

# A seperate peace: the dilemma



The dilemma Brinker Hadley faces in *A Separate Peace* by John Knowles, parallels what many students at Devon School are experiencing in the harsh wartime. Pride and honor compels all the students to want to enlist into the fearful war. Brinker Hadley proudly declares to everyone that he too will enter the war to show that he is a fearless, powerful, and a superior leader. However, the impact and reality of the war forces Brinker to continuously change his personality, and drastically alter his views toward the war. Brinker appears to all the students at Devon as an industrious leader for his involvement and prestige in various school clubs.

Confidence is a key characteristic Brinker portrays, and he shows this off when he starts writing poetry about the war and telling everyone that he too will become a soldier. In fact, after endless hours of working in the snow with all the other boys, Brinker proclaims, “ I'm giving it up, I'm going to enlist. Tomorrow” (92). By showing his bravery to enter the gruesome war, Brinker inspires many of the students to do the same. Gene even states that, “ I [Gene] felt a thrill when he said it... I had been waiting for a long time for someone to say this so that I could entertain these decisive words myself” (92).

All the boys know that they must one day leave the protection of Devon to join the war efforts, and Brinker is convincing them to end their treacherous wait and to act immediately. Brinker's influence shows that he is well looked as a leader and that he is ready to enlist in the war. As the war and the school year continues, Brinker starts to lose the attention of the rest of the boys. Unlike Brinker, Leper goes to war which makes him more valiant than

Brinker because only said he would enlist, but did not. In addition, Gene rejects Brinker's offer to enlist with him even after he agrees.

Brinker felt like he “ could at least cease to be so multifariously civilian” (121) since he would soon join the war. As a result, he removes himself from all his leadership positions. Furthermore, Brinker starts acting like a rebel especially at the Winter Carnival. Becoming impatient and then being easily defeated, he is no longer seen as the top dog. His inability to join the war as Leper does makes many students start to not appreciate him as much. Brinker himself is also changing too from the alteration of the status quo. He has become more immature, lost confidence, and has lost the authority and power he has over the students.

In the Butt Room after Finny's death, Brinker's final transformation is realized. Brinker's father, Mr. Hadley, tells the students “ you boys are the image of me and my gang in the old days” (190). Mr. Hadley envies the boys for their opportunity to be able to participate in the war, and then leaves telling them that they should feel honorable to be in the war. However, Brinker shows that he actually resents the idea of war. Initially, Brinker appears to be more mature than anyone else because of his acceptance toward the war. It is not until after his father speaks that he shows his true feelings when he states, “ Left out!

He [Mr. Hadley] and his crowd are responsible for it! And we're going to fight it” (193). He feels that his father's generation is causing this war, and everyone in Brinker's generation has to suffer. He accepts that he must go to war despite his rejection toward it, he probably will be killed, and that “ it

gives [him] a pain" (193). By accepting that he must face these issues, Brinker has shown that he has matured and is ready to face the conflicts of war, orders, and adulthood, which no other boys have shown. Brinker Hadley changes greatly in his year at Devon as he experiences the effects of the war.

At first he was only an intelligent student and leader, who was trying to impress to all the boys at the school about how he was not afraid to join the war. However, when Leper joins the army before him, Brinker is unable to handle not being the 'top dog' anymore. He starts to rebel which shows the truth about his character. Finally he expresses more about himself by stating he despises the idea of war, as he matures. Brinker's changing characteristics show that in a time of war aggressive changes occur and people start to show their true selves in a time of desperation.