter’s life’****To what extent do you agree with the above statement?*  |

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| **Shyam Kumar – papa** |
| **Reduce*****In no more than 50 words, summarise how papa is presented in the novel.*** | Shyam Kumar, or papa, encapsulating both ‘vulnerability and pride’ (p. 11), symbolises the struggle to balance cultural values and heritage with a desire to adapt to Western traditions for the sake of a family’s well-being and integration. Papa is a dedicated father, affectionate husband, conscientious provider and, at times, a fierce protector. When we are first introduced to papa, we see him enforcing strong morals and integrity as he attempts to hold Meena accountable for her lies. He shares with her the parable of the boy and the tiger to instil life-long lessons that he continues to impress upon her throughout the narrative. He is described by Syal with a ‘sensitive’ face and a ‘generous’ mouth (p. 81), someone ‘tasty enough to flirt with’ (p. 180), yet desperately ‘uncomfortable’ (p. 179), partly because of his cultural sensibilities with the attention he receives from the Ballbearings women. Papa, of course, has his vices and indulgences. We learn that he ‘loved gambling’ (p. 181) and often won, but Syal draws our attention to this seemingly frivolous aspect of his personality to reveal a history that is deeper and profoundly tragic. We learn that he is someone who has ‘courted chance like an old friend’ (p. 181) because he knows all too well what it is like to take a gamble in life when the stakes are stacked against you: ‘a seventeen year old in a refugee camp who owned what he wore’ (p. 181–2). Papa is someone who understands vulnerability and sacrifice, who has ‘lived and breathed and smelled’ (p. 182) poverty, for whom the past is not a ‘mere sentimental journey’ but ‘a murky bottomless pool full of monsters and the odd shining coin’ (p. 75). It is therefore unsurprising how he alternates between composure and outbursts of anger when he sees what he perceives as Meena digressing as she experiments with aspects of her identity and projection.Papa is generous and charitable and loves to host ‘mehfils’ that are ‘legendary’ (p. 71), bringing friends together. This is perhaps in an attempt to create a community and support system to replace the one he, like many other immigrants, would have left behind. But it is when papa sings that Syal illustrates the emergence of his true being: ‘Papa became himself when he sang. My tender papa, my flying papa, the papa with hope and infinite variety’ (p. 83). The repeated use of personal pronouns demonstrates not only Meena’s protectiveness of her father, but also her love and admiration for seeing his uninhibited, true self. Perhaps Syal wants the reader to empathise with papa here – the present participle ‘flying’ reminding us how his creative expression is what makes him soar, and how tragic it was that he was denied an acting career: ‘offered a contract’ when he was younger but ‘refused’ (p. 82) by Dadajee, a communist. However, papa’s sense of duty is unparalleled, as he remains committed to provide for his family, going to an ‘office everyday’ and returning with ‘a bulging briefcase full of papers’ (p. 83). Syal invites the reader’s empathy when Meena makes the ‘connection’ that if her ‘singing papa’ was the ‘real man’, how trapped he must feel ‘the rest of the time’ (p. 83). Despite his personal compromises, papa shows on many occasions that he recognises and values integrity and kindness. This is evident through his candid conversions with Uncle Alan and Mr Topsy/Turvey, his quiet ‘revolutions’ (p. 165) though defiant comments about Churchill, ‘not particularly one of my heroes’ (p. 179), and his important reminders to Meena to always speak up against injustice. Papa’s protection comes in many guises and he plays the role of the immigrant parent like a trained veteran. It is no surprise, therefore, that despite their disagreements, Meena values him for his love and dedication. He too shows growth in his understanding and acceptance of his daughter’s emerging sense of self towards the end: ‘Papa’s silence told me how much better he knew me than mama’ (p. 303). | **Success Criteria*****Using the mark scheme, highlight where the assessment objectives have been met in the model paragraph.*****AO1 – Read, understand and respond to texts. Use quotations and discuss them.****AO2 – Analyse the text using subject terminology.****AO3 – Include social and historical context.** |
| **Transform*****Using the novel, draw three images which represent papa and his actions in the novel. Label with appropriate evidence.*** | **Magpie*****Select at least three key words from the analytical text above that you could use when writing about papa. Make sure you define them.***

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 | **Criticise*****‘What is most important to papa is the pursuit of a better life in a foreign land.’****To what extent do you agree with the above statement?*  |