

**MISS AMERICAN PIE:  
A Diary of Love, Secrets and Growing Up in the '70s  
By Margaret Sartor**

**Student Study Guide**

In **MISS AMERICAN PIE**, Margaret Sartor, a fiercely determined girl from rural Louisiana, presents a poignant portrait of American life during the 1970s that transcends its time and setting and delights in the comedy of everyday life. Sartor examines her emotions and experiences against a backdrop of social tensions, such as the sexual revolution and desegregation. Young Margaret tells her story via a diary absorbing the reader in a style that is spare, moving, and saucy. We hope the following guide will provide suggestions on how Margaret's narrative might be used a tool to encourage students to write on a variety of subjects from personal experiences to public policies, from imaginative literature to popular culture.

*Miss American Pie* is an example of personal, reflective self-analysis. It is about a teenage girl striving for maturity and self-awareness. Margaret Sartor's diary can be used as a model for students to create their own mini-journals, dealing with some of the same questions that Sartor grapples with during her high school experience.

**ASSIGNMENT:** As you read *Miss American Pie*, make your own personal diary entries. Include at least 15 daily entries, describing your activities while modeling Sartor's varying syntax lengths and styles. Notice that some of Sartor's entries consist of one quick thought while others narrate events; also, some entries wax philosophical as events and relationships stimulate life lessons. Be sure your diary includes those life lessons you encounter in your own life.

**DIARY ENTRIES:** Read interactively and respond to Sartor's entries within your personal diary entries, including each of the following:

1. Write a poem to a friend (pg. 108).
2. Include dream specificities (pg. 110).
3. Write a narrative of an important event (pgs.116-117).
4. Be descriptive in your entries as Sartor is in her January 4 entry; use metaphors/similes to describe settings or people.
5. Use listing in entries such as the lists Sartor uses on pages 17, 123, 128, 133, 179, 228, 234, and 239.
6. Formulate your own definition of love (pg.128).
7. Find a poem that you feel needs you (pg.161).
8. Write descriptively about a painting you appreciate (pg.161).
9. Compare your life to a movie character (pg.186).
10. Explain family dynamics: your relationship with parents, siblings, and/or grandparents, aunts/uncles.

11. Include dialogue you share with others (pgs. 219-220).
12. Consider what graduation will mean to you and your extended family (pg. 221).

**EXPOSITORY ESSAY QUESTIONS:** Answer the following questions, based on Sartor's diary entries. Write at least one paragraph for each and keep your language clear and concise:

1. Scan Thoreau's *Walden* and explain what he means when he explains that he went to the woods because "I wished to live deliberately" (pg. 116).
2. Preview some of Georgia O'Keefe's flower paintings and express who you agree with in Sartor's August 11 entry (pg. 161).
3. Explain the Biblical allusion in the January 16 entry and explain what Sartor's mother meant (pg. 176).
4. Compare the following two comments: "I think human desire may be the enemy of spirituality" (pg. 176); "Sometimes love is the enemy" (pg. 178).
5. Watch *Gone With the Wind* and determine whether Sartor is "Melanie . . . [or] really a retarded Scarlett O'Hara" (pg. 180).
6. Analyze how the juxtaposition of the Home Economics bulletin board wedding ring gives significance to the entry about why Mama doesn't wear her wedding ring (pg. 197).

**FINAL ANALYSIS:** Write a 1 ½ - 2 page response essay, focusing on Sartor's "Introduction" (pg. 1-16) and "Acknowledgments" (pgs. 271-272). Within your paper, explain what she has "heard it said" on page 7, and argue whether you think "it's hogwash" or "profound" (pg. 7). What effect does your outlook on this premise mean for the rest of your life?

**SUGGESTED COURSE MATERIALS:**

*Narrative writing to convey experiential understanding*

Margaret Sartor – MISS AMERICAN PIE

Anne Frank – DIARY OF ANNE FRANK

*Exploratory essays of feminist existentialism*

Mary Wollstonecraft - "The Vindication of Women"

Maya Angelou – I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS

Jean-Jacque Rousseau – "Marriage"

Simone de Beauvoir – THE SECOND SEX

Argumentative debate between science v. religion

Lee Strobel – THE CASE FOR A CREATOR  
Richard Dawkins – THE GOD DELUSION

*Expository dichotomy of the romanticist vs. rationalist; nature vs. civilization*

Henry David Thoreau – WALDEN

Francis Bacon – “Of Marriage and Single Life”

THE BIBLE – *Genesis; 1 Corinthians 7; 2 Corinthians 1*

*Individual analyses of personal essays from modern public figures*

Marlo Thomas and Friends – RIGHT WORDS AT THE RIGHT TIME

*Analysis of the expository fiction*

Truman Capote – IN COLD BLOOD

Charles Shields – MOCKINGBIRD: A PORTRAIT OF HARPER LEE

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