

## WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT BONNIE GARMUS



Bonnie Garmus is an American novelist born April 18, 1957, in Riverside, CA. Her former role as a successful copywriter sparked an interest in research and learning. *Lessons in Chemistry*, her debut novel, was published in 2022, earning her the Paul Torday Memorial Prize for a first novel by an author over 60. She also received the British Book Award for Author of the Year in 2023.

Since its publication, *Lessons in Chemistry* has been translated into 43 languages and is named as one of the Top 100 fiction books of the 21st century by *New York Times* readers. In 2023, *Lessons in Chemistry* was adapted into a limited series for Apple TV+ under the same name, starring Brie Larson.



## QUESTIONS: LESSONS IN CHEMISTRY (2022)

- Elizabeth's refusal to conform to societal standards for women makes her a strong role model for Madeline (Mad) and Harriet; however, it generates tension between her and colleagues. How does the book both promote and challenge the definition of a strong female protagonist?
- Grief and bereavement are two recurring themes

## MAKING CONNECTIONS

- A story's impact and message can change when translated across mediums. How does Brie Larson's portrayal of Elizabeth in the limited series adaptation differ from Garmus's original novel? How does it change your perspective on her story?
- What are some of the similarities or differences between Six-Thirty in *Lessons in Chemistry* and Bailey in *A Dog's Purpose*? How does utilizing an unconventional point of view help to shape a story?
- *Lessons in Chemistry* is a novel about the 1950s written in the 21st century. How do you see any modern influences shaping the story? Can historical fiction be an effective teaching tool in place of primary sources? Why or why not?
- How do similar stories such as Margot Lee Shetterly's *Hidden Figures* further our understanding about the intersection of gender and race in 20th-century American society?

## COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- [Girls Who Code](#)
- [American Association of University Women](#)
- [UN Women](#)
- [AWIS](#)
- [Planned Parenthood](#)
- [SAMHSA Grief Support](#)

throughout the novel, especially for Calvin, Elizabeth, and even Six-Thirty. How do their methods of dealing with tragedy shape their character development?

- Perspective plays an important role in the novel, which uses third-person limited POV. Most of the story centers on Elizabeth, but some sections shift to Six-Thirty. How do these perspective shifts impact the story?
- The definition of family changes throughout the book. How does becoming Mad's mother impact Elizabeth's views on family, and how do they differ from Mad's?

## LITERATURE AS PRAXIS

- How might Elizabeth's story have changed if contemporary legislation like Title IX had been in place? How can students be educated about these resources?
- Calvin's interest and dedication to the STEM field originated from science textbook donations to St. Luke's from the Parker Foundation. What are some ways chapters can help support underprivileged children academically?
- Elizabeth uses her TV show to empower women to pursue roles beyond societal norms, especially in STEM. What local or national organizations support women in STEM, and how can students get involved?
- Libraries helped Elizabeth teach herself the skills to become a chemist. How could your chapter partner with a local library to provide educational opportunities for young students?

## ADDITIONAL READINGS

- Apple TV+, *Lessons in Chemistry* (2023)
- W. Bruce Cameron, *A Dog's Purpose* (2010)
- Rita Colwell, *A Lab of One's Own* (2020)
- Rachel Ignotofsky, *Women in Science* (2016)
- Kate Moore, *The Radium Girls* (2016)
- Margot Lee Shetterly, *Hidden Figures* (2016)