

[Lessons in Chemistry](#) by Bonnie Garmus

Reviewed by C.L. Class of 2026

Book - Paper or Ebook - Historical Fiction/ Feminist Fiction

★★★★☆

What made you interested in reading/watching/playing this media?

How did you hear about it or come across it?

I read this book as a part of an AP Literature assignment where we were assigned into book groups.

Setting:

The novel is set in California during the late 1950s and early 1960s. It takes place in a time where there were very rigid gender roles as women were expected to be housewives and mothers and most careers in scientific fields were male dominated and very exclusionary.

Protagonists:

The protagonist is Elizabeth Zott who is a chemist, she stands out because she rejects the limitations that society tries to place on her. She is very logical, seeing the world through a scientific lens and she is very independent, refusing to compromise on her values.

Plotline:

Lessons in Chemistry is about Elizabeth Zott trying to exist authentically in a world that is trying to define her role. Elizabeth begins as a scientist striving to be taken seriously, but due to systemic barriers and personal challenges, her path shifts in an unexpected direction. She eventually finds herself in a position where she can influence a broad audience, particularly women.

Reflection on the novel's strong points and weak points:

One strong point of the novel is that there is a complex protagonist. Elizabeth challenges readers expectations of likability and forces the readers to think about how society defines acceptable behavior. Additionally, the narrative voice is witty and often satirical. It critiques sexism in a way that is both humorous and serious.

A weak point of the novel is that some characters are more overly exaggerated as some "good" or "bad" characters can feel one dimensional.

What are some themes that come across?

Gender inequality, challenging societal norms, the power of education, and perseverance

Do you feel that the cover art is true to what the media is about?

Overall, yes. The clean style reflect Elizabeth herself- she is very direct and focused.

Did you enjoy it? Would you recommend it?

I did enjoy Lessons in Chemistry because it feels different from a typical historical fiction novel. Elizabeth Zott is such an unconventional main character. She's not written to be overly likable or emotional, which actually makes her feel more real and interesting. Her logical, science-based way of viewing the world adds a unique layer to the story, especially since she applies chemistry concepts to everyday life. I would recommend this book to someone who enjoys books with strong female leads and is interested in themes like gender equality and science.

Readalikes/Watchalikes are:

Anne with an E (TV series with a strong female protagonist), Little Women (novel with strong female characters and a focus on independence), Hidden Figures (movie about women in science fighting for recognition)

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