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Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

A Separate Peace

by John Knowles

Written by Tom Zolpar

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A Separate Peace

Objectives

By the end of this unit, the student will be able to:

1. trace the development of various themes of the novel—
 - coming-of-age and loss-of-innocence
 - identity and self-realization
 - the ubiquity of human cruelty
 - conformity and non-conformity; tradition and change.
2. analyze the structure of the novel and explain the impact of structure on plot and theme.
3. explain how the first-person narrative affects the perspective from which the reader understands the novel.
4. evaluate the characters of Phineas and Gene as foils.
5. trace the development of Gene as a dynamic character.
6. analyze the impact of Gene as an unreliable first-person narrator.
7. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
8. respond to free-response questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
9. offer a close reading of *A Separate Peace* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the novel.

A Separate Peace

Introductory Lecture

The Coming-of-Age Novel:

A Separate Peace is John Knowles' first published novel, released in 1959. This coming-of-age novel, or *bildungsroman*, is Knowles's best-known and most widely-read work.

A **bildungsroman**, also sometimes called a "*novel of formation*" is a specific type of coming-of-age novel that presents the psychological, moral and social maturation of the protagonist.

The following are common elements of the *bildungsroman*:

- The protagonist embarks on a journey—whether literal or metaphoric—which prompts his or her growth from child to adult.
- The protagonist must have a reason to embark upon this journey—a loss or feeling of discontent.
- The process of maturation is long and difficult. The protagonist experiences repeated clashes between his or her needs and desires and the stringent values of an unbending social order.
- Eventually, as the protagonist matures socially, emotionally, and psychologically, he or she is assimilated into the society. The novel ends with the protagonist's new assessment of him or herself and his or her new place in that society.

A Separate Peace is Gene's *bildungsroman*. Returning as an adult to the locale of his coming-of-age, Gene narrates the events of the summer of 1942 and the following school year, the period during which he faced and overcame the dark forces of his own psyche.

Gene's journey is a metaphoric one that symbolically takes place while he is away from home at a boarding school. While the reader knows that Gene has a family, we never meet them, and they are rarely mentioned. There are brief mentions of Gene's having been home, but no scenes take place there. We are not even told precisely where Gene's home is, only that it is in the South. Thus, Gene is both symbolically and geographically removed from his home and family for his coming-of-age experience.

In order for Gene to survive in the vastly different societies of the Summer and Winter Sessions, he must pit his personal desires and needs against what he perceives to be the demands of the society of Finny's friendship and then the demands of the boys who appear to threaten him with exposure of his crime. On this level, the entire book is a struggle for Gene to survive—both in the society created by Finny and in the society in which Finny is notably absent. The studious

Gene fails a math test. The timid Gene is the second to jump from the tree. The rule-following Gene skips meals, leaves the campus without permission, gambles, and smokes.

By graduation, he is beginning to assimilate himself into adult society, resigned to the fact that he will “have” to serve in the War, deciding that he is “willing” to do what he “has to,” to meet the basic demands of the society he is about to join.

A Study of Inner Conflicts:

Set against the backdrop of World War II, *A Separate Peace* is a novel about war—though not necessarily the War that becomes an ever-increasing presence in the story. The warfare explored in the novel is not between nations, ideologies, or persons but between the warring fragments within the individual’s own psyche. The first-person-character narrator Gene ends his coming-of-age story with the observation that he fought his war while at Devon and killed his enemy there.

Knowles, of course, leaves it ambiguous whether Gene’s “enemy” is something in his alter-ego Finny—an irresistible exuberance, energy, and charisma—or something in his own psychological and spiritual make-up—a dark and brooding sense of self-doubt and loathing. Most likely, it is some combination of the two—something in Finny that Gene recognizes as missing in himself, a quality that, if he cannot possess it, he must destroy.

Gene, however, is not the only character to experience the inner conflict of a fragmented soul. Finny himself, after his fall (both his literal fall from the tree and his symbolic Fall from innocence) exists in a state of denial in which the war in which he cannot participate does not exist, in which he can train Gene to be the athlete he can no longer be, and in which there can be *no possibility* that the boy he considered his best friend intentionally caused the fall from the tree that destroyed his life.

All of the characters, in fact, exhibit the self-doubt and inner conflict that are so characteristic of the *bildungsroman*.

Leper’s near-desperate desire to belong, to be a part of something, results in his madness. Brinker’s need for order and control—and to impose his sense of order on others—precipitates Finny’s second fall and death.

Knowles’s point is clear: to be at war with oneself and to destroy one’s self in the attempt to reconcile one’s inner conflicts is a part of the human condition. It is an inevitable part of “growing up.”

An Analysis of the Novel’s Structure and Symbols:

A Separate Peace is clearly divided into two “halves,” separated by the incident of Finny’s fall

from the tree.

- **Finny's Fall:**

Finny's fall is the pivotal event of the novel. It ends the Summer Session and sets the stage for the Winter Session. The tree itself, which for the boys in the summer of 1942 looms larger than life, is symbolic of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil that stands at the center of the Garden of Eden. Finny's fall, and Gene's culpability for it, are the "eating the apple," the events that expel the boys from their previous state of innocence. Like Adam and Eve, who must face a darker and harsher world and know the guilt of their disobedience, Gene learns that he must face the psychological and emotional consequences of his action. The adult narrator's visit, in Chapter 1, to the marble staircase and the tree—places he describes as "fearful"—suggests that the guilt still lingers fifteen years after the events he is going to narrate, and he still seeks some kind of absolution.

- **The Summer and Winter Sessions:**

Prior to the fall is the Summer Session at Devon, a time of freedom and lack of restrictions. The teachers are lenient. Finny's charm allows him to get away with anything. This session symbolizes innocence and youth and comes to an end with the fall.

After the fall, Gene returns to Devon for the Winter Session. By contrast, this Winter Session is dark, disciplined, and filled with difficult work. Where the eccentric Leper once kept snails and wandered into the woods in search of natural wonders, now Brinker Hadley imposes order and discipline. The war is much closer. It disrupts Gene's travel. It affects the boys' work routines, and, eventually, it destroys one of them. As Gene observes at the beginning of this second half, "Peace had deserted Devon," and the nearly Edenic feeling of the Summer Session will never be recaptured.

Taken together, the two sessions represent the shift from carefree youth to sober maturity, from innocence to experience. Finny's death is, perhaps, inevitable. Like Peter Pan, he is unable to face this loss of innocence. His death frees him to exist forever in the narrator's memory as the charming and charismatic hero for whom all things came easily.

- **The Devon and the Naguamsett Rivers:**

The first part of the novel centers on the freshwater Devon River. Gene describes it as the "upper river," its course "determined by some familiar hills inland." It is into the Devon River that the boys willingly dive, and it is along the Devon's inland tributaries that Leper spends his innocent summer collecting his specimens.

By contrast, the Naguamsett River is "ugly, saline, fringed with marsh. mud, and seaweed." While the Devon River is separate, falling into the Naguamsett (so that none of the lower river's contaminated water can mix with the pristine Devon's), the Naguamsett is connected directly to the ocean. It touches the world that is tainted by War, and from

which the Devon protected the boys during the summer. Gene's immersion into the salt water of the Naguamsett is not playful or voluntary the way his diving into the Devon was. Both Gene and Quackenbush fall into the muddy, salty water while fighting. And, while the boys jumped freely into the Devon without notice or reprisal, Gene's one immersion into the Naguansett attracts the attention of Mr. Ludsbury and serves as the occasion of a reprimand.

Like the Summer and Winter Sessions, the two rivers represent the competing factions of the boys' personalities—the waning youth and innocence and the encroaching maturity and experience. The shift from the one to the other, of course, comes at the moment of Gene's jostling the branch and Finny's fall from the tree.

- **The Problems with a First-Person Narrator:**

By their very nature, first-person narrators are *always* subjective. Unlike a third-person narrator who can know other characters' backgrounds and futures, as well as what they're thinking and feeling, the first-person narrator can share only his or her own thoughts with the reader.

The entire story is filtered through the narrator's opinions, values, and biases. The reader can experience the story's events only as the narrator experiences them—or as the narrator chooses to relate them. When the first-person narrator is telling a story from his or her past, the absolute credibility of the story is further compromised by the fact that the character's memory of events might not be perfectly accurate.

Gene's narration is an example of how memory can be shaped by feelings. This is especially evident at the beginning of the novel when the adult Gene returns to the tree: "It had loomed in my memory as a huge lone spike dominating the riverbank, forbidding as an artillery piece, high as a beanstalk." When he finally finds the tree—he has to examine it to make certain it is the right one—he realizes that it is "absolutely smaller, shrunken with age," and nothing like the foreboding giant he had remembered. The clear implication is that Gene's memory of the events associated with the tree have magnified the tree far beyond its true size.

Inaccuracy of memory, however, is not the only problem with the first-person narrator. Gene's entire narration of the events of the novel is tainted by the feelings he experienced at the time the events transpired. The reader's impressions of Leper, Brinker—even Finny—are based on Gene's accounts, and through the course of the novel, these accounts are colored by love, hatred, envy, and guilt.

Character Types:

- **Dynamic and Static Characters:**

A **dynamic character** is one whose ideas, opinions, or values change through the course of the novel or play. In *A Separate Peace*, Gene is a dynamic character. At the very beginning, the adult Gene assesses how he has changed in the fifteen years since the events he is going to narrate occurred. During the course of the novel itself, the adolescent Gene grows in his realization of his own dark psychology and in the evil that probably lurks in every human soul.

A **static character** is one who does not grow or change. Despite his injury and the resultant disabilities, Finny remains essentially the same from the beginning of the novel to his death. The inventor of the Super Suicide Society of the Summer Session, the diving challenge, and Blitzball is the inventor of the 1944 Winter Olympics at Devon, the boy who insists that he will coach his best friend to the top academic spot in the school. Finny remains, right up to his death, exuberant, ingenuous, and utterly trusting of his friends and their essential goodness.

- **Gene and Finny as Foils:**

A **foil** is a character whose presence in the novel or play helps to emphasize a particular trait or combination of traits in another character. The main character's cowardice, for example, may be emphasized by placing him beside a heroic foil. The streetwise Artful Dodger is a well-known foil to the naive and helpless Oliver Twist.

While Gene and Finney, in John Knowles's *A Separate Peace*, are best friends and intimate comrades, they are very different—at times nearly polar opposites. Gene is academic, Finny is athletic; Gene is a hard worker, Finny's successes come easily to him; Gene follows the rules, and Finny breaks them; Gene heeds authority figures, Finny does his best to ignore them.

Finny gradually emerges as Gene's foil as Gene intimates to the reader that he believes Finny is intentionally distracting him from his studies. Gene's dark nature offers a stark contrast to Finny's transparency. Gene's envy is made to seem all the more inappropriate when juxtaposed with Finny's ingenuousness. It is important to note, then, that it is immediately after Gene realizes that he and Finny will never be equals, that they will never fully complement one another because Finny is a *natural* athlete and Gene must work to maintain his academic standing, that he jostles the branch, causing Finny to fall, and setting himself "ahead" of his friend and foil.

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Practice Free Response Question #1

Many authors employ the narrative device of the first-person narrator in order to maintain a sense of subjectivity and ambiguity in their novels or stories. A character narrating events in which he or she has been directly involved is likely to be deceptive, forgetful, or unreliable in some other way. To what extent can Gene Forrester in John Knowles's *A Separate Peace* be considered an unreliable narrator? Write a well-organized essay in which you explain how Gene's narration affects the readers' understanding of the story that he tells and their attitude toward him?

Practice Free Response Question #2

The setting of a novel or play is often more significant to the plot and characters than merely identifying the time and place of the action. Write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how World War II functions in the novel on both a symbolic and thematic level of *A Separate Peace*.

Practice Free Response Question #3

The concept of sin and redemption is a popular theological and psychological theme in twentieth-century literature. Write a well-organized essay in which you discuss whether *A Separate Peace* is a novel of sin and redemption. To what extent is Gene redeemed in the end of the novel?

Practice Free Response Question #4

Read the passage from Chapter 1, from the beginning of the chapter and ending, "...not even a death by violence." Then, write a well-organized essay in which you explain John Knowles's purpose in recounting the specific details he includes in the passage. Be certain to support your observations with details from the narrative. Do not merely summarize the passage.

Practice Free Response Question #5

Read the passage from Chapter 4, beginning with Finny's telling Gene, "You work too hard," and ending with Gene's saying, "I redoubled my effort." Then write an well-organized essay in which you analyze the effect of the author's techniques on the reader's sympathy for Gene. Do not merely summarize the passage.

Practice Free Response Question #6

Read the passage from Chapter 10, beginning with, “Although I was walking toward the front door he beckoned me on several times,” and ending, with Gene’s saying, “I’m terribly sorry...I’d better get going.” Then write an essay in which you explain how John Knowles’s syntax indicates the mental states of the characters involved. Do not merely summarize the passage.

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Practice Multiple-Choice Questions 1 – 5

Read the passage from Chapter 1, beginning immediately after the break, with the narrator's saying, "The tree was tremendous," and ending with the end of the chapter. Then select the best answer to the multiple-choice questions below.

1. Gene's description of his first jump into the river contain all of the following **EXCEPT**
 - A. a sense of life-threatening danger.
 - B. personal rivalry.
 - C. extreme terror.
 - D. exuberant abandonment.
 - E. hesitant ambivalence.
2. This passage suggests what kind of relationship between the narrator and Finny?
 - A. hero and sidekick
 - B. intimate friends
 - C. bitter rivals
 - D. leader and follower
 - E. equal buddies
3. What time, according to the passage, do the seniors return to the dormitory?
 - A. at sunset
 - B. at ten o'clock p.m.
 - C. after dinner
 - D. at prayer time
 - E. after "lights out"
4. Which of the following details from the last two paragraphs of the passage emphasizes the separateness of the school from the outside world?
 - A. the books Gene and Finny are reading
 - B. the specific songs playing on the phonograph
 - C. the emptiness of the campus buildings
 - D. the yellow cast of the study lights
 - E. the volume of the radio news
5. Throughout the passage, the narrator suggests that Devon Academy is
 - A. oppressive and rigid.
 - B. formal and unfeeling.
 - C. lax and slipshod.
 - D. conventional and outdated.
 - E. ancient and nurturing.

Practice Multiple-Choice Questions 6 – 10

Read the passage from Chapter 4, from the beginning of the chapter to Gene's saying, "Chet Douglass...is a sure thing for it." Then select the best answer to the multiple-choice questions below.

6. The primary effect created by the opening paragraph of this passage is
 - A. foreboding.
 - B. mournful.
 - C. anxious.
 - D. restful.
 - E. adulatory.
7. Gene's comparison of Finny to the biblical Lazarus suggests that
 - A. Finny looks like a corpse while sleeping.
 - B. death will somehow touch Finny.
 - C. Gene is a particularly religious student.
 - D. Finny is a particularly religious student.
 - E. sunrise is comparable to resurrection.
8. All of the following are reasons for Gene's being angry with Finny EXCEPT
 - A. Gene's failing a math test.
 - B. Finny's losing their money.
 - C. the boys' having no breakfast.
 - D. Finny's sleeping late.
 - E. Gene's sleeping poorly on the beach.
9. The sequence of ideas in this passage links which of the following issues?
 - A. failure and effort
 - B. competition and camaraderie
 - C. death and envy
 - D. academics and athletics
 - E. friendship and enmity
10. All of the following issues are present in this passage EXCEPT
 - A. Gene's envy of Finny.
 - B. Finny's influence over Gene.
 - C. Gene's desire to best Finny.
 - D. Finny's apparent envy of Gene.
 - E. Gene's goal to be class valedictorian.

Practice Multiple-Choice Questions 11 – 15

Read the passage in Chapter 6, from the beginning of the chapter and ending with the narrator's saying, "every bulletin board was a forest of notices." Then select the best answers to the multiple-choice questions below.

11. The "peace" that "had deserted Devon" in the beginning of this chapter is contrasted with
 - A. "a few dozen boys being force-fed education."
 - B. "a new and energetic wind."
 - C. "[Devon's] one-hundred-and-sixty-third Winter Session."
 - D. "the Summer Session was over."
 - E. "the forces reassembled."
12. What motif in the first two paragraphs best connects this chapter with what came previously?
 - A. the full splendor of the trees
 - B. the edge of coolness in the air
 - C. the look of the campus and village
 - D. the falling leaves
 - E. the contrast of the Summer and Winter Sessions
13. The tone of the middle section of this passage (beginning, "I knew, perhaps I alone knew," and ending, "the dancing, clicking jangle of it during the summer") can best be described as
 - A. regretful
 - B. foreboding
 - C. reminiscent
 - D. anticipatory
 - E. celebratory
14. As it is used in this passage, the word *gypsy* ["Ours had been a wayward gypsy music... foolish gypsy ways..."] most likely refers to someone or something
 - A. of Romanian origin.
 - B. foreign and exotic.
 - C. uncontrolled and unruly.
 - D. unscrupulous and shiftless.
 - E. with nomadic tendencies.
15. All of the following are contrasts introduced by this passage **EXCEPT**
 - A. the Summer and Winter Sessions.
 - B. Brinker Hadley and Leper.
 - C. tradition and change.
 - D. war and peace.
 - E. Gene and Finny.

Practice Multiple-Choice Questions 16 – 20

Read the passage in Chapter 6, beginning, “We had never used this lower river,” and ending with Mr. Ludsbury’s saying, “You old boys simply took advantage of the situation.” Then select the best answer to the multiple-choice questions that follow.

16. What is the significance of the introduction of the Naguamsett River in this passage?
 - A. The Naguamsett represents the violence of World War II.
 - B. The Naguamsett represents the change in mood at Devon.
 - C. The Naguamsett’s salt water represents Gene’s bitter mood.
 - D. The Naguamsett’s marshy banks represent the outside world.
 - E. The Naguamsett represents Finny’s absence.
17. Gene’s description of Quackenbush clearly establishes that Quackenbush is
 - A. prone to sudden and violent outbursts.
 - B. a popular team captain.
 - C. the lowest-ranked student in his class.
 - D. efficient and charismatic.
 - E. an enigmatic but stable personality.
18. Which of the following terms best describes the exchange between Gene and Quackenbush?
 - A. antagonistic
 - B. empathetic
 - C. unsympathetic
 - D. discouraging
 - E. irrelevant
19. Which of the following phrases best summarizes this passage?
 - A. peace followed by unrest
 - B. optimism followed by pessimism
 - C. several incidents of alienation
 - D. anger and frustration
 - E. two consecutive confrontations
20. What does Gene’s discussion of the gambling in Leper’s room suggest about Finny?
 - A. Finny is unlucky.
 - B. Finny is creative.
 - C. Finny is reckless.
 - D. Finny is pessimistic.
 - E. Finny is illogical.

Practice Multiple-Choice Questions 21 – 25

Read the passage in Chapter 7, beginning with Brinker Hadley's suggesting, "I'll bet you knew all the time Finny wouldn't be back this fall," and ending at the break, with the voice's saying, "Funny, he came all the way down here and didn't even have a smoke." Then select the best answer to the multiple-choice questions that follow.

21. The intent of this passage is most likely to establish
 - A. Gene's guilt or innocence in Finny's accident.
 - B. Gene's inner conflict concerning his guilt.
 - C. Brinker's influence over the younger students.
 - D. Brinker's utter distrust of Gene.
 - E. Gene and Brinker's burgeoning animosity.
22. What does the "hearing" in the Butt Room suggest about Finny's accident?
 - A. The smokers were waiting to accuse Gene.
 - B. Brinker truly believed it was intentional.
 - C. It was a topic of speculation and mockery.
 - D. No one on campus really cared about it.
 - E. Most students had not heard of it.
23. What is the primary significance of the setting of this episode?
 - A. The Butt Room is a clandestine and dreary setting.
 - B. Smoking is a forbidden activity at Devon.
 - C. The Butt Room is described as "something like a dungeon...in the...bowels of the dormitory."
 - D. "Criminal charges" are laid where the boys are described as looking "like criminals."
 - E. Brinker chooses a hellish, dungeon-like setting to accuse Gene.
24. Structurally, this scene serves to
 - A. advance the plot.
 - B. foreshadow the climax.
 - C. introduce the main conflict.
 - D. introduce a new character.
 - E. clarify character motivation.
25. Which of the following most clearly suggests Gene's state of mind in this passage?
 - A. "I...began moving books with rapid pointlessness."
 - B. his suggestion that they go to the Butt Room to smoke
 - C. "I swear to God you ride a joke longer than anybody I know."
 - D. "I had to take part in this, or risk losing control completely."
 - E. his leaving the Butt Room without smoking

Practice Multiple-Choice Questions 26 – 30

Read the passage in Chapter 12, beginning at the break, with the narrator's saying, "The rest of the day passed quickly," and ending at the conclusion of the chapter. Then select the best answer to the multiple-choice questions that follow.

26. Each of the following is a technique used by the author to increase suspense in this episode **EXCEPT**
- A. a detailed timeline of Gene's movements.
 - B. a summary of conversation instead of dialogue.
 - C. a series of long paragraphs of compound and complex sentences.
 - D. avoidance of the topics of Finny and the accident.
 - E. a broad synopsis of Gene's activities.
27. The tone of this passage transitions from
- A. numbness to disbelief.
 - B. harried to relieved.
 - C. carefree to stoic.
 - D. preoccupied to attentive.
 - E. confident to incomprehensible.
28. One can conclude from this passage that Dr. Stanpole is
- A. incompetent.
 - B. weak.
 - C. worrisome.
 - D. compassionate.
 - E. encouraging.
29. Gene's reaction to the news of Finny's death suggests that Gene most likely
- A. did not believe that Finny was dead.
 - B. did not understand how Finny had died.
 - C. could not comprehend that Finny was dead.
 - D. suspected that Finny would die.
 - E. blamed himself for Finny's death.
30. The narrator's use of the second person in the final paragraph of this passage ("...you do not cry in that case.") is most likely his attempt to
- A. deflect the blame from Gene.
 - B. cause the reader to empathize with Gene.
 - C. cause the reader to sympathize with Finny.
 - D. explain why Gene never cried for Finny.
 - E. establish rapport with the reader.

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Multiple-Choice Answers With Explanations

1. Gene jumps “with the sensation that I was throwing my life away,” thus eliminating (A). (B) is eliminated by Leper’s claiming that Gene’s jump was better than Finny’s, and by the later conversation about whether Gene jumped voluntarily or was “shamed into it” by Finny. (D) is eliminated by Gene’s description of jumping “into space,” and then rising to the surface of the river and feeling fine. (E) is eliminated by Gene’s certain knowledge that he is going to jump, is going to jump immediately after Finny, despite his own anxiety and hesitation. Certainly Gene uses words that suggest excitement: “tingling fingers,” “head...unnaturally light,” and he even admits to a “sensation of alarm,” but, ultimately, he summarizes his response as “a mild state of shock,” not “extreme terror.” **Thus, C is the correct answer.**
2. While there are clearly suggestions of a close friendship, Gene specifies that they were “the best of friends *at that moment*,” suggesting that the friendship is not yet solidified, thus eliminating (B). While it is clear that there is some rivalry between Gene and Finny, there is no evidence that this rivalry can be described as “bitter” (C). (D) is suggested, but not fully confirmed, yet (E) is eliminated by the same observations that suggest but eliminate (D). Gene suspects that Finny is developing a hold over him, yet he is also able to insist that he was not shamed into making the jump. **Gene’s description of Finny as the best athlete in the school, his presentation of Finny’s daring and charisma, and his own willingness to be associated with it, clearly identify (A) as the best answer.**
3. (A) is, of course, eliminated by the fact that even Gene and Finny are out at sunset. (C) and (E) are technically correct, but too non-specific. (D) is tempting, but is ultimately eliminated by the fact that there is no specific prayer time. (B), **however, is established by Gene’s describing the return of the seniors “as the bell sounded ten stately times.”**
4. The books Gene and Finny are reading (A) are typical high school fare and suggest nothing other than the fact that the boys are destined for college after high school. (B) establishes the time period as the 1940s but the songs have no direct bearing on the War. (C) is certainly connected to the fact of the War, but only most tentatively. (D) is an image, but not connected at all with the war. (E), **however, admits that there is a world beyond the Devon campus, but whatever news is being brought onto the campus is kept at a low volume and unintelligible.**
5. The description of the Devon campus as Finny and Gene walk from the river to dinner establishes age, convention, and formality, but there is no suggestion that the atmosphere is oppressive (A). In fact, if it were, the boys would probably not have had the freedom to go to the river or the ability to miss dinner. Nothing suggests that the school is unfeeling (B), and, while it is clear that the rules have been loosened during this special Summer Session, (C) is an exaggeration. Likewise, while Gene clearly establishes the age of the

- school and its traditions, he never ventures to suggest that it is outdated (D). **Thus, (E) is the only possible answer.**
6. Gene clearly admits that his first dawn was a disappointing experience: “not...the gorgeous fanfare over the ocean...but...a strange gray thing.” This clearly eliminates (D) and (E). Still, while Gene begins to see death in the shapes and colors: “he looked more dead than alive,” “the ocean looked dead too,” “dead gray leaves,” Gene’s tone is much more neutral than mournful (B), in fact, in the next paragraph, he begins to see beauty in the sunrise. There is no anxiety (C) for Gene until after Finny is awake, and Gene realizes that there is not enough time for him to return to school and take his exam. **Gene’s preoccupation with how *dead* everything looks, and his association of Finny with death certainly forebodes later events in the novel. Thus, (A) is the correct answer.**
7. Gene has already described Finny as looking “more dead than asleep,” (A), and the Lazarus reference is more related to the beach’s coming alive with the sunrise and Finny’s finally awaking than his death-like appearance. (C) is tempting, if the student gets too caught up in the Eden and Lazarus allusions, but the context more clearly establishes Gene as distracted, gloomy, and impatient than religious. Finny’s being religious (D) would not be the occasion for *Gene* to indulge in a biblical allusion. (E) is also tempting, given the context of the allusion, but the broader context of the passage, the deathlike associations with Finny, his looking more dead than asleep, and then his resembling Lazarus all combine to suggest (B). **Thus, (B) is the best answer.**
8. (A) is actually the beginning of Gene’s believing Finny is distracting him intentionally to ruin his grades. (B) is the cause of (C) and both contribute to Gene’s overall mood in this passage. (D), of course, begins Gene’s anxiety and the rush back to school for the exam that he fails. **Only (E) is not supported by the passage. Gene admits that he could not fall *back* to sleep after he saw the beginning of dawn, but he does not mention that he had passed a sleepless night.**
9. Gene’s uncharacteristic failure (A) is largely due to his skipping breakfast and rushing to school from the beach. Lack of effort is not a real issue. This passage clearly establishes the boys’ camaraderie and suggests a growing rivalry, but as Gene’s forte is academics and Finny’s is athletics, they are not really in direct competition with one another (B). (D) is tempting but will not prove to be the *best* answer. (E) is also tempting, but Gene’s anger and the rivalry that begins to develop cannot be said to be as strong as “enmity.” The passage begins, however, with a description of the dead-looking dawn and Finny’s resembling a corpse awaiting resurrection. It ends with Gene’s excited conclusion that Finny envies his academic success—and that this envy makes the two of them equal. **Thus, (C) is the best answer.**
10. It is Gene’s envy of Finny’s accomplishments (the Galbraith Football Trophy, the Contact Sport Award...) that first makes him wish to be Finny’s equal by excelling in academia (A). Gene suggests (B) when he blames Finny for distracting him the entire afternoon from thinking about his failure in math and preventing him from studying. (D) is the “big

issue” of the episode in the boys’ room after they return from an afternoon of blitzball. The discussion of Gene’s working to be the top student (E) is what prompts Gene’s “realization” that Finny envies his academic standing. With his “discovery” that Finny is envious of his academic success, Gene is pleased to “be even” with Finny. There is no suggestion that Gene wants to best him. **Therefore, (C) is the best answer.**

11. This passage clearly contrasts the Summer Session that ended in the previous chapter with the Winter Session that is just beginning. The “peace” is related to the Summer Session that is over. Most of the choices are details of the Summer Session and are, therefore, part of the “peace,” not contrasted with it. The “few dozen boys being force-fed education” (A) are contrasted with the “seven hundred strong” student body; the “one-hundred-and-sixty-third Winter Session” (C) is contrasted with “the school’s first” Summer Session. (D) is too broad a statement to satisfy, and (E) merely introduces the list of contrasts. Gene does, however, lament the loss of the “peace” in the first paragraph by noting the arrival of (B) in the second paragraph. **Thus, (B) is the best answer.**
12. (C) and (E) are too general to be considered motifs. (B) looks to what is to come, but does not connect with what has passed. (A) is tempting, but, again, the suggestion is more clearly of the autumn that is to come rather than the summer that has ended. The falling leaves (D) connect the arrival of autumn with Finny’s fall that ended the Summer Session. **Thus, (D) is the best answer.**
13. This entire passage clearly looks more backward than forward, at what is gone and over more than what is beginning. Thus (B) and (D) can be immediately eliminated. (E) is inappropriate, given the title of the hymn sung and the narrator’s use of words like *wayward*, *foolish*, and *unforgiven*. (C) is tempting, but, **given the author’s use of words like *wayward*, *foolish*, and *unforgiven*, (A) is the better choice.**
14. (A) is the ethnic definition of *gypsy*, but this is clearly not what Gene is referring to. (B) is tempting, but there is a tone of penitence in the passage, which is not necessarily connoted by *foreign* and *exotic*. (D) is too severe for whatever Gene describes as *wayward* and *foolish*. (E) is not at all supported by the context. (C), **however, is clearly what Gene is describing, a summer that has been unfettered by tradition and law, that has been foolish and wayward, not criminal.**
15. The entire passage contrasts (A). Brinker Hadley is now in the room formerly occupied by Leper, and Gene admits he misses Leper’s eccentricities (B). The key difference between the Summer and Winter Sessions has been the return of Tradition with a few notable exceptions (C). The passage begins with a lament over the loss of peace, and language of war [“the forces reassembled”] creeps into the narrative (D). **Only Finny (E), and all mention of him, is missing from this opening passage.**
16. (A) is deceptively tempting, but careful students will distinguish between the Naguamsett’s connection to the outside world, which includes the War, and its representing the War itself. Given the context of the passage, (C) is too narrow a conclusion, and not supported

- by the text. Like (A), (D) might deceive some students, but the banks are mentioned only as one detail in the overall description of the river, not as significant in themselves. (E) is completely unsupported by the text. **The full paragraph, however, that compares the isolated and freshwater Devon River to the salty and tidal Naguamsett, clearly suggests (B).**
17. While (A) is certainly possible, it is impossible to base such a broad interpretation on a single incident. (B) is clearly untrue as Gene says Quackenbush is so unpopular that he does not even have a nickname—and no one uses his first name. (D) is likewise untrue, as Quackenbush is clearly not charismatic. (E) is eliminated by the same behavior that made (A) tempting. Gene does, however say that he and Quackenbush “were at opposite extremities of the class.” As Gene is at the top of the class, clearly he is saying that Quackenbush is at the bottom. **Thus, (C) is the correct answer.**
18. Gene briefly admits feeling some empathy (B) for Quackenbush, but certainly not enough to define their entire hostile episode. (C) is tempting, but too mild a word to describe their hostility. (D) and (E) are practical give-aways, although some students might be tempted to cite Quackenbush’s dismissing Gene from his position as assistant manager as evidence of (D). From the moment Gene arrives late, however, until he is fired from his position, he and Quackenbush are antagonistic to one another. **Thus, (A) is the correct answer.**
19. There is no clear “peace” at the beginning of this passage, and the “unrest” follows immediately upon Gene’s arrival at the boat house. Thus, (A) is eliminated. Likewise, there is no optimism (B) in the passage. Rather, the description of the Naguamsett River as ugly, marshy, and salty could more accurately be interpreted as pessimistic. Some students might want to cite Gene’s continuing alienation as evidence of (C), but the plot incidents of this passage do not emphasize this element. And, while the passage ends in anger and frustration, (D) it does not necessarily begin on that note. However, Gene’s confrontation with Quackenbush that begins upon Gene’s arrival at the boat house and continues until both plunge into the river, is followed immediately by his confrontation with Mr. Ludsbury, who accosts him about his being wet, the summer gambling, and the ice box in Gene’s room. **Thus, (E) is the correct answer.**
20. While Gene casually mentions that Finny lost even at games he created, this cannot be taken to mean that Finny was particularly creative (B). Likewise, Gene’s mention of Finny’s errors in judgment, deciding what hands should win, are not detailed enough to conclude that Finny was particularly reckless (C). The description of Finny’s play portrays him as anything but pessimistic (D). (E), however, is tempting but is not the *best* answer. The fact that Finny loses at every game, that he is “betrayed” by his cards, can most accurately be interpreted to mean that he is unlucky. **Thus, (A) is the best answer.**
21. Since the passage does not accomplish (A), this is not likely its purpose. There is no evidence in the passage of (C). While Brinker does not appear really to like Gene, it is not accurate to say he has an “utter distrust” (D) of Gene. (E) is tempting, but is not as strong

- as (B). Every aspect of the passage, however: Gene's desire to leave his room and go to the Butt Room, his playing along with the murder accusation, his losing his patience with Brinker, and his rushing from the Butt Room without smoking all suggest (B). **Thus, (B) is the correct answer.**
22. The smokers in the Butt Room do not even know that Gene and Brinker are coming, thus eliminating (A). Whether or not Brinker truly suspects Gene is left too ambiguous to establish (B). It is Gene who mocks Brinker and the accusation, not the boys who mock the accident, thus eliminating (C). (D) is not suggested by the passage. **The response of the boys in the Butt Room, however, and the fact of Gene's having to create a story indicate that most of the boys have not even heard of the accident (E).**
23. Although the Butt Room is described as dungeon-like and in the bowels of the dormitory, it is not a clandestine room (A), and, while Gene admits that smoking is discouraged on the campus, he does not say that it is forbidden (B). (C) quotes the description but does not point to its significance. (E) is eliminated by the fact that it is Gene who chooses to leave his room and go to the Butt Room. (D), **however, suggests a connection between the description of the setting and the action that occurs there. Thus, (D) is the best answer.**
24. As this scene, at best, recaps what is already known, (A) is eliminated. The main conflicts are advanced but not introduced, thus eliminating (C). No new characters (D) are introduced, and character motivation is, if anything, *less* clear as a result of this passage, thus eliminating (E). **As this passage mocks a hearing and points to the issue of Gene's guilt or innocence, (B) is the best answer.**
25. Throughout this passage, it becomes increasingly clear that Gene is ambivalent about how culpable he is for Finny's accident, but that he is growing ever more convinced of his guilt. This is especially evident in his persistent efforts to deflect attention away from the topic of his guilt and to dismiss the entire matter with jokes. (A) is evidence of this, but could also simply indicate Gene's desire to avoid *any* conversation with Brinker. (B) is eliminated for the same reason. Is he avoiding the topic of his guilt. or does he merely want to get Brinker out of his room? (C) is tempting, but is not the best answer, since the climax of this episode has not yet been reached. (D) is more tempting, but it is not until (E), when Gene leaves the room without smoking, that we see the full extent of his inner conflict. Leaving without smoking indicates that (1) he had no intention of smoking to begin with and was present only to defend himself, or (2) he is so distracted by the issue of his guilt that, having "cleared himself," he forgets to perform the innocent action which would have motivated his being there in the first place. **Thus (E) is the best answer.**
26. Most of the passage is a timeline (A): at 10:10, Gene did this; at 11, he did that; at 2:30, he went to the gym; at 4:45, he went to the Infirmary, etc. Gene merely summarizes (B) the history quiz, his trigonometry problem, his conversation with Brinker, etc. There is no direct dialogue until Gene talks to Dr. Stanpole. (C) is inaccurate as there is not a single simple sentence or a sentence with a simple subject and/or predicate until, again, Gene

arrives at the Infirmary and speaks to Dr. Stanpole. (E) is clearly inaccurate since the entire passage before Gene's arrival at the infirmary is broad summary. **(D) is the correct answer because, throughout the passage, Gene makes it a point to pass by the spot where Finny fell, he discusses the night before with Brinker, and he comments about the track that Finny used to run on.**

27. The casual, summative tone of the beginning of this passage can hardly be considered "numb" (A). Nor does Gene seem "harried" (B) as he walks the reader through the day that "passed quickly." In fact, parts of the day—for example the trigonometry problem—seem to have gone quite well for Gene. The day, however, cannot be described as "carefree" (C) either, as Gene makes it a point to reflect on and mention Finny and the accident on several occasions. Obviously, Finny's accident and impending surgery weigh on Gene's mind. The mentions of Finny, however, cannot be said to preoccupy Gene (D) because, again, he does well on the test, seems to enjoy the wrestling, and moves through his day with relative ease. The manner in which Gene mentions the history quiz, the trigonometry problem that "solved itself on [his] paper," his pleasure at learning a new wrestling move, etc., all suggest that Gene feels confident as he moves through his day. At the news of Finny's death, however, he immediately admits that he cannot comprehend what the doctor is telling him. "He was incomprehensible," Gene says. "Dr. Stanpole went on talking incomprehensibly." Finally, the suspected cause of Finny's death "at last penetrated my mind." **Thus, the mood of the passage begins confident and suddenly transitions to incomprehensible. (E) is the correct answer.**
28. There is a brief suggestion that Stanpole might be questioning his own competence (A) when he insists that Finny's surgery was routine, but this is not sufficient to conclude that the doctor is, indeed, incompetent. He is certainly troubled and compassionate, but, again, this is not the same as his being weak (B). Nothing in the passage suggests (C), and his demeanor seems more discouraged than encouraging (E). He is, however, very compassionate (D) to Gene's shock at receiving the news of Finny's death, and at the Devon boys' situation of having to face war and death very shortly. **Thus, (D) is the best answer.**
29. This is a relatively easy question coming after question 26. Gene comments several times that he cannot comprehend what the doctor is telling him, until finally he begins to understand *how* Finny died, which allows him to understand *that* Finny is dead. **(C) is the correct answer.**
30. (E) is immediately eliminated by the fact that this passage comes from toward the end of the novel, and it is too late to establish rapport if one has not already been established. The passage is about Gene and his actions/reactions, not Finny, so (C) is eliminated. (D) would require the use of first person, not second. (A) is tempting, but the thrust of this passage has had more to do with Gene's reaction than his blame. (B), however, explains Gene's mental state, not wanting to feel odd in his reaction to Finny's death. By using the second person, he is including the reader, creating an empathy that might not otherwise be there. **Thus, (B) is the best answer.**

A Separate Peace

Chapter 1

1. What two locations—which he describes as “fearful”—does the narrator visit? How does he describe each?

The narrator first visits a marble staircase, which he realizes is harder than he remembered. Next, he visits a tree on the bank of the river. The tree is smaller than he remembered.

2. What is suggested by the tone of the opening section of the novel?

The somber tone and the fact that the narrator has returned to this place after fifteen years suggests that some horrible events transpired at these spots when the narrator was a student on this campus.

3. What is implied when the narrator considers “how far [his] convalescence had gone”?

A period of convalescence is a period of recovering from an emotional or physical illness or injury. He suggests that he has spent the previous fifteen years recovering from an emotional trauma.

4. Consider the narrator’s reflection that, “Nothing endures, not a tree, not love, not even a death by violence.” What do all of the clues provided so far most likely suggest?

Given all of the clues so far, the suggestion is clearly that fifteen years before this opening passage, something traumatic occurred on this campus at the sites of the tree and the marble staircase that resulted in a violent death. The memory of these traumatic events has haunted the narrator. He believes he has healed (convalesced), and he has returned to this place either to assess the extent of his healing or to finish the healing process.

5. How do the weather and the time of year emphasize the mood of the opening section?

The mood is contemplative, almost mournful. The rainy, somewhat bleak autumn day emphasizes the mood.

6. How is World War II introduced as a factor in the novel?

It is because of World War II and the desire to accelerate the boys’ educations and prepare them for military service that they are at Devon for the Summer Session. Also, the challenge of jumping from the tree into the Devon River is inspired by the physical challenge demanded of seniors approaching graduation.

7. What is the significance of Finny's name?

Phineas is a relatively well-known figure in Greek mythology. Gene's friend, Phineas, is possibly going to achieve mythological status through the course of this novel.

8. How do Gene's and Finny's walks back to the dormitory illustrate their respective characters?

Gene walks with what he calls his "West Point stride." This illustrates his overachieving, rule-following, and anxious character. Finny lolls around lazily and carelessly, illustrating his free-spirited, nonchalant character.

9. How does Knowles emphasize the distance of the War from the lives of the boys in Devon?

As Gene and Finny settle down to study, they turn on a radio to listen to the news. The volume of the radio, however, is so low that the news is unintelligible. Thus, the War is a presence, but only a distant and indistinct presence.

Chapter 2

1. What is the primary purpose of this relatively short chapter?

This chapter sets the relatively carefree tone of the Summer Session and Finny's charisma that enables him to charm himself out of any difficult situation.

2. What character trait of Finny's "stun[s] people"?

Finny is absolutely straightforward. He says exactly what is on his mind.

3. What does Finny's wearing a pink shirt indicate about his character?

At the time the novel was written, pink was considered a "feminine" color. Finny is so full of self-confidence that he can perform outlandish and non-conformist acts without worrying what other people are going to think of him.

4. What does Gene envy in Finny?

Gene admires and envies his roommate's ability to get away with anything.

5. What is the structural and thematic significance of the final event of this chapter?

The boys are jumping from the tree, which is the same tree that the adult Gene visited in the opening of the novel, and which Gene described as a "fearful site."

6. On what dramatic note does this chapter end?

When Gene loses his balance in the tree, Finny catches him.

Chapter 3

1. How has Gene's sentiment from the end of the previous chapter changed by the beginning of this chapter?

Chapter 2 ended with Gene's grateful reflection: "Finny had practically saved my life." Chapter 3 begins with Gene's suspicious "realization" that it was Finny who'd caused Gene to risk his life in the first place.

2. How does the invention of *Blitzball* reflect on Finny?

Just as Finny exists outside of society's rules, Blitzball is a game without rules. It cannot be won or lost—only played, just as Finny enjoys the "play" and not the competition.

3. What inner conflict is Knowles beginning to build for Gene?

Gene loves and admires Finny, but he also envies Finny. He is unwilling to admit this envy to himself.

4. Why does Finny refuse to let it be acknowledged that he broke the school's swimming record?

As was the case with Blitzball, Finny loves the joy of physical play. Winning, losing, championships, and records mean nothing to him.

5. What is Gene's response to Finny's calling him his best friend? What does this response indicate?

Gene cannot respond to Finny in kind. This furthers his inner conflict, the turmoil of emotions he feels: love, admiration, envy—almost hatred.

Chapter 4

1. What significant event occurs that begins to change the balance of Gene's inner conflict? How is this balance shifted?

Gene fails a trigonometry test. He begins to believe that Finny envies him, that Finny is intentionally attempting to ruin Gene's academic record. The balance is shifting from love and admiration to envy and hatred.

2. How does Finny's reaction to Gene's failure contribute to Gene's inner turmoil and the rising action of the novel?

Finny indicates that he believed Gene's academic success came naturally—as did Finny's athleticism. Gene now must face the fact that, since he envied Finny and Finny never envied him, they are not—and never were—true equals. This intensifies Gene's distrust and hatred.

3. What is the culmination of Gene's growing hatred of Finny?

While performing a double jump from the tree with Finny, Gene bounces slightly on the limb, causing Finny to fall.

Chapter 5

1. Why does Gene put on Finny's pink shirt?

In one sense Gene is still trying to identify with Finny, to be the best friend he both loves and hates.

2. Why does Knowles leave the issue of Gene's intent in causing the fall ambiguous?

There are several reasons. First, Gene himself is not certain of the extent of his guilt. Second, Finny may or may not suspect that Gene intentionally caused the fall. Third, the suspense caused by the ambiguity will propel the plot into the next sections.

3. What revelation does Gene have in the hospital room?

He realizes Finny may have a subconscious feeling about Gene causing the fall. Gene also knows that if the situation were reversed, Finny would have admitted his complicity. Additionally, Gene understands, finally, that no competition can exist between them due to Finny's not knowing that there ever was a competition.

4. What is the significance of Gene's admission at the end of this chapter?

Gene admits that, on some level, he has been lying.

Chapter 6

1. How does this chapter introduce the second “half” of the novel?

The first half of the novel was the free, almost-lawless Summer Session. The Summer Session was new and unfettered by tradition. The War was only a distant presence, almost mocked by Finny's choice of attire and the games the boys invented and played. This chapter begins with Gene's reflection, “Peace had deserted Devon.” Finny is absent, but the War is already a bigger presence, apparent at this point in train delays. The atmosphere at Devon is weighted with Tradition and Rule.

2. What is the thematic significance of the hymn they sing at the Winter Session's first chapel service?

They sing a hymn entitled “Dear Lord and Father of Mankind, Forgive Our Foolish Ways.” This supports the developing idea that Gene feels he has transgressed and must now seek absolution.

3. What new feature of the Devon campus does Gene introduce in this chapter? What is Devon's physical relationship with this feature?

Gene introduces the Naguamsett River. The Devon campus lies between the Devon and the Naguamsett Rivers.

4. Compare the Devon and the Naguamsett Rivers. What thematic purpose do they serve in the novel?

The Devon River is a tributary. It is a small, freshwater river that meanders through the New Hampshire countryside. It is separated—isolated—from the outside world. It represents the insular nature of the Summer Session. The boys freely jump into the river in a rite of passage that ostensibly prepares them to participate in the War that, at this point, is nothing more than a distant presence. The Naguamsett River is muddy and salty. It flows directly into the ocean, and is, thus, a gateway to the war-torn outside world. Gene does not jump willingly, but is plunged into the salt water during the novel's first act of real violence—a fight between Gene and Quackenbush. This baptism of sorts initiates Gene into the dark world that is the consequence of human envy, hatred.

5. Why does Gene sign on as the assistant crew manager?

There are two reasons. First, Gene explains that every Devon student must participate in sports. Also, since Finny has been denied sports as a result of the accident, Gene is substituting for Finny as an act of camaraderie.

6. What is significant about the fight between Gene and Quackenbush?

This is the first episode of true violence in the novel. The boys of the Summer Session played roughly, but they never fought. The fight also is largely unmotivated, Quackenbush taking an almost instinctive dislike to Gene, and Gene responding in kind.

7. Compare Gene and Quackenbush's plunge into the Naguamsett River with the earlier jumping into the Devon River.

The boys fall accidentally into the Naguamsett while fighting. Afterward, Gene is cold and feels dirty—he returns to the dorm to shower off the sticky salt. During the Summer Session, the boys freely jumped into the Devon. It was fun and clean. Gene described jumping into the Devon River as being almost as cleansing as a shower.

8. How does Quackenbush reflect Gene's inner feelings?

He calls Gene "maimed," and then tells him that he is not wanted. These comments reinforce Gene's growing negative opinion of himself.

Chapter 7

1. How is Brinker a foil for Leper? for Finny?

Brinker lives in the room that had been occupied by Leper during the summer. Leper was mild, eccentric, and disorderly. Brinker, by contrast, is loud, brutish, and almost obsessive in his orderliness. Finny was charismatic, impulsive, and thoroughly ingenuous. By comparison, Brinker is unlikable, orderly, and seems always to have a double meaning to his words and actions.

2. Explain the ambiguity of the early exchange between Brinker and Gene?

When Brinker sarcastically accuses Gene of getting rid of Finny in order to have the room to himself, he is probably half joking, and perhaps only a little serious. Gene, however, hears the comment through his own guilt and probably exaggerates the extent to which Brinker is really accusing him.

3. How do the boys in the Butt Room react to Brinker's accusation?

Most seem disinterested. One is intrigued but does not seem to have heard about Finny's accident.

4. What does Gene say is the reason he must play along and make up a story about his attempt to murder Finny?

Gene says that playing along and making up the story is the only way not to lose "control" of the entire situation.

5. What is the purpose of the episode in the Butt Room? What new conflict is introduced?

The episode in the Butt Room helps to establish that Gene does—to a considerable extent—feel responsible for intentionally causing Finny's accident. The conflict between Brinker and Gene is also developed.

6. In what ways does the War's presence escalate? What is significant about the sequence of tasks?

The boys' academic schedule is interrupted to perform labor for the war effort. First, they must pick apples before the crop is ruined, and then they must clear railroad tracks of snow. The escalation is that the apple-picking is a civilian activity that they must perform only because the apple-pickers have been drafted into the military—but the boys' effort has no direct bearing on the war. The second activity is more difficult labor and has a direct impact on the war in that the transportation of soldiers is impeded by the snow. One day, while working, Gene sees the soldiers ride by on the train. He comments that the soldiers are not much older than he, and this brings the war very close to home for him.

7. How does Knowles use imagery and word choice to establish the new proximity of the war?

Even the innocent snow is described in military terms, gathering like “noiseless invaders.”

8. Why is enlisting suddenly such an appealing option for Gene?

In the aftermath of the Summer Session and the encroachment of the War on the formerly peaceful Devon, Gene sees enlisting as the best way to break with the past and begin a part of his life in which no one knows him or the misdeeds he has committed. Facing the war directly also seems to be better than allowing it to approach bit by bit.

9. What significant reversal occurs at the end of this chapter? How will it probably affect the plot as it has been developing?

When Gene returns from shoveling snow, Finny is in the room, having returned to school. Gene will probably now change his mind about leaving school to enlist.

Chapter 8

1. Describe Gene and Finny's relationship in the opening of this chapter.

Their relationship seems strained, almost mildly antagonistic.

2. What convinces Gene to give up his idea of enlisting? How credible is his reason?

Gene claims to realize that Finny needs him around, and this is why Gene decides not to enlist. This reasoning is questionable because Gene has already shown himself to be an unreliable narrator. Earlier, Gene was convinced that Finny was sabotaging his efforts at being valedictorian, that Finny envied his academic success—both of which turned out to be false.

3. What is the significance of the wave imagery Gene uses when he describes the war? With what note of foreshadowing does the wave passage end?

The wave metaphor for the swelling presence of the war reminds the reader of the day Gene and Finny left school to go to the beach. Waking up the next morning, Gene described the dawn and Finny in death-like terms, saying Finny looked "more dead than asleep." The passage ends foreshadowing another fearful event. Gene suggests that Finny has helped him dodge this one "wave," but there will inevitably be another, bigger wave.

4. Why does the absence of maids bother Finny so much?

The absence of maids is merely the scapegoat on which Finny can blame all of his frustration and dissatisfaction.

5. How does Knowles create a poignant tone when he describes Finny's return to the gym?

First Gene pauses to note the trophies and banners that bear Finny's name. Then Gene describes the smell of the gym in considerable detail, ultimately comparing the tiredness of a spent athlete's body with the satisfaction of a spent lover's body. The broken Finny has returned to the place he once loved and can no longer.

6. What two key psychological events take place in this gym setting? Why is this significant?

In the gym, Finny both denies the existence of the War, and he insists that Gene will become the school's top athlete in his stead. This is significant because the gym is a place where Finny most belonged and where he is no longer able to compete. By projecting his athleticism onto Gene and denying the existence of the War, which had meant a lot to him, he is creating several layers of denial in order to protect himself from the pain of what he has lost.

7. What does Finny mean when he says that he has “suffered”?

On the one hand, Finny has suffered the pain and inconvenience of the broken leg. He has suffered the loss of athletics—his gift and his love. And, he has suffered the betrayal of his best friend who has tried to claim responsibility for the fall that maimed him.

8. Why do Gene and Finny establish a partnership to train Gene for the 1944 Olympics?

They both are fulfilling a need to belong. Finny is participating in athletics through Gene. In addition, athletics allows them to keep thoughts of the war at a distance.

Chapter 9

1. How does Gene inform the reader of Leper's enlistment?

Gene mentions the enlistment almost casually, slipping it into a description of his own being convinced by Finny that there is no War. He then indulges in a brief explanation of how the enlistment came to pass.

2. What impact does Leper's leaving have on life at Devon? What does Gene say about this?

Leper's leaving has virtually no impact on campus life, except for the occasional joke. Gene says that he thinks they all may have been better off had someone more flamboyant—like Brinker—left first, and made a huge impact by his leaving.

3. How does the imagery of the season emphasize the world the boys inhabit?

The winter is described very negatively; some words used are “dirty water,” “gray,” “cracks,” “mud,” “frail,” “undernourished,” “dirt,” “cinders,” “hopeless,” etc. All these images contradict Finny's happiness and reinforce Gene's feeling of depression.

4. How is the Winter Carnival the highlight of the season?

Everyone gets a chance to let off some pressure, while Finny gets back into his element—sports.

5. How is the “separate peace” the boys achieve on the afternoon of the Winter Carnival different from the “peace” of the Summer Session?

This time, Gene knows it is only temporary, illusory.

6. What reversal ends the chapter and dispels the festive mood of the Carnival?

Leper's telegram arrives.

Chapter 10

1. How does Knowles maintain suspense about Leper in this chapter?

Rather than continuing right to Gene's visit to Leper and what he learns about Leper's war experience, Knowles has Gene pause and discuss his own experiences training and retraining so that he never actually saw any action.

2. How is Leper changed from before he enlisted? What is Knowles most likely suggesting?

The old Leper was gentle, eccentric, and unassuming. This Leper is rude, impatient, and short-tempered. Knowles is most likely suggesting that Leper has had some sort of mental breakdown.

3. Given his newfound bluntness, what observation does Leper make of Gene? What does this suggest?

He says to Gene, "You always were a savage underneath." He then openly accuses Gene of intentionally causing Finny's fall from the tree. This is significant because it is the truth of this statement that Gene is struggling to discern.

4. What is Gene's reaction? What does this suggest about Gene?

Gene pushes over Leper's chair, with Leper in it. This clearly suggests that Gene already believes he is guilty of what Leper has accused him of.

5. How close does Leper consider himself to be to Gene? How do you know?

Leper considers himself to be Gene's best friend. He signed his telegram to Gene "your best friend," and, in this chapter, he confides to Gene what happened to him in the army. Gene might be the very first person Leper has confided in.

6. Why does Gene react to Leper's confidence the way he does?

Gene is capable of very dark feelings. He is also rather self-centered—certainly he is the narrator of the book, but he has made every event—even Finny's accident—to be about him. We have seen this when he was convinced that Finny envied him and was trying to sabotage his academics. Now he is unable or unwilling to be the kind of friend Leper needs. He reacts selfishly, wondering—fearing—whether what the army did to Leper could possibly happen to him. Gene's own selfish fear motivates his reaction to Leper's confidence.

7. Thematically, what has happened to Leper? How are he and Gene similar?

Thematically, the gentle and naïve Leper has lost his innocence. He has glimpsed the darkness in the human soul and is changed as a result. He and Gene are similar in that Gene, too, has begun to see the darkness in his soul.

Chapter 11

1. Structurally, how does Knowles connect this chapter with previous ones?

Chapter 9 included the Winter Carnival that was interrupted by Leper's telegram. Chapter 10 was a brief excursion away from the "separate peace" of Devon into the devastation of the War. The snowball fight at the beginning of this chapter combines the two ideas: there is fighting, but it is a game; there are no harmful consequences.

2. What does the brief conversation between Gene and Finny after the snowball fight foreshadow?

Clearly Finny is going to fall again—and break his leg again.

3. What is the significance of Finny's saying, "Sure. There isn't any war?"

This marks the end of Finny's denial, but the beginning of his hopelessness. Even Gene admits that this statement was the straightforward Finny's only ironic comment.

4. How has Gene's wave metaphor from Chapter 8 intensified?

Gene now remarks that there is little left on the Devon campus that hasn't been taken over by the war effort. There is no "separate peace" any longer.

5. How are the boys preparing for their involvement in the war? What does this suggest?

Because Devon is traditionally a college-preparatory school, its graduates usually go on to Ivy League institutions. The boys, knowing they are expected to join the military upon graduation, are scrambling for appointments to one of the military academies or commissions as officers in one of the service branches. This suggests their hesitance to actually join the War effort, to delay entering the War and to be involved in as "safe" a capacity as possible.

6. What event precipitates the climax? How do we know this is going to be the climax?

Brinker comes to get Gene and Finny during the night. There is going to be a trial. The most important conflict in the book has been Gene's grappling with the extent of his guilt in Finny's accident. For better or worse, this will settle that question.

7. Who gives the testimony that condemns Gene?

Leper gives an eyewitness account describing Gene's and Finny's movements on the limb as "up and down like pistons." The implication is clear: Gene jounced the limb intentionally to make Finny fall.

8. On what note does this chapter end? How was this foreshadowed in the opening section of the novel?

Finny falls down the stairs. These are the same stairs the adult Gene visited on his return to Devon. At that time, he commented that they were “harder” than he remembered.

Chapter 12

1. What is Gene's initial role in Finny's first aid? Why?

Everyone seems to have a role. Gene does fetch a blanket to wrap Finny in, but he hands it to another student to cover Finny. Gene, in his own words, "kept out of the way." Having finally faced the truth of his guilt, Gene probably does not feel worthy to assist Finny in his recovery. He is also afraid that Finny, likewise, does not want him around.

2. What happens when Gene goes to the infirmary to see Finny?

Finny rejects him.

3. How does Gene try to console himself? How convincing are his attempts?

Gene tries to convince himself that, given the broader suffering of the war, the atrocities that are being committed, this little incident involving him and Finny and Finny's broken leg do not really matter. Ultimately, he is not convincing because, all along, this has been the "separate" story of Gene and Finny, not the story of a world at war.

4. Why doesn't Gene cry at Finny's funeral? What does he mean when he says that he felt as if it were his own funeral?

There are several potential reasons for Gene's not crying: guilt, inexpressible grief, a hardness that has grown in him similar to Leper's newfound cruelty. Throughout the novel, he has identified with Finny as one might identify with an aspect of his own personality. Finny was the athlete; Gene was the scholar. Finny was charismatic; Gene was quiet; Finny was a free spirit; Gene was bound by rules. Finally, Finny was genuine and forthright; Gene was secretive and dark. Gene is aware that, in Finny's death, the better part of himself has died.

Chapter 13

1. How has the war literally moved onto the Devon campus?

Army troops are being stationed there.

2. What is Gene suggesting when he says that he will talk about Finny in no other way than his death and Gene's blame in it?

Gene is apparently looking for some sort of confession and absolution.

3. What ironic observation does Gene make while watching the troops and war machinery assemble on Devon's campus? What does he probably mean by it?

Gene observes, "Peace lay on Devon like a blessing." The War is encroaching ever closer on the boys' lives, yet Gene finds peace. He probably means that he is finding some sense of internal peace.

4. What is suggested by Mr. Hadley's reaction to Brinker's decision to join the Coast Guard?

Mr. Hadley clearly does not approve. The Coast Guard, because it was involved in domestic defense and no foreign action, was considered a much less "prestigious" service during World War II.

5. How does Gene plan to serve? Why has he made the decision he has?

Gene has enlisted in the Navy. The two reasons he offers are: (1) if he waited to be drafted, he'd be assigned to the least glamorous, most dangerous service; and (2) in the Navy, he will probably receive so much training that he will never see any action. It is important to note that the adult Gene has already told the reader, at the beginning of Chapter 10, that he did not see any action in the War.

6. What do Brinker's and Gene's decisions, when considered together, suggest about the graduating class of Devon?

Brinker's intention to join the Coast Guard—and therefore not serve overseas—and Gene's intention to receive so much training that he will never see any action both indicate that Devon's boys are probably not as eager to join the War and risk their lives as one might assume.

7. What is Mr. Hadley's attitude toward the war? What does Brinker's reaction suggest?

Mr. Hadley claims to be jealous that he is too old to fight. Brinker's embarrassment suggests that he knows his father no more desires to go to war than he and Gene do.

8. What realization is Gene suggesting when he says, “wars are made...by something ignorant in the human heart”?

Gene’s dark thoughts and unfounded feelings of jealousy and suspicion motivated him to cause the death of his best friend and hero. He knows that it is just the type of dark ignorance that he has seen in himself that causes wars.

9. What is the significance of Gene’s reflection, “All others at some point found something in themselves pitted violently against something in the world around them. ...When they began to feel that there was this overwhelmingly hostile thing in the world with them, then the simplicity and unity of their characters broke and they were not the same again”?

This notion of the individual pitted against his or her society is at the core of the bildungsroman, the story of the character’s psychological and emotional growth that springs from this disconnection with the outside world.

10. What was the “Maginot Line” that Gene refers to? What is the metaphoric significance of this reference?

The Maginot Line was a defensive line built by France along its German and Italian borders before World War II. The purpose was, of course, to prevent invasion. Gene’s use is metaphoric, alluding to his realization that people set up barriers to prevent other people from “invading,” getting to know them on an intimate level.

11. How was Finny different? What does the final paragraph suggest is the theme of this novel?

Finny did not build these defenses. He let others in, allowing himself to love and be loved. The theme of the novel is that these other people who would cross our defenses are not enemies. We have no need to fear them.

A Separate Peace

Chapter 1

1. What two locations—which he describes as “fearful”—does the narrator visit? How does he describe each?

2. What is suggested by the tone of the opening section of the novel?

3. What is implied when the narrator considers “how far [his] convalescence had gone”?

4. Consider the narrator’s reflection that, “Nothing endures, not a tree, not love, not even a death by violence.” What do all of the clues provided so far most likely suggest?

5. How do the weather and the time of year emphasize the mood of the opening section?

6. How is World War II introduced as a factor in the novel?

7. What is the significance of Finny's name?

8. How do Gene's and Finny's walks back to the dormitory illustrate their respective characters?

9. How does Knowles emphasize the distance of the War from the lives of the boys in Devon?

Chapter 2

1. What is the primary purpose of this relatively short chapter?

2. What character trait of Finny's "stun[s] people"?

3. What does Finny's wearing a pink shirt indicate about his character?

4. What does Gene envy in Finny?

5. What is the structural and thematic significance of the final event of this chapter?

6. On what dramatic note does this chapter end?

Chapter 3

1. How has Gene's sentiment from the end of the previous chapter changed by the beginning of this chapter?

2. How does the invention of *Blitzball* reflect on Finny?

3. What inner conflict is Knowles beginning to build for Gene?

4. Why does Finny refuse to let it be acknowledged that he broke the school's swimming record?

5. What is Gene's response to Finny's calling him his best friend? What does this response indicate?

Chapter 4

1. What significant event occurs that begins to change the balance of Gene's inner conflict? How is this balance shifted?

2. How does Finny's reaction to Gene's failure contribute to Gene's inner turmoil and the rising action of the novel?

3. What is the culmination of Gene's growing hatred of Finny?

Chapter 5

1. Why does Gene put on Finny's pink shirt?

2. Why does Knowles leave the issue of Gene's intent in causing the fall ambiguous?

3. What revelation does Gene have in the hospital room?

4. What is the significance of Gene's admission at the end of this chapter?

Chapter 6

1. How does this chapter introduce the second “half” of the novel?

2. What is the thematic significance of the hymn they sing at the Winter Session’s first chapel service?

3. What new feature of the Devon campus does Gene introduce in this chapter? What is Devon’s physical relationship with this feature?

4. Compare the Devon and the Naguamsett Rivers. What thematic purpose do they serve in the novel?

5. Why does Gene sign on as the assistant crew manager?

6. What is significant about the fight between Gene and Quackenbush?

7. Compare Gene and Quackenbush's plunge into the Naguamsett River with the earlier jumping into the Devon River.

8. How does Quackenbush reflect Gene's inner feelings?

Chapter 7

1. How is Brinker a foil for Leper? for Finny?

2. Explain the ambiguity of the early exchange between Brinker and Gene?

3. How do the boys in the Butt Room react to Brinker's accusation?

4. What does Gene say is the reason he must play along and make up a story about his attempt to murder Finny?

5. What is the purpose of the episode in the Butt Room? What new conflict is introduced?

6. In what ways does the War's presence escalate? What is significant about the sequence of tasks?

7. How does Knowles use imagery and word choice to establish the new proximity of the war?

8. Why is enlisting suddenly such an appealing option for Gene?

9. What significant reversal occurs at the end of this chapter? How will it probably affect the plot as it has been developing?

Chapter 8

1. Describe Gene and Finny's relationship in the opening of this chapter.

2. What convinces Gene to give up his idea of enlisting? How credible is his reason?

3. What is the significance of the wave imagery Gene uses when he describes the war? With what note of foreshadowing does the wave passage end?

4. Why does the absence of maids bother Finny so much?

5. How does Knowles create a poignant tone when he describes Finny's return to the gym?

6. What two key psychological events take place in this gym setting? Why is this significant?

7. What does Finny mean when he says that he has "suffered"?

8. Why do Gene and Finny establish a partnership to train Gene for the 1944 Olympics?

Chapter 9

1. How does Gene inform the reader of Leper's enlistment?

2. What impact does Leper's leaving have on life at Devon? What does Gene say about this?

3. How does the imagery of the season emphasize the world the boys inhabit?

4. How is the Winter Carnival the highlight of the season?

5. How is the "separate peace" the boys achieve on the afternoon of the Winter Carnival different from the "peace" of the Summer Session?

6. What reversal ends the chapter and dispels the festive mood of the Carnival?

Chapter 10

1. How does Knowles maintain suspense about Leper in this chapter?

2. How is Leper changed from before he enlisted? What is Knowles most likely suggesting?

3. Given his newfound bluntness, what observation does Leper make of Gene? What does this suggest?

4. What is Gene's reaction? What does this suggest about Gene?

5. How close does Leper consider himself to be to Gene? How do you know?

6. Why does Gene react to Leper's confidence the way he does?

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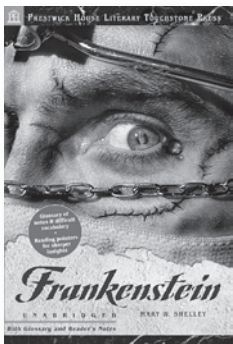
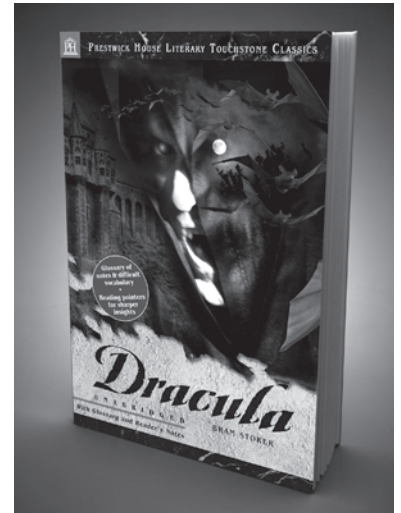
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