

# A Separate Peace

by John Knowles

## Teacher's Guide

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## Synopsis

### Chapter 1

In 1957, 15 years after graduating from Devon School, Gene Forrester returns to New Hampshire and strolls the campus. He compares its appearance with the place he remembers from his teens and searches out First Academy Building and a particular tree near the river. When he locates the tree, he flashes back to the 1942-1943 era and Phineas, his roommate and friend.

In summer 1942, as war dominates the nation's thoughts, Finny is too hyperactive to concentrate during Gene's evening study period. Instead, before dinner, Finny decides to jump off the big tree, which upperclassmen climb and jump to ready them for the military. Although rules forbid other students from jumping, Finny insists on luring Gene outside to make the jump. Gene leaps from a limb into the river to retain Finny's respect. The act becomes a ritual for Finny, Gene, and their friends, Elwin Lepellier, Chet Douglass, and Bobby Zane.

### Chapter 2

Mr. Prud'homme chastises Finny for missing dinner. Finny talks his way out of punishment. Both boys are nearing 17, which may soon be draft age. Finny—a natural athlete, leader, and daredevil, ignores the opinions of others. In contrast, Gene complies with rules and the judgments of his peers. Because of his tendency to seek safety, he feels inferior to Finny and begins competing with him. Finny's outlandish pranks include wearing a pink shirt to celebrate the Allied bombing of central Europe and using a tie for a belt. At the term tea, the interim headmaster, Mr. Patch-Withers, lis-

tens to his rationalization for the bizarre costume and surprises them by laughing. After departing the tea, Finny compounds the dare by enticing Gene to jump with him. Finny calls the event The Super Suicide Society of the Summer Session. Gene teeters, but Finny steadies him. Gene deduces that Finny saved his life.

### Chapter 3

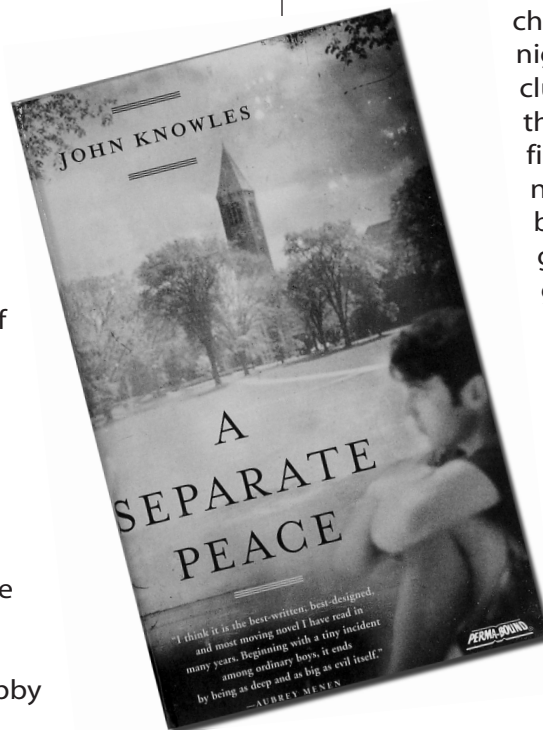
That night, Finny introduces the society to friends at their dormitory, who sign up as charter members. Gene hates the nightly ritual, but is loyal to Finny's club. One night, on the way past the tower at the end of the athletic field, Finny rebels against effeminate summer sports by inventing blitzball, a teamless, unpatterned game with evolving rules. The game is a success.

As the nation concentrates on war, one afternoon, Finny breaks the school swim record, but has no witnesses except Gene, his timekeeper, to attest to the new record. Finny changes the subject of records and proposes bicycling to the beach. They dine at a hot dog stand, use forged draft cards to buy beers, then sleep in the sand dunes. Finny declares Gene his

best pal. Gene hesitates to acknowledge the compliment.

### Chapter 4

The next morning, Gene awakens to dawn on the beach. At 6:30 A. M., he realizes he must ride three hours back to school to take a trigonometry test at 10:00. After a quick swim, they ride back in time for Gene to fail his test, the first he has flunked. With Finny's encouragement, Gene concentrates on his studies and improves his grades by aiming to be valedictorian of the class of 1945 and win the Ne Plus Ultra award. To his dismay, he concludes that



Finny resents his graduating first in their class and believes that Finny lured him to the beach to endanger his math grade.

On a Friday in late August, as Gene prepares for a French exam, Finny announces that Elwin is ready to make his first leap from the tree. Gene complains that he intended to study. Finny coolly replies that jumping is only a game. The reverse psychology entices Gene to the game. Before the club, Finny proposes a double jump. He takes his position on the limb and waits for Gene. Because Gene jostles the limb, Finny looks toward him and slips sideways to the bank. Gene completes the jump.

### **Chapter 5**

Finny smashes his leg and spends days in the infirmary. Gene withdraws to his room to brood as everyone talks about Finny. Out of guilt, Gene wears his roommate's clothes and takes on his characteristics. The next morning, Dr. Stanpole announces improvement in the patient, but declares him unfit for sports. Gene weeps. The doctor adds that Finny has asked for Gene.

On first view of Finny, Gene declares he will cut down the tree. They discuss the elements of the accident. Gene's suspicions flare, then subside. Finny stresses that he lost his balance. Gene realizes that his friend will never accuse him of causing the fall. Gene tries to apologize, but Finny brushes aside his seriousness. Afterward, Finny goes by ambulance to his home near Boston; Finny spends a month at home in the South.

At the end of September, Gene travels 17 hours by train to Boston and takes a cab to Finny's house. In Finny's room, Gene confesses that he caused his friend to fall. The two get into a shouting match that wearies Finny. He promises to return to Devon by Thanksgiving. Gene blames his anger on fatigue and departs for the station. He lies to Finny that he is going to ignore the rules.

### **Chapter 6**

At chapel, Gene notices that five young teachers have gone to war. Continuity returns except for maid service, which will be suspended for the war's duration. The student body consists of 700 young men. Across from Gene and Finny's room lives Brinker Hadley. Reporting late to the Crew House,

Gene angers crew manager Cliff Quackenbush. Because Cliff calls him a "maimed son-of-a-bitch," Gene strikes him. They grapple and tumble into the river.

On the way back to the dormitory, Gene encounters Mr. Ludsbury, who accuses his dorm group of gaming during the summer and orders him to get rid of his icebox. A phone call from Finny awaits in Ludsbury's study. He admits his doubts that Gene would save his place in their room. Finny is piqued that Gene would manage the crew rather than participate. Gene wants no more of sports because of Finny's injury. Finny retorts that Gene must play for him.

### **Chapter 7**

Late that afternoon, Brinker, the big man on campus, visits and accuses Gene of picking Finny for a roommate because he knew Finny would have to leave school. Brinker threatens to find out the truth about the accident. They go down to the Butt Room for a smoke, where Brinker turns him over to boys posing as "the proper authorities." Gene jokes that he put arsenic in Finny's coffee and makes up ridiculous confessional material to divert attention from his guilt. Without lighting a cigarette, he departs to study French.

In mid-October, the students pick apples. When snow paralyzes the railyard, 200 volunteers shovel the tracks as part of Emergency Usefulness. On his way to the train after lunch, Gene encounters Leper on skis quietly observing the woods and looking for a beaver dam. By 4:30, the boys finish clearing the main line for a troop train to pass. Gene feels like a child. The boys return from the station and encounter Leper, who is happy about locating the beaver dam. Brinker sneers at Leper and claims to be enlisting the next day. Gene exults in the exertion of the day, but withers upon finding Finny returned to his room.

### **Chapter 8**

That night and the next morning, Finny complains about the absence of maids. Brinker prods Gene to enlist with him. Finny calls Brinker the "Yellow Peril." The roommates cut class to go to the gym. Exasperated that Gene signed up for no sports, Finny denies that the war exists. He says he gets the joke because he has suffered. To compensate for broken dreams, he trains Gene for the 1944 Olympics.

**Chapter 9**

Gene is relieved to find peace. When Leper enlists early in January 1943, Brinker jokes about Leper taking part in events in the news. Finny avoids the humor and plans a winter carnival. Amid prizes and snow statues parodying the faculty, the participants tussle. Finny opens the games by burning a copy of the *Iliad*, one of the prizes stacked on the table. Finny dances a one-legged caper. The frolic ends with a telegram from Leper asking Gene to meet him “at Christmas location.”

**Chapter 10**

That night, Gene takes the train to Vermont and finds Leper at home in the dining room. He fled the army because he was going to get a Section Eight discharge. He accuses Gene of crippling Finny. In retaliation, Gene pushes his chair over, but accepts Leper’s invitation to stay to lunch. Leper narrates his experience of going “psycho” in front of the corporal, whose face was turning into a woman’s face. Gene flees the house.

**Chapter 11**

On return to Devon, Gene finds Finny in a snowball fight that turns into a siege aimed at Finny. Hours later, Brinker asks about Leper. Gene calls Leper an AWOL. Brinker correctly guesses that Leper cracked up. The military takes over the school with recruiters looking for enlistees. Gene takes no action. One morning at chapel, Brinker accuses Gene of staying out because he pities Finny and believes Gene would profit from clearing up guilt over the accident. After chapel, as Gene translates Finny’s Latin assignment, Finny admits that Leper’s return proves that the war is real. Finny saw Leper after chapel hiding in shrubs.

At 10:05 that night, Brinker and some friends hold a mock trial in the First Building to prove Gene’s complicity in Finny’s accident. Brinker sends for Leper, who testifies that the two boys on the limb had moved like pistons in an engine. Before the trial ends, Finny weeps and rushes from the assembly hall. He falls down the white marble stairs.

**Chapter 12**

The wrestling coach stabilizes Finny, whom they carry on a chair to the infirmary. Dr. Stanpole pronounces the injury a simple break. Gene creeps along the infirmary and leaps at the windows. Out of control, he laughs and weeps. Gene breaks into

Finny’s room to apologize. He wanders the campus and spends the night at the stadium. Before the 9:10 class, Gene gets a note from the doctor to bring Finny’s clothes and personal items. Finny admits his frustration that he is unfit for the war and that he has applied to every service. Gene confesses that the first accident was the result of “some ignorance inside me.” Finny believes him. Dr. Stanpole invites Gene back at 5:00 P. M., after the bone is set. When Gene approaches the doctor, he learns that bone marrow traveled Finny’s bloodstream to the heart, killing him instantly. At Finny’s burial, Gene is emotionless, his spirit as dead as Finny’s.

**Chapter 13**

In June, the military occupies the school. Brinker asks Gene to meet his father. Gene claims to have joined the Navy. Mr. Hadley protests Brinker’s joining the Coast Guard. Gene and the others say nothing about Finny.

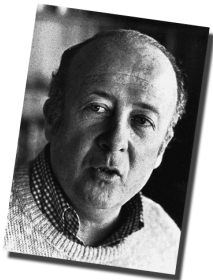
**Timeline**

- Sept. 1, 1939** World War II begins with German invasion of Poland.
- April-June 1940** Germans invade and conquer France.
- Dec. 7, 1941** Japanese planes bomb Pearl Harbor.
- Dec. 8** United States declares war on Japan.
- Dec. 10** Japanese invade the Philippines.
- Dec. 11** Germany and Italy declare war on the United States.
- summer 1942** War dominates the nation’s thoughts.
- late August** *Finny falls from the tree after Gene jostles the limb.*
- end of September** *Gene travels to Finny’s house and confesses that he caused his friend to fall.*
- April 9** U.S. troops surrender at Bataan in the Philippines.
- May 4-8** U.S. Navy stops Japanese invasion of Australia at the Coral Sea.
- June 4-6** Japanese fleet suffers severe losses at the Battle of Midway.
- Aug. 7** U.S. Marines invade Guadalcanal.
- October** *The boys pick apples and shovel snow from railroad tracks. Finny returns to Devon.*
- Nov. 7** Allies invade North Africa.
- January 1943** *Finny dies.*
- May** German troops in North Africa surrender.
- July-August** Allies capture Sicily.
- June** *The military takes over the school. Gene joins the Navy.*

<b>September</b>	Allies invade Italian mainland. Mussolini is deposed and Italian government surrenders to Allies.
<b>June 6, 1944</b>	Allies land in France.
<b>October</b>	U.S. troops invade the Philippines. Japanese navy is wiped out during the battle of Leyte Gulf.
<b>December</b>	German counterattack in the Ardennes is defeated.
<b>April 30, 1945</b>	Hitler commits suicide.
<b>May 8</b>	Germany surrenders.
<b>Aug. 14</b>	Japan surrenders.
<b>1957</b>	<i>Gene Forrester returns to New Hampshire and strolls the campus of Devon School.</i>

### Author Sketch

From his own experience John Knowles created his troubled fictional anti-hero, Gene Forrester. Like the character, the author was born in the coal-mining town of Fairmont, West Virginia, on Sept. 16, 1926, to Mary Beatrice Shea and James Myron Knowles. He attended Phillips Exeter Academy, an exclusive boys' preparatory school in Exeter, New Hampshire. He was still in school during World War II and graduated early in summer 1945 to enlist in the Army Air Corps. He served eight months before entering Yale University, where he earned a degree in English.



As an undergraduate, Knowles wrote for the campus literary magazine and edited the *Yale Daily News*. After graduation, he wrote for the *Yale Alumni Magazine* and the *Hartford Courant*. He settled in New York and worked as a freelance journalist until 1956, when he became associate editor and correspondent of *Holiday* magazine. In 1959, he published *A Separate Peace*, an instant bestseller that supported him while he wrote and traveled to France, the Near East, Italy, and the Greek Islands.

At his home in Southampton, Long Island, Knowles failed to equal his first novel with subsequent works. He dedicated a third novel, *Indian Summer* (1966), to his mentor, playwright Thornton Wilder. In 1972, Paramount Pictures produced a film version of *A Separate Peace*. Knowles returned to his first characters in *Phineas* (1968), a collection of short sto-

ries containing the kernel story that developed into *A Separate Peace*. In 1981, he produced *Peace Breaks Out*, a sequel to *A Separate Peace*. He continued to probe school relationships in *A Stolen Past* (1983), which he set at Yale University.

### Critic's Corner

John Knowles' *A Separate Peace*, winner of the William Faulkner Foundation Award, the Rosenthal Award of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and the Independent School Education Board Award, immediately joined the ranks of young adult classics. Contributing to its success was the use of a citation from Ernest Hemingway's war classic *A Farewell to Arms* for a title. Alongside J. D. Salinger's *A Catcher in the Rye* and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, the work succeeds because of its honest assessment of the teenage psyche.

Critical commentary on Knowles' fiction leans toward praise for control, artistry, and understatement. Truman Capote typified his command of fiction as "quietly vital," an understated grasp of events and symbols that hold meaning for the young. Others admire evocative language and the protagonist's ethical choices, flawed logic, and tragic burden. Knowles' papers and manuscripts reside at Yale's Beinecke Library.

### Other Works by John Knowles

*Double Vision: American Thoughts Abroad* (1964)  
*Indian Summer* (1966)  
*Morning in Antibes* (1962)  
*The Paragon* (1971)  
*Peace Breaks Out* (1981)  
*Phineas* (1968)  
*The Private Life of Axie Reed* (1986)  
*Spreading Fires* (1974)  
*A Stolen Past* (1983)  
*A Vein of Riches* (1978)

### Related Reading

James Agee, *A Death in the Family*  
Orson Scott Card, *Ender's Game*  
Joseph Conrad, "The Lagoon"  
Caroline Cooney, *The Face on the Milk Carton*  
Robert Cormier, *I Am the Cheese*, *Fade*, and *The Chocolate War*  
David Feintuch, *Midshipman's Hope*

Kettie Frings, *Look Homeward, Angel* (play)  
 Joanne Greenberg, *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*  
 Bette Greene, *Summer of My German Soldier*  
 Judith Guest, *Ordinary People*  
 Robert Heinlein, *Citizen of the Galaxy*; *Have Spacesuit, Will Travel*;  
*Red Planet*; *Space Cadet*; and *Starship Troopers*  
 Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*  
 Amy Lowell, "Patterns"  
 Lois Lowry, *The Giver*  
 Katherine Mansfield, "Miss Brill"  
 John Neufeld, *Lisa, Bright and Dark*  
 Scott O'Dell, *Sarah Bishop*  
 Susan Pfeffer, *The Year Without Michael*  
 Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*  
 Edward Arlington Robinson, "Richard Cory"  
 J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*  
 Larry Segrist, *Spacer Dreams*  
 Charles Sheffield, *Godspeed*  
 Charles Sheffield and Jerry Pournelle, *Higher Education*  
 Paul Zindel, *The Pigman* and *The Pigman's Legacy*

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*Contemporary Authors on CD-ROM*. Detroit: Gale, 1994.  
*Contemporary Literary Criticism*, Vol. 1. Detroit: Gale, 1973.  
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 Ellis, James, "A Separate Peace: The Fall from Grace," *English Journal*, 1964, pp. 313-318.  
 Halio, Jay, "John Knowles' Short Novels," *Studies in Short Fiction*, 1964, pp. 107-112.  
 "John Knowles," <<http://web.qub.ac.uk/lib/homepages/john.html>>.  
 McDonald, James L., "The Novels of John Knowles," *Arizona Quarterly*, 1967, pp. 335-342.  
 Pomeranz, Regina, "Self-Betrayal in Modern American Fiction," *English Record*, 1964, pp. 21-28.  
 Rosenfield, Claire, "The Shadow Within: Conscious and Unconscious Use of the Double," *Daedalus*, 1963, pp. 326-344.  
 "A Separate Peace," <<http://pc159.ins.cornell.edu/firsts/plain/ans1120.html>>.  
 "Works Written by John Knowles," <[http://www.exeter.edu/library1/separate\\_peace/bibliography.html](http://www.exeter.edu/library1/separate_peace/bibliography.html)>.

## General Objectives

1. To discuss boyhood rivalry
2. To describe the physical, mental, and emotional effects of coping with an unforeseen accident
3. To characterize the value of discipline and order
4. To characterize honest communication
5. To discuss the nature of loss and regret
6. To account for verbal clashes
7. To discuss human foibles and tendencies
8. To account for errors in judgment
9. To outline different types of manipulation
10. To enumerate examples of menace and hostility

## Specific Objectives

1. To outline the interconnected lives of characters on campus
2. To recount how Brinker tries Gene for endangering Finny's life
3. To explain why Finny admits to having suffered
4. To describe Leper
5. To evaluate changes in Gene's self-concept
6. To define the role of teachers, coaches, parents, and Dr. Stanpole
7. To analyze Gene's last day with Finny
8. To justify Gene's intent to be valedictorian and to compete in the 1944 Olympics
9. To contrast school, home, the tree, and the infirmary as settings
10. To account for Gene's self-torment
11. To study the causes and implications of Finny's rejection of war
12. To contrast Gene before and after Finny's death

## Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of John Knowles' style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

**Characterization:** the creation of full-fledged human motivation, behavior, and response in fictional people. Significant to the novel is the interplay of young personalities in search of maturity. Brinker asserts himself as the big man on campus, yet wilts before the jingoism of his father. Quackenbush intimidates Gene and enrages him

by disdainful cripples. Leper recognizes that he is the misfit, yet deliberately places himself in harm's way by being the first of the group to enlist. The student trial, which assembles the major characters in an intense confrontation, proves that Finny's erratic personality will be his undoing. Gene is the emerging self that allows Finny to manipulate and alter him at will. The emergence of Gene as a man occurs after Finny's death from a willful, outer-directed flight from too much order.

**Historical Milieu:** the human, political, or geographic setting of events in a period of history, as in the violent clash of powers that produces World War II, an external nexus that threatens to draw the seniors at Devon from an idyllic curricular setting of classes and sports into the uncontrolled maelstrom of war in Europe and the Pacific. Gene mentions events and figures from the war as constant, irrefutable reminders that the real world has little in common with Devon. Beyond the safety of trigonometry tests and French exams lies the real test of manhood, which threatens Leper's sanity and crows Brinker, Gene, and Finny into bizarre behaviors that deny reality.

**Motif:** a pattern or predictable arrangement of elements to express an abstract theme in a story, dance, painting, or other artistic work, for instance, order, the pattern of curriculum and rules upon which Devon is predicated. At the first sign of missing chapel, cutting classes, and breaching the dress code, the adults take action against culprits. Gene must answer for gambling in the dormitory and having an icebox in his room. Finny, the wily scamp, talks his way out of trouble for dressing absurdly at the term tea. Mr. Hadley questions the breakdown of order at Devon by ridiculing the arrival of sewing machines as the military takes up residence on campus. Finny's suicide society is a personal attempt to rattle the status quo by organizing a nightly leap into the river from the bonds of school, rules, classes, and tests. The plunge prefaces the seniors' enlistment in war, the ultimate disorder.

## The Importance of Setting

The settings in *A Separate Peace* are overwhelmingly constrictive. On the campus of a small New England school housing 700 students, there are the usual brick and marble buildings—First

Academy Building for classes, Jared Potter Building for meals, a gym, infirmary, dormitories, dean's residence, playing fields, and the Center Commons and Far Commons to which they connect. When Finny leads his suicide society away from the sameness and predictability of school and chapel, he ranges to the school's perimeter, where a tree overlooks the Devon River. The leaps from the limb become test runs of manhood as the boys breach the school's outer limits.

On arrival at Devon in 1957, Gene Forrester comments on the Field House and The Cage. The name suggests the numerous restrictions that hold spirited young men in check. With a spark of imagination and daring, Finny lures Gene away from the suffocating protectiveness of Devon for a three-hour bicycle trip to the beach. In the privacy and openness of the dunes, Finny is able to admit that Gene is his best pal. Their brief foray, marked by purchase of beers with illicit identification cards, brings Gene back after a dawn swim to trigonometry class for a test of his knowledge of a rigid, unimaginative discipline. For the first time, he fails a test.

As the war and maturity pierce the bonds of school and compromise the administration, the characters move away from measured curriculum and rules. Leper skis into the woods to contemplate a beaver dam. Gene crosses a bridge over the Little Devon River to take a nonathletic role at the crew house. Finny goes home to Boston to recuperate from a shattered leg. On Finny's return, he finds Gene dressed for a volunteer job shoveling snow from a nearby railroad, where the students free a troop train. Finny's winter carnival ends with a telegram compelling Gene to travel to Vermont to console Leper on his failure to conform to military life.

The final chapters resonate with breaches of a secure setting. Brinker forces Gene to appear before a student tribunal in First Academy Building to determine his culpability. Brinker's helpers locate Leper, who has been lurking in the bushes outside chapel. Leper's testimony sends Finny flying from the room in tears and ultimately to his death from a second accident on a slippery marble staircase. In fear for his roommate's life, Gene hovers along the outside wall of the infirmary, leaping at window sills to observe Finny's treatment. Gene

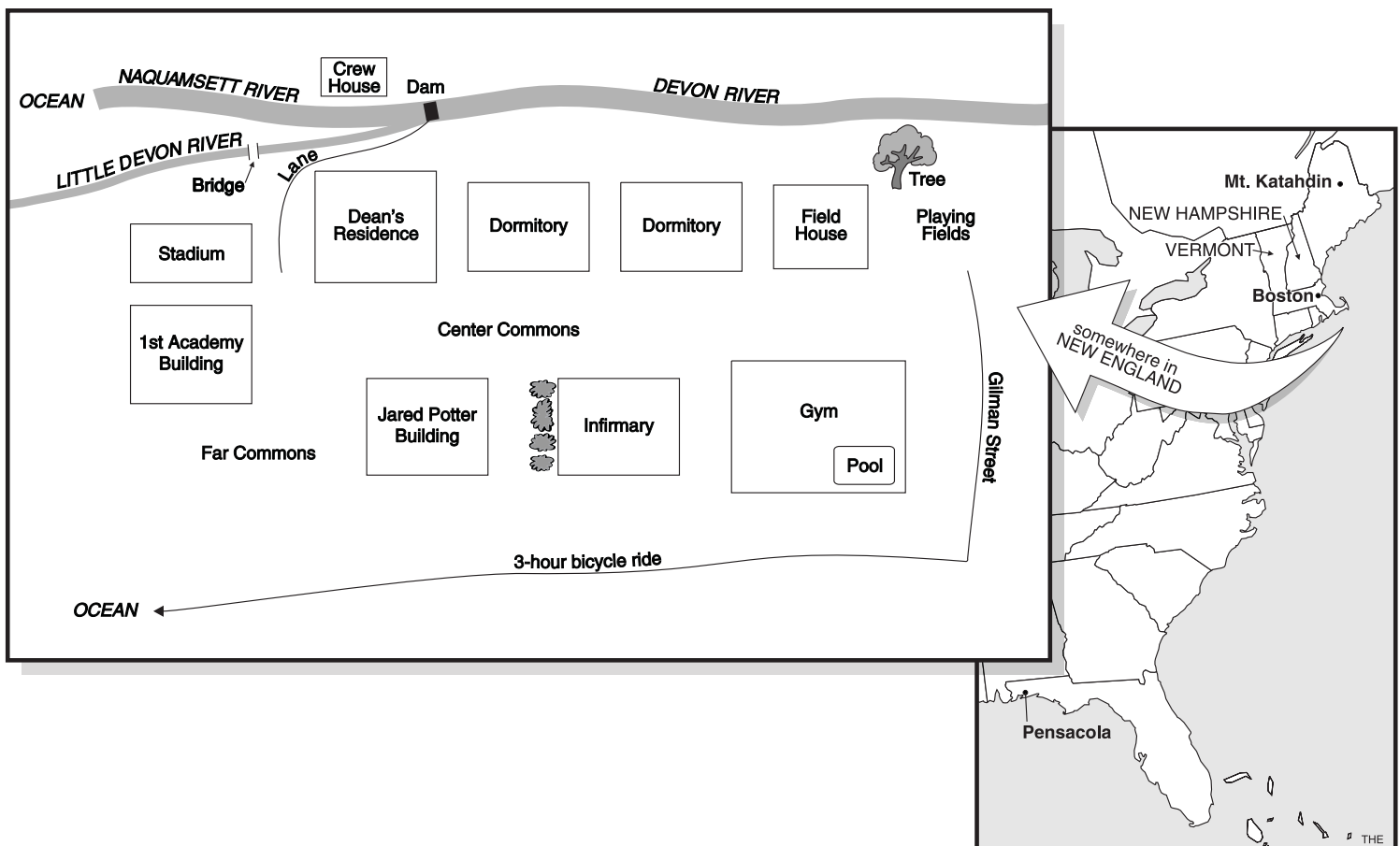
caroms about the campus that night, sleeps in the stadium, and returns with a suitcase for Finny to learn that the extra clothes will not be needed.

The erratic movements of students on and off campus imply the hardships young men face in making the transition from schoolboys to soldiers. The bifurcated river mirrors the coming parting of the ways. Unlike Finny's clean plunge into the gym pool, Gene's fall into the dirty river is a baptism in reality, an introduction to the polluted flow that rings the campus. Descents to the smoking lounge indicate that the murky adult world is already permeating the boys' sleeping halls. The departure to Boston for Finny's burial is a minute part of Gene's extrication from a suffocating friendship that stifles and perplexes him. The journey to Pensacola prefaces Gene's acceptance of the war and his role in the outside world.

### Cross-Curricular Sources

For more information about maturity, World War II, and other subjects and issues deriving from the novel, consult these sources:

Steven Ambrose, *Americans at War* and *Citizen Soldiers*  
 Robert Buckingham and Sandra Haggard, *Coping With Grief*  
 Penny Coleman, *Rosie the Riveter: Women Working on the Home Front*  
 William Dudley, ed., *World War II* (Opposing Viewpoints)  
 Reader's Digest Eds., *America in the 40's*  
 Roger Rosen and Patra McShane, eds., *Coming of Age: The Art of Growing Up*  
 Susan Sinnott, *Doing Our Part: American Women on the Home Front*  
 Also, consult these websites:  
 AWOL  
[http://sunsite.unc.edu/pub/academic/history/marshall/military/mil\\_hist\\_inst/m/milsrv5a.asc](http://sunsite.unc.edu/pub/academic/history/marshall/military/mil_hist_inst/m/milsrv5a.asc)



## Children and Grief

<http://www.psych.med.umich.edu/web/aacap/factsFam/grief.htm>

## Crisis, Grief, and Healing

<http://www.webhealing.com>

## Depression Homepage

<http://www.depression.com>

## A Separate Peace Home Page

[http://www.exeter.edu/library1/separate\\_peace/index.html](http://www.exeter.edu/library1/separate_peace/index.html)

## Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in John Knowles' *A Separate Peace* should include these aspects:

### Themes

- youth
- camaraderie
- hero worship
- rebellion
- remorse
- guilt
- hostility
- recompense
- investigation
- death
- peace

### Motifs

- post-traumatic fallout
- leaders asserting control over followers
- reshaping expectations to express a wartime outlook
- grasping at forgiveness and self-esteem
- turning to the military for escape
- reconciling an inevitable parting

## Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, or sentences that have a particular meaning in the novel. Explain each. Chapter and page numbers allow you to reread the passage in which the item appears.

1. So the more things remain the same, the more they change after all—*plus c'est la même chose, plus ça change*. (Chap. 1, p. 14)  
(In a reversal of a familiar nineteenth-century French proverb—"The more things change, the more they remain the same"—Gene's observation introduces a flashback to his senior

*year 15 years earlier. While he sees that there has been little or no outward change at Devon, nevertheless, there has been profound change in him. Even when things remain the same, the person who experiences these things changes. Everything seems different because he is mature. The lines prepare the reader for the speaker's focus on the tree, love, innocence, and death. The recognition of the inevitability of change prepares the reader for Gene's advance from teenage academy senior to military veteran.)*

2. Phineas didn't really dislike West Point in particular or authority in general, but just considered authority the necessary evil against which happiness was achieved by reaction... (Chap. 1, p. 18-19)  
(*Finny does not like authority, but in his good-natured way, recognizes that authority is needed for a disciplined school and ordered society. He derives joy from reacting against authority in creative ways, such as wearing a tie for a belt. He loves to challenge school rules and then amuses his peers and campus officials by his ingenious explanations.*)
3. As I said, this was my sarcastic summer. It was only long after that I recognized sarcasm as the protest of people who are weak. (Chap. 2, p. 29)  
(*Cutting, derisive remarks become Gene's stock response to Finny's clever manipulation. From the perspective of adulthood in 1957, Gene recognizes that he used sarcasm in his teens to defend his ego against a strong assailant.*)
4. We met every night, because Finny's life was ruled by inspiration and anarchy, and so he prized a set of rules. His own, not those imposed on him by other people, such as the faculty of the Devon School. (Chap. 3, p. 34)  
(*Finny lived by confusion and disdain for order and authority. His creative urges directed his life to impulsive acts that violated school discipline. To carry out maximum anarchy, he involved his gang of friends and manipulated them all into joining in his willful pranks.*)
5. Exposing a sincere emotion nakedly like that at the Devon school was the next thing to suicide. (Chap. 3, p. 48)  
(*Adolescents at Devon are typically cruel toward the vulnerable, such as handicapped students and those disinclined toward athletics. To express an honest feeling such as friendship can open people like Gene to ridicule and torment, as he discovers at the Crew House when he arrives to take the job of team manager. This sadistic tendency is common among insecure youth. Finny, unlike Gene and other Devon seniors, is secure and does not need to defend himself by concealing sincere emotion.*)



6. We had been an idiosyncratic, leaderless band in the summer, undirected except by the eccentric notions of Phineas. (Chap. 6, p. 74)  
*(Gene describes the summer student body as peculiar and distinctly individual. The rising seniors had enjoyed the unusual experience of less discipline and more opportunities to express their personalities.)*
7. "What I mean is, I love winter, and when you really love something, then it loves you back, in whatever way it has to love." (Chap. 8, p. 111)  
*(Finny believes that love must rate an appropriate response. It is inconceivable to him that anyone could fail to respond to an honest expression of love. Finny is not touched by hate and is therefore innocent, unflawed. His belief is true in the sense that it ought to be, but in the real world, the response to love can range from apathy to hate.)*
8. It was as though Athens and Sparta were trying to establish not just a truce but an alliance—although we were not as civilized as Athens and they were not as brave as Sparta. (Chap. 11, p. 159)  
*(Athens and Sparta symbolize opposing philosophies of life. Athens was the traditional center of classical Greek culture. Sparta developed as a superior military establishment. Athenians were devoted to art, philosophy, poetry, and drama while Spartans focused on self-denial, discipline, and subservience to the state. The ideal Athenian was free and basically civilian. The ideal Spartan was a great warrior. Devon, a liberal arts preparatory school dedicated to the cultural development of young men, followed the Athenian ideal. As Gene states, "Devon was by tradition and choice the most civilian of schools." When the school extends hospitality to recruiting officers, it seems that opposing ways of life are establishing an unlikely alliance.)*
9. I could not escape a feeling that this was my own funeral, and you do not cry in that case. (Chap. 12, p. 194)  
*(At various times, Gene and Finny seem to merge personalities. After Finny's injury, Gene looks into a mirror and thinks, "I was Phineas, Phineas to the life. I even had his humorous expression on my face." When Finny returns to Devon, he tells Gene, "Listen, pal, if I can't play sports, you're going to play them for me." After the second injury, Gene realizes that "Phineas had thought of me as an extension of himself." When Gene attends Finny's burial, he observes the death of his youth. Finny's demise symbolizes his own loss of innocence, the part of Gene's personality given to exuberant fun and childish rebellion against authority.)*

10. ...it seemed clear that wars were not made by generations and their special stupidities, but that wars were made instead by something ignorant in the human heart. (Chap. 13, p. 201)  
*(After an unpleasant exchange with his father, Brinker blames war on the older generation. The fat old men force younger men to fight their war for them. Taking the opposite stance, Gene states that the true cause of violence goes deeper than economic, political, ideological, social, or religious factors. Because he has matured by acknowledging evil in his heart, he cannot blame the older men and absolve the young. The evil, which is the cause of war, exists in the hearts of all, old and young.)*

## Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the novel.

### Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

- How is summer session different?  
*(With the student body reduced from 700 to 200 and a makeshift hierarchy governing the boys, life at Devon is an idyllic existence during the summer of 1942. The war has not yet touched them in any irreversible way. Their chief pursuit is imaginative fun. One activity is the formation of the Super Suicide Society of the Summer Session, the qualification for membership being the dangerous jump from the tree limb into the river. Another sport is breaking the rules by cycling six hours round trip to the ocean for a swim, illicit beer, and sleeping on the dunes. Additional activities include gambling in the dormitory and playing blitzball, the summer rage that Finny invents by suspending ruled play for free-form sport.)*
- How badly is Finny hurt?  
*(In the first fall, Finny slides sideways from the limb and lands on the river bank below. The fall shatters his leg. As Dr. Stanpole explains, "It was a messy break," he tells Gene that sports, which had been Finny's life, are finished for him. Gene at first reacts with disbelief that Finny's injury could be so serious. Later, he feels as if the injury had actually happened to him. He visits Finny in Boston and finds him awkward and restive over being housebound and confined to crutches. Finny's only self-indulgent remark about the hurt is a simple, "I have suffered.")*
- Who is the first student to enlist?  
*(As the war impinges on citizens' thoughts and actions, students at Devon form their own opinions on danger to the country and their obligations as male citizens to join the military. After view-*

ing an army recruiting film on troops equipped for skiing on snowy terrain, Elwin "Leper" Lepellier, a ski enthusiast, decides to enlist. An innocuous non-entity with vague ideas about life, purpose, and war, he lives on the edge of student activity at school and cannot survive the realities of military training.

Leper's deterioration is a public humiliation. After hallucinating that the corporal's face turns into a woman's, Leper collapses from mental breakdown and becomes Devon's first casualty of the war. He summons Gene to his home to explain his flight from a potential Section Eight discharge and laughs and weeps uncontrollably. Leper returns unofficially to Devon and lurks in the bushes outside chapel on the day of the tribunal. It is coincidental that Brinker's menials escort him into the Assembly Hall to testify at Gene's mock trial.)

4. How does Finny characterize the war?  
(Because he does not want to be inconvenienced, Finny pretends that the war is an elaborate plot contrived by fat old men who do not want the young men crowding them out of the power structure. This fantasy becomes so involved that the students almost believe it. Finny is so convincing that he and Gene embark on a program of training Gene for the 1944 Olympics, which have been canceled.

Later, Finny admits that the war is real. He divulges that he could not accept the reality of the war because, as a cripple, he could not take part. He adds that he has written letters all winter and posted them in secret from a town post office address to enlist in any army that would take him. He is so desperate that he writes to General Charles de Gaulle and considers offering his services to the Russians.)

5. How is the regular 1942-1943 session at Devon different from the summer session?  
(In Finny and Gene's senior year, order and discipline return to the Devon campus with the opening chapel service. Mr. Ludsbury condemns lapses of the 200 students during the summer and effectively points up a shift in expectations from the 700 students in the regular session. Finny mourns the regular athletic offerings of the winter and sneers at badminton as an effeminate game unworthy of their participation. Another sign of change is absence of staff members who have joined the military and the appearance of Mr. Pike in an ensign's uniform, a symbol of discipline of another type that gains hold at Devon.

The seniors quickly learn how change will affect their lives. From the beginning of the term, maid service is suspended for the duration of the war, a change that brings howls from Finny. Also, Mr. Ludsbury cautions Gene about gambling in the dormitory and demands that he get rid of the leaky icebox that Gene won from Finny in a poker game. Winter brings more change. During a heavy snow, some students volunteer to shovel snow from a

nearby rail line to free a troop train. They talk increasingly about enlistment and events of the war.)

**Questions 6-8 (Interpretive Level)**

6. How does World War II serve as a background for the events of the novel?

(As the war grows more menacing for the United States, students discuss personalities in the news and unusual place names on media maps such as Mussolini, Josef Stalin, Guadalcanal, Madame Chiang Kai-Chek, Pearl Harbor, and the Maginot Line. Saving the local apple crop in the absence of the usual harvesters is fun for volunteers. Brinker Hadley composes occasional verse that claims:

The War  
Is a Bore.  
and  
Our Chore  
Is the Core  
of the War

Subsequent appearance of recruiters with training films reminds seniors that they must make decisions about their mature response to a national emergency.

The full impact of war arrives at the height of the Winter Carnival, where Finny performs a sybaritic one-legged dance of joy in youth. Gene receives a telegram from Leper indicating that he has withdrawn to his Vermont home. When Gene encounters him lurking in the dining room, he understands that Leper's usual eccentricities mask a more serious lack of emotional readiness for adult responsibility. Worsening news from the front exacerbates the knot of evil in Gene's heart. Even Finny must admit that the war is real.)

7. Contrast Gene and Finny.  
(In most respects, Gene and Finny are literary foils. Gene is basically reserved, unimaginative, and obedient to rules and expectations. Lacking an inborn streak of rebellion, he breaks rules only at the instigation of his best friend Finny. Gene is an outstanding student, but not top rank. Although he admires Finny, he begins to suspect that his roommate is really a rival deliberately disrupting his studies. Since Finny is Devon's outstanding athlete, but only a mediocre student, Gene begins to imagine that Finny secretly strives to become an outstanding senior. Therefore, he undermines Gene's scholastic position by luring him to the beach before a trigonometry test and by interrupting his study of French.

On the opposite extreme, Finny is an ideal youth. He is completely spontaneous and creative, not out of rebellion, but out of a joy in living. Unlike Gene, he expresses emotions sincerely and openly. Envy and jealousy are foreign to his nature. As a true athlete,

he displays grace in motion that Gene characterizes as a West Point stroll. The dividing line between Finny and Gene is Finny's insistence that Gene and other boys sample his wayward behaviors and offbeat sense of humor. To this end, he manipulates all to play by his erratic, rule-less style.

After the awkward movement that causes Finny to fall from the tree, he deviates sharply from Gene. By being a good sport and holding no grudges, he welcomes him to his home in Boston. Finny is unable to accept Gene's apology because he disbelieves that his roommate could deliberately cause a life-threatening accident. From this contretemps, the narrative draws a focal conflict as Finny absorbs and overrides Gene's personality, forcing him to participate in sports as Finny's alternate to make up for the unacknowledged betrayal at the tree.)

8. What do the river and trees symbolize?

(A subtle symbolism opens the story as Gene returns after a 15 year absence to examine the tree where Finny broke his leg. The tree, which the author never fully characterizes, is the location of Gene's coming-to-knowledge about himself and his capacity for guile and hatred. Like the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Genesis, the Devon tree suggests loss of innocence as young men determine their moral and ethical outlook on involvement in the war.

Nearby flows the Devon River on the boundary that separates the school from the rest of New England and the Atlantic Ocean. A freshwater stream, it is the outer edge of the playing field. In summer, in lieu of organized football and soccer, the river becomes a place for frolic and free time. The main channel empties over a small waterfall into the Naquamsett, an ugly, saline, and marshy locale fringed with mud and seaweed as the estuary meshes with the sea. At water's edge, Gene loses his innocence in harming Finny and tumbles into the river. The ultimate baptism into reality occurs in a parallel scene as Gene seeks an ignoble position as crew manager and tussles with Cliff Quackenbush on the first day of school. This time, Gene, out of loyalty to Finny, attacks Cliff for ridiculing cripples. The act reveals a change in Gene as he formulates his principles and chooses the ones worth fighting for.

Overall, Devon is a crucible in which male traits replace childish behaviors. As the inscription of First Building indicates, "Here Boys Come to Be Made Men." In difficult transitions, students like Gene and Finny, Brinker and Leper divert their lifestyles from children to adults. In 1942-1943, the diversion takes on ominous overtones as seniors contemplate war and their role as soldiers. The evil that coats Gene's body after the tumble into the Naquamsett River is the reality of international violence and destruction, which he later characterizes as an ignorance of the heart that precipitates war.)

Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. Why does Brinker conduct a mock trial?

(The novel, evolving out of a title that subverts the role of war, builds to a tragic cataclysm of immature emotions and behaviors. Early in the term, Brinker jokingly accuses Gene of deliberately causing Finny's accident. Because of Gene's self-revelatory response to Brinker's innuendo, this conjecture becomes less of a joke and more a quest for truth. Both Gene and Finny must face the event at the tree, accept it, or destroy their friendship. Gene, the betrayer, survives the test; Finny, the betrayed, does not.

The question of Finny's second fall and death shifts the focus from Gene to Finny. As truth emerges at the trial from the skittish Leper, Finny dies from his own rash departure from the Assembly Hall on slick marble stairs, where he tumbles to a second crash that fractures his leg. This time, the break is simple and seemingly less harmful. However, the core of his bone loses a fragment of marrow that stops his heart. On the surface, the event seems like a freak accident, but it is so grievous to the seniors that they stop talking about Finny.

Symbolically, Knowles implies that a quality deep in Finny's makeup impels him toward self-destruction. Gene recognizes early that Finny seems too good to be true, as if his goodness and sincerity cannot continue to exist in a world where evil exists. Finny the athlete and trusting soul gives place to Gene, the alter ego who must redeem himself by assuming Finny's traits and aspirations. After Leper describes the two boys on the limb like pistons in an engine, Finny is critically maimed in spirit. Life as a cripple is intolerable for him. He flees into death as an escape from accepting Gene's treachery.)

10. How does Gene achieve a "separate peace"?

(Gene is a fragile young human who is only dimly acquainted with his capacity for wrongdoing. His rebellion against the manipulative Finny is a spontaneous rejection of the daily activities of the suicide society, a childish form of trial by ordeal that Gene despises. After Finny's fall, Gene never fully rationalizes the incident, but comes to recognize it as the result of the knot of hatred he harbors within. He never suspects the evil's power until he betrays Finny. Tormented by guilt, Gene finally achieves a separate peace by killing his enemy.

To identify the enemy, Knowles builds on the duality of Gene and Finny and Gene's intention to supplant Finny in activities his roommate can no longer join in. Knowles indicates that Gene comes to grips with his regret and guilt 15 years after the fact. Thus, the enemy is youth and its attendant innocence of evil. The encounter with his own flawed makeup forces Gene to become a stronger man, who is capable of burying the faults of the past and living in the present.)

### Questions 11 and 12 (Creative Level)

11. In a descriptive theme, summarize the requirements of an honest friendship. Contrast lifelong buddies with boarding school friends. How and why do the two relationships differ? Why does Gene's friendship with Finny end as their youth fades?
12. Show how these song titles reflect on the issue of separation and alienation of friends: "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree," "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind Forgive Our Foolish Ways," "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," and "They're Either Too Young or Too Old."

### Across the Curriculum

#### Art

1. With a group, create a series of illustrations to accompany a classroom volume of world literature and music. Focus on "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind Forgive Our Foolish Ways," "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," *Jason and the Golden Fleece*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Homer's *Iliad*, Voltaire's *Candide*, and Caesar's *Gallic Commentaries*, Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Far from the Madding Crowd*, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's short stories about Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson.
2. Using desktop publishing or other media, design contrasting murals, web sites, collages, or posters to demonstrate these pairs: falling into the Naguamsett River and locating a beaver dam, breaking the school swim record and being carried on a chair to the infirmary, attending chapel and picking apples, competing at the Winter Carnival and shoveling the rail for a troop train to pass, taking the train to Boston and bicycling to the beach, translating Caesar and holding a trial, and attending the term tea and seeing Finny buried.
3. Create a bulletin board illustrating these settings: crew house, bridge over the Little Devon River, Leper's dining room, Boston station, gym pool, Finny's infirmary room window, chapel, stadium, Jared Potter Building, Far Commons, Field House, Mr. Carhart's office, Gene and Finny's room, and the tree.

#### Cinema

1. View various films about difficult moments for adolescents, for example, *Member of the Wedding*, *Little Women*, *Life with Father*, *True Grit*, *I Remember Mama*, *Titanic*, *This Boy's Life*, *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, *The Sound of Music*, and *Daughters of the Dust*. Discuss why filmmakers focus on problems with coming of age.

#### Drama and Speech

1. Compose a short speech in which you describe the night at the beach. Give evidence of relaxation and honest conversation. Contrast the boys' escapism with that of Leper searching for the beaver dam.
2. Outline the effects of loneliness, insecurity, disillusion, and guilt on characters in the story. How do characters compensate as the war intensifies? Why does Finny's death lessen dramatic tension?
3. Apply a Freytag diagram to the exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. Why does this clear delineation of action lend itself well to radio, audio cassette, or the stage? What problems would a producer have in staging *A Separate Peace* as an opera, TV miniseries, or outdoor musical drama?
4. Role-play the part of a headmaster, nurse, secretary, doctor, police officer, reporter, mortician, coach, grief counselor, hospital orderly, train conductor, or family friend. Explain how the story would change if both Finny and Gene had been injured in the jump from the tree.
5. Dramatize in a short skit a conversation: Leper's mother comforting him after Gene departs, Gene's parents asking about Finny's broken leg, the headmaster welcoming Finny back at Thanksgiving, Brinker's father questioning the headmaster about opportunities for seniors to join the army, Leper heading a committee for the Winter Carnival, Dr. Stanpole questioning Finny about how he fell down the stairs, and Cliff Quackenbush interviewing boys to replace Gene as crew manager.

**Education**

1. Describe aloud ways that coaches, headmasters, counselors, parents, and teachers can aid students who have undergone personal tragedy and turmoil, such as encouraging personal response to lessons, comforting them in the aftermath, giving athletes and performers opportunities to express themselves in music or sports, warning parents of shifts in attitude and habits, suggesting ways of channeling suppressed anger, or asking if students need more time to recover from trauma.

**History and Social Studies**

1. Create a geographic commentary to accompany events in the war. Account for significant details, particularly the Burma road, convoy to Archangel, appointment of de Gaulle, the Tunisian campaign, bombing of the Ruhr, stand at Stalingrad, meeting of the Big Three, the bombing of Pearl Harbor, torpedoing the Scharnhorst, and an attempt on Hitler's life. Discuss the effect of war news on students at Devon.
2. Create a bulletin board contrasting settings described or mentioned in the text. Include Vermont, New Hampshire, Boston, Mt. Washington, Pensacola, and Mt. Katahdin, Maine. Include John Knowles' birth place and the two schools he attended—Philips Exeter Academy and Yale University. Estimate where a 17-hour train ride from Boston would place Gene in the South.
3. Outline a bulletin board of web sites on these leaders and places: Stalin, Hitler, Trebonius, Caesar, Madame Chiang Kai-Chek, Franklin Roosevelt, Athens and Sparta, West Point, Pensacola, Nathan Hale, Henri Giraud, Mussolini, Winston Churchill, and Château-Thierry.
4. Display figures for wartime casualties, including those unfit for military service for either mental or physical impairment.

**Journalism**

1. Outline how you would investigate an accidental fall. Make a list of questions to ask the Suicide Society, Dr. Stanpole, and anyone in

the area at the time of the fall. Comment on Leper's use of a vision of engine pistons to describe the movement that caused Finny to fall.

2. Compose a series of feature articles on the physical and emotional causes, symptoms, and control of guilt and hysteria. Emphasize modern methods of preventing, detecting, and controlling mental problems, e. g., lessening daily stress, relying on family support, group therapy, sleep, exercise, analysis, electroshock treatment, hospitalization, and medication.
3. Outline appropriate, courteous methods of interviewing Leper to determine if he is fit to be tried for being AWOL.
4. Interview the dean, faculty, and recruiting officers who encroach on Devon in 1943. Determine the best way to help seniors determine their part in World War II.

**Language Arts**

1. Lead a discussion of the title. Comment on the choice of a line from Ernest Hemingway's war novel *A Farewell to Arms*. List ways in which each senior seems isolated from the group. Determine what type of peace Gene chooses for himself 15 years after World War II.
2. With a group, list and explain these terms: decathlon, contretemps, pathetic fallacy, *Magna Carta*, Maginot Line, Northern Lights, Guadalcanal, Mahatma Gandhi, amphibious, valedictorian, regimen, laws of motion, paganism, *blitzkrieg*, and *plus c'est la même chose, plus ça change*.
3. Explain to a small group obvious and subtle changes in Finny. Discuss how he displays hostility, suspicion, and doubts about the war. Describe his reaction to Gene's visit to Boston. Explain why Finny weeps at the trial.
4. Create a bulletin board illustrating the stages in Gene's deterioration—from roommate and pal to brooder and cynic. Cite the approximate date of each stage. Include a section on his graduation from Devon and entry into the military.

5. Compose a web site introducing young readers to other works about mental and emotional disturbance, such as Judith Guest's *Ordinary People* and Bette Greene's *Summer of My German Soldier*.
6. Compose an extended definition of doppelganger. Select different examples of duality from the book, particularly Gene's attempt to be Finny by wearing his clothes and training for the 1944 Olympics. Comment on his rejection of his own personality and ambitions. Account for his frustration that Leper and Brinker believe him guilty of harming Finny, who seems like a part of himself.

**Law**

1. Using Gene and Finny as examples, lead a debate about the causes and manifestation of disobedience and rebellion at a private academy for boys. Cite early evidence that the roommates have different personalities from those of Leper, Brinker, and Quackenbush. Comment on cutting class, missing chapel, gambling in the dormitory, keeping an icebox in the room, breaking into the infirmary window, and violating the dress code. Note the dissimilarity between Gene's and Finny's idea of ignoring the rules.
2. Write a theme in which you summarize rules at your school governing fistfights, accidents, missing class or chapel, and leaving grounds without permission.

**Psychology**

1. Compose a short report proving Gene's normality. Cite examples of his ability to be a friend, translate Latin and French, read and analyze English novels, joke with peers, interact during the Winter Carnival, make decisions, travel by train, visit Leper, celebrate holidays, volunteer to pick apples and shovel snow, dress appropriately, study, participate in wrestling, fight, and talk about his guilt.
2. Explain to a small group the need for counseling for Gene and his friends. Suggest questions that need answers: why the students hold a mock trial, why they feel Gene deserves punishment, how seniors can help Leper, and why they willingly involve them-

selves in a nightly ritual that threatens their safety.

3. Compose an extended definition of a friend. What qualities make Gene and Finny worthy friends? Why is Brinker less than a friend to either boy or to Leper?
4. Explain a chart, web site, or poster on the theme of closure. Give reasons why school friends enter different branches of the military, why they stop talking about Finny, where each will go after graduation, and why they involve Leper in the trial.
5. Draw a flow chart displaying the effects of trauma or emotional distress on studying, school performance, work, responsibilities, trust, loyalty, entertainment, smoking, athletics, conversation, gambling, and family relationships.

**Student Involvement Activities**

1. Make an oral report on the theme of disruption. Study the time period between Finny's return to Devon to Gene's departure for Pensacola. Note chronologically how and why the friendship falters and why Brinker and Leper accuse Gene of harming Finny. Discuss major and minor events such as arguments, doubts, accusations, manipulation, lies, evasion, inappropriate humor, and deception. Explain why Gene questions the identification of his enemy.
2. Analyze the intrusions of war on the peace of Devon. Discuss the nation's need of young men for future soldiers. Add information about the recruitment campaign for young women to join the Cadet Nurse Corps.
3. Describe in a short speech the significance of one of these quotations: "His face was as milk and hopeless as ever; mooning above the snappy, rigid blouse, it gave him the air of an imposter," "Under the influence not I know of the hardest cider but of his own inner joy at life for a moment as it should be, as it was meant to be in his nature, Phineas recaptured that magic gift for existing primarily in space,

one foot conceding briefly to gravity its rights before spinning him off again into air," "Finny, I tried to tell you before, I tried to tell you when I came to Boston that time—," "Finny had a vitality which could not be quenched so suddenly, even by the marrow of his bone," "Ordinarily he should have been a magnet for me, the center of all the excitement and influences in the class," "Badminton!' he exploded the day it entered the schedule," and "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."

4. Write a scene in which Gene encounters Brinker and other classmates who were veterans of World War II. Include questions about their experiences at the end of the war and their intent to further their education.
5. Discuss methods by which an emotionally confused teenager can be restored to normality. Suggest ways that Gene's parents can relieve his guilt and regret. How could his old friends and teachers support him as he makes peace with Finny's death? What kinds of jobs and activities might enable him to relax, heal his spirit, and restore his old enthusiasm?
6. Pantomime the individual personality traits and behaviors that distance Gene from Brinker, Leper, Quackenbush, and Finny. Include skits that re-create the atmosphere in the dormitory before and after Finny's return at Thanksgiving.
7. Draw stage settings for a dramatization of a crucial scene. Include a list of characters, props, music, make-up, costumes, and lighting necessary to the scene.
8. Draw a cause-and-effect diagram illustrating how Finny's fall sets in motion Gene's crisis of self-doubt and introspection. Show how the events of 1942-1943 follow him during a return to Devon in 1957.
9. Draw a Venn diagram contrasting lifestyles and activities of Gene, Finny, and Leper. Include volunteer work, school, athletics,

school committees and clubs, dorm relationships, disappointments, grades, aims, and failures.

10. Explain briefly the choices of names. Note that Gene is an ambiguous name that sounds like Jeanne. Make connections between Leper/leaping, Brinker/standing at the brink, Cliff/overlooking a cliff, and Forrester/lost in the forest. Analyze the names Quackenbush and Finny for implications of character or experience. Comment on Gene's response to characters in Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* named Gabriel Oak and Bathsheba Everdene.

### Alternate Assessment

1. List examples of disobedience, silliness, ridicule, pranks, and outright cruelty.
2. Compile a list of actions that demonstrate how Gene makes peace with his inner unrest.
3. Compose a scene in which the seniors learn that Finny is dead.
4. Make a character list and explain the character flaws of each, such as Leper's insecurity and Gene's self-doubt.
5. Explain why *A Separate Peace* is considered a commentary on World War II.

## Vocabulary

Replace each of the underlined synonyms with the correct word from the novel. Choose your answers from the list below. Place your answer in the blank provided. You will have answers left over.

achieve	eternal	imprinted	meathook	transitional
assume	foresee	instinctively	plenty	unleashed
atmosphere	harmonious	intimidated	prevailing	unpatriotic
characteristics	immoral	lurch	sway	vague
crucial	impressed	luxury		

Everyone has a moment in history which belongs particularly to him. It is the moment when his emotions (1) gain \_\_\_\_\_ their most powerful (2) hold \_\_\_\_\_ over him, and afterward when you say to this person "the world today" or "life" or "reality" he will (3) think \_\_\_\_\_ that you mean this moment, even if it is fifty years past. The world, through his (4) released \_\_\_\_\_ emotions, (5) marked \_\_\_\_\_ itself upon him, and he carries the stamp of that passing moment forever.

For me, this moment—four years is a moment in history—was the war. The war was and is reality for me. I still (6) regularly \_\_\_\_\_ live and think in its (7) area \_\_\_\_\_. These are some of its (8) features \_\_\_\_\_: Franklin Delano Roosevelt is the President of the United States, and he always has been. The other two (9) immortal \_\_\_\_\_ leaders are Winston Churchill and Josef Stalin. America is not, never has been, and never will be what the songs and poems call it, a land of (10) abundance \_\_\_\_\_. Nylon, meat, gasoline, and steel are rare. There are too many jobs and not enough workers. Money is very easy to earn but rather hard to spend, because there isn't very much to buy. Trains are always late and always crowded with "servicemen." The war will always be fought very far from America and it will never end. Nothing in America stands still for very long, including the people, who are always either leaving or on leave. People in America cry often. Sixteen is the key and (11) important \_\_\_\_\_ and natural age for a human being to be, and people of all other ages are ranged in an orderly manner ahead of and behind you as a (12) peaceful \_\_\_\_\_ setting for the sixteen-year-olds of this world. When you are sixteen, adults are slightly (13) awed \_\_\_\_\_ and almost (14) scared \_\_\_\_\_ by you. This is a puzzle, finally solved by the realization that they (15) predict \_\_\_\_\_ your military future, fighting for them. You do not foresee it. To waste anything in America is (16) wrong \_\_\_\_\_. String and tinfoil are treasures. Newspapers are always crowded with strange maps and names of towns, and every few months the earth seems to (17) move \_\_\_\_\_ from its path when you see something in the newspapers, such as the time Mussolini, who had almost seemed one of the eternal leaders, is photographed hanging upside down on a (18) spike \_\_\_\_\_. Everyone listens to news broadcasts five or six times every day. All pleasurable things, all travel and sports and entertainment and good food and fine clothes, are in the very shortest supply, always were and always will be. There are just tiny fragments of pleasure and (19) excess \_\_\_\_\_ in the world, and there is something (20) disloyal \_\_\_\_\_ about enjoying them.



## Comprehension Test A

### Part I: Matching (30 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name or names from the list that follows. Place the letter or letters of your answer in the blank provided at left.

- |  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| _____ 1. is angry that Gene upsets Leper.                        | A. Gene              |
| _____ 2. is big man on campus.                                   | B. Quackenbush       |
| _____ 3. falls into the river with Gene.                         | C. Mr. Pike          |
| _____ 4. leaps at the infirmary window.                          | D. Leper             |
| _____ 5. sleeps in the dunes.                                    | E. A. Hopkins Parker |
| _____ 6. originates the suicide society.                         | F. Leper's mother    |
| _____ 7. plays blitzball.  | G. Bobby Zane        |
| _____ 8. takes part in the Winter Carnival.                      | H. Finny             |
| _____ 9. warns about improper dress.                             | I. Chet Douglas      |
| _____ 10. held the old swim record.                              | J. Dr. Stanpole      |
| _____ 11. asks Gene to return to the infirmary at 5:00.          | K. Mr. Patch-Withers |
| _____ 12. wears an ensign's uniform to chapel.                   | L. Mr. Hadley        |
| _____ 13. questions Gene about wet clothes.                      | M. Brownie Perkins   |
| _____ 14. is an expert in first aid.                             | N. Mr. Ludsbury      |
| _____ 15. describes the movement like pistons going up and down. | O. Phil Latham       |

### Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

Briefly answer each question below.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. What aspects of Devon life are emotionally menacing and harmful?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. How does Finny display an inability to follow the rules?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Why does Leper stay in the dining room?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. How do friends react to Finny's death?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. What do recruiters do to interest students in military service?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Why does Finny try to enlist?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. What aspects of school are orderly and disciplined?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. What behavior at the term tea gets Finny in trouble?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. How does Quackenbush react to the new crew manager?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. How does Gene change after the troop train pulls out?

## Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

### Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Underline the correct setting to complete each statement. On the line that follows, explain the circumstances of each episode.

1. At **(the field house, Leper's dining room, Boston station, infirmary, Gilman Street)**, Gene ponders the significance of "The Cage."  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. When Finny returns to Devon, Gene is aiding the war effort at the nearby **(rail line, apple orchard, commons, dam, bridge)**.  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Finny reports that Leper is hiding in the **(crew house, First Academy Building, Jared Potter Building, stadium, shrubs)**.  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Gene is unable to complete his confession in **(Vermont, Boston, the South, New Hampshire, Pensacola)**.  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Leper wants to receive the sun's rays at **(Guadalcanal, the smoking lounge, Devon, Mt. Katahdin, Naguamsett)**.  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain how the author concentrates on a few students at Devon.
2. Describe the aspects of Devon that lean toward discipline.
3. Discuss Leper's skiing expedition.
4. Characterize the Winter Carnival.
5. Contrast Gene's role as crew manager with his preparations for the 1944 Olympics.

## Comprehension Test B

### Part I: Fill-In (20 points)

Supply terms to complete each of the following statements.

1. After four years, \_\_\_\_\_ tags Brinker with the nickname "\_\_\_\_\_."
2. \_\_\_\_\_ sees the corporal's face turn into a \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The \_\_\_\_\_ instructs Gene to meet Leper at \_\_\_\_\_ location.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ explains to Gene how \_\_\_\_\_ travels into the bloodstream and stops the heart.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ has to pedal back from the beach in time for a \_\_\_\_\_ test.

### Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

- \_\_\_ 1. Mr. Ludsbury reprimands Finny for gambling during the session.
- \_\_\_ 2. Mr. Hadley has no respect for doughboys.
- \_\_\_ 3. Brinker implies that Gene has reason to hide his guilt.
- \_\_\_ 4. After the train ride north, Gene takes a cab from the Boston station to Finny's house.
- \_\_\_ 5. Students at Devon earn money by picking apples.
- \_\_\_ 6. The war encroaches on the school in the form of sewing machines.
- \_\_\_ 7. Finny believes he has suffered because the Olympics have been canceled.
- \_\_\_ 8. Mr. Ludsbury finds Leper in the bushes outside Finny's room.
- \_\_\_ 9. Finny expects to enlist in the Coast Guard.
- \_\_\_ 10. After 15 years, Gene makes peace with his past.
- \_\_\_ 11. Leper enlists after seeing a movie about ski troops.
- \_\_\_ 12. Gene takes a 17-hour train ride to Finny's home in the Midwest.
- \_\_\_ 13. The first exam Gene fails is a literature test.
- \_\_\_ 14. The boys shovel snow to clear the way for a train carrying prisoners of war.
- \_\_\_ 15. Finny and Gene get a pass to bicycle to the beach.

### Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

**Part III: Cause and Effect (20 points)**

Supply a reason for the following statements:

1. Leper is unfit for the military because

---

---

2. Gene has reason to feel guilty because

---

---

3. Finny is unsuited for war because

---

---

4. The Winter Carnival is a success because

---

---

5. Mr. Hadley is disappointed because

---

---

6. The war permeates the campus because

---

---

7. Gene earns better grades because

---

---

8. The fall into the Naquamsett becomes a baptism because

---

---

9. The trial requires Leper's testimony because

---

---

10. Gene can't weep for Finny because

---

---

**Part IV: Essay (30 points)**

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Account for Finny's popularity.
2. Describe Finny's last night in the infirmary.
3. Explain the symbolism of the dam, bridge, and rivers that flow at the boundary of Devon.
4. Name events from World War II that catch the students' attention.
5. Contrast summer school with the fall session.

**Answer Key**

**VOCABULARY**

- |                    |                 |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1. achieve         | 11. crucial     |
| 2. sway            | 12. harmonious  |
| 3. assume          | 13. impressed   |
| 4. unleashed       | 14. intimidated |
| 5. imprinted       | 15. foresee     |
| 6. instinctively   | 16. immoral     |
| 7. atmosphere      | 17. lurch       |
| 8. characteristics | 18. meathook    |
| 9. eternal         | 19. luxury      |
| 10. plenty         | 20. unpatriotic |

**COMPREHENSION TEST A**

**Part I: Matching (30 points)**

- |         |               |       |
|---------|---------------|-------|
| 1. F    | 6. H          | 11. J |
| 2. L    | 7. A, G, H, I | 12. C |
| 3. B    | 8. A, H, I, M | 13. N |
| 4. A    | 9. K          | 14. O |
| 5. A, H | 10. E         | 15. D |

**Part II: Short Answer (20 points)**

Answers will vary.

**Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)**

1. field house
2. rail line
3. shrubs
4. Boston
5. Mt. Ketahdin

**Part IV: Essay (30 points)**

Answers will vary.

**COMPREHENSION TEST B**

**Part I: Fill-In (20 points)**

1. Finny, Yellow Peril
2. Leper, woman
3. telegram, Christmas
4. Dr. Stanpole, bone marrow
5. Gene, trigonometry

**PART II: TRUE/FALSE (20 POINTS)**

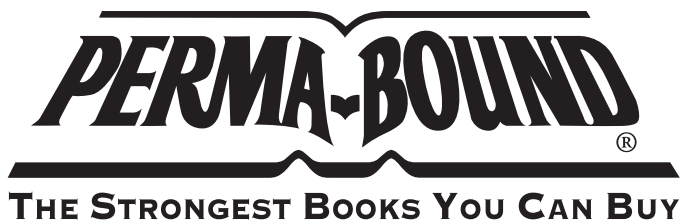
- |      |       |       |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. T  | 11. T |
| 2. F | 7. F  | 12. F |
| 3. T | 8. F  | 13. F |
| 4. T | 9. F  | 14. F |
| 5. T | 10. T | 15. F |

**Part III: Cause and Effect (20 points)**

Answers will vary.

**Part IV: Essay (30 points)**

Answers will vary.



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