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Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

# *A Separate Peace*

by John Knowles

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# *A Separate Peace*

## **LECTURE**

This novel, published in 1960, has been a popular school classic since it first appeared. Although it is set in the closing years of World War II at a private boys' school, few readers have trouble relating to the boys and their problems, because the problems transcend time and place. The feelings, fears, and faults of those boys are instantly recognizable by all youths.

The plot line is simple and direct; the themes are significant. In this regard, you are asked to pay particularly close attention to the first and last chapters. In fact, it will be beneficial if you read both of these chapters twice. As you read and answer the study guide questions, see if you can predict plot development and identify emerging themes.

Note: All references come from the Bantam Books edition of *A Separate Peace*, copyright 1975.

# *A Separate Peace*

## **Objectives**

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

1. identify these literary elements and relate them to the novel: symbolism, foreshadowing, paradox, protagonist, metaphor, allusion, flashback, irony, imagery, personification, simile, mood, theme, and first person narration.
2. write an essay which states the major theme in the novel as it relates to the title, supported by referring to comments and incidents from the story.
3. analyze Gene's growth.
4. synthesize a number of the ideas expressed in the novel.
5. realize how art often reflects reality, especially with respect to human relationships and maturity.
6. explain how the first-person narrative affects the perspective from which the reader understands the novel.
7. examine the issues of conformity and nonconformity.
8. compare and contrast Phineas and Gene.
9. identify Phinny's and Gene's true motivations.
10. analyze Gene as the protagonist as he examines, retrospectively, his own lesson in maturity and responsibility.
11. analyze the use of symbolism in the novel.

# A Separate Peace

## Terms and Definitions

*Allusion* - a reference to a person, place, poem, book, event, etc., which is not part of the story, that the author expects the reader will recognize. **Example:** In *The Glass Menagerie*, Tom speaks of “Chamberlain’s umbrella,” a reference to British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain.

*Flashback* - a scene that interrupts the ongoing action in a story to show an event that happened earlier. **Example:** The movie, *Citizen Kane*, tells its story almost exclusively through the memories of its characters, who all knew Kane before his death.

*Foreshadowing* - the use of hints or clues in a story to suggest what action is to come. Foreshadowing is frequently used to create interest and build suspense. **Example:** Two small and seemingly inconsequential car accidents predict and hint at the upcoming, important wreck in *The Great Gatsby*.

*Imagery* - the use of words to evoke impressions and meanings that are more than just the basic, accepted definitions of the words themselves. **Example:** The quotation, “Get thee to a nunnery,” from *Hamlet* implies that Ophelia must regain her purity and chastity and does not simply mean that she needs to go to a convent.

*Irony* - a perception of inconsistency, sometimes humorous, in which the significance and understanding of a statement or event is changed by its context. **Example:** The firehouse burned down.

- *Dramatic Irony* - the audience or reader knows more about a character’s situation than the character does and knows that the character’s understanding is incorrect. **Example:** In *Medea*, Creon asks, “What atrocities could she commit in one day?” The reader, however, knows Medea will destroy her family and Creon’s by day’s end.
- *Structural Irony* – the use of a naïve hero, whose incorrect perceptions differ from the reader’s correct ones. **Example:** Huck Finn.
- *Verbal Irony* - a discrepancy between what is said and what is really meant; sarcasm. **Example:** A large man whose nickname is “Tiny.”

*Metaphor* - a comparison of two things that are basically dissimilar in which one is described in terms of the other. **Example:** The moon, a haunting lantern, shone through the clouds.

*Mood* - the emotional aspect of the work, which contributes to the feeling the reader gets from the book. **Example:** Gothic novels like *Frankenstein* have a gloomy, dark quality to them, which the author reflects through the depiction of nature, character, and plot.

*Narrator* - the one who tells the story. The narrator must not be confused with “author,” the one who writes the story. If the narrator is a character in the book, the proper term is “first-person narration.” **Example:** *Moby Dick* is narrated by Ishmael, a crewmember. If the narrator is not a character in the book, the correct term is “third-person narration.” **Example:** *Sense and Sensibility*.

*Paradox* - a statement that is self-contradictory on its surface, yet makes a point through the *juxtaposition* of the ideas and words within the paradox. **Examples:** "Noon finally dawned for the remaining, weary soldiers"; "He that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat..."  
-Isaiah 55:1

*Personification* - a figure of speech in which an object, abstract idea, or animal is given human characteristics. **Examples:** The wall did its best to keep out the invaders.

"Because I could not stop for Death,  
He kindly stopped for me."  
-Emily Dickinson

*Protagonist* - the central or main character in a story around whom the plot centers. **Examples:** Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*; David Copperfield in *David Copperfield*.

*Simile* - a comparison between two different things using either *like* or *as*. **Examples:** I am as hungry as a horse. The huge trees broke like twigs during the hurricane.

*Symbol* - an object, person, or place that has a meaning in itself and that also stands for something larger than itself, usually an idea or concept; some concrete thing which represents an abstraction. **Example:** The sea could be symbolic for "the unknown." Since the sea is something that is physical and can be seen by the reader, and also has elements that cannot be understood, it can be used symbolically to stand for the abstraction of "mystery," "obscurity," or "the unknown."

*Theme* - the central or dominant idea behind the story; the most important aspect that emerges from how the book treats its subject. Sometimes theme is easy to see, but, at other times, it may be more difficult. Theme is usually expressed indirectly, as an element the reader must figure out. It is a universal statement about humanity, rather than a simple statement dealing with plot or characters in the story. Themes are generally hinted at through different methods: a phrase or quotation that introduces the novel, a recurring element in the book, or an observation made that is reinforced through plot, dialogue, or characters. It must be emphasized that not all works of literature have themes in them. **Example:** In a story about a man who is diagnosed with cancer and, through medicine and will-power, returns to his former occupation, the theme might be: "Real courage is demonstrated through internal bravery and perseverance." In a poem about a flower that grows, blooms, and dies, the theme might be: "Youth fades, and death comes to all."

# *A Separate Peace*

## QUESTIONS FOR ESSAY OR DISCUSSION

1. How responsible do you think Gene is for Finny's death?
2. Identify these minor characters as individuals and types: Leper, Brinker, Quackenbush, and Mr. Ludsbury.
3. Compare and contrast Finny and Huck Finn.
4. Analyze the point of view in the novel, noting in particular that the events actually take place fifteen years before the novel opens.
5. Discuss human nature and instinct. How do they affect everyday life?
6. Discuss these events in relation to the theme: the Winter Carnival, the mock trial, and Finny's death.
7. Some critics compare Devon in that summer of 1942 to the Garden of Eden. If this is so, what does the tree on the riverbank symbolize, or, to what other tree from the Bible might the riverbank tree be compared? Following through on this analogy, what is the condition of the boys before the experience with the tree, and what is their condition after the experience with the tree?
8. In what sense is this a novel about good and evil? In what sense could this be considered a psychological novel?
9. What is the significance of this title? How does it relate to the narrator's observations in the last chapter, and how do both relate to the novel's major theme?
10. Demonstrate how this novel is an example of the coming-of-age genre. State what Gene is like as a young boy, and identify the personal crisis he goes through that changes him. Then state how he has changed by the novel's end.
11. How would you stage this as a play? Note in particular the setting, lighting, and characterization.
12. In your experience, how realistic do you find the thoughts, feelings, and fears of these boys to be? What, if any, seem true to you? What, if any, do not seem realistic?
13. Write a character sketch of either Phineas or Gene. Include their desires, personalities, feelings for the other, and your own interpretation of them.
14. Explain how World War II affects Gene.
15. Identify the major themes of *A Separate Peace*.

# A Separate Peace

## I. Multiple Choice

1. While visiting Finny's house, Gene decides to retract his confession of guilt when he realizes
  - A. that Finny deserves what he got.
  - B. Phineas will expose him before the rest of the class.
  - C. the confession will hurt Phineas more than the physical hurt he has already suffered.
  - D. that he, Gene, is not really guilty of anything.
  - E. Both A and D
2. When Leper enlists in the ski troops,
  - A. Phineas finally accepts the reality of the war.
  - B. Gene feels compelled to enlist also.
  - C. the boys make up stories about Leper's heroic exploits.
  - D. Mr. Ludsbury reads a poem in honor of Leper's courage.
  - E. Both A and B
3. When Gene visits Leper in Vermont, Gene is chiefly concerned with
  - A. Leper's sanity.
  - B. his own ability to withstand the realities he must shortly face.
  - C. Finny's physical health.
  - D. Finny's emotional health.
  - E. Both C and D
4. According to Gene, wars are caused by
  - A. something ignorant in the human heart.
  - B. the special stupidities of the older generation.
  - C. egomaniacs like Adolf Hitler.
  - D. a lack of understanding between world leaders.
  - E. Both B and D
5. At the infirmary following his accident, Phineas
  - A. still refuses to admit that World War II is real.
  - B. admits that he hates being left out of the war.
  - C. confesses that he is glad that the army has rejected him.
  - D. reveals he's been rejected by all the military services.
  - E. Both B and D



6. Fifteen years after graduating from Devon, Gene looks at the tree, which seems
  - A. as frightening as ever.
  - B. shrunken with age.
  - C. even larger than he remembers.
  - D. to be a symbol of his courage.
  - E. Both A and C
7. Phineas' central belief about sports is that
  - A. nice guys finish last.
  - B. a good sport is a good loser.
  - C. everybody wins in sports.
  - D. sports are less important than scholarship.
  - E. sports build character.
8. When Gene visits him in Vermont, Leper tells Gene that
  - A. Gene is the only person he can trust.
  - B. Gene will never survive basic training.
  - C. Gene is a savage underneath his civilized exterior.
  - D. Gene purposely shook the limb.
  - E. Both C and D
9. The adult characters in this novel, Mr. Brinker and Mr. Ludsbury,
  - A. are good role models for the boys.
  - B. influence the thinking of the boys.
  - C. are sympathetic but ineffective people.
  - D. have little or no positive influence on the boys' thinking.
  - E. are hard, cruel individuals.
10. In preparing Gene for the 1944 Olympics, the boys
  - A. are doing it to impress Mr. Ludsbury.
  - B. are doing it to spite Brinker.
  - C. are making a serious attempt to gain an Olympic berth for Gene.
  - D. are pretending that the war doesn't exist.
  - E. are in over their heads.
11. The title, *A Separate Peace*, is a good example of
  - A. a symbol.
  - B. an allusion.
  - C. a metaphor.
  - D. a flashback.
  - E. irony.

12. In the story, the tree is best seen as an example of
  - A. a symbol.
  - B. an allusion.
  - C. a flashback.
  - D. irony.
  - E. Both B and C
13. A good example of foreshadowing is when
  - A. Leper sees the beaver dam.
  - B. Mr. Brinker says, "Be sure that what you do is right in the long run."
  - C. Gene says, "Nothing endures . . . not even death by violence."
  - D. the boys shovel off the railroad tracks.
  - E. Finny wears his school tie as a belt.
14. Before he dies, Finny
  - A. has forgiven Gene.
  - B. understands that Gene shook the tree limb out of some blind ignorance in his (Gene's) heart.
  - C. tells Gene he can never forgive him.
  - D. writes Gene a letter in which he shows his understanding of the human heart.
  - E. Both A and B
15. The narrator is able to reflect objectively on these events because
  - A. he is a cool, uninvolved individual.
  - B. the death of Finny was a shock to him.
  - C. of the advice he got from Mr. Brinker.
  - D. the events all took place fifteen years earlier.
  - E. Both A and B

**II. Matching: Identify the character described in the statement**

- |            |             |                |
|------------|-------------|----------------|
| A. Brinker | B. Ludsbury | C. Quackenbush |
| D. Leper   | E. Finny    |                |

16. He thinks he is superior to any evil or unpleasant unreality he may confront.
17. He filters out harsh reality and lets in only little pieces at a time.
18. He develops a generalized resentment against an unpleasant evil reality.
19. He strikes out at everything and everyone in an attempt to ward off reality before it can touch him.
20. He ignores reality until he can no longer escape it, then when face to face with it, is devastated by it.

### **III. Essays (answer two)**

1. Prove the following statement: This novel is a good example of the coming-of-age genre. Be sure to mention how Gene is as a young man, what personal crisis he goes through, and how he has changed by the novel's conclusion.
2. A major theme in this novel has to do with the evil that exists in the world and in the human heart and with one young man's ordeal of making peace with this reality. Write a thesis statement to this effect, and then, by referring to comments and incidents from the novel, support your thesis.
3. In analogies, there are usually several ways in which the compared objects are the same or similar. Compare Devon School in the summer of 1942 to the Garden of Eden, and mention several points of comparison. Be sure to include the atmosphere or mood, the tree, the consciousness of Adam and Eve, and the consciousness of the boys.
4. This novel could be interpreted on several levels. It could be viewed as a coming-of-age novel; it could be seen as a novel about good and evil; or it could be seen as a psychological novel about the effects of envy and hate. In one paragraph, point out how this is a novel about good and evil; in a second paragraph, explain how this is a novel about the effects of envy and hate.

# A Separate Peace

## TEST ANSWERS

### I. Multiple Choice

- |      |      |      |       |       |
|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| 1. C | 4. A | 7. C | 10. D | 13. C |
| 2. C | 5. A | 8. E | 11. B | 14. E |
| 3. B | 6. B | 9. D | 12. A | 15. D |

### II. Matching

- |       |       |       |
|-------|-------|-------|
| 16. B | 18. A | 20. D |
| 17. E | 19. C |       |

### III. Potential Essay Answers

1. This novel is a good example of the coming-of-age genre because we first see Gene as an innocent young man who undergoes an ordeal that almost shatters him, but he survives, resolves the crisis, and becomes a stronger and more integrated person.

When the action of the novel starts on page 6, we see Gene as a young, innocent boy challenged to climb and jump off a tree he finds frightening. He meets this challenge, but he comes away feeling resentment and envy for the person who has goaded him into it. This envy and resentment builds as Gene sees Finny getting away with violations of school rules. The ill feeling peaks when he suspects that Finny has an equal resentment of Gene's good grades and, therefore, is trying to pull Gene away from his studies in order to damage those grades. Gene then is shocked to realize that this is not so and that Finny is truly morally superior.

On the tree, Gene cannot control his negative feelings for Finny. From somewhere deep in his heart comes some ignorance that causes him to shake the limb. Afterwards, Gene accepts his action and tries to live with it, but he feels very unsure about his own emotional character. This is brought out vividly when he travels to Vermont to see and to become further confused by Leper.

On the heels of this visit there is the trial, the fall down the stairs, and the subsequent death of Finny. With Finny's death, Gene begins the period of convalescence that he mentions at the novel's outset. While we cannot be sure that the convalescent period lasts the entire fifteen years, we do know that by the time he enters the army, Gene is a stronger, more integrated person, because he tells us that he has killed his enemy at school, and he has no more hate within him.

2. A major theme in this novel is the confrontation with the evil in the world and how this confrontation can make or break an individual. In Gene's case he is able to come to terms with it and survive; others, like Leper, are not as fortunate.

Gene comes to know the evil in the world and in his own heart when he realizes why he shakes the limb that causes Finny to fall. He looks for a way to ease the guilt he feels for his action, and perhaps atone for his evil, by confessing to Finny. But this evil action of Gene's is something Finny cannot face, so Gene tries to do penance for his action — first as a servile assistant crew manager; then later, as a replacement part for Finny's damaged body. Quackenbush tries to spot Gene's handicap, but he cannot because Gene's impairment is a moral one—the knowledge of his own evil action.

After witnessing Leper's disintegration in the face of evil, Gene runs away to save himself; the climax comes with Finny's fall and subsequent death. Gene realizes the evil and hatred in himself have been faced and conquered. He goes off to serve in the army, but he has conquered his enemy—he has reached a separate peace with the world and its evil qualities. While the war will continue, Gene is no longer a part of the battle because he has made a peace with the world and its reality.

3. In the summer of 1942, Devon School is very much like Eden because it is a pleasant, beautiful place, safe and removed from the thoughts of war.

In both of these Edens, however, there is a special tree; it is the tree which represents the knowledge of good and evil. For Adam and Eve, it is an fruit tree; for the Devon boys it is a tall, spike-like tree on a riverbank.

As Adam and Eve are before they take the forbidden fruit, the boys are innocent of the knowledge of good and evil. Just like Adam and Eve, the boys, especially Gene, become aware of the evil in the world and the evil in their own hearts as a result of their interaction with the tree.

4. In moral terms, it is apparent that the novel is about good and evil, especially evil. If one is so inclined, human behavior and negative human feelings can be explained as manifestations of the evil that is in our hearts, specifically, and in the world, generally.

On the other hand, if one chooses to ignore the moral dimension, then the novel can be seen as a psychological story of envy, fear, hate, and their consequences. In the school, fear pervades all; there is also the fear of the future and its dangers. Envy and competition mark the school. Out of the fear and envy grows the hate in Gene's heart that causes him to shake the limb.

# *A Separate Peace*

## **VOCABULARY**

### **Chapters 1 and 2**

deigning — thinking it inappropriate to one's dignity; condescending

droll — amusingly odd

indignant — angered at something unjust or wrong

inveigle — to win over by coaxing and flattery; to tempt

prodigious — extraordinary; huge

ramshackle — rickety; dilapidated

salient — striking or conspicuous

specters — phantom apparitions

tacit — implied

tentative — uncertain; hesitant

transit — a transition or change

### **Chapters 3 and 4**

anarchy — a state of confusion and disorder

cordial — warm and sincere

effulgence — extreme brilliance; splendor

enmity — deep-rooted hatred

gaunt — thin and bony; haggard

haphazard — characterized by mere chance; accidental

insidious — deceitful; sly; treacherous

loping — moving with long bounding strides

venerable — worthy of deep respect and reverence

### **Chapters 5 and 6**

decatalogue — a fundamental set of rules; The Ten Commandments

sinecure — a position or office that requires little work but provides a salary

stupefaction — great astonishment

sultriness — heat and humidity

vindicated — justified; defended

## **Chapters 7 and 8**

abashed — made to feel ashamed or uneasy  
aphorisms — brief statements of principle  
conjugating — joining together  
elite — the best or most skilled members  
idiosyncratic — peculiar, odd  
impinge — to encroach, to trespass  
opulent — great wealth; abundant  
reticent — reluctant; unwilling  
sententiousness — pompous moralizing

## **Chapters 9 and 10**

austerity — plainness; severe simplicity  
desolation — solitude; misery  
enfeebled — deprived of strength  
furlough — a leave of absence  
multifariously — greatly varied; diversely  
presaged — indicated or warned in advance; predicted  
rejoinder — an answer, especially to a reply  
vagaries — whims

## **Chapters 11, 12, and 13**

assimilate — to incorporate, to make part of  
balustrade — a railing  
cogitation — thoughtful consideration  
cohorts — companions or associates  
forlornly — appearing sad or lonely  
impervious — incapable of being affected  
incarnate — embodied in human form; personified  
infantile — immature; childish  
latent — not visible or apparent; hidden  
portliness — stoutness  
undulations — wavelike movements

# *A Separate Peace*

## **Study Guide Teacher's Copy**

### **Chapter 1**

1. A number of times in this chapter, he mentions that “fear” is a major part of his school life. In what way could his school life have been filled with fear?

*Possibly because World War II is facing these students, they may all be feeling fear; but more likely Gene is referring to the fear boys feel in school when striving to be accepted. Perhaps this fear is more acute in a boys' boarding school than in other schools, or perhaps the narrator has a personal reason for feeling fear.*

2. What is implied when he speaks on page 3 of “how far my convalescence had gone”?

*A period of convalescence is a period of recovering from an emotional or physical illness or injury. He suggests that his recovery is an emotional one.*

3. What two specific spots does he seek out to revisit?

*Gene searches for the stairs in the First Academy Building and a specific tree. Both of these obviously play an important part in whatever troubles he is remembering.*

4. What jars the reader in the following statement, and what is implied? “Nothing endures, not a tree, not love, not even a death by violence.” (Pg. 6) What literary term is employed?

*The part about violent death jars the reader because it does not seem to fit with a tree or with love. It suggests that a death by violence occurs and it is going to be significant in the narrator's life. It also implies that friendship, death, and love have disintegrated, just as the tree now seems smaller. The literary term would be either foreshadowing or suspense.*

5. What mood is conveyed in the first five and a half pages, and how is this mood reinforced by the description of the day?

*The mood is thoughtful and sad. The rainy, somewhat bleak autumn day emphasizes the mood.*

6. As the flashback unfolds, how does the mood of the last part of the chapter change?

*It opens on a note of fear as we see Gene's feelings of resentment and fear, but it closes on an upbeat note with Gene and Finny clowning around together.*



7. Who does it appear will be a major character in this story, besides the narrator, and what do we find out about him in this first chapter?

*Phineas, also known as Finny, emerges as the most bold of the boys. He clearly is the leader of this group.*

8. Why does Gene's West Point stride bother Finny?

*It is too military; there is too much sense of regulation and authority involved in it.*

## **Chapter 2**

1. Who is the narrator of this story? How long has he been out of school? Why is this story said to be narrated in flashback? What type of narration is this?

*The narrator, Gene, is a young man in his thirties. The events in the story all take place fifteen or more years before, when he attended the Devon School in New Hampshire, so it is a flashback. Since he is using the pronoun "I," it is a first person narration.*

2. Why does Finny try to win over Mr. Prud'homme?

*Gene says that "if Phineas pressed hard enough," he knew he could get the teacher to respond with "simple, unregulated friendliness between them, and such flows were one of Finny's reasons for living." (Pg. 15) Finny is pushing the rules, knowing his personality would probably win most people over and help him avoid punishment. It is also a time of war, and authority might just be able to be manipulated by the strength of Finny's inherent joy.*

3. Which of Finny's character traits "stun[s] people"? (Pg. 18)

*Finny bluntly states what is sincerely on his mind.*

4. What article of clothing is a symbol of Finny's nonconformity?

*He wears a pink shirt.*

5. What does Gene envy in Finny?

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

6. How does Finny get out of trouble with Mr. Patch-Withers at the tea?

*He explains that wearing his tie as a belt represents part of Devon's responsibility in the war.*

7. In the last two paragraphs on page 21, what are the mixed feelings that Gene expresses?

*He envies Finny and would like to see more excitement, but he is also proud to be Finny's best friend.*

8. What makes Finny such an attractive, likable person?

*He is an open person with a good sense of humor, a boldness of spirit, and a clever turn of mind. Finny is also a fine athlete, a loyal friend, and someone who will push others (and himself) to achieve.*

9. On what dramatic note does this chapter end?

*When Gene loses his balance in the tree, Finny catches Gene and may have saved his life. Even though it is not yet revealed, this incident foreshadows important events revolving around the tree.*

### **Chapter 3**

1. With what realization does this chapter open?

*If Gene almost lost his life, it is because Finny coerced him into climbing the tree in the first place.*

2. How do the rules of blitzball come to be? How does the game reflect on Finny?

*Finny makes up the rules as they play. The game's rules occur spontaneously, they are demandingly athletic, and the name comes from "Blitzkrieg," a small allusion to the war's impact on Finny, an influence Finny refuses to accept.*

3. At the top of page 32, what could we read beneath the surface of Gene's words?

*He really envies Finny, but he does not want to admit it to himself.*

4. Regarding Finny's breaking of the swimming record, why does Gene say, "It made Finny seem too unusual for—not friendship, but too unusual for rivalry"? (Pg. 37)

*Finny's refusal to let anyone know of his record-breaking swim is an extraordinary feat of modesty. He is good and is not going to brag about it; he is nearly perfect.*

5. In the last paragraph, what keeps Gene from responding in kind when Finny says that Gene is his best friend?

*Something holds Gene back; perhaps it has to do with the jealousy he feels over Finny's accomplishments, successes, and friends, and the insecurity Gene feels in their friendship.*

6. What did Gene do to his own disbelief, and why did he do it?

*Every night, Gene has to make the jump from the tree, even though he knows it is dangerous. He does it to save face with Phineas, whom Gene feels emotionally forced to obey.*

## Chapter 4

1. After he flunks his trigonometry test, what conclusion does Gene come to regarding himself and Finny?

*He has come to the conclusion that Finny would envy and resent it if Gene came out first in their class. Gene concludes that they are locked in a deadly rivalry, and he feels that Finny knows it also.*

2. When Gene speaks of Finny's treachery and the hate contained in the world, what treachery and hate is he referring to?

*He thinks Finny is treacherous because he is, in Gene's opinion, trying to ruin Gene's grades. Gene concludes that Finny, beneath the smiles and jokes, really envies and hates him, just as Gene now has convinced himself that he hates and envies Finny.*

3. Why does Gene reverse his opinion, and why does this menace his understanding?

*Gene concludes he is wrong. Finny does not want him to do poorly, but Gene truly feels inferior to Finny now; Finny is much more moral and honest than he is.*

4. Why does Gene agree to forego his studies and venture to the tree?

*He does not want Finny to get the best of him.*

5. How does Gene ensure that he will win the competition in the tree?

*He bounces slightly on the limb, which causes Finny to fall. Gene holds tightly to the trunk, but jumps off the tree after Finny falls.*

## Chapter 5

1. Why do you think Gene puts on Finny's pink shirt?

*While answers may vary, one possible answer is that Gene seeks to relieve his confusion about his own identity. Gene feels guilt, sorrow, and anger, yet loves and admires Finny, so looking like him by wearing his shirt allows Gene to be Phineas.*

2. Does Finny suspect Gene of causing the fall?

*Finny may have an inkling something is wrong because he mentions the shocked expression Gene wore as he (Finny) was falling, but it is not a solid suspicion that the recovering student will bother thinking about. At the beginning of the visit, however, Gene will not admit what the feelings of guilt are. He fumbles, hesitates, and manages to hide the guilt. Later in the conversation, Gene is about to reveal his participation in the fall, but Dr. Stanpole interrupts him.*

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. How does Finny put up a protective shield when he talks to Gene at his home? What does Gene feel?

*He will not allow Gene to accept the blame for the fall. Gene believes that he is hurting Finny more by confessing than by what he did to Finny on the tree.*

## **Chapter 6**

1. For Gene, why has peace left Devon?

*Literally, peace is gone because summer is over; symbolically, it is because Finny is not at Devon and Gene is troubled by guilt. The summer had been filled with bending, breaking, or ignoring the rules. Regular sessions at Devon bring back the rules, restrictions, and teachers.*

2. Find a comparison between the fall and a previous act by Finny.

*The description of Finny standing on the canoe's prow parallels the fall from the tree: "Then, an infinitesimal veering of the canoe, and the line of his body would break, the soaring arms collapse, up shoot an uncontrollable leg, and Phineas would tumble into the water, roaring with rage." (Pg. 66)*

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

*Because Finny has been denied sports as a result of the accident, Gene is substituting for Finny as an act of camaraderie.*

4. What is implied in the following: “Quackenbush was studying me to see if he could detect a limp. But I knew that [he] would never detect my trouble”? (Pg. 69)

*Gene is saying that his injury is not visible because it is not physical.*

5. How does Quackenbush reflect Gene’s inner feelings about himself?

*He tells Gene, “You’re not wanted around here...” (Pg. 71)*

6. How does Gene want to compensate for what has happened to Finny?

*He says he wants “to become a part of Phineas,” meaning he wants to substitute himself for the part Finny has lost. (Pg. 77)*

## **Chapter 7**

1. Why does Gene feel threatened by Brinker?

*Brinker sarcastically accuses Gene of getting rid of Finny in order to have the room to himself.*

2. Find a simile on page 84.

*The snow “gathered there...like noiseless invaders conquering...”*

3. What event accentuates the proximity of the war?

*The boys are asked to shovel the train tracks so the troop train can get through.*

4. In this section, who is the nonconformist? Why?

*Leper does not follow the group, and he looks for a beaver dam instead of shoveling snow.*

5. How does Gene decide that he is going to fit in again?

*He will enlist in the military.*

## **Chapter 8**

1. On his return, what shocks and upsets Finny? Why?

*Hearing that Gene might enlist upsets Finny because Finny needs Gene’s presence.*

2. What literary terms are used in the following excerpt from page 101? What does the last sentence imply?

So the war swept over like a wave at the seashore, gathering power and size as it bore on us, overwhelming in its rush, seemingly inescapable, and then at the last moment eluded by a word from Phineas; I had simply ducked, that was all, and the wave's concentrated power had hurtled harmlessly overhead, no doubt throwing others roughly up on the beach, but leaving me peaceably treading water as before. I did not stop to think that one wave is inevitably followed by another even larger and more powerful, when the tide is coming in.

*The wave imagery is an extended metaphor of war, its consequences, and how the war has affected Gene. The metaphor concludes with a strong element of foreshadowing. The first sentence includes a simile. Inevitably, the war, or something more intimate and personal, will confront them in a larger and stronger way.*

3. What literary term does Finny use to describe winter?

*Finny explains that winter "loves" him. That expression, humanizing a season, is an example of personification.*

4. How does Finny's view of the war reinforce his need to maintain a protective shield?

*He claims "fat old men" have designed the war as a plot. Whether or not this is an ego-defense mechanism is unclear. Phineas, though, momentarily loses his composure when he says that he has "suffered."*

5. Explain the irony in what Finny says about the Olympics on page 109.

*Finny says to Gene, "leave your fantasy life out of this," meaning that Gene's understanding of the war is wrong. The irony is that even Finny most likely could not have competed in the Olympics; the idea of Gene doing so is completely ludicrous.*

6. 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. What shocking decision does Leper make? Why?

*He enlists in the ski troops because he wants to fulfill his duty and stay close to nature. He is, of course, seduced by the recruiter's propaganda and fails to see only negative aspects.*

2. 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.*

3. 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.*

4. In the last sentence on page 128, the phrase “a separate peace” is used. Explain its meaning in the context of that sentence.

*On that afternoon in 1943, they were able to forget about the war. They have, albeit illusorily, reached their own separate peace. In Hemingway’s A Farewell To Arms the protagonist speaks of the separate peace he makes with the enemy when he deserts to Switzerland, so this is also an allusion to that novel.*

5. What event brings an abrupt end to the Carnival?

*Leper’s telegram arrives, in which he says he escaped and needs help.*

## **Chapter 10**

1. Why does Leper feel threatened in the military?

*The service certainly is not what Leper expected. In confronting the rigors and hardships of military training, Leper cracks and begins to hallucinate.*

2. When Gene sees Leper in Vermont, how does Leper negatively characterize him?

*He says to Gene, “You always were a savage underneath.” (Pg. 137)*

3. What does Gene do that seems to prove Leper’s charge against him?

*Gene pushes over Leper’s chair, with him in it.*

4. What change is evident in Leper?

*He is volatile; his timid demeanor has given way to moments of bitterness.*

5. At the end of this chapter, Gene runs off and leaves Leper babbling alone in the field. Why is Gene so upset?

*He realizes that what happened to Leper in the army could happen to anyone, including himself.*

6. Explain Gene's reactions to Leper's accusation.

*Gene knows the charge of deliberately hurting Finny is accurate, but does not believe anyone else knows it. Previously, he grudgingly accepted Finny's insistence that Gene was not at fault. Psychologically, he was rationalizing that Finny was correct. However, when Leper confronts Gene with the truth, it is so unpalatable that he lashes out at Leper.*

## **Chapter 11**

1. What comment reveals Finny has finally acknowledged the reality of the war?

*He says sarcastically, "Sure. There isn't any war." (Pg. 150)*

2. On page 152, what is Brinker suggesting?

*Gene has something to hide regarding Finny's accident.*

3. What event precipitates the climax? Why?

*Brinker comes to get Gene and Finny during the night. There is going to be a trial.*

4. Who gives the testimony that condemns Gene?

*Leper gives an eyewitness account that reveals Gene was on the limb with Finny. Leper says that the two moved up and down like pistons.*

5. As he walks from the room after Leper's testimony, how is Finny feeling? Why?

*He is devastated. He realizes that Gene did shake the tree limb on purpose.*

6. On what note does this chapter end? How does the author describe the event?

*Finny falls down the stairs. The building contains classrooms for learning; the boys will learn the truth about Finny's fall. The assembly hall has poor acoustics, which stands for the words that have been unheard. The situation has a "dreamlike" quality about it. The seniors are dressed in black, and the windows this night had a "deadened look about them, a look of being blind or deaf," which deepens the gloom. (Pg. 158)*



7. Explain the symbolism of holding the trial in “First Building.”

*The author does his best to describe the fall dispassionately. Knowles removes himself, the reader, and, as much as possible, Finny, from what happens. Consequently the style is detached, almost journalistic, and unemotional. It is more dramatic this way, more surprising when compared to Finny’s falling from the tree, which is direct, tactile, and visual. Students should note that “clumsy” and “clumsily” are the descriptive words used to describe Finny in both events.*

## **Chapter 12**

1. What is Gene’s emotional state as he sees the doctor and nurse work on Finny?

*Gene is confused and overly emotional. He laughs and cries simultaneously. (Pg. 175)*

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

*Finny rejects him, even tries to attack him, but with the leg in traction, it is impossible.*

3. Find the irony in the last paragraph on page 177.

*“The old trees...were intensely meaningful, with a message that was very pressing and entirely indecipherable.” This sentence could also be described as paradoxical.*

4. Why has Finny been denying there is a war on?

*He very much wanted to have a part in it but could not.*

5. What does Gene say caused him to shake the tree limb? What does Finny ask? What does this encounter say about Finny?

*Gene says, “It was just some ignorance inside me, some crazy thing inside me, something blind...” Finny asks if a “blind impulse” caused Gene to “jounce” the tree. Finny is shown to be a true friend, unwilling to have Gene suffer. He believes that Gene did not have “some kind of hate you’ve felt all along.” (Pg. 183) That, though, is precisely why Gene shook the tree branch.*

6. How does Gene react at Finny’s funeral?

*He does not cry; he feels that a part of himself has died and a person cannot cry at his or her own funeral.*

## Chapter 13

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

*Army troops are being stationed there.*

2. On page 193 Gene says that, “wars are made...by something ignorant in the human heart.” What, from Chapter 12, does that line seem to echo?

*Gene says to Finny, “It was just some ignorance inside me [that made me shake the tree].” It appears that the ignorance in the heart that causes wars is the same ignorance that causes Gene to hurt his friend and humans in general to wound those they love.*

3. On page 194 Gene sums up Finny’s special way of viewing life, of facing reality. What is Finny’s method?

*He had a way of managing reality in which he let in at one time only as much as he could handle: “letting its [the world’s] rocklike facts sift through and be accepted only a little at a time, only as much as he could assimilate without a sense of chaos and loss.”*

4. What happens to everyone else who cannot do what Finny could?

*“...at some point everyone else found something in themselves pitted violently against something in the world around them. ...When they began to feel...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.” (Pg. 194)*

5. In the next paragraph, what is it that saves Finny and makes him, apparently, different from everyone else?

*He had a serene capacity for affection.*

6. On page 195 Gene says, “I was ready for the war, now that I no longer had any hatred to contribute to it.” Then on page 196 he says, “I never developed an intense level of hatred for the enemy. Because my war ended before I ever put on a uniform; I was on active duty all my time at school; I killed my enemy there.” What is Gene’s enemy, and presumably, everyone else’s enemy?

*Gene’s enemy, everyone’s enemy, is the ignorance in the heart that causes us to feel hate, envy, and spite. This is the enemy that Gene kills at Devon.*

7. In the next paragraph, Gene mentions the sighting of the enemy by others. Here he seems to equate the enemy with reality—specifically, with the loss of innocence when a young person comes face to face with the ugliness and evil in the world. How does this sighting affect the following:

Mr. Ludsbury — *He assumes a superior air and treats everyone else as an inferior.*

Quackenbush — *He strikes out at everything and everyone.*

Brinker — *He develops a general resentment against it.*

Leper — *When he comes face to face with it, it overwhelms him, and he just gives up.*

Phineas — *He does not lose his innocence and harmony in the face of reality, and he is the only one.*

# *A Separate Peace*

## **Study Guide Student Copy**

### **Chapter 1**

1. A number of times in this chapter, he mentions that “fear” is a major part of his school life. In what way could his school life have been filled with fear?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What is implied when he speaks on page 3 of “how far my convalescence had gone”?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What two specific spots does he seek out to revisit?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What jars the reader in the following statement, and what is implied? “Nothing endures, not a tree, not love, not even a death by violence.” (Pg. 6) What literary term is employed?

5. What mood is conveyed in the first five and a half pages, and how is this mood reinforced by the description of the day?
6. As the flashback unfolds, how does the mood of the last part of the chapter change?
7. Who does it appear will be a major character in this story, besides the narrator, and what do we find out about him in this first chapter?
8. Why does Gene's West Point stride bother Finny?

## Chapter 2

1. Who is the narrator of this story? How long has he been out of school? Why is this story said to be narrated in flashback? What type of narration is this?
2. Why does Finny try to win over Mr. Prud'homme?
3. Which of Finny's character traits "stun[s] people"? (Pg. 18)
4. What article of clothing is a symbol of Finny's nonconformity?
5. What does Gene envy in Finny?

6. How does Finny get out of trouble with Mr. Patch-Withers at the tea?
7. In the last two paragraphs on page 21, what are the mixed feelings that Gene expresses?
8. What makes Finny such an attractive, likable person?
9. On what dramatic note does this chapter end?

### **Chapter 3**

1. With what realization does this chapter open?
2. How do the rules of blitzball come to be? How does the game reflect on Finny?
3. At the top of page 32, what could we read beneath the surface of Gene's words?
4. Regarding Finny's breaking of the swimming record, why does Gene say, "It made Finny seem too unusual for—not friendship, but too unusual for rivalry"? (Pg. 37)
5. In the last paragraph, what keeps Gene from responding in kind when Finny says that Gene is his best friend?
6. What did Gene do to his own disbelief, and why did he do it?



## **Chapter 4**

1. After he flunks his trigonometry test, what conclusion does Gene come to regarding himself and Finny?
2. When Gene speaks of Finny's treachery and the hate contained in the world, what treachery and hate is he referring to?
3. Why does Gene reverse his opinion, and why does this menace his understanding?
4. Why does Gene agree to forego his studies and venture to the tree?
5. How does Gene ensure that he will win the competition in the tree?

## **Chapter 5**

1. Why do you think Gene puts on Finny's pink shirt?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Does Finny suspect Gene of causing the fall?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What revelation does Gene have in the hospital room?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
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Quackenbush —

Brinker —

Leper —

Phineas —

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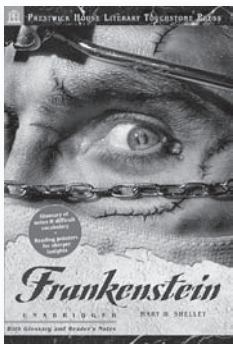
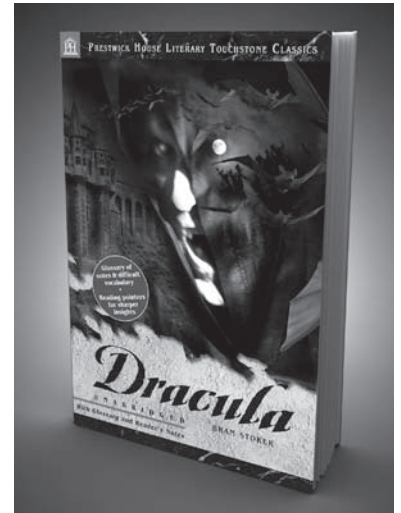
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<input type="checkbox"/> Check or Money Order Enclosed		<input type="checkbox"/> Purchase Order Enclosed <small>We accept purchase orders and authorized orders charged to institutions. Personal orders not on a credit card must be accompanied by a check.</small>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Visa <input type="checkbox"/> MasterCard <input type="checkbox"/> Discover Card <input type="checkbox"/> American Express			
Signature			
Telephone #		Exp. Date	
Credit Card #			
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Subtotal	\$
Shipping 12% S&H (\$6.00 minimum)	\$
Total	\$

For orders of \$50.00 or less, please add \$6.00 for shipping and handling charges. For orders from \$50.01 to \$799.99 add 12% For orders of \$800.00 and more, add 10%

Most orders are shipped FedEx and you can expect delivery within 7-10 working days. Items in stock are usually shipped within one working day of receiving your order.

for expedited delivery ask about the following options:

- Overnight Air
- 2nd day air
- 3 Day Select

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