

Mrs. Rosenberg
English 11
A Separate Peace

Welcome to 11th grade English!

I am looking forward to getting to know you and engage in interesting and intelligent literary discourse over the course of this year.

In order to jump right in come September, please read *A Separate Peace* by John Knowles. It is a coming-of-age novel set during World War II, in America, which examines friendship, inner peace, self identity and national pride.

Please answer the following chapter questions. (Spark Notes will not be sufficient – these require some thought).

After answering the questions, read over the essay prompts and choose ONE and construct a thesis statement. Find three supporting quotes for your thesis statement. This will be the foundation for your essay which will be written in class.

All responses should be in full sentences and formatted in MLA (12 pt font, Times New Roam, double-spaced).

In addition, please read *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. We will be discussing it in class and you will be quizzed on it during the first week of school.

Enjoy your well-deserved vacation. I can't wait to meet you in September.

Mrs. Rosenberg

Chapter Questions:

Chapter 1

1. Looking at the stairs in the First Academy Building, what surprising fact does Gene realize he had overlooked about them? Why is this important?
2. When Gene visits the tree, what does it resemble? Evaluate his observation.
3. How does Gene feel about having seen the tree? Why?
4. Describe the relationship between the narrator (Gene) and Phineas (Finny).
5. Gene states that the two places he wants to see at Devon School were “fearful sights.” Why does he use this term? What is fearful about marble stairs? About a tree? If they are “fearful,” why do you think Gene wants to see them?
6. Why must Gene, against his better judgment, jump from the tree? How does this and his later “wrestling match” with Finny affect their relationship? What does this tell you about the personalities of the two?

Chapter 2

1. Why does Phineas decide he will wear his pink shirt? What does this show about him?
2. What is Gene beginning to realize about Phineas? Evaluate Gene’s reaction to this realization?
3. What does Phineas wear as a belt at the traditional tea? Explain why he does this.
4. Gene admits that he is envious of Finny, who gets away with anything. He states that there is no harm in envying a best friend a little. Do you agree with Gene or not? Explain.
5. When Finny insists they jump from the tree again, why do you think Gene agrees to it, even though he is obviously afraid to do so? Is Gene’s reaction to “peer pressure” a typical one?

Chapter 3

1. Why does Finny invent “blitzball” and how is it representative of him?
2. After Finny breaks a swimming record, what does he make Gene promise? Why? What does this show about Finny?
3. Explain why Gene is shocked about Finny’s decision about the record. What does it make him feel about Finny?
4. What “courageous” thing does Finny admit to Gene before they got to sleep on the beach? What is Gene’s response? What does this show about each boy?
5. Gene has conflicting emotions about Finny having “practically saved his life” because it was Finny’s fault he had “practically lost” it. Yet Gene continues to go to the nightly meetings and jump from the tree without protest. Why do you think he does this?

6. After Finny states that Gene is his “best pal,” Gene isn’t able to return the compliment. He states that he perhaps was “stopped by that level of feeling, deeper than thought, which contains the truth.” What “truth” do you think Gene is feeling? Why?

Chapter 4

1. What does Finny accuse Gene of striving for? Is he? Is Finny jealous?
2. What does Gene determine that he and Finny are even in? Why?
3. What second realization does Gene have about Finny? Is this correct?
4. Describe the effect Gene’s second realization on his efforts as a student.
5. Before they reach the tree, what does Gene realize about the rivalry between him and Finny? How does he feel about this?
6. Finny tells Gene he would be so jealous, if Gene became head of their class, that he’d kill himself out of envy. Gene believes Finny is telling the truth, that Finny’s joking manner is a screen. What other reaction could Gene have had? Why do you think he chose to react in this manner?
7. Gene determines that Finny had deliberately set out to wreck Gene’s grades with all his diversions. He blames Finny totally. Is Gene being realistic? Does Gene have any responsibility for his own actions? How is Gene’s behavior here typical of human nature?
8. After Gene jounces the limb, he hears Finny hit the bank with a thud. Why do you think Gene jounced the limb? Was his action premeditated? What were his thoughts about himself and Finny just prior to the jump? Gene then jumps from the limb for the first time without fear. What explanation can you offer for this?

Chapter 5

1. Gene admits that if anyone had been suspicious of what he had done to Finny he might have developed some defense of himself. What does Gene mean? Why would have being accused have been easier to deal with?
2. Gene wants to tell Finny the truth about what happened and begins to do so. Why is it important for him to tell the truth? Who will it help more, him or Finny? Why?
3. Even when Gene tells Finny the truth, that he caused Finny to fall, Finny is unable to believe it and denies it. Why does he react this way? Why do you think he cannot believe the truth even when he hears it?

Chapter 6

1. Why does Gene hit Quackenbush? What could be the hidden reason?
2. Why does Gene feel his purpose must have been to “become a part of Phineas”? What do you think Gene means by this? Why would he want or need to become a part of Phineas?

Chapter 7

1. Describe how Gene manages to maintain control when he is “accused” in the Butt Room. Why does he react in this way?
2. Why do you think Gene is unable to say he had pushed Finny out of the tree? What had he promised himself he would do when Finny returned to Devon? What effect might his admission to the other boys of what he had done have on the relationship between him and Finny?
3. What does Leper do while the other boys aid in the war effort? What could this show about Leper?
4. What is Gene’s reaction to Brinker’s announcement that he will enlist the following day? What decision does Gene make? Why?

Chapter 8

1. When Gene realizes Finny is returning, about what does Gene change his mind? How would you interpret this change of mind?
2. What are the conclusions Finny has about war? Why do you think he says this?
3. Finny tells Gene that “when you really love something, then it loves you back, in whatever way it has to love.” Gene doesn’t think this is true. Analyze this conversation and their differing views.
4. What is the plan Finny develops for Gene. Why does Finny develop a plan and why does Gene agree to it? What could this show about the mental state of each boy?
5. What are both Gene and Finny startled by? What do the boys do about this discovery?
6. Describe the plan Finny announces he has for Gene. Why does he develop this plan?
7. Before Finny’s return to Devon, Gene had looked forward to enlisting and making a clean start. When he realizes that Finny needs him, even though he has been untrustworthy, Gene decides to stay at Devon. Why do you think he makes this decision? What motivates him to give up his plan to make a clean start? Do you think Finny needs Gene? If so, why?

Chapter 9

1. What conclusion does Leper come to about “everything” after seeing the war film? Analyze this.
2. To what does Gene attribute his surpassing himself in the Decathlon. Analyze this.
3. What occurs that causes the “special and separate” peace of that afternoon to drain away?
4. Leper concludes that “Everything has to evolve or else it perishes.” Gene asks himself how Leper’s theory applies to him, to Phineas, and to Leper. Why do you think Gene is wondering about this? How do you think Leper’s theory might apply to each of the three boys?

5. Leper signs the telegram he sends to Gene, "Your best friend." Why do you think Leper does this? Has there been any indication that Gene is Leper's friend, particularly a best friend?

Chapter 10

1. What conclusion does Gene come to about Leper's "escape"?
2. Why does Gene react with fear to Leper's use of the word *psycho*? Explain why Leper thinks maybe it is the army that is psycho. Analyze his conclusion.
3. When Leper accuses Gene of being a "savage underneath," what example does he use to make his point?
4. Before Gene reaches Leper's house, he is encouraged by his fantasy that Leper had escaped from the spies, that "this wasn't going to be such a bad war," after all. What do you think he means? Why would he want to believe this?
5. By the end of lunch, Gene is certain that Leper's mother is convinced Gene is "a good boy underneath." Gene states that Leper was "closer to the truth" (when he said Gene was a "savage underneath"). What is your opinion of Gene? Is he a "good boy" or is he a "savage"?
6. Gene tells Leper that he doesn't care what happened to him because it has nothing to do with him. Why do you think Gene reacts so violently to what Leper is relating to him? Do you think he really doesn't care? Does it really have nothing to do with him?

Chapter 11

1. Why does Brinker believe Gene has put off enlisting? How does Brinker say Finny should be treated? Why?
2. When Gene and Finny are discussing Caesar, Finny tells Gene he doesn't believe books and teachers but that he does believe Gene, and that he knows Gene better than anybody. Why does Finny need to believe Gene? Does he really know Gene?
3. Brinker tells the group that for both Finny and Gene's good, the matter of Finny's accident should be brought out into the open. He then tells Finny they aren't trying to make him feel bad. What do you think is Brinker's motivation for imagining himself, as Gen puts it, "Justice incarnate"? Why is he so determined to force the issue? Isn't it likely that Finny will be made to feel bad, considering the subject of discussion? Is Brinker, in your opinion, trying to help anyone? If so, whom?
4. At the end of Leper's testimony, Finny calls out, "I just don't care. Never mind." What do you think he means? If he doesn't care about the investigation or getting to the "truth," why do you think he mentioned that Leper was at Devon?

Chapter 12

1. When Gene takes Finny's suitcase to the Infirmary, what does Finny admit he has been doing all winter? What has been the result? Analyze Finny's behavior.
2. As Gene watches Finny being carried out in the chair, he states that he again had the feeling "of having all along ignored what was finest" in Finny. What do you think Gene was referring to? What, in your opinion, was "finest" in Finny?
3. Gene tells Finny that what he did to him wasn't "anything personal," that it was just "some ignorance inside" him, "something blind." Is Gene telling Finny the truth? Recall Gene's realization right before the jump that there hadn't, after all, been any rivalry between him and Finny.
4. Gene the adult states that he had never cried about Finny, that at Finny's funeral he had a feeling it had been his own. What do you think Gene means? Recall his earlier remark that his purpose had been to become part of Finny.

Chapter 13

1. Why does Gene conclude that none of the Devon boys ever accused him of being responsible for what had happened to Finny?
2. Restate and evaluate the conclusion Gene comes to about the cause of wars.
3. Who constructed lines against their enemies, and at what cost? What does Gene wonder about "this enemy"?
4. Mr. Hadley tells Gene and Brinker that one's greatest moment, greatest privilege, is to serve one's country. He goes on to say that the "old guys" like him are proud of the young ones going off to war, and jealous of them, too. Brinker then angrily tells Gene that the "old guys" are responsible for the war but that the young ones will have to fight it. Comment on these two divergent opinions about war. Do you think they are typical of all the older and younger generations?
5. Gene states that everyone he ever knew, except for Finny, found themselves "pitted violently against something in the world around them," and that this "hostile thing" broke "the simplicity and unity of their character." What kinds of "hostile things" do people find themselves pitted against? Is Gene just referring to such things as war, or is he perhaps referring to other types of conflict that cause people to change?
6. Gene comments that he was ready for the war since he no longer had any hatred to contribute to it. What does he mean by this?
7. From Gene's experience with his own "enemy," what conclusions does he come to about enemies in general? What do you think Gene is suggesting about human nature in the last paragraph of the novel.

Essay Prompts:

- 1) At the end of *A Separate Peace*, 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" (Knowles 204). There are many different possible interpretations as to exactly what enemy Gene kills. What enemy do you think Gene kills while attending Devon? Write an essay supporting your thesis with specific examples from the story.
- 2) All of the themes and symbols in the novel involve opposites or "counterpoints." Some examples include Gene and Finny, war and peace, the two rivers at Devon, conformance and rebellion, reality and perception, etc. Discuss the significance in the novel and what possible meaning can be understood from these contrasts.
- 3) In some works of literature, a character that appears briefly, or does not appear at all, can be a significant presence. Write an essay in which you show how such a character functions in *A Separate Peace*. You may wish to discuss how the character affects the action, theme, or the development of other characters.
- 4) Throughout the first part of the book Gene is in a constant battle with himself about the nature of his friendship/rivalry with Finny. At times he feels that they are bonded by competition and deep enmity. Other times he feels that Finny is sincere, honest, and a true friend. After Finny's injury and return to school, Gene feels it is his duty to protect Finny and enforce Finny's ideas and beliefs even if it means not following through on his plans to enlist or personal goals.

Considering Gene's descriptions of the events in the novel, his descriptions of Finny, and his descriptions of their relationship, argue whether or not Finny is a good friend to Gene or would Gene be better off without Finny in his life. What statement is Knowles making about friendship? Were they ever really friends?

- 5) Throughout the book, Gene is associated with bitterness, rivalry, and competence. In contrast, Finny is associated with strength, power, goodness, and excellence. Yet, it is Finny who dies and Gene who lives. Considering both characters write an essay about the strengths and weaknesses in both boys arguing who is the weaker character. Consider the statement Knowles is

making about strength and survival through these young men. What does it take to survive in a modern world?

- 6) Come up with your own thesis for *A Separate Peace*. It should look at a theme that is explored in the novel and on a universal level. Don't forget to formulate a "so what" into your thesis, and make sure your topic is grounded in the text.