

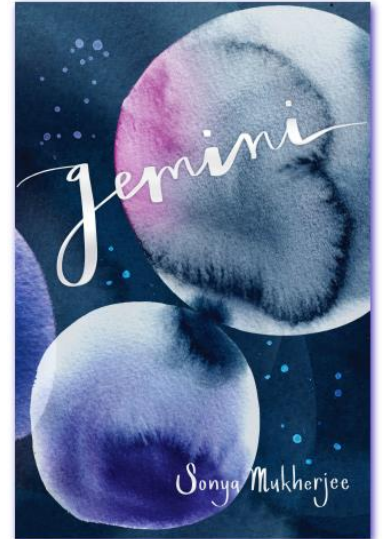
Gemini by Sonya Mukherjee

Chapter *Clara*:

"But at some point I started worrying about Gemini, the celestial twins. Were they glad to spend billions of years together in the sky, always on display, or would they rather wander apart and explore?" (74)

Chapter *Hailey*:

"But even then, in those moments when I had those thoughts, I didn't really want to leave. Even then, feeling the warmth of her body next to mine, the rhythm of her breathing- it was comfort. Knowing that we would have to sort out whatever we were arguing about and be okay again. Knowing that in the end, nothing could change our closeness. To actually be away from her was a dark, cold, lonely thought. Is that cowardice? Maybe. But I like to think it's just appreciating what I have. Because who doesn't want unbreakable love?" (61)



<https://sonyamukherjee.com>

Sonya Mukherjee is from California and currently resides in the San Francisco Bay Area. Growing up, she spent a lot of her time reading books and writing stories, which she still does today as a soccer mom of two kids. She attended Stanford and San Francisco State University, where she studied English and Creative Writing. After working as an editor for some time, Mukherjee released her first novel, *Gemini*, in 2016. The rarity of conjoined twins is what sparked her curiosity and inspired writing the novel. She quotes on her webpage, **"What interested me most was the experiences of real people."**

Summary:

Clara and Hailey are not only twins, they are conjoined twins. Clara loves science and space, while pink-haired Hailey finds love in art. The unbreakable bond that they have with each other makes this book a true, unconditional love story. But as most teenagers do, the twins begin to question their identities and wonder what life would be like if they had true freedom. When the sisters begin to realize how grave their differences are as they prepare to graduate high-school, the life-threatening separation surgery becomes a topic of discussion. They begin to ponder on questions like: Is separation worth the risk? Will we regret how the procedure changes our lives and identities? Are we considering the surgery for the right reasons? What if we die? From this point forward, the girls take on their coming-of-age story. In the end, Clara and Hailey make their final decision and officially gain freedom.



Representative Quotes:

1. "Question: Don't you hate never being able to get away from each other or have any privacy?
[...] My follow-up answer: But seriously, how can you deal with sometimes having to be alone? I can't even imagine what that must feel like. It must be unbearable sometimes. It must make you wish you could surgically attach yourself to another person so you wouldn't ever have to be alone. Doesn't it?" (8)
 - Being attached is normal to the twins. Throughout the story, passages like this show the strong and dependent bond the sisters have. Here, Hailey creates a list of

- frequently asked questions, just for fun, but secretly wishes this would be the solution to the awkwardness when meeting new people. Quotes as such, also point out that although an experience might not be shared, it is certainly still a **human** experience. It is important to find commonalities beyond areas that only the eyes can reach. Have you ever felt lonely? Do you fear it?
2. “But what was this thing that had me tied up and trapped? Was it that band of flesh that connected me to Hailey? Or was it something else? [...] ‘Don’t you ever want to be free of me?’ I asked. [...] ‘I want to be free,’ she said finally, ‘But not free of you.’” (296)
 - At this point, Clara and Hailey are experiencing the desire for individualism. Their character differences are starting to look like possible reasons for resentment of one another in the future. Conversation about surgery for separation has been held between the twins, even though they are fully aware that it is unlikely either one would survive. It is an intense shift in the novel because up to this point, the twins had accepted settling with the limits their parents and small town sheltered them with. Have you ever had a dream or goal that you wanted enough that you were willing to risk your life for it?
 3. “‘It’s true, though,’ Clara said. ‘They could. And once that happened, it would be too late. You would never be able to unring that bell. The videos would be out there, and then anyone could do anything with them. Keep reposting them in new places. Whatever.’ [...] ‘And then at that point, there would be no reason for us to hide away anymore, because the whole world would already know all about us.’” (310-311)
 - This quote represents the coming-of-age story that *Gemini* truly is. The sisters completely let go of considering surgical separation, and instead, decide to push past the boundaries they were previously letting themselves live inside of. The shame and worry of traveling outside of their protected environment was no longer a factor. Instead, a new confidence and zeal radiate through Clara and Hailey as they prepare to graduate high-school.

How to Use This Book in a Classroom:

Gemini serves as a good example when studying and practicing Creative Writing skills.

1. Choose a twin, Clara or Hailey, and write a story about how life would be after a successful separation surgery.
2. Choose a theme from the novel that you have never experienced, and write a story: Unconditional love; Self-esteem; Bullying; Fear of the unknown; Chasing dreams; Loneliness; Challenges; Etc.
3. Choose a theme from the novel that you have experienced, and write a story: Unconditional love; Self-esteem; Bullying; Fear of the unknown; Chasing dreams; Loneliness; Challenges; Etc.

Category of Books that *Gemini* fits from *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning*:

- Chapter 4: Real Life Experiences
- Chapter 6: Identity, Discrimination, Struggles with Decisions
- Chapter 7: Courage, Survival

Why Teens Should Read This Book:

1. *Gemini* is an easy read but has enough complexity in its use of language to develop reading skills. (Exeter Quality #8)
2. The language is colorful and lively, specifically in areas of dialogue. (Exeter Quality #5)
3. Characters share the teen experience of the pressures of high-school, insecurities, and desire for freedom. (Exeter Quality #3)



Text Complexity: Dale-Chall Formula

Raw score 2.0094

Adjusted Score: (3.6365 + 2.0094)

Final Score: 5.6

Readability Index: Grade level 5 – 6

Age Level Most Appropriate: 12-17