

# Free book review about the prime of miss jean brodie

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The remarkable story of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* illuminates two interlaced eras; the 1930s when most of the action takes place and the 1960s when it was published. . Most of the novel takes place during the 1930s at the Marcia Blaine School for Girls in Edinburgh, Scotland, The book center on the schoolmistress, Miss Jean Brodie and her girls, a small group of students, known as " the Brodie set." The girls are six, junior level, ten year old girls when they became Miss Jean Brodie's " crème de la crème" and started a two year tutelage with Jean Brodie. Beyond, or more appropriately, instead of the customary curriculum her teaching includes the subjects of personal life, love, and travels. In her discussions, Miss Brodie references art history, fascism, and classical studies. Her individualistic attitude causes conflict with the more staid headmistress, Miss Mackay, who becomes set on discovering evidence that she can use to discredit Miss Brodie and drive her out of the school.

The story starts in 1936, when the girls are sixteen. Next, it flashes back to 1930, when the girls became Miss Jean Brodie's " crème de la crème" started a two year tutelage with Jean Brodie's. This is the first of the many flashbacks and flash-forwards Sparks uses throughout the novel. There are six girls; Sandy, Rose, Monica, Jenny, Eunice and Mary; Spark structures the book into six major chapters. Each chapter centers on the relationship between the teacher and her students. Brodie is a dominating force in the lives of her students inviting them into her home after hours. This is part of her effort to give them an education in the original sense of the Latin verb *educere*, " to lead out." This has far reaching effects; not just for the time they knew her as a romantic eccentric; a rebellious intellect in an age of

domination and an admirer of the fascism of Benito Mussolini. It goes beyond the time when she was molding their beliefs and aesthetics and carries over into their adult lives. Part of this is because even though her personal effect on each of the girls varies it serves to unite them as they move up through the senior level.

Miss Brodie is a free spirit and, as the headmistress is collecting information to use against her Miss Brodie is flamboyantly in disregard of traditional values. Miss Mackay is soon able to build her dossier. It no secret to the Brodie set or to some of the staff members that Miss Brodie is romantically involved with Mr. Lowther, the singing master. It also, obvious she carries a torch for Mr. Lloyd. But, the art master Lloyd is a married man and to Miss Jean Brodie that makes it unacceptable for her to get involved with him. In the beginning, the girls use these events to help unravel ' the facts of life.' Collecting the pieces of Miss Jean Brodie's life in much the same way as Miss MacKay who is putting them together to build the case against her.

As they grow older the girls enter more directly into Miss Brodie's world and become involved in her schemes. Brodie is in love with Teddy Lloyd the art master, but she renounces him because he is married. Instead of choosing an illicit affair with a married man Brodie instead has an affair with Gordon Lowther, the school's singing master. However, she refuses to marry him so the triangle is formed. Both men love Miss Jean Brodie, a woman in her Prime. Lowther, wants to marry her but she turns him down because she is in love with Teddy Lloyd who is a married Catholic. Lloyd desires her that she cannot simply and openly choose Lloyd, it is because he is already married to someone else. Lloyd's desire can be seen in how every painting he does of

the girls bears a resemblance to Miss Jean Brodie. Meanwhile the girls are watching and learning about life and passion and the headmistress is taking notes gathering up evidence against Brodie.

Now this would be complex enough in itself and brings the story around to where the flashbacks have caught up 1936 when the novel. However it is further complicated when Joyce Emily Hammond, arrives at the school and befriends Brodie. The Headmistress, Miss Mackay, is actively trying and failing to rid herself of Brodie, while the girls are taking notes and learning about life and passion. Joyce Hammond tries to befriend the Brodie set as well but is not accepted by them. Joyce's brother is fighting in the Spanish Civil War. Brodie encourages Joyce to run away to fight on the Nationalist side. Joyce eventually disappears; later it is learned that she was killed in a train wreck in Spain.

As the girls grow up they move apart and go their separate ways. Neither Mary nor Jenny stay to take their exams. Their motives are quite different, Mary becomes a typist and Jenny pursues a career in acting. Eunice and Monica follow different paths; the former as a nurse the latter a scientist. Rose follows a more traditional woman's role and marries a handsome husband. It is Sandy, with her interest in psychology that makes the furthest break from what life, society and Miss Brodie expect. Curiously it is her fascination with Mr. Lloyd's mind along with his stubborn love for Jean Brodie and his religion. When she is eighteen Sandy finds herself alone with Mr. Lloyd and has an affair with him for five weeks during the summer.

Although Sandy loses interest in him as a man she is still fascinated by the part of his mind that loves Jean Brodie. Sandy leaves Lloyd but not before

adopting his Roman Catholic religion, and deciding to become a nun. Before taking the final steps she meets with the Headmistress, Miss Mackay to put a stop to Miss Brodie. She does this by suggesting to the headmistress that she accuse Brodie of encouraging fascism, this tactic succeeds. Although Miss Brodie tries again and again to figure out who betrayed her it is not until her dying moment that she is able to imagine it was her confidante, Sandy. Sandy, does not leave Miss Jean Brodie behind when she becomes Sister Helena of the Transfiguration. She writes *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*. In it there she maintains that "it's only possible to betray where loyalty is due." It is through this we discover how deeply she herself was effected by Brodie. During an interview about her psychology book the line of inquiry turns to if the strongest influences were "literary or political or personal? [or] Was it Calvinism?" Sandy's reply is "There was a Miss Jean Brodie in her prime."

Webster's Dictionary defines Protagonist as "the principal character in a literary work," "a leading actor, character, or participant in a literary work or real event," or "a leader, proponent, or supporter of a cause," a "champion". That definition would seem to make Miss Brodie as the title personality and often the focus of the novel and clearly the center of most of the conflict the protagonist. She is not only a force in herself, she is also the connecting bond between all the other actors. She is the focus of the love triangle with the available, but not very interesting music master and the very interesting but unavailable art master. The headmistress is watching to build a case against her. Her girls look to her to learn about life; while the rest of the school sees those girls as something special.

Never the less, the center of Miss Jean Brodie's conflict is finding out which of her girls betrayed her, and that would make Sandy Stranger the protagonist. Viewed from this vantage Brodie is the swirling hurricane winds and rain that moves and floods everything in its path, but Sandy is the eye of the storm. That would make Sandy the true protagonist of the book. Looking at it from that vantage the title is not Miss Jean Brodie, it is The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie and the prime student she focused her attention on was Sandy, her betrayer.

Going back to the origin of the term, protagonist shows it evolved from the Greek Protagonistes which was the actor who plays the chief or first part. The roots are from protos meaning first and agonists. , Now taken on the surface context of stage drama the term actor is someone who portrays a character on a stage.

In ancient Greek drama, the first or leading actor. The poet Thespis is credited with having invented tragedy when he introduced this first actor into Greek drama, which formerly consisted only of choric dancing and recitation. The protagonist stood opposite the chorus and engaged in an interchange of questions and answers. According to Aristotle in his Poetics, Aeschylus brought in a second actor, or deuteragonist, and presented the first dialogue between two characters. Aeschylus' younger rival, Sophocles, then added a third actor, the tritagonist, and was able to write more complex, more natural dialogue. That there were only three actors did not limit the number of characters to three because one actor would play more than one character. .

But there is another definition one that goes beyond the portrayal of an

individual either in a book or on a stage. That is the view of the protagonist as a competitor, this definition of protagonist is fully in line with the root agon or contest. In this it is possible to see Sandy and Miss Brodie both as protagonists just as it is not possible to separate the wind from the eye of the storm the complexities of the story arrive not just from the whirl wind actions of a strong woman in her prime. It is the interplay and conflict between Sandy and Miss Brodie that shapes and changes their lives. There is another way to look at the protagonist of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. Because this story builds upon the free spirited Miss Brodie, the malleable characters of the girls as they search for their own womanhood and the steadfast relentless efforts of the headmistress to remove Brodie from her part of the earth. From the vantage point of the liberated young women of the 1960s for them all the characters melded together to form the many facets of the "every woman" of the past, suffering under repression and trying to find a way clear to be true to herself.

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