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Study Guide

for

**A Separate
Peace**

by John Knowles



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New York, New York Columbus, Ohio Woodland Hills, California Peoria, Illinois

Meet John Knowles



All of my books are based on places, places I know very well and feel very deeply about. I begin with that place and then the characters and the plot emerge from it. . . A Separate Peace began with a playing field at Exeter Academy.

—John Knowles

Author John Knowles was born in 1926 in Fairmont, West Virginia, deep in the heart of coal-mining country. Although some of his works reflect his West Virginia roots—in *A Vein of Riches*, for example, he tells the story of an early twentieth-century miners strike—Knowles’s best-known works are set in New England. His father and mother were originally from Massachusetts, and the family often spent summer vacations there.

Knowles’s love of New England stems from his experiences as a student. At the age of fifteen, he applied to an elite New Hampshire boarding school, Phillips Exeter Academy. Much to his surprise, he was admitted. At first, Knowles felt out of place. He has said that his classmates seemed “too eastern for me, too Yankee, too tough,” and that he found the New Hampshire winter “breathtakingly cold.” Moreover, his grades were not the best. He admits:

It quickly seemed probable that I would flunk out. . . . Then somehow or other I

knuckled down, learned by myself how to study, discovered I had a brain which had more potential than a knack for writing, and by the end of that first term, I was passing every course comfortably. . . . Meanwhile, I was falling in love with Exeter.

Knowles’s affection for the school is reflected in his first—and most famous—novel, *A Separate Peace*.

Shortly after Knowles entered Exeter, the United States declared war on Japan and entered World War II. Like other young men of the time, Knowles went into the military after he graduated from high school. He trained to be a pilot in the United States Army Air Force aviation program, but when the war ended he decided to go back to school. He attended Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, where he received a bachelor’s degree in 1949.

During his twenties, Knowles traveled and earned a living as a freelance writer. He wrote the stories “Phineas” and “A Turn in the Sun,” which were to form the core of *A Separate Peace*. Knowles then took a job as an associate editor of a travel magazine. Early each morning, before going to the office, he worked on *A Separate Peace*.

The novel, which was first published in England in 1959 and the United States in 1960, proved to be a success—so much that Knowles was able to resign from his job and devote his time to writing and to travel. Since then, Knowles has written a variety of novels, a short story collection, a travel book, and several essays. None of these works has been as successful as *A Separate Peace*, but the fact does not seem to trouble him. He says that because he does not write with a particular audience in mind he is delighted that he has found any audience at all. Knowles may be too modest. He is likely to continue to have an audience for many years to come. Today, Knowles lives in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where he still writes.

Introducing the Novel

To read A Separate Peace is to discover a novel which is completely satisfactory and yet so provocative that the reader wishes immediately to return to it.

—James Ellis, “A Separate Peace: The Fall from Innocence”

It is unusual for an author’s first novel to earn awards and a wide audience, yet John Knowles’s *A Separate Peace* did just that. In 1960, the year that the novel was first published in the United States, the book won both the William Faulkner Award and the Richard and Hinda Rosenthal Foundation Award. About ten years later, the story was adapted for the screen and made into a movie. Today, *A Separate Peace* is standard reading in many high schools. Why is the novel so popular and so well respected?

One reason may be the time in which the novel is set. The action takes place during the early years of America’s involvement in World War II, a period in which many teenaged boys faced a difficult decision: Should they enlist or wait to be drafted into the armed services? As a teenager during World War II, Knowles himself faced this decision, and he drew on memories of this experience and others to portray what it is like to be a young man during wartime. Many critics consider the portrayal to be sensitive and convincing. In the words of Warren Miller:

Mr. Knowles has something to say about youth and war that few contemporary novelists have attempted to say and none has said better.

Although World War II affects the lives of the characters in the story, it would be wrong to call *A Separate Peace* a novel about the war. The story does not take place overseas, in the thick of battle, but rather in the United States, at a fictional New England boys’ school named Devon. Knowles based Devon School on Phillips Exeter Academy, the school he attended as a teenager. The author affectionately recalls a summer that he spent there:

The great trees, the thick clinging ivy, the expanses of playing fields, the winding black-water river, the pure air all began to sort of

intoxicate me. Classroom windows were open; the aroma of flowers and shrubbery floated in. We were in shirt sleeves; the masters [teachers] were relaxed. Studies now were easy for me. The summer of 1943 at Exeter was as happy a time as I ever had in my life.

Similarly, Knowles based many of the characters on former classmates of his. He has said that Phineas (“Finny”) was, in part, inspired by David Hackett, a classmate who went on to play hockey on a U.S. Olympic team. The inspiration for Brinker Hadley was Gore Vidal, an Exeter graduate who today is a noted author. Knowles loosely based the central character, Gene Forrester, on himself. In fact, there is a little bit of Knowles in all the characters. The author says:

It is true that I put part of myself into all four main characters in A Separate Peace: Phineas, Gene, Leper, and Brinker. In addition to using [Gore Vidal] for Brinker, and myself for Gene, I had to, as most novelists do, draw from myself for everyone in the book.

As summer turns into fall, the characters experience conflicts that many readers have found to be absorbing and true to life. If the conflicts seem real, it is because they represent the kinds of inner struggles that everyone experiences. Like real people, the characters discover that the most challenging battles in life are often the battles within.

THE TIME AND PLACE

The central story of *A Separate Peace* begins less than a year after the December 7, 1941, Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, in Hawaii. Shortly after the surprise bombing, which claimed the lives of more than 2,000 U.S. soldiers, the United States entered World War II.

During the 1930s, when international conflicts began to erupt in Asia, most Americans did not want the United States to become involved in conflicts overseas. As other conflicts erupted and spread, many Americans sympathized with the plight of longtime allies, and their fight against Nazi Germany. However, recalling the pain and horror of World War I, most Americans still

wanted the United States to remain neutral. With the bombing of Pearl Harbor, however, the opinion of the American public almost immediately shifted to favor U.S. involvement, and the people quickly readied themselves for war.

In 1940, when the U.S. government instituted the first peacetime draft in the nation's history, all men aged twenty-one through thirty-five were required to register for military service. After the United States entered the war, the registration age was lowered to eighteen. Many young men did not wait to be drafted; patriotism was at an all-time high, and teenagers often felt that it was their duty to enlist.

The war brought changes to the American economy and lifestyle. The military needed weapons, and this need created jobs. The American people did all they could to aid the country. They attended rallies, bought war bonds, conserved fuel and rubber by car pooling, and planted "victory gardens" to supplement the sometimes meager supply of fresh fruits and vegetables. Americans tolerated the sometimes frustrating lack of everyday items such as shoes, but found other shortages considerably less tolerable. For

example, in a popular song of the time, "They're Either Too Young or Too Old," a woman laments the shortage of eligible men.

John Knowles, in an article about his school days, describes how the "man shortage" at home, in the States, changed the makeup of the Exeter faculty:

All the faculty . . . were between fifty and seventy years old when I first entered Exeter in the fall of 1942. I had a young French teacher and one other young teacher but they had left for the war by midyear. All of the faculty on the campus were so much older than we were, that we had no connection with them. They were just too old, too tired, and too busy. One of the reasons that [the main characters in A Separate Peace] develop this intensely close friendship is that they had no one to relate to; no older person to pattern themselves on, to look and talk things over with. . . .

In short, American life, as it had been, changed "for the duration"—a phrase that meant "until the end of the war." To the characters in *A Separate Peace*, "for the duration" seems very long indeed.

Did You Know?

Boarding school is less familiar in the United States than in Europe, where it began. Boarding schools are often called preparatory schools because they are intended to prepare students for some form of higher education.

In the United States, most preparatory school students enroll at age fourteen. The course of study is often challenging, and most students eventually go on to college.

Many boarding schools have their own teaching philosophies. Phillips Exeter Academy uses what it calls the "Harkness Plan," in which twelve students work around an oval table in each classroom. This is

intended to encourage collaboration and the sharing of ideas. Exeter and many other preparatory schools also encourage students to pursue knowledge on their own.

Some parents worry that boarding school students face too much around-the-clock pressure and miss out on the opportunity to spend time with their families. Students live in a competitive environment, and must deal with peer pressure that other students can leave behind at the end of a day. Those who prefer boarding school say that students thrive in small classes, get more involved in sports and activities, and learn at a young age how to get along with a variety of people.

Before You Read

A Separate Peace Chapters 1–5

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Does competition bring out the best or the worst in people?

Think-Pair-Share

With a classmate, list some of the pros and cons of competition. Considering your list, do you think competition is healthy or unhealthy?

Setting a Purpose

Read to see how competitiveness affects a friendship between two teenagers.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

Shifting backward in time is a literary device called a **flashback**. Writers use flashbacks to achieve different purposes. For example, an author might flash back to a character's past in order to provide background information or to help readers see the connection between a character's past experiences and current thoughts, feelings, and behavior. As you read *A Separate Peace*, think about the functions of the flashback in the story.

Getting to Know Characters

A Separate Peace has a **first-person narrator**—one who is a character in the novel as well as the storyteller, or “voice” that describes what happens. In general, this narrative point of view shortens the psychological distance between the storyteller and readers, creating the illusion that the narrator is speaking directly to them, friend to friends.

Like real human beings, first-person narrators may be subject to errors in judgment. They may misinterpret the meaning of events, misunderstand other characters' motivations, and lack the self-insight necessary to understand their own motivations. When you read a first-person narrative, be alert to the narrator's limitations. Verify the accuracy of the narrator's judgments by paying close attention to how the characters interact with the narrator and each other, to what the characters say about the narrator and each other, and to what the characters do.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

anarchy [an'ər kē] *n.* disorder; absence of rules

enfeebled [en fē' bəld] *adj.* weakened; depleted

indulgent [in dul'jənt] *adj.* permissive

inure [in yoor'] *v.* to become used to something unpleasant

inveigle [in vā'gəl] *v.* to entice; to trick into something

nondescript [non'di skript'] *adj.* uninteresting; drab

sedate [si dāt'] *adj.* calm; serene

tacit [tas'it] *adj.* unspoken

Active Reading

A Separate Peace Chapters 1-5

The relationship between Finny and Gene is at the heart of *A Separate Peace*. Gene tells the reader about Finny's attitudes and comments on them. As you read, take notes, in the boxes below, on Finny's ideas about sports, studies, rules, and life in general. Also record Gene's comments on those attitudes and the effect the attitudes have on him.

Sports	Finny a natural athlete, leader, and organizer; assumes he will win and does
	Gene

Studies	Finny
	Gene

Rules	Finny
	Gene

Outlook on life	Finny
	Gene

Responding

***A Separate Peace* Chapters 1–5**

Personal Response

If you could talk to Gene, what would you say to him?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. At what time of year does Gene return to Devon to visit? What atmosphere, or mood, is created by setting the story during this season? What do Gene's descriptions of the season suggest about his state of mind?

2. Describe Finny's relationship with his teachers. What does the teachers' attitude toward Finny suggest about his personality?

3. Gene believes blitzball is a perfect game for Finny. Explain how the game is played. How do the rules of the game and the skills needed to play it reflect Finny's character?

4. Describe the awards Finny has won. What record does he break? What do the awards and his refusal to make his accomplishment public suggest about him?

5. After the overnight trip to the beach, what does Gene decide Finny is trying to do to him? What leads Gene to this conclusion? How does Gene feel when he realizes he is wrong?

Responding

A Separate Peace Chapters 1–5

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

6. Evaluate Finny's response to his injury and Gene's revelation. Is the response believable? Is it consistent with Finny's previous attitudes and behavior? Support your opinions with evidence from the novel.

7. How might Gene answer the **Focus Activity** question? How might Finny? After reading about them, would you change your answer to the **Focus Activity** question? Why or why not?

Literature and Writing

A Complicated Friendship

Review your **Active Reading** chart. Then write an analysis of Gene and Finny's friendship as it was before Finny's fall. What conflicting feelings does Gene have about Finny? Which person in the friendship, in your opinion, is more emotionally mature? Support your ideas with details from the text.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Was jouncing the limb a planned, conscious decision on Gene's part or an impulsive act? In your group, examine the dialogue and the events that occur just before and after the fall. After examining this information, debate Finny's accident. Why might Gene have wanted to see Finny fall? How does Gene feel immediately afterward, and why might he feel this way? Why does Gene later wear Finny's clothing? Use details from the novel to support your conclusions.

Learning for Life

The novel provides Gene's perspective on characters and events. To understand what other characters think, observe what they say and do. Imagine that Finny has been asked by school officials to help them write an accident report about his fall. Write the report based on Finny's perceptions of what happened. How would he explain his reason for being in the tree? how and why he fell?



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

A Separate Peace Chapters 6–10

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Are you eager to leave your teenage years behind you?

Journal

In your journal, write about your feelings toward growing older and experiencing change. What experiences do you hope to have as an adult? What might you miss most about being young?

Setting a Purpose

Read to learn how Gene and the other students feel about becoming adults.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

The Olympics are intended to provide a way for athletes of all countries to come together peacefully and demonstrate their skills. The modern Olympic games were first held in 1896 and every four years subsequently for a time, except in 1916, during World War I, and 1940 and 1944, during World War II. More recently, the games have been held every two years, with the summer Olympics and the winter Olympics alternating.

The Home Front

Although the battles of World War II were fought overseas, the war touched the lives of Americans “back home” in the states. To ensure that the armed forces had adequate supplies of fuel, food, and clothing, the government instituted a rationing system that limited civilian access to gasoline, meat, shoes, cotton clothing, and other goods. To urge Americans to conserve, radio personalities repeated slogans such as “Use it up! Wear it out! Make it do!” In special movie ads, film stars reminded Americans to do their part and invest in war bonds—interest-bearing loans to the government that helped pay for the war. Women dropped off used hosiery in collection boxes labeled “Uncle Sam needs your discarded silk and nylon stockings for gun powder bags. Please launder and leave here.” Children collected scrap metal, rubber, and newspapers, donating them to “the national defense.” Many Americans had a family member, classmate, sweetheart, or neighbor serving in the armed forces, and the reality that loved ones might be killed in battle united Americans in a common cause.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

extrovert [eks' trə vurt'] *n.* outgoing person who enjoys the company of other people

funereal [fū nēr' ē əl] *adj.* solemn as befitting a funeral

gullible [gul' ə bəl] *adj.* easily tricked; naive

idiosyncratic [id' ē ə sing krat' ik] *adj.* peculiar; eccentric

implausibility [im plō zə bəl' ə tē] *n.* unlikeliness; unbelievability

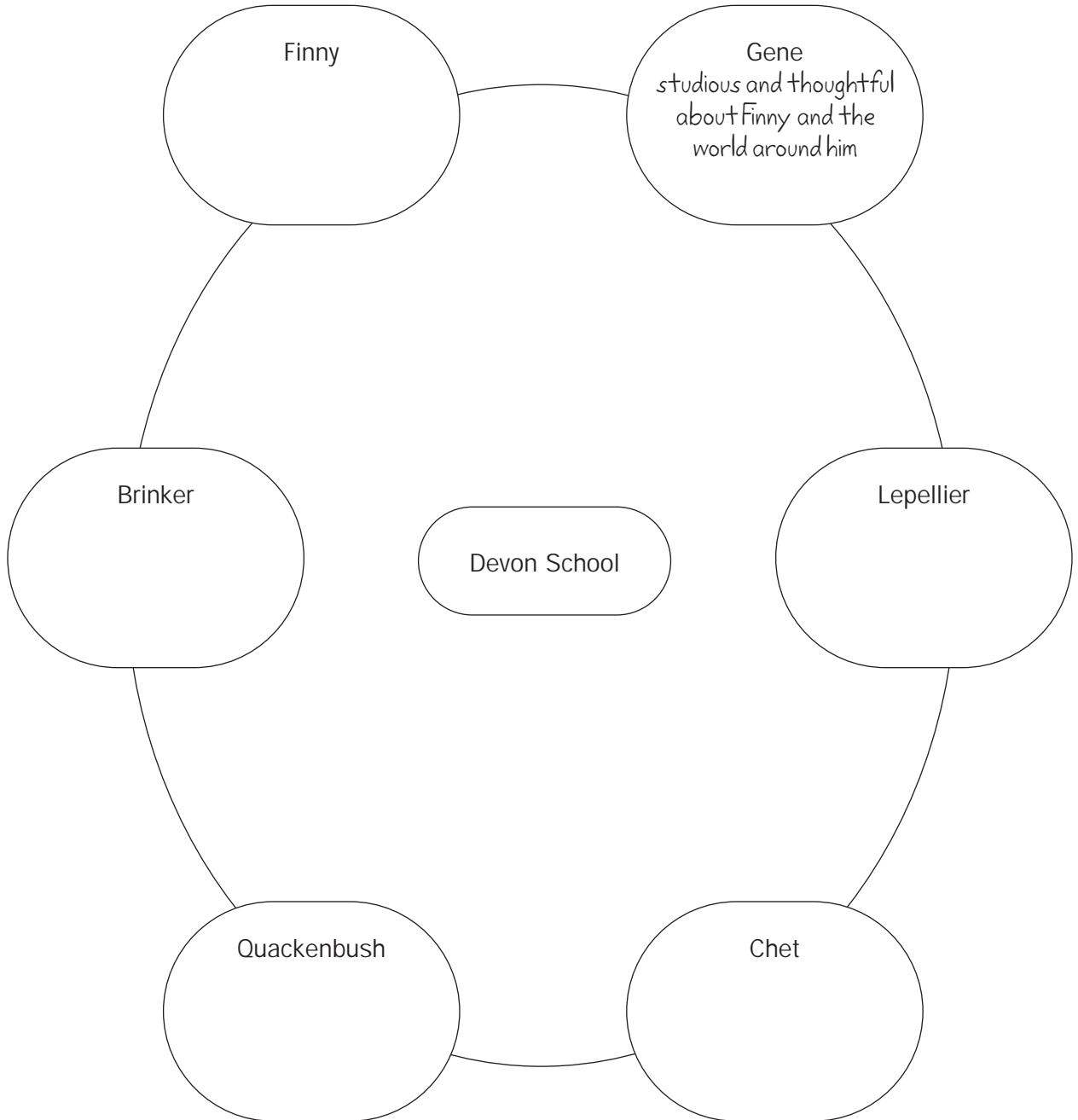
sinecure [sī' nə kyoor'] *n.* position, usually salaried, that requires little or no work

sultriness [sul' trē nis] *n.* humidity; heat

Active Reading

A Separate Peace Chapters 6–10

As you read more about Devon School, keep track of the traits of the important characters. Pay attention to identifying characteristics or qualities that help define each person. Summarize your ideas in a few words; then jot them in each circle.



Responding

A Separate Peace Chapters 6–10

Personal Response

How did Gene deal with his friendship with Finny after the accident? Would you have done anything differently? Why or why not?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What does Gene do when Quackenbush accuses him of being maimed? What motivates Gene to respond this way? In what sense might Gene be maimed?

2. Contrast the mood at Devon during the summer session and fall session. Identify at least three factors that might account for this change in mood.

3. What is Finny's theory about the war? How might his injury influence his feelings toward the war?

4. Why is it surprising that Elwin (Leper) Lepellier is the first Devon boy to enlist? In what ways is he different from the other boys who talk of enlisting?

Responding

A Separate Peace Chapters 6–10

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

5. In this section, what details does the author use to show the ways in which war is changing the atmosphere at Devon?

6. Review your response to the **Focus Activity**. How do you think the students in the novel would answer the question? In your opinion, do most of the students have a clear idea about what life as a soldier will be like? Explain.

Literature and Writing

Analyzing Character

In his note to Gene, Leper pleads, “I have escaped and need help. . . .” Why is Gene, who is on the brink of adulthood, unable and unwilling to feel sorry for Leper? What might Gene not wish to hear? In a paragraph, evaluate Gene’s response to Leper’s breakdown, and explain what the response suggests about Gene. Be sure to support your opinions with examples from the text.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Finny organizes his own version of the Olympic games as part of his Devon Winter Carnival. After finishing a decathlon, Gene says, “It wasn’t the cider which made me surpass myself, it was this liberation we had torn from the gray encroachments of 1943, the escape we had concocted, this afternoon of momentary, illusory, special and separate peace.” In your group discuss what Gene means in this passage. What is the “separate peace” that Gene is describing, and how do the students achieve it on this day? At this point, what does the phrase “a separate peace” mean to you and to the novel? Share your opinions with others in your class.

Performing

With a partner, prepare a dramatic reading of one of the following scenes:

- *Leper’s discussion with Gene in Vermont* Try to convey how the once-gentle skier has changed. The person who reads Gene’s part should reveal Gene’s frustration with Leper’s situation. Use all or part of the segment that begins a few pages from the end of Chapter 10, when Leper says, “I don’t really hate Brinker . . .” and end at the point at which Gene says, “Shut up!”
- *Brinker Hadley’s first confrontation with Gene over Finny’s injury* The person who reads Brinker’s part should decide how serious the confrontation should be. The person who reads Gene’s part should use body language or tone of voice to reveal Gene’s guilt and discomfort.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

A Separate Peace Chapters 11–13

FOCUS ACTIVITY

What does it mean to be at peace with yourself? What kinds of things interfere with peace of mind?

Quickwrite

Jot down your definition of what it means to be at peace. Then list obstacles that often stand in the way of peace of mind.

Setting a Purpose

Read to discover whether Gene and Finny find “a separate peace.”

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

Finny complains about world leaders, saying that they are trying to deceive the public. Two of the “fat old men” Finny complains about are President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Great Britain’s Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Although Finny pokes fun at the president, Roosevelt was, in reality, one of the nation’s most popular presidents. In fact, he was elected four times. First taking office during the Great Depression of the 1930s, Roosevelt proposed the creation of many government agencies and programs that we take for granted today. These include social security and unemployment benefits. His regular radio messages to the American people, called “fireside chats,” lifted spirits throughout World War II. Similarly, Winston Churchill’s speeches inspired Britain during the darkest days of the war. Churchill’s constant appeals to the United States to join the war influenced U.S. policy.

Climax and Resolution

In a novel or short story, the **climax** is the turning point, the point at which the central conflict comes to a head. Most of the events in a story lead to the climax. A **resolution** is the point at which the central conflict is resolved. As you read Chapters 11 through 13, look for the climax, which will suddenly change the course of events for the main characters. Then look for a resolution. Remember that characters do not necessarily find the answers to all of their problems in the resolution. As you read, look for the climax and try to predict what the resolution might be.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

forlornly [fôr lôrn'lē] *adv.* miserably; desolately

impervious [im pur've əs] *adj.* resistant; inaccessible

incarnate [in kär'nit] *adj.* in the flesh

incomprehensible [in'kom pri hen'sə bəl] *adj.* not understandable; mysterious

incongruity [in'kən grōō'ə tē] *n.* inconsistency; disharmony

latent [lāt'ənt] *adj.* potential; inactive

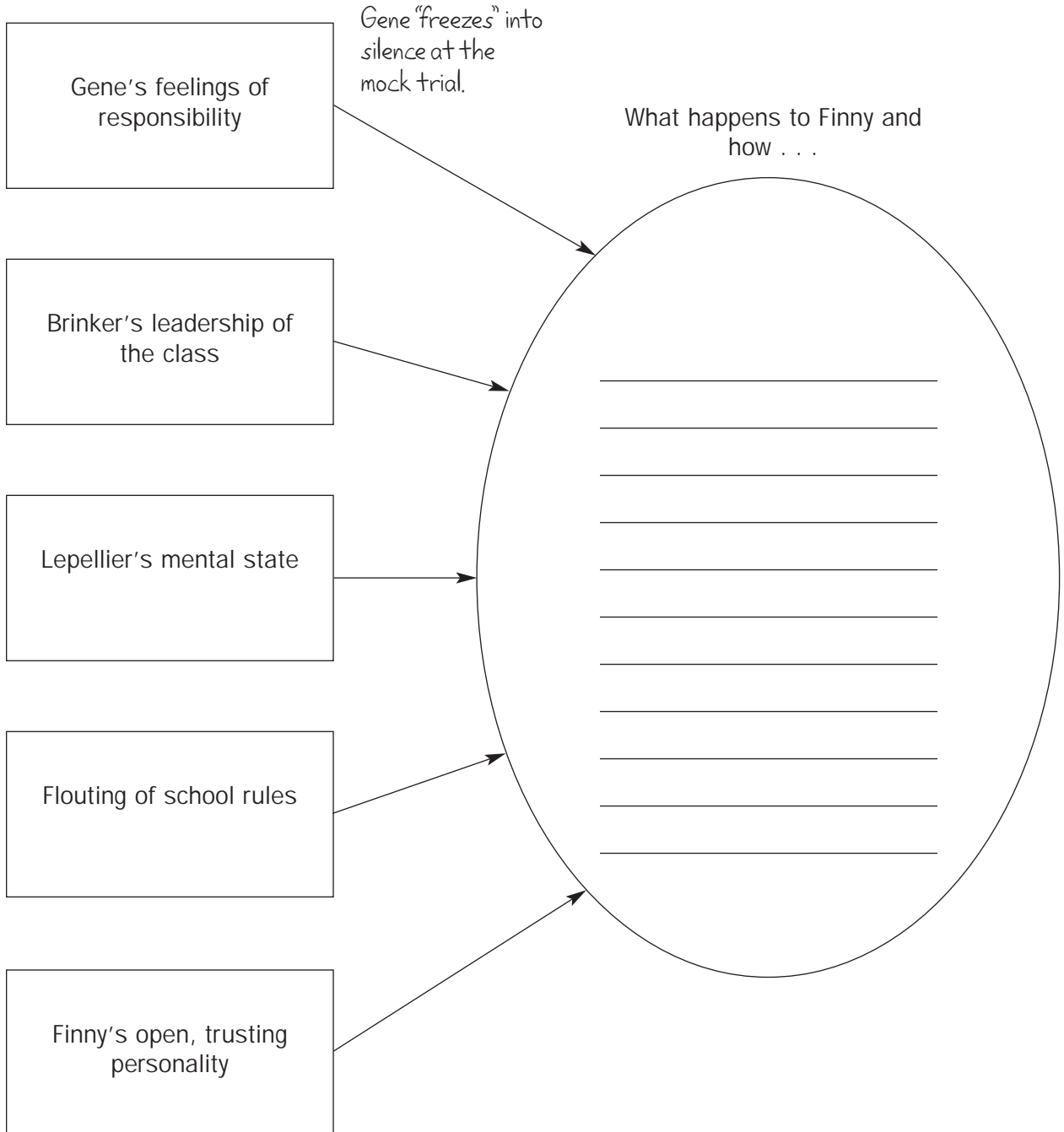
timbre [tim'bər] *n.* the quality of a sound; tone

Active Reading

A Separate Peace Chapters 11-13

As the novel moves toward its climax, several aspects of the story come together: Gene's feelings of responsibility, Brinker's role as a leader, Leper's fragile mental state, disregard for rules in pursuit of fun, and Finny's trusting nature. As you read, make note of how each of these elements plays a role in the outcome of the final section. In the spaces below, take notes on what happens to Finny and why it happens.

The Novel's Climax



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Responding

A Separate Peace Chapters 11–13

Personal Response

How did you feel about what happened to Finny? Describe the emotions you experienced as you read.

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. How does Brinker get Gene and Finny to attend the mock trial? In your opinion, why is Brinker so determined to investigate the incident?

2. What is Leper's description of the accident? Why is his testimony so upsetting to Finny?

3. What does Gene mean when he says, "Phineas, you wouldn't be any good in the war, even if nothing had happened to your leg." What qualities make Finny a poor candidate for military service?

Responding

A Separate Peace Chapters 11–13

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. Do you think Brinker's mock trial was a good idea? Why or why not?

5. What understanding do Finny and Gene reach about the incident in the tree? Does their explanation of what happened satisfy you? Why or why not?

6. Do you blame Gene for Finny's death? Why or why not?

Literature and Writing

Character Analysis

On a separate sheet of paper, write a character analysis that explores how Gene grows and changes during the course of the novel. Review your response to the **Focus Activity** on page 20. Do you believe that Gene has found peace with himself at the end of the novel? Why or why not? Support your opinions with quotations and other evidence from the novel.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

With a small group of classmates, review the opening scene of the novel, in which Gene, now an adult, visits Devon. What places does he most want to see again? Why? After reading the novel, what do you think the real purpose of the visit is? Does Gene's visit support the idea that he has found inner peace or contradict it? Write your response on a separate sheet of paper.

History Connection

Many scholars believe the treaty that ended World War I sowed the seeds for World War II. Consult books or on-line resources to learn more about the Treaty of Versailles. Find out what the terms of the peace agreement were and why they might have sparked more conflict. To perform your search, use key words and phrases such as Versailles Treaty, World War I, and League of Nations. Present a brief report to the class in which you answer the following question: Is Brinker's claim that his father's generation caused the war justified?



Save your work for your portfolio.

Responding

A Separate Peace

Personal Response

In your opinion, what lessons are to be learned from reading *A Separate Peace*? What will you remember most about the novel?

Writing About the Novel

At the end of the novel Gene says, “. . . my war ended before I even put on a uniform; I was on active duty all my time at school; I killed my enemy there.” An essay in *Time* magazine about *A Separate Peace* states, “. . . one of the things the novelist seems to be saying is that the enemy Gene killed, and loved, is the one every man must kill: his own youth, the innocence that burns too hotly to be endured.” Think about these quotations. Then answer two of the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

- Do you believe that the writer of the essay and Gene are referring to the same enemy—innocence? Why or why not?
- Do you believe every person must leave his or her innocence behind in order to mature? Why or why not?
- What is an example of Gene’s innocence early in the novel?
- Does Gene “kill” his innocence? Explain.
- Does Finny lose his innocence? Explain.

Envy: Is It Hurting or . . . Helping You?

Julie Taylor

Before You Read

Focus Question

Recall a time when you were envious of someone. What did you do about it?

Background

This magazine article by Julie Taylor explores possible consequences of envy and suggests ways for an envious person to help herself or himself. Like Gene in *A Separate Peace*, the people in this reading are envious of friends.

Responding to the Reading

1. According to the article, what are some positive ways to deal with envy?

2. Do you agree with the author's hypothesis that envy can be good if it motivates you? Why or why not?

3. Did you find this article to be helpful? Explain. Is there any information you would add to make the article more informative?

4. **Making Connections** Before Finny's fall, how did Gene deal with his envy in *A Separate Peace*? In your opinion, did Gene's envious feelings change? Explain.

Writing a Dialogue

Pick one person from the article who experiences envy. Write an internal dialogue for that person in which you portray his or her inner struggle. Treat envy as one voice in the conversation, and the desire to do something positive with envy as the opposing voice.

The Sprinters Lillian Morrison
Pole Vault Shiro Murano
The Passer George Abbe
A Snapshot for Miss Bricka . . . Robert Wallace
Black Water and Bright Air Constance Carrier

Before You Read

Focus Question

Have you ever felt especially moved by something you read? What was the subject of the reading? Why did it affect you the way that it did?

Background

These poems about sports are by different authors and portray athletes and athletics with vivid imagery. Like the novel, these poems urge us to look beyond the obvious to see the deeper meaning.

Responding to the Readings

1. What similar themes do you see in all the poems? Which poem is your favorite? Why?

2. In “The Sprinters,” Morrison writes, “whose . . . stride / Most mocks the clock / And almost breaks the bands / Which lock us in.” What do you think this means?

3. What sport is George Abbe writing about? What other sport does he allude to within the poem? What words does he use that lead you to your conclusions?

4. **Making Connections** Suppose these poems were written by characters in the novel. In your opinion, which poem do you think Finny would have written? What about Gene? Explain.

Literature Groups

In “A Snapshot for Miss Bricka . . .” Wallace writes, “seeing how everything is less / that seemed so much, how life moves on / past either defeat or victory” In your groups, discuss the meaning of these lines. What other lines are central to understanding the theme of this poem? Which lines set the scene or contribute to the mood of the poem?

from *In Search of Light: The Broadcasts of Edward R. Murrow, 1938–1961*

edited by Edward Bliss Jr.

The Home Front in Upstate New York

Josephine E. Case

Before You Read

Focus Question

Have you ever volunteered to help with a cause you feel strongly about? What did you do?

Background

These readings give more information about World War II, the setting for *A Separate Peace*. Edward R. Murrow was a well-known American journalist whose radio broadcasts from Europe brought news of the war to families all over America. The second excerpt is Josephine E. Case's first-person account of what life was like on the home front during the war.

Responding to the Readings

1. At the end of the excerpt, Murrow says that Americans “have not fought and suffered as the Russians, nor . . . sacrificed as the British.” According to Murrow, what have Americans done? What did Americans at home do for the war, according to Case?

2. In your opinion, how does Murrow's statement about what Americans did during the war relate to what Case says Americans did?

3. If the United States entered a war tomorrow, how do you think our country would be affected? How do you think you would be affected?

4. For what similar or different purposes do Murrow and Case seem to be writing about the war? What methods does each writer use to communicate his or her message?

5. **Making Connections** These two readings give you information about the war, as seen through the eyes of two different individuals. *A Separate Peace* is told from the perspective of the narrator, Gene. What do you learn about the war through Gene's eyes?

Learning for Life

Write a brochure that encourages people in the community to support a cause or an issue that you feel strongly about. Use facts to motivate people, and suggest specific areas in which help or support may be needed. Include one or two illustrations.

D-Day: June 6, 1944

Robert Mason

Before You Read

Focus Question

Have you ever kept a journal? What are some reasons for writing in a journal?

Background

Robert Mason served in World War II as a communications officer. Mason's job was not to fight but to handle communications important to the success of an attack. His D-Day diary records his observations of the soldiers who had to fight in the attack—soldiers who could have been Gene, Finny, or any one of their friends.

Responding to the Reading

1. How does Mason feel as he leaves land aboard the attack transport? Why do you think he feels this way? Are you surprised by his feelings? Why or why not?

2. What does Mason see in the faces of the men as they leave the ship to enter the battle? In your opinion, how is Mason affected by his role as observing officer, rather than a soldier who must go into the battle? Do his observations seem accurate to you? Explain.

3. **Making Connections** Mason watches the faces of the men as they go off to battle, wondering what they are thinking and feeling. In *A Separate Peace*, Leper enlists in the war. What do you think Leper was thinking when he decided to enlist? In your opinion, did he know what to expect from the war? Use examples from the text to support your answer.

Writing a Journal Entry

Write a journal entry from the perspective of one of the soldiers on the ship with Mason. What is your character thinking as he leaves the ship, carrying equipment for battle?

There Really Was a Super Suicide Society

Bernard Carragher

Before You Read

Focus Question

How would you explain your school's organization and atmosphere to someone who was not familiar with the school?

Background

This article examines the movie, *A Separate Peace*, made in 1972. Bernard Carragher, of the *New York Times*, interviews the actor who plays Finny and the author of the novel, John Knowles. The reading explores the real places, people, and events that inspired the novel.

Responding to the Reading

1. What are Heyl's feelings about Exeter? How do they compare to Knowles's feelings about Exeter?

2. How do you think your experiences with school and friends would be different if you went to a school like Exeter? Would you feel differently about the characters in the novel if you had gone to Exeter?

3. **Making Connections** What did you learn about the novel from reading this article?

Creating a Venn Diagram

Use three overlapping circles to create a Venn diagram that shows the relationship between Knowles's, Heyl's, and Gene's experiences in boarding school. Where the circles overlap, describe similarities. Where the circles do not overlap, describe differences.