**Swami and Friends by**[**R. K. Narayan**](https://www.gradesaver.com/author/r-k-narayan)

**Summary**

In 1930, India, like much of South Asia, was still under British rule. In learning about the town on Malgudi, readers are introduced to Swaminathan and his friends, a group which includes [Somu](https://www.gradesaver.com/swami-and-friends/study-guide/character-list%22%20%5Cl%20%22somu), Sankar, [Mani](https://www.gradesaver.com/swami-and-friends/study-guide/character-list#mani), and Pea. The five have a very close friendship, despite their differences, which doesn't seem to follow the phrase, "Birds of a feather flock together".

The friend group is introduced to [Rajam](https://www.gradesaver.com/swami-and-friends/study-guide/character-list%22%20%5Cl%20%22rajam), the son of a new police officer in Malgudi. At first, no one in the group wants to accept him as a friend, but eventually Swaminathan and Mani do. This upsets Somu, Sankar, and Pea, and begins the degradation of their previously inseparable bond.

One day, Swaminathan decides to join a nationalist mob to protest the British that occupy India. The mob, violent in nature, inspires Swami to throw a rock through the window of his superintendent's office. Rajam's father catches Swami, and punishes him. He is forced to switch schools, and overall his life changes for the worse. However, Rajam eventually forgives him.

To ease the tension between them, Rajam starts a cricket team called M.C.C. The team has practices before Swami's new school lets out, so Rajam quickly becomes infuriated. He says that Swami cannot miss a match with another local team, Y.M.U., or else he will not speak to Swami any more.

The headmaster of Swami's school, of course, does not allow him to leave early for the cricket game. In anger, he throws his cane out the window. Not wanting to know what will happen next, he runs out of the building and away from the town of Malgudi. He gets lost in his adventure, but is eventually found.

In the final scene of the book, Rajam is on a train leaving for another area in India. Swami tries to convince him, with the help of Mani that they should stay friends, but Rajam refuses to look at him.

**Themes:**

## Diversity and love

By being friends despite their various ethnic backgrounds, their various castes, their various desires for vocation, their various perspectives on life itself—by appreciating those differences, we see a portrait of community and love. Instead of seeing love as a way of reaching an emotional conclusion in their own private lives, they simply team up. They support one another by providing each other company and diversity, not by actually fixing problems or getting what they want. Love isn't about solving other people's problems, says this book, but rather, it comes through time when you spend time with people.

## Competition

There is another kind of community that does not focus on sharing diverse points of view. This second mode of social order is competition, shown in the novel in the tiny competitions between certain personalities, but also in the symbol of cricket. When Swami can't make it to practices or competitions because of school, we see the unfortunate side of competition: Rajam puts pressure on him to skip school, because Rajam is only thinking about his own personal victory. This is the opposite of community.

## Adventure and time

The frustration that Swami faces in his life is often that his adventures unfold over periods of time, meaning that although adventure can sometimes be ecstatic and full of love and joy (especially with friends at a celebration), there are also times like when Swami gets lost. It takes time to solve the problems he faces on his adventure, so in addition to the challenge of succeeding, there is an unspoken challenge upon Swami to stay enlightened by being patient when he is suffering.

**Analysis:**

Swami and Friends is R.K.Narayan's first novel. Set against the backdrop of the 19th century, it describes the adventures and misadventures of ten-year-old Swami and his motley crew of friends. Narayan creates a mythical town, Malgudi, in southern India so that he has the liberty to meddle with its geography.

Swami’s problems are innocent and charming. He fears his father, resents his strict teachers, and struggles to impress his peers. He admires [Rajam](https://www.gradesaver.com/swami-and-friends/study-guide/character-list%22%20%5Cl%20%22rajam), the rich boy with his ‘European’ attire. His attempts to befriend the aloof and indifferent Rajam are hilarious. Swami’s new-found camaraderie threatens the harmonious relationship he shares with his loyal and passionate group of friends.

In a spirit of nationalistic fervor, Swami joins the Non-Cooperation Movement against the British government. The public speeches, agitations, sloganeering, strikes, and lathi-charges depict the country’s political atmosphere. Swami becomes involved in a stone-pelting incident on the Police Superintendent’s office. The mission school expels him, and he is forced to join the local school.

The action moves from school to playground when Swami and his friends decide to form a cricket club. Anxious to demonstrate his skills at the game, Swami makes every possible effort to attend the practice sessions, even at the expense of skipping school. Chaos erupts when Rajam snaps the ‘friendly ties,’ and a devastated Swami runs away from home. In the characteristic style of Indian story-telling, all ends well with Swami's homecoming. The disturbed family breathes a sigh of relief and life becomes normal once again.

The novel has an unmistakable autobiographical component. Narayan’s style is uncomplicated, non-judgmental, and appealing. The story depicts the small-town intrigues and aspirations with sincerity and subtle humor. On a simplistic level, the narrative describes Swami’s struggle with school, his insecurities, triumphs, and frustrations. Delve deep, and you will discover that the story’s naivety is deceptive and deliberate. It represents more than the humdrum of Swami’s daily existence. It provides a glimpse into India’s struggle for independence. It depicts the confusion of semi-urban India as she grapples with social and cultural conflicts under colonial rule.