

What features of 'willow tree and olive' make it worthy to study? essay sample

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



' Willow Tree and Olive' is a post- modernist novel by Irini Savvedes. The story presents a period of a young girl's life during which we see her discover and accept things about herself by remembering things from her past that she has tried to forget.

Olive is a teenage girl in her last year of school trying to get through the difficulties that come with adolescence: fitting into school, her family and her culture. A speaker who comes to her school triggers something in Olive's memory as she talks about child abuse. Olive is remembering that she was raped as a child, something she never told anyone and forced herself to forget. Gradually more and more memories about the event come back to Olive and she breaks down. She sees a psychiatrist for a few months and is then sent to Greece, her homeland and the place where she was raped. We see the stages of her rehabilitation and her transformation into a woman while she is in Greece.

One of the main themes in this book is Olive's fixation with her culture. At points during the book she talks of her Greek heritage as if she either loves it or hates it, this emotion is a swinging pendulum that alternates depending on which traditional event she's telling us about. It makes her look different to the other girls at school who find her dark hair and skin, her hairy (not to mention tall and broad shouldered) body something to ridicule. She doesn't like her family's general expectation that she will find a Greek man and have a huge wedding with lots of apricot taffeta. Olive does, however, love the history, myths and scenery of her country.

Her frame of mind concerning her culture often varies and we see many diverse facets of her personality mixing to create the attitude at that particular time. Her Greek heritage is an important part of the healing process, and is therefore an important theme in the book, bringing up the subject of multiculturalism in the classroom. We are then able to discuss the subjects of the melting pot vs. the salad bowl and how different cultures fit into society.

Rape and abuse are obviously some important themes in the novel and we learn about the reactions victims have afterwards and the stages they go through for recovery. There are occurrences that are quite vividly important to Olive's recovery: remembering the abuse, regressing back to the child she was when it happened, recognising that she was the victim of rape, realising she was the victim, going to Greece to see the place where it happened, and sewing the olive seeds. Coming to terms with the rape was a long, hard and emotional ordeal for Olive, but we see the strength in her and a human's capacity for emotion. She could not have gotten through the recovery if it hadn't also been for some supportive characters: Kerry, her best friend; Paras and Xino, the people she stays with while in Greece; Sappho, the lesbian poet she learns about; and Ms Cavanaugh, Olive's English teacher.

The style the book is written in is highly effective for the story. It is broken into normal narrative style from Olive's and several other character's points of view, pieces of poetry and writing by Olive, and songs and poems describing Olive's feelings. It is, you could say, fragmented, as a mosaic is. A mosaic is a piece of art made from lots of little pieces of a picture and put

together to make a beautiful image depicting all the artist wants it to; in this case, it is a striking portrait of the journey of a young girl going through hardships that no one should have to endure, but coming through as a better person for it. I can then venture to compare this novel to another piece of art created from fragments. It is far from your conventional text with a beginning, middle and end.

There are a wide variety of symbols used in this text to highlight some of the major points in the story, such as when Olive cuts her hair- she is trying to cut off the part of herself that remembers the abuse, the part that it belongs to. She thinks that by cutting her hair she can relieve the burden and feel clean again. 'K Bear' is the stuffed bear that Kerry buys for Olive when she finds out what had happened to her friend. K Bear is the only thing that Olive can talk to and trust and for a while she depends on having him there. He symbolises Olive's desire to be a child again, to be innocent and pure and protected; the willow tree depicts Olive herself, getting sick but only being able to heal if it helps itself; the mountain Olive can see from her window is somewhere she always wanted to walk to, and although she gets closer and closer every day she can't seem to get there yet. It portrays Olive's recovery and how she's getting one step closer every day.

The olive seeds are a symbol of the final phase of Olive's recovery. She is planting these seeds in the hope that they will grow, flourish and bear fruit, just as she wishes to do. The 'sausage feeling' also shows that Olive is repressing her feelings and gets a tight, uncomfortable sensation when she's

around lots of people. When she no longer gets the 'sausage feeling' we know that Olive is getting better.

'Willow Tree and Olive' is a significant novel because it explores issues of identity and cultural heritage and will appeal to many readers, especially young women. The themes the story investigates are: cultural heritage, social class and its barriers, friendship, relationships, identity, gender, self-discovery, childhood, survival, strength and reincarnation. Its unusual style and intense topics make it highly valuable for a student to study.