The God of Small Things

1. Identity card

Title: *The God of Small Things*

Author: Arundhati Roy

Date of publication: 1997

Genre: Contemporary novel / Family saga

Historical and Cultural Context: Set in Kerala (India) during the 1960s, the novel explores the lasting effects of colonialism, the caste system and social inequality. Through the story of one family, Roy examines forbidden love, childhood, memory and the consequences of breaking social conventions.

2. Plot summary

In a nutshell: the novel follows twins Estha and Rahel, whose childhood is shattered by a series of tragic events. As adults, they reunite and revisit painful memories linked to the death of their cousin Sophie Mol and the forbidden relationship between their mother, Ammu, and Velutha, an Untouchable. Moving between past and present, the novel reveals how personal lives are shaped by social rules, memory and loss.

Key Moments:

- ➜ Sophie Mol arrives from England.
- ➜ Ammu and Velutha begin a secret relationship.
- ➜ Sophie Mol drowns in the river.
- ➜ Velutha is arrested and killed.
- ➜ Estha and Rahel reunite as adults.

3. Main characters

Name	Role	Symbol
Rahel	one of the twins	memory, identity
Estha	rahel's twin brother	silence, trauma
Ammu	the twin's mother	freedom, rebellion
Velutha	untouchable carpenter	love, injustice

4. Major themes and links to the LLCER program

Première – Rencontres

How does the novel illustrate this theme?

- ➜ Encounters between people from different backgrounds shape the characters' lives.
- ➜ Relationships challenge social and cultural barriers.
- ➜ Love and friendship reveal both connection and division.

Key examples

- ➜ Ammu's relationship with Velutha.
- ➜ Sophie Mol's arrival in India.
- ➜ Estha and Rahel's reunion.

Terminale – Arts and debates of ideas

How does the novel illustrate this theme?

- ➜ The novel denounces social inequality and caste discrimination.
- ➜ It questions tradition, power and injustice.
- ➜ Literature gives a voice to those excluded by society.

Key examples

- ➜ The caste system.
- ➜ The forbidden love between Ammu and Velutha.
- ➜ Velutha's death.

5. Key quotes and key words

"Things can change in a day."

memory – childhood – caste – injustice – love – trauma – identity

6. Author's message

- ➜ Social injustice has lasting human consequences.
- ➜ Love should not be limited by social divisions.
- ➜ Childhood experiences shape adult identity.
- ➜ Memory preserves both personal and collective history.